

Employee Newsletter & Resources

April Is National Autism Awareness Month

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD)—or autism—is a broad term used to describe a group of neurodevelopmental conditions typically characterized by differences in communication and social interaction.

April is National Autism Awareness Month, as ASD is the fastest-growing developmental disorder in the United States. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1 in 44 children has this condition. Autism is usually diagnosed in early childhood, and it's a lifelong condition. Yet early intervention can optimize children's ability to learn, engage with others and develop independence.



Managing Seasonal Allergies

According to the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (AAFA), allergies are the nation's sixth-leading cause of chronic illness. Seasonal allergies are an annual nuisance for many people and typically ramp up this time of year. It's no surprise that as plants bloom and neighbors cut their grass more frequently, people living with allergies across the nation start sniffing and sneezing. Further, as mold growth occurs both indoors and outdoors, it's almost impossible to escape these seasonal allergy triggers.

The AAFA reports that more than 50 million Americans experience allergies every year.

Some allergy symptoms may consist of sneezing a couple of times a year. Alternatively, seasonal allergies can cause congestion, a runny or itchy nose, watery eyes and headaches—among other symptoms—for weeks or months.

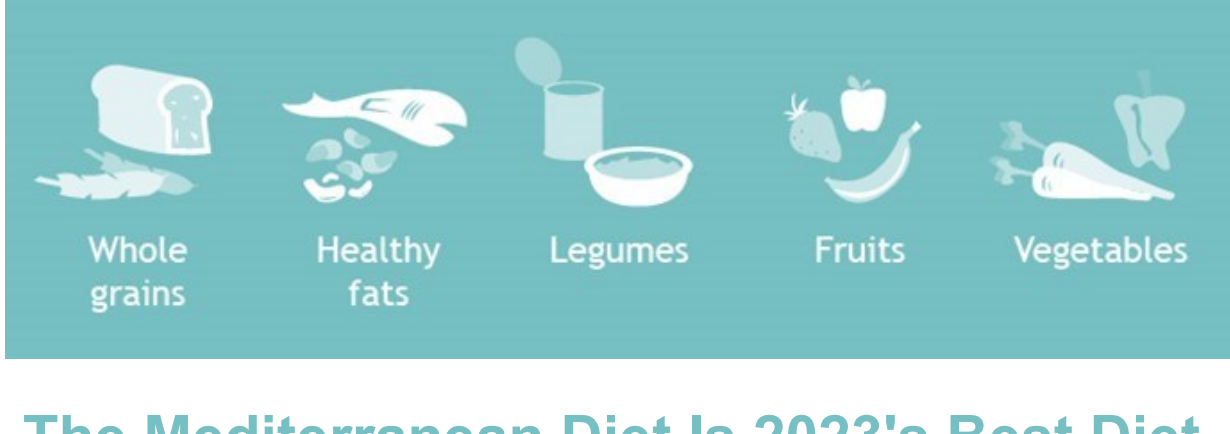
Nip Your Allergies in the Bud

Similar to other types of allergies, seasonal allergies develop when your body's immune system detects and then overreacts to a foreign substance it deems harmful. Spring, summer and fall are the most common times for seasonal allergy symptoms to arise. What may trigger your seasonal allergies depends on what you're allergic to and where you live.

To reduce your seasonal allergy symptoms, consider the following tips:

- Keep track of local allergen (e.g., pollen and mold) counts to help you know when to avoid spending excessive time outside.
- Wash your bedding in hot water to help keep the spread of pollen under control in your home.
- Utilize washable indoor rugs to easily remove allergens.
- Take a shower after spending time outdoors, as pollen can stick to your hair, skin and clothing.
- Clean your floors often with a vacuum that has a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter.
- Change your air conditioning and heating HEPA filters often.

Treatment for most seasonal allergies is available both over the counter and by prescription. You may need a series of allergy shots if your symptoms are severe or chronic. Contact your doctor or allergist to determine which seasonal allergy treatment option is best for you.



The Mediterranean Diet Is 2023's Best Diet

U.S. News & World Report released its annual diet ranking, and the Mediterranean diet topped the list for the sixth consecutive year. This meal plan was named best overall for 2023 as the publication's health experts also voted it the best diet for healthy eating, the best plant-based diet, the best family-friendly diet and the best diet for bone and joint health.

The Mediterranean diet is a meal plan that emulates how people in the Mediterranean region have traditionally eaten, focusing on consuming whole grains and heart-healthy fats. This diet may help support brain function, promote heart health and regulate blood sugar levels. Research further suggests that this well-balanced eating pattern can help prevent some chronic diseases and increase longevity.

A nonrestrictive, healthy meal plan such as the Mediterranean diet may be easier to follow and stay committed to. If you have any questions about your diet, talk to your doctor.

Reduce Your Risk of Hospitalization With 20 Minutes of Daily Exercise

A new study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) Network Open found that physical activity not only decreases people's risk of developing health problems, but may also help prevent them from being hospitalized. Researchers found that the magic number was just 20 minutes of daily exercise.

It's well known that exercise is linked to a lower risk of cancer, diabetes and heart disease. Still, the JAMA study explored the association for conditions not typically linked with exercise. The conditions significantly impacted by exercise were urinary tract infections, gallbladder disease and pneumonia.

Talk to your doctor if you have any questions or concerns about incorporating exercise into your daily routine.

Take Charge of Your Health

Fight Spring Allergies

Millions of Americans suffer from seasonal allergies every year. Springtime can cause seasonal allergies for many due to blossoming flowers, trees, weeds and grasses. Common symptoms of spring allergies include itchy or watery eyes, nasal congestion, post-nasal drip and sneezing. While seasonal allergies are unavoidable in most cases, there are ways to manage them.

Consider the following tips to help combat your spring allergies this year:



- Change your air filters.**
You should frequently check and change your air filters, especially during peak allergy season, to help keep allergens out of your home.
- Stay indoors, if possible, on high pollen count days.**
Check your local news for the forecast on current pollen levels. If pollen counts are high, limit outdoor activities, if possible.
- Clean frequently.**
Allergens can easily find their way into your home. Make sure to remove clothing worn outdoors, vacuum daily and clean your bedding frequently to keep allergens at bay.
- Try over-the-counter medications.**
There are several types of nonprescription medications to take for seasonal allergies, such as oral antihistamines and nasal sprays. Consult your doctor if you're unsure which medication would be best for you.
- Visit your doctor.**
Spring allergies affect everyone differently. If you're having a hard time managing your symptoms, be sure to reach out to your doctor for additional guidance.

This infographic is intended for informational purposes only and is not intended to be exhaustive, nor should any discussion or opinions be construed as professional advice. Readers should contact a health professional for appropriate advice.



April 2023

Managing Unhealthy Coping Mechanisms

When times get tough, instinct often pushes people toward coping mechanisms. These mechanisms can help people feel like they're escaping reality by relieving stress or distracting their minds. While this is a standard response, it can become problematic when one turns to harmful, unhealthy coping mechanisms. Common unhealthy coping mechanisms include oversleeping, excessive substance use, over- or under-eating and impulsive retail spending.

It's expected to have feelings of wanting to escape from reality due to stress or anxiety. Healthy coping mechanisms can help you positively address such feelings and develop long-lasting habits. Consider these healthier coping alternatives:

- **Create task lists.** Unhealthy coping mechanisms can prevent you from reaching your short- and long-term goals. Making a task list of personal goals can help you achieve what you want and elevate your mood by physically seeing your accomplishments when they're checked off the list.
- **Talk about stress.** Find someone willing to listen to you, such as a close friend, family member or mental health professional. Putting your feelings into words can help alleviate stress and anxiety.
- **Address negative feelings.** Negativity is a normal part of life. To avoid it is called avoidance behavior, which can result in reaching for unhealthy coping mechanisms.
- **Learn your triggers.** Knowing what situations you negatively respond to can help you keep track of your triggers and be aware of how you react.
- **Pick up a new hobby.** Activities such as painting or running can be therapeutic for many. Designate a regular time and space to practice your new hobby.

Having negative or overwhelming emotions is natural, but it's important to lean on healthy coping mechanisms to help deal with stress and anxiety. Talk to your doctor or a mental health professional if you are experiencing ongoing emotional struggles.

U.S. Faces Shortage of Mental Health Professionals

The COVID-19 pandemic worsened underlying mental health issues for many Americans. However, mental health care and treatment barriers have existed for some time. One of the most significant barriers is the lack of mental health professionals. Experts predict that within the next year, the United States will be short between 14,280 and 31,109 mental health professionals.

The latest Health Resources and Services Administration data estimates that 122 million Americans (37% of the population) live in areas with a mental health professional shortage. It would take an additional 6,398 mental health providers to fill those gaps. Mental health shortages range in severity across the nation but are most commonly found in rural areas.

Although many Americans are currently dealing with strained health care resources, there are still some ways to receive mental health support. Telehealth is a great place to start receiving virtual mental health care, especially if you live in a rural area. Additional support resources include:

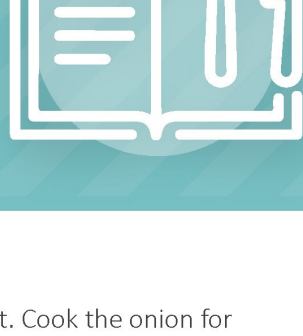
- Primary care doctors who can suggest further mental health resources
- Work-based wellness and employee assistance programs
- The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) National Helpline, which is free, confidential and available 24/7 by calling 800-662-HELP (800-662-4357)
- SAMHSA's 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, a three-digit dialing code offering free, confidential and 24/7 call, text and chat options with trained crisis counselors

Remember to check in with yourself and reach out for help if needed.

Spring Vegetable Sauté

April 2023 Recipe

Makes: 4 servings



Ingredients

- 1 tsp. olive oil
- ½ cup sweet onion (sliced)
- 1 garlic clove (finely chopped)
- 3 small new potatoes (quartered)
- ¾ cup carrot (sliced)
- ¾ cup asparagus pieces
- ¾ cup sugar snap peas or green beans
- ½ cup radishes (quartered)
- ¼ tsp. salt
- ¼ tsp. black pepper
- ½ tsp. dried dill

Nutritional information for 1 serving	
Calories	138
Total fat	1 g
Saturated fat	0 g
Cholesterol	0 mg
Sodium	177 mg
Carbohydrate	29 g
Dietary fiber	5 g
Total sugars	4 g
Added sugars included	0 g
Protein	4 g

Directions

1. Heat the oil in a skillet. Cook the onion for two minutes. Add the garlic and cook another minute.
2. Stir in the potatoes and carrots. Cover and turn the heat to low. Cook until almost tender, about 4 minutes.
3. Add the vegetables start to brown, add 1-2 Tbsp. of water.
4. Add the asparagus, peas, radishes, salt, black pepper and dill. Cook, stirring often, until just tender for about 4 minutes more.
5. Serve immediately.