Taking Care of Yourself During National Wellness Month

National Wellness Month, recognized annually in August, is meant to encourage people to prioritize self-care, build healthy routines and support their physical, mental and emotional well-being.

> Wellness goes beyond physical health. It encompasses mental clarity, emotional resilience and a sense of balance in daily life.

When we invest in our well-being, we're better equipped to handle stress, maintain relationships and perform at our best—both personally and professionally. This month is an opportunity to slow down and focus on the following key well-being components:

- **Movement**—You don't need a gym membership to stay active. Stretch in the morning, take the stairs or go for a walk during lunch. Movement boosts mood and energy.

- **Nutrition**—Fuel your body with whole foods, stay hydrated and avoid skipping meals. Even small changes, such as swapping soda for water, can make a big difference.

- **Mindfulness**—This skill involves focusing on being present. Try meditation apps, journaling or simply taking a few deep breaths during stressful moments.

- **Self-care**—It's important to take time each day to do something just for you. Whether it's reading, listening to music or having a cup of tea, self-care helps you recharge.

- **Stress management**—Identify your stress triggers and create healthy coping strategies. These could include setting boundaries, unplugging from screens or talking to a friend.

You can start taking small steps now to prioritize both your body and mind. Over time, these habits build a foundation for a healthier, more balanced you. If you're struggling with any aspect of your wellness, seek help from health care professionals, including therapists, counselors or wellness coaches. They can provide tailored guidance and support for your personal needs.

Understanding Your Cortisol Levels

Cortisol levels continue to trend on social media as people want to understand energy levels, manage stress and boost their overall well-being. So, what exactly is cortisol? It's your body's primary stress hormone, helping regulate various functions, such as metabolism, blood sugar, blood pressure, immune response and energy. While it's normal for cortisol to fluctuate throughout the day (usually going up in the morning and slowly down during the day), consistently high or low levels can cause health issues. Ideal cortisol levels fall within a specific range that varies slightly based on the time of day and the type of test used.

To get a better understanding of your cortisol levels, seek the advice of a medical professional who can administer a cortisol test that measures the cortisol in your blood, urine or saliva. Standard blood panels generally don't test for cortisol levels. Cortisol testing is usually ordered separately by a physician to learn more about your health conditions.

Understanding how cortisol works can help you stay aware of potential symptoms that could indicate an imbalance. Talk to your doctor to learn more.

Medications That Make It Hard to Handle the Heat

Commonly prescribed medications can impact people more in the heat, causing dehydration or sun sensitivity or limiting the body's ability to regulate body temperature. As such, these medications have heat intolerance, photosensitivity or similar documented side effects:

- **Antibiotics** and **nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs** like ibuprofen may make you more sensitive to sun exposure, resulting in severe sunburn or rashes.

- **Antidepressants** can cause excessive sweating, dehydration and UV light sensitivity. They could also decrease sweat production, preventing the body from cooling down.

- **Antihistamines** can make your body produce less sweat, making it difficult to regulate body temperature in hot weather.

- **Blood pressure medications** can increase sweat production and dehydration. Sun exposure can cause a blood pressure dip, too.

- **Decongestants** like pseudoephedrine can decrease the blood flow to the skin, making it more difficult to sweat and regulate.

- **Stimulants** can increase your metabolic rate, impairing the body's ability to cool down.

Keep in mind that the heat can also degrade certain medications like insulin, inhalers and EpiPens.

The first sign of heat intolerance is feeling hot or uncomfortable. You may also experience headaches, dizziness, cramps, nausea or vomiting, weakness or flushed skin. If you experience heat-related symptoms, go inside immediately and try to cool down. In addition to monitoring for symptoms, it's important to stay hydrated, limit your exposure to direct sunlight and wear protective clothing.

If you have questions about your medications or potential side effects, talk to your doctor. Also, don't discontinue taking any prescribed medications without consulting your doctor first.

Cucumber Salad With Tomatoes

Makes: 4 servings

Ingredients

- 2 cups cucumber (diced)
- 1 cup tomato (seeded and diced)
- ¼ cup sweet onion (chopped)
- 2 cups couscous (cooked)
- 2 tsp. dill weed (chopped)
- ½ cup low-fat Italian salad dressing

Preparations

1. Toss together the cucumbers, tomatoes, onions, couscous, dill and salad dressing.
2. Chill for 1 hour.
3. Serve.

Nutritional Information

(per serving)

Total calories	137
Total fat	2 g
Protein	4 g
Sodium	252 mg
Carbohydrate	25 g
Dietary fiber	2 g
Saturated fat	0 g
Total sugars	5 g

Source: MyPlate

MENTAL HEALTH MINUTE

AUGUST 2025

The Heat's Impact on Mental Health

Health experts warn that extreme heat can significantly affect emotional and psychological well-being. Whether it leads to increased irritability or potential impacts on mental health conditions, excessive heat can be uncomfortable and dangerous.

High temperatures can disrupt sleep, increase stress levels and impair cognitive function. People often report feeling more agitated, anxious or unable to concentrate during heat waves. For some, especially those with preexisting mental health conditions, heat can trigger more severe symptoms.

One lesser-known condition is summer-pattern seasonal affective disorder, which is associated with too much heat and light. Symptoms can include insomnia, agitation, restlessness and depression.

In addition, heat can impact individuals who take certain medications for mental health conditions. For the 1 in 6 Americans who take psychiatric medications, summer poses additional risks. Many medications, such as antidepressants, antipsychotics and mood stabilizers, can interfere with the body's ability to regulate temperature. They may also cause dehydration and heat intolerance, making it more difficult to cope with hot weather.

Tips for Protecting Your Mental Health in the Heat

Consider these tips to protect your mental health during hot weather:

- **Know your triggers.** Pay attention to how heat affects your mood, energy and focus. If you notice patterns, plan your day to avoid peak heat hours.

- **Stay hydrated**. Drink water regularly, even if you don't feel thirsty. Dehydration can worsen mood swings and fatigue.

- **Stay cool.** Use fans, air conditioning, or cool showers to regulate your body temperature.

- **Watch for warning signs.** Be alert to symptoms of heat-related illness, such as dizziness, confusion, nausea or extreme fatigue. Seek help if needed.

If you're experiencing worsening mental health symptoms during the summer, don't hesitate to reach out to a health care provider. Never adjust or stop taking prescribed medications without professional guidance.

10 Ways to Manage Summer Stress

While summer often brings a welcome change of pace with warmer weather, longer days, vacation plans and more time outdoors, it can also introduce new stressors for many individuals. The key is learning how to manage such stress.

Try these 10 practical tips for coping with summer stress:

1. **Stay hydrated and cool.** Keep a water bottle nearby and dress in breathable fabrics.

2. **Set boundaries with your time.** Be intentional about what you commit to and don't hesitate to say no to events or obligations that feel overwhelming.

3. **Maintain a routine.** Try to stick to regular sleep, meal and work times to help reduce stress.

4. **Create a comfortable work environment.** If possible, use fans, adjust lighting and take advantage of natural light to boost your mood and productivity.

5. **Take meaningful breaks.** Instead of defaulting to screen time, use your short breaks to get water, step outside, stretch or take a few deep breaths.

6. **Use vacation time wisely.** Don't let your paid time off go unused. Even a short break or staycation can help you recharge.

7. **Plan ahead for family and travel logistics.** If you're planning trips, get organized early. Clear communication with your team and family can help reduce last-minute confusion, tension and stress.

8. **Reconnect with nature.** Spending time outdoors, even just for a few minutes each day, can help reduce stress and improve mental clarity.

9. **Practice mindfulness or light exercise.** Incorporate short mindfulness practices or light physical activity into your day to lower stress levels.

10. **Limit alcohol and caffeine.** Too much caffeine or alcohol can disrupt your sleep cycle and increase anxiety.

For further guidance, contact a mental health professional.

Take Charge of Your Health

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Keep Your Eyes Healthy

Protecting your overall health, including your eye health, is crucial. As you age, you are at an increased risk of eye diseases, especially if you are overweight or have a family history of eye disease. It's essential to monitor your health and how it correlates with your eye health.

Consider the following healthy habits to help maintain your vision:

Schedule regular eye exams. Visiting your eye care professional for routine dilated eye exams is one of the best ways to ensure your eyes are healthy. A dilated eye exam is the best way to detect diseases in their early stages.

Consume healthy foods. Dark, leafy greens such as spinach, kale and collard greens, and foods high in omega-3 fatty acids, are suitable for your eyes. Try to incorporate them into your diet.

Stay active. Being active can help lower your risk of health conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol, which can increase your risk of eye diseases.

Wear sunglasses. Protecting your eyes, even on cloudy days, from UVA and UVB radiation is essential. Look for sunglasses that block 99%-100% of ultraviolet rays.

Rest your eyes. Working on a computer all day can especially wear out your eyes. Rest your eyes every 20 minutes by looking at something at least 20 feet away for seconds at a time.