

# Completely Well

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**Insurance Agency**

## Preventive

## Stress Awareness Month

We all feel stress and can identify the emotion, but what is stress? Stress is an emotional and physical response to pressure that is unmanageable (or feels unmanageable) at the moment. A deadline, traffic, debt, clutter, an argument with a friend, and working overtime – all are common stressors. Some stress can make us more productive and efficient, but chronic stress takes a real toll on our health.

Stress creates a “fight or flight” response that causes a surge of adrenalin, a rise in heart rate, and an increase in blood pressure. Blood sugars rise and arteries constrict. While these reactions are meant to provide the energy and capacity to manage the stress in the moment, over time these reactions can increase the risk of heart disease and may be associated with an increased risk of obesity and diabetes. Additionally, chronic stress is associated with behaviors that harm your health: smoking, excessive eating, increased use of alcohol, and lack of sleep.

Some people feel that an overbooked schedule and stress are a sign of productivity. It’s important to note that chronic stress actually reduces productivity. This can be due to a reduced ability to concentrate when stressed. Stress also causes the immune system to work less effectively, leading to missing work because of illness.

Managing stress requires an every day commitment to eating right, getting exercise, and sleeping well. In addition, reducing clutter at home and your workspace can help. Consider turning down invitations or requests that are non-essential and would not interest you. Find time to schedule activities that you enjoy, such as reading, hiking, biking, playing board games with the family, etc.

No one is immune to stress. But it is important to recognize what is stressing you and take steps to reduce what stress you can. You will feel better taking control of your response to stress.



**Earth Day - April 22, 2015**

**“It’s Our Turn to Lead”**

**Celebrating its 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Earth Day highlights the need for a healthier environment. This year the focus is on the relationship between sustainability and economic growth. Look for an event near you!**



# Just Desserts

## Nutrition

For many, it's the weakest moment of the meal. Even if you made all the right choices – low fat, low salt, moderate portions – a craving for an after dinner dessert can lead to too much of a good thing. Don't worry. You can enjoy a dessert that is healthy and delicious!

Of course fruit is an excellent choice for dessert, and a fruit salad may be enough to satisfy your sweet tooth. But if you need something more, try sliced bananas, strawberries, or kiwi with a drizzle of chocolate sauce. You will be able to control the added sugar and still feel like you are having a special treat. Still not enough? Consider making a trifle. Traditional trifles use fruit or jam, layered with pieces of

sponge cake soaked in wine or sherry, and custard or whipped cream. A healthy version could be made with layers of fresh fruit, cut up pieces of angel food cake, and a little whipped cream. Make your trifle in individual servings to control the portion.

If chocolate is more your thing, remember that a small piece of dark chocolate is heart healthy and can satisfy the craving. Want more? A Fudgsicle® or low fat/no fat pudding may do the trick. Brownies can be made lower fat by substituting some of the oil for applesauce or plum baby food! Both add needed moisture and a sweet flavor to your favorite brownie recipe. This trick also works if you are using a

boxed brownie mix.

If you want something special – whether out to dinner or celebrating a special occasion at home – remember that it is okay to enjoy a small portion of your favorite treat every now and then. How you eat every day is what matters, not the once in a while small treat. Enjoy your meal, the company, and your dessert on those special occasions.

While it's true that desserts can add a lot of calories, sugar, and fat – not all choices are bad. Pay attention to your choices over time, and you will find that you can include some sweet treats and still be eating right.

## Produce of the Month: Avocado



Mention avocado and guacamole may be the first thing that comes to mind, but there are so many uses for and health benefits of the avocado that it is time to see it as more than a dip for tortilla chips. Avocado is known to prevent inflammation, provide monounsaturated fat (heart healthy), and may help regulate blood sugars.

**The Basics:** Look for avocados that are slightly soft and have no noticeable bruises or cracks. Avocados that are firm can be ripened at home by placing in a paper bag and leaving it on the counter top. Ripe avocados can be kept in the refrigerator for up to one week. Peel the avocado just before using to prevent browning (though sprinkling some lemon juice on the cut avocado will also help). To peel the avocado, cut the fruit in half around the thickest part and gently twist the two halves in opposite directions. Once it has pulled apart, remove the pit. The California Avocado Commission recommends peeling the fruit by slicing the fruit into quarters and peeling the skin the same way that you might peel a banana. Once peeled, it is ready to be eaten or prepared.

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**Try This:** Cubed avocado can be added to salads and tacos. Try sliced avocado on fried eggs. Chopped avocado is also a delicious addition to black bean soup.

**The Facts:** One cup of avocado has approximately 230 calories and is a good source of fiber and vitamins K, C and B6. It is an excellent source of monounsaturated fat.

## Lifestyle

# Posture Counts!

If you ever heard your mother tell you to “stand up straight,” she may have been on to something. Beyond looking better, good posture can benefit your muscular and skeletal system and improve how your body functions and feels.

Imagine a tower of blocks, each balanced on the other, solidly built. In many ways, our bodies are like that tower. We are constructed so that our joints, ligaments, bones, and muscular system can help us stand, walk, climb, bend, and more. By maintaining the proper alignment, we avoid putting

excess stress on the ligaments and joints. Additionally, a good posture keeps the organs in a neutral position, allowing them to function best. Proper alignment requires and maintains a strong core, which can reduce the risk of injury and back pain.

There are things you can do to improve your posture. First, attain and maintain a healthy weight. Excess weight weakens the core and creates an imbalance in the way we stand and sit. Second, avoid crossing legs, standing with a hip out, slumping in a chair, or any

positions that doesn't allow you to distribute your weight evenly. Sit in chairs that support a good posture and keep both feet flat on the ground about a shoulder width apart. Finally, activate your core muscles frequently. This is especially important when you sit down and stand up. By using your core muscles to get up and down, you help to protect your spine and knees.

Posture counts. With good posture, you can experience more energy, better digestive health, and prevent injury. So, stand up straight!

## **Less is More: Do It Yourself Cleaning**

A new trend we are seeing a lot of right now is DIY cleaners. There are many benefits of making your own cleaners; they are environmentally friendly, non-toxic to children and pets, and inexpensive. Try making the following yourself!

### Glass Cleaner

- 2 cups water
- ½ cup vinegar
- ¼ cup rubbing alcohol

Combine all ingredients and store in a spray bottle.

### All Purpose Cleaner

- 4 tablespoons of baking soda
- 1 quart warm water

Mix solution and use a sponge to wipe everything down.

## Fitness

Ask the Trainer by  
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**Question:** I really want to work on my flexibility. Would you recommend Pilates or yoga to help me achieve this goal?

**Answer:** This comes down to your personal preference as both can help you increase your flexibility. I enjoy incorporating both into my fitness routine. They both work on flexibility, strength, breathing and connecting the mind and body. One of the main differences between yoga and Pilates is that yoga will also gradually increase the flexibility of your joints. Pilates focuses on trying to relax muscles that are tense and provide strength and a lengthening to numerous muscles of the body.

I would highly recommend trying out a few yoga and Pilates classes to see what you enjoy and what suits your abilities. There are a variety of yoga and Pilates classes, so try a few out before deciding which is best! And if you are like me, you may even decide you like both. Either way, it will be a great addition to your routine!

### Common Fitness Questions

**What's best for weight loss: strength training or aerobic exercise?**

Both strength training and aerobic exercise are important to fitness and weight loss. Aerobic exercise raises your heart rate, increases your oxygen intake, and helps you burn fat. Strength training builds muscle, causing you to burn more calories every day. The best approach is to work out aerobically at least 5 days a week, and include 2-3 days of strength training a week.

**Does the time of day I work out affect my fitness?**

Some studies have shown that people who exercise in

the morning are more likely to make exercise a habit, but the most important thing is that you work out, no matter what time of day.

**Is there a way to way to include exercise at work?**

Even if you don't have access to a gym at work, you can find ways to move more and improve your fitness. Stand up when taking phone calls. Take the long way to the conference room or the break room. Use the timer on your computer to remind you to get up every 20 minutes. Keep an exercise band in your desk and use it to do strength-training exercises during a break.

### Want to Know More?

*Contact TCU Insurance for information on wellness programs. We can help you reduce healthcare costs and improve employee well being.*



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