



Health & Exercise

YOUR GUIDE TO LIVING WELL IN 2024

Device overuse can
weaken writing muscles

PAGE 12

Is sparkling water
bad for your teeth?

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7 easy-to-keep
fitness resolutions

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HEALTH & EXERCISE GUIDE

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EXERCISE

Five winter-related things to do in Michigan

By Jake Newby
ahealthiermichigan.org

Finding fun things to do in the summer doesn't really require you to put your thinking cap on. But when the temperature plummets in Michigan, fun activities can feel few and far between.

They're out there, though! It's time to start penciling plans onto your winter calendar. Start with some of these ideas.

Attend a winter festival

You can't beat a good family-friendly winter festival. Dozens of event organizers across the state have already released details for upcoming 2024 winter festivals. Here's a short list to get you started:

- Fire & Ice Festival — Jan. 6-8 — Valade Park, Detroit
- Winter Fest — Jan. 14 — Adams Butzel Recreation Center in Detroit
- Ice Sculpture Festival — Jan. 21-22 — Downtown Tecumseh
- Dexter Ice Festival — Jan. 21 — Downtown Dexter
- Warren Cold Rush — Jan. 21 — Warren City Square in Warren
- #StrongerTogether Ice Fest — every Thursday in February — Downtown Lake Orion & Oxford
- Winter Carnival — Feb. 4 — Bear Creek Nature Park in Rochester
- Alpena Ice Festival — Feb. 11 — Downtown Alpena
- Winter Wonderland Weekend — Feb. 16-19 — Downtown Petoskey
- Winter Blast Weekend — Feb. 17-19 — Downtown Royal Oak

Pick up a new sport

Michigan is a great place

to be if you're the type that likes to marry activities with exercise. This winter could be the time for you to learn a new winter sport. How about these options?

- Fat tire biking: Fat-tire bikes — which look exactly how they sound — are permissible on all Michigan trails that allow bicycles and mountain bikes. Many trails in Michigan are groomed specifically for winter fat-tire biking.

- Ice skating: A classic, family-friendly winter sport, ice skating is a fun and challenging activity that can be an underrated workout if you add a little speed to your stride. Campus Martius in downtown Detroit is one of the better-known public ice-skating rinks in the state. Be sure to always wear a helmet and well-fitting skates with sharp blades; dull skates can lead to more falls.

- Snowshoeing: This activity requires wider strides than normal so you're not stepping on the frame of the snowshoes. Ski poles are optional while snowshoeing, but they do tend to give you a better full-body workout since you're getting your arms involved.

- Winter disc golfing: Winter disc golf combines snowshoeing and frisbee with golf rules. Bald Mountain, Brighton, Holly, Ionia, Newaygo, Sleepy Hollow and Waterloo all have disc golf courses, with multiple distance options available in the winter.

Visit a museum or gallery

- Michigan Legacy Art Park in Thompsonville combines light physical exercise with cultural stimulation. The park is open year-round and is exceptionally beautiful in the winter,



PHOTO COURTESY OF AARON ECKELS

The Meridian Snow Slide, a 200-foot thrill ride down Michigan Avenue, was a highlight of the Meridian Winter Blast presented by Quicken Loans.

which is when guests can snowshoe through some or all of the park's breathtaking two-mile stretch of more than 50 contemporary sculptures inspired by Michigan's history and culture. It's dog-friendly, too!

- Frederik Meijer Gardens in Grand Rapids has been touted as one of Michigan's biggest cultural attractions for close to 30 years now, and for good reason. Bringing art and nature together, Meijer Gardens is home to one of the country's premier horticultural display gardens and sculpture parks. And in December, it's even better! Each holiday season, the Immersive Light Expe-

rience takes over the Frederick Meijer Gardens Amphitheater. The awe-inspiring experience adds a new dimension to the holidays that everyone can enjoy! Shows last 20 minutes and play every half hour on select dates. Keep tabs on the park's website for more details.

Go cold-weather camping

There is no shortage of remote campsites and cozy cabins across Michigan to cold-weather camp near. Winter camping is available in select campgrounds across the state, and you can also rent cabins, yurts,

geodesic domes and lodges.

Michigan.gov has an extensive list of winter camping, winter lodging and state forest campground information on its website. Learn more and find about availability, so you can book your reservation in advance.

If you do decide to cold-weather camp this winter, it's important to pack appropriately and to bring everything you need to have a fun and safe experience.

Swim at indoor parks

It might be a haul depending on where you live, but Michigan is home to some fantastic indoor water parks.

Traverse City's Great Wolf

Lodge boasts water slides and wave pools. Then you have other award-winning indoor water parks like Avalanche Bay at Boyne Mountain, the Gold Rush Water Park at Double JJ Resort and Zehnder's Splash Village Hotel and Waterpark.

Of course, you can't forget about classic indoor activities like watching movies at your local movie theater, going bowling and visiting indoor museums this winter. Keep an eye out for continued winter activity content from A Healthier Michigan.

This post first appeared on the A Healthier Michigan blog.



PHOTO COURTESY OF WINTER BLAST ROYAL OAK

Skate for free at The Rink at Royal Oak, the city's outdoor ice rink presented by M3 Investment Services.



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Warm up by a fire when having fun outdoors.

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EXERCISE

Physical activity is key to mental health, especially during Michigan's long winter months

By Mark E Lett

For MediaNews Group

When Michigan's cold, gray days bring on the blues, it's best to hit the ground running.

Or jogging.
Or walking.

In short, movement of all kinds is a key to melting away the emotional lows that accompany the downer days of winter in the Great Lakes State.



Blackson

Take it from Jill Blackson, senior clinical director for Hegira Health, a leader of community-based behavioral health serving Downriver and Western Wayne County:

"It's not unusual in winter to feel down in the dumps," he said. "But even a little movement, a little exercise can help improve your physical and emotional health."

To health and medical professionals, the winter blues are often recognized as seasonal affective disorder, or SAD.

Symptoms can include depression, a loss of interest in activities previously enjoyed, changes in appetite, difficulty concentrating, low energy and difficulty with sleep.

"If you are experiencing sadness, symptoms such as irritability and loss of interest in activities you used to enjoy, or fatigue, it's always a good idea to see a behavioral health professional for an assessment. There is help," Blackson said.

It's worth remembering



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE GAYLORD TOURISM BUREAU

Cross-country skiing in Gaylord's Aspen Park.

that you are not alone when SAD symptoms surface.

The National Institute of Mental Health estimates that millions of Americans experience SAD. The disorder is more common among women than men and is seen more often among people living further north, where daylight hours are shorter.

The Old Farmer's Almanac ranks Michigan among the nation's cloudiest states, with 65-75 clear days per year. Our winter wonderland can be downright dreary at times when icy winds contribute to clouds over the Great

Lakes.

Advice abounds for coping, from state universities to hospitals and mental health services.

The University of Michigan, for example, urges students to consider using artificial sun lamps as an alternative to help get vitamins and gain an energy boost. Other suggestions include Vitamin D supplements and Vitamin D-rich foods such as yogurt, eggs, certain cereals and fish.

Alexa Smyth, exercise physiologist in the cardiopulmonary rehab department of Henry Ford Wyandotte Hospital, includes

these suggestions for battling SAD:

- Keep up with a good routine even if you have no plans — get up, shower, dress and eat — all on a normal schedule.

- If we have a nice day with sunshine, get out for 5 minutes a few times a day for fresh air and to take in the natural light.

- Get out and see others; socialization and good support can make a huge difference.

- Engage in positive stress management techniques — exercise, guided meditation, breathing techniques, connect with oth-

ers, etc.

Exercise is among the go-to techniques for beating the blues. A little, or a lot, pays off with mood-massaging results.

"A walk outside is a great way to start, even if it is a little cloudy, the little bit of light can help," Blackson said. "Really, anything that you like to do."

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan urges exercise of all kinds to "significantly improve one's mood." Consistent exercise, the organization said, "can help battle depression."

Regular exercises, Blue Cross said, can reduce anx-

ety, release "feel-good" brain chemicals (endorphins), improve confidence and take your mind off day-to-day worries."

In "A Healthier Michigan" report, Blue Cross suggests giving these tips a try:

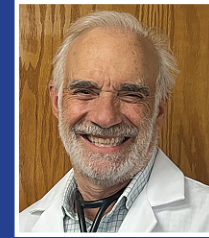
- Go for a brisk walk.
- Take an exercise class.
- Exercise during the daytime, in the sun or near a sunny window.

- Try a new winter activity like shoeshoeing or skiing.

Consider it a way to convert hibernation into a celebration of wellness, health officials said.



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EXERCISE

Local experts advise on ways to enjoy cold-weather runs safely

By Susan Thwing
For MediaNews Group

As the temperatures drop and winter blankets the world in a layer of snow and ice, many Michigan runners might be tempted to retreat indoors. However, winter running can be a safe and invigorating experience with the right precautions and gear.

Local running experts have some quick and easy tips for enjoying that invigorating run safely.

Angela Carron, community relations manager with Michigan-based Gazelle Sports — and an accomplished runner, running coach, and group run leader — said, “As long as you prepare properly, you can run outside safely all winter long.”

Some key tips include:

Pick trails, areas that are cleared regularly

Snow and ice can create hazardous conditions for runners, but most Metropark trails are cleared of snow and ice for hikers and runners.

“Kensington Metropark in Milford offers a great eight-mile loop, and in Ann Arbor, there’s a beautiful section of the B2B (Border to Border) trail that runs along the river,” Carron said. “Those are my go-to places for winter running.”

Paul Aufdemberge, owner of Total Runner in Southgate, agreed that the Metroparks are a great choice.

“Most people are close to a Metropark. Willow Metropark (in New Boston), Kensington, and Stony Creek are all good locations where the trails are regularly cleared,” he said.

Think traction

Even on trails and walkways that have been cleared of snow and ice, it’s impor-



PHOTO COURTESY OF GAZELLE SPORTS

Dressing in layers is a top tip for winter running because it allows you to regulate your body temperature effectively.

tant to ensure good traction when running, especially in the winter.

“We have many shoe traction devices that go over the sole of the running shoe,” Carron said. “The devices are removable and fit over your running shoes to provide additional traction while running. Yaktrax is a great option. We also have devices with spikes to add grip.”

Aufdemberge also recommends Yaktrax or Kahtoola Microspikes as a traction solution. He also said that runners can add ¼ inch hexagonal sheet metal screws to the bottom of shoes for an inexpensive fix.

“The hex screw embeds in the cushion of the sole and

does not come up through the shoe,” he said. “They are inexpensive and are perfect for the icy shoulders of roads and for dirt roads that are minimally plowed.”

See and be seen

While on the trails, it is important to pay close attention to your surroundings and be cautious when running in unfamiliar areas. If you choose to run on sidewalks or streets, avoid running on roads with heavy traffic, and instead opt for well-lit paths and sidewalks.

“Visibility is an issue in the winter as there are a lot more dark hours now,” Aufdemberge said. “Run-

ners can use anything from clip-on lights to armbands to vests to ensure greater visibility. Wearing reflective clothing and accessories, such as a light-up vest or other LED lights, will make sure you’re seen by motorists and other pedestrians.”

Being able to clearly see your surroundings is especially crucial if you prefer running in the early morning or late evening when natural light is scarce.

“How you’re seeing is just as important as being seen,” Carron said. “Wearing a headlamp can make sure you’re illuminating your path in front of and around you correctly. And

wearing a reflective or a light-up running vest will make sure you will be seen.”

Dress for the weather

Dressing in layers is a top tip for winter running because it allows you to regulate your body temperature effectively. Runners can start with a moisture-wicking base layer to keep sweat away from your skin and then add an insulating layer for warmth. Finish this off with a waterproof and windproof outer layer to protect against the elements.

“Also the cold air can be harsh on your face, so wearing open-faced ski masks is helpful, or buffs around

your neck to pull up for extra warmth against the air,” Carron said. “Another trick for exposed skin is to use ChapStick or Vaseline on your face. It helps keep the wind off your face as well as provides a barrier of protection.”

Runners also can purchase waterproof clothing, including shoes, that will keep them warm and dry.

“Gore-tex is your friend,” Carron said. “It keeps you warm without making you overly sweaty. The same with a shoe. The ground can be slushy, wet, and cold. Waterproof shoes keep your toes and feet warm and dry. It’s a must-have to keep you comfortable.”

And, of course, remember hats and gloves to prevent heat loss from your extremities.

Stay hydrated

While it may be tempting to forgo hydration during colder runs, staying properly hydrated is essential. The cold air can be deceptively dry, and you may not feel as thirsty as you would in warmer weather.

Carron advises drinking water before and after a run to maintain optimal performance and prevent dehydration.

“Hydration is a challenge in the winter. It’s good to hydrate well before you run especially if you’re doing a run longer than 90 minutes at a time,” she said.

Have fun!

By dressing appropriately, choosing the right footwear, staying visible, being mindful of icy conditions, and staying hydrated, you can enjoy the benefits of outdoor running while minimizing the risks associated with winter weather. With the right precautions, the colder months can become a season of unique and memorable runs.



PHOTO COURTESY OF GAZELLE SPORTS

By dressing appropriately, choosing the right footwear, staying visible, being mindful of icy conditions, and staying hydrated, you can enjoy the benefits of outdoor running while minimizing the risks associated with winter weather.



PHOTO COURTESY OF GAZELLE SPORTS

Hats and gloves are important to prevent heat loss from your extremities.

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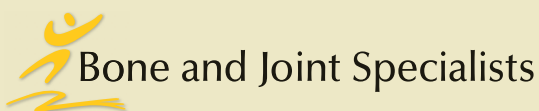
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HEALTH

Local health professionals share self-care tips for the new year

By **Monica Drake**
For MediaNews Group

One of the most popular New Year's resolutions is improved mental health — surpassing even weight loss, according to a survey by Forbes Health.

But, with more than 90% of New Year's resolutions failing, Michigan medical experts are sharing how to make — and keep — a 2024 resolution to prioritize mental health.

L e a h Mills, clinical therapist and CEO of Ntervene, LLC in Ypsilanti, said the first step is to actually understand why mental health is so essential to a person's overall well-being.

“Read up on what encompasses the scope of mental health. Get acquainted with the function of the mind and its power over your body and all that you do and say — to yourself, your family, friends, colleagues/peers and even strangers,” she said.

Next, Mills said, talk to your primary care physician, who can treat mental health issues or refer you to a psychiatrist or therapist for additional help. Therapists also can be found by



Mills



Mekhael



Shiener



McGinn



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

With more than 90% of New Year's resolutions failing, Michigan medical experts are sharing how to make — and keep — a 2024 resolution to prioritize mental health.

visiting psychologytoday.com or through your health insurer's online portal.

“Interview the therapist to find the one that you feel fits best with you and then begin to share what your desired goals are that you would like to address, with the hopes of you gaining mental, emotional and behavioral strength to obtain the life that you deserve,” Mills said.

Dr. Hany Mekhael, chief medical officer at Beaumont Behavioral Health, said it's important to remember that physical and mental health go hand-in-hand — with poor physical health significantly increasing a person's risk of developing mental health problems and vice versa.

“As we commit to exercising and eating healthy, it is

as important to commit to staying positive and not ignoring our mental health. Our mental health is just as important as our physical health,” he said.

“Depression can increase rates of heart disease, obesity, as well as early onset dementia. Research shows that whatever gets inside our body affects our mental health. Eating healthy has a direct effect on our mental health.”

Eating foods high in complex carbohydrates, like brown rice, quinoa, oatmeal, potatoes and corn, can help improve your mental health as they boost your serotonin levels, causing a calming effect. Healthy fats, like olive oil, grapeseed oil, nuts, seeds, oily fish, avocados, milk and eggs, also help

the brain function more efficiently, while trans fats often found in processed foods should be avoided.

According to the Mental Health Foundation, it's important to include a protein with every meal as both animal and plant proteins contain an amino acid the brain uses to help regulate mood. Including more whole grains, fruits and vegetables in your diet also helps keep your brain healthy by protecting it from oxidative stress.

Dr. Gerald Shiener, chief of psychiatry at DMC Sinai-Grace Hospital in Detroit, recognizes that, especially during the holidays, it can be difficult to make healthy choices.

“There are snacks and candy everywhere, and when you're full of carbo-

hydrates and sugar, you can get irritable. As tempting as it is, stick to moderation. It doesn't mean don't indulge, (just) don't over-indulge,” he said. “Also, watch how much alcohol you drink. When you're thrown together with family, and you've had a few drinks, old conflicts can emerge — and that's not good for anybody.”

Mindfulness practices also have been proven to help reduce anxiety and depression, according to the National Institutes of Health. This is the practice of being fully conscious of what's happening in the moment. Claire McGinn, clinic director of Ellie Mental Health in Bloomfield Hills, said an easy way to do this is by identifying things that are

enjoyable through each of the five senses.

“These can be small things — the taste of coffee, the smell of cookies baking, the feel of a soft blanket. Try to find one thing through each sense and do that for just 30 seconds each day. It's important to make sure that you do these activities in a mindful way,” she said.

“Close your eyes, try to find a quiet environment, smell the coffee, feel the heat of the coffee as you sip it. How does the mug feel in your hand? What do you enjoy about the taste on your tongue? Oftentimes we're just going through the motions; things we enjoy just become habits. This helps break us out of that cycle and set our sights on the small joys in life.”

EXERCISE

Workout programs key to balancing lives of cardiac patients

By Mark E Lett

For MediaNews Group

For most of us, keeping our life in balance means understanding and juggling our needs and wants.

But for cardiac patients and those with heart health issues, keeping balance is essential to life itself. The threat of losing balance and falling is an ever-present concern.

The American Heart Association puts it this way: "Falls are a leading cause of injury in older Americans and carry the risk of permanent disability, high medical costs and even premature death."

For those with heart health issues and cardiovascular disease, "falls are very common," said Dr. Sarah Goodin, author of the American Heart Association report.

Reducing the risks of falling, medical specialists say, calls for cardiac patients to put their whole heart into it — and their legs, arms, hands, feet and all their muscles.

In a word: Exercise.

"The most important factor in reducing the risk of falls is to preserve muscle and equilibrium," the Mayo Clinic in New reported. "This can be achieved by regular physical activity in a safe environment."

Take it from Patricia Hale, 77, a retired hospital cafeteria worker whose weekly routine includes workouts through a cardiac fitness program at Corewell Health's William Beaumont University Hospital in Royal Oak.

For Hale, the sessions are preventive to minimize heart disease — and the risk of falling. Participating in well-monitored classes to build strength and balance, she said, was advised by her daughter, a nurse.



PHOTO COURTESY OF COREWELL HEALTH

Cindy Haskin-Popp, manager of preventive cardiology and rehabilitation, leads a cardiac fitness program at Corewell Health's William Beaumont University Hospital in Royal Oak.

"It's working. It's a blessing," Hale said. "I don't want to be a burden to my kids. I figured if I can help myself this way, then that's just what I'm going to do."

Many risk factors contribute to falling, from vision problems and nerve damage to household hazards and use of medicines such as sedatives and anti-depressants, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Age, inactivity and heart-related ailments are among the most significant balance-busters. The costs to individuals — and society — are sobering.

According to the CDC:

- One in every five falls causes a serious injury, including broken bones or a head injury.

- More than 3 million older people are treated

each year for fall injuries.

- Falls across the nation account for more than \$50 billion in medical costs annually.

In Michigan, it is estimated that more than 20,000 residents were hospitalized due to falls in 2021, and 74.1% of those affected were 65 and older. Nearly 200,000 visits to Michigan emergency departments were related to a fall-related injury.

The statistics were so striking that Gov. Gretchen Whitmer declared Sept 18-22, 2023, as Falls Prevention Awareness Week.

The COVID-related pandemic added to concerns about falling.

A University of Michigan study showed that more than a third of people between ages 50 and 80 reduced their physical activ-

ity in the pandemic's first 10 months.

While mobility decreased during the pandemic, the report said, the fear of falling increased.

"Many older adults fall each year, and the pandemic was no exception," said Geoffrey Hoffman, assistant professor at the U-M School of Nursing.

"Physical condition can make a major difference. ... Focusing on prevention now, including physical heart and activity ... is crucial."

A first step toward falling prevention, advise medical professionals, is movement. They are not prescribing the kind of iron-pumping, feel-the-burn workouts associated with commercial fitness centers.

Instead, some hospitals provide specially-designed

facilities where physical therapists conduct supervised sessions to build strength, balance and confidence — all intended to help patients combat falling.

For heart-smart folks like Hale, sessions with like-minded patients are effective and enjoyable.

The Corewell program includes classes to improve cardiac fitness, strength and balance to reduce fall risk and promote independent living. Classes are led by certified clinical exercise physiologists and registered nurses.

"We address the whole person, risk factors, nutrition and both physical and mental health issues," said Cindy Haskin-Popp, manager of preventive cardiology and rehabilitation and author of the 2022 book,

"Simply Fit Senior: A Guide to Vibrancy, Vitality, and Vigor in the Golden Years."

The Corewell therapy is tailored to individual patients. Protocols include monitoring blood pressure, heart rate and heart rhythm and assessing signs and symptoms to ensure exercise is safe.

Instructors lead participants through warm-up, balance exercises, handheld weights, resistance bands, light cardio, agility-coordination exercises and a cool-down stretch. On some occasions, meditative techniques and soft music are in the mix to encourage relaxation and mental focus.

Sessions often are designed to strengthen muscle groups and help patients increase confidence in their movement.

A key to minimizing the risk of falling, Haskin-Popp said, is to develop muscle groups to work in smoother sequences. Over time, patients develop muscle memory supporting various planes of motion.

"So, if a misstep happens, they can have an almost reflexive reaction to pull themselves from a fall," she said.

In describing the hospital's programs, Haskin-Popp — with a master's degree in exercise science — said cardiac rehab workers are "educators, confidants, cheerleaders, caregivers, nurturers, mentors, friends, family, social support and advocates."

An intended byproduct of group physical therapy is greater confidence among patients. Hale said group members support each other during sessions and encourage one another to return for more.

"We laugh, we joke, and we help each other," she said. "And that means a lot."

EXERCISE

Handwriting muscles may feel weaker with less practice, device overuse

By Gina Rich

Special to *The Washington Post*

Aisha Attah used to write by hand a lot, whether for schoolwork or in her journal. But after the pandemic began, Attah, 20, found herself spending more time online — and less with a pen and paper. Months later, in a meeting at her first job, Attah tried taking notes by hand. “It was incredibly uncomfortable,” she said.

Handwriting is a fine motor skill that isn’t innately learned; it needs to be taught and practiced.

It also is a skill that benefits us by stimulating our brain: We remember information better when we write it down by hand, research shows.

But for many of us, handwriting can feel difficult as we turn to smartphones, other devices and even robots for many of our hand tasks.

And with cursive dropped from Common Core State Standards in 2010 in the United States, children have few opportunities to learn and practice; for some, handwriting has been relegated to an extra-curricular activity.

The problem isn’t only that we’re practicing less. Technology has changed the way we use our hands.

Also, the more time we spend on our devices, the greater the probability of problems with our hands and wrists, such as pain, weakness and nerve changes.

“It’s like going to the gym,” said Mellissa Prunty, an occupational therapist at Brunel University London and chair of the Na-

tional Handwriting Association in the United Kingdom. “When you write for long periods of time but you don’t do it often, you are going to feel tired and fatigued.”

Why handwriting matters

The hand-brain connection is stronger when we write something by hand vs. typing it, said Paula Heinricher, an occupational therapist and national presenter for Learning Without Tears, which trains educators in subjects, including handwriting.

Although we might be able to take more notes on a keyboard than by hand, “there’s also research that shows when you write by hand, there is a deeper brain connection and a deeper understanding, and you retain that information longer,” she said.

A 2020 meta-analysis concluded that college students performed worse in their classes when they typed notes into a device vs. writing them by hand. And a 2014 study found that students who took notes by hand understood the information better than those who used laptops for note-taking.

The ability to write quickly and legibly also has a critical link with academic performance.

A 2013 study found that children who had good handwriting skills in preschool performed better in reading and math in second grade.

And in a 2019 study of 141 first graders in four schools in Italy, children who were



PHOTO BY RICARDO ARDUENGO — AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Handwriting is a fine motor skill that isn’t innately learned; it needs to be taught and practiced. It also is a skill that benefits us by stimulating our brain: We remember information better when we write it down by hand, research shows.

taught cursive developed better reading and writing skills compared with a control group.

Prunty has worked with children who have above-average reading, spelling and vocabulary skills.

But because of fine motor coordination difficulties, “those kids, although they’re bright, will write less, and it’s less interesting to read. That’s because their speed is impacted,” she said.

Fewer fine motor activities

If our hand muscles don’t feel particularly sprightly, it’s easy to point the finger at our devices: We send a text instead of writing a note.

Or we type a grocery list into an app rather than scrawling it by hand.

While there is little hard evidence that fewer students are taking notes or completing assignments by

hand now compared with years past, children’s use of devices has increased, especially in the pandemic years, parents said.

But devices aren’t the only culprit.

In general, we’re not engaging in as many fine motor activities as in the past, said Ritu Goel, a certified hand therapist at the University of Maryland Medical Center.

With keyless entry, for instance, many of us no lon-

ger turn a key to unlock our car or the front door; instead, we push a button or tap out a code. So the lateral pinch, a fine motor motion, “is becoming a little less used in day-to-day activity,” Goel said.

The effects of device overuse

Overuse of technology can affect our handwriting muscles; the main ones being the flexor pollicis lon-

gus, the flexor digitorum superficialis and the flexor digitorum profundus.

The flexor pollicis longus enables us to flex the thumb, while the other muscles allow for finger flexion.

We also use these muscles for other fine motor tasks such as picking up small objects.

In a small 2015 study of student smartphone users, researchers found that the flexor pollicis longus tendon — which originates as a muscle in the forearm — was larger on participants' dominant side than the non-dominant side. That was true for all participants, irrespective of how much they used their smartphones.

The size difference, though, was biggest in those who used their devices the most. In that same high-usage group, the median nerve — a sensory and motor nerve beginning at the armpit and ending at the fingers — was significantly larger on the dominant side than the non-dominant side.

Researchers theorized that smartphone overuse caused the differences. With the repetitive pinching motion of texting, “only one muscle is doing really hard work,” said study author Esra Erkol Inal, associate professor of physical therapy and rehabilitation at Reyap Hospital Istanbul. There’s no benefit to using one part of the hand so extensively, Inal said, but there are risks.

Overworking specific muscles can enlarge tendons enough to cause noticeable symptoms. The tendons controlling our hands begin as muscles in the forearm and run out to our fingertips through the tight space of the carpal tunnel. Bigger tendons crowd the median nerve, which essentially gets squished, said Lisa Kruse, a hand surgeon and assistant professor of orthopedics and rehabilitation at the University of Wisconsin School of Medi-

While more research is needed, it's possible that the more we use our mobile devices, the higher the risk for some type of hand dysfunction. Device overuse changes the balance of our hand muscles and could cause damage in the future, Inal said.

cine and Public Health. The result: carpal tunnel syndrome, which causes numbness, pain and weakness in the hand and forearm.

A study of neurology patients at a Turkish university found that people diagnosed with carpal tunnel syndrome spent more hours per day on their smartphones than those without hand or wrist complaints.

Grip strength — which enables us to hold a pen or pencil — may also be affected: A small study of students at a university in Lahore, Pakistan, found a significant association between high levels of smartphone usage and a weaker grip.

While more research is needed, it's possible that the more we use our mobile devices, the higher the risk for some type of hand dysfunction. Device overuse changes the balance of our hand muscles and could cause damage in the future, Inal said.

Help for handwriting muscles

Even as we continue to use technology and devices, we can bolster our handwriting muscles with a few strategies.

Make sure your smart-

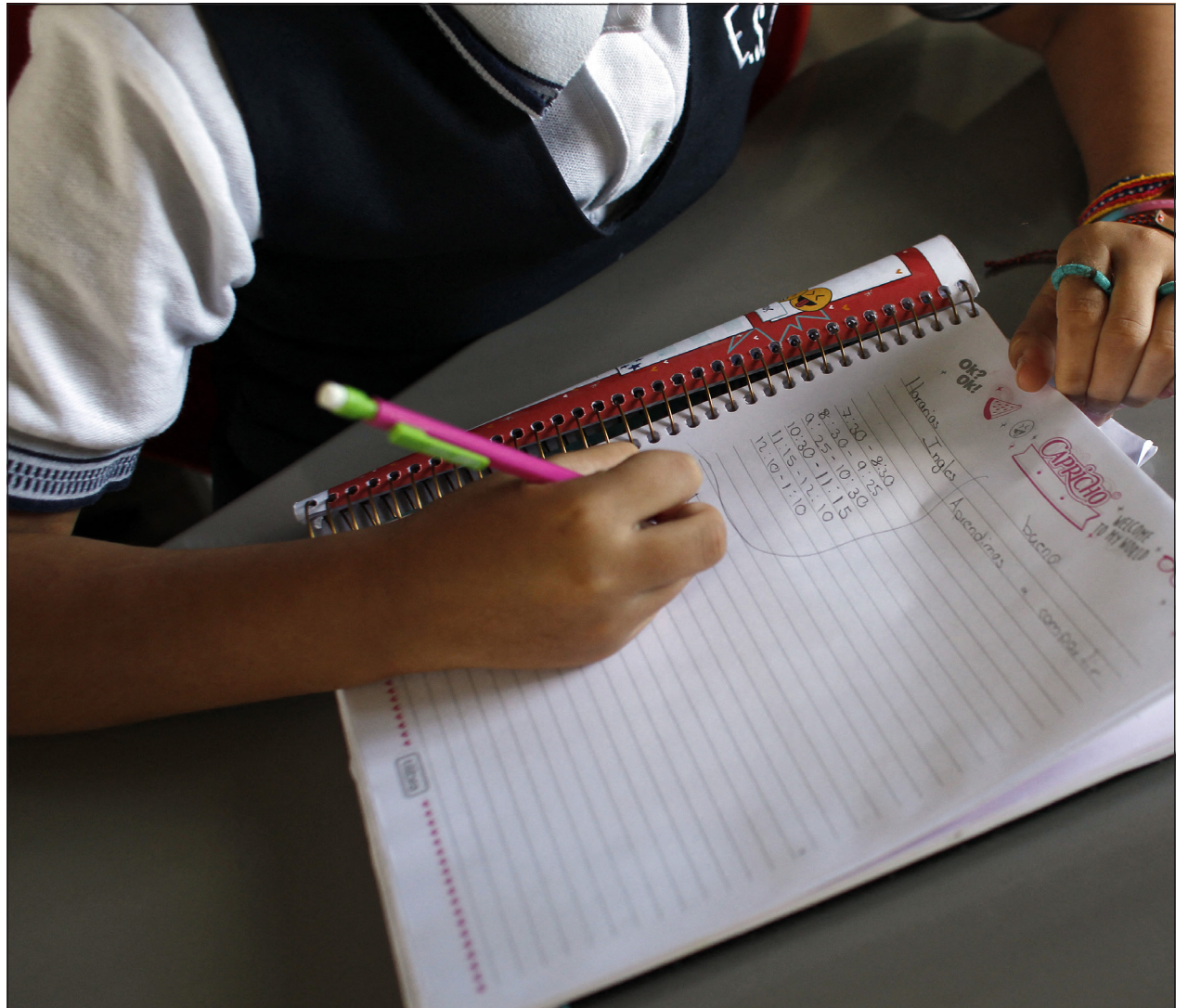


PHOTO BY RICARDO ARDUENGO — AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

A sixth-grade student takes notes during an English class.

phone isn't too big. If our smartphone is large relative to our hand, we wind up reaching across it more, which can cause thumb pain, Goel said. You should be able to hold your smartphone comfortably in one hand with a good grasp.

Use devices mindfully: Her teenage patients scoff, but Goel advises texting with the index finger — not thumbs — while holding the smartphone in the other hand. Give yourself cues to take breaks from scrolling, such as by setting alarms on your phone. And don't forget posture: When working at a desk, Inal stores her phone in a smartphone stand and strives to keep herself vertical, rather than hunched

over.

Stretch and strengthen: If your hands are cramping, Goel recommends tendon gliding exercises, movements to bend and straighten different joints. You can also perform what's called a prayer stretch by bringing your palms together with your elbows out and pointing your fingertips upward for a wrist extension. Reverse the exercise with a wrist flexion, directing your fingertips down so the backs of your hands touch. In addition, Goel suggests rolling your hands across therapeutic putty, Play-Doh or a small rolling pin.

Completing tasks without assistive devices will help strengthen the small

stabilizing muscles in your hands. For instance, using a manual can opener engages your gripping and pinching muscles, Kruse said. One strengthening exercise she suggests: Place your hand on its pinkie finger side on a surface. Bring your index finger upward to engage the dorsal interosseous muscle, located between your thumb and index finger. Work toward adding resistance, such as a rubber band.

When in doubt, get it checked out: If you have hand, wrist or forearm discomfort that interferes with daily activities, seek a medical evaluation. An occupational or physical therapist can perform an ergonomic assessment to identify any

problematic environmental factors — a workstation set too high, for example, Goel said. Sometimes hand fatigue is related to writer's cramp, a type of dystonia or involuntary muscle contractions, which can be treated.

Handwriting, typing and even dictation-to-text methods are all valuable ways to express ourselves. And while it's not realistic or necessary to avoid our devices, it's worth bringing back that handwritten note on occasion and encouraging your children to do the same, Heinricher said.

“The reality is that we are a hybrid world. So it's about having different tools in your literacy toolbox,” Prunty said.

EXERCISE

7 fitness resolutions that are easy to keep

Resolutions to get in shape, exercise more and eat healthier foods are popular each January.

Optimism reigns when making resolutions, but for many, the difficulty lies in keeping them. Healthy resolutions are easier to keep when you have firm ideas and choose reasonable goals.

Individuals looking to get healthier in the year ahead can try these strategies to stay the course:

1. Wake up earlier. Waking up a half hour earlier each day can have a substantial impact. That small amount of extra time can be devoted to meditation, deep breathing exercises or even some yoga stretches.

2. Move around more frequently. Many people with office jobs spend hours sitting in front of computers. A sedentary lifestyle can hurt your overall health. Set

a timer or use a reminder on a fitness tracker to remind you to get up and move around for a little bit every hour.

3. Eat more vegetables. Vague goals like “eating better” are difficult to maintain because there is no specific goal to achieve. Rather, a resolution like eating a fruit or vegetable each day at every meal is something measurable. Vegetables can be hidden in favorite foods, such as desserts. Swap pasta noodles for spiralized zucchini as another easy fix.

4. Stand straighter. Posture tends to decline with age, advises AARP. This can cause the spine to lose flexibility. Stretches to maintain posture can help anyone stand straighter and improve long-term health.

5. Add “bursts” to your walk. Researchers at the Mayo Clinic tout the benefits of interval training.

While high-impact workouts may not be appropriate for everyone, adding little speed bursts to a daily walk can provide significant health benefits. Aim for 30 to 60 seconds of rapid walking at regular intervals to shake up the workout.

6. Drink more water. Increasing water intake can help you feel fuller, thus reducing the likelihood that you will overeat. Gradually increase your water intake by adding a few ounces each day until drinking water becomes rote.

7. Take a workout outside. Switch up your normal routine by making use of the great outdoors to exercise. Instead of three miles on the treadmill or elliptical machine at the gym, opt for three miles on a local hiking trail.

— Metro Creative Connection



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Bicycling is a heart-healthy cardiovascular exercise that strengthens your lower body, yet is low-impact on joints, making it a terrific workout for adults of all ages.



GRETCHEN MCKAY — PITTSBURGH POST-GAZETTE/TNS

Topped with thin rounds of zucchini and creamy Boursin cheese, this summer tart takes just minutes to prepare.

HEALTH

5 vegetables to keep your garden harvest going into the winter

By **Nevin Martell**

Special To The Washington Post

Empty garden beds look so sad during the winter months. Hiding under layers of compost, mulch and the occasional blanket of snow, they sit forlornly, simply taking up space.

But these vacant plots are missed opportunities. With a little effort, some simple equipment and the right plantings, gardens can continue to flourish through the darkest days of the year.

“Gardening in the winter is the easiest gardening that you’ll ever do,” says Caleb Warnock, a winter gardening specialist and owner of SeedRenaissance, a company specializing in heirloom varieties that’s based in Alpine, Utah. There are fewer weeds, most pests have decamped for the season, diseases are almost nonexistent and plants require little to no watering, because the ground is frozen.

One thing you will need to do, though, is install protective covers for your beds before the season starts. Mary Buri, founder of Mars Kitchen Garden, a gardening design, installation and maintenance company in Westchester, New York, suggests purchasing or building cold frames. (They’re essentially unheated, miniature greenhouses that sit on the ground or attach to raised beds.) They trap heat to increase the temperature inside while insulating plants and soil from the most bruising elements of winter weather. There are plenty of easy-to-assemble kits available, or you can build DIY versions using wood or flexible PVC piping for the frames, which are then covered with heavy-duty plastic.

Don’t open your cold frame if the temperature is below freezing, during a snowstorm, first thing in the morning, or in the evening or beyond, Warnock says. “Open them after there has been at least a couple of hours of daylight, even if it’s a cloudy winter daylight,” he says. “Then close them up again, so there will be a couple of hours of sunlight to warm them back up again.”

The only other work required is picking what to grow and planting at the right time. Here are five expert-recommended vegetables that will ensure your beds stay useful throughout the winter.

Arugula

“It’s a wonderful season-extending vegetable for beginners to grow,” Buri says. “So are other greens, such as tatsoi, bok choy and lettuces.” In early fall, sow seeds directly into beds, and water them every couple of days. The greens don’t need to be covered until later in October in the D.C. region, when the first frost typically hits. Roughly four weeks after planting, begin harvesting the biggest leaves, but never take the entire plant, allowing it to continue producing. Keep sowing new seeds every couple of weeks (known as succession planting) to ensure a rolling series of salads throughout the winter. If the plants suffer frostbite, don’t clip the greens while they are still icy, because they will be mushy. Instead, Buri says, wait until midday, after the sun has thawed the arugula, to harvest and enjoy the leaves.

Carrots

Carrots taste even sweeter in the winter, because the cold transforms their starches into sugars. (Eat the greens, too. They’re rich in minerals and vitamins.) Seed the root vegetables two to three months before the first anticipated frost of the year.

As the carrots begin to sprout, thin them out, so they aren’t overcrowded. “Don’t worry: These baby carrots don’t need to go to waste,” says Aerin Peak, owner of Homegrown and Harvested, a garden-coaching service in Silver Spring, Md.

She loves giving those mini carrots to her kids as snacks or throwing them into stir-fries. As temperatures dip, top the carrots with a heavy protective layer of mulch, about 18 inches deep. Even if the ground freezes, so you’re unable to pull out the carrots, the vegetables will be fine until spring, though you should harvest



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

There are several vegetables that can grow throughout the winter that are both low-maintenance and easy to grow, with a few cold weather accommodations.

them after the first thaw, or they will become mushy.

Garlic

“I always remember to plant my garlic in October when we’re getting ready to celebrate vampires, witches and ghosts,” Peak says. She advises using locally sourced organic garlic cloves for the best results.

Place cloves roughly six inches apart, approximately two inches deep, in well-tilled soil primed with lots of compost. The grittier, nubby side of each clove goes down, with the pointy end upward. Make sure to cover them well with mulch. The garlic will take up space until around July, when it will be ready to harvest, so consider placing the aromatic alliums in a dedicated bed or in free-standing towers. Bonus: If you grow a hardneck variety, in

the spring you can harvest the scapes, the plants’ looping green tops, which can be used similarly to garlic and are great in pesto.

Kale

If you’re lazy, Buri says super-low-maintenance kale is the crop for you. Make sure to pick a cold-resistant variety, such as lacinato, White Russian or Vates Blue Curled Scotch. To be rewarded with a winter harvest in the Mid-Atlantic, plant seeds about ½ inch deep and one inch apart in compost-boosted soil in late autumn. Water the plants until the first frost; it’s best to surround their bases with straw or mulch to hold in moisture. Like carrots, kale converts its starches into sugars when it gets cold, so you’ll be treated to sweet leaves packed with vitamins and minerals.

Brussels sprouts

For the best chance of success in the Mid-Atlantic, begin growing Brussels sprouts seeds indoors in July, then transplant your starts in August into a well-tilled bed with good drainage. Space plants about 18 inches away from one another in rows about three feet apart. Cover the base of the plants with plenty of straw or mulch to insulate their root systems. For gardeners in the Mid-Atlantic, Peak recommends planting starts in two phases — in August and at the beginning of fall — to ensure two crops: one around Christmastime, and the other at the start of spring. To obtain the freshest, most tender crop, harvest the sprouts from the bottom of the plant first, and work your way upward as the top-most sprouts mature.

EXERCISE

How to get a decent workout while cleaning your house

By **Hannah Holland**

Special To The Washington Post

Squeezing in time for a Peloton ride or a trip to the yoga studio isn't always possible. But oftentimes, the reasons we have to forgo those things can actually count as exercise — like when you have to skip the gym to clean the house.

Stephanie Thomas, a certified personal trainer, notes how demanding a top-to-bottom cleaning session can be.

“The repetitive motion really adds up,” she says. Everything from changing the sheets to carrying a vacuum cleaner up and down the stairs burns calories and works muscles. According to Healthline, a website dedicated to health and wellness information, vacuuming for a half-hour burns around 80 calories for an average 175-pound person.

And that number doesn't take into account what the push and pull of the machine does for the muscles in your shoulders, arms and core. To the health and wellness community, this type of unintentional exercise qualifies as NEAT, or non-exercise activity thermogenesis.

Pioneered by James A. Levin at the Mayo Clinic, NEAT refers to the calories expended while doing activities that are simply a part of daily life. It's the workout you get from carrying a heavy suitcase up the stairs or chasing your kid around the playground.

Jak Wawrzyniak, founder of Intrinsic Athlete, a personal training company, says that “no matter what the desired outcomes of exercise, whether NEAT or the world's hardest workout, the individual must have a properly aligned diet with their goals.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Deep-cleaning around the house gets your body moving.

When it comes to tidying up your home, fitness experts say there are two distinct ways to sweat more as you sweep: Add gym-worthy exercises into your routine or just be more deliberate about the way you tackle the chores themselves.

Duston Morris, a professor of health promotion and health behavior at Maryland University of Integrative Health, says with either approach, frequency is crucial: “If you're using house cleaning as a way to increase movement and physical activity, do 20 to 30 minutes each day.” Morris also advises switching up the tasks you perform for better muscular bal-

ance: “Focus on laundry and dusting one day, bathrooms the next, and vacuuming and sweeping on other days.”

Ready to ramp up the calorie burn of your household chores? Here's how:

Dusting

Cleaning experts advise you to kick off a major clean with a good dusting, so let's start our cleaning workout there, too.

According to Thomas, dusting will engage your shoulders and arms, “especially when you're reaching up high.”

Her gym-worthy advice is to intermittently incorporate “lunges or squats as

you move around the room.” She also suggests (carefully) adding standing side leg lifts while you're tackling higher-up shelves, turning dusting into a full-body endeavor.

With any chore that makes it possible, Morris urges you to alternate hands room by room. “That way you create muscular balance,” and you aren't just maxing out your dominant side.

Bathrooms

We all know how grueling and time-consuming a full bathroom clean can be.

You're tackling stubborn dirt and grime at all different heights, on a variety of

surfaces — floors, shower, bathtub, mirror, toilet. The good news is that all that movement means you're hitting different muscle groups.

Scrubbing engages muscles in the hands, arms and shoulders. Thomas suggests bringing your legs into the equation while getting a streak-free mirror, with standing calf raises and squats: “You'll really feel the burn with squat holds.”

Kitchen

You'll be targeting similar muscle groups in the kitchen as you did in the bathroom.

Thomas suggests incorporating standing calf

raises, squats and lunges while you're moving around the space.

You can also do incline push-ups against your countertops — these are push-ups done while leaning against an elevated surface, making them easier than the traditional version. And you can really amp up your workout at the dishwasher. “Loading and unloading a dishwasher requires a full range of motion as you go from stooping over the dishwasher to reaching up to a shelf,” Morris says. This is also a good opportunity to carefully incorporate air squats — simple standing squats without any additional weights.

Laundry

If folding clothes is your least favorite chore, you're not alone.

It is another opportunity to incorporate a workout, though. "When you are folding clothes, for example, you could do push-ups or modified push-ups at an incline against the bed or a couch," Thomas says. Try adding five push-ups between every five pieces of folded clothing.

Floors

Thomas has good news here: "Cleaning floors can be a mini-workout" all on its own. "When you vacuum and mop, you're engaging your core muscles," she explains. Not to mention your arms and shoulders, too.

If you change your hand position on the broom or mop handle as you work, Morris notes, you'll target different muscle groups. "For example, sweep or mop some of your floors with your right hand on the top of the broom handle and your left hand on the lower portion of the broom handle. Then do the other half of your floors with your hands in the opposite position."

Morris also suggests deliberately moving around larger items to clean beneath them, not around them. "Pushing or pulling a coffee table is going to engage the biceps, triceps, chest, back and core," Morris says. Other examples? "Lift the corner of your couch to sweep underneath it, and shake out rugs."

There is another, less visible connection between working out and taking care of your space, too: Self-esteem. In both cases, you're setting a goal and achieving it.

This builds on itself, Morris explains: "In the process of accomplishing something physical, you gain more agency, and you believe in yourself more."



PHOTO COURTESY OF BRANDPOINT

Wipes are safe to use on a variety of hard, non-porous surfaces around your home.



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Accomplishing a major deep clean that leaves your house sparkling can feel rewarding.

EXERCISE

What to do when a workout grows stale

Exercise is one of the foundations of a healthy lifestyle.

Routine exercise can help individuals reduce their risk for various illnesses, including cardiovascular disease, and can even have a positive effect on mental health.

Making a commitment to routine exercise can be an adjustment for people accustomed to a sedentary lifestyle.

But even the most devoted fitness enthusiasts will face certain hurdles on their exercise journeys.

One such obstacle is a stale workout. Repeating the same exercises each day for months on end can grow boring, and that boredom may put individuals' commitment to fitness in jeopardy.

If a workout has grown stale, the following strategies might help people stay on a healthy track:

- Don't wait for a workout to grow stale. The most effective way to overcome a stale workout routine is to avoid it entirely. Switching up a routine every four to six weeks can provide enough change to avoid the boredom that can develop after following the same regimen for weeks.

Strength-training regimens can shift from focusing on building muscle to toning muscle. Various fitness experts note that fewer repetitions with more weight is a great way to build muscle, while more reps with less weight can help to tone muscle. Switching back and forth between these approaches can help to avoid exercise boredom. With cardiovascular training, skip the treadmill on nice days in favor of cycling or jogging outdoors.

- Establish new goals. Fitness goals can provide all the motivation individuals need to commit to an exercise regimen. But interest can wane after such goals have been achieved. That's why it's important to continue setting new goals. When establishing new fitness goals, don't forget to consider the fun factor. Pursuit of a goal that's fun will likely be more engaging, so identify some goals that will be effective and enjoyable.

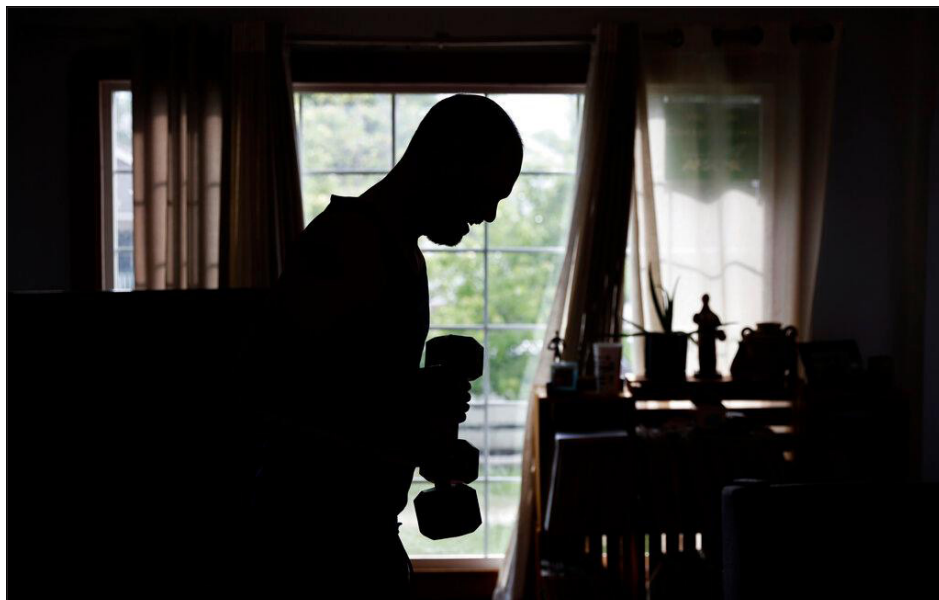
- Bring others on board. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes that individuals tend to feel more motivated and they're more likely to try new activities when working out with a partner. In-

Making a commitment to routine exercise can be an adjustment for people accustomed to a sedentary lifestyle. But even the most devoted fitness enthusiasts will face certain hurdles on their exercise journeys.



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Workout boredom can be a big hurdle on the road to a healthy lifestyle. But there are many ways to ensure workouts don't grow stale.



SHAFKAT ANOWAR — THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Christian Hains works out at his home. Health officials have warned since early on in the pandemic that obesity and related conditions such as diabetes were risk factors for severe COVID-19. It wasn't until he was diagnosed as diabetic around the start of the pandemic that he felt the urgency to make changes. Hains lost about 50 pounds during the pandemic, and at 180 pounds and 5 feet, 11 inches tall, is no longer considered obese.



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Make exercise something kids can look forward to.

dividuals who have been going it alone with their fitness regimens might find involving others can make workouts less boring, and the presence of another person can make it safer for individuals to expand their exercise horizons. For example, a person can safely lift more weight if another

person is always there to serve as a spotter.

- Work with a personal trainer. Personal trainers and other fitness professionals recognize that workout boredom is as big a hurdle as anything regarding committing to a healthy lifestyle. In recognition of that, personal

trainers often know how to switch up a routine so it produces results and remains engaging. Trainers also have the knowledge to tweak routines so they play to clients' interests and strengths.

— *Metro Creative Connection*



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Daily exercise is considered a hedge against brain decline.

EXERCISE



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Children between the ages of 6 and 18 who exercise regularly tend to have lower levels of depression, stress and psychological distress, according to the American Psychological Association.

How to establish fitness goals for kids

Physical activity benefits people of all ages, including kids.

Despite widespread recognition of the positive impact physical activity has on children, many kids are not getting enough exercise.

In an analysis of data collected as part of the 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, the Centers for Disease Con-

trol and Prevention found that less than one in four children between the ages of 6 and 17 participates in 60 minutes of physical activity per day.

When established in childhood and adolescence, good habits like exercising regularly can set young people up for a long, healthy life. Perhaps in recognition

of that, parents often look for ways to promote physical activity to their youngsters.

Setting fitness goals is one way to help young people exercise more, and the following are a handful of strategies parents can try as they seek to promote a love of physical activity in their children.

Regular physical activity can benefit kids for the rest of their lives. Parents can pitch in by embracing various strategies to help kids establish attainable goals that make fitness fun.

- Include fun activities in a fitness plan. Adults recognize the importance of planning when aspiring to achieve certain goals, and a

plan can be just as integral to getting kids to be more physically active. When devising a fitness plan, parents should be sure to include activities kids find fun. Just because dad liked playing baseball doesn't mean his children will. Identify activities that kids enjoy, whether it's hiking or cycling or playing an or-

ganized sport, and include that in the fitness plan.

- Involve kids' friends. Parents often make exercising a family affair, but a 2015 study led by a researcher affiliated with Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center found that children who exercised with friends were far less likely to cite barriers such as lack

of enjoyment or lack of energy as reasons for not exercising. In essence, kids are more inspired to exercise with friends than they are with family members. When establishing fitness goals for kids, parents can work with other parents

so kids can pursue those goals together, increasing the chances that those pursuits will be successful.

- Set aside time to exercise each day. Physical activity should be part of everyone's daily routine and kids are no excep-

tion. Such activity does not need to be a grueling workout, and indeed children's bodies will need time to recover after especially strenuous exercise. But setting aside time each day to be physically active is a good way to en-

sure kids' lifestyles are not predominantly sedentary.

- Make the goals attainable. Parents may know before kids begin exercising or notice shortly after they start being more physically active how much kids can reasonably

handle.

The YMCA notes that's an important factor to consider, as fitness goals should be attainable so anyone adjusting to a new regimen, even kids, stays motivated. A child's pediatrician can advise on

how much exercise youngsters should get each day, and parents can help kids gradually reach that point by setting challenging but attainable goals.

— *Metro Creative Connection*



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Physical activity benefits people of all ages, including kids.



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Young athletes can take many steps to stay healthy without affecting how much they enjoy the thrill of competition.

EXERCISE

How to keep young athletes healthy

The most recent data from the Sports & Fitness Industry Association says 37% of children between the ages of 6 and 12 played team sports regularly in 2021.

At the highest point in 2008, 45% were involved in sports.

According to various youth sports participation surveys, including those from the Aspen Institute and TeamSnap, children between the ages of 6 and 18 spend an average of 16.6 hours each week playing sports.

Young athletes can take many steps to stay healthy without affecting how much they enjoy the thrill of competition, including:

Encourage rest

Pushing the body to the brink without routine rest is a recipe for injury.

Rest provides recovery time for muscles and joints, as well as the mind.

Athletes can aim for at least one day off from the sport per week. After the season ends, children can take an extended break before beginning a new sport.

Eat balanced meals

Families can plan balanced meals that will provide the nutrition that young athletes need to fuel their bodies.

With increased physical activity comes a need to eat more.

The International Olympic Committee says nutrients such as vitamin D, calcium and iron are essential, but often lacking in youths with restrictive diets. A young athlete should eat plenty of complex carbohydrates, healthy fats, protein and vegetables.



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Teenagers need eight to 10 hours of sleep “for optimal health,” according to the American Academy of Sleep Medicine.



GETTY IMAGES

Foods rich in vitamin D.

Encourage variety

MedlinePlus reports many young athletes are engaging in “single-sport specialization” early on, focusing only on one sport, even during off-seasons.

Repetitive use of joints, bones and muscles for these sports can cause various injuries. To prevent that, young athletes should participate in a variety of sports and training exercises.

Wear the right gear

Athletes always should wear the safety gear required for the sport they're playing. This may include eye protection, helmets and more.

Discourage young athletes from playing through pain

Pressing on through pain or an injury is a recipe for damage that could keep a player out for the season or even permanently.

Young athletes shouldn't try to be heroes and play through pain.

Alleviate mental pressure on athletes

Many young athletes throw themselves entirely into sports, perhaps at the expense of having more well-rounded childhoods. The National Federation of State High School Associations says only around 2% of high school athletes are awarded some form of athletic scholarship to compete in college, and fewer than 2% of NCAA student-athletes go on to play professionally.

Putting all of one's eggs in the sports basket can contribute to anxiety that stems from pressure to succeed.

Keep the emphasis on fun so young athletes don't feel pressured.

Avoid performance-enhancing substances

Caffeine, anabolic steroids, steroid precursors, creatine and stimulants are substances athletes use to boost performance. They can cause many health issues and even lead to addiction.

— Metro Creative Connection



PHOTO COURTESY OF MANUEL BALCE CENETA

David Fox, right, with his sons Dewey, center, and Jimmy gather leave a baseball field after practice. David Fox and his wife, Mary Ann, have a rule for their sons, 11-year-old Dewey and 8-year-old Jimmy: They have to play a team sport. The kids get to choose which one. Dewey tried soccer and Jimmy had a go at flag football, but every spring and fall, their first choice is baseball.



FILE PHOTO

Children enjoy exercising most when they do it with friends, rather than with family members, according to a study.

EXERCISE



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Taking it slow. For now.

When your trainer is a toddler: The daily workout of modern parenting

By Caitlin Gibson
The Washington Post

How often do you exercise?

If you are a parent of very small children — with little time to think an uninterrupted thought, much less get to the gym or yoga

class — your answer might be “rarely” or just a bitter snort. You might not be surprised that one recent study found that adults with two or more children below the age of 5 reported 80 fewer minutes of weekly vigorous physical activity compared to those with no children or

just one child.

But here’s the good news: You’re probably getting more vigorous exercise than you think, thanks to the multitude of compulsory workouts incorporated into the daily reality of parenthood.

Here are just a few that

might seem familiar:

Gentle-parenting squats

Your toddler is upset because she wants the blue Play-Doh, no, the red Play-Doh, no, the blue Play-Doh, no, the red Play-Doh, no, ac-

tually she wants a banana, and every time she expresses a new opinion, you lower yourself from a standing position to her level on the ground in order to gently validate her feelings and explain that you don’t even have any Play-Doh, but she can absolutely have a ba-

nana, except now she wants a Popsicle.

Sunscreen sparring

The familiar ritual of applying a sufficient layer of sunblock to every inch of exposed skin on your child — who absolutely refuses to hold still — will test your

endurance and reflexes as well as your mental stamina.

Playground-rescue body contortion

Your kid has reached a high platform at the playground, they're very proud, and now they can't get down. This means you're now squeezing yourself through a too-narrow tube to get to them, or trying to scale a climbing wall built for smaller legs while wearing flip-flops, and then wrangling them back down to the correct altitude while operating completely outside your own center of gravity.

The parking lot sprint

Your kid abruptly pulls free of your grip and makes a beeline toward moving cars, flooding your brain with panicked adrenaline, and suddenly you are Usain Bolt.

The toothbrush pinfall

A daily wrestling match wherein the baby or toddler's shoulders must be held to a flat surface (the floor, a bed) for a count of three because three seconds is definitely all you're going to get in terms of brushing their teeth, even though the dentist said two minutes was ideal. Ha ha, two minutes. Can you even imagine?

The toy-under-the-couch leg sweep

A Hot Wheels car has rolled all the way beneath the couch to the back wall, and your kid needs this toy urgently, so you lie down on the floor and sweep your leg beneath the furniture until you can nudge the car back within reach with your toes. Alternate your legs for maximum benefit: right leg for Hot Wheel, left leg for Lego horse, right leg for fallen Cheez-It, and so forth.

Bath time backbends

Instead of arching your spine backward, as in a



PHOTO COURTESY OF TREVOR LUSH

A toddler is caught getting into a cupboard.

typical yoga backbend, this exercise involves being hunched miserably forward over the side of the tub as you try to shampoo your child's hair while they squirm away and shriek that there's water in their eyes (there is no water in their eyes, but facts are irrelevant now.)

Car seat calisthenics

You have run out of time to democratically negotiate with the tiny tyrant who refuses to acquiesce to their car seat buckles, so it's time to break a full-body sweat as you battle their relentless wiggling, back-arching, and hand-shoving attempts to stop you from strapping them in.

Disaster-aversion lunges

Your toddler is about to drop their dinner plate on the floor, or spill your wine on the carpet or hoist themselves over a deck railing — until you save the day with one heroic, swooping stride.

Outfit-change agility training

The baby has spit up for the fifth time this morning. You retrieve a sixth onesie, put one arm in a sleeve, then put the other arm in a sleeve, then put the first arm back in a sleeve again

because the baby wiggled it free while you were wrangling the second arm, then try to align all the snaps along the legs, then realize you missed one snap and the entire bottom of the onesie is now lopsided, then re-snap the snaps, then realize that the baby spit up again while you were re-snapping, so it's time to find a seventh onesie and/or start another load of laundry.

The flailing-child stair-climb

It's time for bed, but your small child declines to ascend the steps to their room, so they must be physically transported against their will.

Works the arms, back, core and legs — and if your kid manages to escape your grasp and flee back downstairs, you might even get in a few reps.

The couch-flop

Post-workout recovery is essential. Traditionally, this involves stretching, hydration and a power bar; in this case, it involves complete immobility, an adult beverage and ice cream. Don't forget to go to bed early: Your tiny trainers will be waiting for you at 6 a.m. or possibly 5 a.m.

Additional reporting by Monica Hesse.



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

This boy is on the run from his dad.

EXERCISE

DINK, DINK, KA-CHING

The pickleball industry fights to cash in as participation surges

By Rick Maese
The Washington Post

On a Tuesday morning earlier this year, pickleball club owners, manufacturers, retailers and promoters gathered in a conference room outside of Dallas and, over coffee and pastries, plotted the future of the sport.

The PickleForum, held in conjunction with the USA Pickleball national championships, was a first-of-its-kind event whose mere existence suggests the sport's popularity has entered a second phase of development — Pickleball 2.0, let's call it — focused less on grass-roots growth and more on the thing that drives all sports — money.

The industry is still struggling to keep pace with pickleball's surging participation numbers. But small businesses and large corporations alike are catching up, while municipalities and private clubs race to build courts across the country.

The sport has attracted investment from private equity firms and celebrities, including Tom Brady, LeBron James and Drake. While builders construct new courts and manufacturers race to produce new products, broadcasters have signed up to televise pro tournaments and major brands have lined up to sponsor athletes and competing pro tours.

"What's happening is everyone's trying to figure out what their role is going to be," said Tom Dundon, owner of the Profes-



BRITTANY MURRAY — STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Pickleball is the fastest growing sport in America for good reason: it's an outdoor exercise that is accessible and allows socializing at the same time.

sional Pickleball Association (PPA).

Dundon, the billionaire owner of the NHL's Carolina Hurricanes, purchased the PPA in 2021. Back then, he says, pickleball felt like a promising mom-and-pop business. But with so many companies and investors racing to get involved, the sport is grow-

ing fast. The PPA, which is helping stage the PickleForum, merged this year with Major League Pickleball, a team-based outfit, and competes for players, sponsors and fans with a second tour of elite competitors, the Association of Pickleball Professionals.

"It doesn't seem fun to try to sell something peo-

ple don't want," Dundon said in a recent interview. "I wouldn't want to be an inventor and try to convince people, 'Hey, you should use this product.' What was fun about this is people already liked it. Now you just had to expose it to them in a cleaner way."

USA Pickleball officials say they have registered

about 45,000 courts across 11,000 facilities. They estimate more than \$250 million is in the pipeline for court construction, and the sport's national governing body expects to register 1,000 new pickleball facilities annually. Courts are popping up in city parks, in gyms, at country clubs and even in abandoned depart-

ment stores, shopping malls and movie theaters.

Sporting goods and apparel companies are racing to fill retail shelves. Players can find more than 40 brands of paddles on the market, at least 10 companies producing balls and more than a dozen selling nets. There are pickleball-specific clothes, shoes, books, jewelry, eyewear, fingerless gloves, training aids, electric ball machines, even a pickleball-specific sports drink called Dink.

"You're going to see pickleball everywhere next year," said Adam Franklin, president of Franklin Sports, the 77-year-old sporting goods company. "I still think we're really in the early days of how this is going to look in the U.S. landscape."

What's yet to be seen is whether the industry can sustain all the companies elbowing for market share.

"When the piston cars came, there were 400 car companies in Detroit. Eventually there was four," said Bahram Akradi, founder and chief executive of Life Time, the fitness center chain that boasts 170 locations across the United States and Canada. "When something's hot, everybody gets into it, but they don't understand all the aspects of the business. And then eventually, when the supply and demand starts evening out, if you're not a great player with the right model, you're not going to do well."

Most stakeholders agree that it isn't yet close to evening out. Data from the

Sports and Fitness Industry Association suggests the number of pickleball players has grown more than 80% since 2021 and 150% since 2019.

Of Americans, 15% say they have played pickleball in the past two years, according to an August Washington Post-University of Maryland poll. Perhaps more importantly, the sport is more popular among younger people than older ones: A quarter of 18- to 29-year-olds have played in the past two years, compared with just 8% of those 65 and older and 10% of 50- to 64-year-olds.

That suggests a significant shift for a sport that made its first big inroads among active seniors, leaving the industry encouraged about long-term growth potential. But interest from younger people is particularly appealing to advertisers and brands that covet younger consumers.

The sport was technically invented in 1965 and was popular in retirement communities for years. But it only crossed into the mainstream during the pandemic. Franklin says his company started producing pickleball products in 2017, when Walmart wanted to feature “emerging” sports in its stores. Then the pandemic hit, and people flocked to the game — a safe outdoor activity with built-in social distancing. Pickleball nets were among the first sporting goods items Franklin sold out of during that period.

“Retailers are doubling and tripling the space allocated to the sport of pickleball at the expense of other sports,” he said.

Other sports have experienced bursts of popularity with varying degrees of sustainability.

Carl Schmits recalls the racquetball boom in the late 1970s and early 1980s, which inspired a flood of new clubs and courts, equipment and apparel. By the mid-1980s, clubs were



BEN SZILAGY — FOR MEDIANEWS GROUP

Troy Residents begin a game of pickleball at the Troy Community Center. The city of Troy has supported the sport since 2009.

shuttered, converted into gyms and aerobics studios.

Schmits was a racquetball pro at the time who coached and also managed racquetball clubs. Now, as managing director of equipment standards and facilities development for USA Pickleball, he often reminds people of racquetball’s roller-coaster ride.

“I still carry the scars of that period,” he said.

But there are key differ-

ences, he said, mainly that pickleball is more accessible and appeals to a range of age groups. In addition to courts popping up in public parks across the country, players can find games at public and private recreation centers, country clubs, pickleball-specific clubs, school campuses and “dink and drink” businesses such as Chicken N Pickle, which has eight locations and seven more on the way.

According to the Post-Maryland poll, 50% of Americans were in support of building more pickleball courts in their communities, while 13% were opposed and 37% were not sure. But they were more divided about converting tennis courts into pickleball courts; 22% supported their local government doing this, 24% did not, and 53% were not sure.

Schmits said many mu-

nicipalities are smartly growing in phases, making sure pickleball proves it has the staying power of tennis.

For now, those sports remain linked. Many new pickleball courts are replacing tennis courts, but tennis’s popularity has not necessarily suffered. In the Post-Maryland poll, 1 in 5 Americans said they had played tennis in the past two years, five percentage points more than those

who had played pickleball. About half of pickleball players also play tennis. While 44% of Americans said they have a positive view of tennis, far fewer — 24% — hold similar feelings about pickleball. Two-thirds of Americans said they’re neutral toward pickleball, while 10% had negative views.

The poll also found that more Americans rated pick-

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Surge

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leball as easier to play (39%) than tennis (17%) and said it was cheaper (31% vs. 9%). But Americans were about evenly likely to say pickleball and tennis were fun (27% vs. 25%).

Akradi, the Life Time chief executive, was a tennis player who initially had misgivings about pickleball, irked by the space the game was taking up, the lines taped all over his court and the sound the ball makes. But then he tried the sport.

“I got roped in playing one Sunday morning, and that was the epiphany,” he said. “That was the kind of the realization that the sport has got way more legs than people think.”

Life Time started with seven courts at two locations in 2021. Akradi told his property managers to start finding more space — underutilized tennis and basketball courts and unused land across properties. Life Time has more than 600 courts available to players today and will

probably hit 1,000 by the end of next year, far more than any other operator in the country.

He views the growth strategy as similar to a hotel manager studying foot traffic per square foot. If the courts are being used, he says, they're a worthwhile investment for Life Time, which offers members a range of exercise and wellness activities. He sees others racing into the pickleball business, though, and isn't sure how sustainable it all is.

“They're all rookies. They're going into spaces that used to be a Bed Bath & Beyond or something else, and they're paying a lot in rent,” he said. “If that's all you do — people coming and playing pickleball — nobody in that space, in my mind, has proven the business model.”

Because Life Time has emerged as an industry leader, Akradi hears from companies and entrepreneurs who see pickleball's growing pie. They're all eager for a piece, wondering whether they're too late.

“I've had like 50 different people come to me

and they want to build a paddle company or something,” he said. “You know, eventually there's going to be five or six paddle companies, not 50 or 100. Everybody is getting in right now, which is great. Competition is fantastic, and it makes people think, develop, improve, right? And then certain species of any kind will survive, and some won't. It's just the way that everything works.”

The Washington Post-Maryland poll was conducted in collaboration with the University of Maryland's Shirley Povich Center for Sports Journalism and its Center for Democracy and Civic Engagement online from Aug. 17 to 23 among a random national sample of 1,584 adults. The sample was drawn through SSRS's Opinion Panel, an ongoing survey panel recruited through random sampling of U.S. households. Overall results have a margin of sampling error of plus or minus three percentage points.

Scott Clement and Emily Guskin contributed to this report.



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Pickleball has become increasingly popular over the last few years, with more than 36 million players across the U.S.



PHOTO BY PAULA PASCHE — MEDIANEWS GROUP

Pickleball is among the many Michigan Senior Olympics events taking place this season.



BEN SZILAGY — FOR MEDIANEWS GROUP

The Troy Community Center provides paddles and balls for residents who wish to learn the game and aren't committed to buying their own equipment.

EXERCISE

'Weekend warriors' get heart benefits from just a few days of working out

By Gretchen Reynolds
The Washington Post

If you were too busy working this week to work out, a new study has cheery news.

It found that weekend warriors, or people who jammed almost all of their exercise into a day or two, usually on the weekends, were much less likely to develop heart problems than people who rarely exercised at all.

Their hearts, in fact, were as healthy as those of people who spread out their exercise more evenly throughout the week.

The weekend warriors in the study also weren't injured more often than other exercisers.

The results undercut some widely held beliefs about weekend warriors and whether their exercise routines are safe and effective.

They also offer the useful message that the right time to exercise is whenever you can or want to, even if that's only on Saturdays.

What is a weekend warrior?

The popular conception of the weekend warrior tends to be of someone, usually male, frantically sweating through long hours of tennis or basketball or jogging on Saturday and Sunday, then limping back to work on Monday, nursing sore muscles and joints.

This weekend-warrior approach to exercise seems, on the face of it, ill-ad-

vised, unlikely to contribute as much to good health as more consistent workouts do.

But the science hasn't necessarily supported that perception. Several past studies and scientific reviews have suggested that weekend warriors gain substantial health benefits from their compressed exercise routines.

In a study last year in *JAMA Internal Medicine*, for instance, researchers used data from a large government-conducted survey about the health of more than 350,000 men and women to show that those who exercised for at least 150 minutes a week, meeting the standard exercise guidelines, were far less likely to die prematurely than people who did not.

It didn't matter if the exercisers worked out many times during the week or only once or twice, which is the scientific definition of a weekend warrior.

If they met the exercise guideline threshold, they could work out on many days or a few. Their life spans couldn't tell the difference.

Weekend warriors are healthy

But that study and most other past research about weekend warriors relied on people's memories of how often and when they exercised, which can be notoriously unreliable.

They also concentrated on how long people live, which is, obviously, an important outcome for those of us who'd like many

golden years.

But life spans can be influenced by so many factors, including income, mental health, nutrition, weight, social networks, good or bad fortune and genetics, making it difficult to tease out and interpret the role of exercise patterns.

So, for the new study, which was published in *JAMA* this summer, researchers at Harvard University and other institutions decided to focus on the more limited question of whether weekend warriors seem to get similar heart-health benefits as people who space out their exercise.

They began by gathering data from the UK Biobank, which houses copious health information about hundreds of thousands of British adults, many of whom wore activity trackers for a week to objectively measure their movements.

The scientists pulled records for 89,573 of them, most in their 60s, about half women.

After parsing their activity data, the researchers categorized them as meeting the exercise guidelines or not, and then as working out on many days of the week or mostly on one or two, qualifying them as weekend warriors.

Fewer injuries among weekend warriors

Finally, they checked people's health records for diagnoses of heart conditions, including heart attacks, atrial fibrillation and stroke.

As a whole, the group

proved to be quite active, with about 66% meeting exercise guidelines, according to their activity trackers. More surprisingly, a majority of the exercisers were weekend warriors, concentrating most of their activities into only one or two days.

Most importantly, the exercisers showed much less risk for any of the heart conditions than the men and women who didn't meet the exercise guidelines, and their risks were almost identical, whether they were weekend warriors or not.

"Our findings suggest it is the total amount of physical activity and not the pattern of physical activity that matters" for heart-condition risks, said Shaan Khurshid, a staff electrophysiologist at Massachusetts General Hospital, instructor at Harvard Medical School and lead author of the new study.

Notably, the weekend warriors also didn't seem to injure themselves more often than other people, according to the available Biobank data.

The weekend warriors and the other exercisers showed substantially lower rates of serious muscle and bone injuries than the people who rarely worked out.

Minor aches and strains wouldn't show up in this data, though, Khurshid pointed out. Exercisers should try to warm up adequately before any workout, whether on weekends or any other days and slow down or stop if they feel pain.

The study has other lim-



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

A study shows that weekend warriors, or people who jammed almost all of their exercise into a day or two, usually on the weekends, were much less likely to develop heart problems than people who rarely exercised at all.

itations.

Because it's associational, it doesn't directly prove that when you exercise affects your heart, only that the two are linked. The researchers also tried to control for issues such as people's incomes and diets, but those factors could have been just as or even

more fundamental to their cardiac risks than their exercise habits.

Overall, though, the study tells us that if "your schedule is busy and you can't manage to be active on most days, be active on the days when you can," Khurshid said. "It all counts."

EXERCISE

Slow is the new fast: Tips for marathoners at the back of the pack

By Kelyn Soong
The Washington Post

At age 38, Latoya Shauntay Snell has finished 27 marathons. Her secret? She completes them at a very, very slow pace.

Snell, a content creator and motivational speaker, considers herself “super back of the pack” and takes pride in the challenges slow marathon runners face. Back-of-the-packers are not only moving for hours longer than their faster counterparts, but they also often endure more difficult race conditions. They don’t have the same cheering crowds to buoy them, and sometimes hydration and aid stations close before the slow runners get there. Back-of-the-packers are followed closely by “sweeper” vehicles with race officials who insist on giving them a ride to the finish line if their pace slows.

Snell completed the Chicago Marathon this year in 9 hours 19 minutes and 5 seconds by alternating running and walking, finishing well after the 6-hour 30-minute cutoff for the race. For much of the race, she ran without course markers or aid stations, Snell said. (A friend rode a bike along the course and provided snacks.) By the time she got to the finish line, it was too late to receive an official finish time, but Snell was greeted by race volunteers with a finisher’s medal.

“I’m competing against my own body to see how it can perform, see the amazing things that I can do, and I try to celebrate it in real

time,” she said.

Why marathons are getting slower

Runners like Snell are increasingly common at marathons and other large races, and the result is that marathons are getting slower.

Last year, the average time at New York City Marathon was 4:50:26, nearly 23 minutes slower than the 4:27:45 average in 2000. When Carey Pinkowski, the executive race director of the Chicago Marathon, started in his role in 1990, just 6 out of 6,168 runners — about 0.1% — crossed the finish line in over six hours. Earlier this year, about 7% of the 48,000 finishers of the Chicago Marathon finished in 6 hours or more.

Race directors cite a number of potential reasons for the slower pace. More races have introduced charity fundraising programs, which often attract someone who wants to participate and raise funds, but is less concerned about finish time. The average age of marathon runners has increased, and the sport has also attracted more women, who, on average, run slower than men. At the New York City Marathon, women now account for 44% of the runners, up from 28% in 2000. “The stigma of being a back-of-the-pack runner is slowly going away,” New York City Marathon race director Ted Metellus said.

Why marathons set time limits

For race directors, slow



PHOTO BY YUKI IWAMURA — AFP (PHOTO BY YUKI IWAMURA/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES)

Runners compete during the 2022 New York City Marathon in New York on Nov. 6, 2022.

runners present challenges. Hosting a marathon requires permits, street closings, volunteers and a finish line kept open for hours after the first runner crosses. The Marine Corps Marathon in Washington, D.C. starts at 7:55 a.m. and runners must reach the 21-mile mark, near the 14th Street Bridge, by 1:15 p.m. to allow the bridge to reopen to traffic soon after.

“To beat the bridge, your

slowest sustained pace is 14 minutes per mile,” which is about a 6-hour marathon pace, said Marine Corps Marathon race director Alex Hetherington. Runners who can’t keep up will be picked up by a sweeper bus that drops them off at the finisher festival in Rosslyn, he said.

At the New York City Marathon, the buses will follow the last wave of runners, who start at 11:30 a.m.,

at a 6 hour 30 minute or about 15-minutes per mile pace, Metellus said.

After the sweep buses pass, streets reopen to traffic and medical assistance and aid stations aren’t available. Runners still on the course must move to sidewalks. The finish line in Central Park stays open until 11:30 p.m.

Slow runners are on the course longer than faster runners, exposing the body

to more stress, said Laura Richardson, a registered clinical exercise physiologist at the University of Michigan. “It’s longer time of impact on your feet, which can lead to blisters,” she said.

Being on the course for six hours “is a feat in itself,” said Martinus Evans, the founder of Slow AF Run Club, an online running community. “It takes

EXERCISE

Should you quit your marathon training? Here's how to know

By **Kelyn Soong**
The Washington Post

Training for a marathon often requires months of grueling work and commitment. But injuries and other responsibilities can sidetrack even the most dedicated runners. Sometimes, runners may have to withdraw from the race and stop training — even if the decision is agonizing and difficult.

“Nobody wants to pull out of something they were training so hard for and so excited about,” said Greg McMillan, the founder and head coach of McMillan Running, an online coaching business and training program. But, “if you have an injury, it’s only going to get worse in the marathon.”

We asked running coaches and runners for advice on how and when to know to call it quits.

You have persistent injuries

Listening to your body is critical. It can be dangerous to run through an injury, coaches say.

McMillan recommends doing a body check and asking yourself questions like: Do I have an injury that’s getting worse? Am I having to modify my stride because of it? If that’s the case, withdrawing from the marathon would be the safer option.

Brooke Murphy, a 44-year-old from Frisco, Texas, was training for the Dallas Marathon last year when, just a month before her race, she started feeling pain in her hip and iliotibial band.

Her injury improved with physical therapy but eventually returned.

After weeks of deliberation with her coach,

Ruth Atkinson, Murphy switched to a half marathon. Her first marathon would have to wait.

“It was really hard because I was obsessed with needing this goal,” Murphy said. “I just decided the risk was not worth it. There will always be another race, but you only have one body.”

For Shyam Krishnan, on the other hand, deciding to withdraw was easy. The 52-year-old Potomac, Maryland, resident had registered for the Marine Corps Marathon in 2021 and 2022, but skipped both races due to injuries to his Achilles tendons.

“Both times the recovery was six to eight weeks of no running at all,” he said. Krishnan deferred his registration the first time and transferred his bib the second year. This year, training has been going great, Krishnan said. He hopes to complete his first marathon at the Marine Corps Marathon this October in under four hours.

Your long runs are feeling too difficult

Whether you’re running to just complete the marathon or have a specific time goal, certain training markers can indicate whether you will be able to run the full 26.2 miles on race day, coaches say.

If you’re only trying to finish, you should be able to run for at least one hour and 45 minutes, said James McKirdy, owner and head coach of McKirdy Trained. Ninety minutes is around the time when the body’s glycogen depletion takes a toll on the body, he said. If you can’t run this long, “you might need more time to develop both your aerobic system and your muscles to handle the fatigue,”



PHOTO COURTESY OF SHADOE HUARD — THE WASHINGTON POST

Devin Nihill, a 27-year-old living in Montreal, planned to run a sub-three-hour marathon at the Chicago Marathon this year before a knee injury in August caused her to miss training.

McKirdy said.

For runners with time goals, McKirdy recommends making sure you train at a pace and volume that matches your actual fitness. Forcing yourself to train at an unsustainable pace can lead to injury, McKirdy said.

You can calculate your training pace via calculators online.

You're not building up mileage

Atkinson, a running coach with McKirdy Trained, said it makes her

nervous if a runner can’t cover the distance of a marathon in a week. Many marathon training programs require runners to gradually build their weekly mileage and get their body used to spending hours on their feet.

“If an athlete can’t con-

sistently hit 25 to 30 miles a week for a couple of months and we don’t have time to continue to accumulate some fitness,” she said, “that would be when I say, ‘OK, we need to make the hard decision: We either need to fully commit or this isn’t

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Tips

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so much mental fortitude to do that.”

Tips for running in the back of the pack

If you're planning to run a fall marathon at the back of the pack, here's advice from runners and race directors.

- Know the course and rules. Plan ahead to learn time cutoffs and the pace at which you need to run before aid stations and traffic control ends. Evans recommends bringing a digital or printed map of the course. Evans said some organizers have taken down directional signs while he's still out on the course. “As a person who's in the back of the pack, the race is now a scavenger hunt to the finish line,” he said.

- Bring your own nutrition and water. Don't assume aid stations will be open or stocked by the time you get there. Walter Afable, 46, finished the Chicago Marathon in 6:26:50. He wore shorts with pockets to carry energy snacks and stayed hydrated with drinks provided by family members. Some runners use hydration backpacks, but some larger road races have banned them for security reasons.

- Bring your own cheering section. One of the biggest differences in the back of the pack is the crowd, runners say. Deb Levy, 57, is typically a middle-of-the-pack runner — her personal best is 4:39:32. But at the Chicago Marathon this year, an injury and illness sapped her energy, and she had to walk, crossing the finish line at 6:19:37. Levy noticed that the crowd had “thinned out significantly” during the second half of

the race. She recommends joining Facebook groups for back-of-the-pack runners and meeting up with people at the race expo.

- Know the sweeper rules. Every runner should know whether the race has a sweeper bus to pick up slow and injured runners. At the Big Sur International Marathon, Snell was “swept” at one of the cutoff points, but said race organizers were respectful in asking her to join the bus. When Snell boarded, the other participants applauded her.

- Enjoy the view from the back of the pack. The back of the pack can feel like a celebration — even before the race starts. There are runners in costumes, runners with disabilities, people of all ages and body types, and first-time marathoners filled with nervous excitement. “We are the party in the back,” Evans said.



MEG OLIPHANT — GETTY IMAGES

Medals at the Los Angeles Marathon are given out to all who finish, regardless of time.

Training

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the race for this year.”

McMillan views marathon training as a body of work and emphasizes week-to-week consistency. “Don't worry about one workout not going well,” he said. “But if you've only gotten in 50% of the long runs, that's not good, right? Your mileage has been erratic.”

Devin Nihill, a 27-year-old living in Montreal, planned to run a sub-three-hour marathon at the Chicago Marathon this October before a left knee injury in August caused her to miss the rest of her training. She was supposed to peak at 60 miles a week, but after her injury, could only run up to 10 miles a week. “I just knew the training volume wasn't there,” Nihill said. “I wasn't able to run without pain.”

She recently decided to withdraw from the race. “I

want running to be something that I carry with me throughout my life,” Nihill said. “Now, it's finding other ways to stay active.”

You're struggling to stay motivated

Feeling unmotivated and lacking a sense of joy may also be a sign to withdraw.

“Everyone has days where you don't want to get out of the door,” Atkinson said. “But if you find that it's feeling like a chore day after day for multiple weeks, then it might be time to push the reset button.”

A pros and cons list can also be a useful tool when deciding whether to race.

Murphy, the runner from Texas, said that her list helped provide clarity. For the pros, she listed that she would feel accomplished and be able to check off the goal of running her first marathon. The cons were the possibility of injury and getting a “DNF,” which stands for “Did Not

Finish.”

“To me, having that DNF was worse than not even starting it,” she said.

Know that there are alternatives

Runners can still make the most of their race entry.

Some races, like the Marine Corps Marathon in D.C., allow you to defer your race entry to the following year for a fee. Others, like the Chicago Marathon and New York City Marathon, let you cancel your registration with a guaranteed entry for next year, but participants will need to pay the entry fee again. Runners may also transfer their entry, but make sure your race allows it. You can also consider dropping down in distance like Murphy did, or sign up for another race.

“Every runner has their own path,” Atkinson said. “It's OK if you decide that right now, it's not the time for you to achieve your goal.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF KEVIN SHERMAN — THE WASHINGTON POST

Brooke Murphy, 44, had to withdraw from the Dallas Marathon last year.

EXERCISE

How to pair food with exercise to maximize results

Food pairing is often discussed in terms of which wines best complement particular dishes. But pairing food with exercise merits consideration, as it can create the balance needed for overall health.

Food plays an important role in workouts, giving individuals the energy necessary to perform at their peak. Timing meals appropriately and knowing what to eat before or after a workout can make a difference.

Creatine benefits weight lifting

Creatine is an organic acid that is an important ingredient for short-duration, high-intensity exercises, such as weight lifting. According to Kelly Pritchett, director of the nutrition graduate program and assistant professor of nutrition and exercise science at Central Washington University, foods rich in protein from meat, poultry and fish can help optimize stores of creatine. Creatine also may be found in foods and beverages targeted to athletes, like protein shakes and



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Food plays an important role in workouts, giving individuals the energy necessary to perform at their peak.

snacks.

Glucose, glycogen and running

Distance running or other exercises that require endurance, such as skating or biking, require ample en-

ergy. Although low-carbohydrate diets are popular for people looking to lose weight, they're not ideal for people who engage in endurance sports and need carbohydrates for energy, states Johns Hopkins Medicine. Endurance athletes

need more carbs than those who aren't training.

These activities use both glucose in the blood and glycogen, which is sugar stored in the liver and muscles.

Eating plenty of healthy carbs helps bolster energy

stores. Whole fruits and grains are good sources of carbohydrates.

Benefits of bananas

For those with limited time to grab a bite before a workout, bananas might be the perfect option. According to WebMD, bananas have easily digestible carbs that will not weigh you down. The potassium in bananas also may help prevent muscle cramps during and after workouts.

Pre-workout mixes include protein and carbohydrates

A snack or mini meal one to three hours before a workout is ideal so that digestive issues don't occur during a workout when the body directs more blood to muscles than digestion. Food pairings that include a high-quality carbohydrate, like whole grain bread or oatmeal, with a protein source, such as peanut butter or milk, can be key. Blood sugar will stay steady with whole grain carbs, and the protein will help you to feel full and avoid overeating after a workout.

Power up with potatoes

Potatoes are whole foods, meaning they contain a balance of all the essential amino acids, despite being low in whole protein. They're also rich in vitamin B6, which is critical to protein metabolism, says Mark Anthony, adjunct professor of science and nutrition at St. Edwards University, Austin. Potatoes also contain the right mix of sodium and potassium to maintain an electrolyte balance in the body.

Recover right

A mix of carbohydrates and lean proteins also is ideal for exercise recovery. Mix in good fats like avocado and olive oil. Carbs will help replenish depleted levels of glycogen and high-quality protein will help build and repair muscle. Don't forget to drink plenty of fluids to replace what was lost while working out. Food and exercise go hand in hand. It's important to eat well to keep the body in top form.

— Metro Creative Connection



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Peanut butter may pack a more nutritional punch than people realize.



RICHARD WHITING — GETTY IMAGES

A bunch of ripe yellow Bananas.

HEALTH

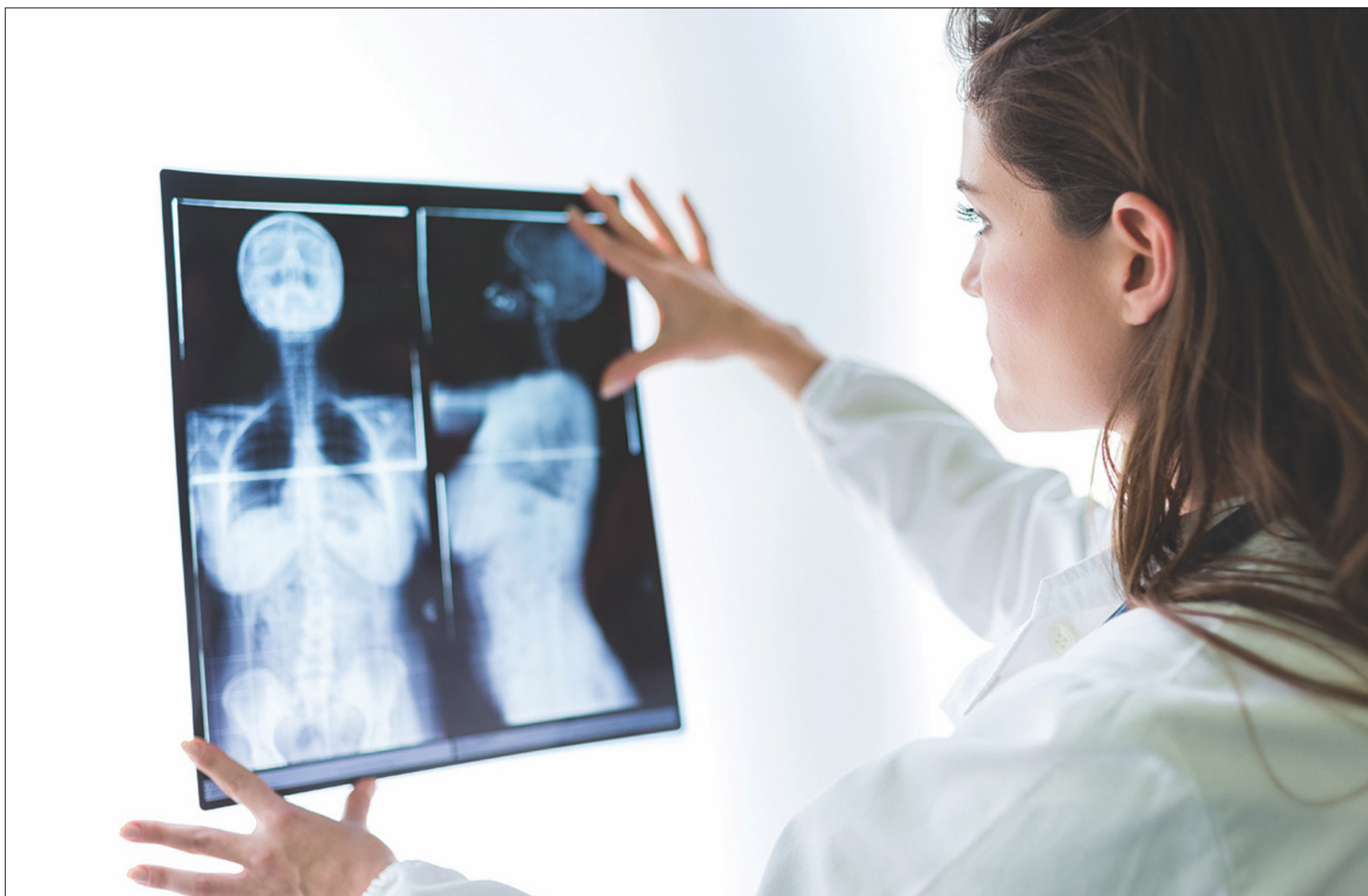


PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Expanding breast cancer treatments have done much to improve survival rates for patients.

Healthy habits that could help women reduce breast cancer risk

Cancer is a formidable disease that the World Health Organization reports is the leading cause of death worldwide. Figures vary, but organizations such as the WHO and the American Cancer Society estimate that around 9.5 million people die from cancer every year.

No type of cancer causes

more deaths in women across the globe than breast cancer. Though the five-year survival rate for breast cancer patients has increased by a significant margin in recent decades, a 2019 study published in *The Asian Pacific Journal of Cancer Prevention* reported a significant increase in breast cancer mortality rate in the

25-year period preceding the study. The researchers behind the study theorized the spike in mortality rate could be due to an increase in the incidence and prevalence of breast cancer.

Like all cancers, breast cancer cannot be prevented. However, various healthy habits could help women reduce their risk for the dis-

ease, including:

- **Avoid alcohol.** The ACS reports that alcohol consumption is a clear risk factor for breast cancer. Risk increases with the amount of alcohol a woman consumes. For example, a woman who consumes one alcoholic drink per day has a 7% to 10% higher risk of getting breast cancer than a

woman who abstains from alcohol. Drinking two to three drinks per day could increase risk by around 20%.

- **Establish and maintain a healthy weight.** Being overweight or obese increases breast cancer risk, particularly among postmenopausal women. According to the ACS, af-

ter menopause, women get most of their estrogen from fat tissue. Fat tissue increases estrogen levels in the body, which in turn increases a woman's risk for breast cancer. Elevated levels of insulin in the body, which is common among individuals who are overweight, also has been linked

RISK » PAGE 35



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

A physically active lifestyle can help women reduce their risk for breast cancer.

Risk

FROM PAGE 34

to higher breast cancer risk. Establishing and maintaining a healthy weight cannot prevent breast cancer, but it can help women reduce their risk for the disease.

▪ Maintain a physically active lifestyle. A sedentary lifestyle increases a person's risk for various conditions and diseases. Women who live such a lifestyle are at elevated risk for breast cancer. The ACS notes that sedentary behavior such as sitting, lying down, watching television, or engaging with screen-based forms of entertainment that do not require physical activity can increase breast cancer risk, especially for women who spend most of their workday sitting down. A more physically active lifestyle that includes routine exer-

cise can help women reduce their breast cancer risk.

▪ Adopt a nutritious diet. Eating right is another way for women to reduce their breast cancer risk. Vegetables, fiber-rich legumes such as beans and peas, fruits across the color spectrum, and whole grains are some components of a healthy, nutrient-rich diet that can help lower breast cancer risk. Women also can avoid certain foods, such as red and processed meats and refined grains, to lower their breast cancer risk.

Though there's no guaranteed way to prevent breast cancer, women can embrace various healthy habits to lower their risk for the disease.

A breast cancer diagnosis inevitably leads to questions about the disease. The bulk of those questions undoubtedly are asked by the millions of women who are

diagnosed with breast cancer. But millions more individuals, including friends and family members of recently diagnosed women, may have their own questions. Women can discuss the specifics of their diagnosis with their physicians.

In the meantime, the following are some frequently asked questions and answers that can help anyone better understand this potentially deadly disease.

What is breast cancer?

Cancer is a disease marked by the abnormal growth of cells that invade healthy cells in the body. Breast cancer is a form of the disease that begins in the cells of the breast. The National Breast Cancer Foundation notes that the cancer can then invade surrounding tissues or spread to other areas of the body.

Can exercise help to reduce my breast cancer risk?

The NBCF notes that exercise strengthens the immune system and women who commit to as little as three hours of physical activity per week can begin to reduce their risk for breast cancer. However, even routine exercise does not completely eliminate a woman's risk of developing breast cancer.

Is there a link between diet and breast cancer?

Susan G. Komen, a non-profit source of funding for the fight against breast cancer, reports that studies have shown eating fruits and vegetables may be linked to a lower risk for breast cancer, while consuming alcohol is linked to an increased risk for the dis-

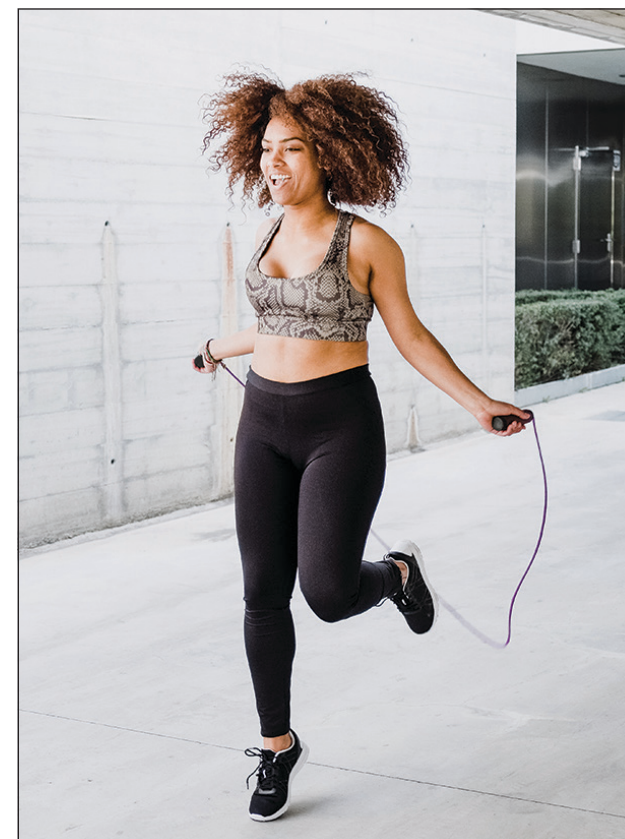


PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Get active. A sedentary lifestyle increases a person's risk for various conditions and diseases. Women who live such a lifestyle are at elevated risk for breast cancer.

ease. In addition, the NBCF reports that a high-fat diet increases breast cancer risk because fat triggers estrogen production that can fuel tumor growth.

Is there a link between oral contraceptives and breast cancer?

The NBCF reports women who have been using birth control pills for more than five years are at an increased risk of developing breast cancer. However, the organization notes that the risk is very small because modern birth control pills contain low amounts of hormones.

Can breastfeeding reduce breast cancer risk?

Breastfeeding and breast cancer are linked, though the NBCF notes that the role breastfeeding plays

in lowering cancer risk depends on how long a woman breastfeeds.

The World Cancer Research Fund International notes that evidence indicates that the greater number of months women continue breastfeeding, the greater the protection they have against breast cancer.

Is there a connection between stress and breast cancer?

The NBCF notes that researchers have found that traumatic events and losses can alter how the immune system functions, which can provide an opportunity for cancer cells to establish themselves within a person's body. The NBCF urges women to identify ways to keep their stress levels in check.

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HEALTH

Is sparkling water bad for your teeth?

By **Lindsey Bever**

The Washington Post

The question:

Is it true that sparkling water can be bad for your teeth because it can erode tooth enamel?

The science:

Beverages that have a low pH — meaning they are more acidic — have the potential to wear away tooth enamel over time, particularly when consumed often and in large quantities. Regular water has a pH of 7, which is neutral. Coffee measures about 5, lemon juice about 2 and stomach acid about 1.

For beverages we consume often, the pH level, ideally, should be above 4, which is considered a “critical threshold,” said John Ruby, adjunct professor of pediatric dentistry at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

Anything below a pH of 4 increases risk of dental erosion, he said.

In a 2016 study, Ruby and his colleagues tested the pH levels of nearly 400 beverages, and the findings were concerning.

The study showed that most beverages tested — sports drinks, sodas, juices, fruit punches and many flavored waters — had a pH below 4. Many tested lower than 3.

Drinking a low-pH beverage every now and then is unlikely to cause a dental issue.

But experts say the risk increases if you consume multiple servings of these beverages every day.

How did sparkling water hold up in the tests?

Only two plain sparkling drinks were tested, and both tested higher than the threshold of 4, meaning they were not as much of an erosion risk.



ANDREW TOTH — GETTY IMAGES

Check with your dentist to determine whether your beverage habits are affecting tooth enamel.

S.Pellegrino sparkling natural mineral water had a pH of 4.96. Perrier carbonated water tested at 5.25.

But adding flavor to water, particularly citrus flavors containing citric acid, can lower the pH. In the 2016 study, Dasani plain water had a pH level of 5.03, but Dasani Lemon water had a pH of 3.03.

Notably, separate research shows that at-home soda carbonators can create plain sparkling water that has a lower pH level than the store-bought kind. One study found that the pH level of water from a SodaStream carbonator ranged from 3.58 to 3.74. SodaStream did not respond to requests for comment.

What else you should know

Sparkling water, which can be carbonated naturally or artificially, contains dissolved carbon dioxide gas

that, through a chemical reaction, turns into carbonic acid, which gives it fizz and makes it more acidic than regular water.

In terms of both dental and overall health, plain sparkling water is a far better alternative than sports drinks, sodas or fruit punch. But how much you drink may affect your dental health.

Sipping from a bottle of sparkling water repeatedly throughout the day lowers the pH in the mouth and also may increase the risk of erosion, said Brittany Seymour, a spokeswoman for the American Dental Association and an associate professor at Harvard School of Dental Medicine.

Seymour said she would advise patients that routinely substituting sparkling water for plain water — or drinking more than two or three bottles per day — may be overdoing it.

Those who are at risk of



ANDREW TOTH — GETTY IMAGES

Sparkling water is a better choice for your teeth than most popular beverages. Although sparkling water is more acidic than regular water, consuming it in normal amounts of a few bottles a day is unlikely to erode your tooth enamel.

dental erosion “are not the occasional consumers” of sparkling water, said Margherita Fontana, a professor at the University of Michigan School of Dentistry.

Check with your dentist

to determine whether your beverage habits are affecting tooth enamel.

The bottom line

Sparkling water is a better choice for your teeth

than most popular beverages. Although sparkling water is more acidic than regular water, consuming it in normal amounts of a few bottles a day is unlikely to erode your tooth enamel.

HEALTH

How to avoid repetitive strain injuries

Repetitive strain injuries can upset workflow and compromise exercise routines. Though such injuries are often characterized as nuisances, for many people they're much more than a minor inconvenience.

Data from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration indicates that repetitive strain injuries (RSI) affect roughly 1.8 million workers in the United States each year. Such injuries are common across the globe, as researchers in Sweden estimate that roughly one in 50 workers is suffering from the symptoms of RSI. These injuries also are not limited to adults, with one study from researchers at Australia's University of Technology finding that 60% of children suffered discomfort when using a laptop.

The Cleveland Clinic notes that RSI most commonly affect certain parts of the body, including:

- fingers and thumbs
- wrists
- elbows
- arms
- shoulders
- knees

These areas of the body are vulnerable when people routinely engage in activities in which they repeat the same motions. For example, office workers who spend eight hours a day typing away at their computers may develop RSI in their fingers, thumbs, wrists and/or elbows. Such workers need their jobs, so what are they and others who suffer work-related RSI to do? Prevention of RSI is not always so easy, but individuals can try various strategies to reduce their risk of developing RSI.

Individuals vulnerable to repetitive strain injuries can employ various tech-

Sitting at a desk all day without taking routine breaks means those parts of your body vulnerable to RSI, such as the wrists, elbows and shoulders, are not moving all day.

niques to reduce the likelihood that these painful and potentially debilitating conditions develop.

Some include:

- Make adjustments to your workstation. Individuals whose RSI are a by-product of sitting at a desk and working on a computer all day long can adjust their workstations to see if this helps reduce strains. For example, a keyboard wrist rest is an inexpensive accessory that can be placed between users and their keyboards to keep their wrists in a neutral position and alleviate wrist pain that results from typing all day. Mouse rest pads serve a similar function and can be equally effective. A keyboard and mouse pad should be low enough to allow users to relax their shoulders.

- Consider replacing your desk and/or chair. Desks and chairs also could increase risk for RSI if they are not compatible. Office workers should be able to pull their chairs beneath their desks when they're sitting and working. If the desk is too small or low to the ground to allow that, or if the chair is not adjustable so it can be pulled up to the edge of the desk while working, workers' posture could



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Individuals vulnerable to repetitive strain injuries can employ various techniques to reduce the likelihood that these painful and potentially debilitating conditions develop.

suffer, as they will be forced to lean into their desk and narrow their shoulders when typing. The Cleveland Clinic notes improving posture helps people avoid putting extra stress on their bodies that can contribute to RSI.

- Get up and walk around. Prolonged periods of sit-

ting can increase the risk of RSI. Sitting at a desk all day without taking routine breaks means those parts of your body vulnerable to RSI, such as the wrists, elbows and shoulders, are not moving all day. The strain that puts on these parts of the body increases RSI risk, which underscores the im-

portance of taking routine breaks.

- Stretch before sitting down. Stretching may be something associated with a workout routine, but the principles of stretching also apply to sitting at a desk. Exercise enthusiasts stretch to loosen and protect their muscles and tendons from

injury, and the same idea can safeguard office workers as well. Some simple stretches throughout the day can keep muscles and tendons in the hands, elbows and shoulders loose and reduce the risk of RSI.

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HEALTH

What to do after being diagnosed with high blood pressure

Hypertension, a condition marked by abnormally high blood pressure, is more common than many people may recognize.

A 2021 report from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services indicated that nearly half of adults in the United States, or roughly 116 million people, have hypertension. And hypertension isn't exclusive to Americans, as the World Health Organization notes that the number of people living with the condition has doubled to 1.28 billion since 1990.

Despite its prevalence, hypertension is not normal, nor is it something to take lightly. In fact, the American Heart Association notes that, if left undetected or uncontrolled, hypertension can lead to an assortment of serious, and potentially deadly, conditions, including heart attack, stroke, heart failure and kidney disease.

Since the threat posed by high blood pressure is so significant, individuals must know what to do upon being diagnosed with hypertension.

The AHA notes that individuals diagnosed with hypertension can try various strategies to get their number down to a normal, healthy range.

- **Eat a healthy, low-salt diet.** A diet that's rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy products, skinless poultry and fish, nuts and legumes, and non-tropical vegetable oils ensures people are getting ample nutrition from healthy sources. The DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) eating plan is designed specifically to help people manage their blood pressure and emphasizes limiting salt, red meat and foods with added sugars, including sweets and



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

People who lift weights are substantially less likely to develop heart disease, high blood pressure and many other chronic illnesses than those who skip resistance exercise.

sugary beverages. It's important that all people, and especially those with high blood pressure, limit their salt intake, as sodium is known to increase blood pressure.

- **Avoid excessive alcohol consumption.** The AHA notes that excessive alcohol consumption can raise blood pressure. In addition, despite what popular misconceptions may suggest, there is no evidence to suggest that red wine consumption is good for heart health. Like other alcoholic beverages, red wine should be consumed in moderation, if at all. The AHA urges individuals to limit their alcohol intake to no more than two drinks per day for men and no one more than one drink per day for women.

- **Exercise regularly.** Routine exercise benefits the heart in myriad ways, including helping people control high blood pressure. Individuals recently diagnosed with high blood pressure who are unaccustomed to physical activity should work with their physicians and a personal trainer to design an exercise regimen that's within their abilities.

As their bodies get used to increased physical activity, people can then work with the same individuals to tweak their routines so they can keep making progress toward their fitness goals. Routine exercise also helps to reduce stress, which the AHA notes is another step people with hypertension should take to lower their blood pressure.

- **Shed extra weight.** Each of the aforementioned strategies can help people shed extra weight, which is another step the AHA recommends for people with high blood pressure. The AHA notes that losing as few as 10 pounds can help to manage high blood pressure. Maintaining a healthy weight also reduces strain on the heart, thus lowering the risk for high blood pressure and the conditions that can arise from it. More than 1.2 billion people across the globe are currently living with high blood pressure. Taking steps to reduce hypertension is a great way to promote long-term health and overcome this often silent killer.

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A 2021 report from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services indicated that nearly half of adults in the United States, or roughly 116 million people, have hypertension.

HEALTH

Why I eat smarter now that I'm older

By Bob Brody Special
To The Washington Post

Growing up in the 1950s and 1960s, I ate what a lot of other kids ate — ravioli from a can, frozen dinners, stuff we'd rightly call junk today. My strict diet meant eating whatever I wanted.

Young adulthood was a little better, but in the 1980s I became a father twice over, and it dawned on me that I should try to eat better. I wasn't perfect, though. I still routinely feasted until my stomach ballooned taut enough to pop.

As I approached 50, my body started whispering warnings to me: I suffered backaches and a hernia, and I grew a paunch that deeply offended my vanity. Thanks to such insults to the system, I took the hint and changed my diet.

Today, at 71, I'm glad I made the shift.

"The elephant in the room is that older people require much fewer calories," says Susan B. Roberts, senior associate dean of foundational research at the Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth College. "We exercise less, our metabolism slows, and taste acuity declines. Every five or 10 years, we should ask ourselves, 'How can I keep enjoying healthy food even when I'm eating smaller amounts?'"

"As you get older, something has to give," she adds. "Now is the time to change your habits and lower your risks of chronic disease."

A 2021 meta-analysis titled "Healthy Aging — Nutrition Matters: Start Early and Screen Often," of which Roberts was the lead author, concluded, "A cohesive body of research finds that a healthy diet and weight

management are able to not only reliably delay the onset of most typical diseases and functional losses in aging, but also arrest progression and severity, and even support remission for some conditions."

The study recommended routine screenings for "age-related conditions" that can be treated with "a nutrition prescription." Healthy diets and weight, it noted, are associated with the prevention of such diseases of aging as dementia, osteoporosis, urinary incontinence, sleep apnea and constipation.

"During the aging process, diet can play a surprisingly major role in one's vitality and longevity — perhaps even more so than genetics," Harvard Pilgrim Health Care reported after exploring the eating habits in communities where people live the longest. "Common denominators between food philosophy and consumption point to the intriguing idea that food and diet could be the prescription for a longer life."

Those common denominators include eating plant-based meals, nuts, and whole, unprocessed foods. In general, researchers recommend eating more fruits, vegetables and whole grains, plus lean sources of protein such as seafood, dairy and fortified soy alternatives (beans, peas and lentils), while cutting back on saturated fats, sugar and salt.

"There is no one-size-fits-all eating pattern for how people should eat differently as they age," says Rachel Stahl, a registered dietitian at Weill Cornell Medicine. "Some may find, for example, that they need to eat smaller meals more frequently."



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Grilled vegetables add significant flavor and provide all the health benefits of veggies cooked in more traditional ways.

A study led by researchers at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health tracked changes in diet and lifestyle of some 74,000 people for 12 years. They followed mostly people over 60 and published their findings in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

The bottom line: Small, gradual improvements in food choices led to a more nutritious diet that, in turn, can lower cholesterol levels, blood pressure, blood sugar and inflammation. It's also never too late to start eating smart, the study suggests.

Yet the Cleveland Clinic reports that, as one ages, particularly after 65, healthy eating "can become more challenging," with weight gain a potential result. A slower metabolism, fluctuating hormones, lowered physical activity and digestive issues are among

the reasons.

"It can be difficult to change our eating habits on our own," says Kathryn N. Porter Starr, a registered nutritionist and associate professor of medicine at the Duke University School of Medicine. "Certain key nutrients, such as fiber, are important to prioritize as we age."

She recommends consulting a registered dietitian nutritionist "who can translate the science of nutrition into practical solutions for you."

And "choose small goals that can be achieved and sustained," she adds.

Since turning 50, I've taken baby steps toward eating smarter, and I now choose foods more selectively: more fresh vegetables (spinach, carrots, cabbage), more fruit (apples, blueberries, bananas), more fish (salmon, tuna, sardines) and only bread that's

whole wheat. I eat red meat only once or twice a month, skip most sweets, and often snack on yogurt and nuts (walnuts, pecans, almonds). My wife, who stays informed about dietary practices, is a big help.

I've also trained myself to stop eating well before facing the risk of spontaneous combustion and losing all my self-respect. I eat more slowly. I divide dinner into two courses, taking an intermission of 15 to 30 minutes to let my stomach signal satiety (and prolong the pleasure). I learned a hard-earned lesson from my father.

He ate fast, finishing almost before anyone else even started, only to grow seriously overweight in his 50s and die of a massive heart attack at 70.

I've improved otherwise, too. I now eat progressively less through the day — as the axiom goes, like a

prince at breakfast, a peasant at lunch and a pauper at dinner. I calibrate my consumption to sync up with my energy needs at a given hour.

I eat meals early in the day and at regular times (usually about 8 a.m., noon and 7 p.m.) and limit myself to a modest intake of wine and beer — no more hard liquor for me.

My dietary philosophy is basic. Treat food as fuel for function — in effect, as medicine — but also as fun and without being finicky about it.

These days, I feel good. I weigh only about 10 pounds more than in high school. Despite borderline high cholesterol and high blood pressure, for which I take daily medication, I remain vigorous.

So, embrace your appetite for change. Hey, if I can do it, then believe me, so can you.

HEALTH

12 great tips to kickstart your new year

By Tara Parker-Pope
The Washington Post

Forget 10,000 steps

There is nothing magical about 10,000 steps a day. So feel free to let go of that goal, writes columnist Gretchen Reynolds. New research shows that for men and women younger than 60, the greatest benefit came with step counts of between about 8,000 and 10,000 per day. For people older than 60, the threshold was a little lower. For them, the sweet spot for reduced mortality risk came at between 6,000 and 8,000 steps a day.

Stop eating predigested food

Many popular packaged foods — breads, cereals, snack chips and frozen meals — have been refined, pounded, heated, melted, shaped, extruded and packed with additives, explains columnist Anahad O'Connor. This extreme processing creates foods that are so easily absorbed by the body that they're essentially predigested. Many foods also are engineered to overcome our satiety mechanisms, which drives us to overeat and gain weight, experts say. While it may be tough to give up all processed foods, try to eat more whole and high-fiber foods — meats, fish, fruits and vegetables. And if you do choose food that comes in a package, check the label and try to buy those with the fewest ingredients.

Take time for 'joy snacks'

Here's an antidote to an ever-stressful, busy and uncertain world. Try finding

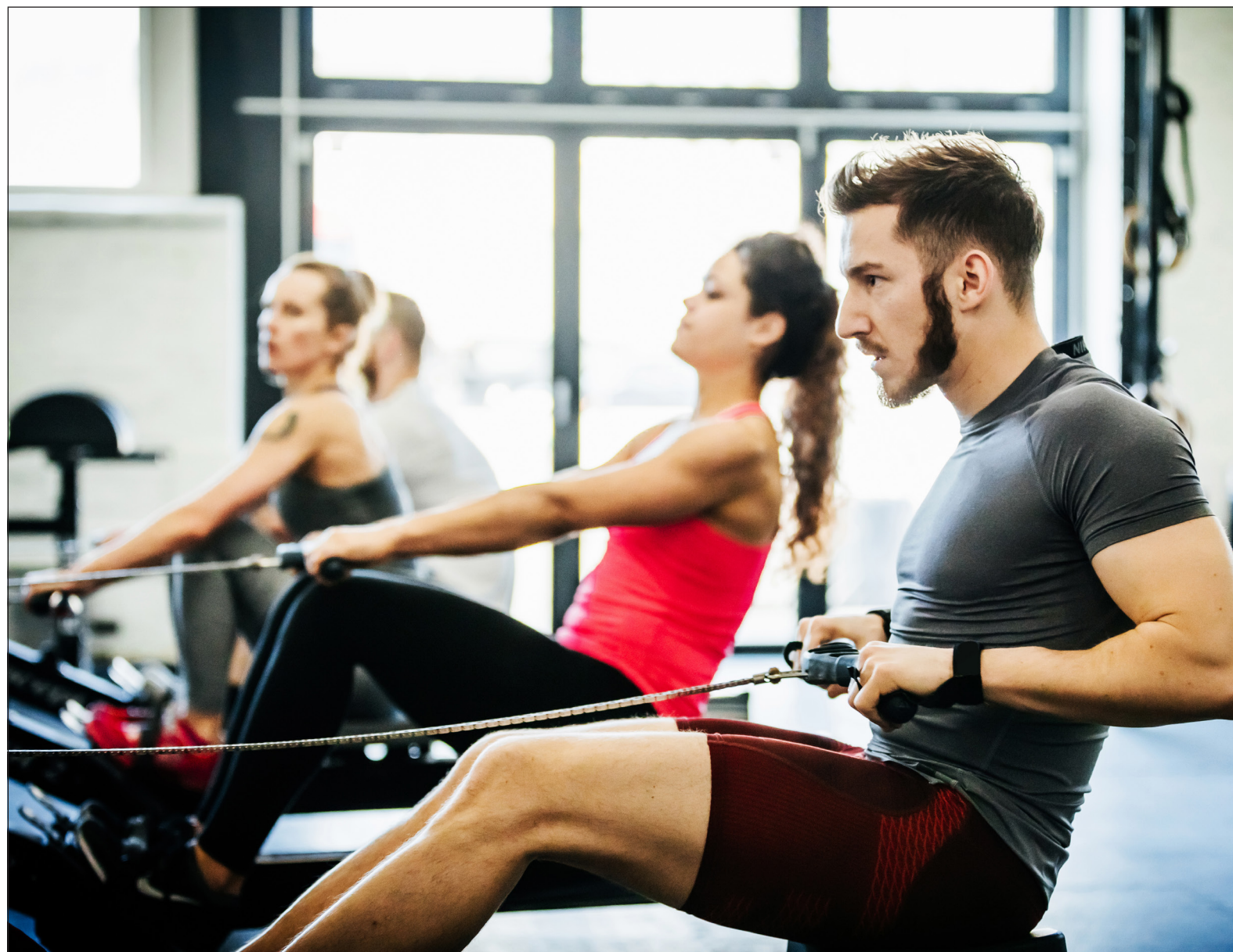


PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Warm-ups are vital before a workout.

and savoring little bites of joy in your day. Columnist Richard Sima calls them "joy snacks." Pet a cat. Savor a cup of coffee. Take an awe walk on a beautiful day. Listen to laughter and conversations on the bus. By mindfully tuning into the pleasant, nice and sometimes routine experiences of ev-

ery day, we can transform an otherwise mundane moment into something more meaningful and even joyful.

Pay attention to your poop

One thing we've learned from columnist Trisha Pasricha is that no topic is off-

limits with your doctor. A general rule of thumb is that anywhere from three to three per week is within the range of normal. Most of the time, poop of a different color is nothing to worry about and probably a result of what you ate and how your body processed

it. If stool is red, maroon or tarry black, discuss it with your doctor. It could be the result of something you ate (beets, anyone?) or a sign of a health condition.

Take pictures for your doctor

Another great tip from

Pasricha is to use your camera phone to snap pictures of things that seem weird, including your poop. "We love seeing pictures of stool!" says Pasricha. If you get a tick bite, take a picture of the tick. Knowing exactly what type of tick can help doctors if you develop health problems in



PHOTO COURTESY OF ORIGINAL X PRODUCTIONS

Take time to enjoy experiences with your friends.

the weeks following the bite.

Try a more relaxed approach to goal-setting

Amanda Morris, who writes about disability, noticed something important about the people she writes about: Their disability gave them new insights into setting more realistic, healthier and gentler goals. She came up with several great tips for goal setting. Focus on how you want to feel, rather than things you want to do. Don't set goals that drain you. Find a goal that empowers or replenishes you. Choose "numberless" goals. For instance, instead of trying to exercise a certain amount of time, try to "move in a way that feels good." And recognize your limits. It's OK to set a goal to do less! (And you can always quit if a goal is too

daunting.)

Take care of your ears

It really has been the year of the ear, with hearing aids going over the counter and new research confirming how important hearing is for brain health. In many cases, people don't even know they have hearing loss, so the first step is to get your hearing checked, writes Lindsey Bever. Age-related hearing loss nearly doubles the risk for dementia. But new research also shows the use of hearing aids can reduce the risk of cognitive decline by nearly 50% among adults who have other risk factors, such as elevated blood pressure, higher rates of diabetes or those who live alone.

Nurture your friendships

For better health, many people focus on the "big

three" — food, fitness and sleep. But research suggests you should make friendship a health priority too, writes Teddy Amenabar. Platonic love trumps romantic love in many ways. People with strong friendships tend to have better mental health and studies suggest they're in better physical health, as well. Researchers have found large social networks lower our risk of premature death more than exercise or dieting alone. A six-year study of 736 middle-aged Swedish men found having a life partner didn't affect the risk of heart attack or fatal coronary heart disease — but having friends did.

Be your own therapist

Therapist Lesley Alderman offers help to cope with the anxiety of a topsy-turvy world and events outside our control: It starts with just taking care of yourself, taking a break from the

news and getting involved in your community. But you can also be your own therapist. Ask yourself, what do I specifically feel hopeless about and why? "Being able to put into words what's getting you down can help you feel less flooded by emotions and better able to process the information rationally," she writes.

Build resilience at any age

Resilience is the ability to bounce back from adversity — a career setback, a relationship breakup or any of the big and small disappointments of daily life, writes Kelyn Soong. Much of the research on resilience focuses on building the skill in childhood, but resilience can be strengthened at any age. While resilience is essentially an emotional muscle, a growing body of research shows



DREAMSTIME — TNS

Francisco Lopez-Jimenez, a Mayo Clinic cardiologist, says there is no magic number of steps per day that people should strive for because everyone is different. What matters most, he says, is that people are moving.

that stressing our physical muscles through exercise is one way to increase our capacity to cope with daily stress. So if you're feeling stressed, get moving. It will benefit your body and help you cope with life's big and small setbacks.

Try a simple, speedy 11-minute workout

You can get an effective aerobic and strength workout at home, or wherever you happen to be, in less time than you might take for a coffee break. There's one caveat: You must perform the exercises — or simplified variations of them — with sufficient enthusiasm and vigor.

Feel good about your brain

While it may feel like your brain peaked in childhood, even aging brains can

learn new tricks. The good news, writes Caitlin Gilbert, is that our brains — unlike other parts of the body — are built to change over our lifetimes. New research dispels the belief that plasticity, the brain's capacity to respond to change, diminishes in the adult and aging brain. Experiences such as engagement in a community, lifestyle choices or exposure to stress can drastically affect brain development and aging. A 50-year-old who is highly social and regularly exercising, traveling or volunteering might have a "younger" brain than a 50-year-old who is largely isolated from others and rarely engages in enriching activities. And although late in life the brain does shrink in size and can begin to degenerate, older individuals also have the potential for greater wisdom built off a lifetime of experiences.

HEALTH

Not just your grandmother's disease: A new look at bone health

By Katherine Ellison

Special To The Washington Post

Molly Giles was standing in her kitchen one spring night in 2019, musing about whether to do the dishes or leave them until the morning, when a bone in her left leg snapped and she crashed to the ground, breaking her hip.

"I passed out, and I'm pretty sure I would have died if my partner hadn't been there and called 911," the novelist recalls.

Giles, now 81, had "bones like meringue," her doctor rather glibly later told her. A scan several years earlier had revealed osteopenia, a precursor to the "silent" disease of bone density loss known as osteoporosis. But neither Giles nor her doctors followed up, and her bones grew increasingly weak until her femur "melted," as she later described it.

Giles isn't alone in failing to take bone health seriously until a crisis.

Weak bones can lead to sudden fractures that can disable or even kill you. Some 20% to 30% of people who suffer a hip fracture die within a year, usually due to a downward spiral involving decreased mobility and possible infections. Nonetheless, experts say osteoporosis remains underdiagnosed, undertreated and widely misunderstood.

"It's just not on the radar screens for many patients and physicians," says Andrea Singer, director of bone densitometry at MedStar Georgetown University Hospital in Washington, D.C., and a spokeswoman

for the Bone Health & Osteoporosis Foundation. The neglect can endure even after a serious bone break, as a 2021 report from Milliman, a data firm, revealed.

Within six months of an osteoporosis-related fracture, the risk of a second break is highest, yet according to the Milliman report, only 8% of Medicare beneficiaries received a diagnostic bone density scan after a fracture. That share dropped to 5% for Black Medicare beneficiaries, and bone experts assume even worse rates for younger patients and those who haven't had a fracture.

"When you come in to see your doctor you may have 15 minutes, during which they'll look at blood pressure, body weight and cholesterol, and then you may have a problem you want to discuss," says endocrinologist and researcher Dolores Shoback at UCSF Health in San Francisco. "So osteoporosis is way down on the list and often isn't discussed — even with older women."

This makes it incumbent on women, in particular, to raise the question if their doctors don't, she adds. "We have a consensus that all women over age 65 should be screened, but we're not getting most of them, not by far."

Health and Human Services recommends that women 65 and older schedule a bone density test, known as a DXA, or DEXA, for dual-energy X-ray absorptiometry scan — a painless procedure that's safer than a standard X-ray. Women 64 and younger who have gone through meno-

pause should ask their doctors if they need one, particularly if they have clinical risk factors, including smoking, drinking more than three drinks a day, and taking prednisone or other glucocorticoid medications.

Many factors contribute to the low rates of testing, not least of which is garden-variety denial of aging. "For many patients, there's a bit of 'That's not me,'" Singer says. "Osteoporosis is your grandmother's disease, and I'm not that frail old lady."

Osteoporosis is more common in older people, affecting an estimated 12.3 million Americans over 50 in 2020. Yet as many as 47 million other Americans of all ages are on the precipice of osteoporosis, with diagnosable osteopenia (low bone mass). Women outnumber men 4 to 1 for reasons that are largely hormonal — women lose up to 20% of bone density up to seven years after menopause, when bone-protecting estrogen levels decline. Women also suffer more than 70% of the related fractures.

But men, who tend to wait even longer to get scanned and treated, have a higher death rate after a hip fracture.

Preventing osteoporosis should begin many years before such problems might occur, experts say.

"We should start paying attention to bone health with kids and teens, when they have their peak bone mass," Singer says. That includes consuming sufficient calcium — 1,200 milligrams in two or three doses spread out through the day

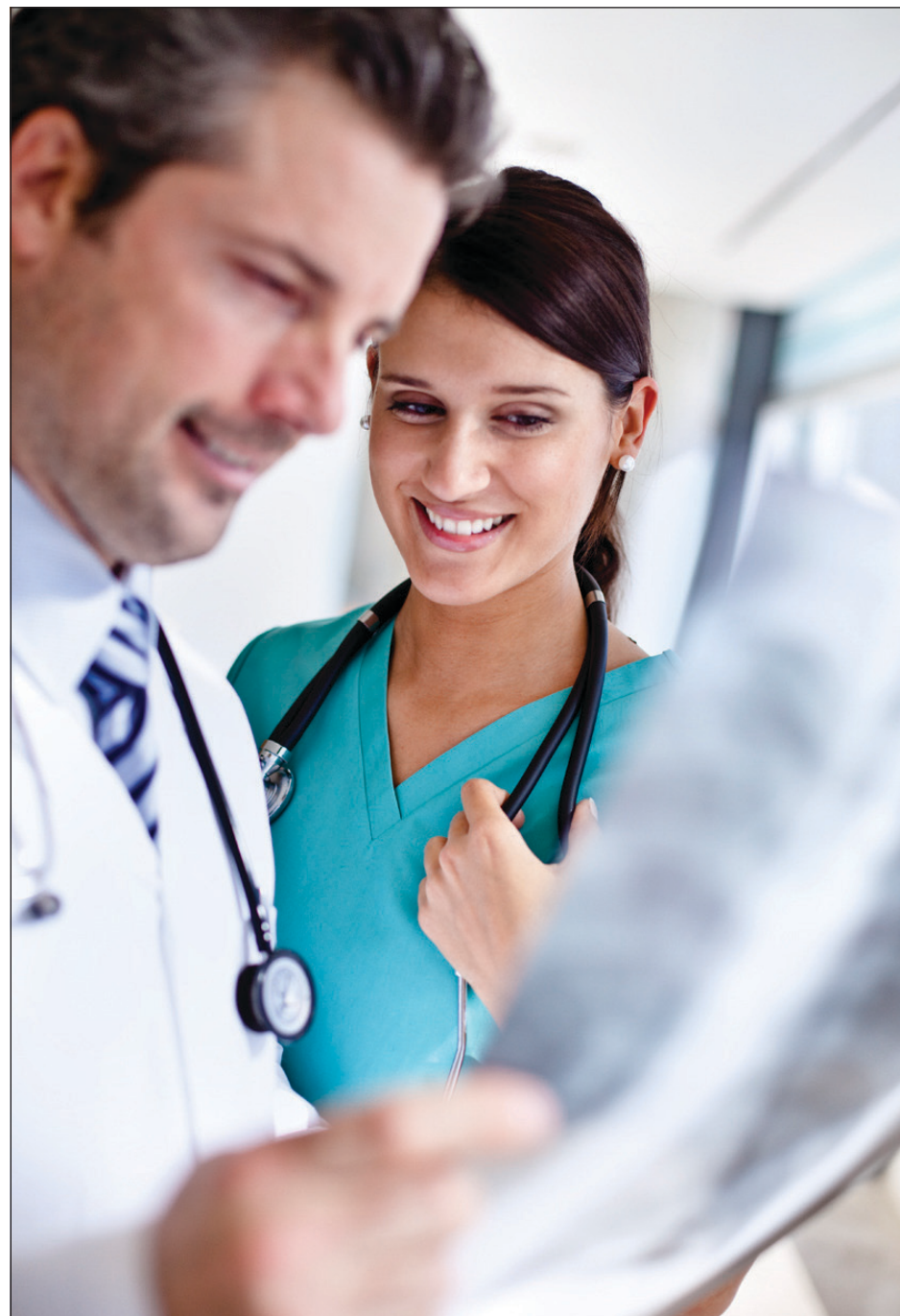


PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

It's incumbent on everyone, but women in particular, to raise the question of bone health if their doctor doesn't.

for women over 50 — and up to 1,000 IU of vitamin D in your diet or supplements.

“In the older population in particular, especially the frail who get the hip fractures, you want to be sure they are getting sufficient protein intake, as well,” Shoback says.

Fortunately, osteoporosis is treatable even in old age, with lifestyle changes and a wide array of medications.

Weight-bearing exercises, forcing your body to work against gravity, can help strengthen bones. This might include walking, climbing stairs or playing pickleball (or tennis). Higher-impact exercise, such as a Zumba class, may be the most effective. Muscle-strengthening activities, such as lifting weights, and balance exercises, including tai chi and yoga, can reduce the risk of fractures from falls.

Some doctors prescribe hormone therapy to replace waning estrogen, strengthen bones and reduce fractures in younger postmenopausal women. The downside is increased risks of strokes and heart attacks for women 60 or older or 10 years after menopause.

More commonly, for more than two decades, doctors have prescribed a class of drugs called bisphosphonates, with brand names that include Fosamax, Boniva and Reclast. Bisphosphonates and denosumab (Prolia), a monoclonal antibody, are known as “antiresorptives” because they target bone cells that break down and reabsorb bone tissue. Some can be taken orally every day, every week or every month; others are given intravenously, every three months.

Bisphosphonates can cause stomach upset, heartburn, and in very rare cases jawbone damage and thigh fractures. Doctors usually recommend that patients who have taken these drugs for three to five years discontinue them for up to two

years, and then resume if there are no signs of problems. These medications can start reducing the risk of fractures in as soon as six months.

Another class of medications builds bones instead of slowing their destruction. These include abaloparatide (Tymlos) and teriparatide (Forteo), both of which resemble the parathyroid hormone involved in regulating the metabolism of calcium. Both require daily injections (usually self-administered) for up to two years.

One new osteoporosis medication is romosozumab-aqqg (Evenity), a monoclonal antibody approved by the Food and Drug Administration in 2019. The medication is designed to help both build bone and reduce bone loss. It requires two injections every four weeks for 12 sessions (over 48 weeks), usually at a doctor’s office. Amgen, the company that makes Evenity, warns it can have serious side effects, including increased risk of heart attack, stroke or death from a cardiovascular (heart or blood vessel) problem.

The benefits of all the bone-builders dissipate within about two years.

In a recent change, some osteoporosis specialists now recommend people with low bone density or a recent fracture begin treatment with one of the bone-building drugs and follow up with an antiresorptive medication to try to maintain their benefits.

But bone-building drugs are expensive, and some insurance plans won’t reimburse unless a patient has already tried other medications. At that point, however, the bisphosphonates may at least temporarily blunt the effect of the bone-builders.

Scientists around the world are working on new medications and treatment approaches for osteoporosis. Some are studying stem-



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Stress fractures are most common in the bones of the lower leg, specifically the tibia, or shin bone, and the metatarsals, the long skinny bones in your foot.

cell therapies that may hasten repair of fractures. Others are looking into drugs that may clear out senescent (age-challenged) cells to help new bones form.

Slowing U.S. drug development progress, however, is an FDA requirement that clinical trials measure their effectiveness by how well they can reduce fractures.

The Foundation for the National Institutes of Health and collaborating scientists have pressed the FDA to substitute measures of bone density changes and biochemical markers, which could reduce the high cost and time involved in current trials.

After Giles’s doctor compared her bones to meringue, he prescribed Fosamax, which she is still taking. She has also adjusted to using a cane and carefully scanning the ground as she walks. Her mordant wit informs both her writing — her book titles in-

clude “Wife With Knife” and “The Home for Unwed Husbands” — and her views on bone fragility and aging.

“One good thing about the fear of falling is you end up seeing a lot of great stuff on the ground, like money and cougar paw prints,” she says. “I even found a silver bracelet half-buried in dirt.”

In the know

- One in 5 women ages 50 to 60 have osteoporosis, a disease that weakens bones to the point where they break easily, according to the National Institute on Aging. The percentage climbs with age until, from age 75 to 84, roughly 32.5% of women and 6.4% of men are affected.

- Age is a significant risk factor for weak bones: Not only are bones more brittle after a woman goes through menopause, but she is also more likely to fall because of weaker muscles and medications that can cause



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Ask pointed questions to your doctor when you feel something is off with your body.

drowsiness.

- Other risk factors for women and men include being a smoker or heavy drinker, having a family history of osteoporosis; having a disease, such as HIV, that can contribute to a relatively rapid loss of bone mass; having had premature menopause; being underweight, small-framed or

taking steroid medications; and having previously fallen and broken a bone.

- Race and ethnicity also matter: For reasons that remain unclear, Mexican Americans account for 13.4% of people with osteoporosis and osteopenia, while non-Hispanic Whites account for 10.2% and Black Americans for 4.9%.

HEALTH

Flu shots may protect against the risk of Alzheimer's, related dementias

By Marlene Cimons

Special to *The Washington Post*

There are many good reasons to get a flu shot, but here's one that might surprise you: It could protect your brain.

Recent research suggests that regular vaccinations against influenza and other infectious diseases such as shingles, pneumococcal pneumonia, and tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis (whooping cough) may reduce the risk of developing Alzheimer's disease and related dementias.

"Vaccines are the great public health success story of our generation," said Paul E. Schulz, professor of neurology and director of the Neurocognitive Disorders Center at the McGovern Medical School at UTHealth Houston, who led several of the studies. "They keep you safe from any number of infections, many of which can be life-threatening. And now it appears there is another tremendous benefit, this one against a disease that is among the most feared."

What the research says

Many studies have found that people receiving vaccinations for flu and several other infectious diseases appear less likely than the unvaccinated to develop dementia, although scientists aren't sure why.

Some believe that infectious agents play a role in the development of Alzheimer's disease and that vaccinations help by preventing or reducing the likelihood of getting these infections.

Alternatively, Schulz speculates that vaccines may curb an immune system reaction to amyloid plaque, a naturally occurring protein found in abnormally high levels in Alzheimer's. The immune system sees plaque as a foreign invader and attacks it, causing chronic brain inflammation and the death of nearby neurons, which contribute to dementia, he said.

In quelling the immune response to amyloid, vaccines may save brain cells that the body's immune system might otherwise kill, he said. It's also possible



PHOTO CREDIT: CITY OF DETROIT

Getting a flu shot this year will help boost your immunity to the various strains of influenza.

that vaccines strengthen the immune system's ability to get rid of plaque. "Fewer plaques lead to less inflammation and less brain cell loss," Schulz said, adding: "We aren't sure yet exactly what the mechanism is, but something is going on with the brain and the immune system that seems to make a big difference."

Peter Hotez, dean of the National School of Tropical Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine and co-director of the Texas Children's Hospital Center for Vaccine Development, said the studies "suggest long-term benefits from immunizations with vaccines that may go beyond the intended direct benefits."

It is unclear why vaccinations may slow or prevent dementia, Hotez said. "In some cases, they may prevent viruses from causing direct neurological involvement, especially for neurotropic viruses, or indirectly through brain inflammation that can result from pathogens," he said. "In other cases, they may stimulate innate immune mechanisms that may be protective against the sequence of events leading to dementia."

Schulz led a recent study that

found a statistically significant difference in the incidence of Alzheimer's after following two groups — one vaccinated against flu and the other unvaccinated — for up to eight years.

In the flu study, the researchers took participants from a national patient database, two groups of 935,887 people each, one group vaccinated, the other not.

To avoid the potential influence of various factors that could affect the results, the scientists ensured each group shared many of the same characteristics, such as age, gender, how frequently they went to the doctor, and certain medical conditions, such as high blood pressure and elevated cholesterol.

Schulz and his colleagues found that an annual flu vaccination for three consecutive years reduced the dementia risk 20% over the next four to eight years, while six shots doubled it to a 40% reduction.

There were 47,889 cases of dementia in the vaccinated group, compared with 79,630 in the unvaccinated participants — a difference of more than 30,000 cases, Schulz said.

Similar results from other vaccines

In another study, his team found similar results with vaccines for other infectious diseases, including shingles, pneumococcal pneumonia and the combination of tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis (whooping cough), known as Tdap, or with tetanus and diphtheria without the pertussis component.

With the shingles vaccines, for example, (Zostavax, the early shingles vaccine, and Shingrix, the most recent one), the researchers compared 198,847 patients, who were vaccinated to an equal number who were not, Schulz said.

Among the vaccinated, 16,106 patients developed Alzheimer's during the eight-year follow-up, compared with 21,417 of the unvaccinated — or 5,311 fewer patients in the vaccinated group got dementia.

With Tdap and Td vaccines, the researchers compared two groups of 116,400 patients each, one vaccinated, one not. In the vaccinated, 8,370 individuals developed dementia over the eight years, compared with 11,857 in the unvaccinated — 3,487 fewer patients among the vaccinated.

With the pneumococcal vaccine, they compared two groups of 260,037 people each, one group vaccinated, the other unvaccinated, and recorded 20,583 dementia cases among the vaccinated after eight years, compared with 28,558 unvaccinated people — 7,975 fewer patients in the vaccinated group, Schulz said.

In two studies conducted in the United Kingdom — still unpublished and under peer review — researchers at Stanford University found similar results.

The first, among an older population in Wales, suggests that vaccination with Zostavax prevented an estimated 1 in 5 new dementia cases during a seven-year period, said Pascal Geldsetzer, assistant professor of medicine in the division of primary care and population health at Stanford University, who led

the research.

The second analyzed mortality data for England and Wales and found a 5% difference in the probability of dying from dementia — or 1 in 20 deaths averted — during a nine-year follow-up.

For both studies, the scientists established two groups for comparison purposes based on the country's birth date eligibility requirements. Those who turned 80 just before the vaccine program started were not eligible for the vaccine, and remained ineligible, while those who turned 80 just after the program began received the vaccine free over the course of the following year.

"It is likely that the only difference between the two comparison groups was a tiny difference in age, but a large difference in the probability of getting the shingles vaccine," Geldsetzer said. "That makes our study fundamentally different in its approach to studies that simply compare people who get vaccinated with those who don't. We think that our findings from this unique natural randomization strongly suggest a causal relationship."

Need for more research

Experts said more studies were needed to determine the effects of the vaccine on the brain.

There may be undetectable factors that distinguish the vaccinated from the unvaccinated, despite researchers' efforts to control for them, such as prior head injuries, genetics or environmental exposures, said William Schaffner, professor of preventive medicine and infectious diseases at Vanderbilt University.

Regardless, experts agree that people should get their shots. "All this requires further studies, but vaccination, along with good diet, exercise, intellectual and emotional stimulation are key factors for healthy aging," Hotez said.

No one should suffer from preventable diseases, Schaffner said: "Vaccinations are a critical means of staying well and living a healthy life."

HEALTH

Shedding fat without losing muscle is next weight-loss target

By Madison Muller and
Cynthia Koons

Bloomberg

Eli Lilly & Co. will study its blockbuster diabetes drug Mounjaro in combination with an experimental muscle-loss treatment as it searches for ways to help patients maintain muscle while losing weight.

The sheer amount of weight patients are shedding from Mounjaro and similar GLP-1 medications has raised concern that it isn't just fat melting away, but potentially vital muscle and bone that play key roles in regulating metabolism and preventing injury, particularly in older adults.

Mounjaro is still under regulatory consideration for treating obesity, and many doctors already prescribe it for that purpose. The drug is part of a new generation of therapies that Goldman Sachs analysts have said are poised for a \$100 billion market by 2030.

Lilly's clinical development arm, called Chorus, will run a trial with BioAge Labs, a closely held California biotechnology company whose experimental drug azelaprag has shown early promise in preventing muscle atrophy in older adults who've been on bed rest.

Lilly and BioAge will test the combination in a mid-stage study starting in mid-2024.

They will also assess whether patients lose more weight than with Mounjaro alone.

BioAge's drug mimics the action of apelin, a hormone produced during exercise that enhances metabolism and muscle function, but decreases with age.

Amgen Inc. initially developed the drug for heart failure, but abandoned it after it failed an early trial. BioAge, however, saw azel-

aprag's promise in another area: aging.

"A lot of benefits seem to be unlocked in an obesity context," Kristen Fortney, BioAge's chief executive officer and co-founder, said in an interview.

Biotech companies have been struggling to woo investors as high interest rates drive them away from what's viewed as a risky industry. Fortney sees obesity as a bright spot, particularly as companies like Lilly and rival Novo Nordisk A/S explore using their weight-loss therapies to treat heart disease and other related conditions.

This isn't Lilly's first foray into studying the effects of a muscle mass treatment.

Preserving Muscle

Lilly acquired obesity startup Versanis Bio for as much as \$2 billion in July for the same reason it's partnering with BioAge. Versanis' experimental drug aims to help people lose weight while preserving muscle mass.

The company is studying the candidate on its own and in combination with semaglutide, Novo's hit obesity drug. Lilly plans to study the Versanis drug in combination with Mounjaro, which is slated for approval for weight loss by the end of the year.

"Lilly is making bold investments to expand our access to external innovation," Lilly spokeswoman Stefanie Prodouz said in a statement. "We seek opportunities that both support and complement our areas of expertise."

Muscle-mass preservation is becoming a hot new area in obesity medicine. Ania Jastreboff, the director of the Yale Obesity Research Center who has led key Mounjaro studies for



DARRON CUMMINGS, FILE — THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Tirzepatide, a new drug from Eli Lilly approved to treat type 2 diabetes under the brand name Mounjaro, helped people with the disease who were overweight or had obesity lose up to 16% of their body weight, the company said.

Lilly, said at a conference that improving the quality — not just the quantity — of weight loss is an essential next step.

Some muscle loss is expected when a person loses weight.

Normally about a quarter of the weight lost comes from lean mass.

That's a problem for anyone shedding pounds, but potentially dangerous for seniors for whom a decline in muscle and bone can reduce mobility and strength and accelerate frailty.

Experts aren't clear on just how big of a problem this is for older people taking diabetes and weight-loss drugs like Mounjaro and Wegovy.

In a clinical trial of semaglutide, the active in-



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY MARIO TAMA — GETTY IMAGES

In this photo illustration, boxes of the Ozempic rest on a pharmacy counter.

redient in Novo's Ozempic and Wegovy, researchers found that on aver-

age, people lost around 15 pounds of lean muscle and 23 pounds of fat during a

68-week trial.

The average age in that group of people was 52.

HEALTH

What's the best diet for your body? A federal study aims to find out

By Anahad O'Connor
The Washington Post

The federal government wants you — yes, you — to join a large and ambitious diet study that could change the way we think about the best foods to eat for optimal health.

For the most part, nutrition experts know what constitutes a healthy diet. The government's Dietary Guidelines for Americans encourages people to eat fruits, vegetables, beans, nuts, seafood, low-fat dairy, lean meat and whole grains, while limiting things such as alcohol, sodium, refined grains and added sugars.

But every person is unique, and so is the way that we metabolize food. Scientists have found that our genes, sex, gut microbiomes, sleep, exercise, stress levels and other factors can influence how our bodies respond to food. Even identical twins can have different metabolic responses to a banana, a cookie, a slice of bread or a bowl of oatmeal.

To sort it all out, the National Institutes of Health is spending \$189 million over five years and recruiting 10,000 adults. The goal of the study, called Nutrition for Precision Health, is to find out how different people metabolize and respond to various diets. The investigators say they plan to use this data to develop machine-learning algorithms that can offer people personalized diet plans to improve their health.

Unhealthy diets are one of the leading causes of death and chronic diseases around the world. Yet health authorities have taken a largely one-size-fits-all approach to nutrition, said Sai Krupa Das, a nutrition scientist at Tufts University who is involved in the study. "We know what's

healthy," she said. "But not specifically for each subgroup of the population."

The agency is recruiting people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, people with obesity, disabilities, chronic health conditions and more. The investigators say they need diversity to understand the factors that determine how we metabolize food.

"We like to say that variation is our friend," said Diana Thomas, a math professor at the U.S. Military Academy who is involved in the study. "We're recruiting everybody we possibly can."

The study is embedded in a larger federal research program called All of Us, which was created in 2015 under President Barack Obama. The goal of All of Us is to advance precision medicine — and ultimately tailor health care for individuals — by collecting health and genetic data from a million volunteers around the country.

Some experts say that developing an algorithm that can offer every individual a tailored diet based on their unique needs and physiology is the holy grail of nutrition.

A handful of companies, such as Zoe and DayTwo, have created algorithms to sell personalized diet plans. But they've typically relied on limited personal data, such as blood glucose tests and microbiome analyses, said Eric Topol, a cardiologist and executive vice president of Scripps Research who wrote about personalized nutrition in his book "Deep Medicine."

Topol said that to tailor dietary advice, more data is needed — such as information about a person's genome, preexisting medical conditions, and sleep, exercise and stress levels. He said one service he tried



ADAM BERRY — GETTY IMAGES

A doctor speaks to a patient as a sphygmomanometer, or blood pressure meter, lies on his desk.

recommended foods high in oxalates, such as nuts and strawberries. Topol has a history of kidney stones, which high-oxalate foods can exacerbate — something the service didn't take into account. "They recommended that I eat nuts, which are the absolute worst food for me," he said.

Topol and his colleagues are leading a precision nutrition study at Scripps to see whether they can predict how different foods affect blood sugar response and whether avoiding blood sugar spikes can prevent health problems.

He said the NIH study is so large, well-funded and comprehensive that it will

probably yield promising results. "I think it's going to play out to be useful in people who want to learn what is an optimal diet — not for the human species, but for them personally," he added.

Enrollment in the Nutrition for Precision Health study is open online. The investigators say people who join will have the satisfaction of contributing to landmark research, and they'll be given free analyses of their gut microbiomes, daily blood sugar fluctuations, insulin, gut and satiety hormones, and other intricacies of their metabolic health.

"People will get a lot of great information about

their health," said Holly Nicasastro, a program director at the NIH and coordinator for the study.

Another selling point: Volunteers will be paid. Participants in the first phase can earn up to \$300. Those who continue on to the second phase can earn another \$2,000. And people who volunteer for the third, which requires living at a clinic site for weeks at a time, will earn up to \$6,200.

But taking part in the study won't be a piece of cake. In the first module, participants will be asked to provide access to their electronic health records so investigators know their medical histories and med-

ications. They'll have to make at least two trips to a clinic site for grip strength and body composition checks. They'll provide a stool sample, and for about 10 days, they'll wear an activity tracker and glucose monitor as they go about their daily lives.

During that time, they'll be required to document meals or take pictures of their food. Others will wear an automatic ingestion monitor — a small camera sensor that attaches to eyeglasses. Those who don't wear glasses will be given fake ones. The camera sensor detects chewing and takes pictures to track

HEALTH

Parents can help kids keep their weight in check

Obesity poses a significant threat to adults and children across the globe.

Being overweight or obese is a particular concern for children because the extra pounds gained in childhood can follow them into adulthood, potentially leading to serious health issues down the road.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the prevalence of obesity was 19.7% and affected about 14.7 million children and adolescents between the ages of two and 19 in the United States between the years 2017 and 2020. Carrying extra pounds puts children at risk for chronic diseases and health conditions like asthma, Type 2 diabetes and heart disease.

A healthy lifestyle can turn the tables on the obesity epidemic. Parents and other caregivers are instrumental in helping children

avoid the pitfalls of obesity. Learning to manage weight is an important life lesson that can pay lasting health dividends.

Here are some ways they can help kids make healthy choices:

- Involve children in health discussions. When children visit the pediatrician for periodic health examinations and physicals, inform them in age-appropriate ways about their health. Doctors frequently use charts and body mass index numbers to explain healthy weight ranges. Use these diagrams and data sets to show children where they rank, but don't make it seem like they made mistakes. Assure them that everyone will work together to get on track.

- Stock the home with healthy foods. Easy access to high-calorie junk foods is a problem for many kids. Children may be more in-

clined to reach for a bag of chips than an apple if the chips are easier to access. Parents can keep plenty of healthy food on hand, and limit the propensity to keep sweets or other foods available.

- Model good behavior. Parents who are overweight themselves and do not eat a healthy balance of foods may be setting the wrong example for their children. Make maintaining a healthy weight a family affair by cooking and exercising together.

- Encourage physical activity. Parents can set strict parameters on screen usage so children have to find other activities to fill their time. When video games or TV shows are no longer available, kids will venture outdoors to ride bikes or play sports.

— Metro Creative Connection



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Cooking as a family is very beneficial to the health of everyone.

Diet

FROM PAGE 46

food intake.

Nicastro said participants can remove the device for privacy. “You always have the option if you’re going to a doctor’s visit or viewing sensitive materials for work to take it off,” she said.

During the second phase of the study, a subset of volunteers will consume three different test diets for two weeks at a time.

The participants will be provided all their meals.

Nicastro said the diets contain varying amounts of fats, carbs, protein, sugar, fiber and processed foods but won’t be named. “There’s no diet that is labeled a healthy diet or any-

thing that’s going to cause a reaction in the participants,” she added. “We don’t want the participants to expect that one diet is going to be good for them or another diet is going to be bad.”

One diet for example contains a lot of plant foods, moderate amounts of dairy, meat, fish and nuts, and very low amounts of sugary drinks and desserts.

Another diet has high amounts of refined grains, meat, sugary drinks and processed foods and low amounts of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.

And the third diet has moderate to high amounts of vegetables, meat, fish, nuts and oils, low amounts of fruit and dairy, and very little sugar or grains.

Nicastro said there

needed to be enough “sunlight” between the diets to help the investigators understand the factors that cause different metabolic responses. “Our goal was to design three diets that would elicit very different responses in the participants so that we could study those differences,” said Nicastro.

The third and most intense phase will include 500 people who will live at a clinic site for six weeks. During that time, the investigators will provide all meals, track every morsel of food the participants eat, and closely monitor their weight, sleep, physical activity, glucose levels and the precise number of calories they consume and burn.

Okay, so how do you join? Almost anyone in the

United States who is 18 or older can join.

Start by enrolling in the All of Us study site, at join-all-of-us.org.

Then you’ll have the option to sign up online for Nutrition for Precision Health, which is being carried out at 14 different research centers in six states — Alabama, California, Illinois, Louisiana, Massachusetts and North Carolina.

Topol said that developing better algorithms for personalized diet advice is a “long haul” effort that could take years, but it’s sorely needed. “Each of us has a different metabolism, microbiome, genome and physiology,” he said. “The fact that we have these general recommendations for nutrition for all humans — we can be more intelligent than that.”



WIRE PHOTO

A report released during November’s National Diabetes Awareness Month names Michigan among 2022’s Most Overweight and Obese States in America.

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