



Live Well, Work Well

March 2026

Build Healthy Habits With “Wellness Stacking”

Building healthy habits doesn't have to mean overhauling your entire lifestyle. In fact, small, meaningful changes are often the most sustainable. That's the idea behind wellness stacking, a method that helps you build better routines by pairing new habits with behaviors you already do every day.

By linking a new action to an existing routine, you create a simple structure that makes healthier choices easier and more automatic.

Wellness stacking works because your brain thrives on predictable patterns. Existing habits, such as brushing your teeth or making your morning coffee, act as “anchors.” When you attach a small wellness habit to one of these anchors, your brain begins to connect the two behaviors. Over time, the new habit requires less effort because it becomes part of an established routine. This reduces the mental load of having to remember to be healthy and makes consistency feel natural rather than forced.

Getting started with wellness stacking is simple. First, identify your daily anchor habits—the things you do without thinking. These might include waking up, sitting down at your desk, eating lunch or winding down at night. Next, choose a small

wellness habit that aligns with your goals, such as drinking a glass of water, stretching for one minute, taking a brief walk or practicing a few deep breaths. Attach the new habit to the existing one using a clear structure. Then, keep the new behavior small, easy, and repeatable to help it stick. Here are some examples of habit stacks:

- After I wake up, I will drink a full glass of water.
- While my coffee brews, I will do one minute of light stretching.
- When I sit down at my desk, I will take five deep breaths.
- After lunch, I will take a five-minute walk.
- Before brushing my teeth at night, I will write down one thing I'm grateful for.
- After I turn off the TV, I will prepare water or snacks for tomorrow.

By connecting tiny wellness habits to moments already built into your day, you can create sustainable changes. Reach out to a health care professional for further guidance.

U.S. News & World Report Reveals Top 2026 Health Trends

This year, U.S. News & World Report (U.S. News) replaced its long-running Best Diets annual rankings with a [Top Health and Nutrition Trends](#) report. The findings reflect survey results from a panel of 58 experts, including doctors, dietitians and health researchers. The experts were asked which emerging health trends would have the greatest impact in 2026. Here are their top predictions:

- 1. Expanded use of glucagon-like peptide-1 (GLP-1) drugs**—About 1 in 5 adults have used GLP-1 medications, and usage rates are rising as costs decrease and pill versions of these formerly injectable drugs become available. GLP-1's popularity will grow as its use broadens beyond obesity and Type 2 diabetes, tackling other conditions.
- 2. Integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and wearable technology**—Wearable tech can reveal simple health information, and can provide real-time information and personalized

recommendations when paired with AI. Many people are opting for smartwatches and smart rings that track metrics, such as physical activity, sleep and food.

- 3. Greater use of "food as medicine"**—While this concept isn't necessarily new, it does recognize that the foods consumed directly impact health. Experts predict a return to the basics of whole, nutritious food this year.

While plant-based food, sustainable sources and meat alternatives used to dominate the U.S. News's diet rankings, those trends landed at the bottom of this new health report. Today's reality is that more people are focusing on ways to incorporate animal products they consider sustainable and ethical.

Consult your doctor for more information about these health trends or for guidance in setting your own health goals for the year.

Understanding Kidney Health

March is National Kidney Month, making it a great time to take charge of your health by lowering your chances of developing kidney disease. Kidneys filter blood to remove waste products and excess water, creating urine. They also produce vital hormones that help create red blood cells, promote bone health and regulate blood pressure.

The National Kidney Foundation reports that 1 in 3 adults are at risk for kidney disease.

Kidney disease is the 9th leading cause of death in the United States. Today, 14% of adults are affected by kidney disease—and 90% of them don't know it. Most won't have symptoms unless their kidneys fail. There are some physical signs of kidney disease, but most people attribute them to other conditions. Here are risk factors for kidney disease:

- Diabetes
- Family history of kidney disease
- Heart disease
- High blood pressure
- Excess weight
- Smoking

Taking care of your kidneys is essential because they work continuously to keep your body healthy.

Regular testing can help detect early signs of kidney issues, while limiting over-the-counter pain relievers reduces the risk of kidney damage. Healthy habits, such as daily exercise, plant-based protein and hydration, support kidney function and can help protect your kidneys for the long term. Contact your doctor for more information about kidney health and warning signs of kidney disease.

Recipe of the Month

Baked Salmon With Herbs and Lemon

Makes: 4 servings

Ingredients

- 16 oz. salmon (or any white fish)
- ¼ tsp. paprika
- ¼ tsp. onion powder
- ¼ tsp. garlic powder
- ⅛ tsp. black pepper
- ⅛ tsp. dried oregano
- ⅛ tsp. dried thyme
- 1 Tbsp. lemon juice
- 1 ½ Tbsp. margarine (melted)

Preparations

1. If using frozen fish, thaw it in the refrigerator according to package directions.
2. Preheat the oven to 350 F.
3. Separate (or cut) the fish into four pieces. Place the fish in a 13x9-inch baking pan.
4. Combine the paprika, garlic powder, onion powder, black pepper, oregano and thyme in a small bowl.
5. Sprinkle the herb mixture and lemon juice evenly over the fish. Then, drizzle the melted margarine on top.
6. Bake until the fish flakes easily with a fork, about 20 to 25 minutes.

Nutritional Information

(per serving)

Total calories	229
Total fat	15 g
Protein	21 g
Sodium	95 mg
Carbohydrate	1 g
Dietary fiber	0 g
Saturated fat	3 g
Total sugars	0 g

Source: MyPlate

Provided by Pierce Insurance Agency, Inc.

The Relationship Between Nutrition and Mental Health

The link between nutrition and mental health is becoming increasingly clear as research continues to show how profoundly food influences the brain. Nutrients affect everything from neurotransmitter production to inflammation levels, gut health and blood sugar stability. When these systems are supported, people often experience steadier moods, sharper thinking and better emotional resilience. While nutrition isn't a replacement for professional mental health care, it forms a powerful foundation that can enhance overall well-being and complement other forms of support.

Try the following nutrition tips to support a healthy mind:

- **Prioritize whole, minimally processed foods.** Choosing whole foods, such as vegetables, fruits, whole grains and lean proteins, can help stabilize blood sugar levels, which can prevent the mood swings and irritability that often follow highly processed meals. By reducing the intake of processed foods, you create a more stable internal environment that supports emotional balance.
- **Eat a variety of colorful fruits and vegetables.** Colorful produce is rich in antioxidants, which protect brain cells from oxidative stress, a process that can contribute to cognitive decline and mood disorders. Additionally, fruits and vegetables provide vitamins like folate and vitamin C, which are essential for the production of neurotransmitters such as serotonin.
- **Stay hydrated.** Proper hydration is essential for maintaining concentration, memory and overall cognitive function. Drinking enough fluids throughout the day can prevent the mental fatigue and emotional instability that often accompany dehydration.
- **Be mindful of caffeine intake.** Caffeine can be helpful in moderation, but excessive intake may disrupt sleep patterns and increase feelings of jitteriness or anxiety. Because sleep is essential for emotional regulation, too much caffeine can indirectly worsen mood. Being mindful of timing and quantity, such as avoiding caffeine late in the day, can help maintain balanced energy and support better mental health.

March is National Nutrition Month, so it's a great time to ensure you're eating well for your body and mind. For further nutrition guidance or support, contact a registered dietician.

Research Links the Use of AI With Depression and Anxiety

As artificial intelligence (AI) tools become embedded in daily life, a growing body of research is raising concerns about their potential impact on mental well-being. A [recent study](#) suggests that frequent or emotionally driven use of AI chatbots may be associated with higher rates of depression, anxiety and irritability among U.S. adults. While researchers emphasize that these findings show correlation rather than causation, the patterns have sparked questions about how people are using AI and what that means for mental health.

Given the emerging evidence, mental health professionals encourage mindful, balanced use of AI. Consider the following tips for using AI responsibly:

- **Avoid using AI as your primary source of emotional support.** General-purpose chatbots are not replacements for trained mental health professionals.
- **Be critical of AI-generated advice.** AI can make mistakes, misunderstand context or provide responses that are unhelpful or emotionally risky.
- **Use AI as a tool, not a companion.** Keep interactions task-focused (e.g., writing help, research summaries) rather than relationship-driven.
- **Check in with yourself emotionally.** Notice whether AI use leaves you feeling calmer, or more lonely, anxious or dependent.
- **Set time constraints.** Limit AI conversations during periods of stress to avoid habitual or compulsive use.
- **Seek human connections.** Prioritize talking with friends, family or colleagues when you need support. AI should supplement, not replace, human relationships.
- **Consult professionals when needed.** If you're experiencing persistent depression or anxiety, human clinical care remains the safest and most effective option.

As AI continues to evolve, researchers will continue to monitor its effects on daily life and mental health. If you are struggling with feelings of anxiety or depression, consider reaching out to a mental health professional who can offer guidance and support.

– Take Charge of Your Health –



Eat Real Food



Nutrition is the foundation of health, influencing disease prevention and overall well-being. Because dietary habits can shape long-term health outcomes, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Agriculture publish nutrition advice every five years. The latest framework is designed to be flexible, offering practical guidance to help Americans make healthier choices every day.

Eat real food, and consider these tips based on the 2025-2030 Dietary Guidelines for Americans:

- **Avoid ultra-processed foods.** The guidelines advise Americans to steer clear of packaged and ready-to-eat salty or sweet foods and limit items containing artificial flavors, dyes, preservatives and sweeteners.
- **Prioritize protein at every meal.** Adults are encouraged to aim for 1.2 to 1.6 grams of protein per kilogram of body weight daily, nearly double previous recommendations, using both animal and plant-based sources.
- **Choose full-fat dairy with no added sugars.** The new guidelines shift away from long-standing low-fat recommendations and instead highlight whole fat milk, yogurt and other dairy products that contain no added sugars.
- **Limit added sugars.** The guidelines note that no amount of added sugar is healthy. Adults should keep added sugars to 10 grams or less per meal, and children ages 5 to 10 should consume no added sugars at all.
- **Limit alcohol consumption.** Previous guidelines explicitly limited alcohol consumption to one drink per day for women and two for men. In contrast, the general recommendation now is to limit alcohol consumption.

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