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healthy living



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WHY DONATE BLOOD?

Our health care system relies upon a continuously replenished reserve of blood in order to operate.

It shouldn't be so hard to meet that requirement. After all, almost everyone over the age of 17 is eligible to give blood. Yet doctors and nurses often struggle with huge deficits as too few donate because they misunderstand the need or the process. Others are simply unaware of how important this life-giving donation can be.

Here's a look at why it's no important, and how you can get involved.

HUGE BENEFITS

Like any other charitable donation, there are feelings of community and goodwill associated with giving blood. But there's more to it – much more – as your blood bolsters the sick and injured through health care emergencies and surgery. At the same

time, there may be a health benefit for you, too. Donors are given a quick health check before giving blood, and there may be important health care indicators found in the results. They check pulse and blood pressure, body temperature and hemoglobins. If your numbers are off, that could be an early sign that there are issues of your own to discuss with a doctor. Either way, you'll potentially be saving a life.

HOW IT WORKS

First, you must be in good health. Other basic requirements for donation include age restrictions, which can depend on the state. You'll also have to weigh a certain amount. You may only donate once every 56 days, and up to six times per year. There is no upper age limit, so long as you're well and there are no limitation on

your activities. If you're on antibiotics, they'll evaluate to determine if it's a bacterial infection since that could be transmitted by blood. Diabetics may donate, but there are certain restrictions for other health issues, including some cancers and HIV.

BEFORE YOU GO

The American Red Cross recommends that donors eat a light meal, and drink plenty of fluids before giving blood. Bring a driver's license or other forms of identification, and the names of any medications you are currently on. Wear a short-sleeved shirt or one with sleeves that can be comfortably rolled up. If you're feeling apprehensive, or are worried about your ability to drive after giving, bring a friend along for support. They'll likely have a light snack and water, but bring your own if you'd like.

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PREVENTATIVE CARE

Everyday measures can have a huge impact on your health

Research shows that many chronic issues are preventable if you stay on top of scheduled visits and wellness checks.

Your physician will run regular screenings to track high blood pressure, diabetes, weight gain, vision problems and cancers, among others. Discuss any other concerns you may have based on how you're feeling, and they may suggest other tests.

Here are some of the most common screenings you'll undergo.

WOMEN

Women between 30 and 65 should have Pap and HPV screenings every five years. Pap tests collect cells from the cervix in order to test for cervical cancer. Most of those who receive abnormal cervical results are either experiencing early changes that can be monitored or will be diagnosed with human papillomavirus infections, according to the National Cancer Institute. Routine exams will also discuss how you're feeling in order to gauge the onset of depression.

Women should have yearly mammograms, since clinical breast exams save so many lives. Other tests or the frequency of testing may be impacted by any chronic diseases you may be suffering, or considered at high risk of contracting.

MEN

Regular blood pressure screenings

are recommended, in particular for those with readings that are higher than 120/80, according to the experts. Men 35 and older should be checked for lipid disorders, and those younger if they are at high risk of coronary artery disease. These fats include so-called "bad cholesterol," or low density lipoproteins, as well as fatty acids known as triglycerides. High lipids are associated with diabetes, kidney and liver disease, and hypothyroidism.

Talk to your doctor about prostate cancer screenings, the timing of which can vary depending on health and age factors. You'll either undergo a digital examination or a prostate-specific antigen test. Men between 65 and 75 who have smoked should get tested for abdominal aortic aneurysms, which when ruptured can lead to severe or even deadly internal bleeding.

EVERYONE

Adults should be checked for diabetes every three years, in particular if you have high sustained blood pressure of 135 over 80. Everyone should undergo regular baseline comprehensive vision exams. Colorectal cancer screenings are also recommended as we age. Discuss your risks with a health care provider, who will help you make informed decisions about these and other screenings. Your current medical condition and specific family history will play a role in deciding.



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**Learn how to
energize the body
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Sedentary lifestyles can lead to a variety of worrisome health outcomes, including diabetes, mobility issues and obesity.

Sometimes, your busy work schedule plays a role. We can become so engrossed in what we do at our workstations that we never get up and move around. Some are so busy that they don't even leave for lunch, eating right at their desks.

Break the cycle by getting healthier while you work. Bring a few coworkers along as you make these important lifestyle changes. Like other office projects, it'll be easier if you work together as a team.

KNOW THE RISKS

Desk jobs, jobs where we remain seated, and other positions that require us to remain at a workstation keep us from moving around on a regular basis. Even those who hit the gym a few times a week still find themselves in a static position for hours on end. That can tip the balance, even with a committed exercise routine. Then there are those who are so committed to work that they don't feel they have the time for anything else other than rushing home.

Unfortunately, those who sit for lengthy periods of time are at greater risk for bone, joint and posture

problems. Heart disease, stroke and diabetes are some of the conditions associated with sedentary lifestyles. Lower energy levels can hamper mental alertness, directly impacting your work.

GET MOVING

Beginners may find that developing a solid plan involves weeks or months as you slowly incorporate more and more physical activity into your routine. In some cases, you may have to get very creative in order to incorporate regular movement into your busy schedule. Start by adding "passive" exercise into your work life: Park further away from the building or, if possible, bike or walk to work. Take the stairs, rather than hopping on the elevator. Get up and walk over to a coworkers desk to discuss a project instead of simply emailing.

These small changes can have a big health impact – and you'll be building endurance and strength. Next, incorporate regular exercise time, at home or at the gym. This may need to be immediately before or after work hours — or later in the evening, after other obligations at home have been dealt with. Some people even convert a portion of their lunch break.

FOCUS ON HIGH CHOLESTEROL

Controlling this number can lower risks for heart problems and stroke

Your body naturally makes all the cholesterol that's needed, but other factors can push us over the line.

This waxy substance is found in many animal-based food sources, like red meat, poultry and dairy. When intake of those fat-rich foods gets out of balance, the liver produces more cholesterol — and that can collect in our artery system.

The heart has to work harder to circulate blood. If plaque breaks loose, it may create blockages leading to the brain that cause a stroke, while blockages around the heart can lead to a heart attack.

It's critically important that we keep these numbers in check in order to live healthier, longer lives. Here's a look at the types of cholesterol, and how they impact our health:

DIFFERENT TYPES

Turns out, not all cholesterol is bad. It's just that too much or one kind of cholesterol can put you in jeopardy of a serious heart problem. So can having not enough of the other kind of cholesterol. Low density lipoprotein, or LDL, is typically described as "bad" cholesterol, while high density lipoprotein is "good." Doctors will also keep an eye on triglycerides, another form of fat made in the body. These numbers might be elevated based on being overweight, physical inactivity, diabetes, smoking, alcohol consumption, or eating too many fats or carbs.

RELATED HEALTH RISKS

Dietary choices aren't the only things to keep a close eye on: Smokers and those with high blood pressure and diabetes are also at higher risk of heart disease. Cholesterol levels can also be impacted by age, gender and family history. Any of these factors may lead to deposits of thick, hard plaque that narrow the arteries, in a process known as atherosclerosis.

TREATMENT OPTIONS

Your doctor will take regular measurements of your cholesterol in order to create a baseline, then make recommendations if the results don't align properly. This will be done with a blood test, and that may require a short fast beforehand. After the numbers have been run, you could be encouraged to make different dietary choices, create or increase your activity regimen, or perhaps begin regularly taking prescriptions. These medications would play a critical role in lowering your risk of stroke and heart attack, depending on your specific situation, so follow the doctor's instructions to the letter.



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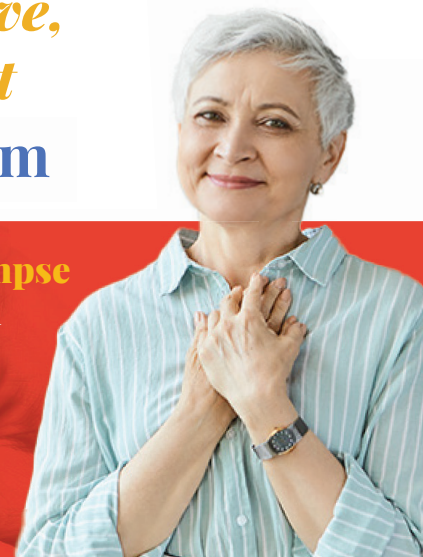
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DEALING WITH PESKY ALLERGIES

It's amazing how much misery can be associated with everyday interactions

Blame exposure to everything from the environment to pets, from medications to food.

But there's a way to avoid certain irritants, and to lessen the impact of the sneezing, scratchy throats and itchy eyes which may follow. If left unchecked, sufferers are at risk for more serious health issues.

Talk to your doctor if you begin to experience a new allergic reaction — or if your symptoms seem to be worsening. In some very serious cases, a visit to a local emergency room may be required to get more immediate care.

DEFINING ALLERGIES

Allergies are actually the result of our immune system's overreaction to foreign substances, according to the Mayo Clinic. Our antibodies identify these substances as harmful, even though they may not be. The most common allergies involve many everyday found things. Airborne allergens include animal dander, pollen, mold and dust mites. Certain foods may also produce a reaction, including wheat, peanuts, seafood, tree nuts, milk and eggs, among others. Many are allergic to insect bites or stings, including bees, ant and wasps. Penicillin and other related antibiotics are allergens for some. Latex is a common skin irritant.

COMMON SYMPTOMS

In most cases, the symptoms of an allergic reaction mimic a cold. The difference is in how quickly these reactions take hold. You may quickly develop a runny nose, itchy eyes, rashes, swelling, sneezing or breathing problems as your immune system cranks up. Check for sensitivities and talk to your doctor about any family history with allergies. Many of these reactions are minor, but in the severest of cases a life-threatening situation known as anaphylaxis may occur. In that case, immediate medical care is needed.

TREATMENT AND PREVENTION

Unfortunately for sufferers, there is no cure for allergies. Still, you can help lessen the occurrences through avoidance, deep cleaning and certain treatments. Allergy meds, including antihistamines and nasal-saline sprays, are typically effective — even at over-the-counter strengths. Check with your doctor, however, before starting any regular regimen of medicine. You may have to avoid time spent with certain pets. For those with a sensitivity to mold, better ventilation and the use of a dehumidifier can reduce moisture. More frequent housecleaning and bedding wash schedules can lessen the impact for those who react poorly to dust or mites.



BAD EATING HABITS TO AVOID



Even small, measurable changes can have make a big difference

Experts confirm what we already know: We're eating badly, and we're eating too much.

The U.S. in general does poorly in these rankings, and some states typically do worse than others, as well. Taken together, the numbers seem to paint a grim portrait.

But we can turn these poor showings around, with one personal choice at a time. They really do start to add up over time.

HEALTHIER CHOICES

The diet of a typical American is often weighted toward unhealthy choices. We get more than the recommended daily limits on calories derived from

added sugars, refined grains and solid fats. These diets also exceed recommended levels of sodium and saturated fat. Often times, the problem is simply the result of dietary choices. We don't eat enough fresh vegetables, fruits and whole grains. As a result, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that the nationwide obesity rate has doubled since 1990.

SMALLER PORTIONS

Average daily intake keeps rising, by hundreds of calories, even as we produce a surplus of available food for consumption. Often times, the extra calories are derived from very familiar places: fast-food restaurants. These franchises have more than doubled since the 1970s. The problem is made worse by an over-reliance on processed and packaged foods, coupled with sugary drinks. They're more often consumed by those from so-called "food deserts," where millions of Americans — including their vulnerable children — live too far away to regularly shop at a supermarket.

FOCUS POINTS

Sodium intake continues to be a huge issue in America, with many adults consuming more than 1,000 milligrams a day above the federal guidelines. Total fat intake has also skyrocketed, doubling since 1980. Blame often goes to soda, dairy and grain desserts, pizza and fried foods, but there aren't always convenient choices to eat healthier. That's led to a focus on correcting food deserts, and in addressing the growing number of families who suffer from food insecurity.

In the meantime, West Virginia (38.1%), Mississippi (37.3%), and Oklahoma (36.5%) had the highest obesity rates, while the least obese places were led by Colorado (22.6%) the District of Columbia (23%) and Hawaii (23.8%), according to the CDC. Even though Coloradans fare best, those numbers are still up 7.6% since 1990.



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