

A background image showing water splashing, with droplets and streams of water in various directions, creating a dynamic and refreshing visual.

APRIL 2024

Is Autism Acceptance Month

Autism is a broad term used to describe a group of lifelong neurodevelopmental conditions that can impact a person's social skills, communication, relationships and self-regulation. It's the fastest-growing developmental disability in the country, with 1 in 36 children receiving a diagnosis. With 5.8 million adults also diagnosed with autism, autism impacts a vast majority of people at home, school, work and in the community.

April is Autism Acceptance Month. Beyond autism awareness, this month aims to highlight the diversity of autistic experiences and needs and serve as a reminder that acceptance can happen daily. One way to accept and include students and employees with autism is to celebrate their differences and focus on their strengths—instead of challenges.

Contact us for more information about autism and how to support the community across the spectrum.

Live Well Newsletter



April 2024

The Health Benefits of Walking



Walking is often overlooked as a form of exercise; however, it offers several health benefits for the body and mind. This simple yet powerful activity is accessible to people of all ages and fitness levels, requiring no special equipment, memberships or training. By boosting physical fitness and enhancing mental well-being, incorporating regular walks into your routine can improve overall health.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends moderate-intensity aerobic exercise— such as brisk walking—for 150 to 300 minutes a week.

Physical Health Benefits of Walking

Walking is a natural, low-impact form of exercise that can yield notable improvements in physical fitness. Simply putting one foot in front of the other can unlock a myriad of benefits for your body, including:

- Increased cardiovascular health (e.g., lower blood pressure and cholesterol levels)
- Improved respiratory health
- Strengthened muscles and joints
- Boosted immune function
- Weight management support
- Reduced risk of developing conditions such as heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, osteoporosis and some cancers

Mental Health Benefits of Walking

Beyond its physical benefits, walking also holds immense potential for nurturing one's mental well-being and emotional balance. Consider these benefits:

- Reduced stress and anxiety
- Improved mood and emotional well-being
- Enhanced cognitive function and reduced risk of cognitive decline and dementia
- Better sleep patterns and quality

Get Walking Today

Whether it's a leisurely stroll through nature or a brisk walk around the block, incorporating regular walks into your routine can improve both body and mind. Walking for 30 minutes at least five days a week is a great way to improve or maintain your overall health and well-being.

While brisk walking is safe for most people, it's still important to talk to your doctor before you start an exercise program.

Nip Seasonal Allergies in the Bud

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that one-quarter (25.7%) of adults suffer from seasonal allergies. Springtime allergies are an annual nuisance for many people as plants bloom and neighbors cut their lawns more frequently. Also, mold growth occurs indoors and outdoors, making it almost impossible to escape allergy triggers. Consider these strategies to alleviate your spring allergy symptoms, such as sneezing, stuffy or runny nose, and watery eyes:

- Keep track of local allergen (e.g., pollen and mold) counts to help you know when to avoid spending excessive time outside.
- Take a shower after spending time outdoors, as pollen can stick to your hair, skin and clothing.
- Wash your bedding weekly in hot water to help keep pollen under control.
- Clean your floors often with a vacuum that has a HEPA filter.
- Change your air conditioner and heating HEPA filters often.

For many people, avoiding allergens and using over-the-counter medications are enough to ease their allergy symptoms. Talk to your doctor if your symptoms remain bothersome.

Understanding Pollen Seasons in the United States

Pollen is one of the most common seasonal allergy triggers. According to the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, these are plants' pollen seasons:

- **February-May: Trees**
 - **April-June: Grasses**
 - **July-November: Weeds**
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2024's Best Diet: The Mediterranean

U.S. News & World Report named the Mediterranean diet the world's best overall diet for the seventh consecutive year, ranking first in 7 of the 11 diet categories. The winning meal plan 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 also 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.

Mediterranean Chicken and White Bean Salad

Makes: 4 servings

Ingredients

- 1 cup skinless cooked chicken (diced into ½-inch pieces)
- 15.5 oz. can low-sodium white beans (drained, rinsed with cold water)
- 1 cucumber (peeled, diced into ½-inch pieces)
- ¼ red or white onion (peeled, chopped into ½-inch pieces)
- 2 Tbsp. vegetable oil
- ¼ cup lemon juice
- 1 Tbsp. dried basil or parsley leaves

- ¼ tsp. salt
- ¼ tsp. black pepper

Preparations

1. Put all ingredients in the bowl and gently toss.
2. Serve it immediately, or cover and refrigerate for up to two days.

Nutritional Information (per serving)

- Total calories: 297
- Total fat: 11 g
- Protein: 20 g
- Sodium: 288 mg
- Carbohydrate: 31 g
- Dietary fiber: 8 g
- Saturated fat: 2 g
- Total sugars: 2 g

Source: MyPlate

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MENTAL HEALTH MINUTE

APRIL 2024



Recognizing the Signs of Stress and Building Resilience

April is Stress Awareness Month, a time dedicated to acknowledging the prevalence of stress and empowering individuals to manage it effectively. In today's fast-paced world, stress has become common, impacting physical health, mental well-being and overall quality of life. However, recognizing the signs of stress and adopting strategies to build resilience makes it possible to navigate life's challenges better.

Symptoms of Stress

Stress affects your mental health, but it can show itself in other ways, too. Here are some symptoms of stress:

- **Physical**—Headaches, muscle tension, fatigue, digestive issues, and changes in appetite or sleep patterns
- **Emotional**—Anxiety, irritability, mood swings and feeling overwhelmed
- **Cognitive**—Difficulty concentrating, indecisiveness or memory problems
- **Behavioral**—Withdrawal from social activities, increased substance

use, procrastination or neglecting responsibilities

Prolonged stress that is not addressed can become a serious health concern.

Coping With Stress

While it's impossible to eliminate stress entirely, there are numerous strategies you can employ to mitigate its effects and enhance your resilience:

- Plan and prioritize your most important responsibilities.
- Limit interruptions so you don't have to refocus each time you're distracted.
- Take breaks away from your workstation to regroup mentally.
- Listen to relaxing music to help you calm down.
- Limit caffeine intake, as this stimulant has been proven to exacerbate stress.
- Get some exercise to work off your stress.
- Try meditating to calm your mind.

Talk to your doctor if you struggle to cope with stress.

The Mental Benefits of Walking

Walking is often overlooked as a form of exercise; however, it offers several health benefits for both body and mind. This simple yet powerful activity is accessible to people of all ages and fitness levels, requiring no special equipment, memberships or training.

Walking is a natural, low-impact form of exercise that can yield notable improvements in physical fitness, mental well-being and emotional balance. Walking has the potential to impact your mental health in the following ways:

- **Reduces stress and anxiety**—Walking can have a calming effect on the mind. Walking reduces levels of stress hormones and releases endorphins, fostering feelings of relaxation.
- **Improves mood and emotional well-being**—Walking stimulates the production of neurotransmitters (e.g., serotonin and dopamine), which play key roles in regulating mood and promoting feelings of happiness and contentment.

- **Enhances cognitive function and reduces risk of cognitive decline**—Regular walking has been linked to improved cognitive brain function and a reduced risk of cognitive decline in later life. Walking enhances blood flow to the brain, promotes new brain cell growth, and boosts memory, concentration and creativity.
- **Promotes better sleep patterns and quality**—Physical activity helps regulate sleep patterns and improve sleep quality, increasing daytime vitality.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends adults should do at least 150 to 300 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic exercise per week. Brisk walking for 30 minutes at least five days a week is a great way to meet that goal and boost your mental health and overall well-being.

Asparagus, Mandarin Orange, Chicken and Rice

April 2024 Recipe

Makes: 4 servings



Ingredients

For the Vinaigrette:

- 2 Tbsp. extra virgin olive oil
- 2 Tbsp. rice vinegar
- 3 Tbsp. mandarin orange juice
(reserved from oranges)
- 1 Tbsp. reduced-sodium soy sauce

For the Salad:

- 3 ½ cups fresh asparagus (trimmed)
- 2 11 oz. cans mandarin oranges
(drained, reserve juice)
- 12 oz. cooked chicken breast
(cut into chunks)
- 3 cups cooked instant brown rice

Directions

1. In a small bowl, whisk vinaigrette ingredients, set aside.
2. Cook rice according to package directions.
3. Place whole trimmed asparagus in a large skillet with 1 ½ inches of water.
4. Bring to a boil, reduce heat and simmer, uncovered, for 2-5 minutes.
5. Rinse with cool water and cut into 1-inch pieces.
6. In a medium-size bowl, toss all ingredients.

Nutritional information for 1 serving

Calories	440
Total fat	11 g
Saturated fat	7 g
Cholesterol	70 mg
Sodium	N/A
Carbohydrate	51 g
Dietary fiber	6 g
Total sugars	12 g
Added sugars included	0 g
Protein	33 g

Source: MyPlate

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