

# TAKE CHARGE!



February 2025

## Heart Boosters

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

Your heart is an important organ that keeps blood pumping and carries oxygen to every cell. It does so much for you, so it's up to you to return the favor and treat it right. Here are ten things you can do to keep your heart pumping strong.

- 1 **Learn your risk factors for heart disease.** Talk with your health care provider about your family history and medical history to develop a personalized care plan.
- 2 **Know your blood sugar,** blood pressure, blood cholesterol and waist circumference numbers. Discuss any changes you need to make with your provider.
- 3 **Eat well.** Plan healthy meals with half a plate of vegetables and fruit, a quarter plate of whole grains and a quarter plate of protein-rich foods, such as fish, tofu and poultry.
- 4 **Move often.** Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity each week. Add in some stretching and resistance training, too. Even a few minutes of activity is better than none.
- 5 **Take steps to quit smoking.** Smoking is linked to heart attacks and high blood pressure. It's important to avoid using cigarettes and vapes. **Note:** Scientists haven't determined if e-cigarettes have potentially harmful, long-term effects.
- 6 **Cut back on alcohol.** Having just one drink a day can increase your risk of heart disease or stroke. If you don't drink, don't start.
- 7 **Get enough sleep.** Both too little and too much sleep are linked to heart disease. Aim for seven to nine hours per night.
- 8 **Reduce stress.** Find ways to lower chronic worry and tension, such as exercise, socializing, being in nature, snuggling with a pet or seeking therapy.
- 9 **Have regular checkups.** They're the foundation of heart health.
- 10 **Take medications as prescribed.** Don't skip doses if you are feeling better or your numbers are controlled. It means the medicine is working.



February is American Heart Month.

The Smart Moves Toolkit, including this issue's printable download, [Jump-Start Your Immunity](#), is at [personalbest.com/extras/25V2tools](https://personalbest.com/extras/25V2tools).

## city events

### Deferred Compensation

#### Nearing Retirement

Wednesday, February 5

12:00 pm – 12:45 pm

Register [here](#)

#### Rollovers Into Deferred Comp.

Tuesday, February 11

12:00 pm – 12:30 pm

Register [here](#)

#### Understanding the Seattle DCP Website

Thursday, February 27

12:00 pm – 12:30 pm

Register [here](#)

### Ten Strategies for Improving Your Finances

Tuesday, February 11

11:00 am – 12:00 pm

Register [here](#)

### Heart in Motion: The Vital Link Between Cardio Fitness and Heart Health

Thursday, February 13

11:00 am – 12:00 pm

Register [here](#)

### Counseling and Therapy Demystified

Tuesday, February 18

12:00 pm – 1:00 pm

Register [here](#)

### Benefits 101: Saving on Health Care With a Well-Being Approach

Wednesday, February 19

10:00 am – 11:00 am

Register [here](#)

### Your Dental Benefits Simplified – Presented by Delta Dental

Thursday, February 20

12:00 pm – 1:00 pm

Register [here](#)

### Benefits 101: Choosing the Right Care at the Right Time

Thursday, February 27

11:00 am – 12:00 pm

Register [here](#)

**Best Bit** ■ Light physical activity boosts the odds of healthy aging. Using findings from the long-running Nurses' Health Study, a Harvard-led research team found walking, housework and other light exercise can significantly increase the odds of reaching age 70 and beyond free of memory issues and chronic illness. **Another reason to get off the couch:** The research revealed every additional two hours of watching TV cuts the odds of healthy aging by 12%.

# Helping Your Child Use Medication

**Between 24% to 43% of U.S. children take medicines.** If your child needs to take medication at school for conditions, such as asthma, ADHD and diabetes, these tips can help:

**Contact your child's homeroom teacher and school nurse.** Determine if your child will be given the medicine or take it by themselves. Alert school personnel to any warning signs your child may need emergency medications.

**Ask the school about a 504 plan,** a written explanation of how the school will accommodate your child's medication needs. Federal law requires all public schools and many private schools to do this.

**Talk to your youngster about the importance of taking their medicine** and how it needs to be taken on time to make them feel better. If they must go to the nurse's office for their medication, assure them that many other children also take medicine at school, and they don't need to feel different.

**If your child takes medication daily, before or after school, create a routine to keep them on schedule.** Put a calendar or chart nearby and have your child add a sticker or checkmark after taking their medicine. Make sure schoolbags containing their medication are kept in the same place at home. Check to see if the medicine is being taken, and ask your pharmacy if auto-refill is available.



**Friday, February 7, is Wear Red Day, honoring women's heart health.**

Heart disease kills more women than all forms of cancer combined. Most women who die suddenly from heart disease have no prior symptoms, and heart disease can affect a woman at any age. But most cardiac events and strokes can be prevented with health education and lifestyle changes to manage your blood pressure, blood cholesterol and blood sugar with your health care provider's guidance. So move more, eat nutritiously and follow your provider's advice. Take medication as directed.

## Home Medical Test Pros and Cons

**For decades, countless people have checked their temperatures,** blood pressure and glucose levels at home. Do-it-yourself ovulation and pregnancy tests are common, too.



**Home medical tests particularly help people with diabetes** who must monitor blood glucose levels and for checking cholesterol levels, and detecting infections, such as COVID, flu, HIV and hepatitis.

**Another obvious advantage of these tests:** You can take them privately in your home, and you don't need to wait for an appointment with your health care provider. What's more, the tests tend to give you data faster than waiting for lab results through your provider. And most home test kits have a phone number to call if you have questions about how to take the test and the results.

**However, home tests have some caveats.** Insurance coverage varies. Most importantly, tests you take yourself can't replace comprehensive medical exams or a provider's care. While self-tests provide data, they can't advise you about health issues and treatment. And home testing isn't a substitute for lab tests. Medical lab tests are more accurate because they're regulated and testing devices are calibrated.

**Note:** A colon cancer test that your provider orders for you to use at home is different from the tests described above because, while you collect a stool sample, you send it to a lab for analysis and results.

## STUDY: Smoking and Cognitive Decline

**Could smoking cause your brain power to decline?** A study by a University College London (UCL) research team suggests the answer is “yes.” The researchers studied ten years of data on the thinking abilities of 32,000 European adults 50 years old and older and found those who smoked had as much as an 85% greater decline in their cognitive abilities over a decade, compared to non-smokers.

**The study was observational**, but the results suggest smoking may be an especially crucial factor affecting the rate of cognitive aging. (In observational studies, researchers collect data from participants or look at data already gathered.)

**But the news wasn't all bad.** The scientists also found healthy living strategies helped smokers keep their mental faculties stronger. The smokers who exercised regularly, drank alcohol moderately and frequently socialized didn't experience cognitive decline faster than non-smokers.

**Bottom line:** Smoking isn't good for anyone. But a healthy lifestyle in other ways may help smokers preserve their mental faculties.

## TIP of the MONTH

### Processed Meats

**A new study shows that cutting back on processed meats**, such as bacon, deli meat and hotdogs, may reduce the risk of colorectal cancer, heart disease and type 2 diabetes. Researchers used a simulation tool and predicted that cutting back on processed meat could save lives. The scientists reported that if Americans could reduce consumption of processed meats by 30%, it could lead to 352,900 fewer occurrences of type 2 diabetes, 92,500 fewer incidences of heart disease and 53,300 fewer cases of colorectal cancer over ten years.

# ASK THE DIETITIAN: Freezing Food

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

eating smart

**Freezing food prolongs its freshness, reduces food waste and saves money.** This helpful guide explains which foods freeze well and how long they can stay in your freezer.

### Q: Is frozen food still nutritious?

**A: Yes. Some vegetables and fruits are picked and flash-frozen at the height of freshness**, which locks in valuable nutrients, making them more nutritious than fresh versions. For meat, fish and poultry, there is little change to the nutrient content due to freezing.

### Q: How long can food stay frozen?

**A: Freezing foods at 0°F keeps food safe indefinitely.** These storage times aren't about food safety, but are about food quality, such as taste and texture:

- Raw ground beef: 4 months.
- Raw steaks and roasts: 1 year.
- Cooked meat leftovers (stew, casserole, etc.): 3 months.
- Raw whole poultry: 1 year.
- Raw poultry parts (breast, wing, etc.): 9 months.
- Cooked poultry leftovers: 4 months.
- Lean fish: 8 months.
- Fatty fish: 3 months.
- Most vegetables: 1 year.
- Most fruits: 6 months.
- Nuts and seeds: 2 years.
- Bread: 3 months.



**Freezing tip:** Use freezer-safe bags or containers and label the food with the name and freezing date.

### Q: Are there any foods I shouldn't freeze?

**A: Yes. The cold temperature changes the texture (and often the taste) of these foods**, which do not defrost well:

- Fresh or hard-boiled eggs.
- Lettuce, tomato and cucumber.
- Raw potatoes.
- Mayonnaise-based salads: tuna, chopped egg, macaroni salads, etc.
- Canned food (while it's in the can).

**Ready to thaw your frozen food?** The best ways are in the refrigerator, in the microwave or immersed in cold water. Do not thaw foods on the kitchen counter — it's not the right temperature and may render the food unsafe to eat due to bacteria.

## One-Pot Chicken Stew

4 tsp extra-virgin olive oil, <i>divided</i>	¼ cup flour
1½ lbs. chicken thighs, cut into cubes	4 cups low-sodium chicken stock
1 onion, diced	2 cups potatoes, diced
4 cloves garlic, minced	2 cups trimmed green beans
2 medium carrots, diced	1 cup frozen peas
2 stalks celery, diced	1 tsp each fresh thyme and rosemary
	½ tsp salt (or more to taste)

**In** a large pot over medium heat, add 2 tsp olive oil. **Add** chicken thighs, cooking until they brown, about 10 minutes. **Remove** to a plate. **Add** remaining 2 tsp olive oil, onions, garlic, carrots and celery. **Cook** 3 minutes to soften. **Add** flour, stock and potatoes. **Bring** to a simmer and cook for 20 minutes, stirring occasionally. **Add** in green beans, peas, herbs and chicken. **Stir**, cover and bring back to a simmer — about 10-15 minutes. **Add** salt and stir. **Cook** until chicken reaches 165°F. **Serve** in bowls topped with fresh herbs.

**Makes 4 servings. Per serving:** 326 calories | 32g protein | 14g total fat | 4g saturated fat | 6g mono fat | 8g poly fat | 17g carbohydrate | 3g sugar (0g added sugars) | 4g fiber | 408mg sodium

## EASY recipe



Keep those questions and suggestions coming!

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• **Watch for the 1095-C Tax Form:** Form 1095-C will be mailed to your home early February. Keep this "Healthcare W-2" for your records.

• **2024 Health and Day Care Flexible Spending Account Claims:** File any remaining 2024 FSA claims by March 31, 2025, with Navia Benefit Solutions. Submit paperless claims online or through the MyNavia mobile app.

• **Qualifying Life Event This Year?** If you have a qualifying life event any time during the year, there may be an impact on your benefits and steps you need to take. For example, are you planning to marry or form a new domestic partnership? You have 30 days to add your new spouse or domestic partner to your benefits through Workday. Are you expecting a newborn or adopting a child? You will have 60 days to add your child to your healthcare plans. For more qualified life events and steps to consider or are required to take, go to the Life Events [page](#). For step-by-step instructions to change your benefits elections in Workday, go to the [Change Benefits job aid](#). Additionally, use the [Manage Dependents job aid](#) to add a new dependent or remove an existing dependent. Questions? Contact your [department's benefits representative](#).

## EXPERT advice

— Elizabeth Smoots, MD

### Q: Is waking up at night okay?

**A:** It's normal to wake up one or two times a night. Waking up more frequently can occur if you drink liquids in the evening, especially caffeinated or alcoholic beverages, or have certain physical and mental health conditions or a poor sleep environment.

**Physical and mental causes:** People with frequent urination, pain, breathing problems, digestive disorders, hormonal changes or dementia may wake up more often at night. So do those with stress, depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety and schizophrenia. Other culprits include sleep disorders, such as sleep apnea and restless legs syndrome.

**Here are some ways to improve your slumber:**

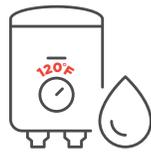
- **Limit** your evening intake of fluids, including alcoholic and caffeinated drinks.
- **Aim** for seven to nine hours of sleep each night.
- **Go** to bed and wake up at about the same time each day.
- **Turn** off all screens at least one hour before bed.
- **Engage** in a relaxing bedtime ritual, such as reading or meditation.

**See your health care provider** for an evaluation if health issues often disrupt your sleep.

# Preventing Burn Injuries at Home

**Nearly half a million people seek medical treatment every year for burn injuries** — with more than 300 children receiving emergency treatment for burns every day. Most accidental burns happen in the kitchen and the bathroom, but they can happen anywhere in the home.

**Here are some of the best ways to prevent burn injuries:**



**SET** your hot water heater at 120°F or lower to prevent scalding. Always test water before letting children or the elderly get into a tub or shower.

**KEEP** matches, lighters and chemicals out of reach and locked up.

**NEVER** leave your stove unattended. Turn pot handles toward the back of the stove so they are not accidentally bumped or spilled.

**WEAR** short sleeves or roll up your sleeves when cooking or grilling. Pull your hair back.

**USE** long-handled barbecue tools when grilling.

**DON'T** hold a child while cooking, grilling or starting a fire.

**MAKE** sure oven mitts and potholders are dry when using them. Moisture retains heat and can scald you.



**PLACE** safety barriers around the fireplace, and never leave a child unsupervised near a fire.

**KEEP** working fire extinguishers within easy reach.

**INSTALL** smoke detectors in your home and test them regularly.

**LEAVE** fireworks to the professionals. Don't attempt to light them on your own.

**REMEMBER** that sparklers heat up to more than 1000°F. Never let children under five use sparklers. Always supervise children older than five while they use sparklers.

**Caution:** Everyone should wear gloves while handling sparklers. And check for fireworks bans. **Tip:** Enjoy a professional fireworks show instead.



**National Burn Awareness Week is February 2 to 8.**