Has the 2020 Pandemic increased less than desirable behaviors?

Don't Let Your Holiday Season Be Full of Fear & Anxiety

Shodair is Montana's leading resource in mental health and has openings in the Helena, Butte and Missoula Clinics.

Psychiatric Appointments 406.444.1125 • Genetic Appointments 406.444.1016

Psychiatry | Therapy | Clinical Psychology | Nutrition
Speech Therapy | Occupational Therapy | Group Home
Addiction Counseling | School-Based Services
Genetic Testing | Inpatient Residential and Acute Psychiatry
Genetic Evaluation and Counseling

To heal, help and inspire hope

Helena • Butte • Missoula • shodair.org
Associated Dermatology and Skin Cancer clinic of Helena understands the importance of healthy skin. Our providers are committed to providing high quality care.

When detected early skin cancer is preventable. The American Academy of Dermatology recommends that everyone check their skin regularly for any new or suspicious spots. If you notice any irregular spots on your skin, or anything changing, itching or bleeding, see a dermatologist.

Remember every time you go outside; your skin is exposed to damaging ultraviolet (UV) rays. Not only does this cause premature skin damage, it also increases your risk of getting skin cancer, including melanoma – the second most common skin cancer in women ages 15-29.

Follow these tips to protect your skin:

~ Don’t skimp on sunscreen. Apply sunscreen to all skin not covered by clothing, including your ears, neck, hands, feet and lips. Make sure your sunscreen is broad-spectrum, water-resistant and has an SPF of 30 or higher. Reapply every two hours or after swimming or sweating.

~ Treat yourself to protective clothing and sunglasses. Since no sunscreen can block 100% of the sun’s rays, wear clothing for added protection. Look for lightweight, long-sleeved shirts and pants and sunglasses with UV protection. There are a lot of great choices in clothing to choose from now. Take it seriously!

~ Be extra careful around water, sand and snow. These surfaces reflect the sun’s rays, increasing your chance of sunburn. Montana has sunny winter days of skiing, so be prepared!

~ If you see something, say something. When detected early, skin cancer – including melanoma – is highly treatable. Check your skin regularly. If you notice any new or suspicious spots on your skin, or anything that is changing, itching or bleeding, see your dermatologist.

Associated Dermatology and Skin Cancer Clinic of Helena offers:

General Adult & Pediatric Dermatology – Board Certified MOH’s Surgeon

In House Board Certified Dermatopathologist – Aesthetic Services

In House Billing Services – We Follow All CDC COVID Guidelines

Jeffry A. Goldes, M.D.

Board Certified in General Dermatology, Anatomic Pathology, and Dermatopathology

Dr. Goldes is active in the community. He was a member of the Air Force Reserves and the Montana Army National Guard for years. Voted 2018 and 2019 #1 Dermatologist in Helena
Winter can be an awe-inspiring time of year. Snow-covered landscapes and opportunities to enjoy sports like skiing and snowboarding make winter a favorite time of year for nature enthusiasts and athletes. As fun as winter can be, many people struggle with the transition from warm weather and long, sunny days to cold weather and reduced hours of sunlight. Sometimes mistaken or misidentified as the “winter blues,” this phenomenon is known as seasonal affective disorder, or SAD.

What is seasonal affective disorder? According to the National Institutes of Mental Health, SAD is a type of depression. The NIH notes that a person must meet full criteria for major depression coinciding with specific seasons for at least two years to be diagnosed with SAD. The American Psychiatric Association says symptoms of SAD can be distressing and overwhelming and even interfere with daily functioning.

The APA notes that SAD has been linked to a biochemical imbalance in the brain that’s prompted by shorter daylight hours and less sunlight in winter. As the seasons change, a shift in a person’s biological internal clock or circadian rhythm can lead to them being out of step with their normal routines. That can contribute to various symptoms, including:

- Feeling sad or depressed
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities once enjoyed
- Changes in appetite, usually eating more and craving carbohydrates
- Loss of energy or increased fatigue despite increased sleep hours
- Increase in purposeless physical activity or slowed movements or speech that may be noticed by others
- Feeling worthless or guilty
- Difficulty thinking, concentrating or making decisions
- Thoughts of death or suicide

Overcoming SAD: The weather can’t be changed, but people can speak with their physicians about the following strategies to overcome SAD.

- Light therapy: According to the APA, light therapy involves sitting in front of a light therapy box that emits very bright light. In the winter, patients typically sit in front of the box for 20 minutes each morning, and they may see some improvements within one to two weeks of beginning treatment. Light therapy is usually continued throughout the winter.

- Medication: The APA notes that selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors, or SSRIs, are a type of antidepressant that are sometimes prescribed to treat SAD.

- Spending time outdoors: People with SAD who don’t typically spend much time outdoors when the temperatures dip may notice their symptoms improve if they make a concerted effort to spend time outdoors in winter.

- Rearrange rooms in the home: The APA notes that rearranging rooms and furniture in a home or office to allow more natural light in during the daytime can help improve symptoms of SAD. SAD is a legitimate concern for millions of people across the globe. Working with a physician to overcome SAD can help people successfully transition to days with fewer hours of sunlight.
The many ways walking benefits your mind, body

Life changed dramatically in 2020. When the World Health Organization declared a COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, hundreds of millions of people across the globe were forced to change how they go about their daily lives, including how they exercise. Health-conscious adults accustomed to exercising at local gyms had to find new ways to exercise in the wake of the pandemic. Many gyms were forced to close in areas hit hard by COVID-19, and that left many people without access to fitness equipment like weights and cardiovascular machines. Resilient men and women soon found ways to exercise, and many of them embraced walking.

Though walking might not provide the same level of intensity that fitness enthusiasts are accustomed to, the Arthritis Foundation notes the various ways walking benefits the body.

- Walking protects against heart disease and stroke. Walking strengthens the heart and protects it against heart disease. The AF also notes that walking lowers blood pressure. In fact, post-menopausal women who walk just one to two miles per day can lower their blood pressure by nearly 11 points in 24 weeks, while women who walk for 30 minutes a day can reduce their risk of stroke by 20 percent.
- Walking can improve mood. One study from researchers at California State University, Long Beach, found that the more steps people taking during the day, the better their moods were.
- Walking can lower risk for cognitive decline. Walking also has been linked to a lower risk for age-related cognitive decline. A study from the University of Virginia Health System found that men between the ages of 71 and 93 who walked more than a quarter of a mile per day had half the incidence of dementia and Alzheimer’s disease compared to men who walked less. In addition, a study from researchers at the University of California, San Francisco, found that age-related memory decline was lower among women ages 65 and older who walked 2.5 miles per day than it was among women who walked less than half a mile per week.
- Foot traffic increased as people were forced to find new ways to exercise during the COVID-19 pandemic. Walking is a great way to stay in shape and even provides some lesser known benefits for people who walk each day.
Whether you love it or hate it, winter is here! If your skin has been feeling dull, tight and dry, the sudden change in temperatures may be the culprit.

Our skin contains a protective barrier called the acid mantle that protects us from irritations and transepidermal water loss. It is important to keep this barrier functioning properly during the winter as low humidity can increase water loss in your skin. Damage to our skin barrier causes sensitivities, aging and dehydration.

How can you help keep your skin healthy and glowing during the winter season? Here are some tips:

- **Tweak your routine** – Make sure you change your skincare routine each season. What works for your skin during the summer months might not work during the winter. In cold weather, our blood vessels constrict, decreasing blood flow. This makes it hard for your skin to keep itself healthy and glowing. Help your skin by switching up your routine – switch out your gel cleanser for a cream cleanser and look for products containing ceramides, lipids or hyaluronic acid. These help to improve hydration and the barrier function of the skin.

- **Apply SPF** – Just because summer is over, doesn’t mean the sun takes a break! Make sure you don’t slack when it comes to applying SPF to your face daily. Ice and snow reflect UV rays, so be diligent about reapplying during winter activities such as skiing or snowboarding. The Skin Cancer Foundation recommends using a SPF of at least 30 to properly protect your skin.

- **Avoid hot showers** – Taking a long, hot shower at the end of a winter’s day may sound amazing, but you skin doesn’t think so! Hot water can be stripping to your skin. Try keeping your hot showers to a minimum and use warm water when washing your face.

- **Consider professional treatments** – Treat yourself during the winter months with a professional treatment! It takes about four weeks for your skin to go through its full life cycle of replacing dead skin cells with new, healthy cells so I recommend my clients to come in about once a month for professional treatments to help slough off dead skin cells. This allows for better absorption of your skincare products and helps keep your skin looking healthy and fresh. The autumn and winter months are a great time to consider doing a deeper chemical peel or a microneedling treatment. Sun exposure that may happen in the summer can increase the risk of unwanted post-inflammatory hyper-pigmentation, so winter is the perfect opportunity to avoid some of these risks and get rid of the damage summer has done to your skin.

Gina Morigeau is a Medical Aesthetician at the St. Peter’s Health Plastic Surgery and Medical Aesthetics clinic. Gina began her career as an aesthetician when she graduated from the Montana Academy of Salons, after she received her Bachelor of Arts from Carroll College in 2015.
In recognition of the role exercise plays in preventive care, the Department of Health and Human Services recommends children, adolescents and adults follow these physical activity guidelines.

**Children and adolescents**

The DHHS recommends that children and adolescents between the ages of six and 17 should get 60 minutes or more of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity every day.

- **Aerobic:** Most of the 60 minutes or more per day should be either moderate- or vigorous intensity aerobic physical activity and should include vigorous-intensity physical activity at least three days a week.

- **Muscle-strengthening:** As part of their 60 minutes or more of daily physical activity, children and adolescents should include muscle-strengthening physical activity at least three days a week.

- **Bone-strengthening:** As part of their 60 minutes or more of daily physical activity, children and adolescents should include bone-strengthening physical activity at least three days a week.

Parents can consult with their children’s physicians to determine age-appropriate muscle- and bone-strengthening activities for their youngsters.

**Adults**

The DHHS advises adults to make a concerted effort to move more and sit less throughout the day. Some physical activity is better than none. Adults who sit less and do any amount of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity gain some health benefits.

For substantial health benefits, adults should get at least 150 minutes to 300 minutes of moderate-intensity, or 75 minutes to 150 minutes a week of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity each week. An equivalent combination of moderate- and vigorous-intensity aerobic activity can serve as a substitute. Ideally, aerobic activity should be spread throughout the week.

Adults should do muscle-strengthening activities of moderate or greater intensity that involve all major muscle groups two or more days a week, as the DHHS notes these activities provide additional health benefits.

These guidelines also apply to older adults, but older adults also should incorporate balance training into their exercise routines. In addition, the DHHS urges older adults to consult with their physicians about the appropriate level of effort for physical activity relative to their level of fitness.

People of all ages should include physical activity in their preventive health care routines. More information about exercise is available at [www.health.gov](http://www.health.gov).
It’s the most wonderful time of the year, but the season that brings cheer and bright lights also brings a more sinister character—flu. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates influenza (flu) results in as many as 45 million illnesses every year. However, the flu vaccine during the 2018-2019 flu season prevented:

- an estimated 4.4 million influenza illnesses;
- 2.3 million influenza-associated medical visits;
- 58,000 influenza-associated hospitalizations; and
- 3,500 influenza-associated deaths.

Not only can the flu vaccine help reduce the risk of flu-associated hospitalization for children, working age adults and older adults, but it also acts as a preventative tool for people living with chronic health conditions, such as heart disease.

The CDC estimates 49 percent of people six months and older got a flu vaccine during the 2018-2019 flu season. However, as we enter the 2020-2021 flu season, there are more reasons to get your flu shot as soon as possible.
What is influenza and how does the vaccine help?
Influenza is a virus that can affect people of all ages and makes infants, the elderly and people living with chronic health conditions and auto-immune disorders more vulnerable. However, there are some who should not receive the vaccine, such as children under six months old and those with serious allergies to the vaccine or ingredients in the vaccine. Be sure to visit with your doctor about any concerns you have about the flu vaccine.

When you get the flu vaccine, which has inactivated strains of the influenza virus, your body develops antibodies against several different forms of influenza. The antibodies will be your body’s form of defense to fight off the virus and protect you from developing symptoms.

Why is it especially important to get the flu vaccine this year?
As we approach the 2020-2021 flu season, we are also combatting the global COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 has changed how we go about our daily lives, and some of these changes can potentially help slow the spread of influenza. For example, since influenza is also a virus, physical distancing, wearing masks and avoiding large groups of people can help control influenza outbreaks. However, COVID-19 is already putting a strain on the health care industry, which usually bolsters itself in preparation for flu season.

According to the CDC, estimates show the seasonal flu caused up to 62,000 deaths in the United States during the 2019-2020 flu season. Comparatively, more than 146,000 Americans died from COVID-19 between February and July 2020.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Montana’s hospitalization rates are climbing, and major medical centers are reaching capacity throughout the state. As of early October, three of every four Montana inpatient hospital beds were occupied by patients with and without COVID-19. By late November, Benefis Hospitals (Great Falls) reported more than 90 percent of its beds were occupied. Billings Clinic, St. Peter’s Health and St. Vincent Health Care (Billings) reported between 70 and 90 percent of their beds filled.

Hospital occupancy rates are not the only cause for concern. COVID-19 hospitalizations also cause shortages of intensive care unit (ICU) beds and ventilators. Hospitals may face supply shortages, which will limit their ability to care for patients with influenza, COVID-19 or both.

Can the influenza vaccine protect you against COVID-19?
While the flu vaccine will not protect you against COVID-19, researchers at the University of Florida Health are finding the influenza vaccine might act as a buffer against COVID-19 symptoms. In their study, people who received a flu vaccination within a year before testing positive for COVID-19 were nearly two- and-a-half times less likely to be hospitalized for COVID-19 than those who did not get the vaccine. Those who received a vaccination were also three times less likely to be admitted to the ICU when they developed COVID-19 symptoms. Researchers believe this is happening because the immune system is primed by the flu vaccine and ready to attack, regardless which virus enters the body.

Where can you get your influenza vaccine?
Contact your primary care provider to set up an appointment to get your flu shot. Pharmacies, drug stores and supermarkets often offer vaccine services, and depending on your insurance, your flu vaccine might be free of cost. You can also visit the CDC’s vaccine finder website to find a location near you: https://vaccinefinder.org/find-vaccine.

Mountain-Pacific Quality Health – Mountain-Pacific Quality Health, the Medicare Quality Innovation Network- Quality Improvement Organization (QIN-QIO) for Montana, Wyoming, Alaska, Hawaii and the U.S. Pacific Territories to help improve the delivery of health care and the systems that provide it with the goal to increase access to high quality health care that is affordable, safe and of value to patients.


https://vaccinefinder.org/find-vaccine

IT’S MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER BEFORE.
Resolutions that focus on health and fitness are made each year. Numerous people are eager to lose weight, improve their physical fitness levels or even stop habits that can hinder their mental or physical wellness. As the new year ticks closer, individuals can explore these popular resolutions as they get on the path to better health.

1. **Commit to quit.** The American Cancer Society says about half of all Americans who keep smoking will die due to the habit. Smoking kills more Americans than alcohol, car accidents, guns, HIV, and illegal drugs combined. Smoking not only causes cancer, it also damages nearly every part the body, including the bones, reproductive organs, mouth, skin, eyes, and blood vessels. Quitting can help reverse the effects of years of smoking.

2. **Limit alcohol intake.** The phrase “everything in moderation” applies to alcohol consumption. Excessive consumption of alcohol can lead to liver and kidney damage. When these organs are not functioning properly, they cannot filter toxins out of the body, resulting in potentially irreparable damage. Resolve to cut down on alcohol consumption if you are drinking more than two drinks per day.

3. **Address stress.** It’s easy to underestimate the effects of stress on the mind and body. Left unchecked, stress can contribute to heart disease, obesity, diabetes, and high blood pressure, says the Mayo Clinic. Resolving to reduce stress by adopting certain techniques can improve self-esteem and mood.

4. **Exercise more readily.** Physician Partners of America states that exercise can improve mood and sleep, help people control their weight, reduce the risk of heart disease, improve bone and muscle strength, and potentially extend their lives. Resolving to exercise doesn’t require drastic changes. Small steps can add up to big results.

5. **Visit the doctor.** Too often people put off going to the doctor until something is wrong with their health. It is much better to be proactive and avoid illness through testing and conversations with a physician. Doctors may be able to recognize symptoms and risk factors that could be indicative of future illness. Routine physical exams also will check cholesterol and glucose levels, monitor blood pressure and include other preventive care options.

6. **Improve your diet.** Eating more meals made at home and incorporating more fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains and lean protein into your meals can improve overall health. Healthy changes top the list of New Year’s resolutions each year. Certain resolutions can greatly improve overall health.
Factors that may affect your eligibility to donate blood

Blood donations are vital to many people’s survival. Whether someone has lost blood after a car accident or as the result of a chronic disease, without the selfless decision by millions of blood donors to donate blood, people in need may not be able to overcome their injuries and illnesses.

The H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center & Research Institute notes that it conducted 15,699 red blood cell transfusions and 11,621 platelet transfusions in 2019. Cancer patients may need transfusions for a variety of reasons. Some may have lost a significant amount of blood during surgery, while others may experience a low blood count due to their treatments. Cancers in the blood and bone marrow do not allow the body to produce normal blood-making cells, thereby creating the need for transfusions.

Prospective donors recognize the need for blood, which may be even greater as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Though the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention note that it’s safe to donate blood during the pandemic, social distancing guidelines and nervousness about donating adversely affected the blood supply in the United States and other nations in 2020. However, the American Red Cross notes that only a handful of factors may affect prospective donors’ eligibility to donate blood.

Cold, flu and other illnesses
The Red Cross urges prospective donors to wait to donate blood if they:
- have a fever or a productive cough (one that brings up phlegm)
- do not feel well on the day of their scheduled donation
Donors also are urged to wait to donate until they have completed antibiotic treatment for sinus, throat or lung infections.
Additional requirements regarding donors’ height and weight as well as donation intervals can be found at www.redcrossblood.org.

Medications
The Red Cross says that most medications will not disqualify prospective donors from being able to donate. However, the Red Cross also notes that some medications may require a waiting period after patients take their final dose before they are eligible to donate. Donors can contact their local blood donation center as well as their physicians to determine if any medications they’re currently taking or have taken recently will affect their eligibility to donate.

Low iron
Some donors are ineligible to donate because of low iron. Donation center staff conduct screening tests to measure the amount of hemoglobin present in potential donors’ blood. Hemoglobin is a protein in the body that contains iron and carries oxygen to the tissues in the body. If the hemoglobin count is too low, donors will be asked to wait to donate.
The body needs iron to make new red blood cells and can help to replace those lost through blood donations. Thankfully, donors whose hemoglobin levels are low can take steps, such as eating foods that are rich in iron, to improve their hemoglobin levels so they can donate blood in the future.

Travel
Potential donors may be ineligible to donate blood if they lived in or traveled to a malaria-risk country in the past three years.
Travel destinations will be reviewed at the time of donation, so donors should be ready to answer questions about their travels during their donation appointment.
Donating blood saves lives. To ensure the safety of donors and donation recipients, prospective donors may need to wait to donate until they are eligible.
Many adults have known about the value of fruits and vegetables since they were youngsters and their parents repeatedly told them how important it was to eat healthy foods. Despite those early lessons, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that less than 10 percent of adults and adolescents eat enough fruits and vegetables. That’s unfortunate, as fruits and vegetables are loaded with vitamins that benefit the body in myriad ways.

The U.S. National Library of Medicine notes that vitamin deficiency occurs when people do not get enough of certain vitamins. Recognizing the many functions vitamins serve may compel adults and adolescents to include more fruits and vegetables in their diets.

- **Vitamin A:** The USNLM notes that vitamin A helps form and maintain healthy teeth, bones, soft tissue, mucous membranes, and skin. According to the World Health Organization, vitamin A deficiency is the leading cause of preventable blindness in children and increases the risk of disease and death from severe infections.

- **Vitamin B6:** Vitamin B6 helps form red blood cells and maintain brain function. Though the National Institutes of Health notes that isolated vitamin B6 deficiency is uncommon, a deficiency has been associated with various conditions, including a weakened immune system and dermatitis cheilitis, a condition marked by scaling on the lips and cracks at the corners of the mouth.

- **Vitamin C:** Vitamin C is an antioxidant that promotes healthy teeth and gums, helps the body absorb iron and maintains healthy tissue. In addition, vitamin C plays an integral role in helping wounds heal. Vitamin C deficiency impairs bone function, and Merck notes that in children that impairment can cause bone lesions and contribute to poor bone growth.

- **Vitamin D:** The USNLM notes that 10 to 15 minutes of sunshine three times per week is enough to produce the body’s vitamin D requirement for people at most latitudes. It’s hard to rely on food to supply ample vitamin D, which helps the body absorb calcium that is necessary for the development and maintenance of healthy teeth and bones.

- **Vitamin E:** Vitamin E helps the body form red blood cells and utilize vitamin K. Green, leafy vegetables like spinach and broccoli are good sources of vitamin E. The Office of Dietary Supplements notes that a vitamin E deficiency can cause nerve and muscle damage, potentially leading to muscle weakness and vision problems.

- **Vitamin K:** Vitamin K helps to make certain proteins that are needed for blood clotting and the building of bones. The T.H. Chan School of Public Health at Harvard notes that the main type of vitamin K is found in green leafy vegetables like collard greens, kale and spinach. Vitamin K deficiency is rare, but it can lead to bleeding, hemorrhaging or osteoporosis.

Vitamins are crucial to human beings’ overall health. Eating ample amounts of fruits and vegetables is a great and delicious way to avoid vitamin deficiency.

**Maybe it’s time you had LASIK**

Call today to schedule your FREE initial Lasik screening!

406-453-1613 or 1-800-541-2417

Mark F. Ozog M.D. | 1417 9th Street South #100 | Great Falls, MT 59405
Prioritizing our children’s mental health during stressful times

LAUREN LESLIE, SHODAIR CHILDREN’S HOSPITAL

Stressful. Unusual. Unexpected. Historic. Troubled. Pick your synonym for 2020, it all adds up to a year that has pushed most of us out of our comfort zone and into anxiety. And, if you think this only affects adults, think again.

Many of Montana’s children are struggling with fear, anxiety, and stress. The on-going social distancing, an unusual school year, and family concerns have all created a situation where many feel lost and out of control.

At Shodair Children’s Hospital, we understand how important good mental health is and we know there are things we can all do to help the children in our lives avoid getting stuck in a cycle of gloom and despair.

Recreational Therapy and Activities at Shodair are designed to help patients, mostly children, gain experience in areas such as communication and social skills, leisure education, coping skills, and general wellness. “These are skills that everyone needs in order to effectively handle the stress of the uncertain times we are living in,” states Shodair’s Director of Allied Therapy Melissa Nichols. “The same activity can help children develop different skills depending on their ages – middle schoolers making bracelets might be learning how to tolerate frustration, while for high schoolers the same activity is teaching them coping skills and how to identify meaning in an activity.”

Of course, not all learning happens in a classroom and during any time of change and uncertainty, children feel an increased need to know they are safe. We’re all dealing with a lot these days and even many adults are struggling with their emotions, but the children in our lives really need to know that adults are making them a priority and will be there for them no matter what.

Looking for more specifics? You can’t go wrong following this advice:

**Truly listen**
- Don’t think you know what children are going to say before they say it or give a canned response no matter what their question. Give them your full attention.

**Be honest**
- Don’t lie. Of course, you can’t predict the future, but you can answer their questions to the best of your ability while reinforcing the fact that you are there for them.

**Practice kindness**
- Children don’t always understand their feelings well enough to explain them in words. Instead they may become needy, irritable, or overly emotional, but they don’t need discipline as much as they need reassurance.

**Spend time**
- Take some time to just be with your child. Most children find this simple act very calming and soothing.

**Build flexibility**
- Talk about what things are within your control and what things are outside of that control. Start with something silly, like “Can we control the rain? What would we do if it did rain when we wanted to go to the park? Could we still have fun?” Then move into talking about more serious topics and how we can plan for them even if we cannot control them.

**Share coping skills**
- Children learn by watching those around them, so show them how you are coping with difficult feelings. What things do you do to stay calm that they can do too? Everything from taking deep breaths to listening to music to rubbing your hands up and down your arms until the skin feels warm. If it works — share it!

In the end, the most important thing for the children in your life to know is that you love them and are there for them. Sure, they probably already know that, but especially now, they really can’t hear that too much. It’s simple, it’s effective, and it’s something you can do today and every day!

Lauren Leslie is a Primary Therapist at Shodair Children’s Hospital, where she works with children ages 3–11. Her professional interests include play therapy, mindfulness work, and trauma focused care.
One of the most absurd things I ever heard about health and nutrition was when a New York Times writer tried to explain why diet sodas don’t work. She said that after drinking a zero-calorie soda someone might think it was OK to succumb to the temptation of eating a calorie-containing apple they might not otherwise have eaten.

Excuse me? An apple?

Now I realize that an apple has been depicted as the original dietary transgression, but seriously, if you saw a man, no matter how obese, chowing down on an apple, would you think that the apple was leading him to an early grave?

I didn’t think so. In fact I have no doubt that people who eat more apples live longer, healthier lives. We’ve been saying “An apple a day keeps the doctor away,” for over a century now.

With that original dietary transgression we were said to have gained the knowledge of good and evil. So what knowledge can we gain from an apple? Why won’t apples lead us to an early grave?

In short, it’s a matter of calorie density and timing. Apples, like most fresh fruits and vegetables, are high in fiber and moisture; and in their raw state they take some chewing. You have to eat a lot of apples to get a lot of calories. That’s a lot of bulk and a lot of chewing.

In an earlier article I wrote about the idea that humans were able to evolve large brains by removing the need to chew all day. Massive jaw muscles attached to a sagittal ridge along the top of the head just wouldn’t allow a cranium big enough for a deluxe brain like yours and mine. Brains also burn a lot of calories, about 20 percent of them when we’re at rest for an organ that’s only two percent of our weight.

As it turned out, we solved

Lessons from a Forbidden Fruit
that chewing and calorie problem through meat-eating and cooking, but nowadays we've come too far. It's just too easy to get more calories than we need from cooked and refined foods high in fats and sugars, as in sodas and juices, along with all kinds of rich foods, desserts and snacks.

But you'd have to eat six average apples, or two pounds, to equal the calories of a Big Mac. The fiber in apples not only spreads the calories apart in physical space but in time as well, because it slows down the rate sugar is released into your blood. The glycemic index (GI) measures this, ranking raw apples at 36, not far from slow-digesters like lentils at 32. In contrast, rice and breads can be twice as high, up there with potatoes (from 63 for fries to 87 for boiled) and white sugar (65).

The reason this matters to your health is that rapid spikes in blood sugar levels lead to weight gain and contribute to the development of type 2 diabetes.

The moisture in apples, and again, other fruits and vegetables, also serves to dilute the calories to create a less calorie-dense food. Between the fiber and moisture, the sheer bulk, the volume of what you eat, fills your stomach and gives you a genuine feeling of fullness.

There's another time factor that comes into play when you eat, and it's been called “the pistachio principle.” People eat fewer pistachios when they have to shell them to eat them. While that could be because the empty shells remind them how much they've eaten, there's another likely explanation: it takes time for your body to react to the food you've eaten. If you eat quickly the signal to stop comes too late to keep you from overeating.

This is an obvious benefit of eating whole raw foods like apples that take a long time to chew.

There are deeper lessons from apples that touch on the art of living. You can turn any eating into a meditative experience. Like other pleasurable acts, the joy is in the journey, there's no reason to rush, and you can take this time to accept the gift that is aptly called “the present.”

There are deeper lessons from apples that touch on the art of living. You can turn any eating into a meditative experience. Like other pleasurable acts, the joy is in the journey, there's no reason to rush, and you can take this time to accept the gift that is aptly called “the present.”

A gateway to the present is to pay attention to your senses, because they are your conscious connection to the present. The crunch of an apple is now. The sweetness and tartness you taste is now, along with the bouquet of aromas that, with taste, make flavor.

You can take time and feel truly filled by your food, not just in your belly but in your spirit. Sometimes, as the late Rabbi Jonathan Sacks once noted on Krista Tippett’s On Being, we don’t have to pursue happiness. It’s pursuing us, and all we have to do is stop and let it catch up.

So next time you eat an apple, think of that. And don’t worry about it making you fat.
St. Peter’s Health brings the latest in surgical technology to Helena.

St. Peter’s Health now has one of the most sophisticated surgical suites in the state of Montana. Our $9 million renovation includes brand new operating rooms with antibacterial lighting and a robotic assisted surgery program. This is one of the many ways St. Peter’s Health is committed to becoming the gold standard for health care in Montana. Learn more at sphealth.org.