

Health & Wellness

YOUR GUIDE TO LIVING WELL

Resolutions inspired by
trending health topics

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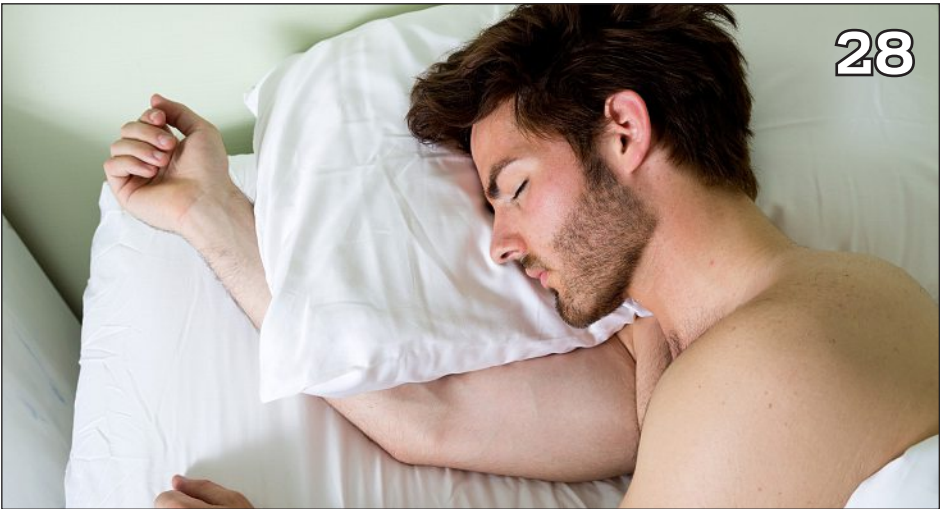
Simple strategies to
combat stress

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HEALTH & WELLNESS

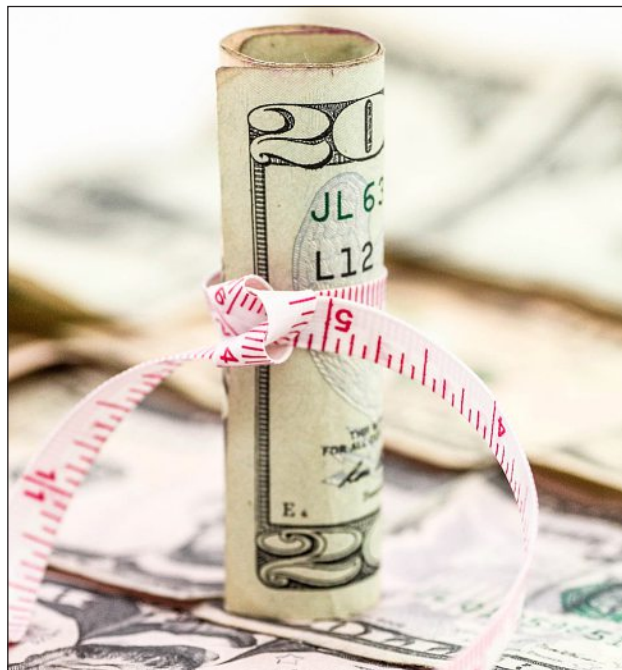
6250 Metropolitan
Parkway, Dock D
Sterling Heights, MI 48312

CONTACT US
Customer service/circulation:
 586-731-1809
ADVERTISING
Advertising: 586-716-8100
STAFF
Publisher, Michigan Region:
 Greg Mazanec,
 mipublisher@medianewsgroup.com
Vice president of news:
 Don Wyatt, 248-285-9652,
 dwyatt@medianewsgroup.com
Custom Content Editor:
 Jenny Sherman, 248-284-7046
 jsherman@medianewsgroup.com

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FINANCIAL HEALTH

Reach your New Year's resolutions on a budget



Regardless of your plans for the new year, adopting a few smart strategies can help ensure you meet your goals affordably.

Whether your New Year's Resolutions include eating healthier, exercising more, or devoting more time to self-care, having a plan can help you reach your goals on a budget.

This new year, consider the following tips from the experts at Dollar General:

Healthier Eating

Preparing food that is healthier, tasty and affordable is easier when sticking to recipes and a budget. To help customers make healthier decisions, Dollar General partnered with a registered dietician and nutritionist to create "Better For You" recipes from ingredients available at every Dollar General store. The complete collection can be found at dollargeneral.com, and includes simple, budget-friendly recipes, such as loaded egg muffins, roasted broccoli almondine and secret ingredient brownies,

making it easy to whip up something delicious and nutritious at each meal.

Self-Care

A healthy dose of self-care can make you happier and healthier. Self-care may include adopting a new hair care routine, experimenting with skin care products, or learning a new recipe. It may also mean taking time to meditate, read new books or spend less time on electronics and more time with friends and family. Be sure to dedicate time on the calendar every day to self-care.

Smart Saver

To begin 2022 with a fresh perspective on finances, make a budget that includes household essentials. While food is one budget line item that can fluctuate, you can be sure to save by taking advantage of retailers' apps that help



While food is one budget line item that can fluctuate, you can be sure to save by taking advantage of retailers' apps and coupons that help you shop savvy.

you shop savvy. For example, the Dollar General app includes digital coupons, a Shopping List feature so you can take note of needed items and calculate the estimated total before going to the store, and a Cart Calculator feature, which keeps a running total of purchases while you're in the store. Understanding budgets, sale items and available digital coupons before shopping can help keep you from overspending and hopefully support your financial stability goals.

Regardless of your plans for the new year, adopting a few smart strategies can help ensure you meet your goals affordably.

*Story courtesy of
StatePoint Media*

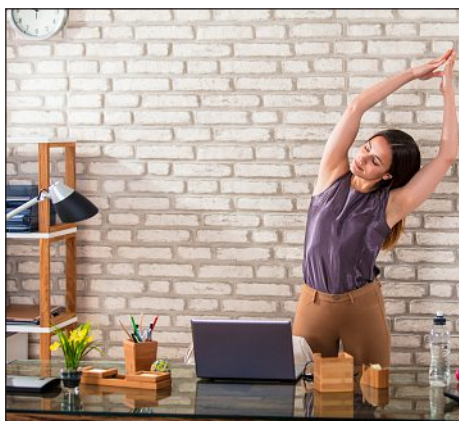


Understanding budgets, sale items and available digital coupons before shopping can help keep you from overspending and hopefully support your financial stability goals.

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CONNECTION

MENTAL HEALTH

Simple strategies to combat stress



Breathing and meditation can help alleviate stress, according to the American Heart Association.

Just about everyone experiences stressful situations. Sometimes a measure of stress can provide motivation to do one's best or strive for an especially lofty goal. However, when stress becomes a chronic condition, it can adversely affect individuals' quality of life and even their overall health.

Harvard Medical School says stress can manifest itself in myriad ways. Stress can cause tension headaches, indigestion, aches and pains, or even heart palpitations, and it may affect the mind by making it hard to concentrate or make decisions. Many people experience stress through emotional or psychological symptoms, such as irritability or feeling down. Learning how to effectively manage stress is essential for individuals' overall well-being.

Exercise regularly

Exercise serves many functions, including acting as a potent stress relief strategy. The Cleveland Clinic says aerobic exercise releases endorphins, which are natural substances that help a person feel better and maintain a positive attitude. Movement activities like yoga or Tai Chi also can relax the mind and body and promote physical health.

Take media breaks

Overwhelming oneself with a barrage of negative news stories or constant information can increase stress levels. Individuals can strive to remain informed and still build breaks into their schedules. Shut off news programs, turn over the newspaper or tune out of social media from time to



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Overwhelming oneself with a barrage of negative news stories or constant information can increase stress levels.

time. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that individuals who are stressed out by world events reduce the number of times they read the news or check the headlines each day.

Meditate or perform breathing exercises

Breathing and meditation can help alleviate stress, according to the American Heart Association. A quick meditation can provide some perspective. If a situation is stressful, go for a walk or take a few slow, deep breaths until the body relaxes. Harvard Medical School also says meditation can induce a relaxation response, which is

an antidote to stress.

Change negatives to positives

Negative self-talk may increase stress, but positive self-talk can help a person calm down. Individuals should practice positive self-talk every day. Instead of saying, "I hate when this happens," say, "I know how to deal with this, I've done it before."

A small amount of periodic stress can be a good thing. However, chronic stress poses a significant threat to individuals' long-term health.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection

Breathing and meditation can help alleviate stress, according to the American Heart Association. A quick meditation can provide some perspective. If a situation is stressful, go for a walk or take a few slow, deep breaths until the body relaxes.



Learning how to effectively manage stress is essential for individuals' overall well-being.

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PHYSICAL HEALTH

Age-based health screening guidelines

Early detection is crucial to overcoming serious illnesses. Preventive care is something parents prioritize when raising children, but it's a crucial component of healthy living as an adult as well.

Health professionals recommend various age-specific screenings and tests, and these can serve as a guideline for individuals as they navigate adulthood. The following age-specific health screening recommendations, courtesy of Beaumont Health and Columbia Doctors Primary Care, can serve as a preventive care guideline, though doctors may advise patients to get more frequent screenings depending on their medical histories.

18 to 39 years old

- **Cholesterol.** A cholesterol check should occur around age 20, then every five years until age 35. Afterward it can occur annually.

- **Skin screening.** An annual full body screening will identify any suspicious moles or skin lesions.

- **Cervical cancer:** Women in this age range should receive a Pap smear every three years and an annual pelvic exam.

- **Breast exam.** Self-examination of the breasts and examination by a clinical provider should take place every year.

- **Testicular exam.** Men should conduct self exams for testicular abnormalities. Doctors may examine the testicles during annual physicals as well.

- **Tdap vaccine.** All adults should get the Tdap vaccine if they did not receive it as an adolescent to protect against pertussis, and then a Td (tetanus, diphtheria) booster shot ev-



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Women should begin receiving annual mammograms at age 40.

ery 10 years.

- **HPV vaccine.** The human papilloma virus vaccine is recommended if you did not receive it as an adolescent.

40 to 64 years old

- **Zoster (Shingles) vaccine.** Two doses of this vaccine will be administered between two and six months apart starting at age 50 and up.

- **Colorectal screening.** A colonoscopy to detect any

colorectal illnesses is recommended beginning at age 50.

- **Prostate screening.** Prostate screenings begin at age 50 unless you are a high-risk individual, in which case screenings begin at age 40.

- **Osteoporosis.** Doctors may recommend a bone density test and osteoporosis screening at age 50 and up if certain risk factors are present.

- **Lung cancer screen-**

ing. If you are a past or current smoker, it's wise to have an annual lung cancer screening. The American Lung Association says adults age 55 and up can have this screening covered by health insurance.

- **Mammogram.** Women should begin receiving annual mammograms at age 40.

65 years and older

- **Cervical cancer.** Most women can stop getting

Pap smears at this age if they have no history of cervical cancer. Women who have had a hysterectomy may no longer need pelvic exams after age 65.

- **Pneumococcal and pneumonia vaccines.** These are recommended every five years for certain conditions and risk factors.

- **Cognitive health.** Doctors may assess your cognitive health to see if there are any risk factors for dementias. In addition to

these screenings, doctors may conduct annual depression screenings to assess mental health. Routine blood glucose monitoring may be necessary based on risk factors for diabetes.

Individuals are urged to speak to their doctors to map out a health screening schedule specific to their needs.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

A cholesterol check should occur around age 20, then every five years until age 35. Afterward it can occur annually.

PHYSICAL HEALTH

Various strategies that are vital for healthy eyes

Eyesight is easily taken for granted. But when something goes awry, the value of strong eyesight is crystal clear. Once diminished sight occurs, it is very difficult to get it back without serious intervention — if at all. That is why it is so vital to keep eyes healthy and functioning at their peak.

Eye care involves regular vision checkups but also includes other components. The following tips can keep most people on the path to healthy eyes.

- **Eat for healthy vision.** Various vitamins and minerals are needed for healthy eyes, especially those in leafy greens like kale, spinach and collard greens. Fatty fish like tuna and salmon also have been shown to help the eyes, according to the National Eye Institute. In addition, healthy eating can help people lose weight. Being overweight or obese increases the risk of diabetes, which contributes to vision problems.

- **Say “yes” to a dilated eye exam.** Many eye diseases have no early symptoms, so the only way to check for eye disease early is through a comprehensive dilated exam. Getting the eyes dilated is painless and fast. Specialized eye drops are used to dilate the eyes. Dilating the pupil enables the eye doctor to see inside of the eye to check for diabetic retinopathy, glaucoma, age-related macular degeneration, and retinal problems. Dilation will last for a few hours, depending on the patient. Although uncomfortable for a little while (dilated pupils let in more light, causing squinting), it’s well worth it to catch diseases early.

- **Practice frequent handwashing.** Washing hands regularly helps to keep bacteria, dust and dirt out of the eyes should you touch your face. In addition to washing hands, avoid rubbing your eyes.

- **Wear UV protection.** Arizona Retinal Specialists indicates that exposure to ultraviolet radiation increases risk for age-related macular degeneration and may cause sunburn on the corneas or photokeratitis. UV-protected eyeglasses, sunglasses and contact lenses can help, as will using shade hats or visors.

- **Wear eye protection.** When participating in sports, using chemicals during science class or operating equipment like a leaf blower, wear the right protection to keep eyes safe.

- **Give your eyes a rest.** Eye doctors know that people spend a lot of time staring at screens during the day. Providing a rest is necessary. Follow the 20-20-20 rule, which translates to every 20 minutes, look about 20 feet away for 20 seconds. Protecting eyes is a simple yet often overlooked component of maintaining overall health. Taking measures to keep the eyes safe is both easy and effective.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Eye care involves regular vision checkups but also includes other components.



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FITNESS

Classes that make exercise fun

Some people find the best way to get in shape is to do so alongside another person. Group classes can provide the inspiration, variety and fun needed to keep fitness enthusiasts engaged. Some are offered by traditional gyms while others may be found at specialty fitness facilities.

Regular exercise is essential to good health, and these classes can add a spark to workouts.

- **Spin class.** Spin classes have been around for some time and have long been a trendy group exercise. Many health clubs offer spin classes in their facilities. Spinning may be easier on the joints than other exercises due to the smooth rotary motion of the stationary bikes. Resistance can make the exercise harder and simulate riding uphill outdoors.

- **Trampoline classes.** Sometimes referred to as “SkyRobics,” trampoline classes take place in trampoline recreation centers or specialized trampoline training centers. NASA states that 10 minutes of bouncing on the trampoline is equivalent to 30 minutes of jogging. Bouncing around also can help adults feel young again.

- **Surfing/yoga meld.** These classes focus on getting into yoga positions on an unstable board. Boards may be balanced on three stability boards, and the body has to work to support muscles while exercising, resulting in a leaner look.

- **Barre class.** Barre borrows techniques from ballet training to help sculpt the body, with a focus on toning the legs, glutes and core.

- **Dance class.** Many exercise classes are built around dancing. While Zumba™ may be the best known, bur-



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Many health clubs offer spin classes in their facilities.

lesque dancing, Bollywood dancing and tap dancing to get in shape are all growing in popularity.

Group classes can be a great way to keep individuals engaged with their fitness routines.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection

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PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Some may wonder if coffee or tea is more beneficial for overall health. Both, it turns out, have distinctive benefits.

NUTRITION

Is tea or coffee the healthier choice?

Millions of people consume coffee or tea, with some even enjoying multiple cups of these caffeinated beverages daily.

Coffee is known to perk a person up in the morning, while tea is touted as a relaxing drink that can ease away stress. Some may wonder if one of these popular beverages is more beneficial for overall health than the other. Both, it turns out, have distinctive benefits.

Coffee and certain teas contain caffeine, a powerful stimulant for the central nervous system. Caffeine may improve endurance exercise outcomes and improve mental alertness. Healthline says that caffeine may reduce type 2 diabetes risk by improving insulin sensitivity. In addition, moderate caffeine intake has been linked to protective effects against dementias, metabolic syndrome and non-alcoholic fatty liver disease. Since coffee tends to have higher concentrations of caffeine than black tea (95 mg vs. 47 mg in an eight-ounce serving), it can provide more caffeine-related benefits than tea.

Both tea and coffee have high levels of antioxidants that can help people reduce their risk for certain illnesses. The National Cancer Institute reports that antioxidants in both tea and coffee have been shown to slow the growth of cancerous tumors. Tea may help lower cholesterol and the polyphenols in tea could boost good bacteria in the gut, according to Eat This, Not That! People may be more inclined to drink more coffee and tea so they can consume more antioxidants. However, excess coffee consumption can make people jittery from too much caffeine. Since tea has less caffeine, it might make for a better choice.

But tea and coffee provide similar health benefits, and one isn't necessarily better than the other.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Moderate caffeine intake has been linked to protective effects against dementias, metabolic syndrome and non-alcoholic fatty liver disease.



Both tea and coffee have high levels of antioxidants that can help people reduce their risk for certain illnesses.



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Research has shown that people feel happier after actively singing than they do when simply listening to music.

MENTAL HEALTH

Five New Year resolutions to boost your well-being

It's already the time of year to reassess where the past 12 months took you and decide what you want to improve, change or start doing in 2022. Coming up with meaningful resolutions can be hard. To help simplify this process and get started toward becoming a better you, here are five things to consider working into your daily schedule in the new year:

1. Cut screen time for better sleep. Multiple studies show if you stop using screens an hour or two before bedtime, you'll likely have a more restful night's sleep. Unplugging also allows you to relax and decompress after a busy day. Your energy levels will rise, your brain and body will thank you, and it will be easier to start fresh in the morning.

2. Add more fresh foods to your diet. Fruits and vegetables are loaded with vitamins and nutrients, so why not kick off 2022 with a resolution to eat more of them? Try a new kind of lettuce. Eat berries with your oatmeal. Take an apple to the office. Be realistic about how much you can eat in a week. Don't overstock your refrigerator, but definitely add more fresh produce to your shopping cart.

3. Allow your favorite spaces to bloom. Adding a flowering plant to your favorite room, such as an easy-care Just Add Ice Orchid, inexpensively brightens your décor. Research shows that having plants boosts mood, productivity and well-being. Plants, includ-

ing orchids, also remove toxins from the air. Orchids are particularly good at eliminating xylene, a chemical that causes nose and throat irritation and potential neurological issues.

4. Walk it off. Walking daily for even 15 minutes burns extra calories and improves your mood. Longer walks, such as vigorous hikes, build physical and mental endurance and strengthen cardiovascular health. If you're crunched for time, take that short walk or even a couple short ones throughout the day if your schedule allows it. The benefits are worth it. Don't forget to bring your favorite walking buddy with you!

5. Sing in the shower, the car or the kitchen. Research has shown that people feel happier after actively singing than they do when simply listening to music. If joining a choir isn't your thing, never fear. Breaking into song in the car, shower or while you're cooking can provide the same kind of lift. It doesn't matter where you sing, it just matters that you do. Harmonizing with friends makes it even more fun.

As you read this list, you might be inspired to come up with a few other encouraging ways to become your best self in 2022. Go for it. Kick off this new year with better focus, renewed enthusiasm and a fresh approach to the days and weeks ahead of you!

Story courtesy of StatePoint Media



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Unplugging from screens and smart devices allows you to relax and decompress after a busy day.



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Individuals who can't wait to lace up their sneakers and hit the road should consider the pros and cons of running before doing so.

FITNESS

The pros and cons of running

Few physical activities inspire the devotion that avid runners have for running. Millions of individuals across the globe lace up their sneakers and run for miles on end each day, and the fitness experts at Fit-bit note that running is the most popular activity in the world.

The global popularity of running suggests it's an activity that's all gravy and no grief. However, running can take a toll on a body, and individuals who can't wait to lace up their sneakers and hit the road should consider the pros and cons of running before doing so.

Pros

- Running and heart health. Running generally has a positive effect on heart health. The heart is a muscle, and much like weight training can help strengthen muscles like biceps and triceps, running can strengthen the heart and make it more efficient. Cardiologists with the Copenhagen City Heart Study noted that jogging increases oxygen uptake, which makes it easier for the heart to pump a larger amount of blood and do its job more easily. In addition, various studies have found that running can reduce individuals' risk for heart disease by a significant percentage.

- Running and mental health. "Runner's high" is a well-documented yet not entirely understood phenomenon. Though it's often associated with the release of mood-enhancing hormones known as endorphins and characterized as a routine and euphoric by-product of running, experts at Johns Hopkins Medicine note that research indicates

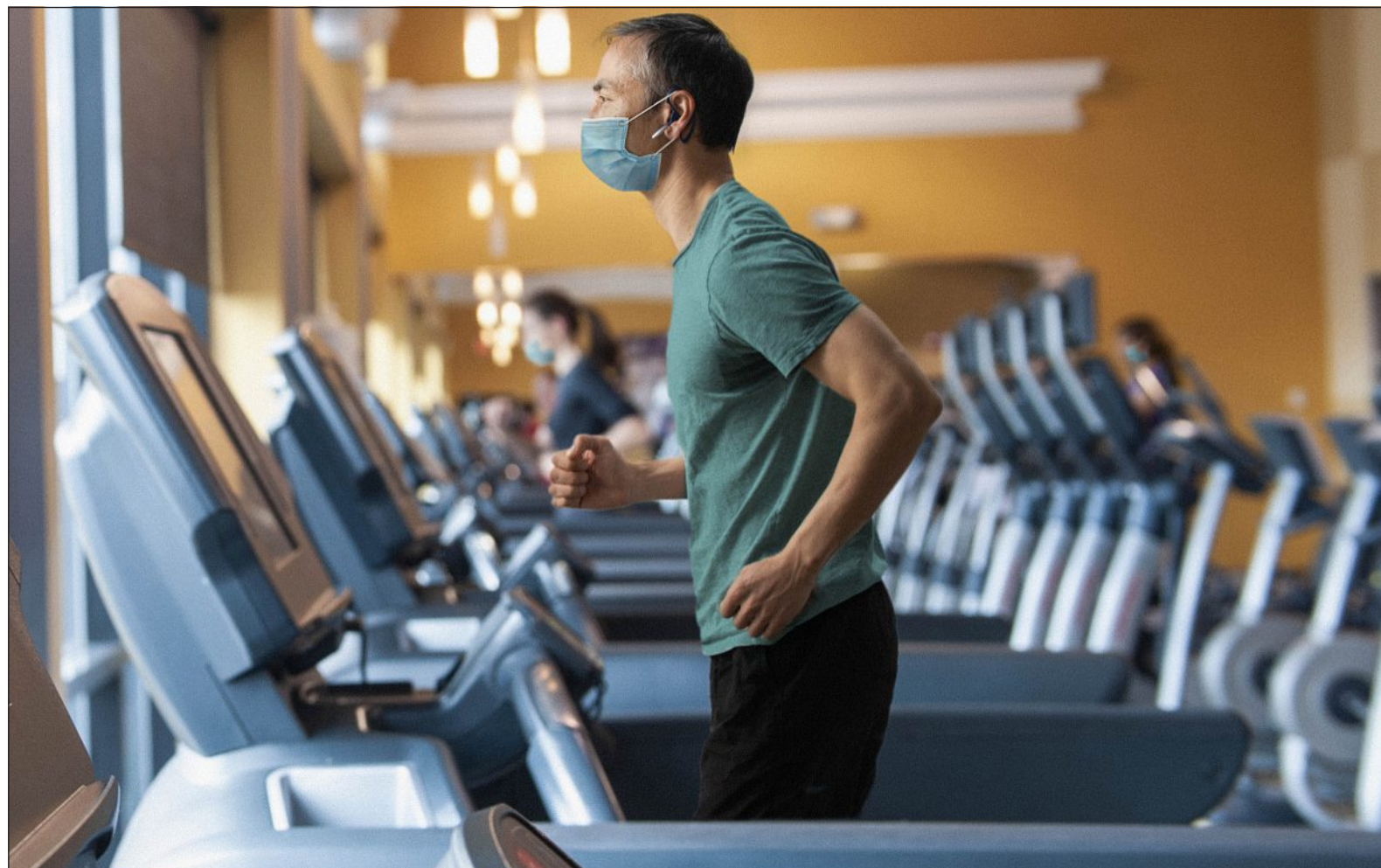


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All physical activities involve some measure of injury risk, but it's still worth noting that runners are not immune to such risks.

very few runners actually experience runner's high. Instead, runners may feel good after running because physical activity increases levels of endocannabinoids in the bloodstream. Higher levels of endocannabinoids may promote short-term responses like reduced anxiety and a greater feeling of calm. This is an important distinction, as runners who don't feel runner's high after a long run should know that they're likely still gaining some mental benefit from running, even if a long

run makes them feel more nauseous than euphoric.

- Running and brain power. Running also has been found to benefit brain power. Researchers at the University of Ulm in Germany found that individuals who jogged for 30 minutes per day three times a week benefitted from a substantial improvement in concentration and visual memory.

Cons

- Running and joint health. Though many medical professionals now dis-

pute that there's a link between running and osteoarthritis, running can lead to wear and tear on the joints over time. It's important to note that such degeneration can occur even in non-runners, especially those who live sedentary lifestyles. Being physically active is an important part of maintaining long-term joint health, but individuals who like to run should be sure to devise a balanced workout regimen that includes strength training to make the muscles and tis-

sues around joints stronger. Running without strength training could contribute to unhealthy joints.

- Running and injury risk. All physical activities involve some measure of injury risk, but it's still worth noting that runners are not immune to such risks. The Cleveland Clinic notes as many as 60% of runners will experience injuries that sideline them for several weeks or months. Plantar fasciitis, runner's knee, shin splits, and Achilles tendinitis are some injuries commonly suf-

fered by runners. Common running injuries can make it hard to perform any cardiovascular exercise, which can have a significant and adverse effect on runners' overall health.

Though medical experts generally suggest the rewards of running outweigh the risks for healthy individuals, it's still important that men and women weigh the pros and cons before lacing up their running shoes.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Make exercise something kids can look forward to.

LIFESTYLE

Get kids on a healthy track

Childhood obesity is a serious medical issue affecting children around the world, but notably in North America. While the issue has been around for decades, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says American children and teenagers have witnessed a significant increase in weight gain since the COVID-19 pandemic began.

Younger school-aged children have been among the hardest hit during the pandemic. A study published in September 2021 found the percentage of obese children and teens increased to 22% compared with 19% before the pandemic. The CDC looked at the BMI of study subjects between March 1, 2020 and November 30, 2020. One of the study's authors, Dr. Alyson Goodman of the CDC's National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, described the results as "substantial and alarming."

Being less physically active, overweight and eating the wrong foods can start children on a path toward problems that once were only considered conditions of adulthood, namely hypertension, diabetes and high cholesterol, offers the Mayo Clinic. To reverse course, parents, guardians and educators can focus on helping children become more physically fit. The following are a few ways to do so.

- Encourage participation in sports or other physical activities. Sports practices, games, competitions, and other activities may keep children moving for an hour or more several



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Parents, guardians and educators can focus on helping children become more physically fit in various ways.

days per week. However, the American Academy of Pediatrics states that only 25% of children get the recommended 60 minutes of physical activity per day. Emphasize a fun activity with a focus on movement that produces shortness of breath, body warmth and sweat. These are indicators that the heart rate is really pumping.

- Use exercise as a reward and not a punish-

ment. Make exercise something kids can look forward to. Reward a job well done on a test with extra time biking with friends or a hiking trip to a scenic national park. Kids will be begin to associate exercise with fun.

- Offer a variety of foods. Kids who eat a variety of foods are more likely to get the nutrients the body needs, according to Kids Health® by Nemours.

These healthy foods should include at least five servings of fruits and vegetables a day, with an emphasis on vegetables.

- Limit screen time. Children may be inclined to entertain themselves by heading for the television, mobile phone or tablet first, especially after a year-plus of being stuck indoors. But parents can make a concerted effort to limit kids' screen time

in favor of more physically challenging pursuits.

- Teach healthy eating habits. A Harris Poll survey conducted on behalf of the American Psychological Association found that 61% of respondents age 18 and older reported a median weight gain of 15 pounds during the pandemic. Teach children that weight loss is accomplished when more calories are burned than

consumed. Pay attention to portion sizes and explain how beverages like fruit juices can be sneaky sources of extra calories.

Children may need a little extra help getting fit, especially if they gained weight during the pandemic. Teaching healthy habits now can help kids enjoy healthy futures.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Cast-iron, nonstick or enamel-coated pans and skillets require less oil or butter while cooking to prevent foods from sticking.

NUTRITION

Prepare your favorite foods with nutrition in mind

Beloved dishes and comfort foods share some common elements, notably their flavor and ability to quell hunger pangs. However, those creamy mac-and-cheese recipes or buffalo wings also may share some less savory characteristics, including a lack of nutrition.

Various popular dishes are made from ingredients that are high in saturated fats and calories. In fact, Nutritionix, a nutritional information reporting company, indicates the average one-cup serving of homemade macaroni and cheese measures in at 510 calories, with 29 grams of total fat and 16 grams, or 80% of the total daily recommended value, of saturated fat.

Certain foods also may be cooked through less healthy techniques, such as frying. But rest assured that being fit and healthy doesn't mean having to give up on tasty comfort foods. Just about any recipe can get a healthy makeover. Consider these cooking tips that can make popular dishes a little more nutritious.

Use an air fryer

Frying makes everything from chicken to fries to sliced vegetables more delectable. But with that crispy coating and juicy interior comes the addition of fat and calories from the oil. Healthline says a small baking potato contains 93 calories and 0 grams of fat. The same amount of French fries contains 319 calories and 17 grams of fat when fried.

Air fryers can simulate the benefits of deep frying without the negative side effects. An air fryer uses heat and air (convection) to mimic the results of deep frying with little-to-no oil.



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Consider these cooking tips that can make popular dishes a little more nutritious.

Ditch the cream

Thick and tasty dishes like fettuccine alfredo involve the use of cream. Using low-fat milk that's thickened with flour or cornstarch instead of cream can make such dishes a little healthier. Thickened low-fat milk trims more than 680 calories and 53 grams of saturated fat per cup off

of recipes that call for heavy cream, according to EatingWell.com.

Swap mayonnaise or sour cream for Greek yogurt

Potato salads and cole slaws are prized for their creamy and tangy flavors. These sides can be made

more nutritious by replacing mayonnaise with a thick Greek yogurt as the base of the dressings. Greek yogurt adds live and active cultures that can improve gut health, and the yogurt also will cut down on the calories and fat in the recipe. Greek yogurt also can be used in onion or vegetable dips for snack platters.

Cook with the right pans

Cast-iron, nonstick or enamel-coated pans and skillets require less oil or butter while cooking to prevent foods from sticking. That translates into roughly 120 fewer calories per tablespoon of oil.

Replace salt with other herbs and spices that can add flavor without extra sodium.

In addition, always taste the recipe before adding more salt, as it very well may be fine without it, suggests Harvard Medical School.

Tweaking recipes can make it possible to enjoy your favorite foods without sacrificing nutrition.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Overconsumption of alcohol is not the only potential danger lurking on New Year's Eve.

LIFESTYLE

How to plan a safe New Year's Eve night out

New Year's Eve is a popular night to paint the town red. That popularity could skyrocket even further as the world says goodbye to 2021 and ushers in 2022.

Many cities and millions of individuals toned down their New Year's Eve shenanigans a year ago, as the COVID-19 pandemic made it hard to celebrate safely. But the rollout of three effective vaccines has beckoned revelers out of their homes, and that could make for an especially rowdy New Year's Eve. Fun might be the top priority on New Year's Eve, but safety must be in the mix as well. As individuals make plans for a night out this New Year's Eve, it can help to keep these safety tips in mind.

- Utilize a car service. Whether it's a ridesharing service like Uber, a taxi cab or even a private limousine for large parties, leave the New Year's Eve driving to the professionals. This ensures that no one will drive after having too much to drink. Even revelers who can control their alcohol consumption should avoid driving if they plan to drink.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, a person need not be legally impaired to experience impairment. Drivers with a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of .08 are considered to be legally impaired. But the NHTSA reports that a BAC of .05 can reduce coordination, lead to a reduced ability to track moving objects, make it difficult to steer, and produce a slower-than-normal response to emergency driving situations.

- Go out for dinner first. Experts at the University



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

As individuals make plans for a night out this New Year's Eve, it can help to keep these safety tips in mind.

of Notre Dame's McDonald Center for Student Well-Being note that having food, especially foods that are high in protein, in your stomach prior to consuming alcohol will help slow the processing of that alcohol. Someone who has not eaten will typically hit a peak BAC between

30 minutes and two hours of drinking. But someone who has eaten will typically peak between one and six hours of drinking depending on the quantity of alcohol consumed.

- Make a plan. Overconsumption of alcohol is not the only potential danger lurking on New Year's Eve.

Large crowds can make it easier for friends to become separated, especially if they plan to visit more than one establishment before or after the clock strikes 12. When going out with a group on New Year's Eve, create an itinerary, complete with meet-up spots, for the entire night.

This ensures anyone who gets lost can easily find his or her way back to the group. Individuals who are wandering alone on New Year's Eve may be vulnerable to criminals who are looking to prey on people whose inhibitions have been lowered by alcohol and/or the festive atmo-

sphere of the night.

A rowdy New Year's Eve may be on tap as the world ushers in 2022. That likelihood only underscores the importance of emphasizing safety when going out this December 31.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

This year, consider making Earth-friendly New Year's resolutions. A few tweaks can reduce your household's impact on the planet.

LIFESTYLE

Resolve to make your home more Earth-friendly in the New Year

Resolving to green up your act in the New Year? Here are just a few tweaks you can make right at home to substantially reduce your environmental footprint.

Make Appliance Upgrades

Home appliances are improving all the time, with many newer models designed specifically with efficiency in mind. If your home appliances, such as your washer, dryer, dishwasher, refrigerator and HVAC system, are on the older side, it may be time to replace one or more of these items. Over time, you'll offset the upfront cost with reduced energy bills. Plus, you'll be helping protect the climate. Look for ENERGY STAR-rated products, which have met strict EPA standards.

Optimize Heating and Cooling

North American Technician Excellence (NATE) offers the following energy-saving tips to help you keep your home comfort system running at peak performance:

- Change your air filters monthly, or as directed by the manufacturer.
- Add weatherstripping and caulk around windows and doors to improve your home's insulation. Improperly insulated walls, floors, attics, basements and crawlspaces waste energy and can also lead to moisture imbalance.
- Install a programmable thermostat to help regulate temperatures.
- Don't keep clutter near your HVAC units, and don't store anything next to them that could impede ventilation. Likewise, keep vents and returns free of obstructions. Don't lay carpet over vents, place furniture over or in front of them, or obstruct airflow.
- Dry air feels cooler than moist air. A simple humidifier may make your home feel five degrees warmer.
- Even the most efficient system can suffer if it's not properly

maintained. For optimum comfort and sustainability, make sure all your HVAC installation, maintenance and other work is performed by a NATE-certified technician. NATE-certified technicians have demonstrated their knowledge of today's increasingly sophisticated heating and cooling systems by passing a nationally recognized test developed and supported by all segments of the heating, ventilation and air-conditioning industry. Better installation and service means your equipment will run at peak efficiency. Visit nate.org for additional HVAC energy-savings tips and resources, and to find a NATE-certified technician in your area.

Reduce Food Waste

American food production uses 10% of the nation's total energy budget, 50% of its land, and 80% of its freshwater, according to FoodRescue.net. Unfortunately, up to 40% of all food ends up in landfills. Label food items in your pantry and fridge and organize them by date to help ensure you consume food before it spoils. If you see that you've prepared too much of a certain item, freeze it. Of course, many foods produce unavoidable scraps. Use them to create stock or compost them. Composting will reduce your home's contribution to landfills while enriching your garden. Bonus: it's also a great way to reduce yardwork waste.

Make an Impact Today

Want a quick project you can complete in an afternoon? Swap out incandescent lightbulbs for energy efficient LEDs. According to the EPA, residential LEDs — especially ENERGY STAR-rated products — use at least 75% less energy, and last up to 25 times longer.

This year, consider making Earth-friendly New Year's resolutions. A few tweaks can reduce your household's impact on the planet.

Story courtesy of StatePoint Media



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Label food items in your pantry and fridge and organize them by date to help ensure you consume food before it spoils.



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Speak with a doctor or nutritionist to learn more about supplementation.

NUTRITION

How different vitamins affect the body

At the dawn of a new year, it's not uncommon for people take inventory of their personal health and strive to make positive changes. Being more conscientious of the foods they put into their bodies is a start, but some individuals may wonder if supplementation can help them go one step further.

Nutrition Insight reports that 77% of American adults consume dietary supplements, and Nutraceuticals World indicates 98% of adult supplement users are taking vitamins and minerals. Individuals considering supplements should always discuss them with their physicians prior to including them in their health regimens. Even those who haven't considered supplements can discuss them with their physicians, as Harvard Health, Medline-Plus and the U.S. National Library of Medicine note that various products can provide some significant benefits.

- **Vitamin A (retinoids/carotene):** Beta carotene can be converted into vitamin A as needed. It plays an important role in vision, keeps tissues and skin healthy, and also is involved with bone growth.

- **Vitamin B1 (thiamin):** Helps convert food into energy, and is essential for brain health and nerve function.

- **Vitamin B2 (riboflavin):** This works with other B vitamins by promoting growth and the production of red blood cells

- **Vitamin B3 (niacin):** Helps convert food into energy. It's also essential for healthy skin, blood cells, brain, and nervous system function.

- **Vitamin B5 (pantothenic acid):** Helps make



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Being more conscientious of the foods they put into their bodies is a start, but some individuals may wonder if supplementation can help them go one step further.

lipids, neurotransmitters, steroid hormones, and hemoglobin in the body.

- **Vitamin B6 (pyridoxine):** This vitamin may reduce the risk of heart disease by helping to lower homocysteine levels. It also helps convert tryptophan into niacin and serotonin, a mood-regulating neurotransmitter.

- **Vitamin B9 (folate):** Vital for new cell creation, it helps prevent brain and spine birth defects when

taken early in pregnancy. It also may lower risk for colon cancer risk.

- **Vitamin B12 (cobalamin):** Vitamin B12 is important for metabolism and energy production. It also helps form red blood cells and maintain the central nervous system.

- **Biotin:** Biotin helps to metabolize proteins and carbohydrates. It also promotes healthy bones and hair.

- **Vitamin C (ascorbic**

acid): This is an important antioxidant that promotes healthy teeth and gums. It also helps the body absorb iron and maintains healthy tissue by promoting wound healing. Vitamin C may help boost the immune system to help with illness prevention or recovery.

- **Vitamin D (calciferol):** Also known as the "sunshine vitamin," vitamin D is made in the body after individuals spend time in the sun. It is hard to get

enough vitamin D from food sources alone. Vitamin D also helps the body absorb calcium, which is vital for healthy bones and teeth.

- **Vitamin E (tocopherol):** An antioxidant that helps the body form red blood cells and use vitamin K. Scientists also are studying a potential relationship between vitamin E and a lower risk for Alzheimer's disease.

- **Vitamin K (menadi-**

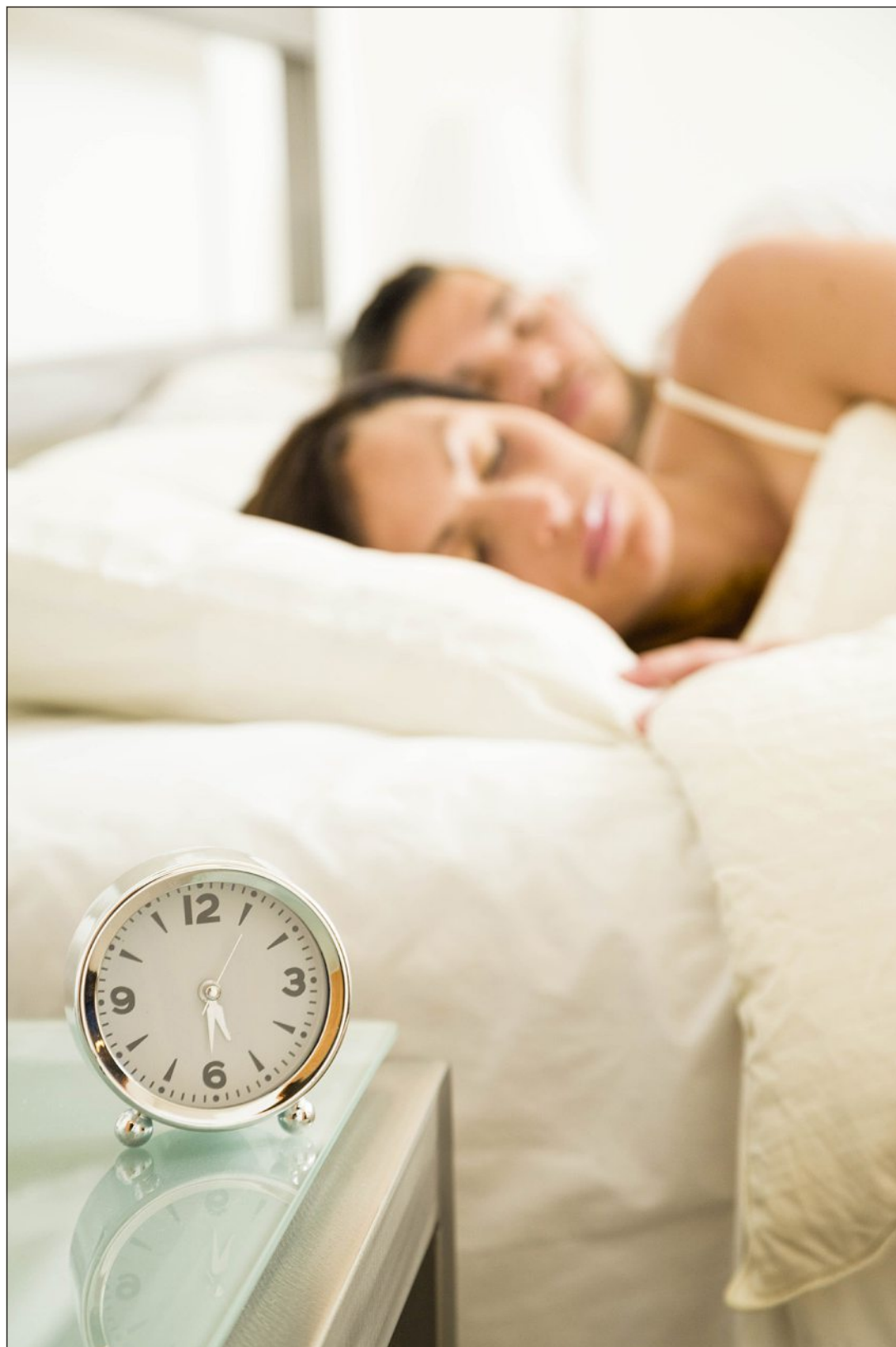
one): Vitamin K activates proteins and calcium essential to blood clotting. It also may help prevent hip fractures.

In addition to these vitamins, the body needs various minerals, including calcium, iron, copper, iodine, magnesium, and more. Speak with a doctor or nutritionist to learn more about supplementation.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection

PHYSICAL HEALTH

What sufficient sleep does for the human body



Sleep is not often mentioned alongside diet and exercise as a vital component of overall health.

PHOTO
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CONNECTION

Sleep is an often unsung hero of overall health. Diet and exercise get their fair share of glory, but without a good night's rest, even the most physically active, nutrition-conscious individuals are vulnerable to a host of ailments and illnesses.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, most adults need seven or more hours of sleep on a regular schedule each night. Athletes may even benefit from additional sleep. In fact, a 2011 study published in the journal *Sleep* examined the effects of sleep extension on the athletic performance of collegiate basketball players. That study found that athletes asked to extend their normal sleep times exhibited faster sprint times and increased free-throw accuracy and a reduction in fatigue at the end of the sleep extension period. Improved athletic performance is not the only way that sufficient sleep benefits the human body.

Sufficient sleep and the immune system

The Mayo Clinic notes that the immune system releases proteins called cytokines during sleep. The release of certain cytokines needs to increase when individuals are experiencing infections or inflammation, which is one reason why doctors often recommend extra sleep to sick patients. Without adequate sleep, the immune system may not produce enough cytokines, and that can increase the frequency with which individuals get sick.

Sufficient sleep and weight gain

The Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health reports there is mounting ev-

idence to suggest a link between insufficient sleep and weight gain and obesity. Studies exploring this potential link have been conducted for decades and have examined how sleep affects people of all ages and genders. At the 2006 American Thoracic Society International Conference, researchers who had tracked women's sleep habits for 16 years found that those who slept just six hours per night were 12 percent more likely to experience major weight gain than women who slept seven hours per night. Experts aren't entirely sure why this relationship exists, but the results of various studies support the idea that insufficient sleep is a potential catalyst for gaining weight.

Sufficient sleep and chronic disease

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes that insufficient sleep has been linked to the development and management of various chronic diseases. For example, the CDC indicates that insufficient sleep has been linked to an increased risk for type 2 diabetes. In addition, the CDC reports that instances of hypertension, stroke, coronary heart disease, and irregular heartbeat are more common among individuals with disordered sleep than they are among people without such sleep abnormalities.

Sleep is not often mentioned alongside diet and exercise as a vital component of overall health. But a good night's rest is no less vital to long-term health than a healthy diet and physical activity.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Without adequate sleep, the immune system may not produce enough cytokines, and that can increase the frequency with which individuals get sick.



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Individuals who want to avoid debt can keep an eye open for these pitfalls.

FINANCIAL HEALTH

Pitfalls to avoid falling into debt

High consumer debt can compromise individuals' financial futures and have an adverse effect on their overall health. Debt has long been an issue that threatens individuals' well-being, but the good news is that certain debts seem to be on the decline.

According to the "Quarterly Report on Household Debt and Credit" that was released in May 2021 by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, credit card balances were \$157 billion lower by the end of the first quarter of 2021 than they had been at the end of 2019. Authors of the report credit that decline to paydowns by buyers and reduced consumption opportunities related to the pandemic.

Individuals who want to avoid debt can keep an eye open for these pitfalls.

- **Retail credit cards.** Many retailers offer their own credit cards. Consumers may be enticed to sign up for such cards by the opportunity for instant, and often significant, savings. For example, a home improvement store may offer an immediate 25% discount to customers who sign up for a store credit card and use the card to make a purchase. As enticing as such savings can be, consumers should recognize that a recent study by CreditCards.com found that the average retail credit card APR is 25.9%. That's more than 6% higher than a general purpose credit card. Consumers who cannot pay balances in full each month could end up paying much more in interest if they use retail credit cards instead of general purpose cards.

- **Too many accounts.** A 2019 study from the credit reporting agency Experian



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

A budget is the most effective way for individuals to gain control of their spending.

found that the average American has four credit cards. Though many consumers can effectively manage that many cards, the more cards an individual has, the easier it can be to lose track of spending. More cards also means a greater potential for more debt, as each card has its own limit that is unrelated

to the limits on other cards.

- **Bonus hunting.** Another pitfall to avoid is the temptation to use credit cards instead of cash in an effort to accumulate more travel miles or cash back bonuses. Consumers should aspire to use cash over credit whenever possible. Doing so ensures consumers are not spend-

ing money they don't have, which is one of the most common ways that individuals build significant consumer debt.

- **Failure to budget.** A budget is the most effective way for individuals to gain control of their spending. That lesson seems to resonate more with young people than older men and

women. A 2019 poll from Debt.com found that 74% of consumers between the ages of 23 and 38 use a budget to govern their spending, while only 67% of consumers between the ages of 39 and 54 use a budget. A failure to budget can increase the risk of spending impulsively and make it hard for consumers to

see what's coming in and what's going out. That's a recipe for accumulating debt.

Avoiding certain pitfalls can help consumers avoid accumulating debt that can adversely affect their financial futures.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



FILE PHOTO — COURTESY OF WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

According to Google Trends, online searches for collagen have increased steadily since 2014.

LIFESTYLE

Resolutions inspired by trending health topics

Improving personal health is a popular New Years resolution. A 2020 Finder survey found that an estimated 188 million Americans planned to make resolutions to carry them into 2021. Similar numbers of people likely will put personal goals on the calendar this year. Those focused on health and wellness may consider these trending topics.

Collagen supplementation

Collagen is a family of proteins that serves as the structural component of most connective tissues in the body. Collagen production wanes as people age, but it also can drop quickly due to excess sun exposure, smoking, lack of exercise, and excess alcohol consumption, according to the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. Many people are interested in maintaining adequate levels of collagen, which is vital to giving skin a youthful appearance and helps to maintain healthy joints.

According to Google Trends, online searches for collagen have increased steadily since 2014. Collagen has become a top-selling supplement to improve hair, skin and nails. Though human studies that prove collagen supplementation efficacy are lacking, some randomized controlled trials have found that collagen supplements improve skin elasticity and joint mobility and reduce joint pain. Collagen supplements are thought to be safe, but people should discuss supplementation with a doctor first.

Fermented foods

More research is showing a connection between



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

CBD has been studied as a treatment for a wide range of conditions like Parkinson's disease, diabetes, multiple sclerosis, and anxiety.

digestive tract (gut) health and immunity, and people concerned with boosting their immune systems are paying attention. Research published in the journal Cell in 2014 indicated the immune system has evolved to maintain a symbiotic relationship with microbiota in the gut. Accordingly, when operating optimally, this immune system-microbiota alliance allows the induction of protective re-

sponses to pathogens.

Naturally fermented foods may help strengthen the gut microbiome by supplying it with healthy probiotics, according to Dr. David S. Ludwig, a professor of nutrition at the T.H. Chan School of Public Health. Some pickles, Korean kimchi, sauerkraut, and other foods can be beneficial. Consumers should look for product labels that say "naturally fermented," which

use live organisms for the fermenting process.

CBD and hemp products

Even though medical marijuana and recreational marijuana use is now legal in many parts of the country, CBD is widely being harnessed in its own right. Cannabidiol oil is a chemical found in marijuana and hemp plants. CBD doesn't contain THC, the psychoactive ingredient found in

marijuana that produces a high, advises the Mayo Clinic. CBD has been studied as a treatment for a wide range of conditions like Parkinson's disease, diabetes, multiple sclerosis, and anxiety. The only CBD product currently approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration is prescription Epidiolex for epilepsy.

Since hemp oil is high in essential fatty acids, it may produce anti-inflamma-

tory effects and improve brain function. It is widely used in beauty products like skin creams as well. Always speak to a doctor before using CBD and related products. Getting healthier is a common theme of New Year's resolutions. Various health trends could affect what people resolve to do in the year ahead.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Volunteering provides opportunities to socialize, which can help ward off the loneliness that can sometimes contribute to anxiety and depression.

MENTAL HEALTH

3 ways to protect your mental health

Improving one's overall health and maintaining that health over the long haul can have a profound impact on quality of life. For example, the Harvard Medical School notes that regular exercise can slow the natural decline in physical performance that occurs as people age. That means routine exercise can serve as something like a fountain of youth that allows people to keep their cardiovascular fitness, metabolism and muscle function on par with their younger counterparts.

When attempting to improve long-term health, it's important that people emphasize mental health as much as they do their physical health. The Anxiety & Depression Association of America notes the importance and effectiveness of preventive efforts in relation to depression and anxiety. In regard to mental health, prevention efforts can function in much the same way that exercise serves physical health. Routine exercise helps people to maintain healthy weights, reducing their risk for various conditions and diseases. Preventive efforts designed to improve mental health can significantly reduce a person's risk for anxiety and depression. Various techniques and strategies can be utilized to promote mental health, and these three are simple and highly effective.

1. Get enough sleep. According to the Primary Care Collaborative, a not-for-profit member organization dedicated to advancing an effective and efficient health system, sleep and mental health are intimately related. Sleep loss can contribute to emotional insta-



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Adults can speak with their physicians about how much sleep they should be getting each night.

bility. The amygdala is the part of the brain responsible for humans' emotional responses. When an individual does not get enough sleep, his or her amygdala goes into overdrive, leading to more intense emotional reactions. The prefrontal cortex is another part of the brain that needs sufficient sleep to function properly. Without it, the prefron-

tal cortex, which is integral to impulse control, cannot function properly. Adults can speak with their physicians about how much sleep they should be getting each night. Those needs change as individuals age.

2. Eat a balanced diet. A balanced, healthy diet doesn't just benefit the waistline. According to the ADAA, a

balanced diet that includes protein, healthy non-saturated fats, fiber, and some simple carbohydrates can reduce the likelihood that mental health issues like fatigue, difficulty concentrating and irritability will arise during the day.

3. Volunteer in your community. A 2020 study published in the Journal of Happiness

Studies found that people who volunteered in the past were more satisfied with their lives and rated their overall health as much better than people who didn't volunteer. Perhaps the most noteworthy finding in the study was that people who began volunteering with lower levels of well-being tended to get the biggest boost from

volunteering. Volunteering provides opportunities to socialize, which can help ward off the loneliness that can sometimes contribute to anxiety and depression.

Mental health is important, and protecting it should be part of everyone's health care regimen.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Working out with a friend or family member can provide the healthy level of competition needed to keep workouts going.

FITNESS

Features to look for in a fitness center

Each January, individuals make New Year's resolutions that focus on getting fit. Soon afterwards, the phones at area gyms start ringing off the hook with men and women looking to become new members.

In fact, according to IHRSA, The Global Health & Fitness Association, 12% of all new gym memberships begin in January. Gyms are not one-size-fits-all organizations. Gyms that appeal to some might not appeal to others. The following are some features to consider when looking for a new gym.

- **Cost.** IHRSA says 46% of former gym members claimed the reason they quit was due to cost. Finding an affordable center is a top priority for many people. The good news is many gyms market themselves as low-cost options with low monthly fees with minimal annual add-on costs.

- **Specialized programs.** Some fitness centers focus on specific workout regimens, such as CrossFit facilities. If a certain style of workout is compelling you to get in shape, research gyms that specialize in that program.

- **Atmosphere.** Two gyms may have the same equipment and group classes but may give off completely different vibes. Individuals should take tours to assess who is visiting the gym and what kind of atmosphere exists inside it. The goal is to find a comfortable, encouraging environment with like-minded people that will keep you going back.

- **Hours of operation.** A center that has flexible hours is important for people balancing careers, families and school



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Visit each gym you're considering to determine if equipment is modern, well-maintained and clean.

schedules. Planet Fitness suggests asking about the general hours of the gym; when trainers are available; whether certain sections of the gym or amenities close at certain times; and when classes are offered.

- **Guest privileges.** Working out with a friend or family member can provide the healthy level of competition needed to keep workouts going. Ask about family membership discounts as well.

- **Equipment.** Equip-

ment is an important consideration as well. Visit each gym you're considering to determine if equipment is modern, well-maintained and clean. Gyms that have several broken down treadmills or outdated strength

training equipment may not be worth the membership fee. Determine which equipment is included in the cost of membership as well. Cardio machines, free weights, stretching areas, weight machines, and changing rooms are

desirable among many gym members.

The right facility can make all the difference and help people achieve their fitness goals.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection

FITNESS

Strategies to solve stamina issues

Athletes know that energy is vital to their training and performance. But every athlete experiences days or periods when energy levels wane. Lack of energy can compromise performance and derail individuals' fitness goals, especially if they can't find ways to increase their stamina.

Individuals can try various strategies to improve their stamina. Certain solutions may be temporarily effective, but people who want to commit to a long-term fitness regimen should forgo fads in favor of long-term remedies to improve their endurance. The following are some strategies athletes can try to overcome stamina issues.

- Design a multifaceted fitness regimen. Strength training and cardiovascular exercise are often separated, and that can have an adverse effect on stamina. The fitness and wellness retailer Johnson Fitness notes that a healthy combination of strength and cardio training, sometimes referred to as concurrent training, allows the body to perform at its best. When the body is performing at peak capacity, energy levels should not be an issue.

- Remember to rest. It might seem counterintuitive to suggest that rest will actually help athletes avoid prolonged periods characterized by a lack of energy. But rest is vital to recovery. The American Council on Exercise notes that rest allows the body to repair muscle tissue, which is routinely damaged during exercise. Without that time to repair, athletes may feel fatigued when they begin their workouts, and insufficient rest between workouts increases the risk for injury.



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Various strategies can help athletes overcome a lack of energy so they can stay the course and achieve their fitness goals.

- Eat before you exercise. Athletes who exercise on an empty stomach may note their workouts tend to start off sluggish, and that's not a coincidence. The Cleveland Clinic notes that food fuels exercise by providing energy the body needs to get through a workout. Carbohydrates can provide the energy individuals need to make the most of their workout, but men and women who like to exercise in the early morning hours may not reap those

Sagging stamina could be a byproduct of boredom. Experienced fitness enthusiasts know that exercising as part of a daily routine and a routine exercise regimen are not one and the same. Periodically switch up a workout so the body does not grow accustomed to the same exercises and the mind does not grow bored with performing the same exercises.

rewards. In such instances, a small piece of fruit or granola bar can increase blood sugar levels, which are at their lowest after waking up, and provide a small yet useful energy boost.

- Switch things up. Sagging stamina could be a byproduct of boredom. Experienced fitness enthusiasts know that exercising as part of a daily routine and a routine exercise regimen

are not one and the same. Periodically switch up a workout so the body does not grow accustomed to the same exercises and the mind does not grow bored with performing the same

exercises. New challenges can reinvigorate a passion for exercise, which should reduce the mental stamina associated with doing the same exercises over and over again.

Many athletes confront a lack of stamina at some point. Various strategies can help athletes overcome a lack of energy so they can stay the course and achieve their fitness goals.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

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LIFESTYLE

Healthy hobbies families can enjoy together



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

There are plenty of family-friendly hobbies that can be enjoyed at home. Cooking is one such hobby, and it can have some surprising benefits for youngsters.

Resolutions to get fit might garner the bulk of people's attention come New Year's Day. But resolution season also marks a great time for busy families to commit to spending more time together.

Hobbies can bring people together, which makes them an ideal outlet for families who

want to spend more time with one another. Families on the lookout for hobbies they can enjoy together can consider the following activities.

▪ **Hiking.** Hiking is a family-friendly activity that's free and ideal for individuals who also want to turn over a healthy leaf as the new year dawns. The car-

diovascular benefits of hiking are well-documented and include lowering hikers' risk for serious ailments, including heart disease. But the exposure to nature that hiking provides can benefit entire families. A 2015 study published in the journal *Landscape and Urban Planning* found that hiking can help to re-

duce feelings of anxiety. Hiking trails run the gamut from flat trails that are ideal for families that include young children to more challenging trails that require a little climbing.

▪ **Cycling.** Cycling is another healthy, family-friendly hobby. The experts at MD Anderson Cancer Center note that cycling

builds muscle, helps people maintain a healthy weight, releases endorphins that can make it easier to relieve and manage stress, and improves balance. Both adults and children can reap those rewards. When cycling with young children, parents can look for flat cycling paths that won't discourage kids or require them to do



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Painting together as a family can benefit both adults and children in unique ways.

more than their bodies can handle. Older children and teenagers can handle more challenging paths, and parents of children in these age groups can even consider incorporating mountain biking into their cycling routines.

■ **Cooking.** There are plenty of family-friendly hobbies that can be enjoyed at home. Cooking is one such hobby, and it can have some surprising benefits for youngsters. According to Nemours KidsHealth®, cooking can be a great way for parents to reinforce basic math skills kids are learning at school. Older kids who don't need such lessons can benefit from cooking with their parents by learning to prepare nutritious meals that can lay the foundation for healthy eating habits throughout adulthood.

■ **Painting.** Painting together as a family can benefit both adults and chil-

dren in unique ways. Harvard Medical School notes that studies have found that artistic expression can help people with depression and anxiety. Young children, including preschoolers, also can benefit from painting, which helps them develop both their fine and gross motor skills and improves hand-eye coordination. Parents of adolescents should know that painting has also been found to be a productive outlet for teenagers to express themselves, and the process of seeing a painting project through from inception to completion can boost confidence and self-esteem.

As the new year dawns and resolutions are made, families can look to various hobbies they can engage in together to make the year ahead both happy and healthy.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



Hiking is a family-friendly activity that's free and ideal for individuals who also want to turn over a healthy leaf as the new year dawns.



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

A growing number of restaurants are not only requiring their staff to be fully vaccinated, but also their customers.

PHYSICAL HEALTH

Dining out with unvaccinated children

Dining out safely and confidently has long been a coveted component of getting back to normal life after the pandemic. In spring of 2021, mask mandates were lifted in most areas and it seemed like dining out and other activities were returning. However, new variants of the virus and breakthrough infections have added to uncertainty and raised some familiar questions about the safety of dining out, particularly with unvaccinated children.

Though COVID-19 vaccines are now available to people ages 5 and older, children younger than 5 remain ineligible for vaccination. As a result, families may once again be wondering how to navigate going out. Epidemiologists and other public health experts agree that there is no such thing as zero risk when dining out. Families must conduct their own risk assessment before venturing out with unvaccinated individuals. The following tips can help parents assess that risk so they can make the safest, most informed decisions possible.

- Check virus infection rates. Study the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention risk levels for areas where you intend to dine out. This information is free and can provide valuable insight as to the safety of a given area.

- Opt for outdoor seating. It's generally safer to dine outdoors than indoors. According to Saskia Popescu, an infectious disease epidemiologist and assistant professor at George Mason University, when dining indoors people are eating and drinking without masks on. They don't know other people's vaccine status and they are there for prolonged periods of time, during which vi-

rus particles could be circulating through the air. Virus particles are dispersed outdoors more easily than in a crowded interior space.

- Dine at off-peak hours. If you must eat indoors due to weather or other circumstances, it may be better to dine during off-peak hours when the restaurant is largely unoccupied. This reduces the risk of contact with other people.

- Consider restaurants that require proof of vaccination status. A growing number of restaurants are not only requiring their staff to be fully vaccinated, but also their customers. New York City mayor Bill DeBlasio announced in late August 2021 that visitors to gyms and indoor dining establishments would have to be vaccinated beginning in September — showing proof of at least one vaccine dose. While requiring vaccinations is a hot-button issue across the globe, diners concerned about unvaccinated individuals should contact local restaurants requiring vaccinations to determine if ineligible persons can still dine there. If so, those restaurants may be safer bets than establishments with no such requirements.

- Wear masks as much as possible. Have unvaccinated children wear masks while walking through the restaurant and other crowded areas. They can pull down masks to eat and then put them back on when they finish eating.

Dining out with unvaccinated children requires parents to carefully assess risk and make decisions that keep their children as safe as possible.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

It's generally safer to dine outdoors than indoors.



Parents can weigh the risk/reward of dining out with unvaccinated children and take as many precautions as possible to keep them healthy.



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Minimizing distractions in your workplace or home office can make it easier to maintain focus and complete tasks.

LIFESTYLE

How to be more organized at work

The dawn of a new year is a time when change is readily welcomed by millions of people across the globe. Many people see a new calendar year as a great time to turn over a new leaf, and New Year's resolutions are often made with the intention of making positive changes.

Committing to being more organized is a popular goal each January, and it's one that can pay some surprising dividends if individuals can see it through to fruition. For example, in 2011 researchers utilized functional magnetic resonance imaging and other measurements to determine that clearing clutter from a home and work environment improved individuals' ability to focus and process information. That study, published in the *Journal of Neuroscience* in 2011, also concluded that clearing clutter increased productivity.

Professionals can take note of the relationship between being organized and being productive and embrace certain strategies to be more organized at work. While organizing at home may be as simple as emptying the pantry or tossing out old magazines, organizing at the office is more likely rooted in minimizing distractions that can make it hard to maintain focus and complete tasks. The following are some strategies to clear clutter in office environments.

- Communicate during your commute. Professionals who take mass transit or carpool to work can use their commutes to comb through their emails. That may seem like an insignificant strategy, but it's not. In 2018, Adobe surveyed more than 1,000 office workers in the United States and found that the average worker spent more than three hours per day on work emails, and an additional 2.5 hours on personal email. Professionals can use their commutes to organize emails and respond to those that are most pressing. That should free up time to get more done during the workday.

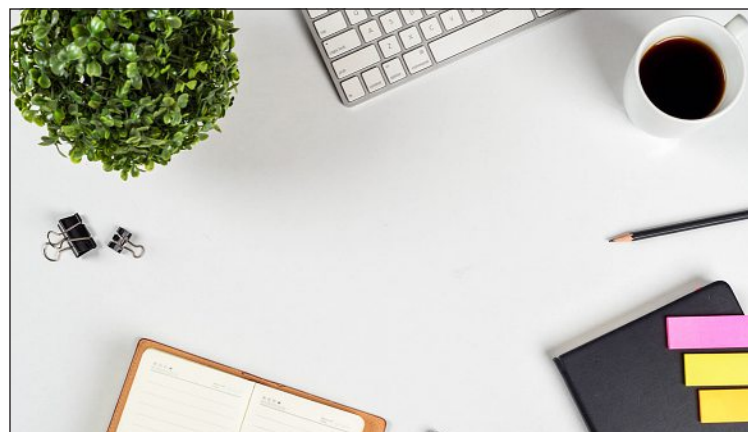
- Turn off unnecessary notifications. Smartphone and device notifications provide an endless stream of distractions that can make it hard for professionals to organize their days and maintain their productivity. A 2020 study from the multinational telecommunications firm Telefónica found that the average smartphone user gets as many as 63.5 notifications per day. During the workday, individuals can clear some mental clutter by turning most app notifications off.

- Keep a clean professional pantry. A disorganized kitchen cabinet can make it hard to find ingredients when preparing a meal at

home, and that sense of disorganization can compromise efforts to complete projects at work. A system for naming and storing files can make it easy to access documents quickly throughout the day. Keep separate folders for each project as well as subfolders for each component of the project. Store these in an organized manner on your computer and archive files and folders after the project is completed.

Various strategies can help professionals clear out work-related clutter and increase productivity.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



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PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

During the workday, individuals can clear some mental clutter by turning most phone app notifications off.



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

For parents of little ones, being aware of RSV is critical during its peak season and beyond.

PHYSICAL HEALTH

What every new parent needs to know about RSV

While COVID-19 and influenza continue to make headlines, another contagious respiratory virus has been spreading at an alarming rate, one which can be severe and even life-threatening to infants and toddlers.

Indeed, respiratory syncytial virus, or RSV, is so common that nearly 100% of children have been infected with the virus by age two. It's also the leading cause of hospitalizations in all infants. While most people, including infants, develop only mild symptoms, for some, it can progress to severe complications. Despite these facts, many parents have never heard of RSV. This is why the American Lung Association with support from Sanofi Pasteur, is working to educate expectant mothers, parents and caregivers about RSV's symptoms, when to contact a healthcare provider, and the steps they can take to protect themselves and their children.

"Typically, peak season for RSV infection in the United States is fall through spring, however, a rise in cases in the summer of 2021 prompted a health advisory from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. With people taking fewer precautions as COVID-19 restrictions are lifted, RSV is spreading at an unusually high rate," says Albert Rizzo, M.D., chief medical officer for the Lung Association.

Recognizing RSV

Here are the symptoms of RSV, as well as how to recognize signs that may indicate a worsening illness:

- Mild cold-like symptoms, including congestion, runny nose, fever, cough and sore throat.
- Very young infants may be irritable, fatigued and have breathing difficulties.
- A barking or wheezing cough can be one of the first signs of a more serious illness.
- Infants with severe RSV will have short, shallow, rapid breathing. This can be identified by a "caving-in" of the chest be-

tween and under the ribs (chest wall retractions), a "spreading-out" of the nostrils with every breath (nasal flaring), and abnormally fast breathing. In addition, the mouth, lips and fingernails may turn bluish due to lack of oxygen.

When to call the doctor: Parents should call their pediatrician if their child has a poor appetite or decreased activity level, cold-like symptoms that become severe, a shallow cough that continues day and night, or their child is experiencing any new, worrisome symptoms. They should seek emergency care if their child is having trouble breathing.

Preventing Infection

RSV is spread through close contact with someone who's infected via coughing and sneezing, or from touching objects such as toys or doorknobs that have the virus on them.

"Those in contact with an infant or young child, especially if they were born prematurely, are very young, have chronic lung or heart disease, a weakened immune system, or have neuromuscular disorders, should take extra care to keep them healthy by washing hands, covering coughs or sneezes and avoiding them when sick, if at all possible," Dr. Rizzo adds.

There's no vaccine yet to prevent RSV, but scientists are working hard to develop one. However, everyone can help stop its spread in the following ways:

- Avoiding close contact with infected people.
- Avoiding sharing cups, bottles or toys that may be contaminated with the virus.
- Washing hands with soap and water after coming into contact with an infected person.

More information about RSV is available at Lung.org/RSV.

For parents of little ones, being aware of RSV is critical during its peak season and beyond.

Story courtesy of StatePoint Media



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Respiratory syncytial virus, or RSV, is so common that nearly 100% of children have been infected with the virus by age two.

FITNESS



PHOTO COURTESY OF GETTY

Committing to overall wellness is more about lifestyle changes than numbers like weight loss or muscle mass.

Shifting wellness attitudes shape 2022 fitness trends

In adjusting to the constraints of the pandemic, many Americans had to improvise where and how they work out. After months of adapting to a “gym anywhere” mentality and learning to accommodate more flexible workout schedules, this new fitness mindset is inspiring some larger trends for healthier living.

“We’ve learned that wellness is not one-size fits all, and that it’s achieved by small habits like regular hydration that can really impact how you feel throughout the day,” said celebrity fitness trainer Harley Pasternak, MsC. “Collectively, nourishing both body and mind together as one makes holistic health a sustainable lifestyle.”

Pasternak and the experts at Propel Fitness Water are forecasting five fitness and wellness trends to watch for in 2022:

Accountability Buddies

When gym closures ran rampant, folks leaned on others for inspiration to get moving, so it’s no surprise working out in pairs (or more) is a continued way to

focus on fitness. Feelings of burnout may be common heading into 2022, so having a partner who gives you a healthy sense of camaraderie and competition can help push you to show up on days when you’d rather rest and stay committed to your goals. It also provides a sounding board when you need suggestions for nutritious recipes or fresh at-home cardio ideas.

Versatility in Gym Spaces and Schedules

When a large segment of the workforce started working from home, the rituals of before- and after-work gym visits fell by the wayside. People grew more accustomed to improvising where they work out, whether it was their neighbor’s garage, their living room or a running path in the city. As exercisers are less beholden to studio or gym schedules, the “gym anywhere” mentality is a level of flexibility many are holding on to, even as they ease back into more normal work routines.

Health in Small, Achievable Doses

This trend is all about recognizing health transformations don’t happen overnight, and even modest steps can make a big difference in how you feel throughout the day. One example is paying more attention to your hydration. If you aren’t properly hydrated, few other things tend to go right either. Small habits like throwing Propel Powder Packs into your gym, work or school bag can make a difference. Filled with enough electrolytes to replace what is lost in sweat, they are handy for on-the-go hydration and are easy to add to a water bottle.

Wellness Goals vs. Fitness

Committing to overall wellness is more about lifestyle changes than numbers like weight loss or muscle mass. People embracing this trend are forgoing numeric goals based on performance in the gym or on the scale and instead emphasizing outcomes that affect life, nourishing both body and

mind together as one. Fitness goals are an essential component, but so is supporting your mental health as well as being cognizant of what you’re putting into your body. When each piece is well taken care of, your body is better able to work like a well-oiled machine.

Low-Impact Workouts

This year, walking treadmill challenges gained virality on social media, marking the increasing popularity of workouts that are low impact yet effective. Getting moving is the key, even if it means taking your tempo down. You don’t need to do hours of HIIT every day to see results. In fact, less time- and energy-intensive workouts are easier to sustain and can often yield the same, or better, results.

Find more hydration options and wellness tips at propelwater.com.

Story courtesy of Family Features/Propel