

Being Social is Healthy!

Throughout the COVID pandemic there have been numerous health experts speaking out about the effects the quarantine is having on our mental health. But the quarantine can also be hindering physical advantages our bodies receive from socialization. According to a recent Dutch study, subjects who said they were socially isolated had a higher risk of pre-diabetes and type 2 diabetes than those who reported having plenty of emotional support. Why? Social connections may help keep blood sugar under control by reducing stress and depression, and by inspiring people to make healthier choices. As we work towards ending this pandemic, let's appreciate the ability to socialize and support one another again!



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Avoid Allergens at Home

If you have seasonal or year-round allergies, reducing your contact with triggers, especially inside your home, is one of the first steps experts recommend. And whether you have allergies or not, limiting allergens in your home may also cut your exposure to problematic chemicals. An analysis published in the journal Environmental Science & Technology found that house dust may contain potentially harmful substances, such as phthalates and flame retardants.

1. **CLEAN BEDDING THE RIGHT WAY.** Dust mites – microscopic critters that feed mainly on dead skin flakes – can accumulate in fabric. If you're allergic to them, send your sheets and pillowcases through the washer and dryer regularly. Certain washing machines have a built-in heater with sanitizing cycles, which may kill more mites, and an extra rinse cycle may aid in removing allergens. Consider buying sheets labeled "woven fabric" that have a fabric pore size of 6 micrometers (microns) or less. That weave size prevents dust mites from penetrating the fabric.
2. **TAKE CARE OF YOUR AIR.** Opening your windows to let fresh spring air in might also allow outdoor allergens, such as pollen, to enter your home. Instead, close your windows and cool off with your AC if needed. This can also help cut humidity, limiting the growth of mold and dust mites, which thrive in damp environments. But maintaining your AC is key. If you have a window unit, clean the filter regularly as suggested by the manufacturer. And if you notice little black dots around the openings where the air comes out, that could indicate mold growing inside and it might be time for a new unit. For central air, opt for a high-efficiency disposable filter and follow the manufacturer's instructions on how often to change it.
3. **DO A P.M. RINSE.** Consider taking a shower at night to wash away the allergens you've picked up during the day – that way, you won't bring them into bed with you.
4. **VACUUM OFTEN AND WELL.** Because dust can contain dust mites, mold, pollen, and animal dander or fur – even cockroach droppings – you should vacuum your home weekly. The American College of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology advises that people who have allergies pick a vacuum with a HEPA filter. Using a bagged model is wise because emptying the dust can release allergens back into the air. And consider having someone else do the vacuuming for you.
5. **BE SAVVY ABOUT FLOORING.** Your carpet can be an allergen reservoir. Opt for a hard-surface floor (and washable throw rugs with rubber backing) instead.
6. **CONSIDER USING AN AIR PURIFIER.** An analysis published in the journal Current Allergy and Asthma Reports suggests that portable air purifiers – which can filter pollutants from the air – can provide some benefit for those with allergies. A portable air purifier works in only one room at a time, though. Avoid "electrostatic precipitator" and "ionizer" purifiers. These can release ozone, which can irritate your lungs.

Courtesy of Consumer Reports "On Health"

STRESS AWARENESS MONTH

Stress Awareness Month is an annual designation observed in April. Have you ever been in a situation that was a little (or a lot) overwhelming, you had deadlines approaching and a mile-long to-do list, and you were just in way over your head?! Well, you're definitely not alone. Everyone feels stressed from time to time, especially as we get older and the responsibilities really pile onto our plate. The thing about stress is, a little bit of it isn't necessarily a bad thing, but too much of it can be detrimental to our emotional and physical health. Learning to find that healthy balance is the best way to live a productive, happy life.

A small amount of stress once in a while is a good thing, because it means you're working hard and you care about what you're doing. If you were never stressed, that would probably mean you're living a lethargic lifestyle without a whole lot of work involved. However, too much stress doesn't allow us to think straight, and is overbearing and counterproductive. Prolonged stress even leads to real physical problems and can cause strokes, IBS, ulcers, diabetes, muscle and joint pain, miscarriages, and many more.

This month, recognize the difference between good and bad stress and try to find your happy place within the madness.

HOW TO OBSERVE

This month, we are all challenged to keep our stress levels low, and our peace levels high. Here are some great ways to keep your mind clear and de-stress if you find yourself getting too overwhelmed.

1. **Exercise.** You've probably heard this one before, and even though it's probably not exactly what you want to do when you're feeling stressed (because laying on the couch and watching movies sounds more appealing), exercising gets endorphins pumping through your brain, which triggers a happy feeling. Exercise lowers your body's stress hormones like cortisol, and releases chemicals that make you feel more at peace.
2. Think about taking **natural supplements** to help you feel more at ease. Natural remedies like lemon balm, omega-3 fatty acids, ashwagandha, green tea, and essential oils are very helpful.
3. **Light a candle or turn on the oil diffusers**, put on some soft, soothing **music** and **dim the lights**. Take a **deep breath** and count your blessings.
4. **Caffeine intake reduction** can help (even though it's tough to kick the coffee!) because caffeine tends to make us jittery, which can cause stress and anxiety.
5. **Spend time laughing with friends and family.** Let yourself have a good time and get your mind off the busyness of the real world.

Courtesy of National Day Calendar



Nondrug Options for Neck Pain

Between 10 and 21 percent of people will experience neck pain in any given year, and it's one of the most common reasons people seek care at an emergency room or from a primary care doctor. Until recently though, research had not shown any clear difference among three main treatments used for neck pain: medication, spinal manipulation by a chiropractor or other professional, or exercise.

Now a published study has found that home exercises recommended by a therapist are more effective at relieving neck pain than medication – and are comparable in efficacy to spinal manipulation, which also trumps medication but carries some risks (and can be costly).

The study, which appeared in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, involved 272 adults who had neck pain for the previous two to 12 weeks. They were randomly assigned to receive one of three treatments; medication, spinal manipulation therapy, or what experts call “home exercise with advice” – in this case, two hour-long therapy sessions where they learned gentle, controlled movements for neck and shoulder joints, which they practiced on their own.

After 12 weeks, the people in the spinal manipulation and home-exercise groups had outcomes superior to those who received medication, including less pain and greater range of motion. That's an important finding given the risks of the medication frequently prescribed for neck pain, including gastrointestinal bleeding (with NSAIDs), addiction and abuse (with opioid pain relievers), and drowsiness (with muscle relaxants). So it makes sense for people who are experiencing neck pain to start with one of the nondrug approaches, preferably exercise, since neck manipulation can cause a stroke in rare cases.

Courtesy of Consumer Reports “On Health”