

COMPLETELY WELL

December 2014



Insurance Agency



Lifestyle

The Importance of Relationships

Whether we are talking about friendships, a marriage, supportive co-workers, or even our Facebook pals – the relationships we have make a difference in our health. Good relationships – those in which we feel listened to and supported – can strengthen our immunity and help us live longer! When we feel isolated or in a relationship that is full of conflict, we are at a higher risk for both feeling bad and serious health issues. Let's look at the science behind the importance of relationships.

The connection between happiness and health is strong. Some studies found that people have lower stress-related hormones when happy. Other studies found that people took better care of themselves when they were happy. And while being in a relationship isn't necessary for being happy, having a support network in good times and challenging times is directly linked to happiness. According to *Harvard Women's Health Watch*, "Social connections help relieve harmful levels of stress, which can harm the heart's arteries, gut function, insulin regulation, and the immune system." Conversely, *Health Psychology* reported on a study that found that people who did not consider their spouse "supportive or listening well" had increased inflammation markers often associated with an increased risk for cardiovascular disease. The stress of isolation or a relationship in conflict on the immune response has been studied by Ohio State University, and it was concluded that psychological stress caused a breakdown in the communication of the immune system, weakening its effectiveness. A separate study found that social stress was a greater mortality indicator than physical stress. And while research continues in the connection between relationships, happiness, and health – it is clear that supportive relationships are as important to our health as diet, exercise, and sleep.

Continued on page 2

The Importance of Relationships continued.

So what can you do to improve the relationship aspect of your health? First, take note of relationships that are causing you stress. Try to work through the issues that are affecting the relationship, seeking help from a therapist or clergy if necessary. Second, don't wait for others to call or text you. Find time to reach out to friends and family. Finally, consider volunteering your time to help others. Volunteering - whether at a hospital, church, school, animal shelter, museum, food pantry or any other organization that needs help - will connect you with people who care about the same causes you care about and will provide you with a chance to help others.

Realizing that the relationships you are in - family, friendships, workplace, and neighborhood - has a significant impact on your health is the first step to actively working on the relationship and appreciating it. And remember, the way you relate to those around you affects their health as well. During the holiday season, it would be nice if we all made a point of being the best and the healthiest friend we can be.

Less is More: Holiday Gift Shopping Game

Do you have a large group of friends to shop for or want to do something different with your spouse for Christmas? Try a White Elephant Gift Exchange with a twist!

1. Everyone is assigned a friend/family member to purchase for and given a strict dollar limit.
2. The goal is to see who can purchase the most gifts within their dollar limit.
3. You can set rules such as: they all have to be usable gifts instead of dollar store finds, all gifts must be purchased, or you can use the dollar limit to give a home-made gift.
4. To hold everyone accountable, you can have the receipts turned in.
5. Hold a small gift giving party and have fun!

Gift giving is not about buying the latest, greatest, most expensive thing on the market. Giving gifts is supposed to show how much you care for the people in your life. So keep it small, fun, and focus on making memories.

Happy Holidays,
Marie McFadden, CHES



It's Not Too Late!

If you haven't gotten a flu shot yet, it's not too late! According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the flu vaccine decreases the chance that you will need to see your doctor due to flu symptoms by 60%. This year's flu has caused more complications for those ages 18-64. H1N1 is active this year. **The best prevention is the flu vaccine.**



**Looking for
a way to
save money on
wrapping paper?**

Happy
Holidays!

Brown kraft paper (available in rolls) can be customized for any occasion. Let the kids draw holiday designs, use inexpensive stamps or even cool stickers for a one of a kind look that is easy on the wallet.



Produce of the Month: Potatoes

The potato has been both celebrated as the perfect food and maligned as a cause for weight gain. The truth is that potatoes are high in fiber and a good source of vitamin B6, potassium, and vitamin C and is a healthy choice when not fried or smothered in butter or other high fat toppings.

The Basics: Choose potatoes that do not have obvious bruising or cuts, are not sprouting, or have any green discoloration. Store potatoes in a dry, cool, dark place, such as a cabinet or basement. Do not store potatoes in a plastic bag; leave open in a box or mesh bag for circulation. When ready to use, wash well and prepare according to your favorite recipe.

Try This: Roast sliced or diced potatoes with a little olive oil and salt (400 ° until the edges are brown). For a fun presentation, bake potatoes then let cool slightly. Cut in half and remove most of the flesh. Combine the cooked potato with your favorite veggies, lean protein (if desired), and some BBQ sauce. Put the mixture in your potato shell and serve!

Vegan, Vegetarian, and Plant-Based Eating

Nutrition

We make choices everyday about what to eat. We choose to eat certain foods because we like them, because they are good for us or maybe out of habit. The food choices we make on a daily basis determine our diet. Those who choose not to eat meat eat a vegetarian diet. There are many reasons that people may choose a vegetarian diet. Some choose to avoid meat out of concerns for animals and how they are treated in the food industry. Others avoid meat in response to their religion, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, which encourage followers to follow a vegetarian diet. There are an increasingly large number of people who are avoiding meat for the health benefits that vegetarianism offers. But did you know that there are many types of vegetarians?

Vegans: Vegans will not eat any foods that came from animals, including dairy and eggs. They will not eat any foods that contain animal products, either.

Lacto-ovo-vegetarian: These vegetarians will include dairy products (cheese, butter and milk) and eggs in their diet but will avoid all meat (including fish and poultry).

Lacto-vegetarian: These vegetarians include dairy products but no eggs or meat.

Pescatarian (or pescetarian): Vegetarians who eat fish along with plant products are called pescatarians.

Semi-vegetarian: This term applies to someone who primarily eats a vegetarian diet but may include, on occasion dairy, eggs, some poultry or fish.

There are many ways to incorporate a vegetarian approach into your diet, and the benefits of eating a plant-based diet are clear - lower cholesterol, reduced risk of certain cancers, lower blood pressure and reduced risk of obesity. Adding a vegetarian meal once or twice a week can start to improve your health. Including a variety of foods into your weekly diet will provide the nutrients you need. For example, a meal that includes beans, broccoli, a low fat cheese and whole wheat bread would provide iron, protein, calcium, vitamin B12 and other important nutrients. Taking a multivitamin is sometimes recommended for those who follow a strict vegetarian diet.

Eating a vegetarian diet doesn't mean a diet that lacks flavor and diversity. Check out vegetarian recipes online or at your local library for ones that appeal to you. Strive for a meatless meal or meatless day once a week. Adding more produce, grains, and legumes to your daily diet will bring you significant health benefits and bring more variety to your plate.



Preventive

Preventive Health Screenings

It's likely that you've already been screened for certain health conditions. If you've had your blood pressure taken, been weighed at the doctor's office, or had a blood test, you have been screened! Here is some information on health screenings that you should know.

Everyone:

High Blood Pressure – Recommended annually, blood pressure screenings are important to your cardiovascular health. Undetected and untreated high blood pressure raises your risk for stroke, heart attack, heart failure, and kidney damage.

Overweight/Obesity – Being overweight or obese raises your risk for heart disease, diabetes, and certain cancers. It also increases the risk for joint related issues and metabolic syndrome. Regularly monitoring your weight will help you and your doctor understand your overall health risks.

Cholesterol - Cholesterol is screened through a fasting blood test and frequency depends on personal and family medical history.

Colon Health – Screening for colon cancer or precancerous cells is recommended beginning at age 50, earlier if family or personal medical history indicates. This is most often done by a colonoscopy.

Skin Cancer – Regular medical exams should include checking for any changes in the skin that could indicate cancer.

Diabetes – A fasting blood test is recommended at least once every 3 years, beginning at age 45, earlier if blood pressure (treated or untreated) is 135/80 or greater.

Women:

Breast Cancer - The American Cancer Society recommends a mammogram every 1 – 2 years, beginning at age 40. Early screening may be done depending on personal and family medical history. A breast exam is also recommended.

Cervical and Pelvic Health – Pap smears are done to detect cervical cancer or precancerous cells and are recommended beginning at age 21, then every 3 years until age 30. Ages 30-65 are recommended every 5 years. Women over age 65 who have had no abnormal Pap smears in the prior 10 years may stop the screening. Pelvic exams are recommended to be done along with Pap smears.

Bone Density – Bone density test determines the risk for osteoporosis, most often tested at age 65.

Men:

Prostate Health – Men should discuss with their doctor the recommended screening for prostate cancer given their personal and family medical history. Both digital exam and a blood test (PSA) are available and should be discussed.

Testicular Health – Men should be checked for any unusual changes or lumps in the testicles during every exam. Self-exam may also detect a lump.

Question: It's the same thing each year around the holidays for me. I tell myself I'm not going to gain weight. I'm going to continue to work out and start the New Year off right. Unfortunately I struggle each year and always gain weight during the holidays. Do you have any suggestions on how to beat the holiday weight gain?

Answer: I get it. You work all year long to stay healthy and lose some weight, then boom! It's the holidays, and food and temptations are everywhere! I understand it's hard to say no. You think, "Oh one won't hurt, or I'll work extra hard this week at the gym," but then something comes up. This time of year can get crazy, and working out doesn't happen! Then add the emotions and stress holidays can bring, and you start to binge eat or snack on all the wrong things. Again, I get it! But I'm here to tell you that there is hope!

First, let's pinpoint why you may sabotage yourself this time of year. I mentioned a few reasons why this can happen to people, so I want you to take a moment and figure out your why this happens to you. Once you know that, it will help you make some changes or avoid certain things. Below are some suggestions on how to avoid those extra pounds this holiday season.

- 1) **Plan and Prepare:** If you are going to attend a holiday party or get-together, make sure you are prepared. Don't just wing it and think you can control yourself. Eat a little something before you go, bring a healthy dish or have a healthy snack with you to hold you over.
- 2) **List:** Make a list of every good reason why you want to lose weight, and read it to yourself every morning -- and when you are tempted to eat something you hadn't planned, just read it again, so you're constantly reminding yourself about what's important.
- 3) **Don't give into Peer Pressure or Food Pushers:** This time of year, people are making those yummy treats and start to pressure you into eating them. It's okay to say NO. It's not disrespectful or hurtful to turn down a treat someone has made for you. Don't let people pressure to eat something you do not want to just because it's the holidays or a celebration! You can celebrate and have fun without breaking your diet.
- 4) **Small portions:** Portion size is a huge deal. If you do enjoy some of the holiday treats this time of year, then make sure that you watch your portion size. Grab a smaller plate, eat the healthy snacks and dishes first, and drink plenty of water.
- 5) **Continue to workout:** One of the easiest things you can do is make sure not to skip your workouts. Even if you only get 15-20 minutes a day, that is better than nothing. Schedule it into your day and just do it!!! Get it done first thing in the morning if you can. Then if something comes up during the day, you've already got it in!

If you need further help please contact me via the portal and I can help answer any further questions you may have! Have a great holiday season!

Hot Fitness Trends

- CrossFit and P90X are still going strong. Both are focused on muscle building and avoiding exercise plateaus. Both also involve a variety of different exercises in a given workout. This is a high intensity workout!
- Hot Yoga is still a hot trend! Performed in a heated studio, hot yoga is normally Bikram yoga, a physically demanding form of yoga. If you are interested in trying hot yoga, check out your local studios certifications and options. Most studios offer a variety of temperatures and levels.
- Body Weight Training – According to the latest American College of Sports Medicine survey, the number one exercise trend for 2015 is going to be body weight training. Body weight training uses the body's own weight to build muscle. Exercises include planks, lunges, push-ups, squats, and pull-ups.

Remember to see your medical professional before beginning any exercise routine.



Want to know more?

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



Insurance Agency