

Employee Newsletter & Resources

October is Health Literacy Month

Health literacy is the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process and understand basic health information needed to make appropriate decisions. Your health care provider may provide medical language you're unfamiliar with or don't understand. This is why it's essential to know how health-literate you are.

October is Health Literacy Month, as health literacy can help people obtain appropriate medical and behavioral health. Those with low health literacy may not receive equal care because they do not have the same level of understanding as their provider. Ways to improve health literacy include asking questions, researching your medical conditions and having further conversations with your provider.




What to Know About This Year's Flu Season

Influenza (flu) season lasts from October through May in the United States, with peak flu activity between December and March. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the timing and duration of flu activity have been unpredictable. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported early increases in seasonal flu last year. The Southern Hemisphere also experienced an early surge of flu activity this year, which may indicate what's to come in the United States.

Furthermore, health experts anticipate another wave of respiratory viral infections this fall, namely from the flu, the virus that causes COVID-19, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). Fortunately, vaccines for all three viruses will be available for the first time in the fall. Vaccinations have been shown to reduce hospitalizations and death and may be particularly beneficial for those with compromised health.

People vaccinated against the flu last season were about 40% to 70% less likely to be hospitalized because of flu illness or related complications, according to the CDC.



Tips for Staying Healthy

The flu can cause serious complications for people of any age, but children and older adults are especially vulnerable. To help keep your household healthy this flu season, consider the following suggestions:

- Get vaccinated. Being vaccinated against the flu is your best chance of preventing the illness. The CDC recommends that anyone 6 months and older get a flu shot every year. The flu and COVID-19 vaccines can be given at the same visit.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick, and stay away from others when you feel unwell. Because flu and COVID-19 symptoms are similar, doctors say it's best to get tested to know what you have.
- Wash your hands often using soap and warm water to protect against germs. If soap and water are unavailable, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes to prevent the spread of germs.
- Sleep well, stay active and drink plenty of water to keep your immune system strong.
- Eat a nutritious diet of healthy grains, fruits, vegetables and fiber.

September and October are the best months to get vaccinated against the flu, so don't delay getting your shot. Contact your doctor today to learn more about

Where Are the Germiest Places?

Germs are a part of life—and they're everywhere. The dry air associated with fall and winter also makes it easier for germs to spread and linger in the air. Here are some germ hot spots:

Home—Remote controls, kitchen counters, bathroom fixtures and handles, sponges and toothbrush holders
Workplace—Desks, keyboard, mouse, chair armrests, writing tools, handles, switches and doorknobs
School—Water fountains, doorknobs, desks and tables, shared school supplies, cafeterias and playgrounds

Hand-washing is one of the best ways to prevent the spread of germs, especially after sneezing, coughing or blowing your nose.

Sanitizing vs. Disinfecting

It's important to first clean surfaces to remove dirt, which can lower the effectiveness of sanitizing or disinfecting.



Sanitizing with weaker bleach or sanitizing products reduces bacteria to safe levels.



Disinfecting with stronger bleach solutions or chemicals kills most bacteria and viruses on surfaces and objects.

Stocking a Nutritious Kitchen

You don't need to master the art of meal planning to eat well during the week. It can be as simple as stocking your kitchen with mealtime building blocks. Consider keeping these nutritious pantry, fridge and freezer staples on hand to make healthy eating easy:






- **Canned chickpeas** can easily be added to soups or mashed with seasonings for extra protein and fiber.
- **Chicken breast** is a great protein to build a meal around. You could make pasta, soups, casseroles, sandwiches and more.
- **Extra-firm tofu** is full of plant-based protein and calcium. Its neutral flavor makes it great for stir-fries and curries.
- **Quinoa or lentils** are versatile options to round off meals. They are packed with fiber and protein.
- **Whole-wheat spaghetti** is a great last-minute meal idea. It has a sizable dose of fiber and helps reduce cholesterol.
- **Frozen spinach** can easily go in egg dishes, pasta or smoothies. It is packed with four times the nutrients of fresh spinach.

With these healthy basics on hand, you can toss together nutritious meals that require minimal effort.

Take Charge of Your Health

Keep Your Eyes Healthy

Chronic stress can cause insomnia, depression, a weak immune system, headaches and other mental and physical health issues. One way to manage your stress is by practicing mindfulness. Mindfulness is a state of intentional focus on the present moment. It can boost mood, reduce stress, improve focus, help with weight management and reduce pain. Consider the following tips for practicing mindfulness:

- 
Schedule frequent eye exams.
 Regular eye exams can help you detect diseases in their early stages when they're easier to treat. Visit your eye care professional routinely for dilated eye exams.
- 
Stay active.
 Being active can help you control your blood sugar levels and maintain a healthy weight, reducing your risk of developing eye disease.
- 
Rest your eyes.
 Too much screen time can strain your eyes. If you work on a computer all day, give your eyes a break every 20 minutes by looking at something at least 20 feet away for several seconds at a time.
- 
Consume healthy foods.
 Certain foods, such as dark leafy greens and foods high in Omega-3 fatty acids, contain nutrients that contribute to eye health. Eat these foods whenever possible.
- 
Wear sunglasses.
 Sunglasses can protect your eyes from damaging rays. Look for sunglasses that block 99 to 100 percent of UVA and UVB radiation.

MENTAL HEALTH MINUTE

October 2023



How Can Grounding Techniques Help Manage Feelings?

Grounding is a practice that can help you manage experiences such as flashbacks, unwanted memories or negative emotions. These techniques involve focusing on the present to distract yourself from anxiety and other challenging emotions

Physical Grounding Techniques
 Physically grounding yourself using your senses to help you navigate feelings of distress. A technique to physically ground yourself is to put your hands in water and focus on the temperature of the liquid or switch from cold water to warm water and back while focusing on the present moment.

Other physical grounding exercises include deep breathing, savoring food or drink, picking up nearby objects and moving your body (e.g., walking, running in place or doing jumping jacks).

Mental Grounding Techniques
 You can mentally ground yourself with exercises that prevent mental distractions and help redirect your thoughts to the present.

Such exercises include memory games, category-thinking (e.g., listing all the types of cake you can think of), reciting a song or book passage you know by heart, and visualizing a daily task you enjoy.

Soothing Grounding Techniques
 Soothing techniques can be used to comfort yourself in times of high anxiety or distress. These techniques are intended to promote good feelings that reduce or distract from negative emotions.

You can practice soothing techniques by picturing the face of someone you love, repeating compassionate phrases about yourself, spending time with your pet, visualizing your favorite place or listing positive things.

Conclusion
 Your gut health significantly impacts the health of your brain and body. By eating foods that promote gut health, you may experience improved focus,

Try These Mood-Boosting Activities

Negative emotions and disappointments can easily derail your activities. Although it's common to be in a bad mood occasionally, letting negative emotions take over your day can leave you feeling worse. Instead of ignoring a bad mood, try a mood-boosting activity.

Free Mood-Boosters
 Walking outdoors is a great activity for improving your mood. Spending time outdoors and being in sunlight have both been proven to boost mood. Additionally, walking can release endorphins, which ease stress and discomfort.

Find ways to laugh, such as watching funny videos, sharing jokes with a friend, going online or watching comedians.

Try aromatherapy to de-stress. Scents can trigger positive memories and help relieve anxiety or stress. Find your favorite scented soap, smell something that reminds you of a loved one or sample a new essential oil.

Play cheerful and upbeat music. This can help boost your mood, ease tension, reduce anxiety and even improve certain brain functions, such as memory.

Do something nice for somebody else, such as a co-worker or friend. Being compassionate to others can make them feel better and may improve your mood as well. Consider small favors, such as doing chores for your housemate or partner, walking a neighbor's dog or helping a stranger with their groceries.

Talk to people in your life who uplift you. A short call or time spent with a loved one can help you reduce tension. As a bonus, your loved one may be able to make you laugh, take your mind off your troubles or remind you that you're not alone.

Conclusion
 The next time you're in a bad mood, try one of these free mood-boosting activities to reduce stress and lessen the impact of negative emotions.

Spicy Baked Squash

October 2023 Recipe

Makes: 4 servings



Ingredients

- Vegetable cooking spray
- 1 acorn squash
- 1 dash of salt
- 2 Tbsp. margarine
- 3 Tbsp. brown sugar
- 1 tsp. cinnamon
- ¼ tsp. nutmeg
- ¼ tsp. ginger

Nutritional information for 1 serving

Calories	122
Total fat	6 g
Saturated fat	1 g
Cholesterol	0 mg
Sodium	91 mg
Carbohydrate	19 g
Dietary fiber	2 g
Total sugars	7 g
Added sugars included	6 g
Protein	1 g

Directions

1. Preheat the oven to 400 F.
2. Coat the baking sheet with vegetable cooking spray.
3. Wash the squash. Cut it in half lengthwise. Remove the seeds. Cut the squash into ½-inch slices.
4. Place the squash on the baking sheet. Sprinkle with salt.
5. Melt the margarine on low heat in a small saucepan.
6. Add the brown sugar, cinnamon, nutmeg and ginger to the saucepan.
7. Spread the margarine mix on the squash.
8. Bake for 20 to 25 minutes or until tender.

Source: MyPlate
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