

BE WELL™

A wellness newsletter provided by EMI Health

“Life Is a Journey. Have Some Fun.”

The Gift of Giving

Helping others helps you, too.

Volunteers make a vital difference in the lives of others. And volunteering your time and efforts can benefit your own health as well — from reducing stress to boosting self-confidence and becoming more content over time.

People volunteer for different reasons: to explore health care careers, sharpen skills needed for work, stay active during retirement, and put their free time to good use. While volunteers come from many backgrounds, they all share the desire to help others. In return, research has shown that volunteering may provide some important benefits, such as:

Lower risk of depression: The social interaction and support system within volunteering based on common interests have been shown to decrease depression.

Reduced stress: Time spent helping others may raise your sense of meaning and appreciation, both given and received, which can have a stress-reducing effect.

Gaining new skills and experience: The work that volunteers provide is essential on many levels, which gives them a sense of purpose.

Socializing with others: Fundamental to volunteering is making new friends and building relationships as part of a shared activity together.

In addition, regular volunteering can improve your self-confidence and sense of self-worth, as you improve someone else's life.

Volunteer opportunities include: museums, libraries, senior centers, service organizations, local animal shelters, youth organizations, national parks or conservation efforts (may vary due to COVID-19 conditions).

Learn more at [volunteer.gov](https://www.volunteer.gov).

The **Smart Moves Toolkit**, including this issue's printable download, **Stretching: Stay Flexible at Work**, is at personalbest.com/extras/21V12tools.



Volume 41 • Number 12 • December 2021

BESTbits



■ **Reminder: National Influenza Vaccination Week is December 5 to 11.**

People age six months and older need the flu shot. Those with chronic health conditions, including asthma, diabetes or heart disease, have increased risk for developing serious flu complications that can lead to hospitalization. This year, the flu shot — and getting the COVID-19 vaccination if you haven't already — is more important than ever due to the possibility that the flu and COVID-19 will spread this winter.

■ **Know before you go for safer, smoother air travel.** Want to know what you can bring on a plane? Did you forget your ID? Should you sign up for TSA PreCheck to get through security faster? The TSA is available 365 days a year to answer any security-related travel questions. Learn more at tsa.gov/travel/travel-tips.

■ **Drinking and driving: This dangerous combination led to 28% of overall driving fatalities in 2019 in the U.S.** When social plans involve alcohol, designate a non-drinking driver for your group. Don't let friends drive after drinking; take their keys. If you have been drinking, get a ride home from a friend who has not been drinking or call a cab. If you host a party with alcohol, offer alcohol-free beverages and remind guests to designate a sober driver.

Note: Due to production lead time, this issue may not reflect the current COVID-19 situation in some or all regions of the U.S. For the most up-to-date pandemic information visit coronavirus.gov.

The most important thing is to snack on things that are filled with real food and nourishing ingredients that will leave you feeling energized and happy.

— Ella Woodward



TIP of the MONTH

Plan for Nutrition

Things can get busy during the holidays, but you and your family can still eat well.

The key is planning. Choose recipes, plan a week's worth of meals, make a grocery list, and shop so you'll have the necessary ingredients on hand. Repeat your basic plan weekly and occasionally add new recipes to simplify meal times.



eating smart Secrets of Sugars

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

Sugar: It's a word with a bad reputation.

But there's more to know about this sweetener, and the news isn't all bad.

The truth is, Americans do eat too much sugar, and the No. 1 source is sweetened beverages, such as soft drinks, coffee beverages and fruit drinks. Baked goods, candy, ice cream and chocolate are also high in sugar.

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA) recommend no more than 12 teaspoons (48 grams) of **added sugars** per day. Unfortunately, most Americans get closer to 22 teaspoons (88 grams) daily, which is well above the recommendation.

What are added sugars? They are any sweetener that's added to food, including sugar, high fructose corn syrup, honey or syrup. And yes, even sugars with unusual names, such as **evaporated cane juice, agave or date sugar** are considered added sugars. These products are often marketed as healthy alternatives due to the presence of trace minerals — but you'd need to eat cups of them to get any substantial quantities of minerals (don't try that).

Too much of any added sugar — even one that *sounds* healthy — is problematic since it increases the risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes and certain cancers.

What doesn't count as added sugar? Natural sugar occurs naturally in fruit, sweet vegetables, milk and yogurt (e.g., lactose or milk sugar). Since these foods also contain vitamins, minerals, protein (in dairy) and fiber (in fruit), the sugar is not as problematic.

Natural sugars do not count toward the DGA's limit of 12 teaspoons of added sugar per day. That means you can enjoy whole fruit; the DGA recommends two cups a day.



Festive Egg and Vegetable Casserole

EASY recipe

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| 1 tbsp butter | 5 cups chopped kale or spinach |
| 1 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil | 12 eggs |
| 2 cloves garlic, minced | ½ tsp salt |
| 2 medium red peppers, chopped | 1 cup crumbled goat or feta cheese, divided |
| 6 green onions, sliced | |

Preheat oven to 350°F. **Grease** a casserole dish with butter. **In** a large pan over medium heat, add olive oil. **Once** hot, add garlic, peppers and green onions, and cook about 8-10 minutes.

Add kale or spinach and let wilt, about 3 minutes. **Crack** eggs into large bowl. **Scramble** with fork. **Add** salt, ½ cup cheese and cooked vegetables. **Mix** well. Add mixture to casserole dish. **Top** with cheese and bake 30 minutes. **Serve** with hot sauce (optional).

Makes 6 servings. Per serving: 281 calories | 19g protein | 18g total fat | 7g saturated fat | 6g mono fat | 3g poly fat | 12g carbohydrate | 4g sugar | 4g fiber | 435mg sodium

Your living is determined not so much by what life brings to you as by the attitude you bring to life; not so much by what happens to you as by the way your mind looks at what happens.

— Khalil Gibran

Clear out the clutter. This time of year, many people end up receiving more gifts than they can use. Do you have kids' toys, clothes you no longer wear, or gadgets and tools you have barely touched? Give them to a local charity. You'll declutter your home and have less stuff to deal with. You'll also make those goods available to someone in need. Or, if you could use some extra money, cash in on your clutter by selling new or gently used items at a garage sale, swap meet or online.

work&life

Stay Positive This Season

The holiday season can be full of cheer — and stress. You probably make lists of everything you need to do, including groceries you'll need to buy for special meals and gifts for friends and family.

Maybe it's time to also consider a list of strategies for a calmer season:

- **Give yourself permission to accept a less-than-perfect holiday.** This time of year can trigger family disagreements and anxieties about getting together — or not — for holiday meals. Let go of what you can't change. Talking to a friend or therapist can help.
- **Do a reality check.** Holiday preparation can be time-consuming and tiring. Consider a simple approach with a few well-loved decorations. If cooking a huge meal is stressful, order a precooked feast and relax.
- **Save time, energy and money on gifts.** Stick to a budget. Consider online gift cards and send a personal, meaningful note. Or give the gift of you (e.g., helping with chores and errands).
- **Spend quality time with your loved ones.** Reading holiday stories, watching movies with your kids and letting them decorate cookies can build wonderful memories and reduce stress. Missing family members? Video visits can spread holiday cheer and smiles.
- **Take time for you.** Indulge in calming bubble baths. Watch your favorite movies. Listen to podcasts. And don't forget to exercise. A ten-minute walk is a proven stress buster and mood lifter. Bad weather? Take a break with an exercise video.



Improve Your Relaxation Techniques

Learning to relax can help you be resilient to stress. But taking a little time out to get away from work and personal tasks isn't always enough to truly relax your mind and body.

That's why learning how to strengthen your relaxation skills can help you trigger your body's **relaxation response**. It's the opposite of a stress response and results in calmer breathing, lower blood pressure, better digestion and a reduced heart rate.

Take five to ten minutes to regularly use these relaxation techniques. Try these:

- **Autogenic (self-generated) relaxation** involves visual imagery and body awareness to reduce stress. Visualize a peaceful setting and focus on slow, relaxing breathing while feeling your muscles relax.

- **Progressive muscle relaxation** helps you focus on the difference between muscle tension and relaxation. Start with your toes and work up to your head or go in the opposite direction and tense muscles in each part of your body for about five seconds, relax for 30 seconds and repeat.

Remember, your ability to relax improves with practice. Make patience a habit.



“When the world is so complicated, the simple gift of friendship is within all of our hands.”

— Maria Shriver

Black ice is difficult to see and extremely dangerous.

It's a glaze of ice formed on pavement due to a light freezing rain or refreezing of snow or water. Use extra caution whenever conditions exist for black ice on the road. Drive slower than the posted speed limit and extend your braking distance. If you realize you're driving on black ice, avoid sudden moves; if you're skidding, lift your foot off the accelerator and glide across the ice until you find traction.

body&mind

Q: What are the mental health effects of COVID-19?

A: While acute COVID-19 may clear up within weeks, some people experience post-COVID-19 symptoms for months after they otherwise recover, according to the CDC. This is known as **Long COVID**, and it can manifest as depression or anxiety, as well as various physical symptoms. In addition, the stress of hospitalization and treatment can lead to post-traumatic stress disorder.

Other research suggests about a third of COVID-19 survivors experience neurological or mental health conditions, the most common being anxiety and mood disorders. Diagnosis can be complicated as symptoms, such as poor appetite, low energy and impaired concentration, can occur in both depression and viral illnesses.

If you have not been infected, your best protections are getting vaccinated, masking, social distancing and other public health measures. If you have had COVID-19 and are experiencing mental health symptoms, seek professional help.

— Eric Endlich, PhD



National Handwashing Awareness Week is December 5 to 11.



Handwashing: What You Need to Know

Regular handwashing is one of the best ways to prevent illness. It's especially important to wash your hands during these key times:

- Before, during and after preparing food.
- Before and after eating food.
- After using the toilet.
- After changing diapers or cleaning up a child who has used the toilet.
- Before and after caring for someone who is sick.
- Before and after treating a cut or wound.
- After blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing.
- After touching garbage.
- After touching an animal or animal waste or handling pet food.

To adequately remove germs (which include bacteria and viruses), follow five important handwashing steps:

1. Wet your hands with clean, running water (warm or cold) and apply soap.



- 2. Lather your hands** and make sure you cover the backs of your hands, between your fingers and under your nails, too. Help young children with handwashing to make sure they wash all parts of their hands.
- 3. Keep washing your hands** for at least 20 seconds. Do you need a timer for you, or to help youngsters, know how long to wash? Hum the "Happy Birthday" song twice from beginning to end.
- 4. Rinse your hands** under clean, running, cold or warm water.
- 5. Dry your hands** using a clean cloth or paper towel, or air dry them.

If no soap and water are available, use a hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.

Start where you are.
Use what you have.
Do what you can.

— Arthur Ashe



Does cold weather make your joints hurt?

You aren't alone. Although arthritis can increase susceptibility to aches when temperatures drop, cold weather can make anyone's bones hurt. To ease the impact of cold weather on your body, dress in layers to stay warm. Do light exercise before you go out; this will lubricate and loosen stiff joints. Maintain a healthy weight to reduce stress on joints and apply heating pads to painful areas when needed.

body&mind

Q: Cold, flu and COVID-19 symptoms?

A: The viruses that cause colds, influenza and COVID-19 spread in respiratory droplets and often have similar symptoms. When you're trying to tell which condition you have, consider some of these differences.

COVID-19 vs. a cold: Shortness of breath, fever, fatigue, muscle aches and loss of taste and smell occur more commonly with COVID-19 than the common cold. Colds are more likely to involve sneezing.

COVID-19 vs. the flu: Both conditions can cause a cough, sore throat, stuffy nose, fever, fatigue, muscle aches and shortness of breath. Unlike influenza, COVID-19 often involves the loss of taste or smell; the loss often occurs early in the illness without a stuffy nose.

When to get tested: It's often difficult to tell what condition you have based on your symptoms alone. Get tested if there's a possibility you could have COVID-19 since the risk of serious illness is higher than with other common viruses. If you need help finding a testing site, check with your local health department or district. And if you haven't already, get vaccinated for COVID-19.

— Elizabeth Smoots, MD



Winter Family Fun

Ready for some fun family pursuits? Don't let the chilly months and less daylight hold you back. Whatever the size of your family — mom, dad, kids, grandparents, siblings — daytime, night time, indoors or outdoors, take time for a midweek break or weekend family adventure, and have fun together.

Start by stepping outside. Exploring the outdoors can invigorate and energize you. Walk through a park, toss a football or try snowshoeing or roller skating, weather permitting. As long as kids bundle up and stay safe, being outside in the cold offers mental and physical benefits for them and for adults.

Indoors, spend warm, cozy evenings playing card games or board games. Read novels or historical sagas out loud to your audience. Try out an online dancercise routine. Have fun family movie nights or camping nights with sleeping bags. Baking nights can provide a relaxing finish before bedtime.

On bad weather days, gyms and indoor swimming pools are a great outlet for your kids to run around and enjoy, or maybe explore an intramural pickup basketball league. At night, do some stargazing, a unique experience for a family to search and admire the stars together.

Learn more at funathomewithkids.com.



Q: Tips for discussing finances?

A: Knowledge and communication are necessary for a healthy relationship with your significant other, especially in personal finance. Follow these practices to build a strong foundation:

- 1. Communicate.** Meet weekly to review upcoming expenses (trips, dining out, etc.) to avoid surprises and plan financially for costs.
- 2. Create a budget.** Keep a spending diary for at least three weeks to track spending. Build your budget from there.
- 3. Each person must know the other's financial goals.** Think about short-term, intermediate and long-term goals. Try to consolidate both sets of goals into a list of three to four for each category. Post the goals in a prominent location for frequent reminders.
- 4. Pay attention to triggers.** Are there words or behaviors that cause an emotional response? Understanding and processing why we spend can lead to healthier communication and relationships. Consider if therapy would help with processing any financial triggers.
- 5. Money can be a challenging topic.** Think through and make a list of questions you would like to ask before you talk. Be thorough and specific.
- 6. Trust but verify.** If the relationship is new but headed for a legal commitment, ask for copies of credit reports and financial statements. If you are entering a committed relationship that could have legal and financial components, no information should be off-limits.

— Jamie Lynn Byram, PhD, AFC

5 Winter Sport Safety Tips

Ready to have some fun outdoors this winter? Many who live in or travel to areas with snow and ice love to participate in winter sports. Here are five tips to stay safe while enjoying winter activities:

- 1. Get fit.** Make sure you're in good physical condition before attempting any winter sport. Check with your health care provider to make sure you're healthy enough to participate. Always warm up with light exercise and then stretch. Stretch after exercising, too.
- 2. Dress appropriately.** Use proper protective equipment, such as a helmet, and ensure all equipment is in good condition before heading out. Layer your clothing. **Tip:** Wear a breathable or wicking base layer, one or two insulating layers and a wind and waterproof outer layer.
- 3. Know your abilities and limits.** Choose sports, slopes or maneuvers that match your abilities. Take lessons to improve your skills.
- 4. Stop when you're tired.** Most accidents and injuries happen when athletes push it or continue after they are fatigued. Stop and rest or call it quits for the day when you are tired.
- 5. Follow rules and respect warnings.** Stay off frozen lakes, rivers and ponds. Stay inbounds when skiing, snowboarding, snowshoeing and snowmobiling.



SAFETY CORNER

December is Safe Toys & Gifts Month.



Annual Safe Gift Guide

For the new driver:

- **Roadside safety kit** that includes jumper cables, flares, handwarmers and more.
- **Ice scraper**, snow brush and a windshield defogger cloth.

For the runner or walker:

- **Personal alarms** — these come in a variety of forms, including a keychain or wristband.
- **High-visibility vest** or reflector strips.

For the new parent:

- **Baby safety kits** — everything the new parent needs to protect their bundle of joy, including doorknob covers and plug protectors.
- **Safety gates** — there are many models, including expandable gates to fit doorways or stairs.

Check cpsc.gov to make sure no safety recalls have been issued.



For seniors:

- **Wearable remote heart monitors** — these lightweight, wearable sensors will collect and send real-time data to a host company, which can provide it to doctors or caregivers.
- **Medication managers** — some smart watches work in conjunction with pill dispensers and some can even alert caregivers or health care providers that medications aren't being taken. There are also medication alarm clocks and medication dispensers with alarms. For the technically savvy, there are also apps.

Toning Up Made Easy

By Diane McReynolds, Executive Editor Emeritus

No time to fit in hour-long exercise routines? No sweat. Boosting your physical fitness is a good idea. It can become routine when you weave it into your daily lifestyle, even during the busy holiday season. The trick is keeping exercise simple so you won't view it as one more thing you must do.

Learn ways every day to get up and move more. Try these (and remember to warm up with light exercise first):

- Welcome your day with a walk in the fresh air.
- Work up a sweat indoors with physical chores; sweep, vacuum or wash windows.
- Pace while thinking or talking on a phone.
- Garden, or sweep out the garage or walkways.
- Walk through a shopping mall after parking several blocks away.
- Add stretching and walking breaks to boost energy and metabolism.
- Do two sets of seven strength-training movements for ten minutes.
- Limber up with some squats and lunges.
- Do some errands on foot — trips to the store, hair salon or post office.
- Meet a friend for a scenic walk in the park.

Kick it up a notch:

- Use an exercise machine while you watch a favorite TV series; you'll look forward to viewing the show's progress at your next workout.
- Try exercise bands — a portable, easy way to build muscle.
- Liven up your solo workouts with music.
- Exercise with a good friend to keep each other committed; the buddy system is a proven way to stay motivated.
- Swim at a community pool after work instead of passively watching TV.
- Treat yourself to golf lessons, and practice.

Mix up your activities to keep fitness pursuits interesting and pleasurable. Examples: Alternate daily walks with biking, or if your strength training workout becomes tedious, create multiple routines and vary them each week.

Improving your physical fitness offers many health benefits. Regular exercise can reduce your risk of chronic disease, improve your balance and coordination, help you lose weight, and even boost your self-esteem. And you can reap these benefits regardless of your age or physical ability. The current exercise guide for healthy adults:

- At least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity, or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic activity each week, or an equivalent combination of moderate and vigorous aerobic activity.
- Strength training exercises of all the major muscle groups at least twice a week.



How long does it take to tone up your body?

To enhance your overall physical fitness, focus on diet and exercise. If you need to lose weight, a healthy target is to drop one to two pounds a week; it could result in 15 to 30 pounds lost in six months, depending on your physical activity.

Note: Before a major increase in routine exercise, check with your health care provider.

December Fill-in-the-Blank Puzzle

Find out how well you know the topics covered in this issue of the newsletter.

- 1 The Dietary Guidelines for Americans' limit for added sugars is _____ teaspoons a day.
- 2 _____ muscle relaxation helps you focus on the difference between muscle tension and relaxation.
- 3 The stress of hospitalization and treatment for _____ can lead to post-traumatic stress disorder.
- 4 Regular _____ is one of the best ways to prevent illness.
- 5 _____ ice is a glaze of ice formed on pavement due to a light freezing rain or refreezing of snow or water.
- 6 Most accidents and injuries happen when athletes push it or continue after they are _____.
- 7 _____ can increase susceptibility to aches when temperatures drop.
- 8 Shortness of breath, fever, fatigue, muscle aches and loss of taste and smell occur more commonly with _____ than the common cold.



You'll find the answers at personalbest.com/extras/Dec2021puzzle.pdf.

The Smart Moves Toolkit, including this issue's printable download, *Stretching: Stay Flexible at Work*, is at personalbest.com/extras/21V12tools.

Dr. Zorba's corner

Rethinking 10,000 Steps

Do you need 10,000 steps a day to stay fit?

Not at all. That was a number created by one of the first pedometer manufacturers. Studies have shown that if you get to about 4,500 steps a day, you're in the sweet spot of wellness. Other research shows that if you walk fewer than 1,500 steps a day, you're more likely to be frail and weak and to fall. Steps are only one measurement of health and wellness. Strength training, aerobics and balance activities, such as Tai Chi and yoga, can be part of your wellness program.

— Zorba Paster, MD

Stay in Touch. Keep those questions and suggestions coming!

Email: PBeditor@ebix.com • Website: hopehealth.com

Executive Editor: Susan Cottman

Advisers: Patricia C. Buchsel, RN, MSN, FAAN; Jamie Lynn Byram, PhD, AFC, MBA, MS; Eric Endlich, PhD; Mary P. Hollins, MS, JD, CSHM; Kenneth Holtyn, MS; Reed Humphrey, PhD; Gary B. Kushner, SPHR, CBP; Diane McReynolds, Executive Editor Emeritus; Zorba Paster, MD; Charles Stuart Platkin, PhD; Cara Rosenbloom, RD; Elizabeth Smoots, MD, FAAFP; Margaret Spencer, MD
Editor: Aimie Miller

The content herein is in no way intended to serve as a substitute for professional advice. Sources available on request. © 2021 Ebix Inc. All rights reserved. Unauthorized reproduction in any form of any part of this publication is a violation of federal copyright law and is strictly prohibited. Hope Health® is a registered trademark of Ebix, LLC.

1 Ebix Way, Johns Creek, GA 30097

Phone: 800-871-9525 • Fax: 205-437-3084.