



Insurance Agency

In this Issue: Understanding Plant Based Diets, Core Fitness, Tired of Being Tired, Starting with Day One, Arugula, *Less is More: New Year's Resolutions*



January Goals

Beginning this month, we will be suggesting monthly goals for you to try and track.

Nutrition

Plan one meatless dinner a week.

Fitness

Add core workouts to your workout.

Preventive

Track the amount of sleep you get.

Lifestyle

Do an assessment of your health as it is today. Complete the Health Risk Assessment on your wellness portal, or take the HRA again.



Lifestyle

Starting with Day One

“Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can.”

- Arthur Ashe,
Professional Tennis Player

When setting goals – New Year’s or otherwise – we know how important it is to have specific goals and ideas about what you want to achieve, where you want to go. But there are times that we focus so much on what we want to achieve that we forget to take into account where we are starting. Knowing exactly where you are – how much you smoke, how much you weigh, how much exercise you get, your blood pressure, cholesterol, etc. – is critical for developing a healthy plan that has the best chance of succeeding.

Like pictures in a magazine, the goals we set for ourselves may be unrealistic. Goals that are measurable, with small incremental steps, are the goals we are more likely to reach. For example, wanting to run a marathon or participate in a triathlon are great goals. But if you don’t exercise, the difference between where you are now and what you envision may be so big, that you find yourself too quickly discouraged.

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Here is where measuring your current level of fitness can help you. If you do not exercise – or exercise rarely – then setting a goal of walking 3-5 days a week is a better immediate goal. Once you have achieved that, you can set another goal, and so on. Eventually you can realistically consider running a marathon as a goal.

What about lowering cholesterol? First, your doctor will probably give you advice (and possibly medication) to assist you. Then, you can set both dietary and fitness goals to help you lower your cholesterol. Do you normally eat a lot of high cholesterol foods: fried foods, animal proteins, dairy (other than fat-free)? Understanding how much of your diet needs to be changed can help you; radical dietary changes can often be difficult to sustain. Begin by making small changes – switch to low or fat free dairy and lean meats and add more servings of fruits and vegetables. Once you have adapted to those, consider making further changes to help you.

Whether it's losing weight, quitting smoking, or decreasing stress – looking at yourself and taking stock of exactly where you are at will give you the best chance at success. Remember, your weight, how much you smoke, how you handle stress, your blood pressure ... they are what they are whether you acknowledge it or not. It is important to accept exactly where you are right now. What choices, situations, and habits helped to create the current you whether healthy or unhealthy? Identify what has worked and hasn't worked for your overall health. Know your numbers (blood pressure, cholesterol, weight, waist size), look carefully at your diet, and keep track of how much activity you get. With this information, you can come up with a realistic, doable plan to make 2014 your healthiest year yet.

Sleep – we need it, we want it, we struggle getting enough of it. The sleep we get, both the amount and the quality, has a direct impact on how we feel during the day – physically and emotionally. So what is such a big deal about being tired? Why does sleep matter so much?

- According to the REGARDS project (REasons for Geographic and Racial Differences in Stroke, sponsored by the National Institutes of Health), regularly getting less than 6 hours of sleep a night quadruples your risk of stroke. (2012)
- Not getting enough sleep is associated with increased calcification of coronary arteries, a predictor of future heart disease and heart attacks. (JAMA 2008)
- Poor sleep – in quantity and quality – is associated with a weakened immune system. (JAMA 2009)
- A Case Western University research project found that people who slept less than 6 hours a night were 47% more likely to have colorectal polyps. These polyps have the potential of becoming cancerous. (2011)

Preventive

Tired of Being Tired?

“Sleep is the best meditation.”

- Dalai Lama

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- People with type 2 diabetes had a 43% higher insulin resistance level if they slept poorly. (*Diabetes*, 2011)
- Sleep specialists at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine and Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic found that a lack of quality sleep negatively affected disease resistance, metabolism, brain function, reaction time, sensitivity to pain, and mood.

So how can we get enough quality sleep? Try the following tips:

- ✓ You've heard it before – go to bed and wake up at approximately the same time every day, including weekends.
- ✓ Do not work on your computer, check your phone, play with your iPad, watch TV, or use any other electronic device that produce artificial light for at least 1 hour before sleep. According to *Psychology Today*, recent research has shown that the blue wavelength light decreases melatonin levels, disrupting the body's sleep-wake cycle.
- ✓ Avoid caffeine beginning in the afternoon.
- ✓ Find times during the day for sunshine and exercise. Whether it is a walk outside or you open the curtains in your office, both exercise and daytime exercise can help you sleep better at night.
- ✓ Make sure your bedroom is dark and cool. Turn the clock away from your bed and close the curtains. Turn the thermostat down so you are not too warm at night.
- ✓ Avoid both nicotine and alcohol at night. Nicotine is a stimulant, making it difficult for you to fall asleep. And though alcohol can make you tired, drinking before bed can cause restlessness during the night.

Getting enough sleep every night is important. If you continue to have trouble sleeping, discuss your concerns with your doctor. Sleep well!



Did You Know?

Though cotton/polyester blend sheets are wrinkle resistant, they can make you feel too warm. Try 100% cotton to stay cool.

Thread count is the number of threads that are woven into 1 square inch of fabric. Higher thread counts are softer – but there is no real need to exceed 200 count sheets for everyday use.

Want to get rid of dust mites? Wash and dry your sheets in hot water (130° F).

Less Is More: New Year's Resolutions

It's that month again, where we all strive to make positive changes. Are you making a resolution to get fit, eat healthy, or have less stress in your life? Great! Now how in the world can you really do that, especially on a budget? This month I wanted to speak from personal experience and revisit a few topics about making cost effective changes for the better.

Resolution #1: Eat a Healthier Diet.

I always say start at home. Cooking at home automatically reduces fat, calories, and sugar amounts because you can control your food choices. Reduce your eating out to once or twice a week; take the rest of what you used to spend and put that towards your grocery bill, choosing healthier options. One of my favorite swaps is to replace all ground beef with ground lean turkey. I use turkey in everything! From tacos to pasta dishes, I have swapped completely. I always stock up when it is on sale. For example, 3 large packages of lean turkey costs \$14.07; I got it for \$11.25 on sale. Your wellness portal has dozens of healthy recipes to try.

Resolution #2: Exercise more.

Going back to a previous article, research gym memberships, as prices are extremely competitive. However, there are several other options. Did you get any gift cards for Christmas? Majority of chain stores sell exercise equipment. I have found exercise DVD's for less than \$15, requiring no equipment, beyond gym shorts and shoes. If you are willing to brave the cold (or heat if you live south), you can always run or walk outside, just make sure to dress in layers that you can take off and put back on as you warm up and cool down. For more information, view your wellness portal for videos and examples.

Resolution #3: Reduce your stress.

Find an activity that is relaxing and recharging for you. Personally, I take walks with my dog. This not only clears my head, but also exercises my dog at the same time! Anything outdoors and gets me moving is an instant stress reduction. Reading can also be very relaxing; bookstore prices may not be, however. Check out your local library or a discount bookstore.

Resolution #4: Spend more time with family and friends.

How do you do this without spending money? Well you just need to get creative. My family is full of cooks, so instead of going out, we have "carry in's." Want to get out? Go see an afternoon movie instead of a night movie, SO MUCH cheaper. Go to the park and take a walk, have a picnic or sledding if there is snow. Check your Sunday papers for discounts and coupons. Many bowling alleys, museums, and restaurants will offer specials or reduced prices to bring in business.

No matter what you choose for your resolution, get creative and don't break the bank. Good Luck!

-Marie McFadden, CHES



“One cannot think well, love well, sleep well, if one has not dined well.”

- Virginia Woolf,
author



+ **Nutrition**



Understanding Plant Based Diets

Making a change to your diet is one of the most common New Year's resolutions. And, lately, plant based diets have been big news. So what's this movement all about? Is it just a flash in the sauté pan?

Simply put, plant based diets are diets that emphasize minimally processed fruits, vegetables, and grains. Why is this approach making news? Plant based diets are heart healthy, reduce cancer risk, reduce the risk of diabetes, and help you achieve and maintain a healthy weight without feeling hungry. Additionally, plant based diets are considered better for the environment and the wallet.

There are well-known plant based diets that are based on the success of reversing heart disease. Dr. Dean Ornish and Dr. Caldwell Esselstyn are just two of them. The research is powerful. Patients with prior diagnosed heart disease were able to reverse their disease. Plant based diets are also associated with better blood sugar control in diabetics due to the increase of fiber and reduction of processed foods. These factors are also reasons that plant

based diets are associated with a decreased cancer risk. For many people, eating a plant-based diet is the easiest way to lose weight. Individuals can eat greater amounts of vegetables, fruits, and whole grains for fewer calories than processed foods and meats.

Eating a plant-based diet is not only good for your health, it's good for the environment. According to Scientific American, "...current production levels of meat contribute between 14 and 22 percent...of 'CO₂-equivalent' greenhouse gases the world produces every year." Or a better way to understand it is a "half pound of hamburger...releases as much greenhouse gas into the atmosphere as driving a 3,000-pound car nearly 10 miles."

So what to eat? A variety of vegetables, fruits, and whole grains are the healthiest foundation to any diet. If you choose to eat meat, choose lean cuts and proper portions. Embracing the plant based diet movement – whether you go vegan, vegetarian, or just meatless Monday – is an important step to better health.

A leafy green known as salad rocket, Arugula packs a punch with its peppery flavor. Arugula is often found in salad mixes and is a member of the cabbage/mustard family. Low in calories and rich in phytochemicals, arugula is a good source of vitamins A, C, and K.

The Basics: Arugula is available in most grocery stores, especially in salad mixes. It is highly perishable, so buy it no more than a couple of days before using. While it can be stored unwashed in the refrigerator, some people choose to store it stem down in a glass of water (changing the water daily). When ready to use, wash thoroughly and trim the stems.

Try This: Arugula is a salad staple, but it is also a great addition to soups, pastas, and even pizza. Arugula can be steamed or sautéed and pairs well with garlic, tomatoes, and potatoes. The

Produce of the Month: Arugula



next time you make brunch, add chopped arugula to your egg dish. The bright arugula and creamy egg flavors work well together!

The Facts: One cup of arugula is less than 10 calories and is a good source of fiber and vitamins A, C, and K.

+ Fitness

“Take care of your body. It’s the only place you have to live.”

- Jim Rohn,
Motivational author

Core Fitness

Much has been written and talked about concerning working “the core” during the past few years. This is more than a fitness fad; core fitness is an important aspect to overall fitness and helps to prevent injury, maintain good posture and retain mobility as we age. Having a strong core increases stability and balance. Working out your core is an easy addition to any exercise program and has many benefits.

The core muscles include the abdominal muscles and the muscles in the back. Think of these core muscles as a girdle, holding the spine and internal organs securely. The abdominal muscles consist of the transverse abdominal muscle, the oblique and the rectus abdominal muscle. The transverse abdominal is the deepest muscle, running from front to back, horizontally like a weight belt. The obliques are located at both sides of the torso and are used when rotating the body. The rectus abdominal muscle is the one associated with “6 pack abs” and runs from the rib cage down. Working all of the abdominal muscles is an important part to core fitness. Work the transverse abdominal muscle through pelvic tilts and pulling in your stomach muscle (focusing below your belly button) and holding for 10 seconds. Pilate’s exercises work this muscle well. Work your obliques by

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using rotation in your crunches as well as side bends. Crunches, sit-ups and reverse crunches are all good choices for working the rectus abdominal muscle.

The back muscles are also important in core fitness. The main back muscles that are part of the core are erector spinae (a group of muscles that run along the neck to the lower back) and multifidus (a muscle that stabilize the spinal column). Yoga and Pilates are great ways to build back muscle (and abdominal muscle) strength. The Plank Pose is the perfect exercise for all core muscles.

Working the core doesn't need special equipment or even a gym membership. Add five minutes of core exercises to your regular workout and increase your time as you get stronger. Core exercises are also great to do at home while watching television or listening to music. Whenever you do them, know that strengthening your core will improve your posture and help prevent injury. Core fitness is here to stay. Start improving yours today.

Want to know more?

Contact TCU Insurance for more information on wellness programs and how they can help to reduce healthcare costs and improve employee wellness.

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