

Inside This Issue:

Self-Care Corner	2
Medical News.....	3
Feed Your Body – Feed Your Soul.....	4
Be Fit	6
Success Over Stress.....	7

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HealthyLife[®] Letter

Promoting Health. Enhancing Life. Reducing Costs.

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Hair loss: *more than skin deep*

Hair loss is a common issue among men and women alike. The U.S. National Library of Medicine says about 50 million men and 30 million women have some degree of hair loss or baldness. Most of the time, this is due to hereditary hair loss.

Sometimes, however, hair loss is a sign of a health problem. Hair loss can sometimes be caused by:

- Thyroid problems
- Diabetes
- Low iron in the blood (anemia)
- Prostate cancer in men
- High blood pressure (hypertension)
- Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) in women

Hair loss doesn't always mean you have a serious illness. Sometimes hair falls out for a little while and then starts to grow back. Some of the reasons this happens include:

- Hair breakage from chemicals like perms and hair color
- Hairstyles that pull on the hair, such as tight ponytails and braids
- A stressful event, such as a death in the family
- Stress on the body from major surgery, childbirth or some illnesses



Common hair loss treatments

Knowing the cause of your hair loss is the first step to treatment. For instance, if iron levels are low, your doctor may recommend an iron supplement. Treatments for common hereditary hair loss include:

- Topical minoxidil (brand name Rogaine, which can be purchased in stores)
- Finasteride (prescription medicine for men only)
- Topical or oral estrogen or other hormones (prescription for women only)
- Hair transplant surgery

- Brushing hair too hard or too often
- Some prescription medicines, including those for arthritis, cancer, depression, gout, heart disease and high blood pressure
- Hormone changes, such as during pregnancy or menopause

If you notice sudden hair loss, it's important to find out the cause. If you notice large amounts of hair falling out when combing or washing your hair, or thinning or bald spots, make an appointment with your doctor.

Source: American Academy of Dermatology

Still no flu shot? It's not too late

The flu causes hundreds of thousands of hospitalizations and thousands of deaths each year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). It's a serious disease that is especially dangerous for babies, the elderly and those with health conditions, such as heart disease.

National Influenza Vaccination Week (NIVW) is December 3-9, and it's a great time to go and get your flu shot if you haven't done so yet. You may be wondering if getting a shot now will be helpful, and the answer is "yes!" Here's why:

- Getting the shot now means you could be protected before the peak of the holiday season. It takes about 2 weeks to get the full immunity from a flu shot.
- Flu season usually continues until March or even April of each year. Getting the shot now means months of protection!
- As long as the flu keeps spreading, the flu shot can keep you from getting sick.
- If you do get sick, your illness will probably be much milder.
- No one likes to have a fever, chills, cough, headache, sore throat, body aches, nausea or vomiting. Getting the flu shot now means you reduce your risk of getting all these symptoms from the flu this season. The flu is much more serious than a cold.



Top flu shot myths busted

Many people have heard myths about the flu shot and may wonder if it's safe and effective. Check out these common misconceptions and the truth about the flu shot:

Myth: You can get sick from the flu shot.

Fact: The flu shot cannot make you sick with the flu. It contains inactivated (killed) viruses. Some people have mild side effects that last only a day or so that include aches, soreness and a low fever. These side effects are much shorter and milder than getting the flu.

Myth: It's better to just get the flu and get immunity that way.

Fact: While most healthy people will recover from the flu without problems, this is a dangerous risk to take. Anyone who gets the flu can be at risk of having serious problems. And, there is a high risk of spreading it to loved ones, especially babies, the elderly and people with weakened immune systems.

Myth: I got the flu shot last year, so I don't need a new one.

Fact: The flu shot changes each year based on what flu viruses are going around. Experts choose several viruses that are most likely to make people sick and include them in the vaccine. Last year's vaccine may not offer protection against this year's viruses.



HIV and AIDS – how much do you know?

When HIV and AIDS were first discovered, they were commonly thought to be one in the same. Nearly everyone who had HIV would eventually get AIDS. But as treatment for AIDS and HIV has continued to progress, HIV does not always turn into AIDS.

Today, there are special medicines called antiretroviral therapy (ART) that can help keep HIV from getting worse. These drugs can help a person live a long, healthy life with HIV, preventing them from getting AIDS later on.

HIV: What it is and how it's treated

HIV stands for human immunodeficiency virus. HIV is spread through certain bodily fluids. Most commonly, it is spread through sexual contact or sharing needles.

HIV attacks the body's immune system, destroying the body's cells that fight off infections. There is no cure for HIV, but there is treatment.

Early treatment with ART is important. Someone who begins HIV treatment in the early stages of the infection can live nearly as long as someone who doesn't have HIV.

About 166,000 people have HIV and don't know it. This means they aren't getting the treatment they need to live longer and they can spread HIV to others.

HIV is NOT spread through:

- Hugging or casual kissing
- The air, such as sneezing or coughing
- Mosquito or other insect bites



Symptoms of HIV

Within 2 to 4 weeks of getting HIV, a person may feel like they have a bad case of the flu. Symptoms include:

- Fever
- Headache
- Swollen glands
- Sore throat
- Body aches
- Rash

These symptoms may last a few days or several weeks. Having these symptoms does not mean you have HIV.

Some people do not feel sick at all after getting HIV. That's why it's important to get tested if you think you may have been exposed.

To find an HIV testing site near you, go to locator.hiv.gov.

AIDS

The last stage of an HIV infection is acquired immunodeficiency syndrome, or AIDS. Once HIV has progressed to AIDS, the body's immune system is badly damaged. A person with AIDS may get sick often, and may get infections and cancers because the body cannot fight them off.

Starting treatment at this late stage can still be helpful to someone with AIDS. But, it is much better to begin treatment as soon as possible after getting HIV.



Sources: HIV.gov and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Giving the gift of healthy eating

The holiday season is usually associated with a lot of unhealthy, rich foods and sweets. The result of eating too much of these treats is often weight gain. A study in the *New England Journal of Medicine* found that people gained weight within 10 days of a national holiday, and it took several months to lose that weight.

This year, celebrate without extra weight! Spread the gift of healthy eating to others by giving gifts that encourage good habits.



Making healthy food easier

If you're looking for a thoughtful gift that will be truly appreciated, try giving the gift of healthy food that saves time and effort! Here are some ideas:



Make a healthy meal that freezes well and hand deliver it.

The recipient can choose to freeze and eat later, or eat it that day. Be sure you are aware of any food allergies or other dietary needs. Some ideas include homemade chili or pasta sauce.



Put a more creative twist on a traditional fruit basket and give them a fruit salad that's ready to eat.

Pre-washed and cut fruit that's ready to grab means they can enjoy it right away, without any prep time.



Put soup ingredients in a mason jar.

This is a popular gift that helps the person prepare an easy and healthy dinner. Usually, the dry ingredients for your favorite soup will go well in a jar. Be sure to include directions on how to cook it, and consider adding some whole-grain bread on the side.



Share your favorite mix or sauce.

Do you have a secret recipe for healthy granola or a delicious marinade for meats? Share your gift of cooking by putting it in a jar or container with a nice label. Provide tips on how to use or prepare it.



Not into cooking? You can always purchase dishes or containers that are useful for healthy eating. For instance, a person who eats lunch on the go may appreciate containers that can keep salads, dressing or other healthy foods fresh and delicious.

10 WAYS

to avoid holiday weight gain

It can be especially hard to avoid extra pounds when there's holiday food everywhere you turn. Stick to the basics of healthy eating so you can make it to the new year without regrets.

1 DRINK MORE WATER
Drinking water before you eat may help you feel fuller and eat less.



2 SKIP THE SODA, HOT COCOA AND HIGH-SUGAR COFFEE DRINKS
Replacing sugary drinks with water can help you lose weight.



3 GET EXERCISE
Even just a few minutes a day has health benefits and can help you burn calories.



4 EAT FRUITS AND VEGETABLES
These foods are generally packed with nutrition and low in calories.



5 GET ENOUGH SLEEP
Lack of sleep can cause more cravings for unhealthy foods.



6 LISTEN TO YOUR BODY
Stop eating when you start to feel full, not when you're stuffed.



7 START WITH SMALL PORTIONS
Start with smaller amounts of food on your plate, and wait to see if you need more later.



8 KEEP A FOOD DIARY
This helps you get a clear picture of what you've eaten.



9 DON'T EAT AND WATCH TV
This can lead to mindless eating and consuming too many calories.



10 BUILD MUSCLE
Muscles help your body burn more calories, even when resting.



Beat winter doldrums by using a pool indoors

If you think swimming pools are just for summer fun, think again. Winter is a great time to take advantage of an indoor pool to get some low-impact exercise. Exercising in water offers many benefits no matter what the season. Try it this winter because:

- It's low impact, so it's easy on joints that may get sore with activities like running or jumping.
- It helps you be more flexible. In the water, you may be able to move your arms and legs in ways that are difficult on land.
- Warm water pools can feel soothing, especially in cold weather.
- It helps people with arthritis or orthopedic/joint injuries to improve joint movement without pain or strain from traditional exercise.
- It offers a nice change from land exercises — and variety may help you stick with a workout.
- A pool workout helps keep you cool, even if you're working hard.
- Water exercise may improve mood and mental well-being.
- Water offers natural resistance that can tone and strengthen muscles.



Don't swear off pool exercise because you can't swim.

There are many exercises that can be done in the water that don't include traditional swimming. If you can't swim, stick to the shallow end or wear a life jacket. Try these exercises:

- Walk or jog from end to end in the shallow end.
- Grab the edge of the pool and kick your legs from side to side.
- Try the "superman": hold the edge of the pool and point your body out straight behind you. Keep your body in a straight line and hold the pose for a few seconds.
- Do jumping jacks in chest-deep water

Many local fitness centers have pools for exercise and even water aerobics classes. A community center, hotel or school may offer public swim times as well.



To help keep public pools clean and to avoid illness:

- Shower before and after using a pool
- Don't get pool water in your mouth
- Don't use the pool if you're sick, especially if you have had vomiting or diarrhea within the last week
- Stay out of the pool if you have an open wound that's not fully healed or fully covered with a waterproof bandage

Sources: National Institutes of Health and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Managing financial stress

Do finances keep you awake at night? If so, you're not alone. More than 75 percent of Americans say money is a big source of stress, according to the American Psychological Association (APA).

Although we can't always change our financial problems right away, we can learn to cope with this type of stress. This can help you stay healthier and learn to deal with challenges in a positive way.



If you're stressed about money, try these tips:



Remain calm and make a plan.

It can be easy to get caught up in the panic of the moment when a problem arises. A sudden expense needed for an emergency or stories about a "bad economy" in the news can make things feel hopeless. Instead, think about small steps you can take now to improve your budget. This may be writing down a few specific ways you can cut back on expenses. Or, look at your past spending and make a plan to cut back on things you can do without for now.



Look at the positive side of being thrifty.

Eating meals at home instead of at a restaurant can be a fun family bonding time. Have everyone help prepare the meal or pick out their favorite dish for the weekly menu. Can't afford a fitness membership? Exercise with a family member or friend at home and make it fun.



Be proud of progress.

If you saved \$5 by making your coffee at home rather than buying it at a coffee shop, that's a step in the right direction. Think about the little ways you can save money and how they add up over time. These small successes can get you to your goal.



If you can't pay your bills, ask for help.

Banks, utilities and credit card companies will often give you extra time to pay if you're in a financial crisis. It doesn't hurt to call and ask.



Identify unhealthy behaviors.

If you deal with stress by drinking alcohol, smoking or gambling, this will often make matters worse. Not only do these habits cost more money, but they can cost you your health, job and relationships. Healthy ways to cope with stress include exercise, deep breathing, eating a balanced diet, listening to music or calling a friend. If you need help with unhealthy behaviors, ask your doctor or look into community support groups.



Telling kids about tragedy

Talking to kids about scary events and disasters is important when they're old enough to understand. Kids may have more fear of an event if they don't know any details. They may imagine something much worse than what happened.

Although telling kids some details may help, the American Academy of Pediatrics says it's important that you filter the information you give your child. Think about the child's age, personality and what they will be able to cope with. These steps can get the conversation started:

- **Ask the child what they know about the event.** This can help you separate facts from fiction. It gives you a way to explain the things they already know in a way that is direct but not scary.
- **Avoid any graphic details.** Although the media may share lots of details that are graphic and scary, children should be shielded from these things.
- **Don't be too vague.** Saying "something happened that was bad" doesn't give enough information. Instead, name the place where it happened and tell them that some people were hurt. The police/ firemen/ government, etc. are helping people and working to keep us safe.
- **Keep it open ended.** Tell them if they have any questions, they can ask you.



Is your child coping?

After a disaster, some children have a hard time coping. These red flags may be a sign that your child needs help:

- Trouble sleeping, nightmares or being very tired all the time
- Unusual aches and pains, such as headache or feeling "sick" often
- Appetite changes
- Social changes, such as aggression or being clingy
- Frequent feelings of sadness or fear

Talk to your child's doctor if you notice any of these changes.

