

COMPLETELY WELL

April 2017

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Insurance Agency

Distracting Driving

You're driving. The speedometer is at 55. You receive a text. You reach for your phone and your eyes leave the road. 5 seconds pass. Your car hurdles through space, crossing the length of a football field. Your body is behind the wheel, but your mind isn't, and that's when collisions occur.

Consider: The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration rates failure to pay attention as the most significant factor in most crashes. A recent study by the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute says the same—80% of all crashes occur within 3 seconds of driver distraction.

Distracted driving includes any behavior that takes your attention away from the road. The most common one is cell phone use. According to the NHTSA, drivers that use a cell phone are four times more likely to be injured in a car accident. And don't think that a hands-free device is any safer. New research from the University of Utah shows that talking on a handheld or hands-free cell phone created the same distraction and the same delayed reaction time as someone driving with an alcohol

level of .08%. In many cases, those talking on a cell phone performed worse than those who were intoxicated. It appears that having a conversation (no matter if holding the phone or not) is enough of a distraction by itself. The brain focuses on the language and loses focus on the road. So, what about talking with someone in the car? It's not as much of a distraction because the person in the car with you reacts to the same conditions you do and can adjust to your need to concentrate more completely. It is clearly better to save your phone calls for when you are not behind the wheel.

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Healthy Home Cleaners

We all like a clean home, and spring is synonymous with cleaning. But what about the products we use? Are they cleaning the home but harming our health? Here are some ideas to consider when getting ready to spring clean:

- Ammonia and bleach are two common ingredients in household cleaners. They do the job, eliminating mold and bacteria from surfaces. However, they are irritating to the respiratory system and skin. More seriously, mixing the two together can create a toxic gas that can be fatal.
- Vinegar kills bacteria and eliminates mold and mildew and is environmentally friendly. Create a household cleaner with a 50-50 combination of vinegar and water. Baking soda will safely remove stains from sinks, bathtubs, and is great for cleaning greasy pots, pans, and baking sheets. Create a paste with water or vinegar to use as a cleanser. Use baking soda to remove pet odors from carpets and upholstery by lightly sprinkling, wait 15 minutes, and then vacuum.
- Hydrogen peroxide can be used as another alternative to bleach to whiten grout and clean the toilet bowl. A 50-50 mixture of hydrogen peroxide and water will work to soak out the stink from kitchen sponges!
- You can create your own “air freshener” by mixing together water, vinegar, and your favorite fruits and spices in a spray bottle. Try adding the peel from a lemon or orange.
- Olive oil mixed with vinegar can be used as a natural leather cleaner and rejuvenator.

Be sure to test all cleaning solutions on a small area first. What are you waiting for? Throw open the windows, de-clutter, and give a healthier spring clean a try.

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Produce of the Month Pea Pods

Crunchy and slightly sweet, pea pods are delicious raw or cooked! Pea pods are the shells that contain green peas. Eating the entire pea pod adds nutrition and fiber to this common vegetable. **Snow peas** are flat with small peas inside with a mild flavor. **Snap peas** are a cross between snow peas and garden peas and pack a sweeter crunch.

The Basics: Pea pods are available in most grocery store produce sections as well as in the frozen food section. Choose pea pods that have no obvious bruises or discoloration, are plump, and are a rich green color. Store fresh pea pods in the refrigerator. When ready to eat or prepare, rinse under cold water and remove any tough strings. Pea pods can be eaten raw for a snack or sautéed or boiled to be enjoyed in a meal.

Try This: Pea pods are common in many Asian dishes but they are also delicious when combined with traditional American fare, such as roasted carrots, pasta, or sautéed mushrooms. When enjoyed as a snack, you can create an avocado and yogurt dip to make it extra special. Combine plain Greek yogurt with ripe avocado. Blend well and season with garlic, lime juice, and salt and pepper to taste. Want a little kick? Add some chopped jalapeño pepper!

The Facts: Pea pods are a good source of vitamin C, A, and K and a great source of fiber. It also is a good source of calcium and potassium. One cup of pea pods has approximately 26 calories, 0 grams of fat, and no cholesterol.

Strengthen Your Stride with Aerobic Walking

Take a look around, and you will see many people with an activity tracker on their wrist. Perhaps you have one, and you regularly meet your step goal. All of that is good and good for our health, but it may not be enough.

Having a goal to get between 5,000 and 10,000 steps a day is a great way to make sure you are moving throughout the day. But if regular walking doesn't raise your heart rate or increase your breathing rate, you may need to pick up your pace. Aerobic walking, also called power walking, involves using a more fluid stride, concentrating on the extension from the hips and thighs and a powerful pump of the arms. A pulse rate that is consistently in your personal aerobic zone is also important. Aerobic walking uses more muscles and may be a better workout for your heart and lungs, helping you reach your wellness goals more effectively.

Many gyms and fitness centers have walking groups and some even teach aerobic walking. Be sure to wear good shoes that protect your foot and stabilize your step. Keep your hips, knees, and feet in line to avoid straining ligaments, and don't work to the point of pain or exhaustion. Remember, aerobic walking is not a run. One foot should be on the ground at all times and take fluid steps to reduce any impact on the feet and legs. You should feel like you are working somewhat hard but not too hard. For example, you should always be able to hold a conversation during aerobic walking. As always, check with your doctor before beginning any exercise program.



Distracted Driving *continued from page 1.*

Drowsy driving is another real danger. In one study, sleepiness increased the risk of a car crash by at least 4 times the normal risk. Shift workers are especially vulnerable to driving tired. The NHTSA estimated that drowsy driving results in 1,500 deaths and 71,000 injuries every year.

It is easy to forget that each day we put ourselves behind the wheel of a 2-ton vehicle and drive it at speeds reaching 55 miles per hour or more. To us, we're running errands or heading to work, not maneuvering a major piece of machinery through what can be dangerous territory. We put on our seatbelts, obey traffic signals and feel safe. But each day, millions are looking away from the road to dial or answer a phone, change the radio station, reach for something in a bag or purse, or pay more attention to the food and drink from the drive-through. Anything that takes your attention away from the road counts as a distraction and a cause of distracted driving.

Take care of yourself, your passengers and others on the road by saving all of those distractions for when your car is parked and turned off. Get plenty of sleep and avoid driving when too tired. You will be a safer driver, making the road you drive a safer place to be.

The Power of Probiotics

According to molecular and cell biologist Joerg Graf of the University of Connecticut, bacterial cells outnumber human cells in the human body. Bacteria are everywhere! We spend money on a variety of antibacterial products, but it's now clear that most bacteria are not harmful. In fact, some are essential for a strong immunity, digestive health, and even mental health.

- Over 70% of our total immune system can be found in our gut, which includes your small intestines and large intestine (colon).
- An imbalance of bacteria in the gut, can lead to indigestion, poor nutrition, weight gain, and skin conditions.
- Recent studies show that a reduction of healthy bacteria in the gut is associated with an increased risk of depression and anxiety.

So how do we maintain a healthy “gut”? A diet that has vegetables, fruits, and whole grains as its foundation is key. In addition, eating foods such as unsweetened yogurt, miso, sauerkraut, tempeh, and kefir daily help to provide the healthy bacteria the digestive tract needs. But if you can't eat those foods every day, there are a variety of probiotics on the market that can help.

To find the best probiotic, start with the label. Be sure that the product contains live active cultures and always check the expiration or use-by date. The label should include the specific strain of probiotic bacteria included in the supplement as well as the number of Colony Forming Units (CFUs). For an adult, choose a product that contains at least 7 different varieties of beneficial bacteria and contains of 20-50 Billion CFUs. To help prevent any negative detox symptoms, gradually work your way up to the recommended dose.

Probiotics are considered supplements and are, therefore, not regulated by the Food and Drug Association unless the probiotic is being used in a clinical trial. Quality probiotics distributed by reputable companies will often support their claims with research available on the company's website.

Finally, be sure to let your physician know about any over-the-counter supplements you are taking. While probiotics are generally considered safe, they are not appropriate for everyone and may have serious side effects for those with underlying medical conditions.





Ask the Trainer

By Erin M. Long, B.S., NSCA-CPT

Q: Hey Erin! I've been dealing with a chronic knee injury for the last few years and the last time I worked out on a regular basis at a gym I really hurt it. I haven't been back since because I am scared and nervous about hurting myself again. Do you have any suggestions on how to get past the nerves and how to prevent another injury? Thank you! -Abigail T.

A: Hello Abigail! Thank you for reaching out about this subject. As a fitness studio owner and personal trainer, I deal with this type of situation regularly. When someone comes to see us after dealing with a chronic injury (whether it is from working out or not), they are often skeptical or skittish toward working out and often struggle trusting someone to help them and not get hurt again. No one can guarantee there isn't a chance you could injure yourself again but there are many things you can try to do to prevent it.

The first thing I would recommend is make an appointment with a doctor or physical therapist to see what caused or is causing this injury. They should give you some direction on what is going on and things you can and cannot do before returning to your workouts. If you already have seen someone and know the cause, then it's time to find the right facility for you. Start your research on the gyms or fitness center you may like to join. Make sure it's a place you feel comfortable and have the personnel to help you if needed. If you decide to work with a personal trainer (which I would highly recommend to get started) please find out their background and experience. I recommend working with someone with experience in the field and, preferably, has worked with your type of injury before.

Once you find the place or the person to workout with, start back slowly. It is normal to feel some discomfort in the affected area but know the difference between discomfort and pain. If it is painful, STOP!!! Do not try to push through. If you are feeling good and experiencing no pain, that doesn't mean you should go in and hit it hard, especially if it's been a while. Working with a professional will help make sure you are doing things correctly and personalize the workout to you and your body. There are so many exercises out there that won't cause you pain and that will build strength and bring stability in order to prevent a knee injury again. Listen to the professionals you decide to work with and be patient with the process (and with yourself). Following a workout, be sure to stretch to increase flexibility, ice the affected area, drink plenty of water and support your body with nutritious foods. This all can help your situation.

I hope this helps as you get ready to start working out again. Take Care! -Erin Long, B.S., NSCA-CPT

Quieting Your Mind

There's an empowering truth about your thoughts: they come and go, and your attention is like fuel for them. The more you focus on and merge with your thoughts and emotions, the more intense that they become.

The opposite is true, too. If you are caught up in a painful memory, reliving an argument or thinking about what you should have said, you can mindfully redirect your attention to something else. Instead of engaging with negative self-talk, worry, revenge fantasies, or whatever is troubling you, try focusing instead on the physical sensations of your body in this moment. Try to focus on the feeling of the breath at the tips of your nostrils, but any physical sensation will do, to start. Explore the feeling of your breath, the breeze on your skin, the feeling of your heart beating. When a thought arises, think, "Yes, that's there. I acknowledge that," and then continue investigating what you're experiencing, in this moment.

This process of skillfully moving your attention and accepting whatever sensations arise is a powerful antidote for internal suffering. Instead of engaging with and elaborating on our neuroses and insecurities, we can accept that, yes, that's there, but I don't have to engage with and empower it. It's important not to think of this as a tool for avoiding certain aspects of your experience. Don't run or hide from negative thoughts, pain, or sad feelings! Recognize them, feel them fully, and then *let go*. Then move onto the next sensation.

Try it! You'll notice that when you do approach your thoughts, whatever they may be, with an open and friendly awareness, they're less sticky. You are less likely to get caught up in them and, consequently, you suffer less.

This process, when repeated over time, is a powerful catalyst for positive growth. You come to realize that, when you're caught up in your own thoughts, you're missing a great deal of what is going on around you, now, in this moment. The world around you will begin to feel richer, and your own internal fantasies less important. You notice how your experience of the external world, in this moment, is more complex and satisfying than your thoughts and fears. You start to live in the open air.



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