

Completely Well



Insurance Agency



Nutrition

Enjoying the Benefits of a Mediterranean Diet

In this Issue: Arthritis Action Month, Benefits of Reading, the Mediterranean Diet, Olives, Less is More – Vacations, Ask the Trainer, Pick Up the Pace, and Skin Cancer Prevention Tips

Blue skies, warm seas, and rolling hills – these images come to mind when you think of the Mediterranean. Normally thought of as Italy, Greece, Morocco, and Turkey, the Mediterranean features a cuisine that is focused on fresh plant foods, whole grains, olive oil, beans and legumes. Research has shown that Mediterranean diet provides significant health benefits, including improving heart health and lowering the risk for diabetes.

One reason that the Mediterranean diet is a healthy one is because the fat in the diet is considered a heart healthy fat. Rather than butter and other saturated fats, the Mediterranean diet used olive oil, nuts, seeds, and avocado – all “heart healthy” fats. These fats help to lower blood cholesterol and triglyceride levels.

Another reason for the healthy benefits of the Mediterranean diet is its emphasis on carbohydrates and its limitations on meat. The general Mediterranean diet is approximately 50% carbohydrate and 10-

35% protein. Keeping the overall amount of protein lower than the average American diet helps reduce saturated fat and cholesterol. Additionally, the carbohydrates emphasized in the Mediterranean diet are vegetables, fruits, and whole grains – all without much added salt (herbs instead) and without high fat sauces or gravy. The frequent use of tomatoes in the diet provides an excellent dose of lycopene (known to help prevent certain cancers and possibly reduce stroke risk) and lutein (good for eye and cardiovascular health).

The Mediterranean diet provides a balanced, healthful variety of foods that appeal to almost any palate. Build a menu around fresh fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Add moderate amounts of healthy fats and include small portions of lean protein, especially plant proteins such as beans and legumes. Avoid too many sweets and refined carbohydrates (white bread, white rice, etc.). If you are tired of trendy diets and hard to follow meal plans, give the Mediterranean approach a try!



Produce of the Month - Olives

Olives are a salty, somewhat bitter fruit that can be used in a variety of savory dishes. A good source of fiber and iron, olives provide a healthy fat that is linked to reduced cholesterol and cardiovascular health.

The Basics: There are a wide variety of olives, and they are cured in a variety of ways. Fresh picked olives are very bitter, so the olives are cured, usually in brine. Olives are available in jars or cans or, in some stores, are available in bulk from barrels or bins. Olives can be stored in the refrigerator for a month or longer. When ready to eat, you can pit the olives by placing the flat of a knife on the olive and pressing down. This will release the pit,

which can then be picked out. You can then slice or chop as needed.

Try This: Olives can be added to almost any salad or pasta dish. You can also make an olive spread known as a tapenade. A tapenade is made with chopped olives, olive oil, lemon juice, and capers. Olive tapenade is usually served with crusty bread as an appetizer. Or try adding sliced green olives to brown rice, drizzled with olive oil and lemon juice.

The Facts: One cup of olives is approximately 150 calories and is a good source of iron, fiber, and vitamin E.

Preventive

Skin Cancer Prevention Tips

May is Melanoma/Skin Cancer Detection and Prevention Month. With summer just ahead of us, it's important to follow the skin cancer prevention guidelines listed below.

- Apply sunscreen everyday on all exposed skin (SPF 15 or higher).
- Reapply sunscreen every two hours if sweating or in water (e.g., pool, sprinkler, etc.)
- Choose swimwear for your children that minimize sun exposure – swim shirts for boys, one-piece swimsuits for girls.
- Keep babies out of the sun. Sunscreen is only recommended for babies six months or older.
- Stay out of direct sunlight between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.
- Wear a hat that shades the face and, ideally, the back of the neck.
- Do not use tanning beds.
- Wear sunglasses that block out UVA/UVB rays.
- Check your skin regularly for changes to your skin, especially a mole, beauty mark, or spot that changes in color or size.
- Have your skin checked yearly by your doctor as part of your annual wellness visit.

Arthritis Action Month



Sponsored by the Arthritis Foundation, Arthritis Action Month is intended to educate people about arthritis, its symptoms, its treatments, and its effects on an individual's functionality and productivity. Arthritis affects more than 50 million Americans and costs approximately 128 billion dollars a year in lost wages and productivity. The leading cause of disability, arthritis is a degenerative joint disease, normally classified into one of three types.

Osteoarthritis is the most common form of arthritis, causing stiffness, pain, and limited range of motion of the affected joints. Caused by a breakdown of the joint's cartilage, osteoarthritis is most commonly found in the hands, knees, hips, low back, and neck. Risk factors for osteoarthritis include repeated overuse, obesity or overweight, heredity, sedentary lifestyle, or prior joint injury. Regular exercise to build surrounding muscle and maintain joint movement is necessary, and pain relievers may be an option. Physical or occupational therapy may also be needed to regain and/or preserve flexibility.

Rheumatoid arthritis is an autoimmune disease, in which the body's immune system attacks its own tissue causing inflammation and long-term joint damage. Though the symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis may be limited to the joints, it is a

systemic disease that can affect organs throughout the body. Rheumatoid arthritis needs to be diagnosed and monitored by a doctor.

Juvenile arthritis – any type of arthritis diagnosed in someone under the age of 18 – can lead to changes in the growth of bones and joints and lead to a shorter stature as an adult. Children with juvenile arthritis need to be monitored by their physician.

Treatment for osteoarthritis ranges from lifestyle changes to surgery. Some of the most common treatments are

- lose weight/ maintain healthy weight
- exercise regularly – especially flexibility exercises
- physical therapy
- medication such as NSAIDs (ibuprofen, naproxen, and aspirin), corticosteroids (by mouth or injection), or acetaminophen
- arthroscopy surgery (surgeon is able to “clean” the joint of floating debris and inflamed tissue)
- joint replacement surgery

Treatments for rheumatoid arthritis and juvenile arthritis can vary, so it's important to be seen regularly by a doctor.

Lifestyle

Benefits of Reading

We know a good book can pass the time, make us smile, and even teach us something new about the world – but did you know that reading has health benefits? Reading reduces stress, can improve moods, and improves cognitive ability.

According a study from the University of Sussex, reading for only six minutes can reduce your stress levels by 68% (2009). The reduction of stress produces a slower heart rate, lower blood pressure, and less muscle tension. Feeling less stress is one of the reasons that so many people report that reading improves their mood. One survey (sponsored by the National Year of Reading) found that 86% of participants said that reading made them feel better. Reading can be an opportunity for escape from daily troubles and can also be inspiring. For example, reading may offer examples of people who have overcome difficulties or of people who have found success or happiness through perseverance and hard work. These examples can motivate us and provide the beginning of a blueprint for how we deal with our own lives.

The act of reading is complex – asking the



brain to interpret symbols, compile meaning, and imagine a story. This complexity is beneficial for the physical health of the brain, helping to slow cognitive decline and to preserve memory. In fact, a study published in *Neurology* (2013) claimed that people in their late 70s and 80s were able to slow down their rate of cognitive decline by about 32% by having a hobby that stimulated the brain, such as reading. Learning new things creates actual changes in the brain, producing synaptic connections between brain cells. As we learn – for example, by reading about something new – the connections between our brain cells strengthen.

Rather than just turning on the television, try picking up a book or a magazine. Read for just 10 minutes a day, and you may find that you are less stressed. Try a variety of genres (history, mystery, fiction, non-fiction) and see if you can find a book that takes you on a wonderful journey, cover to cover.

Less is More - Vacations

Vacations, we all need them, but how on earth do we pay for them? Vacations are proven to be good for your mental health. They give us a chance to unwind and recharge from the chaos that life can throw. However, they are just plain expensive, so in order to enjoy your time away follow a few simple rules.

- 1) Be realistic. We all would love to spend 2 weeks in Italy but 4 days in Florida may be

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more your speed right now. Just because you would rather be in Europe does not mean that you won't have just as much fun and relaxation someplace closer to home.

- 2) Pick a destination and start saving. Each year pick a place to go to (again, be realistic) and discuss options with a travel agent or do research online. This will give you an idea of how long it will take to save up. Set a budget that you can stick to and plan your trip accordingly.
- 3) Travel in the off-season. If school and work schedules allow, travel during non-peak seasons. Vacation spots typically charge more in the summer so consider a late fall trip or sometime in February.
- 4) Think outside the typical vacation spots. Many countries are trying to boost tourism and have very reasonable rates. Places such as the Dominican Republic, Brazil, and even Vietnam will all provide that exotic, tropical experience without the hefty price tag.
- 5) Cruises or all-inclusive resorts are great for the budget conscious traveler. You will generally have to pay in full in advance; however, depending on the package this will include your flight, hotel, food, and beverages. This concept makes it very easy to ward off any unforeseen expenses.
- 6) Have a stay-cation. If you really cannot go anywhere, use your vacation time anyway. Stay home for a week and get all those pesky to-do list items done. Or you can check out your local state park and go camping.

The bottom line is that vacation and downtime is so important, and with a bit of creativity and planning, everyone can rest up and re-charge.

Marie McFadden, CHES

Fitness

Ask the Trainer:

How do I get a flat stomach?

Erin Long, B.S., NSCA-CPT

There are many factors that create a flat stomach. You could do a thousand crunches every day and still not achieve that goal. It's going to take going to take time, hard work and patience to get there. Genetics also plays a role. Having said that, two types of exercise can help: strength training and cardiovascular exercise. The abdominals are just like any other muscle group: for definition to become visible, the muscle must grow larger and the fat that lies over them must decrease. Strength training will

increase the muscle, but you will only get a flat stomach if you combine strength training with cardiovascular exercise to get rid of the fat. Most individuals do not do nearly enough cardiovascular exercise to decrease their body fat percentage to a point where they would see abdominals. Eat extremely clean, getting enough protein, good fats, and carbs. You will lose belly fat and improve overall health through healthy eating and exercise.

Picking Up the Pace

Feel that walking isn't as good for you as running? A new study has shown that is not true! Walking can be just as good - if not better - for you! It CAN be. The key here is that you need to expend as much energy as runners do. And, for walkers, that means more time walking. What's the benefit? According to research from the Life Science Division at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory (2013), walkers reduced their risk for high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, and heart disease by a greater percentage than runners did. For example, runners decreased their risk for high blood pressure by 4.2%, while walkers reduced their risk of high blood pressure by 7.2%. This seems to be because walkers exercised for more minutes per week than runners did.

Remember, to benefit from walking, you will need to expend energy. Another study done by Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory looked at the connection between walking speed and mortality. The study reported that increasing walking speed increased longevity. Increasing your speed by even a couple of minutes a mile had a significant improvement in longevity. If you cannot walk quickly, you must walk farther.

Walking can help you manage your weight, reduce your risk for cardiovascular disease, and improve your mood. Don't feel you have to run to be healthy. Just pick up the pace a little and make sure you are putting in enough time and distance. You will quickly see why walking is one of the most popular exercises for people of all ages!

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

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