



Insurance Agency



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Preventive

National Asthma and Allergy Awareness Month

May is National Asthma and Allergy Awareness Month, sponsored by the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (AAFA). With spring allergy season in full bloom and a summer to look forward to, it's important for patients with asthma and allergies to know triggers, symptoms, and treatments.

Asthma:

- While the actual cause of asthma is unknown, both family history and a personal history of allergies increase the risk.
- Asthma causes the airways of the lungs to narrow, making it hard to breath. It can be life threatening.
- Allergens, irritants, upper respiratory infections, cold air, some medications, and some food preservatives can trigger asthma attacks.
- Asthma symptoms include shortness of breath, coughing, a feeling of tightness in the chest, and wheezing.
- Treatments for asthma include avoiding triggers, medication (including oral corticosteroids and inhaled steroids), short-acting bronchodilator inhalers, and long-acting bronchodilator inhalers.

Allergies:

- An allergy is an autoimmune response to an allergen (whatever you are allergic to).
- Allergies can cause runny and/or stuffy nose, watery eyes, itching, and hives. A serious allergy reaction called anaphylaxis causes the swelling of the throat and/or tongue, trouble breathing, and vomiting.
- Common allergens include pollen, mold, dust, ragweed, certain medicines, insect stings, nuts, dairy, and wheat.
- Treatments for allergies include avoiding allergens, medications to reduce symptoms, and emergency medications for anaphylaxis reactions.

National High Blood Pressure Education Month

Your blood pressure is a measurement of the force, or pressure, of the blood pushing against your blood vessel walls. Your blood pressure is written as two numbers: systolic pressure over diastolic pressure (i.e. 120/80). The systolic pressure is the pressure that occurs during a heartbeat, and the diastolic pressure is the pressure that occurs between heartbeats, when the heart relaxes. If your blood pressure is too high, it is an indicator that your heart is overworking. It puts you at increased risk for heart disease and stroke. Many times, there are no symptoms with an elevated blood pressure. That is why it is important to have your blood pressure checked regularly.



Diagnosing high blood pressure takes more than a single reading since food, medication, illness, and our mood can all affect the reading. Your doctor will take a number of readings over time to diagnose high blood pressure (hypertension). You are at an increased risk for hypertension if you are overweight, over the age of 35, smoke, eat a diet

high in fat and/or salt, are a woman with a history of gestational hypertension or are sedentary.

See your doctor for regular checkups that include checking your blood pressure. Lowering your blood pressure is possible with diet and exercise but should be monitored by your physician.

Nutrition

Produce of the Month: Artichoke



By the beginning of April, artichoke season is in full swing. Mostly grown in California, artichokes should be increasingly available at your local grocery store and offer an impressive menu item for a dinner party or terrific vegetable for any weeknight.

The Basics: In the United States, California is responsible for almost 100% of our artichokes. When purchasing, select an artichoke that feels heavy for its size. It may also “squeak” when you squeeze the leaves together. Brown tips and gray streaks can indicate frost damage but is not a reason not to buy the artichoke since the inside is protected. Wash your artichoke in cold water, pull off the lower petals and cut off the stem. Cut off the tip of the artichoke (about 1/2 - 1 inch) and use kitchen scissors to cut off the thorns. You may now dip it in lemon juice to preserve the color. At this point you may boil, steam or microwave the artichoke. (Check your favorite artichoke recipes for the best cooking method.)

Try This: Many people like to eat artichokes dipped in butter but other dips can work as well and be a nice change. One low-fat option is a dip made with light mayonnaise and Dijon mustard (2:1 ratio) with a little dill to taste.

The Facts: One medium artichoke has about 60 calories, 0 grams of fat and 6 grams of fiber. It is also a good source of vitamin C.



The Importance of Fiber

Take a walk through the grocery store and you will find any number of products claiming to be a good source of fiber. But do you know why fiber is important? Dietary fiber is necessary for gastrointestinal health but is also good for maintaining a healthy weight, regulating blood sugars and lowering the risk for heart disease.

There are two types of fiber: soluble and insoluble. Soluble fiber dissolves in water, creating a gel that slows down digestion, helping you to feel full. Soluble fiber can help reduce LDL cholesterol and may increase insulin sensitivity, reducing the risk of diabetes. Soluble fiber is found in beans, berries, oats, apples, oranges, carrots, and pears. Insoluble fiber does not dissolve in water, helping to prevent constipation by speeding up the digestive process. Insoluble fiber is found in seeds, zucchini, onions, dark leafy vegetables, and whole grains - including whole wheat, brown rice, and barley.

Dietary Guidelines recommend that women under 50 get 25 grams of fiber per day. Women over 50 should eat at least 21 grams per day. Men under 50 should consume 38 grams of fiber a day, 30 grams for men 51 and older. If you do not currently eat a lot of fiber, take it slow. Increasing your fiber intake too quickly can lead to gas and discomfort. Try to add fiber to each meal and snack, e.g. a fruit to your breakfast, a vegetable to your lunch, and a whole grain to your dinner.

The best sources of fiber are whole foods, not processed foods with fiber added. Fiber supplements are an option if you and your medical professional feel it's necessary for regularity. Otherwise, spend most of your grocery store trip in the produce section. You will get the needed fiber, with the additional benefits that vegetables and fruits offer.

Lifestyle

Less Is More: Spend Less Challenge

Need a jumpstart to save some money? Try the Spend Less Challenge! See how under-budget you can come this month. Here are some ideas to help you:

- Cut out all restaurants, coffee shops, and fast food stops.
- Dig deep in your closet to cut back on dry cleaning bills.
- DVR or stream your entertainment rather than going out to the movies.
- Organize your kitchen and bathrooms, ensuring you have a current inventory and don't buy what you don't need.
- Turn off all electronics and lights in unoccupied rooms – every little bit helps!

Relax!

Need to relax? The answer is yes, because relaxation is important for your physical and mental health.

Relaxation can

- Improve your immune system by helping to reduce systemic inflammation.
- Reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke.
- Sharpen your memory.
- Help you maintain a positive mood.

But so many of us can't seem to find the time to relax or the ability to turn our minds off to the worries and stresses of the day. There are things you can do to find the time and be able to relax. Don't think that you need a large amount of time. Relaxation can have a positive effect in only 5-10 minutes. Turn off all electronics, including iPads, computers, and cell phones, or at least darken the screen. Pay attention to your breath, trying to slow your breathing down a little. Enjoy a cup of hot tea or a small piece of dark chocolate. Read a book. Stretch gently. Talk to a friend. Each of these things can help lower blood pressure, reduce your heart rate, and allow you to relax for a moment.

Relaxation isn't a luxury. It is necessary in order to handle the rest of the day. Add relaxation to your day the way you add exercise. You will feel better and have more energy by taking a little time to recharge.



Fitness

Exercising With Arthritis

Arthritis, the most common degenerative joint disease, costs approximately 128 billion dollars a year in lost wages, lost productivity and medical care. Arthritis is a common condition in this country, even being featured on television commercials almost daily for over-the-counter pain relievers. The most common type of arthritis is osteoarthritis. Osteoarthritis can create stiffness, pain, and limited range of motion in the hands, knees, hips, back, and neck.

Exercise is encouraged to maintain overall health and range of motion. However, rigorous exercise may not be appropriate because it can increase inflammation. Aerobic exercise such as walking, swimming, or biking can be a great way to stay in shape. Adding flexibility training (yoga, ballet, Pilates, etc.) can help strengthen muscles and keep a full range of motion. Strength training is important because the muscle supports the joint, and stronger muscles protect the joints during every day activities.

If arthritis makes morning particularly tough, choose to exercise in the evening. If you are having an unusually difficult time with your arthritis, choose rest over exercise.

Be sure to check with your doctor about what exercises he or she recommends and any precautions you should take. Staying active is important, and maintaining movement is critical for controlling arthritis.

Question: I am getting ready to have a knee replacement within the next 6 months and I was wondering if you had any advice on how to make my recovery easier with diet or exercise. I am 66 years old, female, and pretty sedentary at the moment. Any input would be appreciated.

Answer: Thank you so much for asking this particular question. Many people do not understand that there are many things that you can do to prepare yourself for having a knee replacement. First off, make sure you consult your doctor or surgeon to make sure it is okay for you to participate in certain activities. Next, if you have a few extra pounds to lose, it's smart to start watching what you eat and take a little weight off. The less weight you put on that knee after surgery the better. Make sure you are consuming plenty of protein to help build some muscle to go along with exercises I am going to recommend. Before we get into the particular exercises you should be doing, it is also important that you start a walking regimen. If it's hard for you to walk due to the pain in the knee, I'd recommend working out in a pool; it's a

Ask the Trainer

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great workout that is less stressful on the joints. Most of the exercise I recommend can be done in the pool as well. Start with a 10-15 min walk a few days a week and gradually increase the time each week. The more active you are before your surgery the easier and faster the recovery should be.

There are also many different exercises that you can do at home without almost any equipment to work on leg and arm strength. You will need both during recovery. Try side leg raises, toe raises, and inner thigh squeezes. You can also lift light hand weights to work on your shoulders, biceps, and triceps. I would also recommend contacting a physical therapist or certified personal trainer in your area for further help or recommendations.

Want to know more?

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



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