

BETTER HEALTH



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Did You Know

If you're feeling stressed, reading a good book can lower your cortisol levels and other unhealthy stress hormones by 68%. Researchers from the University of Sussex found that stress reduction can be achieved within six minutes of reading.

They also found that reading reduces stress better than other methods such as listening to music (61% reduction), drinking tea or coffee (54% reduction), or going for a walk (42% reduction).

Researchers believe the concentration of reading a good book helps distract the brain away from anxious and stressful thoughts, which reduces heart rate and muscle tension caused by stress.

(Ed. Note: Of course, we know that reading THE Good Book, not only calms our hearts but also soothes our souls!)

Source: anxietycentre.com



A Little Walking Works: More Is Even Better

The largest study of its kind researching the "necessary" number of steps to take per day has good news for everyone. The most recent study – involving more than 225,000 people – showed that just 2,400 steps per day can help reduce your risk of dying prematurely from heart disease or stroke. That's good news for those days where you aren't able to walk as many steps as you'd like.

The news gets even better if you can walk a few thousand steps more:

- Walk 4,000 steps per day and you'll cut your risk of dying from any cause (not just from heart disease and stroke).
- Each extra 1,000 steps beyond 4,000 is associated with an additional 15% reduced risk of dying from any cause. (The health benefits eventually top off at around 20,000 steps.)

The research team from the Medical University of Lodz in Poland and Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in the U.S. found that the results applied to both men and women regardless of age and where they lived, and the biggest benefits were seen among those under the age of 60.

Source: *The Week* and *BBC News*



Don't Fall for Fad Diets

In the quest to stay healthy, ward off diseases, or lose weight, we may be tempted by the latest health trends, but don't fall for trends that promise a magic bullet for weight loss.

MYTH – Drinking apple cider vinegar can help you lose weight.

REALITY – No scientific evidence exists to support this claim. Studies of apple cider vinegar for weight loss have not shown significant and sustainable weight loss across a widely diverse group of people.

Drinking too much apple cider vinegar could instead create health risks such as throat irritations, drug interactions, altering insulin levels, and eroding teeth enamel.

MYTH – Eating only certain types of foods or engaging in certain types of exercise based on your blood type will cause you to lose weight.

REALITY – No evidence exists showing a correlation between blood type and foods or exercise that will improve your health. A 2020 study published in the *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics* by the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (a nonprofit group of 12,000 doctors) found no association between blood type and body weight, body fat, blood fats, or blood sugar control. People who claim to lose weight with a blood-type diet probably did, but only because of the food restrictions that had them eating fewer calories or cutting back on processed foods or foods high in sugar and saturated fat.

A lifestyle of eating healthier, non-processed foods such as fruits and vegetables, whole grains, lean meats, etc. – along with regular exercise – has a much greater chance to help you reach your health goals than a quick-fix diet plan based on your blood type.

Source: *Mayo Clinic and US News*

Money Management

A saying you don't hear too often is "cash is king." That can still be true today – even in our mostly cashless society. Cash can help you be a better ruler of your budget. Research shows that people spend more money when using credit cards versus paying with cash. That's because the average cash transaction is \$22, whereas the average non-cash transaction is \$112. The tap of a credit card may make it too easy to pay for an \$100 item, but if you have to pull \$100 of cash out of your wallet, that may be enough of a jolt to prevent an impulse buy.

Medications Can Cause Dehydration

If you are regularly dehydrated, it could be a result of your medications. Some of the signs and symptoms of mild to moderate dehydration include:

- Lightheadedness
- Dizziness
- Headache
- Fatigue
- Muscle cramps
- Dry mouth

If you're experiencing these symptoms, it could be from certain medications that affect kidney function and electrolyte balance. The following are the most common medications that cause dehydration.

Blood pressure medications – ACE inhibitors (angiotensin-converting enzyme inhibitors) and ARBs (angiotensin II receptor blockers) can suppress your urge to drink water, potentially leading to dehydration. Those types of medications include (but aren't limited to) lisinopril, ramipril, losartan, valsartan, and irbesartan.

Diabetes medications – Excess sugar in the blood causes the kidneys to work harder to get rid of the sugar. They do that through urination which can lead to dehydration. Those types of diabetes medicines include (but aren't limited to) metformin, canagliflozin (Invokana), and empagliflozin (Jardiance).

Diuretics – Often referred to as "water pills," diuretics are typically used to treat high blood pressure, heart failure, liver failure, tissue swelling (edema), and kidney disorders, such as kidney stones.

Laxatives – Over-the-counter laxatives such as Dulcolax, Miralax, Senokot, and Milk of Magnesia (or off-brands containing magnesium citrate) can cause dehydration because they soften the stool by pulling water from other body parts to send to the colon.

If you suspect that one or more of your medications may be causing dehydration, talk with your doctor about the recommended fluid intake that is safe to keep you well-hydrated.

Source: *healthline*



Red Wine and Your Heart

The old adage that drinking a moderate amount of red wine is good for your heart is no longer the case. The “healthy” narrative began due to the presence of the antioxidant resveratrol found in grapes which is thought to protect blood vessels and slow aging – at least it did with a study of mice. If the antioxidant resveratrol is in grapes, the thinking goes, it must also be in red wine. It is, but studies show you would have to drink at least a hundred glasses of red wine daily to get the amount of resveratrol equivalent to the doses that improved health in mice.



Similarly, a study of older adults living in the Chianti region of Italy, whose diets are naturally rich in resveratrol, found no link between resveratrol levels and rates of heart disease.

The concern is that even low levels of alcohol consumption increase the risk of high blood pressure, stroke, and an abnormal heart rhythm. That’s why the World Heart Federation is now saying that alcohol is not good for the heart.

Source: *NBC News and Harvard Health*

Everyday Activities Count as Exercise

We know the importance of daily, planned, purposeful physical activities such as walking, running, aerobics, strength training, etc., but the following routine activities also burn calories and count as a workout:

Snow Shoveling

Snow shoveling for 30 minutes burns roughly 200 calories. You also benefit from the resistance training by pushing, lifting, and tossing the snow.

Grocery Shopping

Pushing a cart up and down the aisles for an hour can burn up to 250 calories. As you unload your groceries from the car, grab a grocery bag in each hand and do some bicep curls as you walk into the house.

House Cleaning

With vacuuming and dusting, you not only keep your house clean, but 30 minutes of vacuuming helps you burn 100 calories, and you’ll burn an additional 80 calories after 30 minutes of dusting.

Yard Work

Once the seasons change, and you’re back outside tending to your lawn and gardens, pulling weeds for 30 minutes can burn roughly 100 calories, and mowing the lawn with a push mower can burn up to 350 calories per hour.

Washing the Car

Washing your car with a bucket, sponge, and hose and then drying it with a chamois or towel will burn approximately 120-150 in 30 minutes.



Popcorn Can Be a Healthy Snack

Non-buttered popcorn is a healthy snack. Popcorn is low in calories and fat, a source of protein, and as a whole grain, supplies fiber to your diet.

Eating three cups of no salt, butter-free popcorn (popped on a stove top in 2 tablespoons of oil) amounts to you consuming 90 calories, 3.5 grams of fiber, 1 gram of fat, and 4 mg sodium. Research has even found that popcorn has more antioxidants than fresh corn or fruits.

Unfortunately, we tend to cancel out popcorn’s health benefits by adding lots of butter and salt. For example, if you eat an entire bag of microwave buttered popcorn, you will consume 210 cal., 14 g of fat, and 390 mg of sodium. If you can hold yourself to three cups of the microwaved buttered popcorn (which the USDA considers a serving), the results are better: 90 cal., 6 g of fat, and 135 mg of sodium.

Source: *WebMD & USDA*



Food for Thought

Sweet potatoes are high in fiber and are full of healthy nutrients. They contain high levels of beta-carotene which is converted into vitamin A to support your vision. Vitamin A also supports your immune system by fighting infections in your body. Sweet potatoes help with stress management because they contain significant amounts of magnesium which assists in reducing stress and anxiety.

Source: *healthline.com*



Editor's Pulse *by Steve Gruenwald*

Do Make Me Laugh

You may have heard this children's joke: "I know God has a sense of humor, because he created you!" It's not a very nice joke, but the truth is God created laughter. In His wisdom, God designed built-in, automatic responses for the health of our bodies. As our bodies heat up due to working out or being in the sun too long, sweating occurs to cool our bodies. Laughing is similar. When something strikes us as funny, we reflexively smile or laugh.

A recent study points to the health benefits associated with laughter – particularly with heart health. The study showed that patients with coronary artery disease who engaged in laughter therapy had reduced inflammation and increased oxygen flow throughout their bodies.

For the study, half of the participants were asked each week to watch a variety of hour-long comedy programs and sitcoms. The other half watched serious documentaries with topics such as politics or the destruction of the Amazon rainforest. At the end of the 12-week study, the comedy group improved by 10% in a test measuring how much oxygen their heart could pump through the body and how well their arteries could expand.

The "humor" group also showed a significant reduction of stress hormones – inflammatory biomarkers – which place a strain on the heart and increase the risk for a heart attack

or stroke. With the "serious" group, the oxygen flow and biomarkers remained unchanged. It's as if the researchers discovered what God has been telling us for centuries: "A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones." (Proverbs 17:22)

If laughter is good heart medicine, then taking time to laugh is a preventive exercise. We need a good belly-laugh to counter-balance the serious consequences of a sinful world. Ecclesiastes reminds us of that need for balance as there will always be "... a time to weep and a time to laugh."

The seriousness of life isn't hard to find, so you may need to be purposeful to bring out the humor in your living. Seek out sources that encourage laughter. Spend time with family and friends that foster healthy laughter. I've been blessed in my lifetime to be surrounded by family and friends that recognize when I get too serious due to life situations. Their joking and humorous natures resuscitate my heart with some much-needed laughter.

While writing this, a song kept popping into my head reminding me of the importance laughter has not only on our health, but also on our attitudes. It's an oldie from Mary Poppins: "The more I laugh, the more I fill with glee. And the more the glee, the more I'm a merrier me!"



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