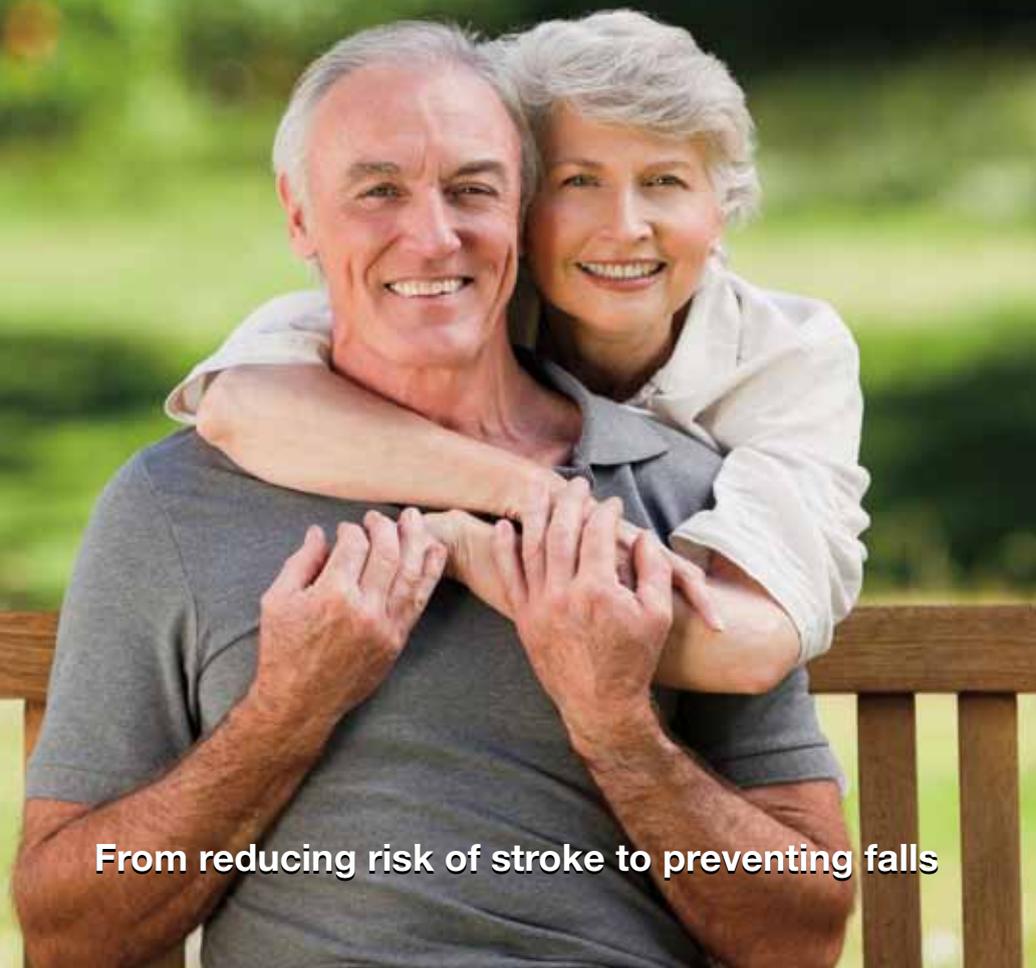


# MAYO CLINIC

# 50 Head-to-Toe Health Tips



From reducing risk of stroke to preventing falls

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# 1 Reducing your risk of stroke and heart attack

Heart disease remains the No. 1 cause of death, while stroke isn't far behind. Protect your heart and brain with these steps:

- **Don't smoke**

One of the best ways to protect yourself against a stroke or heart attack is by not smoking. The benefits of quitting show up after only a few months.

- **Maintain a healthy weight**

Being overweight increases your risk of high blood pressure, high cholesterol levels, cardiovascular disease and diabetes — risk factors for a stroke and heart attack.

- **Limit fats and cholesterol**

Choose fat-free or low-fat dairy products. Limit saturated fats and avoid trans fats. Instead of butter, margarine and shortening, use monounsaturated oils (olive, canola and peanut) and polyunsaturated oils (corn, safflower, sesame, sunflower and soy).

- **Eat fish that have omega-3s**

Eat fish that have omega-3 fatty acids, such as salmon and trout. (See “Eat foods high in omega-3s,” page 34.)

- **Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables**

Produce contains nutrients such as potassium, folate and antioxidants that may protect against stroke and heart attack. Eat at least three servings of fruits and at least four servings of vegetables daily.

- **Limit alcohol use**

Small amounts of alcohol may have cardiovascular benefits, but too much alcohol can raise blood pressure. Moderate drinking means no more than one drink a day for women and anyone 65 or older and no more than two drinks a day for men younger than 65.

- **Reduce salt (sodium)**

Limiting sodium in your diet and making other lifestyle changes can help prevent high blood pressure. If you already have high blood pressure, reducing sodium intake further may help lower it.

## 2 Exercising for a healthy heart

If you exercise regularly, you may lower your risk of a heart attack and stroke. If you are middle-aged or older and haven't been exercising regularly or have a chronic health problem, work with your doctor to develop an exercise program. To condition your heart safely:

- **Start at a comfortable level of exertion**

Try walking five to 10 minutes over a short distance indoors. Increase your time by five minutes a session as you're able.

- **Schedule regular exercise**

Aim for 30 to 60 minutes a day of low- to moderate-intensity physical activity.

- **Include variety**

Combine three types of exercise — stretching (flexibility), endurance (aerobic or cardio) and strengthening (weight training). Start each session with a warm-up of lower intensity, and cool down gradually. Mind-body exercises, such as yoga and tai chi, may provide even greater benefits.

- **Cross-train to reduce your risk of injury**

Alternate among exercises that emphasize different parts of the body, such as swimming, bicycling and walking.

- **Don't overdo it**

Start slowly and build up gradually, allowing time between sessions for your body to rest and recover. And forget the saying "No pain, no gain." A little muscle soreness when you do something new isn't unusual, but soreness doesn't equal pain. If it hurts, stop doing it.

- **Increase your physical activity**

Even routine activities such as gardening, climbing stairs or washing floors can burn calories and help improve your health. You'll get the most benefit from a structured exercise program, but any physical movement helps. Walk or bike to the store instead of driving, park farther away at the shopping mall or take the stairs instead of taking an elevator.

## 3 Choosing a home blood pressure unit

You can track your blood pressure by using a home monitor between checkups. To choose the best monitor for you, ask your doctor for advice and balance convenience with accuracy:

- **Know your options**

Manual blood pressure monitors use a stethoscope and an inflatable arm cuff connected by a rubber tube to a gauge that records the pressure. Digital monitors have a cuff that automatically inflates and a gauge that records blood pressure. Manual monitors are usually less expensive than digital monitors, but can be more difficult to use. If your heart rhythm is usually irregular, a digital model may give you an inaccurate reading. Wrist and finger monitors provide less reliable readings.

- **Get a good fit**

Many monitors offer different-sized cuffs, so make sure to buy the right size for your arm. A poor fit reduces accuracy. Measure around your upper arm to choose the correct cuff size.

- **Consider your abilities**

Is the gauge or digital display large enough to read easily? Do you hear well through a stethoscope? Can you easily pump the inflatable cuff on a manual model?

- **Choose a validated monitor**

Look for a model that's been validated, meaning its readings are accurate and repeatable.

- **Learn how to use it properly**

After you buy a blood pressure monitor, take it with you to your doctor's office. In addition to making sure the device works properly, your doctor or nurse can help you learn how to use it.

- **Check accuracy**

Every six to 12 months, have your home monitor checked against a standardized unit at your doctor's office, fire department or public health service.

## 4 Staying mentally sharp

Boost your memory and develop habits that can help counter age-related memory loss:

- **Make associations**

For example, if you're introduced to Fred who has red hair, link his name to his hair color.

- **Choose what to remember**

If you meet several people at once, focus on remembering a few key names.

- **Recite, retrieve and review**

Recite key information several times to learn it and retrieve it often. Review information you'll need, such as paging through your high school yearbook before your reunion.

- **Break it down**

Break down new information into units. For example, to memorize a long-distance phone number, break it down into the area code, the next three digits and the four remaining numbers.

- **Pay attention**

Forgetfulness may indicate nothing more than having too much on your mind. Slow down and pay full attention to the task at hand. Limit distractions.

- **Keep track of appointments, tasks and contacts**

Use appointment books, calendars, to-do lists, address books or computer software — whatever works for you.

- **Develop routines**

For example, put frequently used items such as keys in a designated spot when not using them.

- **Create rituals and cues for common tasks**

Make sure your keys are in hand before locking your car doors, for example. Place packages you need to mail near the front door so that you won't forget them.

- **Include physical activity in your daily routine**

Physical activity increases blood flow to your whole body, including your brain. This may help keep memory sharp.

### 5 Avoiding heartburn

Heartburn results from a backup of acid-containing stomach contents into your esophagus. Here are tips for prevention:

- **Eat smaller meals**

Too much food expands your stomach and puts pressure on a band of muscle (the lower esophageal sphincter) that helps keep food and acid from backing up into your esophagus.

- **Avoid alcohol, fatty foods, chocolate, spearmint and peppermint**

These foods can relax your lower esophageal sphincter and promote upward flow of stomach contents.

- **Consider using an antacid or H-2 blocker**

Antacids such as Maalox, Mylanta, Tums and others help neutralize stomach acids temporarily. Over-the-counter H-2 blockers such as famotidine (Pepcid AC), ranitidine (Zantac) and others reduce stomach acid production, which may relieve or prevent symptoms when taken before a meal. But overuse of antacids or H-2-receptor blockers can cause side effects.

- **Don't eat before sleeping**

Wait two to three hours after eating before lying down. This allows enough time for the stomach to empty and increased stomach acid to taper off.

- **Stop smoking**

The nicotine from cigarettes can relax your lower esophageal sphincter, allowing acid to flow back into your esophagus.

- **Lose excess weight**

Slimming down if you're overweight helps reduce the pressure your abdomen puts on your stomach when you're lying down.

- **Wear loose clothes**

A tight belt or waistband can put pressure on your stomach and push acid into your esophagus, causing discomfort.

- **Elevate the head of your bed**

Raise the head of your bed four to six inches. This helps keep stomach acid in your stomach, where it belongs.

## 6 Preventing excess gas

Too much gas typically is caused by the incompletely digested foods fermenting in the intestine. To prevent excess gas:

- **Limit gassy foods**

The worst gas formers are beans and other legumes, wheat and wheat bran, cabbage, onions, Brussels sprouts, sauerkraut, apricots, bananas, and prunes. Milk and other dairy products also can cause gas if you have reduced amounts of lactase, the enzyme needed to digest lactose, the main sugar in milk.

- **Consider taking anti-gas products**

Beano, a food enzyme, helps improve the digestion of gas-forming foods. Nonprescription medications such as simethicone (Gas-X, Mylicon) or antacids that also have simethicone (such as the anti-gas formulations of Maalox or Mylanta), may relieve gas.

- **Eat fewer fatty foods**

Fatty meats, fried foods, cream sauces and gravies tend to increase gas and bloating. They also can contribute to unwanted weight gain.

- **Limit sugar substitutes**

Many healthy people don't easily absorb sorbitol and mannitol contained in some sugar-free foods, candies and gums. The amount of sorbitol contained in five sticks of sugar-free gum can cause gas and diarrhea in some people.

- **Consider products for lactose intolerance, if needed**

If you have trouble digesting milk sugar (lactose), consider buying lactose-reduced or lactose-free products. Or choose products with the lactase enzyme (Dairy Ease, Lactaid), which can help you digest lactose.

# 7 Preventing constipation

Constipation is defined as having a bowel movement fewer than three times a week. To help prevent constipation:

- **Don't skip meals**

Balanced, regularly scheduled meals promote regular bowel function.

- **Eat high-fiber foods**

Emphasize fresh fruits, vegetables and whole grains at every meal. Increase fiber even more by adding 2 to 3 tablespoons of wheat bran to cereals, casseroles and baked goods.

- **Drink plenty of fluids**

Drink at least eight 8-ounce glasses of liquid daily in the form of water, juice, milk, tea or soup.

- **Increase your physical activity**

Try to get 30 minutes or more of exercise, such as walking, biking or swimming, on most days of the week.

- **Answer the urge**

When you feel the urge to go, don't delay. Holding a bowel movement can foster constipation.

- **Be flexible about 'normal regularity'**

Don't fret if you're not a once-a-day person. Some people have bowel movements several times daily, while others might have them only three times a week.

- **Ask your doctor about fiber supplements**

If you're having difficulty getting enough fiber in your diet, your doctor may recommend a fiber supplement. Over-the-counter products such as Citrucel and Metamucil promote regularity. But food is still the best source of fiber.

- **Don't rely on stimulant laxatives**

These include products such as bisacodyl (Dulcolax) and senna (Senokot), which work by irritating the walls of your intestines. Habitual use can make constipation worse. For occasional relief, try osmotic agents, such as milk of magnesia or Miralax. Don't use laxatives regularly without consulting your doctor.

## 8 Managing mild diarrhea

Diarrhea ordinarily clears up on its own within one or two days. For a mild case of diarrhea, here's how to ease your discomfort:

- **Drink certain liquids**

Try broth, diluted fruit juices (except prune juice) and beverages such as Gatorade that contain electrolytes. Drinks that have electrolytes help replace the fluids and body chemicals lost during diarrhea.

- **Drink enough liquids**

Drink enough liquids so that you urinate about every four hours. If you have diarrhea and your urine is dark, you may be getting dehydrated. This is a clue to drink more fluids.

- **Eat low-fiber foods (only when you have diarrhea)**

As your symptoms improve or your stools become formed, start to eat low-fiber foods, such as soda crackers, toast, white bread, eggs, rice or chicken. Avoid greasy or fatty foods, milk, and highly seasoned foods for a few days.

- **Avoid anti-diarrheal medications**

Short-term diarrhea doesn't require antibiotics. Over-the-counter anti-diarrheal products may actually prolong your diarrhea. Situations vary, though, so ask your doctor about your specific case.

## 9 Dealing with stress incontinence

Sudden, strong pressure (stress) on your bladder from exercising, coughing, sneezing or heavy lifting can cause incontinence. This "leaky bladder," called stress incontinence, is common among women. Treatment varies, depending on severity. Talk with your doctor about options, such as:

- **Kegel exercises**

To do these, imagine that you're trying to stop your flow of urine. Squeeze the muscles you'd use and hold for a count of three. Relax for three counts. Repeat. Do these several times a day. With a simple physical exam, your doctor can help you identify these muscles and learn to do Kegels. Most women will benefit, and the results can be long lasting. If you do Kegels routinely, you'll likely see improvement within two months. If you don't, talk with your doctor.

- **Stock up on supplies**

Incontinence pads or protective undergarments are not bulkier than normal underwear and can be worn under everyday clothing.

- **Other procedures**

Ask your doctor about other options, such as medications, biofeedback, devices and minimally invasive surgical procedures.

## BONES AND JOINTS

# 10 Preventing osteoporosis

Proper nutrition and regular physical activity can help prevent this bone-thinning disease. Following these suggestions:

- **Eat calcium-rich foods**

Products such as yogurt, cheese, dairy milk and milk substitutes — such as soy, almond and coconut milk — are rich sources of calcium. Fat-free and low-fat products, calcium-fortified orange juice and cereals, fish with edible bones, and certain vegetables (such as rhubarb, soybeans and spinach) are good sources. Healthy adults ages 19 to 50 need at least 1,000 milligrams (mg) of calcium a day from all sources. Older adults need 1,200 mg a day.

- **Consider a calcium supplement**

Calcium citrate is more easily absorbed than calcium carbonate, but requires more pills to reach the recommended amount. Calcium carbonate is the least expensive and most commonly used calcium supplement, and it's absorbed best when taken with meals.

- **Get enough vitamin D**

If you're not taking a multivitamin, consider a calcium supplement that also has vitamin D, and milk that's fortified with vitamin D. Vitamin D is essential for enhancing the amount of calcium that ultimately reaches your bones. In addition, the body can produce vitamin D from exposure to sunlight. Ten to 15 minutes of exposure two to three times a week helps.

- **Exercise regularly**

Regular physical activity and exercise help slow bone loss and improve balance, coordination and muscle strength.

- **Avoid smoking and excessive alcohol**

Smoking increases the rate of bone loss. Regularly drinking more than moderate levels of alcohol can hasten bone loss and reduce your body's ability to absorb calcium.

## 11 **Treating back pain at home**

Back pain usually resolves within two to three weeks with these simple self-care measures. But contact your doctor immediately if your back pain resulted from a fall or blow to your back, or if it causes weakness or numbness in one or both legs, or new bladder or bowel problems.

- **Apply heat**

Try using a heating pad (on the low setting), heat wrap, heat pack or warm compress for 20 minutes. To avoid burns, don't fall asleep while using a heat source. Consider setting a timer to turn off the heat source or to wake you up if you do happen to fall asleep.

- **Use over-the-counter medications if needed**

Acetaminophen (Tylenol, others) may help control pain. Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, such as ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin IB, others), also can reduce inflammation. Read labels and use the recommended doses unless your doctor advises otherwise. Check with your doctor if you're taking other medications.

- **Combine rest with gentle movement**

Get plenty of rest, but avoid prolonged bed rest. Staying in bed more than a day or two may slow your recovery. Moderate movement keeps your muscles strong and flexible. Avoid heavy lifting, pushing or pulling.

# 12 **Living with arthritis: Assistive devices**

If you have arthritis, assistive devices may allow you to carry out daily tasks more independently. Consider these options:

- **Hand aids**

Look for aids that provide a wide-diameter grip, such as a foam or plastic sleeve that slides over a pen.

- **Grooming and personal hygiene**

If you have limited range of motion, use long-handled brushes and combs. Consider bathing aids such as long-handled sponges and brushes, bath benches, and grab bars. Use an electric toothbrush or one with a foam handle. Use mirrors with foam rubber handles for an easier grasp.

- **Getting dressed**

Buy a shoehorn with an extension handle and use a stocking aid to help pull on hosiery. Look for tools that grip buttons and zippers. Sew fabric fasteners such as elasticized Velcro tabs onto shirt cuffs. Select wraparound skirts or stretch trousers if limited range of motion makes dressing a challenge. Try clip-on neckties.

- **In the kitchen**

Put everything that you use often within easy reach. Store frequently used cookware and utensils in cabinets at hip-to-shoulder height. Consider a single-lever faucet so it's less taxing on your finger joints. Use an electric can opener and electric knife.

- **Cleaning your home**

Use a long-handled mop, dustpan and broom. Keep cleaning supplies on each floor and store supplies within easy reach. Avoid unnecessary bending or stooping.

# 13 Spotting skin cancer

Learn to recognize the signs and symptoms of the three types of skin cancer. Even melanoma, the deadliest form, can usually be successfully treated if caught early. And remember, no matter what your age, minimizing your exposure to ultraviolet (UV) light will help reduce your risk of skin cancer and premature aging.

### • **Melanoma**

Although melanoma can occur in any area of your skin, it often develops in a mole or other dark spot. Examine your moles and look for these ABCDEs identified by the American Academy of Dermatology:

**A**symmetry. One half of the mole doesn't match the other half.

**B**order irregularity. The edges are often ragged, notched, blurred or irregular, and the pigment may spread into the surrounding skin.

**C**olor. The mole may have shades of black, brown and tan, or areas of white, gray, red, pink or blue.

**D**iameter. Melanomas are typically larger than a pencil eraser, although early melanomas may be smaller.

**E**volving. Look for changes in the size, shape, appearance or color of a mole over a few weeks or months. Changes may include scaliness, oozing, bleeding, itchiness, tenderness, pain, the appearance of a bump or the spread of pigment from the border into the surrounding skin.

### • **Basal cell carcinoma**

This may appear as a small, raised, smooth, shiny or pearly bump that's whitish to pink in color. Over time, it may scab, crust or turn into an open sore and bleed. Basal cell carcinoma grows slowly and rarely invades internal organs, but it can spread to nearby tissues if left untreated.

### • **Squamous cell carcinoma**

Most often this type of skin cancer appears as a raised, scaly, crusty or wart-like bump, ranging in size from a pea to a chestnut. Squamous cell carcinoma can spread internally if left untreated.

# 14 Guarding against dry skin

With age, oil glands become less active. Your skin is less able to replenish the oils and fluids removed by soap and water. To guard against the drying effects of bathing, try these tips:

- **Limit baths and showers**

Bathing once a day or every other day is sufficient for most people.

- **Limit time and temperature**

Use warm (not hot) water for five to 10 minutes.

- **Select soaps carefully**

Choose superfatted, nonsudsing soaps that clean without removing natural oil. This includes brands such as Basis, Purpose and others. Soap substitutes in bar, gel and liquid forms are less drying than are deodorant and antibacterial soaps.

- **Limit use of soap**

Limit the use of soap to your face, underarms, genital areas, hands and feet. Using clear water on the other areas of your body cleans adequately most of the time.

- **Pat dry, don't rub**

When toweling dry, pat your skin gently. Or brush your skin rapidly with the palms of your hands.

- **Seal in moisture**

While still damp, lubricate your skin with an oil or cream, especially on your legs, arms, back and sides. A heavy moisturizer (water-in-oil formula) is longer lasting than a light cream that contains more water than oil.

# 15 Controlling dandruff

- **Shampoo regularly**

Start with a mild, nonmedicated shampoo. Gently massage your scalp to loosen flakes. Rinse thoroughly.

- **Use medicated shampoo for stubborn cases**

Look for those containing pyrithione zinc, salicylic acid, coal tar, selenium sulfide or ketoconazole. Brands include Denorex, Head & Shoulders, Neutrogena T/Gel, Selsun Blue or Nizoral. For best

results, use dandruff shampoo as directed. A prescription shampoo such as ciclopirox (Loprox, Penlac) also may help.

- **Use tar-based shampoos carefully**

These shampoos work well, but they can leave a brownish stain on light-colored or gray hair. They can also make your scalp more sensitive to the sun. Check the label for ingredients.

- **Treat your hair gently**

Dandruff shampoos can be harsh on your hair and scalp. Use a conditioner regularly. For mild cases of dandruff, alternate dandruff shampoo with your regular shampoo.

- **See a dermatologist**

If dandruff persists or if your scalp becomes irritated or extremely itchy, you may need a prescription shampoo.

## EYES AND EARS

# 16 Ensuring proper lighting

Increase overall lighting in your home to compensate for your need for more light as you get older. Make sure rooms have uniform lighting from several sources.

- **Position lights appropriately**

Concentrate light on close work by using adjustable gooseneck lamps and lights underneath kitchen cabinets. The finer your task, the more light you need. Position lights for reading to shine from over your shoulder. Use lampshades that completely shield the bulb so that light is directed up and down, not into your eyes.

- **Turn down glare**

Replace glaring ceiling fixtures with wall or floor lamps that direct light upward. Choose matte surfaces instead of shiny tabletops and highly polished floors that reflect light into your eyes. Select a non-glossy, off-white paint for walls. This type of surface maximizes light in a room without creating glare.

- **Use natural light wisely**

Design skylights with light wells that provide reflected light, not direct sunlight. On windows, install blinds that allow you to direct light upward to reflect off the ceiling. This offers uniform illumination and minimizes glare.

## 17 **Protecting your eyes from the sun**

Sunglasses protect your eyes from damage from ultraviolet (UV) light. Long-term exposure to UV light increases your chance of cataracts. Choose sunglasses that:

- **Provide maximum protection from UV light**

Choose lenses that block 99 to 100 percent of ultraviolet A (UVA) and ultraviolet B (UVB) light. Check the label.

- **Reduce glare**

Choose sunglasses that are dark enough to reduce glare — light that bounces off smooth surfaces such as pavement, water, sand and snow — but not so dark that it's hard to read traffic signals. Polarized lenses decrease glare, but make sure they also provide maximum UV light protection.

- **Fit close to your face**

To minimize UV light that can enter from the sides, buy wrap-around sunglasses.

- **Meet your needs**

Sunglasses that effectively block UV light don't need to be expensive. If you wear glasses for vision problems, ask your eye doctor about transition lenses that darken automatically when you're out in the sun. However, it takes time for the lenses to darken and lighten in different lighting conditions, so make sure these types of lenses meet your needs.

# 18 Preventing noise-induced hearing loss

Repeated exposure to loud noise — or even a one-time exposure — can damage the delicate, sound-sensitive hair cells in your inner ear. This type of hearing loss is irreversible but preventable. To protect your hearing:

- **Lower the volume on your TV and stereo**

Choose personal stereos with an automatic volume limiter.

- **Turn down the volume on headphones**

By directing sound into your ear, headphones can produce levels loud enough to damage your hearing. Hold your headset an arm's length away. If you can hear the sound, the volume is probably too high.

- **Muffle the sound**

Noise can be damaging if you have to raise your voice to be heard by someone an arm's length away. Wear earplugs or earmuffs when you're around noisy tools, equipment or firearms. Use commercially made devices that meet federal standards. Make sure the protectors fit snugly. Don't use cotton earplugs. They're ineffective and can become lodged in your ear canal.

- **Have your hearing tested**

If you're frequently around loud noise, have your hearing checked annually. A hearing test can detect mild hearing loss before the damage is obvious or disabling.

# 19 Choosing the right hearing aids

You can greatly increase your satisfaction with a hearing aid by following these suggestions:

- **Learn about the choices**

Hearing aids come in many styles and sizes — from small ones that fit completely in the ear canal to larger ones that fit in or behind the ear. The components can be analog or digital. Discuss all options with your audiologist or otolaryngologist.

- **List your priorities**

When people buy hearing aids, they typically face a trade-off among three factors — cost, performance and size. If you rank those factors, it'll help you make a selection.

- **Find out what meets your needs**

Make sure you understand why a specific type of hearing aid is recommended and how it will meet your needs. Don't assume the latest, most expensive model is best. Practice putting the battery in and taking it out until you can do it easily.

- **Buy on a trial basis**

A hearing aid should come with a 30- to 60-day trial period and a warranty. Get the terms of the trial period in writing. Also ask how long the warranty lasts — preferably one or two years — what is and isn't covered, what the return policy is, and what amount will be refunded if you return the hearing aid.

## NOSE, THROAT AND MOUTH

# 20 Relieving seasonal allergies

Follow these tips if you have hay fever or seasonal or year-round nasal allergies (allergic rhinitis):

- **Identify your personal allergy season**

If you have hay fever and live in the Midwest, for example, fall is a common allergy season, due to ragweed.

- **Reduce your exposure**

If you have allergies during the summer, try to spend more time in air-conditioned places. Consider a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter for your home heating and cooling system.

- **Rinse your nose with a saltwater solution**

Rinsing with a saltwater (saline) solution can remove irritants and allergy-causing particles from your nose. Saline nasal irrigation kits and devices, such as bulb syringes and neti pots, are available over-the-counter. Buy or make your own sterile saline solution.

- **Ask about medications**

Prescription steroid nasal sprays are among the most effective treatments. Antihistamines, available by prescription and over-the-counter, often provide symptom relief. Oral decongestants or anti-allergy nasal sprays may help. Avoid decongestant nasal sprays because they can worsen nasal congestion. Ask your doctor for advice.

- **Pinpoint the offender**

If medications aren't effective, a skin or blood test may help identify the substance you're allergic to (allergen). Tiny amounts of suspected allergens are introduced into the skin by multiple pricks, scratches or injections. Be sure a doctor who specializes in allergic diseases does the test.

- **Consider allergy shots**

If you have severe, recurrent allergies, or if allergy medications aren't working, allergy shots may help desensitize your system.

## 21 Soothing minor sore throat pain

To help relieve a sore throat, try the tips below. However, see your doctor if you're exposed to strep or have any of these signs or symptoms: fever, nausea, vomiting, swollen neck glands, difficulty breathing or swallowing, tonsils with pus, sores in your mouth, or severe pain that doesn't improve in a few days.

- **Drink lots of liquids**

Staying well hydrated helps keep mucus thin and easy to clear.

- **Gargle with warm salt water**

Mix 1/2 teaspoon of salt with 8 ounces of warm water to soothe and help clear your throat of mucus.

- **Suck on lozenges or hard candy, or chew sugar-free gum**

These products stimulate secretion of saliva, which bathes and cleanses your throat.

- **Consider taking pain relievers**

Over-the-counter analgesics such as acetaminophen (Tylenol, others), or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin IB, others), may temporarily help relieve sore throat pain. An oral anesthetic and analgesic combination such as Chloraseptic may also be helpful.

- **Rest your voice**

If your sore throat involves an inflamed larynx, talking a lot may lead to more irritation and temporary loss of your voice.

- **Humidify the air**

Adding moisture to the air prevents drying of mucous membranes.

- **Avoid air pollutants**

Don't smoke. Avoid smoke-filled rooms and fumes from household cleaners or paint.

## 22 **Battling bad breath**

Occasional bad breath is usually due to bacteria, certain foods or a dry mouth. When bad breath doesn't respond to self-care, ask your dentist to check for gum disease or poor-fitting dental work, or see your doctor for a possible medical cause. To fight bad breath:

- **Brush and floss after you eat**

Good dental hygiene is the best way to prevent odor.

- **Brush your tongue**

Giving your tongue, including the back of your tongue, a good brushing removes dead cells, bacteria and food debris. You can use a toothbrush or tongue scraper.

- **Chew sugar-free gum**

The action stimulates the flow of saliva to prevent dry mouth and to wash away food particles and bacteria.

- **Rinse your mouth with water**

Periodically swish your mouth with water to help keep it clean.

- **Don't use tobacco products**

Smoking and tobacco use cause an unpleasant mouth odor and irritate gum tissue.

- **Cut down on odor-causing foods and beverages**

The most likely offenders are garlic, onions, fish, milk, eggs, legumes, cabbage, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, coffee and alcohol.

- **Carry mouthwash or breath mints**

Mouthwashes generally don't fight bacteria, but they disguise bad breath. The strong oils in peppermint, spearmint and wintergreen also cover up odor.

## 23 Choosing toothpaste and mouthwash

Fluoride provides the best defense against tooth decay. Other claims you may find in toothpaste and mouth-rinsing products include:

- **Plaque control**

Some products claim to remove plaque or kill bacteria that can cause plaque. But all toothpastes remove some plaque if you brush and floss well.

- **Tartar control**

Anti-tartar pastes can help prevent a buildup of tartar, but no toothpaste can remove tartar — that takes a professional cleaning. In addition, an anti-tartar paste may increase your teeth's sensitivity to cold.

- **Desensitizing pastes**

These products contain chemicals that block pain perception in your teeth. Sensitive teeth may be a sign, however, of a problem that needs treatment, not cover up.

- **Baking soda pastes**

Baking soda is a mild abrasive and stain remover, but when wet it loses some of its stain-removing power.

- **Mouthwashes and rinses**

Using a mouthwash or rinse can complement dental care by protecting surfaces you may have missed when brushing and flossing.

# 24 Controlling painful leg cramps

Several factors, including dehydration, use of diuretic medications or overuse of your muscles, can trigger leg cramps. They usually occur at night. Your doctor may prescribe a muscle relaxant if you have frequent leg cramps.

### To prevent leg cramps:

- **Stretch daily**

At least three times a day, including before bedtime, stretch your calves and feet. Stand two to three feet from a wall, place your hands on the wall. Keep your heels on the floor. Lean toward the wall and bend one knee. Hold for 15 to 30 seconds. Straighten your leg. Repeat with the other knee. Stretch each leg at least three times.

- **Drink plenty of liquids daily**

Water and other fluids help your muscles contract and relax.

### To relieve leg cramps:

- **Stretch and massage**

Straighten your leg and point your toes upward while you gently rub the cramp to help the muscle relax.

- **Stand up**

For a calf cramp, put your weight on the cramped leg and slightly bend your knee. For a thigh cramp, keep both legs straight and lean forward at the waist. Use a chair to steady yourself.

- **Apply cold or heat**

Use ice or a cold pack if you have pain and tenderness. Use a warm towel or heating pad to relax tense muscles.

# 25 Self-care tips for varicose veins

If you have varicose veins, try these tips to improve circulation:

- **Wear compression stockings**

These stockings are sold at most pharmacies and medical supply stores. Using a tape measure, you or your pharmacist can measure your legs to ensure you get the right size and fit according to the size chart on the package.

- **Walk**

Walking is a great way to get the blood circulating in your legs. Ask your doctor about an appropriate activity level for you.

- **Elevate your legs**

When sitting or lying down, elevate your legs above the level of your heart. Do this 10 to 15 minutes three or four times daily.

- **Don't sit or stand for long periods**

Change your position frequently. During long car trips, stop to take a brief walk every couple of hours. On flights, walk through the cabin about once every hour. Don't sit with your legs crossed. Remember to wear your compression stockings when traveling.

- **Watch what you wear**

Tight clothes can restrict circulation. Avoid high heels.

- **Control your weight**

Being overweight puts extra pressure on your veins.

## 26 Shopping for shoes

For healthier and more comfortable feet, try these tips:

- **Don't buy shoes with pointed toes or high heels**

Pointed shoes cramp your toes and can lead to foot problems such as ingrown nails, calluses, corns or bunions. High heels can cause back problems by forcing you to lean back to compensate for the forward tilt of your heel.

- **Leave ample room for your toes**

Laced shoes generally offer more room and adjustable support. Athletic shoes are ideal. Other good selections are strapped sandals, and for women, soft, roomy pumps with cushioned insoles.

- **Select shoes that don't trap sweat**

Shoes that don't allow feet to breathe promote perspiration, which can irritate your skin.

- **Shop for shoes in the afternoon**

Feet swell as the day goes on. If you buy shoes in the morning, they may feel too tight later on. Getting fitted at the end of the day may give you a fit that's too roomy in the morning.

- **Have your feet measured**

Shoe size can change as you age or put on weight. Your arches tend to relax with age, and you may need larger, wider shoes.

- **Choose shoes that are comfortable right away**

Don't buy shoes that feel too tight or that you need to "break in." They should fit well and feel comfortable when you try them on.

## 27 **Staying ahead of athlete's foot**

The fungus that causes this itchy rash thrives in the warm, dark, wet environment between your toes. The key is keeping your feet dry.

- **Select well-ventilated shoes**

Wear sandals, leather shoes or athletic styles that allow feet to breathe.

- **Alternate shoes**

Don't wear the same pair every day. Change wet shoes immediately. Don't store out-of-season styles in plastic.

- **Protect your feet in high-risk areas**

Wear waterproof sandals or shoes around public pools, showers and locker rooms.

- **Wear acrylic socks**

When wearing closed-toe shoes, wear socks made of synthetic fibers, such as acrylic or polypropylene, that wick away moisture. Cotton socks tend to absorb moisture from your feet.

- **Change damp socks**

If your feet sweat, change your socks twice a day.

- **Use antifungal products**

For recurring infections, use an antifungal medication such as clotrimazole (Lotrimin AF, Mycelex), terbinafine (Lamisil AT) or miconazole (Micatin, Zeasorb). If an infection lasts longer than four weeks, see your doctor.

# 28 Preventing and treating corns and calluses

Try these tips to keep skin from developing thick, hardened layers:

- **Wear comfortable shoes**

Wear shoes that don't cramp your toes. Consider soft, leather shoes or open-toe sandals. Soft insoles cushion your feet.

- **Adjust your walking style**

Walking on the sides of your feet can produce calluses and corns. If you tend to wear down one side of the heels of your shoes, you may be shifting your weight unevenly as you walk. Ask your primary care doctor or a foot doctor (podiatrist) if a shoe insert (orthotic device) could help distribute your weight more evenly.

- **Safeguard your skin**

Pharmacies and medical supply stores sell a variety of products such as tufts of lamb's wool, nonmedicated corn pads and toe coverings to protect your skin.

- **Try home treatment**

Gently rub thickened skin with a towel or pumice stone after bathing. Don't try to remove all of the toughened skin at once — this process may take a week or longer. Don't trim a corn or callus, especially if you have diabetes or circulation problems — you might introduce an infection. If you have diabetes or circulation problems, avoid over-the-counter foot care products that contain salicylic acid.

- **Get professional help**

If a corn or callus becomes an open sore (ulcerated), see your doctor. Don't delay, especially if you have diabetes or circulation problems — a simple problem can quickly turn into a serious one.

# 29 Warming up cold hands and feet

If your hands and feet always seem to be cold, try these simple measures to keep warm:

- **Wear warm clothes**

This keeps your whole body warm and helps maintain circulation to your hands and feet. Layer clothing for indoor as well as outdoor wear. Try wearing a long-sleeve, silk camisole or shirt under a

blouse or sweater, topped by a wool jacket for indoor dress. Use warmth-conserving fabrics such as silk, wool or down, or synthetic fabrics such as polypropylene.

- **Exercise**

During activity, small, surface blood vessels dilate so that more warm blood flows to your hands and feet. The effect can last several hours.

- **Avoid all forms of nicotine**

Nicotine is a vasoconstrictor — a substance that narrows blood vessels and reduces blood flow to small, surface vessels.

- **Avoid certain medications**

Certain migraine medications with ergot derivatives and beta blockers such as propranolol act as vasoconstrictors and may cause cold hands and feet. If you suspect that a medication might be causing your symptoms, talk with your doctor, but don't make changes to your medication regimen without your doctor's advice.

- **Reduce stress**

Chronic stress and anxiety can cause your nervous system to pump out adrenaline. This hormone also acts as a vasoconstrictor.

## PREVENTION OF COMMON ILLNESSES

### 30 Do's and don'ts for avoiding infections

Follow these tips to help lower your risk of infections:

- **Do wash your hands**

Wash your hands with soap and water before handling food, after using the bathroom and after handling pets. Wash your hands often when you have a cold.

- **Don't share eating or drinking utensils**

That's a good way to spread infections.

- **Do cook certain foods thoroughly — especially hamburger — to kill bacteria**

Don't eat raw or undercooked meat or poultry, raw seafood, or raw eggs. Don't drink or cook with unpasteurized milk.

- **Don't drink water that's likely contaminated**

This includes, for example, water from streams or lakes near campsites or hiking trails.

- **Don't put your fingers in your mouth or eyes**

Doing so transmits germs.

- **Do avoid contact with ticks, rodents and reptiles**

Stay away from turtles, snakes, lizards, ticks, mice and other potential disease carriers.

- **Do keep up to date with vaccinations**

They can protect you from life-threatening infectious diseases.

- **Do recognize signs of generalized infections**

Signs and symptoms of an infection include fever, sweats and chills. For skin infections, look for redness and warmth.

- **Don't delay contacting your doctor if you're sick**

Many serious infections are treatable in the early stages.

- **Don't expect an antibiotic each time you're sick**

Antibiotics don't help with many common infections, and overuse encourages the growth of drug-resistant microorganisms.

## 31 **Fending off the flu**

To help prevent any illness, eat healthy foods, get enough sleep, exercise regularly and wash your hands often. A vaccination is recommended to reduce the risk of flu (influenza). Flu vaccine is available as a shot or nasal spray.

- **Who needs a flu shot?**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends annual flu shots for everyone older than 6 months. If the vaccine supply is limited, the priority typically goes to people at high risk of complications from the flu, including:

- Children age 6 months until their 5th birthday
- Children 5 years of age or older and adults with a chronic condition (such as asthma, diabetes or heart disease), or those with a suppressed immune system
- Pregnant women
- Adults age 50 and older

- Residents of nursing homes and other long-term care facilities
- Those who are extremely obese
- Health care workers
- Those at high risk of complications from the flu, including caregivers and household contacts of anyone at high risk

● **Who should avoid flu vaccination?**

Flu shots are safe for almost everyone. However, if you have had a serious reaction to a dose of flu vaccine, are allergic to eggs or have a history of Guillain-Barré syndrome, ask your doctor for advice.

● **What’s the best time for a flu shot?**

Flu shots need updating every year because the virus strains change frequently. It’s best to get your flu shot as soon as it’s available, generally from August through October.

● **What are the side effects?**

Some people may have a minor reaction, such as soreness at the injection site, mild muscle aches or a slight fever for a couple of days afterward.

## MEDICATIONS

# 32 Avoiding food and drug interactions

When taking a prescription or nonprescription medication:

● **Read the label and all printed information**

Nonprescription products print information on the package. Prescription drugs generally come with information fact sheets and may have warning stickers on their containers. Drug information is also available on drug company websites.

● **Don’t mix medications into food unless advised**

Acid or minerals in certain foods can alter some drug ingredients. Breaking apart pills can destroy special coatings that protect your stomach or the medication, or that allow for slow, uniform absorption.

● **Don’t mix medicine into hot beverages**

Heat can destroy or alter drug ingredients.

- **Don't consume grapefruit or grapefruit juice with medications**

A substance found in grapefruit and its juice can alter the effects of several drugs, sometimes causing a buildup of medication, which could become toxic. One example is atorvastatin (Lipitor), which is used for high cholesterol.

- **Avoid alcohol**

Alcohol can increase or reduce a drug's effects or increase side effects.

- **Don't take a vitamin and mineral supplement or antacids at the same time as your medication unless your doctor approves**

Some nutrients can bind with drug ingredients, reducing their absorption and limiting their effectiveness.

- **Tell your doctor if you're taking dietary supplements**

Many herbal and other dietary supplements have known interactions with medications, and others haven't been thoroughly tested for interactions. While you're on medications, check with your doctor or pharmacist before adding supplements.

- **Take medication as recommended**

Some drugs are better absorbed with food to reduce the risk of stomach irritation or upset. Other drugs may be better absorbed when taken with a full glass of water an hour or two before meals. Follow your doctor's or pharmacist's instructions.

# 33

## Asking the right questions about your medications

Keep a list of your medications and doses readily available in your purse or wallet. Whether you're taking a prescription drug or one you buy over-the-counter, don't hesitate to ask your doctor or pharmacist questions.

- **What's the name of the medication?**

Learn both the generic and brand names.

- **Why are you taking it?**

Knowing why your doctor has recommended a particular medication increases the chances that you will take the medication appropriately and receive the intended benefit.

- **What effect can you expect?**

How will the drug make you feel? How soon can you expect results? Some drugs take days or weeks to have an effect.

- **How much, when and how long should you take it?**

Make sure the directions make sense. "Four times daily" could mean with each meal and at bedtime or every six hours, including the middle of the night.

- **Are there restrictions?**

Some foods can interfere with the effectiveness of a drug. Alcohol also can interfere and cause certain side effects. In addition, some drugs can make you sensitive to sunlight.

- **What are the side effects?**

What are common side effects? Which side effects may go away with time? Which side effects should prompt you to contact your doctor?

- **What do you do if you miss a dose?**

Do you take it as soon as you remember or wait until the next dose is due?

- **Are there alternatives?**

Do other drugs or treatments cost less or have fewer side effects? Will a generic drug provide the same benefit?

# 34

## Getting the most from a visit to your doctor

Make the best use of the short time you have for your appointment.

- **Arrive on time**

Promptness helps ensure an unhurried visit.

- **Know your own and your family's medical history**

Your previous medical conditions and those of blood-related family members are important. Be prepared to discuss them in detail with your doctor.

- **Bring someone along if you feel comfortable**

Someone else may help think of additional questions or help you understand instructions.

- **Bring a list of concerns**

Once you're in the doctor's office, it's easy to forget health issues you want to discuss. A list may jog your memory, but keep it brief. Include only issues of primary concern.

- **Bring your medications**

Show your doctor all your medications in their original bottles so that your doctor can see the dosage and types of drugs. Also bring in or make a list of any vitamins, herbal products, dietary supplements and over-the-counter medications you use.

- **Answer questions accurately and completely**

Your doctor needs facts on which to base an accurate diagnosis and treatment plan.

- **Speak up**

If you have questions or doubts about your diagnosis or treatment, express them. For example, your doctor can explain the benefits of a medication, its possible side effects and how long it will take to work. Don't leave until your questions are addressed and resolved.

## 35 Following your doctor's advice

To get the most from your appointment, make sure you understand and can use your doctor's advice when you get home.

- **Ask for written instructions**

Have your doctor list the main points as you discuss them. Or request brochures, videos or websites about the topics you discuss.

- **Know your prescription**

Ask why this drug is best. Find out what you can expect from it, including side effects and how to take it correctly.

- **Expect explanations**

Be sure you know why a test is ordered, what it will involve, what the risks are, and how and when you'll learn results.

- **Repeat what you hear**

This process allows your doctor to identify any instructions that aren't clear.

- **Solve problems together**

If you don't think it's realistic to follow your doctor's recommendations, speak up. For example, financial restraints might keep you from buying a certain medication. Your doctor may know of a less expensive generic medication that will work just as well.

## FOOD AND NUTRITION

## 36 Choosing disease-fighting foods

Research indicates that eating certain foods can help lower your risk of several diseases.

- **Eat at least four servings of vegetables a day**

Vegetables are loaded with vitamins and minerals, contain fiber, have no cholesterol, and are low in fat and calories. They're a great source of many nutrients that appear to help reduce the risk of chronic diseases such as heart disease, cancer and diabetes. Eat a variety of vegetables to get all the health benefits.

- **Eat at least three servings of fruits a day**

Fruits are filled with vitamins, minerals, antioxidants and fiber. Except for a few, such as avocado and coconut, they're virtually free of fat. Fruits are a major source of nutrients that may help lower the risk of cardiovascular disease and cancer. Choose a variety of fruits to get the most health benefits.

- **Eat foods high in omega-3 fatty acids**

Eating at least two servings (about 4 ounces each) a week of fish that are rich in omega-3 fatty acids — such as salmon, trout, tuna, herring and sardines — can help reduce your risk of heart disease. Instead of frying, bake or grill the fish. *Note:* The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) advises pregnant women, nursing mothers and young children to avoid king mackerel, shark, swordfish and tilefish (golden bass or golden snapper), which are higher in mercury. Tuna steak and albacore tuna generally have more mercury than canned light tuna. Plant sources of omega-3s may not have the same effect. These include canola oil, soybeans (whole and oil) and walnuts (whole and oil).

- **Choose whole-grain foods**

Eating whole grains may lower your risk of cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and cancer. In addition to the more familiar whole-grain breads and cereals, add variety to your diet with hulled barley, brown rice, buckwheat, bulgur, millet, quinoa, whole-wheat pasta and wild rice.

## 37 Using healthy cooking methods

Several easy cooking methods can promote healthier eating.

- **Invest in nonstick cookware**

Instead of pouring oil in a pan, use nonstick cookware and vegetable cooking sprays. One tablespoon of vegetable oil has 120 calories and 14 grams of fat, but a one-second spray has negligible calories and less than 1 gram of fat.

- **Think flavor, not fat**

Sauté vegetables such as onions, mushrooms or celery in a small amount of wine, broth, water, soy sauce or Worcestershire sauce. Keep a supply of onions, fresh garlic, ginger root, Dijon mustard,

fresh lemons and limes, flavored vinegars, sherry or other wines, cornstarch (to thicken sauces), and plain fat-free yogurt.

- **Try different cooking methods**

Microwave or steam vegetables. Then dress them up with flavored vinegars, herbs and spices. Cook fish in parchment paper or foil to seal in flavors and juices.

- **Modify recipes**

In most recipes, you can reduce sugar, salt and fat by one-third to one-half without sacrificing taste.

- **Minimize meat**

Decrease the amount of meat in casseroles and stews by one-third and add more vegetables, rice or pasta. Or, replace meat with beans, nuts, eggs or low-fat cheese. Buy lean cuts of meat.

## 38 Do's and don'ts for losing weight

- **Don't skip meals**

During the day when you're active, your body needs calories and nutrients. Eating regular meals, including a healthy breakfast, may reduce impulse snacking, meal size and calorie intake.

- **Limit meat consumption**

Meat is a major source of fat — keep portions under 6 ounces daily. Eat more servings of vegetables, fruits and whole grains.

- **Don't starve yourself**

If you're on a diet that's too strict, eventually you'll go back to eating regular food. Unless you've learned how to eat a variety of healthy foods and still lose weight, you won't achieve long-term weight control.

- **Exercise regularly**

Any exercise burns calories. To promote weight loss, exercise at a moderate intensity for at least 30 to 60 minutes on most days of the week. Walking is a good form of exercise.

- **Drink water**

Drinking water with your meal can help fill you up. Drinking water also slows the pace of your eating — and people who eat fast tend to overeat.

- **Weigh wisely**

Daily weighing can be a helpful tool for some people who are trying to lose weight or prevent weight gain. But daily shifts in body water can show up as pounds on your scale. So keep this in mind and pay greater attention to trends in your weight.

- **Reduce stress**

Stress can trigger overeating. Instead of turning to comfort foods, try relaxation techniques such as deep breathing or meditation.

## 39 Handling food safely

Keep food safety in mind from the time you shop to the time you eat.

- **When shopping**

Don't buy food that's in dented or bulging cans, or in jars with bulging lids. Refrigerate perishable items as soon as possible — within two hours (or one hour if the temperature is above 90 F). Put fresh fruits and vegetables in bags rather than directly in the shopping cart to prevent contact with additional germs or with drippings from other foods.

- **When preparing food**

Wash your hands with soap and water. Rinse produce thoroughly before and after peeling. Wash knives and cutting surfaces after handling raw meat and before preparing other foods to be eaten raw. Launder dishcloths and kitchen towels frequently.

- **When cooking**

Cook all ground meat, hamburger or roast beef thoroughly. Meat, especially if grilled, is likely to brown before it's completely cooked, so use a meat thermometer to ensure that meat is heated to at least 160 F at its thickest point. Avoid undercooked eggs.

- **When storing food**

Always check expiration dates. Use or freeze fresh meats within three to five days after purchase. Use or freeze fresh poultry, fish and ground meat within one to two days after purchase. Refrigerate or freeze leftovers within two hours of serving.

- **When eating out**

Order red meat prepared medium or well done. Ask that seafood be thoroughly cooked.

# 40 Keeping foods safe at picnics

Use these tips to ensure safe eating at your picnics:

- **Use an insulated cooler**

Put ice or a frozen gel pack on top, with foods to be kept coldest on the bottom.

- **Pack right from the refrigerator**

Keep food cold or frozen to the touch before putting it in your cooler or cold vacuum bottle, such as a thermos.

- **Wrap all foods separately in plastic**

Don't place foods directly on ice that's not of drinking-water quality. Keep raw meat, poultry and fish well wrapped so that drippings don't contaminate other foods.

- **Don't put your cooler in a hot trunk**

Transport your cooler inside your car — not the trunk. Keep the cooler in the shade at your picnic or campsite, and keep the lid on.

- **Keep food and utensils covered until serving time**

Flies, other insects and household pets can carry salmonella bacteria.

- **Keep hot foods hot**

Use a vacuum bottle or insulated dish for serving.

- **Clean your hands**

Take along alcohol-based hand sanitizer and disposable hand towels to use before and after working with food.

- **Remember the 2-hour rule**

Return leftovers to your cooler as quickly as possible. Two hours is the maximum time food should be left unrefrigerated — one hour if the temperature is 90 F or higher. If your ice has melted or the gel pack is only cool, discard perishable leftovers.

# 41 Getting your vitamins

In recent years there has been increasing evidence that multivitamins and single or combination vitamin-mineral supplements may not provide the health benefit consumers expect. In some cases, the opposite or no beneficial effects have been reported. If you eat a balanced diet, taking a multivitamin may mean you'll exceed what your body needs or can use. Talk to your doctor or dietitian to weigh the possible benefits and risks of a vitamin supplements.

- **Get enough calcium**

Women age 51 and older and men 71 and older need 1,200 milligrams (mg) of calcium a day. For men ages 51 to 70, the recommendation is 1,000 mg daily. See “Consider a calcium supplement,” page 11.

- **Get enough vitamin D**

This helps the body absorb calcium and is essential to maintain proper bone strength. Because many older adults don't get regular exposure to sunlight and have trouble absorbing vitamin D, taking a supplement with 600 international units (IU), or 800 IU if you're older than 70, may help improve bone health.

- **Look for vitamin B-12 (cobalamin)**

Adequate levels of this vitamin may reduce your risk of anemia, cardiovascular disease and stroke. Older adults often don't absorb this vitamin well. A supplement with 2 micrograms (mcg) may help. You also may need supplemental vitamin B-12 if you take a proton pump inhibitor, your stomach doesn't have enough acid, you've had gastric bypass surgery or you're a strict vegetarian.

- **Check the iron content**

Adult men and women who are beyond menopause generally don't need iron supplements. Because of the risk of iron overload, don't take a multivitamin with iron unless your doctor recommends it.

# 42

## Making informed decisions about herbal supplements

Because of the limited regulation of herbal supplements in the United States, be cautious about using any herb. Read reports on clinical studies about safety and effectiveness, and tell your doctor if you're using herbal products.

### Avoid using these herbs:

- **Borage, coltsfoot and comfrey**

Toxic chemicals called pyrrolizidine alkaloids contained in these herbs may cause liver disease, lung problems and possibly even cancer, especially with long-term use.

- **Chaparral**

Use of this herb (also called creosote bush or greasewood) has been linked to liver disease. Chaparral has been touted to cure cancer, slow aging, "cleanse" the blood and treat skin problems, but no evidence supports these claims.

- **Ephedra (ma-huang) and other weight-loss herbs**

This herb, once found in several weight-loss products, contains ephedrine, which can stimulate your heart and nervous system to dangerous levels, causing a heart attack, seizure, stroke or sudden death. The sale of ephedra has been banned in the U.S. since 2004. Some ephedra substitutes, including bitter orange (*Citrus aurantium*) and aristolochia also have been linked to serious health risks.

- **Germanium**

Evidence doesn't support claims that this element, found in some dietary supplements and herbal remedies, promotes good health, fights AIDS, cancer and other illnesses, or helps treat heavy metal (mercury) toxicity. However, there have been numerous reports of kidney failure, nerve damage and even some deaths linked to its use.

- **Kava**

Also called kava kava, this herb is used for anxiety and insomnia. Reports of severe liver damage linked to its use have caused several European countries to pull it off the market. The FDA has issued warnings but not banned sales. Until more is known, don't take kava or products that contain it. If you've been using it, ask your doctor whether you need tests to check your liver function.

- **Yohimbe**

Yohimbe can cause serious side effects, including tremors, anxiety, high blood pressure and rapid heart rate.

**Exercise caution if using these herbs and many others:**

- **Ginger and ginkgo**

Taken in high doses or combined with blood thinners, such as warfarin (Coumadin) or aspirin, or with nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as acetaminophen (Tylenol, others), ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin IB, others), each of these herbs could increase the risk of bleeding problems.

- **St. John's wort**

Used for mild to moderate depression, St. John's wort can alter the effects of many common prescription drugs, such as warfarin, heart drugs, seizure medications and drugs to prevent organ rejection in people who have had transplants.

## SAFETY AND FIRST AID

# 43 Preventing falls

Falling is one of the most common causes of loss of independence among older adults — but you can take many steps to prevent falls. Use this checklist to take a fall-prevention inventory of your home:

- **All rooms**

Keep electrical cords and furniture out of walking paths. Fasten carpets to the floor with tape or tacks. Don't use throw rugs.

- **Stairways**

Make sure that stairways are well-lighted and include sturdy handrails on both sides. Carpet runners should not be loose. If you have low vision, apply bright tape to the first and last steps.

- **Bathrooms**

Install grab handles and nonskid mats inside and just outside your shower and tub and near the toilet. Shower chairs and bath benches minimize the risk of falling.

- **Kitchens**

Don't use difficult-to-reach shelves. Never stand on a chair. Use nonskid floor wax, and wipe up spills immediately.

- **Bedrooms**

Put a light switch by the door and a lamp by your bed so you don't have to walk across the room to turn on a light. Plug night lights into electrical outlets in bedrooms, halls and bathrooms.

## 44 **Avoiding yardwork mishaps**

Follow these easy steps:

- **Save your back**

Choose tools with handles long enough to allow you to work without bending over, or use a garden stool. Don't lift oversized packages of fertilizer or sod. Use a wheelbarrow or just buy smaller packages.

- **Wear sunscreen**

Avoid sunburn by using sunscreen with a minimum sun protection factor (SPF) of 15.

- **Protect yourself from insects**

Use insect repellent that contains DEET. Perfume, scented hair spray or lotion attracts stinging insects.

- **Wear light-colored, well-fitting clothes**

Bright colors attract insects, too. And loose clothes allow insects access to your skin.

- **Choose sensible shoes**

Wear closed-toe, sturdy, nonskid shoes to prevent injuries from lawn mowers.

- **Turn off the lawn mower motor**

Then unclog, adjust or fix the equipment. Add fuel before starting the engine or after allowing the motor to cool for several minutes. Don't smoke.

- **Handle chemicals carefully**

Before spraying bug or weed killers, wait for calm weather. Wind can blow chemicals back toward you and irritate your skin. Wear protective goggles, gloves, full-length pants and a long-sleeve shirt.

# 45 Treating puncture wounds

A puncture wound — for example, from stepping on a nail — usually doesn't result in excessive bleeding. The wound may seem to close almost instantly, but it can still be dangerous because of the risk of infection. If the puncture is more than superficial, contaminated, or the result of an animal or human bite, seek medical attention right away. Remember these tips:

- **Apply gentle pressure if there's bleeding**

Press down on the wound using a clean soft cloth. If the wound was deep enough to draw blood — especially if it spurts or continues to flow after several minutes of pressure — seek medical attention immediately.

- **Clean the wound**

Rinse the wound under running water to help remove debris and bacteria. Don't use soap — it can irritate the wound. If dirt or debris remains in the wound after washing, use tweezers cleaned with alcohol to remove the particles. If you can't remove all the debris, see your doctor. To clean the area around the wound, use soap and a washcloth.

- **Apply an antibiotic**

After cleaning the wound, apply a thin layer of an antibiotic cream or ointment such as Neosporin to help keep the surface moist and discourage infection. If a rash appears, stop using the product.

- **Cover the wound**

Bandages can help keep the wound clean and keep harmful bacteria out. Change the dressing at least daily or whenever it becomes wet or dirty. If you're allergic to adhesive, use adhesive-free dressings or sterile gauze and hypoallergenic paper tape.

- **Watch for signs of infection**

See your doctor if the wound doesn't heal or if you notice redness, a pus-type drainage, warmth or swelling.

- **Keep tetanus booster shots up to date**

Adults generally need tetanus boosters every 10 years. If you have a deep or dirty cut or wound, and you haven't had a tetanus shot within five years, your doctor may recommend a booster.

## 46 Do's and don'ts for minor burns

Seek emergency care if a burn is serious, covers a large area, or is on your eyes, mouth, hands or genital area. For minor burns, remember these tips:

- **Do cool the burn**

Hold the burned area under cold running water for about 15 to 20 minutes. If that's impractical, immerse the burn in cold water or cover it with cold compresses.

- **Don't put ice directly on the burn**

Putting ice directly on a burn can further damage your skin.

- **Do consider a lotion and pain relievers**

Once a burn is completely cooled, apply a lotion or moisturizer to soothe the area and prevent dryness. For sunburn, try 1 percent hydrocortisone cream or an anesthetic cream. The gel from the leaf of an Aloe vera plant also can help soothe a burn. A nonprescription pain reliever, such as aspirin, ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin IB, others), naproxen (Aleve) or acetaminophen (Tylenol, others) may help.

- **Don't use butter**

Putting butter on burned skin holds heat in the tissue and may cause more damage. Applying butter increases your chance of infection.

- **Do bandage a burn**

Cover the burn with a sterile gauze bandage. Wrap loosely to avoid putting too much pressure on the burn. Bandaging keeps air off the burn and reduces pain.

- **Don't break blisters**

However, if the area is tender, snip a tiny hole in the blister with a small scissors that has been sterilized in alcohol. If the blister is broken, wash the area with mild antibacterial soap and water, then apply an antibiotic ointment and a gauze bandage.

## 47 Staying clear of lightning

In the United States, hundreds of people are injured or killed by lightning each year. To protect yourself:

- **Stay inside your home or an enclosed building**

Keep away from doors, windows and anything that conducts electricity.

- **Use the 30-30 rule if you're caught outside**

If you see a lightning flash, count how long it takes until you hear thunder. If it's 30 seconds or less, seek a safer location right away. If you can't see the lightning but you hear thunder, go to a safer location.

- **Avoid trees and tall isolated structures**

They're lightning targets. Avoid small, open picnic pavilions and rain shelters. If you're in an open area, drop anything you're carrying, get away from other people and crouch down as low as possible.

- **Seek safety in an enclosed car**

Close the windows. Convertibles and cars with plastic or fiberglass roofs and sides won't protect you. Get off bicycles and motorcycles.

- **Don't touch metal objects**

Drop metal items — such as golf clubs, tools or tennis rackets — which conduct lightning.

- **Don't mix water with lightning**

Get out of and away from water — it conducts electricity. Don't wash your hands, and don't do the dishes or the laundry. Get out of the shower or tub.

- **Turn it off and hang it up**

Don't use electrical appliances or talk on the phone. Lightning can follow electrical wires and phone lines into your home.

## **48 Handling a medical emergency**

Keep the numbers of emergency services, such as your doctor, fire department and police, next to your phone. Take the time to learn basic cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). If your area is served by 911, call that number first.

- **Stay calm**

Speak slowly and clearly when describing the incident.

- **Be exact about your location**

Give your name, phone number, address, apartment number, city or town, and directions, including landmarks or cross streets.

- **Describe the type of help you need**

Is it medical, police or fire assistance?

- **Give details about the victim's condition**

Is the person bleeding severely? Choking? Unconscious? How long ago did the incident occur?

- **Describe first aid**

If someone else is present and giving first aid, what kind is it? CPR or other emergency care?

- **Describe the victim's location**

Is he or she in the upstairs bedroom? Downstairs on the bathroom floor?

- **Listen carefully**

Then write down instructions. Ask the dispatcher to repeat the information.

- **Don't hang up too soon**

Wait until the dispatcher tells you to hang up.

- **Make sure your house number is clearly visible**

If it's dark, turn a light on outdoors to show your house number.

## STRESS MANAGEMENT

### 49 Healthy ways to deal with stress

Take common clues to stress — headaches, upset stomach, trouble sleeping — seriously. Learn to manage stress with these techniques:

- **Change the factors you can**

You may not be able to walk away from a stressful job or home situation, but you can develop new responses to defuse anger or conflict. You can also learn to manage your time better with stress-lowering techniques — from delegating household responsibilities to just saying no.

- **Exercise regularly**

The natural decrease in adrenaline production after exercise may counteract the stress response. Physical activity can relieve symptoms of anxiety. Along with medical care and counseling, exercise can help improve anxiety and depression.

- **Relax**

Learning techniques such as guided imagery, meditation, muscle relaxation and relaxed breathing can help you relax. Your goal is to lower your heart rate and blood pressure while reducing muscle tension. You can also focus on hobbies or activities you find calming, such as reading, listening to music or playing with your pet.

- **Find a friend**

Social support can help reduce stress and prolong life.

- **Recognize when you need help**

If stress is keeping you from work or leisure activities, talk with your doctor or a specialist in behavioral medicine. Behavioral therapy is one approach that can help you manage your symptoms.

## 50 **Getting a good night's sleep**

Sleep deprivation can lead to forgetfulness and problems in concentration. To sleep better, consider these suggestions:

- **Don't try too hard to sleep**

Read or watch TV until you become drowsy, and then go to your bedroom to fall asleep naturally. Try to maintain a regular time for going to bed and for getting up.

- **Keep a regular sleep schedule**

Try to go to bed and get up at the same time every day, even on weekends.

- **Adjust your sleep environment**

Your bedroom should be quiet, dark and cool. Hide the clock if you worry about not sleeping. Don't use the bed for anything other than sleep and sex.

- **Avoid or limit caffeine, smoking and alcohol**

Caffeine is a stimulant. Nicotine also can interfere with sleep. And although alcohol is a depressant and may help you doze off, it can disrupt restful sleep.

- **Exercise and stay active**

Regular physical activity and exercise contribute to restful sleep. Aim for 30 minutes or more of exercise on most days. Avoid exercising too close to your bedtime so that it doesn't interfere with your sleep.

- **Watch what you eat before you sleep**

A light snack may help you relax before sleeping, but avoid heavy meals and foods that could cause heartburn. Drink less liquid before bedtime so that you won't have to go to the bathroom as often.

- **Avoid or limit naps**

Daytime naps can make it harder to fall asleep at night. If you really need a nap, limit it to 30 minutes or less before 3 p.m.

- **Check your medications**

Ask your doctor if any of your medications — both prescription and nonprescription — may contribute to insomnia.

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