

Total Health

& WELLNESS

SPRING 2022

For Members of United Service Association For Health Care

Adele

Living Life Her Way

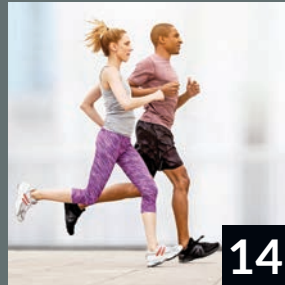
MANAGING BLOOD
PRESSURE WITHOUT
MEDICINE

TALKING ABOUT
MEMORY PROBLEMS

USA
United Service Association
For Health Care



[cover story]
 Adele: Living
 Life Her Way
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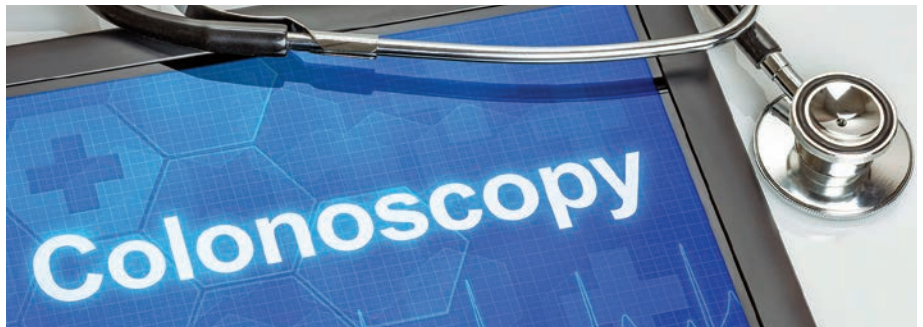


Sport the Right Eyewear

Protecting your eyes is a must when doing activities with a higher risk for injury. These include racquet sports, cycling, soccer, basketball, and football. Choose safety glasses or goggles with impact-resistant 3-mm polycarbonate lenses—also available in prescription form.

Keep It Cool at Lunchtime

Packing a lunch for work or school? An insulated bag or box is the best option for cold foods. Put in at least two frozen gel packs—or one along with a frozen bottle of water. Place one under and one on top of foods that can go bad. These include eggs, meat and poultry, cheese, and cut fruit, even if they're bought in a prepackaged combo.



Start Colorectal Cancer Screenings at Age 45

That's according to the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, which previously advised starting at 50. Why the change? Trends show an increasing risk for colorectal cancer at younger ages. If you're between ages 45 and 75, talk with your health care provider about screening options and which test is right for you.



Communicate Better in an Emergency

Communication is vital during an emergency such as a natural disaster. To prepare, have family members check their cellphones to make sure key contact information is correct and complete. Everyone should also have a paper list. Emergency contacts should include someone outside your area. And remember: During a crisis, texts are more likely to connect than calls.

Get in the Know About Prediabetes

More than 84 percent of people with prediabetes don't know they have it because of a lack of clear symptoms. But prediabetes can develop into type 2 diabetes and lead to heart disease and stroke. Talk with your health care provider about your risk and testing. Or take the American Diabetes Association's 60-Second Type 2 Diabetes Risk Test now at www.diabetes.org/risk-test.





What You Don't Know About Skin Cancer Can Hurt You

Skin cancer affects more people in the United States than any other type of cancer. In fact, nearly one in five will develop it.

→ **BUT A NEW SURVEY FINDS HUGE GAPS IN PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE ABOUT RISK FACTORS.** The American Academy of Dermatology recently asked 1,000 U.S. adults basic questions about skin cancer, tanning, and sun protection. About one-third flunked the test.

The biggest misunderstandings occurred among younger adults born after 1981. Unfortunately, research suggests indoor tanning and sunburns at younger ages increase risk later.

The Myth of a Healthy Glow

Tanned skin is not a sign of vitality. In fact, a bronze hue is the body's attempt to protect itself. Experts now know nearly all skin cancers result from too much exposure to ultraviolet (UV) light.

Many skin cancers are curable. However, melanoma—the deadliest type—is on the rise. About 106,000 Americans will be diagnosed with melanoma this year. Again, most cases are linked to UV exposure.

Stay Skin-Safe All Year Round

Summer may be prime time for getting outdoors and enjoying the sun, but the risks of too much exposure don't go away in fall and winter. Whatever the season, sunburn can still occur on cloudy days. And snow can reflect harmful UV rays.

Many people see tanning beds as a safe source of vitamin D. An estimated 7.8 million adults use them. But in fact, artificial UV rays from beds and lamps may be even more harmful than natural ones.

To prevent skin cancer, get vitamin D from foods like fatty fish, milk, and orange juice. Wear water-resistant sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 30 or higher and broad-spectrum protection, even when it's cloudy. Prefer a tanned look? Use a self-tanning lotion, foam, or spray, instead. +

SOME HALF-BAKED IDEAS ABOUT SUN SAFETY

In a recent study by the American Academy of Dermatology, it was revealed:



31 percent did not know tanning causes skin cancer



53 percent weren't aware shade can protect you from the sun's harmful rays



47 percent falsely believed having a base tan prevents sunburns, or weren't sure

What Could That Rash Be?

Bumps and itchiness and redness, oh my! Discovering a rash on your skin can be alarming.

→ **WHILE MOST RASHES AREN'T LIFE-THREATENING, THEY STILL CAN CAUSE UNCOMFORTABLE SYMPTOMS AND SIGNAL COMPLICATIONS, SUCH AS INFECTIONS.** Because there are many different reasons for rashes, be sure to visit your dermatologist. They can determine what's causing your breakout and treat it properly.

Here are some common conditions that can result in a rash.

Atopic dermatitis (aka eczema): This is a chronic skin condition in which you develop itchy red rashes that come and go over time. Many different irritants can trigger these rashes, such as:

- Allergens like pet dander and dust mites
- Soaps, detergents, and lotions with heavy fragrances
- Cleaning products
- Cold dry air

Allergic reactions to drugs: Rash is the most common type of allergic reaction to medication and may take days or weeks to develop. Contact your health care provider if you notice a rash while you are taking a medication. Common drugs that cause allergic reactions are nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), antibiotics, chemotherapy drugs, anti-seizure drugs, and ACE inhibitors.

Lupus: This disease of the immune system can affect your skin in several ways. For instance, you may get a scaly patch on your scalp or a butterfly-shaped rash across your nose and cheeks. You may experience times when your symptoms disappear and other times—called flares—when they're worse. Often, lupus affects other parts of your body besides your skin, such as your joints, muscles, and kidneys.

Poison ivy, oak, or sumac: An oil found in these plants can cause an itchy, blistering rash within a few hours to several days after exposure. If you have swelling on your face, or difficulty breathing or swallowing, you may be having a severe reaction and should go to an emergency room right away.



Shingles: If you've had chickenpox, you can get shingles. The virus stays in your body and may reactivate many years later, resulting in a painful, blistering rash. If you get shingles, contact your provider. Antiviral medication can reduce your symptoms, but it's most effective when taken within three days of developing a rash.

When to Seek Immediate Care for a Rash

Sometimes rashes can require urgent treatment. If you notice any of these symptoms, contact your dermatologist or go to the emergency room right away:

- Rash that's covering your entire body or spreading rapidly
- Fever with the rash
- Blistering
- Yellow or green fluid, swelling, crusting, pain, or warmth where the rash is located +

Plan Your Plate to Lower Cancer Risk

As with heart disease and diabetes risk, there's no single food or nutrient that can eliminate your risk for cancer. But by focusing on healthy eating habits that help you reach and maintain a healthy weight, you can lower your odds.

→ **GOOD ADVICE TENDS TO BE CONSISTENT.**

In fact, it's likely you've heard some of these tips before for a variety of benefits.

Producing Results

No matter your age, snacks and meals should include plenty of fruits and vegetables. They're low in calories but full of water, vitamins, minerals, fiber, and a range of other natural substances that might help prevent cancer. Here are ways to add produce to your menu:

- **Aim for more than the minimum.** Have at least 2.5 to 3 cups of veggies a day. And at least 1.5 to 2 cups of fruit.
- **Avoid getting into a rut.** Don't rely too heavily on starchy veggies, like corn and potatoes. Instead, eat a range of colors, especially:
 - **Dark green**, such as kale, spinach, broccoli, and collard greens
 - **Red**, such as tomatoes and red bell and chili peppers
 - **Orange**, such as pumpkin, orange bell peppers, and butternut squash

- **Use canned and frozen produce to expand your options.** These are good for you, too, but steer clear of added sugar, salt, or fat.
- **Choose beans, lentils, and edamame.** These plant-based sources of protein—and fiber—are good alternatives to processed and red meats. You can enjoy them fresh, canned, or dried.

The Whole (Grain) Story

Because whole grains keep 100 percent of the original kernel, they also retain fiber, iron, B vitamins, and other healthy compounds. Basically, they're far superior to their refined counterparts, which lose most of their healthy properties during processing. For example, brown rice, whole wheat pasta, and whole-grain bread are much healthier than white rice, regular pasta, and white bread. Other fiber-full options are quinoa and oatmeal.

Potential Allies

Outside of the key three—veggies, fruits, and whole grains—these foods may contribute to a cancer-fighting meal plan:

- **Unsalted nuts and seeds.** These plant-based options for protein also offer dietary fiber. Just watch your portions to keep the calorie count in check.
- **Fatty fish.** Protein-rich salmon, tuna, and trout are among the rare natural dietary sources of vitamin D.
- **Roasted coffee.** But keep it moderate—about 24 to 40 ounces a day. And avoid downing it at very hot (150 degrees or higher) temperatures, which may up your risk for esophageal cancer. Limit calories and fat from added sugar, cream, and whole milk. +



Italian Greens and Beans Soup

This fantastic soup does the body good as a light lunch or accompaniment to a complete and balanced dinner.



INGREDIENTS

1 small head of garlic, about 6 cloves
Canola or olive oil spray
1 medium onion, diced (about 1 cup)
2 carrots, diced (about 1 cup)
2 celery stalks, diced (about 1 cup)
1 bunch Swiss chard, stems and leaves chopped and separated (about 2 cups leaves)
1 bunch kale, stems removed and roughly chopped or torn (about 2 cups)
2 cups baby spinach
15.5 oz.-can cannellini beans; do not drain
1 qt. vegetable or chicken broth, no salt added
¼ tsp. sea salt
½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
1 tbsp. white balsamic vinegar, apple cider vinegar, or lemon juice

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Place garlic head onto a piece of aluminum foil. Spray with oil. Bake for 30 minutes.
2. While garlic is baking, heat a large pot for three minutes on high heat. Turn off, spray with oil, then turn back on high. Add onion, reduce heat to medium, and sauté for about three minutes, stirring frequently.
3. Add carrots, celery, and Swiss chard stems, spray again with oil, and sauté for another eight minutes, stirring frequently. Then add greens, one bunch at a time, stirring frequently, and sauté until everything is wilted.
4. Pour half the beans with water into pot, and reduce heat to low, stirring frequently. Pour in 1 cup of broth.
5. When garlic is finished baking, remove from heat, and let cool.
6. Puree half of the beans with the garlic cloves. Add garlic and bean mixture to the pot, along with the rest of the broth, and increase heat to medium.
7. Season with salt, pepper, and then add vinegar. Makes 8 cups.

PER SERVING

Serves four; serving size is 2 cups. Each serving provides about 170 calories, 0.5 g fat (0 g saturated fat, 0 g trans fat), 0 mg cholesterol, 600 mg sodium, 33 g carbohydrate, 6 g sugars, 10 g fiber, 10 g protein.



5 Ways to Manage Blood Pressure Without Medication

High blood pressure is a common and dangerous condition that increases your risk for heart disease and stroke. The good news is that there are lifestyle changes you can make to keep your blood pressure under control.

→ **TALK WITH YOUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER ABOUT WHETHER MANAGING YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE WITHOUT MEDICATION IS POSSIBLE FOR YOU.** Even if you do need to take medication, you can still benefit from the following strategies.



To reduce your blood pressure, also avoid or limit the following:

- Sugary beverages
- Saturated and trans fats
- Tropical oils (like coconut and palm)
- Full-fat dairy
- Fatty meats

1. Optimize Your Diet

An eating plan that puts the focus on vegetables, fruits, and whole grains has been proven to reduce blood pressure, among other benefits (See page 6 to learn more). Fish, poultry, beans, nuts, and healthy oils are good choices, too. Look for nutrient-rich foods that have potassium, calcium, magnesium, and fiber.

Keep your sodium consumption to less than 2,300 mg a day—or to less than 1,500 mg a day to reduce your blood pressure even more.



2. Add More Activity to Your Day

Aim for at least two and a half hours a week of moderate-intensity exercise. This means your heart rate is up and you're breaking a sweat, but you're still able to talk. Some great options include:

- Brisk walking
- Bicycling
- Doing water aerobics
- Playing doubles tennis
- Pushing a lawn mower



Alternately, you can do 75 minutes a week of vigorous activity. It's also a good idea to do muscle-strengthening exercises at least twice a week.

3. Prioritize High-Quality Sleep

While sleeping, your blood pressure goes down—so if you don't sleep enough, it stays higher for longer. Aim for at least seven hours of sleep a night. The more well-rested you are, the better shape your heart and blood vessels will be in. Plus, good sleep will give you the energy to exercise more and make good decisions about your nutrition.



4. Limit Alcohol Consumption

When you drink too much alcohol, it can raise your blood pressure. Men should have no more than two drinks a day, while women should stick to a limit of one drink a day.



5. Stop Smoking—And Stay Away from Secondhand Smoke

Smoking harms the body, including the heart and blood vessels. Nicotine, the addictive chemical in cigarettes, speeds up your heartbeat and causes your blood pressure to rise. While smokers are at the most risk, people who are exposed to secondhand smoke can also be harmed by it. +



CAN YOU TRUST BLOOD PRESSURE KIOSKS?

When you go to the pharmacy, you might notice a kiosk where you can test your blood pressure. Maybe you've even tried one to check your heart health. But be warned: A kiosk may give you inaccurate results, according to the FDA.

Why Kiosks Aren't for Everyone

To get an accurate blood pressure reading, the cuff that's used to read it must be the correct size for your arm. A cuff that is too big will give you a low reading and one that is too small will give you a high reading. This is why health care providers have a range of cuffs available in their offices. But kiosks usually have only one cuff and its size varies by machine.

You may also get inaccurate results if you don't sit correctly or put the cuff on wrong.

Why Accurate Results Matter

If left untreated, high blood pressure can cause heart attack, stroke, heart failure, and kidney problems. There usually aren't any symptoms of high blood pressure, which is why experts recommend regular blood pressure tests.

However, one blood pressure test, whether it's from a kiosk or your provider, doesn't automatically mean you have high or low blood pressure. Your blood pressure can change quickly, depending on factors like stress and your posture. This is why providers typically do several tests before making a diagnosis.

Try This, Instead

The American Heart Association recommends having your blood pressure checked by your provider at least once every two years starting at age 20. If your blood pressure is elevated (higher than 120/80 mmHg), your provider may check it more often and recommend that you also monitor it at home.



Monitoring Blood Pressure at Home

When monitoring your blood pressure at home, it's important that you do it correctly. Learn how by visiting www.heart.org, where you'll also find information on choosing the right blood pressure monitor.

Adele



Living Life Her Way

Strong. Unapologetic. Soulful. For millions of fans, these words describe singer-songwriter Adele Adkins' music. But they are a reflection of her life as well.

Known worldwide by her first name only, Adele has connected with audiences around the globe, reaching hearts with her lyrics. Her raw natural talent was discovered by a record label early on, launching her to stardom while still just a teenager. Fifteen Grammy wins and one Oscar later, the British vocalist is just getting started.

Discovering Herself

Adele is known for husky, moving ballads inspired by her personal life, such as "Someone Like You," "Make You Feel My Love," and "Hello." After taking a hiatus from music—and the public eye—for close to six years, the über-private Adele recently released a new album titled *30*. Similar to her other albums—*19*, *21*, and *25*—the title represents her age when she started creating the album. *30* overflows with songs that reflect on recent years filled with anxiety and change. As always, Adele crafted this album the same way she's accomplished all her goals—by being passionately true to herself.

"I've learned a lot of home truths about myself along the way. I've shed many layers but also wrapped myself in new ones. [I] discovered genuinely useful and wholesome mentalities to lead with, and I feel like I've finally found my feeling again," Adele commented on her Twitter page on release of the album. "I'd go so far as to say I've never felt so peaceful in my life."

Finding Self-Care

During her years off the radar, Adele went through a devastating divorce from Simon Konecki—the father of her son, Angelo. In addition to expressing herself through music, she processed this difficult time by focusing on positive self-care, including therapy, meditation, and self-reflection. She also found physical activity as an outlet to work through her frustrations and emotions.

"[The gym] became *my time*. I realized that when I was working out, I didn't have any anxiety. It was never about losing weight. I thought, if I can make my body physically strong, and I can feel

that and see that, then maybe one day I can make my emotions and my mind physically strong,” Adele said to *Vogue*.

Adele fell in love with exercise. She worked with a trainer and regularly engaged in weight lifting, circuit training, boxing, hiking, and more. The vigorous activity helped her achieve mental clarity. But it transformed her physically as well.

Making Healthy Changes

Adele’s weight has been the topic of magazines and tabloids since she hit the spotlight. And at every turn, she has promoted body confidence at any size. As a result, Adele served as a role model for women everywhere. But when she emerged from her years-long hiatus, Adele’s 100-pound weight loss took the world by surprise. It seemed everyone was talking about her weight—except Adele. Both positive and negative

myself and not anyone else. ... You don’t need to be overweight to be body positive; you can be any shape or size.”

Exercise was a big part of her transformation. But so was healthy eating. Despite news reports to the contrary, Adele didn’t follow any specific diet or eating plan. According to her trainers, she focused on whole, unprocessed foods. But she didn’t give up the fare she loves. Again, true to self, Adele seemed to achieve her goal without compromise.

Overcoming Adversity

Clearly, Adele isn’t a stranger to adversity. But even before her divorce, her courage was challenged. In 2012, she suddenly lost her voice during a live concert. Soon after, she learned that a polyp on her vocal cords had begun hemorrhaging.

“[It was] like someone put a curtain over my throat ... and I could feel it. It felt like

Joining the Fight

Adele not only sings her passion but lives it, too. She is a major supporter of Grenfell United, a charity that supports the survivors and bereaved families of the 2017 Grenfell Tower fire in London. She works closely with the charity today to make positive change for others. But she’s not afraid to get messy. At the time of the fire, Adele was moved to go to the scene, personally lending support and giving hugs to survivors.

“It was just absolute despair ... I just couldn’t believe there was a building on fire in the middle of central London and it didn’t cause more outrage,” Adele said to *British Vogue*. “I haven’t seen people as resilient as [the survivors] in my whole life.”

Adele helps stand up to adversity through her support of other charities as well, including Amnesty International—a global organization that fights injustice. She’s also heavily involved with Sands, a UK charity that works to reduce stillbirth and neonatal deaths and supports those affected by it.

Being Bold

Now living in California, Adele continues to choose her own path. She is focused on raising her son as normally as possible with her ex-husband and continues to make positive choices for her mind and body. Her healthy addiction to exercise hasn’t waned. And neither has her priority on making music that speaks to her. But she’s doing so with more focus and less anxiety than ever before.

Strong. Unapologetic. And always soulful.

Adele is an example for all of us on how to be bold and intentional. Taking care of those we love. Showing compassion to others. And living our best life. Thankfully, we can listen to Adele belt out soulful inspiration along the way. ✦

“My body’s been objectified my entire career. It’s not just now. I understand why [my weight loss is] a shock. I understand why some women especially were hurt. Visually, I represented a lot of women. But I’m still the same person.”

opinions rolled in. Thankfully, her unapologetic strength and focus on body confidence didn’t change with the number on the scale.

“My body’s been objectified my entire career. It’s not just now. I understand why [my weight loss is] a shock. I understand why some women especially were hurt. Visually, I represented a lot of women. But I’m still the same person,” Adele said to *Vogue*. “I did it for

something popped in my throat,” said Adele, as reported by CBS News.

Adele underwent surgery on her vocal cords to remove the polyp—a scary proposition for a megastar musician on her way up. It wasn’t clear if she would ever sing again. But in true Adele form, she dug deep to find a way forward. Perhaps it’s part of the reason she’s so drawn to helping others fight through adversity.

Urgent Warning on Kids' Mental Health

In October 2021, the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and Children's Hospital Association declared a national state of emergency in children's mental health.

→ **THE REASON?** Young people are experiencing rising levels of loneliness, depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts.

The Pandemic Effect

The mental health challenges children face have been made even more difficult by the COVID-19 pandemic. Isolation, uncertainty, and fear have taken a toll. So has grief. During the pandemic, more than 140,000 children have lost a parent, custodial grandparent, or grandparent caregiver.

Communities of color have been hit hardest. Of those who lost a primary caregiver during the pandemic, 65 percent are children of racial and ethnic minorities, even though they make up just 39 percent of the population.

Losing a caregiver who provides a home, daily care, and love can have long-lasting negative effects on a child. These kids are more likely to have mental health problems and lower self-esteem, live in poverty, and be at risk for substance abuse and violence.

How to Help

Supporting the kids in your life starts with modeling self-care. Practice self-compassion, talk about how you're feeling, engage in exercise, and focus on factors under your control.

If you notice a child is struggling, here are some ways to help:

- **Check in.** Let the child know you're always available to talk. Ask how

they're doing. Some kids like direct conversations. Others might prefer to express themselves through an activity like painting.

- **Relax together.** Spend time together doing things that help you connect, like watching a movie.
- **Teach coping strategies.** Tools such as mindfulness and yoga can help build resilience.
- **Offer counseling.** Some children may benefit from talking with a professional counselor. This is especially true for those grieving the loss of a loved one.
- **Talk with a pediatrician.** Worried about your child's behavior or want more ideas on how to support them? Their pediatrician is a great resource. +



RECOGNIZING MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES IN KIDS

Not all children show stress in the same way. Look for these common signs.

SIGNS IN YOUNG CHILDREN	SIGNS IN OLDER CHILDREN AND TEENS
Hitting, biting, or intense tantrums	More conflicts with friends and family
Trouble eating	Loss of interest in activities they previously enjoyed
Difficulty falling asleep at night	Problems with memory and concentration
Clinginess or fear of going outside	Increased reckless behavior

For Less Joint and Back Pain, Get Back to the Basics of Good Health

Your musculoskeletal system, which includes your muscles, bones, joints, and tendons, is the framework that supports your body. It is what allows you to move and go about the activities of your daily life.



→ **YOU CAN UNDERSTAND, THEN, WHY IT'S IMPORTANT TO RETURN THE FAVOR.** To give your body the support it needs to function well and be healthy.

One way to do that is by keeping inflammation in check. Inflammation is your body's natural response to an injury or disease. It can promote healing—but it can also be harmful if it lasts too long or affects healthy tissue. In the musculoskeletal system, that can lead to swelling, pain, and trouble doing your normal activities.

The Role of Inflammation

These are just a few of the musculoskeletal conditions that may be linked to inflammation:

- **Low back pain** is one of the most common reasons for missing work or seeing a health care provider. Inflammation often plays a part in the pain. The inflammation may be caused by an injury, such as a tear in a back muscle or tendon (the band of tissue that attaches muscle to bone). Or it may be due to arthritis that gradually damages the joints and bones of the spine.
- **Tendinitis** is inflammation in a tendon. It may cause pain and soreness near a joint. Often, it results from overuse of the affected area. You may hear it called tennis elbow or pitcher's shoulder. It can also be caused by nonsport activities, such as typing, sawing, or tightly gripping tools for a long time.

- **Osteoarthritis** is the most common type of arthritis. It occurs when the tissues in a joint gradually break down over time. This condition was once blamed on wear and tear. Scientists now know that most of the damage is caused by other issues, including inflammation. The result is pain, swelling, and stiffness.
- **Rheumatoid arthritis** is an autoimmune disease (a disorder in which the immune system attacks the body's own cells by mistake). It mainly affects the joints, causing painful inflammation. It can also cause problems in other parts of the body, such as the heart, lungs, and eyes.

A Shared Path to Less Pain

Different musculoskeletal conditions have their own sets of symptoms and medical treatments. Yet the same healthy lifestyle choices help prevent or manage many of them. Why is that? One explanation is that these actions help lessen the inflammation that is at the root of many musculoskeletal problems.

Here are some of the ways you can help your body avoid or limit pain:



Being physically active on a regular basis strengthens your bones and muscles. It also has inflammation-fighting effects. Plus, staying active helps ease arthritis symptoms and may speed up recovery from chronic back pain. For a low-impact workout that's easy

on the joints, try walking, biking, or swimming. A word of caution: There are times when your body needs a chance to rest and heal, for example, if you have tendinitis. Check with your health care provider about what's right for you.



Eating a nutritious diet provides the nutrients you need for healthy bones and muscles. Choosing fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and healthy fats (such as those in fish and olive oil) may help keep inflammation at bay. In contrast, saturated fats, trans fats, and processed foods may worsen inflammation.



Losing weight, if you're overweight, reduces the strain on your joints. It's especially good for your hips and knees. If you have arthritis, losing as little as 5 percent of your weight may decrease related pain and disability. That's just 12 pounds for a 240-pound person. Because excess body fat can promote inflammation, losing weight may help with that, too.



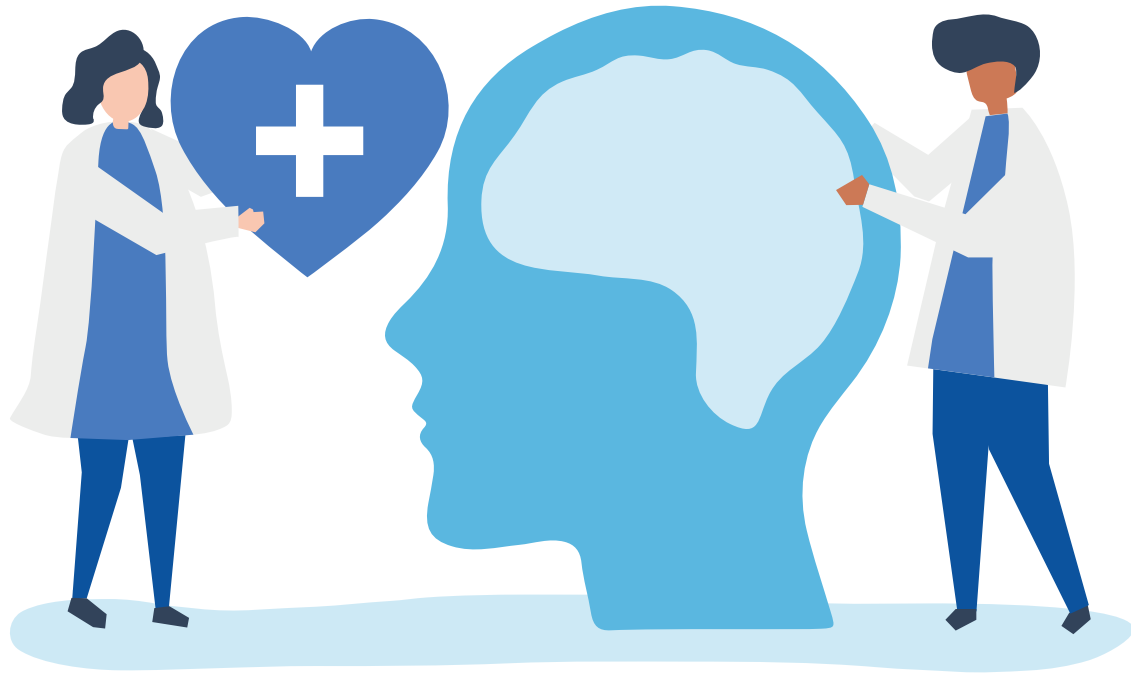
Quitting smoking is one of the best things you can do for your health. Smoking increases the risk of developing rheumatoid arthritis and osteoporosis (a condition in which bones become weak and fracture easily). It can also speed up the breakdown of spinal disks (the cushiony pads between the bones of the spine). Plus, quitting smoking reduces signs of inflammation in the body.

These steps are great for your overall health. And because they support your musculoskeletal system, they help you do what matters most to you with less pain and greater ease. +

PROTECT YOURSELF FROM INJURY

Musculoskeletal injuries can cause a lot of discomfort. Plus, you're more likely to develop osteoarthritis in an injured joint. These simple precautions reduce your risk of getting hurt:

- Stay physically active throughout the week, not just on the weekends.
- Ease into a new sport or activity. Gradually increase the intensity over time.
- Warm up with light exercise and stretching before more intense activity.
- Face an object when reaching for it. Don't reach backward or sideways.
- Avoid sitting in the same position for long. Switch up your position often. When you can, stand up and stretch or walk around.



Talking About Memory Problems

Many of us worry about developing memory problems as we age. So, it is surprising that less than half of adults with memory concerns have discussed them with a health care provider.

→ **IT'S NORMAL TO GET A BIT ABSENTMINDED AS YOU GET OLDER.** Usually, things such as forgetting certain words or where you left your keys don't signal a serious memory problem. But if these blips concern you, you should talk with your provider.

If you have memory problems that make it hard to do everyday activities, such as shopping, driving, or communicating, it is especially important to see your health care provider. While these symptoms can be caused by certain medicines, an infection, or depression, they can also be signs of a more serious memory problem, such as Alzheimer's disease or dementia. Your provider can help you learn what's causing the problem and how to treat it.

Prepare for Your Visit

Make an appointment with your provider to discuss your memory problems. Plan to bring the following to your visit:

- A list of all of your medications, including prescriptions and over-the-counter remedies
- A list of your symptoms and when they occur. Try to be as specific as possible. For example, "When I go to the store, I spend a half hour searching for my car in the lot."

If you are afraid you might forget what to bring, ask a family member or friend to help you get ready for the appointment—and maybe go with you.

What to Expect at the Visit

There is no single test that can diagnose memory problems. Your health care

provider may do a full physical exam and ask you questions about your symptoms and medical history. Your provider may also run some tests, including:

- Blood and urine tests to check for an underlying issue
- A brain scan, such as an MRI scan or CT scan
- Questions to check your thinking, language, and memory skills

Depending on the results, your provider will explain the cause of your condition and review possible treatment options. If your provider cannot find a problem, they may refer you to a specialist. +



Is It Alzheimer's? Learn more about the 10 early signs of Alzheimer's disease and how these differ from normal age-related changes at www.alz.org.

Could Gaming Be Good for You? The Surprising Health Benefits

Recently, researchers have begun uncovering new benefits to video games—and not just for young players. Here are three ways they can improve your health and well-being at every age.

→ **VIDEO GAMES GET A BAD RAP—OFTEN FOR GOOD REASON.** Health experts point to the risks of too much screen time, from strained eyes to poor sleep to lack of physical activity. Some games feature questionable content. But not all digital diversions are a poor use of time.

Kids and Teens: Focusing Attention

In June 2020, the FDA took a brave new step. It approved a video game—called *EndeavorRx*—to help kids with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

The approach has some benefits when paired with other ways of treating the disorder. Video games keep people with ADHD engaged and motivated so they stick with therapy. And they have relatively few side effects.

One caution: Kids and teens with ADHD may have a greater risk of video game addiction. Signs of unhealthy gaming include becoming obsessed with devices and uninterested in other activities. If you spot these issues, talk with your pediatrician.

Middle-Aged Adults: Easing Stress

Contrary to popular opinion, most gamers are adults—the average age range is 35 to 44. Many play as a way to set aside the stress and anxiety of daily life.

Research suggests the strategy works. Often, playing games boosts levels of dopamine, a brain chemical linked to pleasure. Feelings like happiness, surprise, and enjoyment result. Players may enter a “flow” state, which increases their confidence and quality of life.

Older Adults: Boosting Memory

As we get older, a part of the brain called the hippocampus goes through structural and functional changes. That’s one reason many older adults have trouble with their memory.

Trying new things helps offset this decline. But if your mobility is limited, your options for novel experiences might be, too.

Enter video games: immersive new worlds that don’t require leaving your living room. In one study, people ages 60 to 80 played video games daily for four weeks. Afterward, they did better on memory tests than those who simply played solitaire. +



Choosing a Video Game to Play

Video games are assigned an ESRB (Entertainment Software Rating Board) rating that provides basic information about what kind of content is included and what ages it’s appropriate for. While the rating cannot tell you how fun the game is to play, it can help you make a more informed choice as a parent or player. Learn more at www.esrb.org.



Are You Down in the Dumps or Is It Depression?

Everyone feels low, blue, or downright sad at times. If these emotions are strong or don't ease up, you may wonder whether you (or a loved one) are depressed.



→ IT'S A QUESTION WORTH ASKING.

Depression is a serious medical condition that deserves treatment so that you can feel better—mentally and physically. Yet 35 percent of people living with depression aren't getting the help they need, according to a national survey.

It's important to understand that depression affects people in different ways. If you're concerned about it, your best next step is to see your health care provider. Read on to learn about differences between depression and just feeling "down in the dumps."

Are You Sad ... or Is It Something More?

It's normal to feel down, especially if you're dealing with a discouraging situation or major life-changing event, such as job loss, serious illness, a natural disaster, the end of a relationship, or the death of a loved one.

Sadness, however, is only a small part of depression, according to the National Institute of Mental Health. In addition to causing a low or "empty" mood, depression can have an impact on your physical health

and on your ability to think clearly.

Symptoms of depression include:

- Feeling hopeless or pessimistic
- Feeling guilty or helpless, or having low self-worth
- Having little interest in activities you once enjoyed
- Low energy
- Trouble concentrating
- Difficulty getting to sleep or trouble with oversleeping
- Appetite and/or weight changes
- Restlessness or irritability
- Thoughts of death or suicide

Has It Been Days ... or Weeks or Months?

Timing is key. A blue mood that lasts a few hours or a couple days—or ebbs and flows—likely is not depression.

Depression lasts for weeks, months, or even longer. You can't just "snap out of it." Also, it's important to know that depression and grief are not the same thing. Losing someone close to you is difficult, but the painful feelings tend to come in waves—

mixed with moments of happy memories. However, if grief lasts a very long time or is unusually severe, your grief may be edging into depression.

Are You Feeling Ill ... or Experiencing an Important Clue?

Health problems that can mimic depression or trigger depression-like symptoms include thyroid disorders, vitamin deficiencies, and viruses. Medications that may cause depressive symptoms include beta-blockers, corticosteroids, and hormone-altering drugs.

Depression itself can cause cramps, aches and pains, headaches, and digestive problems that don't seem to have a physical cause and that don't ease up when treated.

Are You Grumpy and Tired ... or Having Unique Symptoms?

Some surprising feelings and reactions may be overlooked signs of depression. For example, men with depression may have more irritability, fatigue, and loss of interest in work or hobbies than women.

For women, depression may crop up in the weeks before menstruation (as premenstrual dysphoric disorder, which includes serious and disabling irritability, anger, and even suicidal thoughts), after the birth of a baby, or during perimenopause. Older adults with depression may seem grumpy, tired, or confused rather than sad.

Since depression can affect people in such different ways, it's best to make an appointment with your provider if you suspect something isn't right. Remember, depression is a medical condition, and it can be treated. +

MIND YOUR MOOD BY TRACKING IT

Mood tracking is the act of recording your moods from day-to-day so that you can recognize trends, triggers, and how you're using your energy. There's no one way to create a mood chart, but here are a few tips.

Why Write It Down?

Logging your mood can have many benefits, including helping you:

- Understand your mood patterns
- Better cope with stress
- Make informed decisions
- Process your emotions

1 – CHOOSE YOUR MEDIUM.


You can use a plain notebook, a journal, a calendar, or even an app.

2 – BEGIN WITH THE BASICS.

Start by recording how you were feeling on a particular day. It's helpful to jot down whether your mood changed and anything significant that happened that day—maybe you had an argument with your partner, came down with a cough, or received exciting news.

3 – DECIDE ON DETAILS.

You can also add details like number of hours slept, time spent exercising, or any self-care practices you tried (taking a bath, calling a friend, etc.). Over time, you can see how these factors affect your mood.

 **Emotion wheels** can help you put a name to what you're experiencing. To see an example of one called the Feelings Wheel, visit <https://feelingswheel.com>.

The Powerful Benefits of Taking Time Off

Of the more than three-fourths of Americans who have paid vacation days, less than half use them. That's a mistake because taking time off for yourself is not just fun. Its benefits include improved focus and job performance, less stress, better heart health, and even a lower risk for early death.

→ Time Away Matters

Your body responds to workday pressures by producing hormones like adrenaline and cortisol. These help you meet deadlines and other challenges.

Without breaks, this process enters overdrive. Levels of stress hormones stay high. This can result in burnout, anxiety, depression, and damage to your cardiovascular system.

Days off provide a hard reset, interrupting the cycle. When you're refreshed, it's easier to make wise choices, such as eating well and exercising.

Make the Most of Your Break

You don't have to book an expensive getaway. Day trips, mini-vacations, and staycations help, too. To make any respite restful:

- **Slow down.** Packing too much into time off adds excess stress. Include time to relax and activities specifically focused on recovery, such as easy walks and connecting with friends and family.
- **Leave work behind.** You might feel like you need to check email or take a few business calls. But these so-called spillover tasks interfere with vacation's positive effects.

Do your best to set boundaries and mentally detach from your job.

- **Get mindful.** When you focus on the present moment, the advantages of leisure linger. One study showed that people who meditated during vacation—either with a guided session or on their own—felt more energized and emotionally healthy 10 weeks later. +

THE OTHER GOOD REASON TO STAY HOME: SICK LEAVE

If you're not feeling well, it's best to stay home when you can. If your employer offers sick leave, you typically aren't compensated for unused days. So, it pays—for your health and the health of those around you—to use that time.

