

Completely Well

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Insurance Agency

Preventive

National Kidney Month

The National Kidney Foundation sponsors National Kidney Month each March, putting the focus on kidney health and function. Most people are aware that the kidneys filter waste products from the blood, but kidneys are also important for heart health, bone health, and blood production.

The kidneys help to regulate sodium. Important for heart health and cellular function, sodium can be dangerous when levels are too high. The kidneys help to pull sodium out of the blood and excrete it in urine. Additionally, if sodium is required in the bloodstream, the kidneys can release sodium that is stored to help maintain proper levels. Reducing sodium levels helps keep blood pressure lower. However, if blood pressure is too low, the kidneys create an enzyme (renin). This enzyme works to create a series of chemical reactions in the body that help to raise blood pressure.

Kidneys are also vital for bone health. The kidneys release an enzyme that helps to convert vitamin D (from the sun or from food) into the form of Vitamin D that can be used within the body, especially for bone health. Kidneys also release a hormone that stimulates the production of red blood cells in the bone marrow. Red blood cells contain hemoglobin, which carries oxygen from the lungs to the cells throughout the body and carries carbon dioxide waste to the lungs where it is breathed out.

Kidney health is vital to so many functions of the body. Unfortunately, according to the National Kidney Foundation, over 26 million Americans have undiagnosed kidney disease. Kidney disease, the 9th leading cause of death in the United States, is a serious condition – one that can lead to a need for a transplant or cause kidney failure. Discuss your kidney health with your doctor and what you can do to keep your kidneys healthy and functioning well.

Did you know?

Early kidney disease is virtually symptom free. Regular exams with your doctor and common blood tests can help detect kidney disease in its early stages.





Lifestyle

The Patience of Spring

If asked, I imagine that most people would say that, of all the seasons, winter requires the most patience. Summer seems to end just days after it has begun, and fall tumbles like the leaves into the first snow. Winter's cold, ice and slush and lack of sunshine can seem endless. I would argue, however, that spring is the season that teaches us the most about patience. We hunker down in the winter, hot pots of stew or chili to stave off the cold, DVDs and the television roaring along with a fire. We know what winter requires of us, and we are up to the task. Spring, on the other hand, plays an early game of "peek-a-boo," teasing us with a warm afternoon and extra sunshine, only to be followed by a colder wind in the evening. Spring is about enjoying the early blooms and periods of warmer weather as they come, knowing that it will unfold in its own time, bringing more and more for us to take in and appreciate.

In many ways, the patience we need in spring is like the patience we need as we are undertaking any major life change. We know that any change - losing weight, getting fit, and quitting smoking - takes a plan and effort. We sometimes forget, however, that it demands patience. We can begin an exercise program on Monday and get discouraged by Friday. We can start a diet this week and feel like we've failed next week. No one expects an entire garden to bloom along with the early spring daffodils and tulips! Gardens are planned to bloom over the course of a season or two, taking their time and responding to the care we give them. It's no different with us. Whatever change we are trying to have blossom in us, it takes time and care to see it in full bloom.

If you have been exercising, notice the early signs that your fitness is improving: more energy, some definition in your arms, stronger legs. Don't judge your efforts on the fact that you do not yet have washboard abs or can't fit into a smaller size. If you are trying to lose weight, respect each good decision you've made concerning your nutrition, portion control, and response to hunger. Continue to make those decisions and the number on the scale will eventually follow. If you are trying to quit smoking, remember the benefits that happen after only one day of quitting: your chance of having a heart attack decreases! It will take more days without smoking for other benefits, but each day brings you closer to a healthier and happier you.

In my house, when the first warm wind blows, my children drop their winter coats and run out the door with a spring jacket and gym shoes, ready for the full spring season to greet them! They are so disappointed when the winter outerwear goes back on, at my demand or a sudden drop in temperature. I remind them to be patient. Soon enough we will be in the welcoming weather of spring, enjoying the sunshine and time outdoors after what has, admittedly, been a long winter. Patience is what's needed. With the season. And ourselves.



This winter getting you down?

If you find yourself struggling with what's left of a difficult winter, try some of the following stress busters.

- Exercise – taking time to move everyday can increase your endorphin levels and reduce stress.
- Have some citrus – the smell of citrus is a known mood changer, and the added vitamins and fiber are a healthy bonus!
- Sunlight – open the curtains and let the natural light in, known to improve moods. Better yet, bundle up and get outside for some fresh air and sunshine.

Seasoning Without Salt

By now you probably have heard that Americans consume too much salt, and that too much salt can raise your blood pressure. High blood pressure puts a strain on the arteries and heart muscle, increasing the risk of heart disease and stroke. The best way to reduce sodium is to reduce or eliminate processed foods.

Additionally, reducing take out and restaurant meals will also lower sodium intake. At home, you can reduce sodium by using herbs and other aromatics rather than salt.

Herbs: Both fresh and dried herbs are good at adding flavor without adding sodium. There are some basic herbs that every kitchen should have: basil, oregano, rosemary, mint, and thyme. Fresh herbs should be added toward the end of the cooking process. Also, if you are using dried herbs in place of fresh herbs, use only about 1/3 of what is called for. Dried herbs can be much stronger than the fresh ones.

Other Aromatics: Onions, garlic, and lemon are wonderful flavors to work with in your kitchen. All add depth to a recipe without the added sodium. They have health benefits as well. If you don't like eating onions or garlic, you can experiment

with onion and garlic powder. This can flavor your recipes without the texture or potency you may not like. Lemon can brighten up many dishes and is great with chicken, fish, pork, vegetables, rice, and potatoes.

Advice: Go through your spice cabinet. Dried spices can last a long time, but may lose some of their flavor. Best way to know? Smell them. If you don't really smell the spice, you probably won't taste it. Do not add any salt until after you have used your herbs and/or aromatics and tasted it. Tasting is key. And if you are cooking a dish that will simmer for a period of time, taste the dish before and after it has simmered. Many herbs take time to infuse a dish. If salt is needed, add a small amount to start. Did you know that the U. S. dietary guidelines suggest that we eat no more than 1 teaspoon worth of salt a day! Also, if you are adding salt, add it to the dish you are cooking rather than at the table. Less salt will be needed for flavor when it has cooking time. Lastly, though coarse salt is still very popular, fine salt will actually register more saltiness on your tongue; and, therefore, you can use less of it!



Produce of the Month: Herbs

It's a good bet that you have more than one. It's also a good bet that you use at least one every week. What is it? Herbs! According to *The Herb Society of America's New Encyclopedia of Herbs and Their Uses*, an herb is "a small seed bearing plant...valued for their flavor, fragrance, medicinal and healthful qualities...."

The Basics: Almost all herbs are available in fresh and dried varieties. The following are some of the most popular.

Basil – Slightly sweet, fresh basil is well paired with tomatoes (and tomato sauces), pork, chicken, rice, and potatoes. If using fresh basil, add to your recipe when it is almost finished to keep the bright color and flavor.

Oregano – Oregano is a standard herb in most Italian

and Greek dishes. Somewhat earthy, most oregano we use is in the dried form. Fresh oregano, however, is a great addition to salads and on pizzas just prior to serving.

Rosemary – A common ingredient in French and Italian cooking, rosemary is a strong flavor, best suited to roasted meat and sauces. It does pair well with bread and focaccia recipes.

Mint – Associated with desserts and teas in the United States, mint is used extensively in savory dishes in the Middle East and the Mediterranean. It is bright and pairs well with rice dishes and roasted pork.

Sage – Though we may think of Thanksgiving dinners when we think of sage, it is used frequently in both French and

Italian food, especially in meat dishes and sausages.

Try This: Keep a fresh basil plant in your kitchen, and snip a few leaves to chop and use with sliced tomatoes, drizzled with olive oil and balsamic dressing. Make an easy tabbouleh – a Middle Eastern bulgur wheat salad. Combine cooked and cooled bulgur wheat with olive oil, chopped tomatoes, chopped green onions, chopped parsley, chopped mint, and lemon juice. Toss and serve.

The Facts: There are negligible calories in herbs. Many herbs are associated with decreased inflammation and a strengthened immune system.



Less Is More – Herb Window Garden

Growing your own food can be a healthy and delicious way to save money and help the environment. You do not need to have a large yard or community garden space to grow some basic spices. You just need a warm sunny spot and water.

Oregano, Basil, Thyme, Parsley, and Marjoram are very popular for apartment/condo dwellers. You can start these from seeds or buy a small plant.

Both are very inexpensive. Ground spices and fresh leaves can really add up on the grocery bill, so having a fresh stock in your own kitchen will save in the long run. Add fresh leaves to your pizza, pasta, chicken, or even on top of a burger patty; you will really taste the difference.

To begin you will need a few things.

1. 1 six-inch pot for each plant (the cheap

plastic kind at the grocery store work perfectly). Just be sure there are drainage holes in the bottom. Also, have a plate for the pot to sit on to manage water run off.

2. You can place a layer of gravel in the bottom of the pot and then fill 2/3 full with soil.

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Less is More, Continued

Including some form of compost soil works best for vegetables.

3. If growing from seeds, follow the package directions for how deep to plant the seed.
4. If growing with a started plant, place the plant into the soil and pack the soil around the plant. If you are planting more than one per pot, place the larger plants towards the middle.
5. Water enough so you see it start to drain out of the pot at the bottom.

Be careful not to over water your plants. They really only need water every few days or when the soil is dry. Also, keep them warm and in a sunny window. Trim the leaves when you use them, instead of plucking them off. This is less trauma for the plant. As the plant grows, continue to trim it back.

You can freeze the leaves if you struggle with keeping the plant alive in the winter. Simply trim as many leaves as you would need at one time, put them in a small freezer bag, add a bit of water, and toss in the freezer. You can also freeze chopped up spice leaves and olive oil in an ice cube tray for soups and stir fry's.

Good luck and be creative! Fresh spices go with everything!

Marie McFadden, CHES

Fitness

Fitness Needs as We Age

Regular exercise is important for everyone. But are there specific fitness needs for different ages? The answer to that is yes – and no. The basic elements of fitness – aerobic fitness, strength, and flexibility – are true for whatever age you are. However, because our bodies change as we age, there may be a need to emphasize one of the elements. And there certainly can be a need to approach fitness differently.

Aerobic Fitness: All ages need to exercise aerobically. The difference, however, is that the target heart rate changes as we age. Target heart rate is found by first subtracting your age from 220 ($220 - \text{age} = \text{maximum heart}$

rate). The target heart rate is 60-85% of the maximum. Given that formula, the target heart rate for a 30 year old is 114-161, while the target heart rate for a 50 year old is 110-144. Additionally, any health conditions (more likely to be experienced as we age) will affect our target heart rate. So what to do? Everyone should move aerobically 5-7 days a week for a minimum of 30 minutes. If you are older, begin with lower impact exercises, such as walking, swimming, and biking.

Strength Training: Important for maintaining muscle mass and metabolism, everyone should do strength training a minimum of 2-3 days a week.



If you are older, this is especially critical. Muscle is lost as we age, and our metabolism slows down. Strength training helps to maintain a strong frame and can keep you more active as you age.

Flexibility: Everyone should work on flexibility a minimum of 2-3 days a week. Often overlooked by those who are younger, flexibility is essential to maintaining range of motion and reducing injury. Yoga, tai chi, and ballet bar work are good flexibility exercises for any age.

March Goals

Nutrition: Choose a different herb to try each week. Look for the fresh variety in your local grocery store or begin your own herb garden.

Fitness: Track activities in all 3 elements of fitness: aerobic, strength training, and flexibility. Make sure that you are working on all 3 each week.

Preventive: Try to reduce your sodium levels by reducing processed foods. If you haven't had an annual exam in the last 12 months, schedule one with your doctor.

Lifestyle: Get ready for spring by making a list of activities you want to do when the weather gets better. Get ready by putting money aside (if needed), preparing your equipment (bike need a tune-up?), and/or taking inventory of your spring clothes and shoes.

Want to know more?

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



Brian Liechty RHU, REBC
120 E Washington St
Plymouth IN 46563
800-936-5373
bliechty@tcuinsurance.com