

Physical Wellness

We all know that there are lots of things we must do to maintain our physical wellness. When we were very young, our parents took responsibility for seeing that we got the right foods and sufficient rest, had clean surroundings, and received regular medical examinations and immunizations.

Over time, we learned about health habits, both at home and in school. We learned about our need for rest, nutrition, and exercise, and how to care for minor injuries. As we got older, we needed to take more responsibility for these things. Many of us continue to take new and significant positive steps to develop or restore physical health needs so we can live a longer lifespan and a more satisfying life.

This month, we will review some good habits for physical wellness, like brushing our teeth and flossing regularly, scheduling regular dental appointments, and getting our annual physical exams. We also need other regular checkups, like going to the eye doctor, and can benefit from other health screenings.

Why get a flu shot?

There are many different viruses that cause the flu. Over time, the viruses change. That means that, each year, new vaccines are developed, based on the best predictions about this year's flu risk.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov) recommends getting a flu vaccine early in the fall, before the flu begins to spread. Everyone should get a vaccination. If you have special concerns, contact your doctor for advice about how to proceed.

Afraid of shots? Many people are. For some people, a nasal spray vaccine is an option. If that's not a solution for you, try taking a slow deep breath before and during the vaccination.¹

Flu prevention tips

The most important thing you can do, besides getting the flu vaccine, is to wash your hands often with soap and water. Keeping your hands away from your eyes, nose, and mouth also can help.

Be kind to others by covering your nose and mouth with a tissue if you cough or sneeze. And stay home if you're sick! That will help you get better and help prevent the spread of germs.

Health Screenings

People of all ages should stay on top of their overall physical health. You should plan to schedule an annual physical and/or make an appointment with your doctor (or dentist) if you are experiencing any troubling physical health problems (including dental pain or discomfort).

While you're there, check to see if you're up to date on your vaccines and screenings. Check out the check-up checklist on page 4 in this issue! It's important to make it a regular routine to stay well by focusing on your physical wellness.

Who needs a flu vaccine?

NO!

Even healthy people can get the flu, and it can be serious. Everyone 6 months and older should get a flu vaccine. **This means you.** This season, protect yourself—and those around you—by getting a flu vaccine.

For more information, visit: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu>

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Health Fairs

A health fair is one way to help people maintain and/or regain a focus on health, and to collect up personally relevant information on a variety of health-related topics. Usually, a community health fair includes some combination of information sharing and health screenings. Many people appreciate having a one-stop location to build our awareness of physical wellness, find out something new about our own health, and discovering potential risk areas. Health fairs also offer support and resources for managing specific health conditions.

Health fairs can take place on schools, workplaces, healthcare facilities, general community settings, and other places. Some behavioral health agencies offer annual health fairs for staff and/or people served by the agency. Many health fairs operate as a drop-in, but some require pre-registration, so they can plan to order supplies, manage capacity, and/or advise people about preparing ahead of time for certain tests.

One common component of health fairs is free or low-cost screening examinations. Open health screenings almost always give people a chance to have their blood pressure measured and to have a small sample of blood tested for blood sugar, cholesterol levels, and/or AIDS.



Smokers may have the opportunity to blow into a spirometer, which collects information about lung function and volume.

Some screenings are conducted by specifically qualified professionals, so a chiropractor might be checking posture, a mental health clinician might administer brief interview screenings for depression and substance use disorders, or a pharmacist might be helping people assess their risks of drug-drug interactions.

There might even be a van outside where women can get mammograms, or where dentists or eye doctors are doing exams. Some health fairs include direct preventive health services, such as a flu shot clinic.

Sometimes, groups solicit community help at a health fair. For example, a health-related charity could be seeking walkers for a fundraiser or the Red Cross could be conducting a blood drive.

There are lots of reasons to conduct a health fair. If this is something you wish to consider doing, we recommend: forming a committee or workgroup, and then starting to answer some basic and inter-related questions.

The Collaborative Support Programs of New Jersey Wellness Institute and the UIC Center on Psychiatric Disability and Co-Occurring Medical Conditions ⁱⁱ developed a new integrated health tool called, *Promoting Wellness for People in Mental Health Recovery: A Step-by-Step Guide to Planning and Conducting a Successful Health Fair*.



You can download the manual and health fair planning forms from the Solutions Suite website: <https://www.center4healthandsdc.org/health-fair-manual.html>

The manual is a step-by-step guide to designing a health fair. Health fairs help people in mental health recovery better manage medical conditions that can be improved with screening, education, and support. Fairs also help people learn about their health and support them in making choices that lead to a satisfying lifestyle.

Following the study that developed the health fair manual, an article was publishedⁱⁱⁱ that highlights the unique perspectives of participants about how health fairs motivated them to take steps towards a healthier lifestyle. For example, some reported learning new information, such as the man who was surprised that smoking had heart health risks in addition to causing problems with breathing. Another participant learned that she is at risk of heart disease when her diabetes is poorly controlled and her blood sugar gets too high.

Changing Our Health Habits

Change is hard for everyone, and changing your diet brings special challenges. Food is important as fuel, but also provides emotional comfort and often has significance within a culture or family.

Small changes can make big differences, and this article will give you ideas of some little switches you can make that could have a big effect. You can introduce two or three of these ideas into your meal planning every week.

Try something new

The first change to recommend is one that you probably know already—eat more fresh fruits and vegetables. The current recommendation for good health is to eat a total of at least 2 ½ cups of fruit and/or vegetables each day or, as an easier way to remember, eat five servings.^{iv}

If you don't eat that many now, trying just adding in a serving of vegetables, like small salad, or a piece of fruit, like an apple. You also can sneak more into your diet by adding carrots to spaghetti sauce (really—try it!) or adding some fruit to your breakfast cereal.

Other changes include replacing what you are used to with something new.^v Here are some examples:

- Do you eat iceberg lettuce? Try kale instead—either adding a little bit to a salad or eating the kale by itself. Kale offers many benefits, as it is rich in vitamins A, C, and K (vitamin K has anti-cancer health benefits). Kale also promotes eye health.
- Do you eat white rice? Try quinoa (pronounce KEEN-wah). It's rich in protein and magnesium and has twice as much fiber as *other* grains.
- Do you eat instant oatmeal? Try adding ground flaxseed, which contains “good” fats (Omega # fatty acids) that have heart health benefits.
- Do you drink sugary drinks? If you've tried switching to water, but find it boring, try adding fresh fruit. A slice or two of lime, lemon, or orange in your water bottle can pep up your drink. Or try Cucumbers and mint leaves or sliced strawberries.

- Do you eat flavored yogurt? That's great—you are building your bones and helping create a healthy gut. Try eating plain yogurt with fresh berries. If you want, add a little sweetener, but cut down over time as your tastes adjust to less sweetness.

Take Care of Your Smile

Halloween is a time for candy and desserts, but don't forget to take care of your smile. Focus on keeping your teeth and tongue clean.

Candy and sugar can rot your teeth to the core. It's a good idea to completely avoid candies like taffy and anything that is particularly sticky. While they may taste good, they're very difficult to get out of your teeth. Make sure you brush and floss if you do eat some of these sweets and make an appointment to have your teeth cleaned soon after.

Most dentists recommend brushing and flossing your teeth twice a day, as well as flossing and rinsing with mouthwash. You might want to add another habit to your oral hygiene routine, tongue scraping.

Your tongue is covered with tiny hills and valleys where bacteria can hide.^{vi} One way to clean out those germs is to brush your tongue with your toothbrush, or use a tongue scraper, which you can get at drugstores. Many people like them, although the American Dental Association^{vii} says there is no research evidence that tongue scrapers prevent bad breath. Even so, why not give it a try and find out for yourself?



Check out this article from the American Dental Association for fun Halloween activities that won't rot your teeth:
<https://www.mouthhealthykids.org/en/activity-sheets/halloween>

The Check Up Checklist^{viii}

| Annual Exams and Screenings for Everyone | |
|-------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Physical exam | The physical exam typically includes a blood pressure check; listening to the heart and lungs; checking the skin, eyes, and ears; and asking about depression, tobacco and nicotine use, alcohol and drug use, and safety (seat belt use, helmet use, violence at home) |
| Cardiovascular health screening | In addition to checking your blood pressure and listening to your heart, this often includes asking about your family history and health habits and may include a blood test for cholesterol and triglycerides. |
| Body Mass Index (BMI) | Your BMI is calculated from your weight and height. A chart or an online calculator assigns a category (underweight, normal, overweight, obese). These numbers may need to be adjusted for people of African or Asian descent. ^{ix} |
| Dental exam | In addition to an annual dental exam, professional dental cleaning is recommended twice each year. |
| Other Regular Screenings | |
| Cervical cancer screening (women) | Women should have a gynecological exam with a PAP smear every 3-5 years along with a test for HPV and, if at risk, checked for sexually transmitted diseases |
| Mammograms (women) | Unless there is a family history of breast cancer, women should get mammograms every other year |
| Prostate cancer screenings (men) | Check with your healthcare provider to see if this is necessary |
| Colonoscopy | After getting a colonoscopy at age 50, you will receive a recommendation for future screenings, often once every 5-10 years |
| Other cancer screenings | If you are fair skinned, regular skin cancer screenings are needed. If you smoke, you should be screened regularly for lung cancer. |
| Diabetes (blood sugar) | If you are overweight or have a family history of diabetes, this test is recommended after age 40. If you already have diabetes, you should be checking your blood sugar frequently. |
| Vaccinations | |
| Flu vaccine | A flu vaccine is needed every year—mark your October calendar! |
| Pneumococcal vaccines | This is recommended for adults over age 65 or adults who have certain health conditions (check with your healthcare provider) |
| Shingles vaccine | This is recommended for adults over age 50 |
| Other vaccines | Check with your health care provider to see if you are up to date on tetanus and diphtheria (Tdap) boosters (needed every 5 years) and other vaccinations. Young adults may need the HPV vaccine. You may need additional vaccinations if you travel to other countries. |

Note: The recommended frequency of some screenings depends on your age, so check with your healthcare provider.

Health Literacy

In addition to all the other fall events that occur in October, this month has been declared “**Health Literacy Month.**”^x

Health literacy means the **ability to find, understand, evaluate, and use health information.**

Finding health information can be a challenge. Often, people turn to the internet. Unfortunately, there is a lot of questionable information. We usually go first to trusted sources like these:

- The National Library of Medicine Medline Plus
<https://medlineplus.gov/>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
<https://www.cdc.gov/>

Both of these sites have alphabetical listings of diseases and conditions, so you can get a general overview.

Once you find information, it may be difficult to understand. It may be written for an audience with an advanced education and may include terms that aren't familiar to you. Both Medline Plus and the CDC have made an effort to use plain language, *but their material still may be confusing.* You may benefit from asking someone to go through the information with you, such as a healthcare provider or other support person.

Be skeptical of sites sponsored by someone selling a book, a membership, medication, or vitamins, as well as sites that are just discussions among untrained and anonymous people.

Getting advice from your healthcare provider is a good place to start. Explain what you found and where you found it, then ask if it makes sense for you to follow the recommendations, if there are any.



Communicating Health Information

For our readers who provide health education and share health information with others, here are some things^{xi} to keep in mind:

- Low health literacy is strongly associated with health risk factors and poor health outcomes.
- People whose native language is not English may benefit from health information in their preferred language. Many resources from health-related government websites include printed versions in multiple languages.
- Sometimes we can understand what we hear or read, but have emotional reactions to health news that gets in the way of making sense about it.
- Some health issues are embarrassing, so we may not ask questions.

Useful resources on health literacy

Medline Plus has a 16-minute tutorial on evaluating health information on the internet:

<https://medlineplus.gov/webeval/webeval.html>

The Medical Library Association has a section on their website labelled “for patients” that describes how to find good health information. They also list the top 10 most useful websites for health information.

<https://www.mlanet.org/p/cm/ld/fid=398>

Engage With Your Providers

It is important to stay on top of your health, but it is equally important to establish a good relationship with your healthcare providers. You should feel comfortable enough to ask questions and, if you have a doubt about something, feel comfortable to express it. Research findings^{xii} show that people who are more engaged with their health care are likely to have a safer and better quality experience. Four strategies that can help you and family to be engaged with your healthcare provider.

The first strategy is **Teach-Back**. After you get information or instructions, try “teaching it back” by explaining it in your own words. This help you be sure that your healthcare provider has adequately explained medical information to you and that you know what you need to do. That is a very important part of having a relationship with your doctor.

The second strategy is **Be Prepared To Be Engaged**. Try writing out any questions or concerns before an appointment. This can help you stay on top of your medical visits. During your appointment, ask questions and take notes. You can ask your healthcare provider to print a summary of your visit, including any instructions for things you need to do. Just like you used to prepare

References

Thanks to William Latin for his contributions to this issue. Illustrations are from openclipart.org. The photograph of taking blood pressure is from <https://pixnio.com> and the CDC announcement on page 1 is from cdc.gov

ⁱ Boerner, K. E. et al. (2015). Simple psychological interventions for reducing pain from common needle procedures in adults: Systematic review of randomized and quasi-randomized controlled trials. *The Clinical Journal of Pain*, 31(Suppl 10), S990-S998. Available online at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4900414/>

ⁱⁱ The UIC Center on Psychiatric Disability and Co-Occurring Medical Conditions and the development of the health fair manual are funded by two federal agencies, the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research, and the Center for Mental Health Services Research at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. The content of the manual does not necessarily reflect the policy or position of any Federal agency.

ⁱⁱⁱ Swarbrick, M. A., Cook, J., et al. (2013). Health screening dialogues. *Journal of Psychosocial Nursing and Mental Health Services*, 51(12), 22-28. The article is not available for free, but can be accessed through the publisher’s website: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24102839/>

^{iv} <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/vegetables-full-story/>

^v For more info visit www.webmd.com or www.mindbodygreen.com

^{vi} As reported in “Why You Should Be Brushing Your Tongue” by Anna Schaefer at www.healthline.com/health/dental-oral-health/brushing-your-tongue

^{vii} Check out “Tongue Scrapes and Cleaners in the “A-Z topics” section of the American Dental Association site www.mouthhealthy.org

^{viii} Based on the health screening recommendations of the US Preventive Services Task Force and the chart posted on the website of the American Academy of Family Physicians (<https://www.aafp.org/aafp/2016/0501/p738.html>)

^{ix} Katzmarzyk, P. T., Bray, G. A., Greenway, F. L., Johnson, W. D., Newton, R. L., Jr., Ravussin, E., Ryan, D. H., & Bouchard, C. (2011). Ethnic-specific BMI and waist circumference thresholds. *Obesity (Silver Spring)*, 19(6), 1272-1278. This full-text article is available at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3933952/>

^x See healthliteracymonth.org

^{xi} Adapted from Swarbrick, M. (2018). *Wellness Coaching Manual*. Freehold, NJ: Collaborative Support Programs of New Jersey, Inc.

^{xii} See the article, “Patient and Family Engagement in Primary Care” at www.ahrq.gov/professionals/quality-patient-safety/patient-family-engagement/pfepriarycare/interventions/index.html

your homework for school, you should be prepared at your appointment with notes and questions. You have stay on top of your health!

The third strategy is **Medication Management**. Basically, this strategy involves going over your complete list of medications with your healthcare provider. Take a list of your medications to your appointment, or just bring all your pill bottles with you. Discuss what medications you are on and ask any questions you have about them. If you use the same pharmacy for all your prescriptions, that’s another way of being sure that your medications work well together and don’t have risky interactions.

The final strategy is **Warm Handoff**. Before you leave your medical appointment, use this time to clarify anything you don’t understand and discuss it with your healthcare provider if you have concerns. Later, talking over any questions or concerns with friends, family, or other supporters will help you put together your list for your next appointment.

These are all great strategies for staying engaged and active in your own care. By staying engaged, you could find that your overall experience may improve, you may feel more comfortable, and you will experience better health overall as a result.

