

HR Newsletter & Resources

February Is American Heart Month

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States, responsible for every 1 out of 5 deaths. Cardiovascular disease and the conditions that lead to it can happen at any age. Some types of heart disease include arrhythmia, heart failure, heart attack and stroke.

February is American Heart Month, a time when you can check in on your cardiovascular health. While heart disease can be deadly for adults, it's also preventable in most people. Risk factors include high blood pressure, high cholesterol, smoking, obesity, an unhealthy diet and physical inactivity.



The Art of Waking Up Refreshed

Some people wake up ready to take on the day, while others may need more time or a cup of coffee to start their day. Regardless of which camp you're in, there's an art and a science to waking up refreshed in the morning. Unfortunately, many fall short when it comes to getting enough sleep.



So, what's the trick to waking up refreshed? First and foremost, getting enough quality sleep each night is a critical first step. Sleep experts recommend that adults get at least seven to nine hours of sleep nightly.

Additionally, consider these tips to improve the quality of your shuteye and improve your chances of waking up energized:

- **Keep a consistent sleep schedule and routine.** Try your best to have the same wake-up and bed-times, regardless if it's a weekday or weekend.
- **Set one alarm—and make it a happy tone.** Wake up when your first alarm goes off and resist hitting the snooze button. While at it, select an alarm tone on your cellphone that is cheerful or upbeat to kick-start a good mood.
- **Practice gratitude.** Grateful thinking and moods can help you sleep better and longer, so focus on having a positive outlook. Consider keeping a gratitude journal to reflect on daily entries of what you're grateful for. Alternatively, you can focus on positive thoughts and what you're excited to do or achieve the following day. An attitude of gratitude can help keep pessimism or worrisome thoughts at bay.
- **Practice good sleep hygiene.** Sleep experts recommend avoiding exercising or eating spicy foods close to bedtime and sleeping in a cool dark room.

It takes more than one night to see a change in your sleep habits, so stick with it and try it out for at least a week. Talk to your doctor if you continue to have concerns about your sleep quality.

The Importance of Anxiety Screening

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) now recommends that adults under the age of 65 get regularly screened for anxiety. It's meant to help primary care clinicians identify early signs of anxiety, which can go undetected for years. This is the first time the agency has recommended anxiety screening in adult primary care without symptoms.

The Task Force noted that the lifetime prevalence of anxiety disorders in adults in the United States is 40.4% for women and 26.4% for men. The recommendation was prioritized due to anxiety's public health influence and the country's increased focus on mental health in recent years. The guidance stops short of recommending anxiety screening for people 65 and older since many common symptoms of aging—such as trouble sleeping, pain and fatigue—can also be symptoms of anxiety.

If you already show signs or symptoms of anxiety, contact your doctor to be assessed and connected to care. Anxiety screening tools, including scales and questionnaires, have been developed and are available in primary care.



Boost Your Immunity With Nutrition

This winter, cases of the common cold, the flu, RSV and COVID-19 are prevalent. Since a healthy diet can help boost your immune system, it's crucial more than ever to take care of your body so it can fight off infectious diseases. Consider the following immune-boosting diet tips:

- **Focus on putting nutritious foods into your body.** Your body absorbs nutrients from whole fruits, vegetables, nuts, grains and proteins more efficiently than processed foods or supplements.
- **Limit inflammatory foods** such as those with refined carbohydrates, trans fats, high-fructose corn syrup, refined oils and high sodium content. Think of it as limiting or avoiding processed and fast food when possible.
- **Choose fruits, vegetables** (especially leafy greens), nuts, fatty fish and olive oil. Focus on fueling your body with healthy foods that include dietary fiber, nutrients or probiotics.

Stay hydrated and drink enough water for your body to operate at its best.

Take Charge of Your Health



Choose a Heart-healthy Diet

Heart disease is the leading cause of death for men and women in the United States. Diet-related factors, such as obesity, high blood pressure and uncontrolled diabetes, can significantly impact your risk of developing heart disease. Thus, diet is one of the most significant ways to improve your heart health.

Here are some tips for creating a heart-healthy diet:



Control your portions. How much you eat matters as much as what you eat. Limit your portion sizes by tracking your intake, following serving sizes and using smaller plates or bowls.



Eat more fruits and vegetables. Fruits and vegetables are low in calories and provide a great source of vitamins and minerals. Eating more of these can also help you cut back on higher-calorie foods.



Limit unhealthy fats. Saturated and trans fats can increase your cholesterol and ultimately increase your risk of heart disease. Incorporate heart-healthy fats, like salmon, avocados, and nuts, into your cooking.



Choose low-fat protein sources. Fish, poultry, lean meat and eggs are among the best protein sources for heart health. Choose low-fat options, such as skinless chicken or fish, and avoid fried or breaded meat.



Select whole grains. Eating whole grains can help regulate your blood pressure and improve heart health. You can start by making simple substitutions in your diet, like brown rice instead of white rice, or trying a new whole grain like barley or quinoa.

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MENTAL HEALTH MINUTE

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Breathing 101

Breathing is something you do all the time, often with little or no thought. Even during times of stress, your breathing will typically unconsciously shorten. Learning to control your breathing can be an essential tool for improving your mental and physical health.

Breathwork, which is known as the combination of breathing exercises and mindfulness practices, can improve mood and focus, increase relaxation, boost sleep quality, and reduce symptoms of anxiety, depression and grief. This practice can also lower blood pressure, reduce asthma symptoms and help with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease symptoms.

Breathing Exercises

Various breathwork exercises could be right for you, such as the following:

- **4-7-8 breathing** involves inhaling for four seconds, holding your breath for seven seconds and exhaling for eight seconds.
- **Box or square breathing** involves four steps, each lasting four seconds. You inhale, hold your breath, exhale and hold your breath again, repeating the process. This exercise is most effective when you breathe entirely through your nose.
- **Bellows breathing** can help you wake up when you're feeling tired. Begin by making loose fists with your hands and holding them by your shoulders, with your elbows at your ribs. Next, inhale through your nose as you press your fists toward the sky. Quickly exhale as you bring your hands back to their starting position.

Like any skill, it's important to practice. Experiment with different breathing techniques and having your eyes open and closed.

Conclusion

Breathwork is a free and low-risk activity you can try at home to boost your mental and physical health. If you're having trouble getting started, consult a certified breathwork practitioner or download a mindfulness app.

The Power of Affirmations

Affirmations are a type of positive self-talk that can promote internal change and self-love while reducing anxiety, doubt, worry and fear. You can alter your subconscious thoughts by repeating these supportive and encouraging phrases. Furthermore, believing these positive statements will make you more likely to act in ways that reinforce self-love, which can help turn these positive statements into reality.

Successfully using affirmations can boost mood, improve self-esteem, increase motivation, enhance problem-solving abilities, promote optimism and help you address negative thoughts.

Tips for Affirmations

It's essential to keep your affirmations realistic. Repeating unrealistic statements to yourself may be counterproductive as you're unlikely to believe what you're telling yourself. For example, "My life is perfect" is a positive statement that's unlikely to improve motivation or decrease anxiety.

Instead, you should focus on crafting messages that motivate your mind to change. For example, "I am working to improve my life." The following are additional tips to consider when creating your affirmations:

- Use a first-person perspective.
- Write your affirmations in the present tense.
- Acknowledge your fears and doubts in your affirmation (e.g., I can manage my anxious thoughts).
- Connect your affirmations to your core values (e.g., compassion and hard work).

Commit to reading your affirmations two or three times a day for a month and see how you feel. You can also put your affirmations where you will see them throughout the day (e.g., near the coffee pot) to ensure they're at the center of your thoughts.

Conclusion

Affirmations can be a powerful tool for change and self-love. However, they don't work for everyone. Contact a mental health professional if you're experiencing persistent anxiety symptoms.

Three-can Chili

February 2024 Recipe

Makes: 6 servings



Ingredients

- 15.5 oz. can low-sodium pinto, kidney, red or black beans (undrained)
- 15 oz. can corn (drained)
- 14.5 oz. can low-sodium crushed tomatoes (undrained)
- Chili powder (to taste)

Nutritional information for 1 serving

Calories	116
Total fat	1 g
Saturated fat	0 g
Cholesterol	0 mg
Sodium	197 mg
Carbohydrate	23 g
Dietary fiber	7 g
Total sugars	3 g
Added sugars included	0 g
Protein	6 g

Directions

1. Place the contents of all three cans into a pan.
2. Add chili powder to taste.
3. Stir to mix.
4. Continue to stir over medium heat until heated thoroughly.
5. Refrigerate leftovers.

Source: MyPlate

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