

BETTER HEALTH

Summer 2024 | Volume 40 | Number 2



Try Exercise to Lessen Depression

Physical activity has been shown to be 1.5 times more effective at improving symptoms of depression, anxiety, and distress than counseling or medications. That's the result of a comprehensive study published in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine*. The study included 97 reviews, 1,039 trials, and 128,119 participants.

The greatest benefits were seen among participants with depression, and pregnant and postpartum women.

Source: *Science Daily*

As we celebrate 40 years of Better Health, special thanks to Susan Neunreiter who has been the graphic designer for the past 22 years. She may be behind the scenes, but it's her God-given talents that make every issue look great!

Celebrating Better Health and Moving Forward

by Steve Gruenwald, Editor

The Better Health newsletter is now in its 40th year of helping LCMS church workers navigate the challenges of leading healthier lives!

I have been blessed with the honor and responsibility to write and edit Better Health for 27 of those 40 years. As I began this journey of encouraging church workers to be healthy, I set aside the back page as my "Editor's Pulse" specifically for a purpose I explained in my very first issue: "Although each of us is created uniquely, we share many common experiences in our walk through this earthly life. As editor, my prayer for this column is threefold: that the messages will be of significance to your life; that you 'come away' from this column a bit more reflective, refreshed and relaxed to tackle the daily tasks ahead of you; and finally, that we are reminded daily – even during the 'down' days – of the many blessings showered on us by our Heavenly Father." I pray that through the past 27 years some of the articles hit those marks.

With mixed emotions I will be retiring from Concordia Plans in early September of this year, and so my time writing and editing Better Health will come to an end. It's been a privilege for me to have served the LCMS for 40 years of ministry – my first 12 as a Lutheran educator and these last 28 at Concordia Plans.

Starting in 2025, the talented writers of Concordia Plans will be your new guides on this path of well-being. More information about that transition will be in the next (fall) edition of Better Health.

I thank God for giving me the opportunity to be with you on this wellness journey, and I once again offer words of encouragement that I have shared with LCMS church workers across the country: May we all continue to strive to Be Well so that we may continue to Serve Well those whom God has entrusted to our care.



Money Management

Researchers have found that couples with joint bank accounts have better relationships, fight less about money, and feel better about how their household finances are handled.

The study involved 230 couples in their early married lives. Each couple began the study with separate bank accounts. Some were asked to keep their accounts separate, others were told to open a joint account, and the final group could make their own decision about whether to have joint or separate accounts.



After two years, those who had joint accounts reported substantially higher relationship satisfaction than the couples with separate accounts. They expressed “being in this together” and viewed purchases as working towards the same goals.

Couples with separate accounts viewed spending as more of a business arrangement: I pay for this, you pay for that. Couples with separate accounts also expressed feelings of resentment because they at times felt that their spouse wasn't paying his/her fair share.

Source: *Journal of Consumer Research*

Health Tip

The ability to forgive improves your health, your relationships, and your outlook on life. According to a study in the *Journal of Adult Development*, those who are able to forgive are more satisfied with their lives and less likely to report symptoms of psychological distress including feelings of nervousness, restlessness, or sadness.

John's Hopkins Medicine shared the results of studies that have found the act of forgiveness can lower the risk of heart attack; improve cholesterol levels and sleep; and reduce pain, blood pressure, and levels of anxiety, depression, and stress.

“Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” ~ Ephesians 4:31-32



Food for Thought

Lycopene and Vitamin E are the two most powerful antioxidants that help prevent cancer and aging. Lycopene is present in tomatoes (fresh and canned), watermelon, papaya, and pink grapefruit, while vitamin E is abundant in Atlantic salmon, rainbow trout, mango, kiwi, and nuts (sunflower seeds, almonds, peanuts, etc.).

Source: *healthline*

Did You Know

Stress can make allergy symptoms worse. In a study published in the journal *Psychoneuroendocrinology*, participants with hay fever had significantly more severe allergic reactions in stressful situations compared to non-stressful situations.

You can reduce stress with exercise – particularly those that increase your heart rate and your breathing. You can also reduce stress with slow, deep breathing exercises.

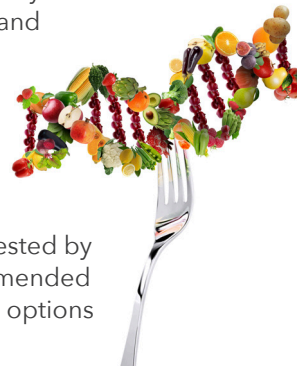
Source: *Harvard Health Publishing*

Be Wary of DNA-based Diets

Several companies are marketing DNA-based diets that promise a personalized way to lose weight. They claim that a DNA test will determine whether or not you have specific genetic variants that make you more susceptible to obesity, problems with alcohol intake, or food allergies or intolerances.

Unfortunately, no research – no clinical trials – have shown that tailoring a diet based on DNA information actually works. In fact, a study called DIETFITS (published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* by researchers at Stanford University Medical School) found no difference in weight loss between overweight people on diets that “matched” their genotype versus those on diets that didn't.

Genes are responsible for explaining only 5 to 10% of diseases, such as type-2 diabetes, and obesity. The more important factors influencing health and the susceptibility to different diseases are modifiable lifestyle behaviors which can't be measured through DNA tests. Other factors such as emotional, economic, metabolic, or social, also play a significant role in impacting someone's ability to lose weight. Consequently, the diets suggested by a DNA test end up being generally recommended nutritional guidelines – and healthier meal options – that are easily accessible for free.



Sources: *News Medical Life Sciences & Scientific American*

Sunday Also a Day of Health

Regular church attendance is good for our physical health and our mental health. In a review of 69 studies, regularly attending church is linked to a lower incidence of death from cardiovascular disease.

Similarly, a Norwegian study published in the *International Journal of Psychiatry in Medicine* found that the more time a person spends at church, the lower his or her blood pressure. (The Norwegian study strengthened an American study that had already made that conclusion).

Furthermore, *Psychology Today* reports that regular church attendance also boosts mental health by providing feelings of hope and belonging, as well as increasing self-esteem and sense of self-worth. That makes sense because as Christians, we know we are loved: “*But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*” ~ Romans 5:8

Source: *Consumer Reports on Health*



Exercise Supports Brain Health

An international study published in the *Journal of Alzheimer's Disease* shows that being physically active is related to healthier brain sizes in the areas most important for memory and learning.

The study looked at MRI brain scans from 10,125 people and found that those who regularly walked, ran, or engaged in sport activities (tennis, pickleball, etc.) had larger brain volumes in three key areas:

- Gray matter – which helps with processing information.
- White matter – which connects different brain regions.
- Hippocampus – which is important for memory.

Cyrus A. Raji, M.D., the lead researcher, summed up the results this way: “Our research supports earlier studies that show being physically active is good for your brain. Exercise not only lowers the risk of dementia but also helps in maintaining brain size, which is crucial as we age.”

Researchers noted that even moderate walking (fewer than 4,000 steps a day) can still have a positive effect on brain health.

Source: *Science Daily*



Avoid Certain Drinks for Better Sleep

What you have to drink minutes or even hours before you settle into bed can affect your sleep. Alcohol can initially make it easier for you to fall asleep, but then ends up shortening the amount of REM sleep in the first part of the night leading to more restless sleep the remainder of the night. Consuming drinks with caffeine – even six hours before bedtime – can make falling asleep difficult because caffeine blocks the hormone adenosine, which promotes sleepiness.

Source: *Sleep Foundation*

Sugar Negates Heart-Healthy Exercise

A recent study indicates that drinking just two servings per week of sugar-sweetened beverages such as soda or sports drinks can erase the heart health benefits of physical activity. The findings, published in *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, were based on an analysis of data involving 100,000 adults over a 30-year period.

The results showed that people who drank sugar-sweetened beverages more than twice a week had an increased risk of cardiovascular disease despite their engagement of 150 minutes of weekly physical activity (the recommended amount of weekly workout time). For those who consumed sweetened beverages on a daily basis, the risk for cardiovascular disease was even higher.

The reason is that ultra-processed sugary drinks promote chronic inflammation which puts stress on the heart and blood vessels which can lead to increased buildup of plaque in the major arteries of the body.

Most public health organizations recommend completely replacing soda – even diet soda – with water and unprocessed fruit, but if you feel the need for a soda, try to limit your consumption to 1 can of soda per week.

Source: *Medical News Today*



Editor's Pulse *by Steve Gruenwald*

All Bets are Off, You've Already Won

Do you ever wonder if the disciples were betting men? I'll bet you they were! It's part of our sinful natures to bet, to boast – to prove that something we know, or some skill that we have, is better than that of others. The opposite is also true: It's part of our sinful natures to doubt, to be distrusting when others make claims that we feel aren't accurate. Can't you just hear the disciples: "Jesus, I'll bet you I will never rebuke you or betray you." "There's no way we're feeding all these people with these bits of food – what are the odds of THAT happening?!"

The disciples were typical sinful people who more than likely also thought in terms of probabilities. They may have calculated the odds of what Jesus said regarding his death and resurrection. Chances are they weren't hopeful at all of a turn-around from what they saw on Good Friday. They probably thought to themselves, "Really, what are the odds that a person would rise from the dead?!" They had a point to some extent.

Up until Jesus' ministry, the odds of a person coming back to life after being dead were a googolplex to one. Unfortunately for the disciples, their memories failed them

during their moment of crisis and mourning. The disciples should have been smarter bettors than that. Didn't they see that Jesus greatly changed the odds concerning death during his time on earth? Were not the disciples witness to people being raised from the dead? The **odds makers** at the time should have realized that because of who Jesus was, He was not confined to typical earthly likelihoods. He was the son of God, sent to save the world of their sins – and that's exactly what He did.

Thanks be to God that we don't have to hedge our bets with the gift of salvation. There's nothing we could do anyway given our sinful condition! God did it all for us. It's not a roll of the dice that we're saved. We don't spin any wheel and cross our fingers to see if we get to live with Him eternally. We don't have to play our cards just right. Forgiveness and salvation are a free gift from God through faith in Jesus.

To have a savior who died on the cross for the salvation of us all, and then who rose again three days later? You bet. To be forgiven of all the nasty things we do, say, and think? You bet. To have the promise of an eternal life in heaven with Him and all believers? Jackpot!



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