



Live Well, Work Well

April 2026

Nip Seasonal Allergies In the Bud

Springtime allergies are an annual nuisance for many people. As plants begin to bloom and people start to cut their grass more frequently, allergy sufferers nationwide start sniffing and sneezing. If this sounds familiar, you may have seasonal allergies, which are symptoms that occur at specific times of the year, typically when allergens are released into the air. The most common spring allergy trigger is tree pollen, which peaks from March to May. What's more, mold growth blooms both indoors and outdoors, making it almost impossible to escape allergy triggers.

According to the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, 1 in 4 adults experience seasonal allergies from pollen from trees, grass and weeds.

Similar to other types of allergies, seasonal allergies develop when your body's immune system detects and then overreacts to a foreign substance it thinks is harmful. For some, allergy symptoms may consist of sneezing a couple of times a year. But for others, seasonal allergies can cause congestion, a runny, itchy or stuffy nose, watery eyes, headaches and

more for weeks or months at a time. To reduce your allergies, consider the following strategies:

- Wash your bedding every week in hot water to help keep pollen under control.
- Take a shower after spending time outdoors, as pollen can stick to your hair, skin and clothing.
- Limit the number of throw rugs to reduce dust and mold. Also, opt for washable rugs.
- Clean your floors often with a vacuum that has a HEPA filter.
- Change your air conditioner and heating HEPA filters often.

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

The Impact of Chronic Stress

Stress is defined as a “state of worry or mental tension” often brought on by a difficult situation. It’s a natural reaction to perceived threats. Stress can be a good thing in small doses; it’s the body’s way of handling sudden demands and challenges.

Stress responses can enhance your focus, increase energy and promote quick responses. However, frequent and long-term chronic stress can negatively impact your health.

Stress triggers are deeply personal, and each person experiences this feeling differently. While stress is a normal part of life that comes and goes as you navigate various life circumstances (e.g., getting a

Cutting Down on Added Sugars

Sugar is woven into the modern diet—often in ways that aren’t obvious. While naturally occurring sugars can be part of a balanced eating pattern, added sugars are a different story. The [2025–2030 Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#) (DGA) reflects mounting research that reducing added sugars can improve metabolic health and lower long-term disease risk.

The DGA recommends limiting added sugars as much as possible and advises that a single meal contain no more than 10 grams of added sugar.

Cutting back doesn’t have to happen overnight. Small, consistent changes can make a meaningful difference, so start with these strategies:

- **Rethink your beverages** by swapping sugar-sweetened drinks for water, sparkling water, unsweetened tea and coffee served black or with minimal sweetener.

new job or presenting a project), chronic stress is different. It’s characterized by prolonged and constant feelings of pressure and anxiety. Chronic stress can contribute to feelings of anxiety and depression, issues with high blood pressure, a weakened immune system, sleep disturbances and digestive issues. If left unchecked, it can have a long-lasting impact on your physical and mental well-being.

If you’re experiencing symptoms of chronic stress, reach out to your health care provider or employee assistance program for guidance and support.

- **Choose whole, fresh fruit** over fruit juice.
- **Build meals around whole foods**, including vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, healthy fats and whole fruits.
- **Reduce sweetness gradually** to make it easier to adapt without feeling deprived.
- **Read nutrition labels carefully**, checking both total sugars and added sugars.

Reducing added sugar is not about eliminating all sweet foods or striving for perfection, but about awareness and balance. Occasional treats can fit into a healthy eating pattern, but daily habits matter most. Meal planning, mindful grocery shopping and paying attention to labels can help you stay within recommended limits. Over time, cutting back on added sugars may improve energy levels, weight management and overall health.

Recipe of the Month

Avocado Black Bean Taquitos

Makes: 5 servings

Ingredients

- 1 ripe, fresh avocado (halved, pitted, peeled and mashed)
- ½ cup low-sodium canned black beans (rinsed)
- ½ Tbsp. cumin
- 1 tsp. garlic powder
- ½ tsp. salt
- 10 (6-inch) corn tortillas
- 1 cup rainbow cherry tomatoes (chopped)
- ½ cup red or yellow bell peppers (seeded and diced)
- 1 Tbsp. fresh jalapeno (seeded and minced)
- 1 Tbsp. onion (minced)
- 1 Tbsp. fresh lime juice
- 2 Tbsp. fresh cilantro leaves (chopped)
- ½ cup plain nonfat Greek yogurt

Preparations

1. Using a fork, mash the avocado and black beans together in a bowl. Stir in the cumin, garlic powder and salt.
2. Spread approximately 2 Tbsp. of the mixture onto a corn tortilla, dividing equally between 10 tortillas. Roll tightly to form 10 taquitos.
3. Place taquitos into the air fryer at 400 F for 5 minutes. When the timer goes off, flip and put back into the air fryer for 5 more minutes. Depending on the air fryer, you may need to decrease the time to 3 to 4 minutes per side.
4. While the taquitos are cooking, combine the cherry tomatoes, bell peppers, jalapeno, onion, cilantro and lime juice in a small bowl to make fresh pico de gallo.
5. Once the taquitos are golden brown and crispy, remove from the air fryer and top with fresh pico de gallo and Greek yogurt.

Nutritional Information

(per serving)

Total calories	181
Total fat	6 g
Protein	7 g
Sodium	300 mg
Carbohydrate	27 g
Dietary fiber	7 g
Saturated fat	1 g
Total sugars	13 g

Source: MyPlate

MENTAL HEALTH MINUTE

Provided by Pierce Insurance Agency, Inc.

Recognizing Good and Bad Stress

Every April, National Stress Awareness Month offers a timely reminder to check in with yourself and understand how stress shows up in your life. Stress is a natural part of being human, but it doesn't always feel the same. Learning to tell the difference between "good" and "bad" stress can help you stay energized, productive and mentally well.

Good stress, or eustress, is what you feel when you're excited or challenged in a positive way. Think about starting a new job or preparing for a work presentation you're passionate about. Your heart may race, and your adrenaline may spike, but the experience feels energizing rather than overwhelming. This kind of stress enhances performance, builds confidence and often leads to a sense of accomplishment. Eustress is typically short-term, manageable and directly connected to goals that matter to you.

Bad stress, or distress, is very different. It arises when demands exceed your capacity, when situations feel beyond your control, or when pressures persist without relief. Signs of bad stress can include trouble sleeping, irritability, headaches, loss of focus, decreased motivation or feeling emotionally drained. Over time, chronic distress can weaken the immune system, harm mental health and increase the risk of burnout.

Managing stress effectively starts with awareness. Taking breaks, prioritizing important tasks, reaching out to others when you need help and setting realistic expectations can prevent stress from tipping into harmful territory. By understanding how your body responds to stress and paying attention to the signals, you can harness the benefits of positive challenges while protecting your well-being.

Recognizing the difference between good and bad stress is essential to maintaining a healthy, productive life. Eustress can be a powerful motivator, driving you to achieve your goals and grow as an individual. By embracing eustress and managing distress, you can find the balance you need to thrive across various aspects of your life. Contact a mental health professional for further information about stress.

The Mental Health Benefits of Hobbies

In a culture where being busy often becomes a badge of honor, hobbies can feel like indulgences reserved for people with extra time. Nevertheless, research consistently shows that engaging in meaningful pastimes isn't just fun; it can be beneficial for mental health. Hobbies can provide structure, creativity, social connection and stress relief, all of which support one's emotional well-being. As such, engaging in hobbies can have the following mental health benefits:

- **Reduced stress and emotional balance**—Hobbies can serve as a powerful form of stress relief by providing a break from daily responsibilities. Creative activities have been shown to lower cortisol levels, even for people without prior experience.
- **Improved mood and cognitive function**—Engaging in hobbies can stimulate the brain through learning and creativity. Research shows that when people try new activities, the brain often forms new synapses and releases dopamine, which can enhance mood and cognitive resilience. Creative hobbies, such as writing or painting, can also improve subjective well-being by fostering self-expression and mastery.
- **Increased social connection and community support**—Group-based hobbies, such as book clubs, sports leagues and craft groups, can decrease loneliness and build support networks. Community-based hobbies can be especially valuable for bonding with others and relieving stress.
- **Reduced anxiety and depression**—Research provides consistent links between hobby participation and lower levels of depression, anxiety and stress. Hobbies can foster relaxation, pleasure and overall life satisfaction.

Making time for hobbies isn't self-indulgent; it's essential. Hobbies can help enhance emotional well-being and balance the demands of modern adult life. If you're finding it hard to enjoy activities you once liked or have little interest in doing any hobbies, consider reaching out to your health care provider. For additional guidance on building your mental wellness, a doctor or mental health professional can help.

– Take Charge of Your Health –



Reduce Spring Allergy Symptoms



Each year, millions of Americans deal with the discomfort of spring allergies. As trees, flowers, weeds and grasses come back to life, they release pollen that can trigger reactions such as watery or itchy eyes, congestion, runny nose, coughing and sneezing. Although seasonal allergies can't always be avoided, there are practical steps you can take to keep symptoms under control. Consider these strategies to help manage springtime allergies:

- **Refresh your home's air filters.** During high pollen months, check and replace air conditioning and heating HEPA filters often to help reduce the amount of pollen allergens circulating in your home.
- **Keep indoor spaces clean.** Pollen can easily be carried indoors on hair, skin and clothing. Change out of outdoor clothes promptly and shower, vacuum regularly and wash bedding weekly to help eliminate trapped allergens.
- **Monitor pollen forecasts.** Many weather apps and local news outlets now provide daily pollen counts. On days when levels are high, try to limit outdoor activities when possible, especially midday when pollen levels peak.
- **Consider over-the-counter (OTC) relief options.** Nonprescription antihistamines, nasal sprays and eye drops can help reduce symptoms. Be sure to follow the usage directions and choose products that best suit your needs.
- **Talk with a health care provider.** Allergy symptoms can vary widely from person to person. If OTC methods aren't providing enough relief, contact your doctor for personalized treatment recommendations.

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