

# Total Health

& WELLNESS

FALL 2021

For Members of United Service Association For Health Care

FINDING  
RELIABLE HEALTH  
INFO ONLINE

TAKING CHARGE  
OF YOUR BREAST  
CANCER RISK

*Getting Real  
with* **Hoda  
Kotb**

## New Digital Edition!

Navigation is easy and convenient:

- Use the interactive table of contents
- Link directly to online resources
- Zoom and search the magazine
- Print and share articles



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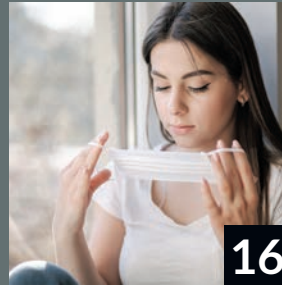
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# FALL 2021



### TOTAL HEALTH & WELLNESS

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## Keep or Toss: Using Food Dates Correctly

A recent study shows that many consumers are applying “Use By” and “Best If Used By” dates incorrectly when making decisions, which can lead to waste. The “Use By” label on packaged deli meat and other products means they may not be safe to eat after that date. “Best If Used By” isn’t a safety date. You don’t have to throw it out right away if it’s stored properly. For more food safety tips, go to <https://foodsafety.gov>.



## Avoid Scary Encounters with Allergens

Halloween can be an extra scary time if your child has food allergies. Many popular treats contain common allergens. Even if a particular candy is usually safe for your child, “fun size” or miniature versions can contain different ingredients, so you need to check the labels on each one. Remind your child to wait until they are home to make sure the candy they get is safe to eat. And be sure they have an epinephrine auto-injector with them at all times, just in case.



## Bring Your Workouts Indoors

If exercising outdoors means doing lots of cardio, moving indoors as the weather cools is a great chance to add strength training to your routine. Start with one session a week and work up to two or more. Try handheld weights, exercise bands, body-weight exercises (like wall push-ups), and yoga poses. To view sample exercises, visit [www.nia.nih.gov/health/exercise-physical-activity](http://www.nia.nih.gov/health/exercise-physical-activity). Search for “Everyday Guide.”

## Dental Exams Help Protect Against Diabetes-Related Gum Disease

Having diabetes increases your risk for tooth loss from gum disease. To protect your teeth, the American Dental Association suggests seeing your dentist every three or six months, depending on your gum health and dentist’s advice. Ask your dentist to share your exam results with your health care provider, too. Bonus: If you’re struggling with uncontrolled diabetes, your blood sugar should go down over time if you’re treated for gum disease.



## For Kids, Screen Stacking Can Mean a Less Healthy Lifestyle

How many screens do your kids use at a time? According to a recent study, the likely answer is two or more. The adolescents’ favorite combo was phone, TV, and tablet. Usage spiked during evenings and weekends, but it also took place after school and before bed. All this adds up to less physical activity and sleep, and a higher body mass index (BMI). And a higher BMI means a higher risk for health issues, like diabetes and breathing problems.



# Where to Find Reliable Health Information Online

How do you know which health websites are accurate—and which are cyber-quacks? Start with the five sites below. Then read on for tips on finding additional trustworthy e-resources.

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→ **1 MyHealthfinder, <https://health.gov/myhealthfinder>:** Prevention and wellness resources, news, and interactive tools for individuals and families. The evidence-based health information is available in English and Spanish.

**2 MedlinePlus, [www.medlineplus.gov](http://www.medlineplus.gov):** Information produced by the world's largest medical library on more than 600 medical conditions. It also has an illustrated health encyclopedia with more than 4,000 entries.

**3 Familydoctor.org, <https://familydoctor.org>:** Patient education articles for the whole family. Content is reviewed by health care providers.

**4 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov):** Offers statistics, disease information, and health guides for travelers. Includes resources in English and Spanish.

**5 National Institutes of Health, [www.nih.gov](http://www.nih.gov):** Links to different institutes and centers within the NIH that focus on various topics. For instance, you might find out about treating heart disease from the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute.

Remember these tips as you search online:

- Pay attention to who pays for and operates the site. Pages produced by the government, a nonprofit organization, or a university are often your best bet. These end in .gov, .org, and .edu.
- Medical information changes quickly. Look for a date at the bottom of the page. Responsible health websites regularly update the majority of their content. If information hasn't been reviewed in the past two years, find a site that is current.
- It's easy to get a second opinion online. Check more than one site.

Don't rush to action based only on information you find online. Your health care provider is still your best source of personal medical advice. Talk with them about your research. Your provider can help resolve conflicting advice. +



# A Surprising Way to Boost Heart Health: Get a Flu Shot

Health experts advise that almost everyone get an annual flu shot. But if you're wavering, here's another reason to consider getting one: Doing so may protect your heart.

→ **IN A LARGE NATIONAL STUDY, RESEARCHERS FOUND THAT 12 PERCENT OF PEOPLE HOSPITALIZED WITH THE FLU HAD A MAJOR, SUDDEN HEART PROBLEM.** These included infections, acute heart failure, and dangerous blood pressure changes.

## More About the Flu and Your Heart

This new study adds to the evidence that the flu poses a peril to this vital organ. Doctors have already found that the flu:

- Increases the risk for death of any cause, including heart issues.
- Is often followed by heart attack, stroke, and other sudden problems. In fact, one study showed the risk for a heart attack was six times higher within a week of having the flu.
- Seems to be worse in people with existing cardiovascular conditions. In a recent flu season, about half of the people who were hospitalized with the flu had heart disease.

Often, the virus attacks the heart muscle and blood vessels directly. In other cases, getting sick with the flu causes other heart-related complications. Your blood may clot, your veins and arteries may constrict, and your heart may have to work harder. This can worsen existing issues or cause new ones.

## Why, and When, to Get Vaccinated

For all these reasons, health experts stress the importance of a flu shot for people with heart problems. But what if you're perfectly healthy—do you still need to get vaccinated?

Absolutely: Getting the shot may reduce your risk of having a serious heart event by more than one-third. And it's even more important during the COVID-19 pandemic. You'll be a health care hero, saving resources that are already strained.


You need a shot this year even if you got one last year. Although the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advises getting immunized by the end of October, flu season stretches into the winter months. That means even if you wait until January or later, you'll still get some protection. +




## YOUR SHOT TO STAY HEALTHY

In addition to your flu shot, be sure to schedule your COVID-19 vaccine if you have not already gotten one. They are safe and effective. And they are helping keep millions of Americans protected from this serious disease.

Also ask your health care provider about other vaccinations you may need to stay healthy based on your risk factors. For example, getting a pneumonia vaccine is recommended for many adults ages 65 and older, as well as younger people who smoke or have certain health conditions. Shingles vaccines are suggested for anyone ages 50 and older.

 **Learn More!** Find where to get a COVID-19 vaccine near you at [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus). To see what other shots you may be due for, use the CDC's interactive tool at [www2.cdc.gov/nip/adultimmsched](http://www2.cdc.gov/nip/adultimmsched). Just answer a few questions for personalized results.

 **Digital feature!**  
Access helpful online tools and activities.

# Air Fryers: Your New Go-To for Healthy Cooking?

Some home cooks swear by the slow cooker. Others trumpet the toaster oven. Now, there's a newer tool for your countertop—one that makes healthier versions of your favorite foods.

→ **AIR FRYERS PROMISE CRISPY FRENCH FRIES, JUICY FRIED CHICKEN, AND KID-PLEASING FISH STICKS, ALL WITH LESS FAT AND OIL.** They're faster than baking in the oven. And unlike many products with bold marketing claims, they appear to deliver.

## Light on Oil, Lower in Fat

Contrary to the name, air fryers don't actually fry your food. Instead, they work like a convection oven, circling hot air around food. An exhaust fan also blows when cooking, keeping food surfaces dry.

The result is a crisp, crunchy exterior and browned color. Air fryers accomplish this with minimal oil. You'll need only about a tablespoon in most cases. Deep-fried dishes made without an air fryer, meanwhile, often require up to 3 cups.

Less oil is a good thing because higher fat intake can contribute to inflammation, high cholesterol, and other health problems. Studies have linked eating fried foods to heart disease, clogged arteries, and even early death. Saturated and trans fats—found in palm oils, shortening, and some oils used in commercial fryers—pose the greatest danger.

## Versatility, for a Price

Though they're trending now, air fryers have been around for more than a decade. They were popular in Europe and Australia before their American debut.

Besides deep-fried favorites like onion rings and chips, you can also use them to make many other dishes. Vegetables, eggs, baked goods, and—depending on size—even entire turkeys can be prepared in an air fryer.

The big downside? The cost. While low-end or smaller models start around \$40, larger and multifunction brands might cost as much as \$400. If you cook a lot and love fried foods, however, it might be worth the investment. +

# Healthy Air Fryer Chicken Strips

For a meal that's fun to prep and tasty to eat, look no further than these homemade chicken strips!

## INGREDIENTS

1 lb. chicken breast strips (about 6 to 8; if chicken breast strips are very large, cut them in half)  
¼ cup nondairy milk (like almond milk) or skim milk  
1 tsp. apple cider vinegar  
3 tbsp. cornmeal (polenta)  
1 tbsp. ground flaxseeds  
1 tsp. onion powder  
1 tsp. garlic powder  
½ tsp. salt  
⅛ tsp. black pepper  
2 egg whites (about 4 oz.)  
2 tbsp. flour (whole wheat flour or gluten-free flour blend)  
Olive oil spray

## DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat air fryer to 400 degrees.
2. Place chicken tenders, nondairy or skim milk, and apple cider vinegar in a bag. Shake to coat.
3. Stir together cornmeal, ground flaxseeds, onion powder, garlic powder, salt, and pepper in a small bowl. Place egg whites in another small bowl and place flour in another small bowl.
4. Dredge each chicken breast strip in flour, then dip in egg whites and roll in cornmeal mixture. Set on a plate. Repeat until each chicken breast strip is coated.
5. If using an air fryer with two fryer pans:
  - Place coated chicken strips into both pans, spread out. Spray with olive oil spray.
  - Air-fry for five minutes, remove, and use tongs to flip over. Spray again with olive oil spray. Bake for another five minutes, then switch trays, and bake for another five minutes, or until chicken is no longer pink in the middle and reaches an internal temperature of 165 degrees.

If using an air fryer with only one basket or pan:

- Place coated chicken strips into pan or basket, spread out. Spray with olive oil spray.
- Air-fry for five minutes, remove, and use tongs to flip over. Spray again with olive oil spray. Bake for another 10 minutes, or until chicken is no longer pink in the middle and reaches an internal temperature of 165 degrees.

## PER SERVING

Serves four; serving size is about two strips, or 4 ounces, of chicken. Each serving provides: 200 calories, 4 g total fat (1 g saturated fat, 0 g trans fat), 85 mg cholesterol, 170 mg sodium, 9 g total carbohydrate, 2 g dietary fiber, 0 g sugars, 29 g protein.

# Taming Irritable Bowel Syndrome

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is a common condition that affects as many as 20 percent of Americans. Self-care can help those who suffer from it manage the problem.

## → IBS CAN CAUSE PAIN, DISTRESS, AND

**DISCOMFORT.** While some people have mild symptoms, others have pain so severe that it becomes disabling.

Up to one in five Americans has IBS, which is more likely to affect women than men—especially those younger than age 35.

### Symptoms of IBS

People with the following symptoms may have IBS:

- Gas and bloating
- Constipation, diarrhea, or both
- Stomach cramping and pain
- Feeling as if a bowel movement is incomplete
- Mucus in their stool

### Causes and Treatment

The cause of IBS isn't known. However, stress may trigger IBS symptoms in some people, and the following foods can cause symptoms to flare:

- Coffee or other drinks with caffeine
- Carbonated beverages, especially those with artificial sweeteners
- Dairy products
- Alcohol
- Raw fruits
- Foods containing wheat, rye, or barley
- Legumes, cabbage, and other foods that cause gas

Half of all people with IBS never seek medical care for the condition. Although there is no

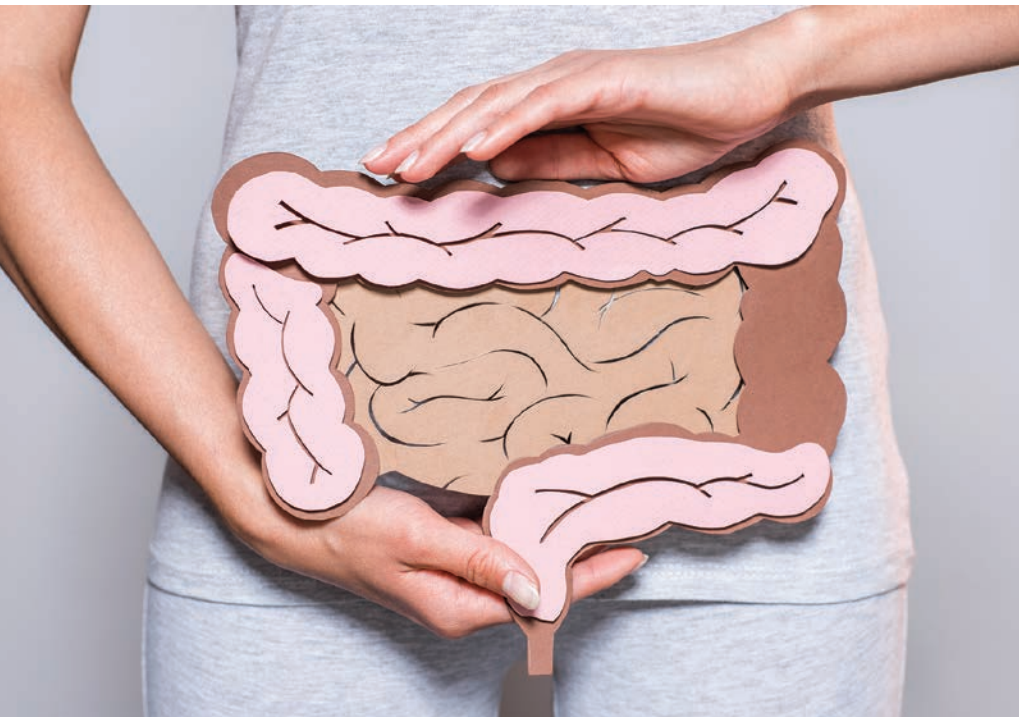
cure, many can attain relief for their symptoms. Possible medical treatments include taking fiber supplements, laxatives, medications to control diarrhea, antispasmodics, and antidepressants.

### The Importance of Self-Care

Self-care plays an important role in managing IBS. Steps to take include:

- Eating a healthy, balanced diet
- Slowly increasing fiber intake
- Eating four or five small meals a day instead of three large ones
- Keeping a food journal to determine if certain foods make symptoms worse
- Exercising regularly
- Getting enough sleep
- Reducing stress by learning and practicing relaxation techniques

Fortunately, IBS has not been linked to cancer or any other diseases. For more information, visit the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases at [www.niddk.nih.gov](http://www.niddk.nih.gov). +



 See page 9 for more self-care tips!





# 4 Tips for Living with a Digestive Disorder

Now more than ever, it's important to continue taking care of your health and not delay essential treatment.



## 1. Know Your Nutrition Needs

Dietary changes can help ease the symptoms of many digestive disorders. For some conditions, such as ulcerative colitis, nutrition is a very important part of managing the disease.

Different digestive disorders have different nutritional requirements:

- **For gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD):** Avoid eating or drinking things that make heartburn worse. Common culprits include coffee, spicy foods, alcoholic beverages, and high-fat foods.
- **For celiac disease:** It is crucial to avoid foods and drinks with gluten. Gluten is a protein found in barley, rye, and wheat. Always check the ingredients on food labels.
- **For Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis:** Your health care provider may recommend a special diet, such as a lactose-free diet, depending on your symptoms. They may also recommend supplements if you have trouble absorbing nutrients.
- **For irritable bowel syndrome (IBS):** Large meals can trigger cramping and diarrhea, so eat small meals throughout the day. Also, gradually add more high-fiber foods to your diet to help with constipation.

Talk with your provider or a dietitian to learn which dietary changes could help you.



## 2. Keep a Food Diary

Writing down what you eat can help you learn which foods cause you trouble. This is especially helpful for disorders such as IBS and Crohn's disease, for which certain foods can trigger or worsen symptoms. A food diary is also a key part of diagnosing food allergies.

In your food diary, write down everything you eat and drink during the day. Record how much you consume and at what time. In the same diary, write down what symptoms you have and when they occur.

Share your food diary with your health care provider. You may need to cut out foods that cause you problems.



## 3. Stop Smoking

Smoking contributes to many digestive diseases, including cancers of the digestive system. Here are a few ways smoking affects digestive diseases:

- Smoking increases the risk for heartburn and GERD. That's because smoking weakens the muscle that keeps stomach acid from backing up into the esophagus.
- People with Crohn's disease who smoke tend to have worse and more frequent symptoms.
- Smoking damages the liver's ability to process medications, which can affect the dose needed to treat a digestive disorder.

Ready to quit? Visit <https://smokefree.gov> to create your quit plan and learn about managing cravings.



## 4. Partner with Your Health Care Team

Work closely with your health care provider and specialists to get the best care possible. Tell your provider about all your symptoms, even if you think they're embarrassing. And make sure all your health care providers have a full health history, a list of all the medications you take, and all your test results.

Together, you and your health care team can help manage your digestive disorder so that you can live a full life. +



Hoda Kotb

# Getting Real with Hoda Kotb

For many of us, Hoda Kotb, an award-winning broadcast journalist and author, seems more like a close girlfriend than a celebrity. We've listened to her report on hard news, yes. But we've also shared in her joys, fears, and vulnerabilities each morning on NBC News' *Today* show. When Hoda opens up, we listen. And for good reason. Through life's challenges, Hoda has gained a healthy perspective that's worthy of our attention.

Hoda, an Egyptian American, spent her early career as a reporter for a local TV station in New Orleans. She moved on to become a correspondent for *Dateline NBC* before working her way into other roles, most notably the fourth-hour host of *Today* with Kathie Lee Gifford (now cohosted by Jenna Bush Hager). In 2018, Hoda also was named coanchor of the entire *Today* morning show with Savannah Guthrie—the first all-female coanchors in its history.

## Authenticity

Through the years in front of cameras, Hoda has influenced her millions of viewers in many ways. But arguably nothing has had a greater impact than her cancer journey. In 2007, Hoda was diagnosed with breast cancer and was inspired to share her experience with the world. Hoda allowed *Today's* cameras to follow her through her battle, including an eight-hour mastectomy and reconstructive surgery. Since then, she's talked extensively about her cancer diagnosis, treatment, and recovery in the hope of helping others.

"When you are unguarded, you are who you are. When you hold back, you give people less ... it is safer, but also more boring," Hoda said to *PainPathways* magazine. "When people know who you are, they will like you or not for who you are, and I think that's what most people want. You have to let go and realize that you are better off if you are not trying to control everything that happens in your life."

## Empowerment

No one would choose to face a difficult diagnosis and treatment. But Hoda transformed her struggles into something positive. Facing these challenges gave her the confidence to live life intentionally and without reservation.

"My illness empowered me in a way I didn't expect," Hoda shared in an interview with *Health* magazine. "It gave me courage, knowing you get one ride around the sun. And then, suddenly, it isn't so scary."

Armed with this courage, Hoda focused on the important things in life, including family. After cancer treatment prevented her from having children of her own, she and partner Joel Schiffman adopted a newborn girl, Haley Joy. Two years later, their hearts grew again with the adoption of Hope Catherine.

"[With breast cancer] you get a bad card, but here's that window that God opens: You can't scare me," Hoda told CancerConnect. "And there's nothing better than getting that because small things don't matter as much, because you get rid of the people in your life who are hurting you, because you hold on tight to those who help you; and it's a moment of complete and total focus because for once in your life you get it."

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**"You have to let go and realize that you are better off if you are not trying to control everything that happens in your life."**

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## Balance

In addition to pulling close to those who matter most, Hoda has continued to focus on her health—inside and out. That means going beyond just diet and exercise. Sure, Hoda works for her toned arms, but with a greater purpose than just looking good. (She told her trainer she wanted to be able to lift her daughter again and again and again.) She focuses on activities that bring her joy, such as predawn runs in Central Park when the city is peaceful. The cancer survivor also eats nutritious foods but gives herself the grace to indulge. (She's known for her love of fried chicken and wine.)

Everything Hoda does seems to enhance her life, not control it. Getting at least eight hours of sleep and sitting down to write in her



Hoda Kotb visits Build Studio, in New York City, to discuss her book *I've Loved You Since Forever*. (Photo: Gary Gershoff/Getty Images)

gratitude journal every morning helps keep her balanced. So does loving the person she is.

“My outsides come and go, whether it’s because of gray hairs or scars. All that stuff is going to be there, but I feel if I am comfortable with who I am on the inside, I will always be OK,” Hoda wrote in an essay for *Today*.

### Giving Back

Working to inspire and lift others up is part of Hoda’s healthy, balanced life. And doing so has put her struggles into perspective.

She wrote for *Today*, “When I feel crummy about how I look or whatever I am going through, I remind myself there is always someone else going through a more difficult time.”

Hoda lives by those words, doing what she can to help others. For example, Hoda raised more than \$500,000 for the American Cancer Society’s Shine a Light campaign, which is used for pediatric cancer research. She also donated a portion of proceeds from her children’s book *I’ve Loved You Since Forever* to the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia.

Hoda is also involved with other causes, including Tomorrow’s Voices—a program that helps teens interested in philanthropy reach their goals. She was named a 2020 Outstanding Mother Award Honoree by the National Mother’s Day Committee, an honor recognizing exceptional women for successfully building their careers, nurturing their families, and helping improve the lives of others.

“Somewhere deep, deep, deep down in that place you can barely touch ... that’s the place you have to find the strength to stand up,” she said to CancerConnect. “If you survive breast cancer, it could be the best thing that happened to you because suddenly you are empowered; because you have strength now; because you realize that your life has margins ... it’s to be valued and not wasted.”

Hoda has clearly gained the courage to share these lessons, ones that were shaped by her cancer diagnosis and treatment. And more than ever, we should listen. Each one of us has the power to focus on what matters most: to be unafraid to strive for our greatest potential, and to live life to the fullest with those we love—cancer or no cancer. +




United Service Association  
For Health Care Foundation  
*Giving from the Heart*

## YOUR USA+ MEMBERSHIP HELPS OTHER PEOPLE, TOO!

Many people are facing significant challenges: financial, emotional, or physical problems that severely impact the quality of their lives. And many times, all that is usually needed is some assistance from someone who truly cares. On the other hand, there are many people who would love to participate in charitable causes—they just might not know how to reach out and help. Maybe you’re one of those people. If so, it might be comforting for you to know that your United Service Association For Health Care (USA+) membership includes an extra benefit: philanthropy.

As a member of the USA+ family, a portion of your membership fee is donated to the USA+ Foundation, which gives to charities that make a difference and are committed to saving and improving lives. Through the combined contributions of our members, more than \$8 million has been awarded to more than 200 worthwhile charities, community programs, and national research programs. Remember: Together, we can make a real difference.

 **For additional information** regarding the USA+ Foundation or to request a Donation Grant Application form, please email us at [info@usahc.com](mailto:info@usahc.com) or call 800-872-1187.



# How Your Living Conditions Affect Your Health

What you eat. Whether—and how much—you exercise. Choices you make every day affect your health and well-being.



→ **BUT THERE'S A BIGGER PICTURE, TOO.** The world around you matters when it comes to your risk for health problems. Your neighborhood, the job opportunities available to you, the quality of the air you breathe—all these play a role in how well, and even how long, you live.

## Social and Physical Environments Matter

Experts have a name for these factors: social determinants of health. Increasingly, researchers are studying how they affect individuals and communities. For example:

- People who don't live near grocery stores may have a harder time eating a healthy diet. This raises their risk for heart disease and diabetes. It also decreases life expectancy.

- Children in neighborhoods with high rates of violent crime often see and experience disturbing events. This can lead to behavioral and mental health problems later in life.
- Those who don't have insurance lack access to cancer screenings and other health care services that prevent, detect, or treat illness.

Researchers have known about these issues for years. But the COVID-19 crisis has brought more attention to them. In one study focused on Indiana, for instance, ZIP codes predicted people's risk for COVID-19 infection. The more African American, Hispanic, or immigrant households, or people living in poverty in an area, the greater the number of cases.

## Reducing Health Disparities

These realities don't mean you shouldn't aim to improve your lifestyle. Your daily choices still make a difference. But more far-reaching changes are needed to offer everyone the best chance for better health.

Such efforts might include:

- Programs like tutoring to help more kids and teens succeed at school, plus financial aid for college
- Career counseling to help people find jobs, and childcare, which allows them to stay employed
- Sidewalks and bike lanes to promote activity and increase safety
- More widespread health insurance coverage so that everyone can see a health care provider or dentist when they need to
- Research to understand—and reduce—the health impact of discrimination based on race, gender, or other characteristics

These steps can improve conditions now, as the country continues to cope with the long-term consequences of COVID-19. What's more, addressing these inequities will build a society strong enough to face future challenges. +



See page 12 for information about how your membership in USA+ is making a difference for families in need of assistance.

# Feel Dizzy When You Stand? Here's Why to Tell Your Doctor

You're sitting or lying down. You leap up. Suddenly, you're dizzy and light-headed.

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→ **MANY PEOPLE HAVE HAD THIS EXPERIENCE.**

But for some, these sensations occur regularly when they stand or sit up. They may also have headaches, blurred vision, and nausea, or even faint and fall down.

These are all signs of a condition called orthostatic hypotension, which health care providers have long linked to heart problems. Now, a new study suggests it might have consequences for the mind, too.

## Why Dizziness Strikes

Orthostatic hypotension happens when your blood pressure drops suddenly. Your body's vital organs—including your brain—then lack oxygen and nutrients. That's why you feel weak and dizzy or pass out.

In addition to a sudden change of position, this can happen when you:

- Strain on the toilet
- Feel anxious
- Have eaten a large meal or had alcohol
- Exercise

Sometimes, treatment for high blood pressure can lead to orthostatic hypotension. Orthostatic hypotension can also be linked to problems like diabetes, heart failure, or Parkinson's disease. Dehydration and low levels of vitamin B-12 may play a role as well.

## The Link to Later Brain Health

Sitting down may help the problem in the moment. But as the new study suggests, there could be long-term issues.

In a group of more than 2,000 older adults, about 300 had orthostatic hypotension. Those

who did had a 40 percent greater risk of developing dementia during a 12-year follow-up. Why? Over time, periods of low blood flow could hurt brain tissue or the blood vessels that nourish it.

## Stopping the Spin

If you're feeling dizzy regularly, talk with your health care provider. Finding the cause can point you toward a treatment that steadies your blood pressure—and keeps you standing tall.

These steps may also help:

- Ask your provider if you should change any medications.
- Drink six to eight glasses of water daily.
- Move around a bit before getting out of bed or a chair—for instance, wiggle your hands and feet. Then, rise slowly, making sure you have something stable to grab on to. +



# Caffeine: Beyond the Cup

This widely used drug has benefits for everything from athletic performance to Parkinson's disease. Here's how to power up safely.

→ **SOME PEOPLE FIND THEIR PICK-ME-UP IN A CUP OF COFFEE.** Others pick up a pill for their jolt. And athletes sometimes seek their spark in gum, chews, and supplements.

No matter how you choose to consume caffeine, you're not alone. Nearly eight in 10 adults drink, eat, or otherwise ingest a caffeinated product daily.

Caffeine's benefits go beyond a quick buzz. But like any drug or supplement, it has risks and downsides. Here's the knowledge you need to take it with eyes wide open.

## The Perks of Caffeine

Caffeine is a natural substance found in more than 60 types of plants, including tea leaves, coffee beans, and cacao pods.

Throughout the day, your body builds up levels of a chemical called adenosine, which prompts your brain to rest. Caffeine works by blocking the effects of adenosine on neurons, warding off sleepy feelings.

In addition, caffeine might help:

- Increase your ability to pay attention—and, over time, your cognitive function
  - Improve performance in running, cycling, or other endurance sports, as well as brief high-intensity exercise
  - Decrease risk for some serious health conditions, including cancer, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease
  - Reduce risk for Parkinson's disease and also treat some of its symptoms
  - Promote weight loss
  - Ease migraine headaches, although in some cases, it may serve as a trigger
- Keep your caffeine intake consistent to avoid withdrawal headaches

## Safe Ways to Seek Stamina

Most healthy adults can safely consume up to 400 milligrams of caffeine daily. That's the amount in three to five 8-ounce cups of coffee or two maximum-strength caffeine pills.

However, others should be cautious. Pregnant or breastfeeding women, people with high blood pressure or heart problems, and those with anxiety should check with their health care providers about limiting caffeine. Kids should avoid caffeine before age 12, and teens should limit intake to 100 milligrams per day.

Plus, some people are simply more sensitive to caffeine's effects. Signs you're overdoing it include:

- Trouble falling or staying asleep
- Jitters, restlessness, or dizziness
- Fast or abnormal heartbeat
- Anxiety
- Nausea or an upset stomach
- The need to ingest more to get the same results

In addition, to use caffeine wisely:

- **Drink carefully.** Don't combine caffeine with alcohol; it can increase your impairment. And exercise caution with energy drinks. Some of their ingredients, like guarana, can make you feel even more wired.
- **Keep count.** Caffeine can crop up in pain relievers, cold medicines, and over-the-counter alertness remedies. Check labels to make sure you're not overdoing it.
- **Time it right.** Caffeine reaches peak levels in your blood about an hour after you take it. However, its effects may linger for four to six hours. So, sipping coffee or tea in the evening could disrupt your sleep at night. +





# Helping Teens with Depression Brought On by the Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has been tough on families. For teens, the past year will likely be remembered for how much they missed their friends and school, sports, band, or other activities. Some were disappointed when long-awaited milestones—such as prom and graduation events—were canceled or went virtual. Others were touched by the illness or loss of a loved one.

→ **THESE CHALLENGES HAVE TAKEN A SERIOUS TOLL ON TEEN MENTAL HEALTH.** In a national poll conducted in early 2021, parents reported that 31 percent of teen girls and 18 percent of teen boys experienced new or worsening depression during the pandemic.

Now, even as life starts moving closer to normal, many teens are still struggling emotionally. Here's how to offer the support they need—and when to reach out for additional help.

## Keep Communication Lines Open

Look for natural moments to strike up a conversation about how the pandemic has affected your family. Invite your teen to open up about the experience, and listen for sadness or anxiety. Such feelings may be signs that your teen could use extra support and attention right now.

Be aware that some teens pull away from their families when distressed. If that sounds familiar, try connecting with your teen over a shared activity you both enjoy. That might mean practicing yoga, riding bikes, or going fishing, for instance. You'll have a chance to check in about how things are going while having fun together.

## Stay Alert for Signs of Depression

It's normal for your teen to go through emotional ups and downs, especially in trying times. True depression is more than ordinary moodiness, however. It's a health condition that can wreak havoc on your child's daily life.


Watch for these signs of depression:

- Long-lasting sadness, hopelessness, irritability, or anxiety
- Disinterest in things your child once enjoyed

- Changes in eating or sleeping habits
- Poor self-esteem
- Reduced concentration
- Drop in grades
- Restlessness or trouble sitting still
- Unusually slow movements

If you notice these warning signs, ask your child's health care provider to screen your teen for depression.

The pandemic has placed a unique strain on families. Know that there are resources available to help your teen cope with any lingering distress. +

 **When to Seek Immediate Help.** For any talk of suicide call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at **800-273-TALK (800-273-8255)** right away.



# Financial Stress? Don't Pay the Price with Poor Health

When your wallet takes a hit, your health may suffer, too. It's a common problem. In a 2020 survey, 64 percent of Americans said they felt stressed out about money. That could be bad news for their bodies.

## → The High Cost of Stress

An unplanned expense could send your stress level soaring. Depending on how you react, this may lead to:

- Upset stomach
- Headaches
- Back pain
- Sleep problems
- Frequent colds

If you're living paycheck to paycheck, stress can become routine. Long-lasting stress may contribute to:


- High blood pressure
- Heart disease
- Diabetes
- Depression
- Anxiety

## Managing Financial Strain

It may take a while to build up your savings or pay off your credit card. But there are things you can do to reduce your financial stress starting today. And that can pay dividends in better health.

- **Take charge of your financial situation.** Track your spending to see where the money goes. Then look for ways to trim your expenses or stretch your money further. If you're drowning in debt, ask about setting up a payment plan.
- **Create a written budget and stick to it.** At first, this may lead to more anxiety. But in the long run, having a plan can reduce your stress.

- **Focus on one big financial decision at a time.** Tackling too much at once can leave you feeling overwhelmed. Space out major purchases.
- **Avoid falling back on unhealthy habits.** Some people react to financial woes by smoking, drinking, gambling, or eating junk food. These behaviors only add to the physical toll.
- **Learn healthy ways of keeping stress in check.** Relax with deep breathing, meditation, a walk, or a warm bath. Connect with supportive family and friends. These strategies not only work well to ease stress—they're a lot cheaper than a cigarette habit or bar tab! +

 **Need Budgeting Help?** To print out a handy worksheet, go to [www.consumer.gov/content/make-budget-worksheet](http://www.consumer.gov/content/make-budget-worksheet).



# Back to the Basics: Explaining Breast Cancer

From statistics to screenings to treatments, there is a lot to know about breast cancer. The basics below can help you understand the disease and take steps to lower your risk.



→ **THE WORDS BREAST CANCER DON'T CONJURE HAPPY FEELINGS.** But here's some breast cancer news that isn't bleak: Right now, there are more than 3.5 million breast cancer survivors in the U.S.

Although statistics say that about one in eight women will develop breast cancer in her lifetime, the number of women who develop and die of the disease has declined over time. Why? The likeliest answer is increased screenings and advanced breast cancer treatment.

## How It Starts

Cells are the building blocks of the body. When cells grow uncontrollably, this is called cancer. The name of a cancer depends on where it starts, so breast cancer starts in the breast.

The disease can begin in a number of places within the breast itself, such as the

glands that produce breast milk. When it starts in the ducts through which milk flows, this is called invasive ductal carcinoma, one of the most common forms of breast cancer. Cancer, however, isn't isolated. As time passes, harmful cells can spread to other parts of the body.

## Risk and Risk Reduction

Measuring breast cancer risk isn't an exact science. Doctors can't always explain why some women develop the disease and others don't. But some factors, such as being age 50 or older, up your risk. Other risk factors include:

- Starting your period before age 12
- Having dense breasts
- Having a family history of breast cancer
- Inheriting mutations in the cancer-related genes BRCA1 or BRCA2

These risk factors are out of your control. But certain risk factors, such as drinking and physical activity, can be altered with healthy lifestyle changes. Following these tips may reduce your risk:

- Avoid alcohol. If you do drink, limit yourself to one alcoholic beverage per day.
- Stay at a healthy weight for your height, especially after menopause.
- Work out at least 150 minutes every week. Try to reach 300 minutes if you can.

## Stick to Screenings

Experts offer slightly different suggestions when it comes to breast cancer screening. Some recommend getting yearly mammograms starting at age 45. Others suggest starting mammograms at age 50 and getting this screening every two years. Talk with your health care provider to decide the best schedule for you.

Whichever screening schedule you choose, sticking to it is essential. Breast cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death in women, but if caught earlier, it's easier to treat. Cancer stages are numbered from zero to four; the more advanced the cancer, the higher the number. Finding cancer at stage zero or one improves the chances that treatment will be effective.

## Types of Treatment

Treatment options vary depending on the kind of breast cancer and how far it has spread. Options include surgery, hormone therapy, radiation therapy, biological therapy, and chemotherapy. Your provider may recommend combining two or more treatments. +

# Take Charge of Your

## BREAST CANCER RISK

One in eight women will develop breast cancer in her lifetime. While some risk factors are beyond your control, there are steps you can take to help keep the big C at bay. Here's what you can do decade-by-decade to slash your risk.

### *In Your 20s*



**Fill up on fiber.** Consuming more fiber-rich foods in early adulthood decreases your breast cancer risk by about 12 to 19 percent. Reach for fruits, veggies, legumes, and whole grains.

### *In Your 30s*

**Limit your alcohol intake.** Women who indulge in two to three daily drinks have about a 20 percent higher risk of developing breast cancer than teetotalers. Keep your sips to no more than one boozy drink per day.



### *In Your 40s*



**Hit your stride.** Clocking at least 150 minutes of physical activity, such as brisk walking, per week slashes your risk for breast cancer by about 12 percent. Staying active after menopause is especially important.

### *In Your 50s*

**Take a stand.** Spending lots of time on your tush increases your risk for breast cancer by 10 percent. Take the stairs instead of the elevator, walk or bike when possible, and take breaks to walk and stretch during the workday.



### *In Your 60s*



**Make it Mediterranean.** Following a Mediterranean diet may lower your risk for breast cancer by up to 20 percent. So reach for olive oil instead of creamy sauces and dressings. And add more plant foods and fish to your plate.

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**WE'RE GOING FULL DIGITAL!**  
Starting with our Spring 2022 issue, look for your newsletter to arrive exclusively via email instead of in your mailbox. We hope you enjoy the new format!

# 5 Reasons to Schedule a CHECKUP NOW

When was the last time you saw your primary care provider (PCP)? If you are like a lot of people, you may have put this off during the pandemic. A checkup can help ensure that you stay healthy. Here are five reasons to schedule one now.

## 1 YOUR MEDICAL RECORDS WILL BE CURRENT.

Your medical history—including your family's health history—changes over time, and this may affect your risk of developing conditions like stroke, diabetes, heart disease, and cancer.



## 2 YOU'LL KEEP UP WITH YOUR VACCINE SCHEDULE.

Regular immunizations aren't just for kids—they're for adults, too. See page 5 for more on this topic.



## 3 YOU CAN STAY UP-TO-DATE ON SPECIALIZED EXAMS.

Your PCP can notify you about screenings you're due for, such as eye exams, mammograms, and other tests. You may even be able to schedule them at your checkup.



## 4 YOU'LL GET A LOOK INSIDE YOUR BODY.

Some potentially serious conditions, like high blood pressure, may not show any symptoms. At a checkup, your provider will check your blood pressure and do other exams that may alert you to hidden health conditions.



## 5 YOU'LL BE ABLE TO HAVE CONDITIONS TREATED.

Minor or annoying symptoms may signal a bigger health issue. Your PCP can diagnose and address the problem before it gets worse.

