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Employee – Employer Trust

Personal Best

HOPE Health Letter®

DECEMBER 2023

Everyday Relaxation Guide

Mind-body workouts involve a combination of movement, meditation and breathwork. The physical aspects of this practice can produce a mental focus that may help distract you from negative, bothersome thoughts while enhancing your body's flexibility and balance. Mind-body therapies have become increasingly popular in the past two decades. In brief, they include:



Mindfulness meditation: This is designed to calm mind and body by reducing negative thoughts that can feel overwhelming. It involves sitting comfortably and focusing on breathing. It may be helpful for people with anxiety, depression or pain.

Breath focus meditation: Start by focusing on your breath, silently counting inhalations and exhalations — in *(one)*, out *(two)*, in *(three)* and so on. This can help you focus on something besides troublesome thoughts. **Suggestion:** Practice at the same time each day.

Repetitive prayer: For this technique, you silently repeat a short prayer, or a phrase from a prayer, while practicing breath focus — a method that may be especially appealing if religion or spirituality is meaningful to you.

Body scan: This technique blends focused breathing with progressive muscle relaxation. Start with a few minutes of deep breathing. Then focus on one part of your body or group of muscles at a time as you mentally release any physical tension you feel there.

Yoga and tai chi: These ancient practices combine rhythmic breathing with a series of postures and flowing movements. Yoga involves holding poses and postures. Tai chi is performed in a dance-like, martial arts form.

Note: If you are not normally physically active, have chronic health problems or a painful or disabling condition, you may find these relaxation techniques too challenging. Check with your health care provider before increasing your physical activity.

BEST bits

■ **Starve a cold, feed a fever?** You need to eat, regardless of what ails you. A daily well-balanced, nutrient-rich diet can help keep your immune system strong, lowering your risk for illness. Essential nutrients that can support immune health include vitamins C and E, as well as beta carotene. Some of the best sources of these nutrients are asparagus, beets, broccoli, cantaloupe, carrots, corn, guava, kale, mangoes, mustard and collard greens, nectarines, pink grapefruit, squash, sweet potato, tangerines, tomatoes and watermelon.

■ **Flu and COVID-19 vaccine reminder for the 2023-2024 season:** The annual influenza (flu) vaccination is recommended for everyone age six months and older in the U.S. Because flu viruses are constantly changing, the composition of vaccines is reviewed annually by the FDA and updated as needed to best match viruses that research indicates will be most common during the upcoming season. For COVID, specific schedules are based on age, health status and vaccine product. Check with your health care provider for advice about your or your children's individual needs for the COVID-19 vaccination.

■ **Ready to shovel some snow?** While many people can handle the effort, *shoveling snow can put others at risk for heart attack.* Sudden exertion, such as moving hundreds of pounds of snow, especially after being sedentary for several months, can put a big strain on the heart. Pushing a heavy snow blower also can cause injury. And, there's the cold factor. If you are managing a health concern, check with your health care provider before tackling the snow.

The Smart Moves Toolkit, including this issue's printable download, **Give Yourself the Gift of Health**, is at personalbest.com/extras/23V12tools.

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Maximize Exercise with Food

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

Being physically active is wonderful for overall health. Benefits include improved mood, more energy, better sleep, stronger muscles and a decreased risk of developing heart disease and cancer.

Pairing exercise with the right dietary pattern is even more beneficial than exercise alone. To maximize the benefits of exercise, ensure that you fuel your body with the nutrients it needs before, during and after your activity. Your exact nutrient needs will depend on the type and duration of exercise, but these tips should be top of mind:

Carbohydrates provide energy during exercise. Foods, such as whole-grain bread, pasta and rice, as well as fruit, provide carbs and can be eaten before a workout to fuel up, and after a workout to replenish what's been used.

Muscles are broken down during exercise, so protein is vital after exercise to repair muscles and body tissues. You probably don't need protein powders or bars after basic exercise. Instead, choose a post-workout meal with protein-containing foods, such as milk, eggs, chicken, tofu or cheese.

Staying hydrated with water is vital. When you exercise, water is lost through sweat, and it needs to be replenished. Keep a water bottle handy and sip before, during and after exercising.



Do I need a sports beverage?

Sports drinks contain water, sugar and electrolytes, such as sodium and potassium. They are recommended when you lose fluid and electrolytes via sweat. This happens only when you exercise at a vigorous intensity for more than one hour and you are sweating heavily — for example, after a hockey game, hour-long run or intense spin class. Plain water is all you need after moderate activity with minimal sweat.

TIP of the MONTH

Season to Taste

You may find the words **season to taste** in your recipes. What does that mean? Seasoning refers to salt, pepper, herbs and spices. Some people may like a bit more or less of these flavors, so you can adjust to suit your taste buds. How? Taste the final cooked dish, and then add a pinch of flavor and taste again. Repeat until you've reached the desired flavor. **Note:** Do not taste dishes with raw meat, eggs or poultry. Wait until they are fully cooked.

Leftover Turkey Caesar Wraps

- 2 cups cooked turkey, chopped
- 4 cups Romaine lettuce, torn to bite-sized pieces
- 1 large tomato, diced
- ¼ cup croutons, coarsely chopped
- 3 tbsp Parmesan cheese
- 3 tbsp creamy Caesar dressing
- 4 large whole-wheat tortillas

In a mixing bowl, add turkey, lettuce, tomato, croutons and Parmesan cheese. **Coat** with Caesar dressing and mix well. **Add** a quarter of the salad mixture to each of the four tortillas. **Roll** tightly and enjoy.

Makes 4 servings. Per serving: 382 calories | 41g protein | 10g total fat | 2g saturated fat | 4g mono fat | 3g poly fat | 31g carb | 4g sugar (0 added sugar) | 5g fiber | 543mg sodium

EASY recipe



Mental Health After Major Surgery

By Eric Endlich, PhD

Major surgery is often stressful, and emotional aftereffects are common. The American Heart Association, for example, reports that up to 25% of patients develop depression following cardiac surgery.

Common triggers for such reactions include:

- ❖ Stress and worry about your medical condition, surgery or recovery.
- ❖ Pain and fatigue following the surgery.
- ❖ Effects of anesthesia, pain relievers or other medication.
- ❖ Disruption in your routine (e.g., inability to work or exercise).

While medication can be beneficial for serious conditions, such as depression, the following steps may also help you bounce back:

- ❖ **Resume physical activity** in accordance with your surgeon's advice. Exercise can help boost your mood and energy.
- ❖ **Develop a schedule or structure for your time.** Completing planned tasks, whether taking a shower or calling a friend, can promote a sense of accomplishment.
- ❖ **Practice healthy habits.** Maintain a nutritious diet, limit alcohol consumption and get adequate sleep.
- ❖ **Stay connected** with friends, family or coworkers. Discuss the challenges you're facing.
- ❖ **Remain realistic about your recovery.** Understand that it's a gradual process, and pause to celebrate your progress along the way.
- ❖ **Seek professional help if your emotional reactions continue beyond two weeks,** cause substantial distress or make it difficult to fulfill your daily responsibilities. Your health care provider may be able to prescribe medication or refer you to a licensed psychotherapist.



SLOW

'Tis the season to get in the slow lane.

Warning: Hurrying is dangerous to your health and safety. It's time to get out of life's fast lane and consciously slow down. Rushing to meetings and constantly multi-tasking can be life-threatening. Distracted driving and speeding cause deadly car accidents and hurrying is a primary cause of serious injuries from falls, according to the National Safety Council. And rushing spikes stress hormones, raising your blood pressure.

The Art of Delegating

Learning how to delegate successfully is the key to achieving more.

Whether you lead a team at work or need your kids to help with a list of holidays chores, delegating can give you energy and time for matters that need your specific attention. But how do you delegate without being overly bossy or seeming demanding?

Try these tips for delegating successfully:

Start with your reasons about what needs to be done. People are more likely to care about performing specific assigned tasks well if they understand why the work you are delegating to them matters. So, explain why you think they will do a good job. Show enthusiasm for their ability to succeed and explain the task clearly.

Don't micromanage. It's fine to check how a task is going now and then, but constantly asking for updates can frustrate the person you delegated a task to and waste your time. In fact, sometimes the hardest part of delegating work to others is letting go of at least some control.

Provide deadlines. If a task or project has a short turnaround time, make sure you've made it clear and check in once or twice — but not constantly — before the task must be completed. If the task has a longer time frame until it must be completed, be specific about when you'll need brief updates as work progresses.





Dress for exercise success this winter.

You can enjoy being active outdoors in cold weather — if you wear the right clothing. When you start an outdoor winter workout bundled up against the cold, you produce body heat, especially in the chest and stomach, and you can soon feel uncomfortably hot. But if you are wearing layers — for example, a T-shirt under a sweater or sweatshirt, a jacket, jogging pants, gloves, hat and maybe a muffler — you can easily regulate your body temperature. Take off your sweater or jacket, depending on how cold it is, and tie it around your waist to cool off. Your head and hands typically will remain cold, so keep your gloves and hat in place.

body & mind

Q: Sadness vs. depression?

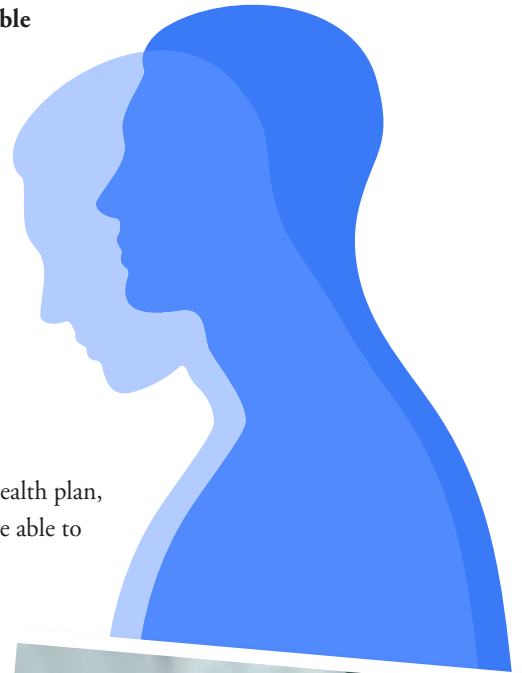
A: Nearly everyone feels sad on occasion, but depression is a more serious, treatable condition. Sadness is a temporary emotional state which tends to occur in response to a particular event, such as a loss or disappointment. It may go away on its own within a few days, or even a few minutes. Crying or talking about the cause of the sadness may provide relief.

Depression, in contrast, doesn't always have an identifiable trigger, and may last much longer. Depression can also make it hard to function at work, home or school. Symptoms include:

- Appetite changes.
- Sleep changes.
- Low energy.
- Memory or concentration problems.
- Thoughts of death or suicide.
- Decreased interest in usual activities.
- Feeling guilty or worthless.

People suffering from depression often benefit from psychotherapy (talk therapy) and/or medication. Your health plan, employee assistance program or health care provider may be able to suggest referrals if needed.

— Eric Endlich, PhD



Online Pharmacies

There's no doubt that prescription drugs can be costly. Sometimes, insurance may not cover medications prescribed by your health care provider, or you may have a high copay.

Many people save money on prescription drug expenses by using online pharmacies. With much less overhead than traditional pharmacies, web-based stores can typically offer lower prices on prescription drugs and deliver them by mail.

But are all online pharmacies safe? Unfortunately, the answer is no. There are fraudulent online pharmacies selling fake versions of medications and/or selling expired or damaged drugs that have been stored improperly.

If you are considering using an online pharmacy, take these steps to protect yourself:

Never use a medicine from an online pharmacy that looks different from what you receive at your usual pharmacy.

Never

take ordered drugs that arrive in

damaged packaging, have an expired date or no expiration date and have only foreign language instructions.

Only use an online pharmacy that requires a health care provider's prescription.

Verify that an online pharmacy is a legitimate U.S. company. Check the pharmacy's license in your state's board of pharmacy license database by using the location tool at [fda.gov/drugs/besaferx-your-source-online-pharmacy-information/besaferx-resources-consumers](https://www.fda.gov/drugs/besaferx-your-source-online-pharmacy-information/besaferx-resources-consumers).

Only use online pharmacies on the list.



Q: Sinus infection relief?

A: Sinus infections are all too common this time of year. Characteristic symptoms include facial pain and pressure, drainage down your throat, nasal congestion and yellow mucus. Here are some ways to find relief.

Simple home remedies: Drink plenty of liquids. Inhale warm water vapor or apply warm compresses over your sinuses; to avoid burns, don't let it get too hot. Use a neti pot or saline nasal spray a few times a day to remove thick secretions. And get plenty of rest.

Medications: Nasal corticosteroids reduce inflammation around the sinus openings so they can drain. Tablet or spray decongestants relieve congestion. Acetaminophen or ibuprofen can reduce pain. Antibiotics are usually unnecessary unless the infection persists or becomes severe.

When to seek medical care: Call immediately if you have a high fever, pain or swelling around your eyes, confusion, vision changes or a stiff neck. Also contact your health care provider if your symptoms worsen after seeming to improve, or the infection lasts more than a week.

— Elizabeth Smoots, MD



You may have seen this in the news last year: Rutgers University researchers looked at two decades of health data on half a million Americans and concluded having an elevated body mass index (BMI), including obese levels, didn't raise the risk of death. Because being overweight has long been deemed unhealthy and even dangerous, the surprising new findings were labeled a paradox that does not agree with a large body of scientific evidence. The study isn't the final word on this issue and being overweight remains a well-established risk factor for developing heart disease, type 2 diabetes and cancer. **Bottom line:** Keep extra pounds in check and remember that one study isn't conclusive.

QuikRisk™ Assessment: Germs' Favorite Hideouts

Germs are often lurking where you least expect to find them. Test your knowledge.

ANSWERS:

1. The germiest item in a home can be the:

- a. Toilet seat. | b. Kitchen sponge. | c. Dishwasher.

2. The average household cutting board has ____ times more fecal matter than a toilet seat.

- a. 50. | b. 100. | c. 200.

3. You should disinfect your mobile phone:

- a. Daily. | b. Weekly. | c. Every two weeks.

4. To ensure your toothbrush doesn't grow excess bacteria, you should store it:

- a. In a closed container. | b. Next to the sink. | c. As far away from the toilet as possible.

5. You should wash your bed linens:

- a. Every other week. | b. Every week. | c. Once a month.

1. b — A kitchen sponge can be the germiest item in your home. **Tip:** Sanitize your sponge in the microwave for two minutes daily; replace it every two weeks.

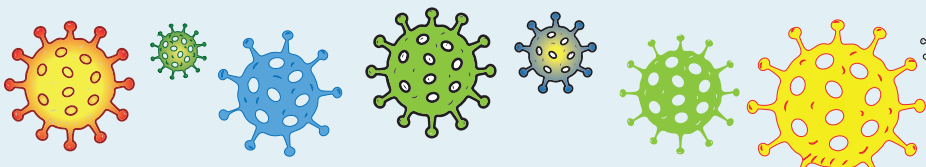
2. c — The average household cutting board has 200 times more fecal matter than a toilet seat.

Tip: Run it through the dishwasher or clean it with a bleach solution.

3. a — Disinfect your phone daily. Most phones have ten times more bacteria than toilet seats.

4. c — Every time you flush your toilet, germs can float around the bathroom for up to two hours. Close the lid when flushing and store your toothbrush away from the toilet. **Tip:** Store your toothbrush upright to air it out.

5. b — Minimize exposure to harmful bacteria by washing bed linens weekly. A new study found that unwashed pillowcases can have more germs than a toilet seat after only one week.



dollars&sense

Boost Your Interest Earnings

Earning interest is a smart way to grow savings.

Historically, the typical formula for higher rates of interest involves accepting greater risks. Thankfully, there are ways to boost the interest you earn that don't require you to take additional risks.

Here are strategies to earn more:

❶ **Check with your bank to see if accounts paying higher interest rates are available.** Financial institutions offer high-yield savings and interest-bearing checking accounts for qualifying customers. Also look at online banks and credit unions. The market is competitive, which makes the field attractive for consumers with money to save.

❷ **Consider a certificate of deposit (CD) ladder.** Certificates of deposit are earning higher than usual rates. A CD ladder allows you to divide your money among several CDs with varying maturity dates, staggering the length of time you go without access to the funds in each of your CDs. With CD laddering you can take advantage of the higher interest rates without giving up access to all your money for, say, five years. **Note:** The money is unavailable until the CD matures.

❸ **Compounding interest is a common way to watch your account balances grow.** This method adds interest to the principal, which allows you to earn more interest on your accounts.

— Jamie Lynn Byram, PhD, CFP, AFC, MBA

safety solutions



December is Safe Toys and Gifts Month.

Annual Safety Gift Guide

'Tis the season for giving with safety in mind. There may be something for everyone on your list with these innovative gift ideas:

For the traveler: There are many options, such as portable door locks, door stop alarms, portable safes, RFID wallets or purses and travel money belts.

For the fashionista: Wearable safety jewelry is all the rage. Check out necklaces, fitness bands, bracelets and even hair scrunchies that have safety features with buttons and apps designed to send alerts.

For the adventure seeker: GPS satellite messengers are great for when people are off the grid (out of cell phone reach). And you can also tuck a hybrid flashlight into their stocking.

For the DIYer: Protective gear, such as gloves or goggles, are thoughtful and practical.

For the runner or biker: LED flashlight gloves can come in handy when running or biking at dusk. Portable keychain alarms are also a great gift for the athlete on your list.



Choosing a Cleaning Company

Use these guidelines if you need to hire a cleaning company for your home:

- ❖ Ask trusted friends for recommendations or check references.
- ❖ Make sure the company or individual is insured and bonded. Confirm that your insurance covers people working in your home.
- ❖ Ask what type of cleaning products they use and let them know if you have chemical sensitivities. **Tip:** Provide cleaning products for the company to use in your home.
- ❖ Ask if the company conducts employee background checks (if you are working with a company, not an individual).
- ❖ Discuss costs ahead of time.
- ❖ Decide how the cleaners will gain access to your home when you aren't there. Consider if you are willing to give them a key or a code.
- ❖ Ask for a written contract to protect you and them.



Year-End Health Assessment

By Diane McReynolds, Executive Editor Emeritus

Before assessing your health in 2023 using the list below, consider how your physical health and mental well-being are related. Together, they define what has become known in the past several decades as *wellness*.

- ❖ **Health** refers to a state where your physical body is strong and free from disease.
- ❖ **Wellness** refers to a broad overall balance of your physical, emotional, social, intellectual, environmental and occupational well-being.

For example, physical injuries can lead to mental health issues, while ongoing depression or stress can lead to physical ailments and failing mentality. Regular physical activity and exercise can produce many health benefits, including elevated mood and reduced stress, while healthy eating also can protect and improve your mental health. **Regular physical activity** can also boost brain health, help manage weight, strengthen bones and muscles, improve your ability to perform everyday activities — and reduce your risk for disease.

How are health assessments useful? They measure your current health status and identify specific risk factors that might cause potential health problems in the future — such as chronic stress, insomnia, overweight, poor diet and sedentary lifestyle. They can also identify any undiagnosed health concerns that require further examination by a medical professional.

To improve your health, you first need to understand your physical and mental health and risk factors for ill health.

Note: Personality factors strongly associated with good health and well-being include optimism and self-esteem. Genetic and personality factors are closely related and can influence your sense of well-being and confidence.

Some people equate wellness with physical health — nutrition, exercise and weight management — while in recent decades wellness has become more. Wellness is the act of practicing healthy habits daily to reach better physical, mental and emotional health outcomes — so that instead of just surviving, you're thriving.

For the following health assessment, evaluate your current lifestyle habits as they might relate to your well-being by choosing **True** or **False**.

- 1. Mental health:** You maintain a state of mental well-being that enables you to cope with the stresses in your life, realize your capabilities and strive to keep learning. **T** ☐ **F** ☐
- 2. Exercise 1:** You maintain a regular exercise plan that includes at least 150 minutes per week of moderate-intensity physical activity, such as brisk walking. **T** ☐ **F** ☐
- 3. Exercise 2:** You get two days per week of muscle-strengthening activity. **T** ☐ **F** ☐
- 4. Nutrition:** You choose mostly whole, minimally-processed foods, such as vegetables, fruits, whole grains, dairy, legumes, fish and nuts, which supply nutrients, including calcium, potassium, dietary fiber and vitamin D. **T** ☐ **F** ☐
- 5. Sleep:** You get seven to nine hours of sleep regularly to remain alert and fit and promote optimal health. **T** ☐ **F** ☐
- 6. Work-life balance:** You are typically able to minimize work-related stress, sustaining a stable work style while maintaining good health and general well-being. **T** ☐ **F** ☐
- 7. Online screen time:** You try to limit your daily personal screen time to two to four hours a day (for adults) outside of work screen use. **T** ☐ **F** ☐
- 8. Checkups and medical screenings:** You follow the recommended screening schedule for your age. It may include regular physical exams, skin checks, cholesterol and blood pressure screening, eye exams, immunizations and screening for sexually transmitted diseases. **T** ☐ **F** ☐
- 9. CDC immunization recommendations:** In addition to vaccines for all adults (COVID-19, influenza and Tdap or Td), make sure you're current on MMR (before age 65), Varicella (before age 50), shingles (after age 59), HPV (before age 45), and hepatitis B (before age 60). **T** ☐ **F** ☐

DR. ZORBA'S corner

A Prescription for Exercise

Exercise is good for you; you know that.

Everybody does. It helps trim your waistline, helps your heart, helps keep your blood pressure down and even helps your memory. Recent research published in *BMJ* shows it also helps treat depression and anxiety. If you don't exercise, start today (first check with your health care provider if you're unaccustomed to exercise). The CDC recommends 150 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise every week, but studies show as little as ten minutes twice a day is a good way to start. And any amount of movement, even walking around for a few minutes every hour, washing windows or vacuuming, is beneficial. — Zorba Paster, MD

December Fill-in-the-Blank Puzzle

Find out how well you know the topics covered in this issue of the newsletter.

- 1 Pairing exercise with the right _____ pattern is even more beneficial than exercise alone.
- 2 _____ is vital after a workout to repair muscles and body tissues.
- 3 Up to 25% of patients develop _____ following cardiac surgery.
- 4 Never take _____ that arrive in damaged packaging, have no expiration date (or an expired one) and have only foreign language instructions.
- 5 _____ are usually not necessary unless the sinus infection persists or becomes severe.
- 6 A kitchen sponge can be the _____ item in your home.
- 7 _____ is the act of practicing healthy habits daily to reach better physical, mental and emotional health outcomes.
- 8 A new study found that unwashed _____ can have more germs than a toilet seat after only one week.

Stay in Touch. Keep those questions and suggestions coming!

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