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## Nutrition

### The Nutritious Garden

The research is clear; a diet that includes an abundance of vegetables, fruits, and whole grains offers the greatest health benefits. And in spring, it's a great time to plant a vegetable garden that can help you meet that dietary goal!

To maximize nutrition, include a variety of color in your garden. In a small garden measuring 4x8, you can grow zucchini, tomatoes, green beans, eggplant, and a variety of herbs (including basil, rosemary, and oregano). The green zucchini is a good source of vitamin C, fiber, manganese, and folate. Green beans are an excellent source of vitamin A and fiber. The red tomato contains vitamins A, C, K, and B6, and the purple eggplant is a good source of vitamin B1, B6, potassium, and fiber. Herbs contain plant compounds (polyphenols) that have anti-inflammatory properties.

But what if you don't have a backyard or access to a garden plot? There are a variety of plants that can be grown in a pot on a porch or even in a sunny window. The key is to choose a container that is deep enough for the roots. Be sure to find a spot that gets at least 6 hours of sun a day. Gardening in a pot offers you a fun way to combine plants; for example, a pot that combines tomato, onion, and cilantro makes a great "Salsa Pot."

Growing a garden – or even 1 plant – can help you and your family eat more vegetables. In fact, adults who garden eat nearly 1½ times more fruits and vegetables a day. With all the benefits and the low cost, it's a good time to give gardening a try!

## Gardening Tips for Beginners:

- Give plants the room they need. Planting too close together can reduce a plant's sun and water.
- Prepare the soil before planting. Add an organic fertilizer or compost and add it to your soil. Be sure to rake or rototill it.
- Start small. A few plants will produce plenty of vegetables!



## Produce of the Month: Swiss Chard

Swiss chard is a leafy green vegetable, common in Mediterranean cooking. An excellent source of vitamins A, C, K and E, it is also a low calorie source of many phytonutrients known to regulate blood sugars, act as an anti-inflammatory, and improve bone health. Swiss chard can be used in place of spinach, broccoli, or kale when planning a meal.

**The Basics:** Swiss chard can be found in your local grocery store. Choose chard with leaves that look fresh: not wilted, without holes, rich green color. Store the Swiss chard unwashed in the refrigerator. It should keep for up to 3-5 days. When ready to prepare, rinse the Swiss chard in cold water and remove the leaves from the stem (or use the first inch or so of the stem closest to the leaves). The stems may be cooked and eaten but can be very tough. One common way to cook Swiss chard is to boil it in a large pot of water with added salt. Boil uncovered for about 3 minutes. Drain the pot and remove as much water from the Swiss chard as possible, using a fork or spoon for press out the water. You can also sauté the Swiss chard in a little olive oil with salt and pepper.

**Try This:** Add Swiss chard to your cheese quesadillas. Or chop Swiss chard and add to scrambled eggs or a quiche recipe. Swiss chard is a good addition to almost any pasta recipe as well.

**The Facts:** One cup of Swiss chard is about 35 calories and an excellent source of vitamins, iron, fiber and calcium.

## Preventive

### National Stress Awareness Month



April is National Stress Awareness Month, sponsored by The Health Resource Network, a not for profit health education organization. Stress is a serious risk factor, increasing the risk for heart disease, obesity, diabetes, mental illness, and possibly cancer. Controlling stress is an important aspect of a healthy life. Proven methods of stress control include –

- Sleep – Getting regular and adequate sleep is critical to stress relief.
- Meditation – There are many different types of meditation. Find one that feels comfortable to you and begin with just 5 minutes a day.
- Friends and Family – It is important to have a strong social network.
- Exercise – Regular exercise helps to reduce stress and has a number of other health benefits.

If you struggle with chronic stress, talk with your health professional about other options. There are ways to reduce the negative impact of stress and live a healthier and happier life.

## Eastern and Western Medicine

A thorough discussion of Eastern and Western medicines is complex, but it is possible to identify some key differences in the approaches of Eastern and Western medicines and understand when each might be most useful.

Eastern medicine began over 5,000 years ago, focusing on plants as a way of health and a treatment for illness.

Though Western medicine can be traced back to the ancient Greeks, the invention of modern Western medicine is in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Eastern medicine focuses on the whole body, treating the whole person: diet, family, stress, etc.

Western medicine emphasizes a diagnosis that relies on specific tests, symptoms, and examination markers.

Western medicine has made excellent progress in surgical procedures and pharmaceutical treatments.

The most common Eastern medical treatment is acupuncture, used to treat both physical and emotional health issues.

According to the National Institute of Health, acupuncture has proven to be a good option for back pain, arthritis, tension & migraine headaches.

Many physicians trained in Western medicine have added Eastern methods to their practices.

Seeking out licensed practitioners of Western or Eastern medicine is important to receiving good care. If you are interested in acupuncture or other Eastern medicine techniques, talk to your doctor about your interest. Read what you can about the options and expected results. The best combination may be the holistic approach of the East with the targeted science of the West.



## Lifestyle

### The Health Benefits of Pets

For those who currently own pets or those who are thinking about getting a pet, you may be surprised at the health benefits that having a pet offers. Having a pet has a positive effect on both emotional and physical health.

Owning a pet can reduce the risk of depression. Animals provide companionship and comfort, reducing loneliness and raising your overall mood. One research study showed that nursing home residents were less lonely when visited by dogs than when visited by people. The unconditional love from a pet can create

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very comfortable silences, allowing for complete relaxation.

Owning a pet is also associated with decreased blood pressure, lower cholesterol and triglycerides, and an increase in exercise. A study of 48 stockbrokers who were already taking blood pressure medicine showed that after half of the stockbrokers were given a pet, their blood pressure dropped significantly compared to the half who were not given a pet. If your pet is a dog, studies show that you walk more on average than those without a dog. Also, those who walk dogs make more eye contact with the people around them than those who walk without a dog.

Appreciate the benefits of pet ownership and allow yourself to relax and reduce your stress by interacting with your pet. If you do not have a pet, consider whether one fits into your lifestyle. Pets do require attention and interaction to be happy and healthy. Also, as we are thinking about our pets, protect them during the summer months by never leaving them in a car and bringing them inside when the outside temperature gets too hot. If your pet spends most of its time outside, provide shade and plenty of fresh water. Taking good care of our pets helps them take care of us.

### Did You Know? To Buy or Not to Buy: Generic Medicine

Imagine that you're suffering from allergies -- given the month, this might not be too much of a stretch -- and the local drugstore has Benadryl and diphenhydramine. Benadryl will cost you three times more than diphenhydramine, but at least you know the Benadryl name. What do you do?

Diphenhydramine is the active ingredient of Benadryl. Anything containing diphenhydramine is equivalent to Benadryl, as long as the dosages are equivalent. And store brand diphenhydramine usually costs about a third of the brand name. Given that, the store brand would be a good choice.

When you buy something like Benadryl instead of the generic equivalent, you're paying more for a brand. The two products are identical in their effects. The difference is an advertising campaign and a name. And that's the whole reason that Benadryl is more familiar than something called diphenhydramine: advertising.

Still need convincing? One study out of Brown University found that pharmacists bought store brand medication 91% of the time. That's in contrast to the average household, which bought generic only 26% of the time. The conclusion? The more you know about medicine, the more likely you are to prefer the store brand.

So how can you take advantage of this? Next time you're about to buy brand name medication, check the label for the active ingredient. Then, grab the store brand equivalent that contains that ingredient. It's just as effective and you'll be spending a fraction of the cost.

## Fitness



Staying active is necessary for good health. But what do you do if arthritis is causing frequent pain or if you experience joint stiffness? Maybe you aren't experiencing either of these, but you may wonder how to keep your joints healthy for as long as possible. Exercise is an important component to joint health. Knowing what to do – and how much to do – can help you keep your mobility and reduce injury.

Before you begin any exercise program, talk with your doctor about what's right for you. When you have permission to begin, start with the basics of joint health: get moving! The worst thing you can do for your joints is to sit still. Lack of movement increases stiffness, which can lead to more pain and less exercise. Walk every day, and take frequent breaks from sitting. If your hands are stiff, lightly moving your fingers and gently making a fist can help. The key is to be gentle; don't squeeze or put added pressure on your joints.

Building muscle can also protect joints. Use lighter weights (whether on a machine or a hand weight) to avoid added stress on your joints. Focus on more repetitions over adding too much weight. Regular weight lifting will also help you lose weight, which can reduce the strain on your joints.

Stretching is also important. Be sure to warm up first. Stretching cold muscles can hurt the ligaments and tendons that attach bone to bone and bone to muscle, respectively. After warming up, stretch gently but completely.

Finally, if you do have joint problems, avoid repetitive motions (when possible). You may benefit by working with a physical therapist to maintain your range of movement. Dietary changes that focus on reducing inflammation may help. These include reducing/eliminating sugar and increasing intake of fish, berries, and green tea. A vegetarian/vegan diet may also be helpful.

The goal of fitness is to live a long and healthy life, able to do the activities you need and want to do. Taking care of your joints is a part of that. Keep moving, and talk to your doctor about any joint pain or stiffness you may have.

**Ask the  
Trainer by  
Erin M. Long,  
B.S., NSCA-CPT**

### Question:

Hi Erin. My question for you is how do you know when or if you need to change your workout program? I've been doing the same program for the last two months and I'm not sure if I should keep it up or switch. ~Keisha M.

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### **Answer:**

Hi Keisha. Before I answer your question I need to ask you a few questions.

- Have you stopped seeing results in your current program?
- Are you getting bored?
- Has something happened to prohibit you from continuing your program?
- Have your goals for working out changed?

So let's go to the first question, have you stopped seeing results? If you are still seeing the results you were looking for under your current program, why switch? It can sometimes take a good few months to really see results you are looking for, so make sure you give it enough time. If you haven't seen any results these last two months, then you may need to look for a different program.

The second question asks if you are you getting bored. Who wants to continue a workout regimen that you don't enjoy? If I'm bored, then my motivation drops and I don't look forward to the workout, which can have many negative effects. Make sure it is something you enjoy.

Moving on to the third question, has something happened to prohibit you from continuing your program? Has time become an issue? Have you have an injury occur? When these things happen, it may be time to change your program depending on the intensity and time of the workouts. Give yourself time to heal if you are injured.

Lastly, have your goals changed? From time to time our fitness and health goals can change. For instance, let's say you started a program to lose 15-20 pounds and your program does such that. Well now you want to work on toning and strength or maybe want to start working towards running races. Most likely the program you were on for losing weight might not help with these new goals. It would then be time to look for a new program to help you reach these new goals.

But as I said, if your current program is still working for you, why change? There is no reason to change something that is working for you. Hope this Helps!

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### **Want to know more?**

Contact Teachers Credit Union for information on wellness programs. We can help you reduce healthcare costs and improve employee well being.

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