



Personal Best

HOPE Health Letter®

JANUARY 2024

Health from Head to Toe

Ready for your routine health checkup?

As a standard baseline examination practiced for decades, this review can inform you and your health care providers about your current health condition, needs and goals — from head to toe. It typically includes an evaluation of your circulatory, digestive, muscular, respiratory and nervous systems as well as your mental health status.



Regular checkups can lead to the detection and treatment of chronic diseases, such as high blood pressure and elevated cholesterol levels which can lead to cardiovascular problems, and identify the need for screenings, such as a colonoscopy or a mammogram.

Preparing for your routine checkup? Most of the time, there's nothing special you need to do to prepare for your physical. If you are having blood work done, you may be asked to fast and drink only water for a specified period of time before your appointment. Provide a list of prescription and over-the-counter medications and supplements you take regularly.

It's never too late to establish daily habits that will benefit your overall health and well-being. Research and talk to your provider about possible dietary changes and suitable exercise routines that you enjoy and can help with weight loss or health goals.

Practical ways to improve your health from head to toe: Pick one lifestyle habit that requires changing. Maybe it's a change to your dietary pattern, exercise routine, sleep schedule or how you cope with stress. Formulate a plan to implement change. It takes a few weeks for a new habit to stick. Once the new healthy habit becomes routine, add another new habit if needed.

Tip: Bring a list to your checkup with the three most important concerns you have about your health.

The [Smart Moves Toolkit](#), including this issue's printable download, [Personalized Weight Loss Plan](#), is at personalbest.com/extras/24V1tools.

BEST bits

■ **Do you still need to worry about COVID?** It's been several years since the outbreak of COVID-19, and while it is not in the news as much, it is still here and still contagious and can lead to serious complications and even death. Hospital stays due to COVID have decreased, and those who are hospitalized aren't getting as sick as people did during the pandemic, especially if they have been vaccinated. **Note:** Many people who get symptoms don't get tested or use home tests, which are not reported to the CDC. If you have COVID, isolate yourself at home and take other steps as your health care provider advises, especially if you have a weakened immune system.

■ **The Ask Me 3 program encourages people to ask their health care provider about their health.** The three questions: ① What is my main health problem? ② What do I need to do? and ③ Why is it important for me to do this? To learn more, search for **Ask Me 3** at ihi.org.

■ **When it comes to skin care products labeled "natural" and "clean," most are not — and may contain allergens.** Among 1,651 so-called "natural" skin care products, researchers found that most of them contained ingredients that can produce **allergic contact dermatitis** — an inflammatory skin disease caused by a hypersensitivity reaction. If you have very sensitive skin, choose products labeled **fragrance free** or **hypoallergenic**. Soaps, lotions and fragrances labeled as clean and natural may still cause skin irritation. Look for products that have the fragrance-free notation on the EPA's Safer Choice label.

Curb Nighttime Eating

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

It's common for healthy eating plans to go awry in the evenings. Snacking while watching TV often leads to distracted and mindless eating. Chances are that means your fullness cues are ignored and



portions are larger than usual. If you're pulled in by the allure of potato chips and ice cream after 8 p.m., here are eight ways to deal with the nightly snack attack.

1. **Assess your appetite.** Are you snacking because you're truly hungry, or is it out of habit or boredom? Rate your hunger on a scale from 1 to 10 and eat a portion to satisfy your true hunger level.
2. **Grant yourself permission.** If you're always hungry in the evening, listen to your body. Make an evening snack a standard part of your daily eating habits, and choose a satisfying, nourishing mini-meal instead of a large quantity of ultra-processed foods.
3. **Enjoy an evening treat but control the portion.** Serve yourself one portion on a plate or bowl, rather than eating out of the product container.
4. **Snack on whole vegetables and fruit (not juice).** They are filled with fiber and fluid, which can help you feel full and satisfied for relatively few calories.
5. **Prevent distractions.** Mute the TV or put down your phone while eating. Focus on enjoying your food instead.
6. **Eat regularly.** Sometimes night snacking is an indication that you're not eating enough during the day. Make sure to have regular meals and snacks.
7. **Choose wisely.** Stock the kitchen with nourishing snacks, such as fruit, vegetables, yogurt, nuts, seeds, popcorn, edamame and hummus, etc.
8. **Do something else!** If you aren't hungry at night but eat due to boredom, change it up. Go for a walk, call a friend, create a games night or book club, try yoga or prep for your next meal.



TIP of the MONTH

Plastic Food Packaging

Storing food at home? Some people are turning to glass, stainless steel or ceramic containers instead of plastic. Studies show that some plastic polycarbonate containers break down over time, and bits of plastic may leach into food when the containers are heated. The chemicals that get into food have been linked to hormonal issues and infertility. If you're concerned, you can choose glass or ceramic containers with lids, especially if you often reheat leftovers in the microwave.

Lentil and Mushroom Stew

EASY recipe

2 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil	3 tbsp balsamic vinegar
3 cloves garlic, minced	2 tbsp reduced-sodium soy sauce
1 onion, diced	2 cups no-salt-added tomato sauce
2 medium carrots, peeled and diced	3 cups water
2 celery stalks, diced	2 cups baby potatoes, quartered
3 cups button mushrooms, sliced	1 can (15 oz.) no-salt-added brown lentils, drained and rinsed
1 tsp each dried thyme and oregano	½ tsp salt, or more to taste
2 tbsp flour	

In a large pot, heat oil over medium. **Add** garlic, onion, carrots and celery. **Stir** and cook about 7-8 minutes. **Add** mushrooms and herbs. **Cook** 3-4 minutes, adding flour to coat vegetables. **Stir** in vinegar, soy sauce, tomato sauce and water, and stir well. **Add** potatoes and lentils. **Simmer**, stirring occasionally until potatoes are cooked through, about 20 minutes. **Salt** to taste and serve.

Makes 8 servings. Per serving: 353 calories | 16g protein | 8g total fat | 1g saturated fat | 4g mono fat | 3g poly fat | 58g carbohydrate | 14g sugar (0g added sugar) | 15g fiber | 578mg sodium

Expressive Writing: Is It for You?

By Eric Endlich, PhD

If you're looking for a way to manage your feelings about your experiences — especially the upsetting ones — consider expressive writing. Through journaling, letter writing or freewriting, expressive writing may help:

- Lower your distress (especially if you're already someone who expresses your feelings).
- Improve your immunity (resistance to certain diseases).
- Reduce your stress and anxiety levels.
- Improve your mood.
- Increase your self-awareness.
- Recover from traumatic events.

But just writing about what happened to you isn't always enough. It may be important to write about the meaning of the events for you as well. If you want to try expressive writing:

- Write for at least 20 minutes at least four days in a row.
- Choose topics that are personal and important to you. For example, write about a time when you felt especially happy, sad, proud or scared.
- Don't stop to think, correct or edit — just write continuously.
- Remember you're writing only for yourself. You can say anything.
- Don't be surprised if you're somewhat emotional for the first session or two; it often gets easier. Of course, you can stop if it's too upsetting.

After a few days, notice how you feel. With any luck, you'll start to experience some healing, growth or other positive benefits.



If you use your smartphone constantly, chances are you may develop text neck.

Symptoms include shoulder pain, neck aches and headaches. They develop from hours spent slumped in a chair or leaning over a table or desk with shoulders hunched forward and your head tilted toward your phone or another device. For relief, roll your shoulders back and don't tilt your head forward toward the phone's screen (use a docking port). And about every 20 minutes, take a break from your mobile device. Stand, roll your shoulders and gently move your neck from side to side and up and down to increase blood flow. Consider reducing your screen time.

Personalities of Happy People

Where does happiness come from? From a biological perspective, our bodies produce certain chemicals that regulate our moods. Called happy hormones, these are chemicals in your system that promote positive mood and feelings. They include:

- **The hormone serotonin, which plays several roles in your body,** including influencing learning, memory and happiness as well as regulating body temperature, sleep, sexual behavior and hunger. Lack of enough serotonin may play a role in depression, anxiety, mania and other health conditions.
- **The hormone dopamine, which is called the feel-good hormone,** because it can produce a sense of pleasure. This sensation might give you the motivation to do positive things or feel good during your day. Dopamine is considered part of your mental reward system.

Each of us may define happiness

differently. Psychologists call happiness

an ongoing emotion of joy and satisfaction that can be associated with an overall positive attitude. Whether you're a happy person or frequently feel unhappiness from day to day, you can transform your life to become happier.

So, what might you feel when you're having positive experiences and higher levels of your happy hormones? Some signs that you are happy may include:

- Feeling satisfied and rewarded.
- Relaxing and experiencing less stress.
- Having enjoyable relationships with people.
- Sharing your joy with others.
- Being more open to where life takes you.
- Feeling that you have accomplished (or will accomplish) what you want in life.

The more frequently you feel these positive emotions, the stronger and more satisfied you can feel from day to day.



Many U.S. toddlers aren't fully vaccinated. America Academy of Pediatrics researchers found that among more than 16,000 American children, between 19 and 35 months old, about 73% received all recommended vaccines. However, more than 17% started but didn't finish their vaccinations, and 8.4% of these children lacked only one more dose to be fully vaccinated. About 9% of the children had no vaccinations. It's important to remember vaccines can protect toddlers from many serious diseases, including chickenpox, COVID-19, flu, hepatitis B, measles, mumps, pneumococcal infections, polio, RSV and rubella. Your child's health care provider can give you a vaccination schedule for your little one.

Q: ADHD Non-Drug Treatment?

A: **Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is often identified in childhood but can persist into adulthood.** While treatment with medications (often stimulants such as methylphenidate) is a fairly standard approach, several non-drug interventions have been studied, including:

- **Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT)** — This may involve revising distorted or unhelpful thoughts, as well as modifying behaviors or the environment.
- **Parent training** — Studies have shown benefits in various behavioral areas.
- **Neurofeedback/biofeedback** — Participants may benefit from altering their brain wave patterns via EEG feedback in the form of a game.



- **Exercise** — There is some evidence that exercise is helpful for children with ADHD, and many adults report positive benefits as well.
- **Meditation, mindfulness, yoga and tai chi** — All of these approaches have shown promise.
- **School-based interventions and accommodations** — Students with a diagnosis of ADHD may qualify for special education services or disability accommodations (e.g., testing in a distraction-reduced environment).

— Eric Endlich, PhD

Lunge into Health

If you want to strengthen your legs, take a plunge and lunge. The lunge can improve your lower body strength, balance and stability. It's a body resistance exercise that especially targets the quadriceps and hamstring muscles in your thighs, lower leg muscles and your glutes (the gluteal muscles in your buttocks), according to the Mayo Clinic.

Lunges engage your core muscles, too, including those of the pelvis, lower back, hips and stomach. This exercise is a good way to train if you play sports that involve lunging, such as tennis, basketball and soccer.

The lunge requires no exercise equipment and no trips to the gym. If you are ready to try lunging, follow these steps recommended by Mayo's lunge exercise experts:

1. Start by standing up comfortably, then step ahead with one foot and lean forward until your knee reaches a 90-degree angle to the floor, keeping it centered over your foot.
2. Lower your rear knee until the shin is parallel to the floor or ground.
3. Then return to your starting position. You should feel some tension, but not pain, in your legs.



Can't lower your knee to a 90-degree angle? Just go as low as it feels comfortable. Do as many repetitions as you can, but stop if you are tired or feel muscle fatigue.

To learn more, search for five lunge variations for leaner legs at [acefitness.org](https://www.acefitness.org). Of course, always check with your health care provider before starting any new exercise if you have any health conditions, such as heart disease, or you're not used to regular physical activity.

Q: Blood draw tips?

A: Many people experience anxiety about needles or the sight of blood. If blood bothers you, take these steps to minimize your discomfort the next time your health care provider orders a blood draw.

Ask about special instructions. Do you need to avoid food, drinks (besides water) or medicine before your test? How long in advance should you not consume them?

Stay adequately hydrated. Drink ample water the day before and day of your blood test. It's easier for the technician to find your veins when you're well hydrated.

Reduce the risk of fainting. Avoid watching the blood draw. Think about something else while you look away.

Dress appropriately. You may be asked which arm you prefer for the blood draw. Wearing a short-sleeved shirt can make it easier for the technician to access your veins.

Calm your nerves. Take slow deep breaths before and during the procedure. Listening to music on your headphones can provide a soothing distraction during your blood draw.

— Elizabeth Smoots, MD



When should you still mask up? Anybody with symptoms or a recent positive test or exposure to someone with COVID-19 should wear a mask to protect others from possible infection. While masking is no longer required by your state, health care facilities may individually choose to require masking for employee and patient safety. There are also circumstances in health care when masks are needed to prevent the spread of other infectious diseases, such as colds and flu. You might consider masking in nursing homes, public transport and crowded places indoors even where they're not required if you feel safer wearing a mask or if you are infected with any infectious disease, but are well enough to go out.

Pre-Surgery Consultation: What to Expect

By Elizabeth Smoots, MD

Are you planning to have surgery? A pre-op checkup for major procedures is often required, usually within a month before the surgery. This gives your health care provider time to treat any medical problems you might have before surgery.

Preoperative evaluation: Your health care provider will likely review your medical history and perform a physical exam. Further evaluation may be needed if you have diabetes, sleep apnea, heart problems, high blood pressure, clotting problems or other disorders. A history of heavy smoking or difficulty walking up the stairs may also require appraisal. Make sure your surgeon gets copies of the reports of your pre-op checkup and other evaluations to reduce the risk of having your surgery delayed. Some hospitals may also require you to talk to an anesthesia nurse or physician before surgery to discuss your health.

Pre-surgical testing: Your surgeon or health care provider may recommend certain tests before surgery. These tests can depend on your age, general health, risk factors, medical problems, and the type of surgery you're having. Common tests include a complete blood count, blood sugar and tests of kidney and liver function. A chest X-ray to check your lungs or an electrocardiogram to check your heart may be recommended. In certain situations, other testing may be required. The possibilities include a heart exercise stress test, lung function tests, or endoscopy of your colon or stomach. Imaging tests, such as an MRI scan, CT scan or ultrasound, may have to be completed and reviewed before surgery. Get your pre-op checkup at the earliest opportunity to ensure adequate time to complete everything required.



Q: How to Plan Your Estate

A: Your estate is your possessions and financial assets minus debts. Estate planning is critical, especially for those who are responsible for minors. Your estate can pass two ways at death: one through contracts and trusts to beneficiaries (life insurance, retirement plans, bank accounts) and the other through probate (your will). If you do not have a will, your state's intestate succession laws determine who inherits.

Take these steps to keep your estate in good order:

1. Write your will. Handwritten wills are acceptable; however, they leave the door open for contest. Contact an attorney to see what is best for your situation.

2. Review the beneficiary designation on your life insurance policies, retirement plans, bank accounts and health spending accounts. Also, review the ownership designations for assets, such as automobiles, to make sure they transfer according to your wishes.

3. Prepare advance directives so your wishes are followed should you become incapacitated.

4. Consider a Power of Attorney (POA) that allows someone you choose to make decisions for you if you no longer can. An attorney can help you choose what type of POA is best for your situation.

5. Inform one or two close friends or family members of the location of your financial records, advance directives and wills.

6. Discuss your financial situation and estate plans with your spouse or significant other at least once a year. Consult with an attorney for specific planning needs. Because wills can be contested, an attorney will know how to ensure that your wishes are followed.

— Jamie Lynn Byram, PhD, CFP, AFC, MBA

2024 Safety Resolutions

It's a new year and making resolutions to stay safe should be on top of your list. Here are some ideas:

- **Be proactive.** Make a plan for your tasks or where you are going. Address hazards before an injury occurs.
- **Pay attention to personal safety.** If something doesn't feel right, step back, review your surroundings and stay cautious. **Tip:** Pay attention and avoid using your phone while walking or driving; view it when you get to your destination. Carry a personal alarm.
- **Stop rushing.** Accidents happen when we hurry. Slow down on the job and at home. A few minutes usually won't make a difference.
- **Know and understand safety precautions before you start working on a task.** Make sure you are familiar with and follow all safety procedures, including what PPE to wear, what the **Safety Data Sheets** state and what to do in an emergency.
- **Inspect all safety gear and PPE.** Make it a point to inspect everything before you start your job.
- **Keep your work area clean and uncluttered.** Organize your work area at the end of each shift.
- **Be a safety role model for others.** Your coworkers will notice if you take time to wear the appropriate PPE and follow instructions. They will also notice if you don't.



CORNER

SAFETY

Basic Bathing Safety

January is National Bath Safety Month.



Bathing can be relaxing, but don't get casual about safety. Keep these precautions in mind:

- Use a nonslip mat in your bathtub unless it has a nonslip surface. Keep a slip-proof bathmat directly outside of your tub.
- Keep bathing essentials within easy reach to avoid climbing in and out of the tub to get them. Get a bath caddy to hold body washes, shampoos and lotions.
- Consider installing shower seats, grab bars and a walk-in tub, especially for elderly adults and those with disabilities.
- Never leave young children alone in a bathtub — not even for a minute.
- Control water temperature to avoid burns from scalding water. Set the thermostat on your water heater at 120°F or lower.



- Install ground-fault circuit interrupters to lessen the likelihood of electrical shock if an electrical appliance falls into the water. **Best bet:** Keep electrical appliances, such as hairdryers and electric razors, away from the bathtub.
- Keep it clean. Mold and mildew can lead to health problems and make a surface slippery.

Balancing Work, Life and Caregiving

By Diane McReynolds, Executive Editor Emeritus

Many employees are not just caring for children, but elderly relatives, too. Nearly 18 million individuals in the U.S. are caring for someone age 65 and older who needs help because of limitations in their physical or mental abilities. And many of them do so while trying to earn a living.

Caregivers tend to remain silent in the workplace about their caregiving responsibilities because they fear being viewed as less than fully committed at work and losing their jobs or missing out on promotions. They may often feel distracted at work and mentally, physically and financially overtaxed. Many eventually resign because the strain becomes too much.

Caregiving is common. An estimated 18% to 22% of workers in the U.S. are also caregivers for ill, elderly or special-needs adults or children and spend an average of nearly 24 hours a week providing care. And the percentage of caregivers will likely increase as our population ages.

It typically involves a long-term commitment lasting an average of 4½ years, according to a recent AARP report. Caregiving can include health emergencies and lesser crises that can profoundly change the lives of caregivers and those they care for.

Working caregivers often report ongoing health problems, depression and lower productivity at work as well as financial hardships. If you are a caregiver who is frequently distracted at work, feeling emotionally and physically exhausted, we hope the following steps and reminders can lead to work-life solutions and help ease your stress.

1. Practice good organization. It can ultimately reduce stress, boost your energy and create more time for you. A simple way to do this: Use a notebook or an online equivalent (e.g., patient portal, calendar app) to schedule and remind you of necessary tasks and appointments.

2. Have a contingency plan. Even if you remain well organized, life can disrupt your plans at home and at work. Make a list of possible scenarios that could interrupt your day: For example, your child becomes ill and you need to attend an important meeting at work. Reach out to family, friends, your supervisor or coworkers who might be able to provide last-minute solutions. Try to identify your options before emergencies happen.

3. Take time for yourself. Setting aside time to rest and relax can help you recharge and manage stress. List activities and then do ones that can boost your physical and mental energy. Get some exercise, relax with a good book or meet friends for a meal or movie. Positive actions can help you feel more positive.

4. Find support and ask for help. With the high number of caregivers in the workplace, you may find others in the same position as you — juggling job needs, caregiving and personal time. You might compare notes, gain advice and help support each other emotionally.



5. Learn your employer's leave policies. More companies are recognizing working caregivers' challenges and offer workplace benefits, such as paid family leave. Also, determine if you can use personal, sick or vacation days for caregiving. If your company provides an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), it may offer caregiver benefits as well as counseling, information, referrals, eldercare assessments and financial counseling.

6. Explore possible scheduling options at your workplace. For example, flexible hours could let your workday begin later so you can assist your loved one earlier in the day. Another option could be a compressed schedule where you work four long shifts and get the fifth day off for caregiving.

Workplace managers: For those with caregivers on your team, a positive way to help is by listening to their needs and enabling them to work flexibly whenever possible, either by giving them flexible hours or by allowing them to work from home when necessary. A good way to help them is to ask for their input.





DR. ZORBA'S corner

Dementia and Olive Oil

Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia ruin lives. We know that controlling blood pressure and cholesterol, not smoking and not drinking more than one to two drinks a day may help reduce the risk of getting dementia. And exercise clearly plays a role. But a new study published in the journal *Nutrition* suggests olive oil might play a key role. Scientists who followed 90,000 people for 30 years found taking as little as one-half of a tablespoon seemed to reduce the risk of dying from dementia by 28%. Previous studies also showed two tablespoons of olive oil every day dramatically reduced the risk of stroke and heart attacks. My suggestion is to put extra-virgin olive oil on your salad every day. It's good for your brain and your heart and the least processed of olive oils. Previous research has shown that olive oil as part of a Mediterranean dietary pattern also protected against cognitive decline. — Zorba Paster, MD

■ Study: Hospitalization and Type 2 Diabetes Link

People with type 2 diabetes have higher rates of hospitalization than nondiabetics. A study of more than 1.5 million people in Hong Kong examined the association between type 2 diabetes and inpatient bed-days between 2002 and 2018. Half had type 2 diabetes and half did not. Compared to those without diabetes, the risk of hospitalization from all causes in people with type 2 diabetes increased 1.75-fold in men and 1.87-fold in women. The risk was even higher in people diagnosed with diabetes at age 18 to 39 years: a 3.54-fold risk in men and a 4.29-fold risk in women. Among people younger than age 40 at diagnosis, mental health disorders were the cause of 38% of hospital bed-days.

Researchers concluded that type 2 diabetes is linked to an increased risk of days spent in a hospital. People under age 40 are at higher risk. A focus on mental health disorders is needed for young people with type 2 diabetes, the researchers said. Separate studies are required to examine the patterns in the U.S.

Note: *Association* means a certain health outcome, such as hospitalization, is linked to or is more likely with people who have a condition or disease.

■ Study: High Blood Pressure and Alcohol

A single alcoholic drink a day is linked to high blood pressure (hypertension) in some people. An analysis of seven studies involving 19,000 adults in the U.S., Korea and Japan found an association between the number of alcoholic beverages consumed daily and increases in systolic blood pressure, the upper blood pressure reading number.

Systolic blood pressure increases with age and is a risk factor for cardiovascular disease. In the analysis, blood pressure readings climbed more rapidly through the years as the number of daily drinks increased. The analysis of adults with no prior history of hypertension or heart disease was published last year in *Hypertension*, the journal of the American Heart Association (AHA).

Drinking alcohol for potential health benefits is a myth, according to the AHA. The Association advises limiting alcohol intake; if you don't drink already, don't start. — Elizabeth Smoots, MD

The Smart Moves Toolkit, including this issue's printable download, **Personalized Weight Loss Plan**, is at personalbest.com/extras/24V1tools.

Stay in Touch. Keep those questions and suggestions coming!

Phone: 800-871-9525 • Fax: 205-437-3084 • Email: PBeditor@ebix.com

Website: personalbest.com

Executive Editor: Susan Cottman

Advisers: Patricia C. Buchsel, RN, MSN, FAAN; Jamie Lynn Byram, PhD, CFP, AFC, MBA; Eric Endlich, PhD; Mary P. Hollins, MS, JD, CSHM; Kenneth Holtyn, MS; Reed Humphrey, PhD; Gary B. Kushner, SPHR, CBP; Diane McReynolds, Executive Editor Emeritus; Zorba Paster, MD; Charles Stuart Platkin, PhD; Cara Rosenbloom, RD; Elizabeth Smoots, MD; Margaret Spencer, MD
Editor: Airmie Miller

Graphic Designer: Sheila Nupen

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