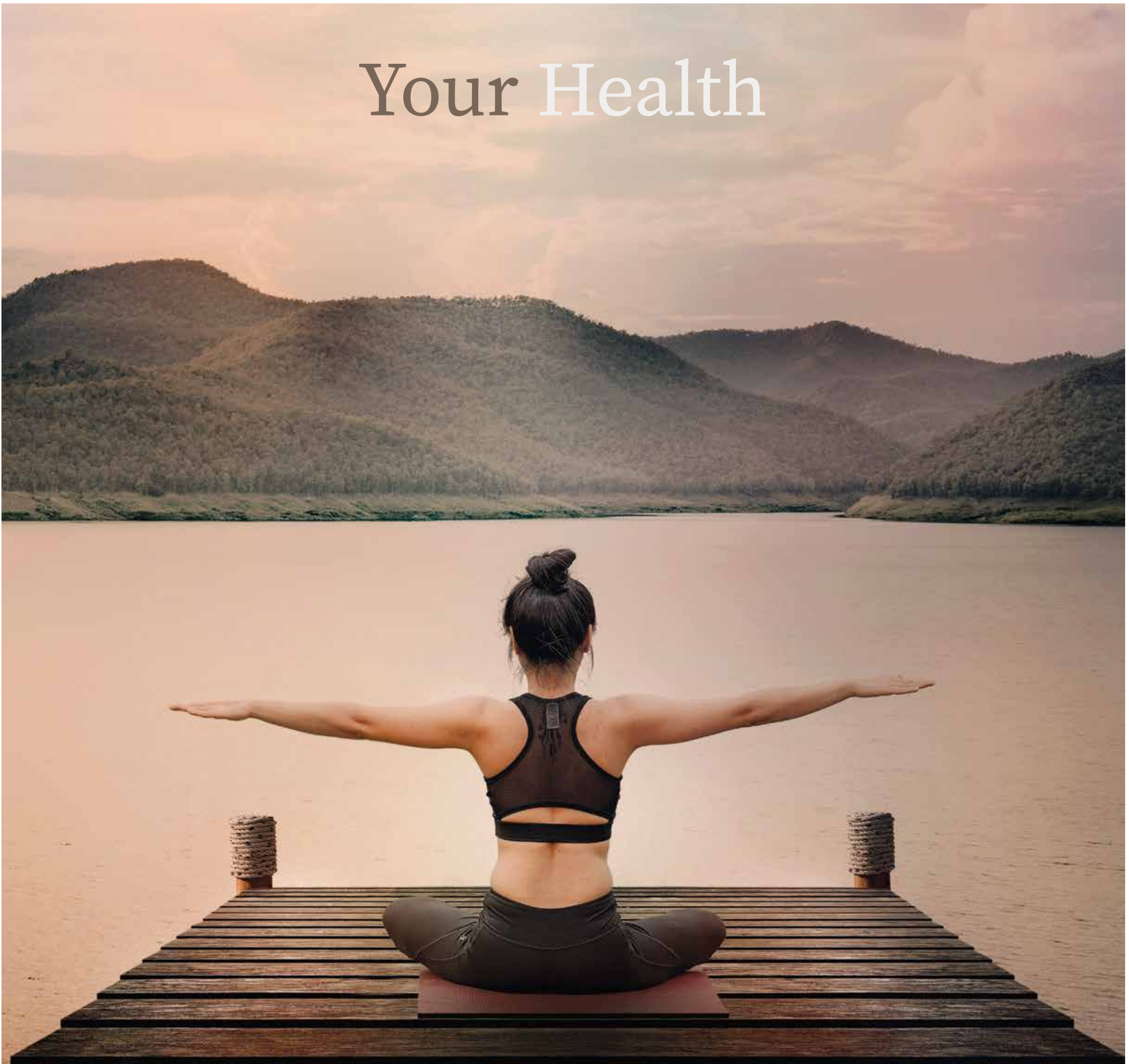


Your Health



Staying on Schedule

Doctor visits aren't only for the sick. Regularly scheduled wellness checks are essential for maintaining good health.

Everyone should seek medical attention when they are sick, of course, but routine check-ups — also known as physicals or well visits — offer a wide range of benefits that go beyond immediate health concerns. So, make an appointment for at least one of these visits annually. They are covered under most insurance policies, and are offered at no cost through Medicare.

EARLY DETECTION AND PREVENTION

Well visits are important because they provide a critical opportunity for protection or early detection of illnesses. During these appointments, a healthcare professional will conduct thorough assessments of your overall health. That may include physical exams, a review of your personal and family history, medical evaluations, mental health evaluations and routine screenings. By closely monitoring key health indicators, doctors can identify problems at their initial stages. Early detection allows for timely intervention before you develop more serious issues.



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PROMOTING WELLNESS

These well visits go beyond preventing and treating illness, as they likewise focus on promoting overall wellness. Healthcare providers will use these visits as an opportunity to discuss healthy lifestyle choices such as exercise, stress management, nutrition and mental health. They'll offer guidance on disease prevention, weight management, smoking cessation, alcohol intake and more. They'll then

help you develop a plan to address these things, empowering you to adopt healthier habits while making positive changes that improve your quality of life.

OTHER BENEFITS

Regularly managing chronic conditions can lead to improved outcomes — and can potentially save lives. Well visits may also include important vaccinations and immunizations which protect against

preventable diseases and reduce the risk of outbreaks in your community. These visits may include discussions about age-appropriate screenings like mammograms, colorectal cancer screens and prostate screenings.

TALKING THINGS OVER

Develop an open and honest relationship with your healthcare provider through these regular well visits. Continuity of care helps doctors better

understand your lifestyle, individual health needs and medical history. You'll receive more personalized health recommendations tailored to your specific situation. Open communication during well visits also allows for discussions about other questions, concerns or notable changes in your health status. You'll be actively participating in your health decisions and well-being — and that's a good feeling, too.

Snacking the Right Way

Let's face it, maintaining a healthy diet can be very difficult in today's fast-paced environment.

With some careful planning and wise choices, however, it's possible to incorporate healthy snacking into your busy lifestyle.

Look for snacks that address your nutritional needs while keeping you energized throughout the day. The best options don't merely curb your appetite. They give you what you need to thrive. Here's how to find healthy snacks that suit your hectic schedule while also addressing the conscious decision to prioritize your health, one snack at a time.

SMARTER EATING

Low-carb, high-protein snacks help manage appetite and regulate blood sugar levels. Turkey roll-ups are a great example: Layer preferred ingredients like cheese, cucumbers, pickles or tomato onto a slice of turkey breast, then roll it up to create a wrap. If fruit or grain bars are your preferred snack, make sure they are whole grain, include whole-food ingredients and have minimal added sugars.

GETTING STARTED

Prepare everything in advance: Wash and cut vegetables and fruits while portioning out nuts, hummus



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or nut butter. Use reusable items like small plastic containers, mason jars or bento boxes to keep snacks fresh. Avoid overeating by practicing portion control, and stay hydrated by carrying a reusable water bottle.

EASY IDEAS

Fresh fruits such as apples, grapes and bananas are both convenient and packed with

vitamins and fiber. They also have natural sugars, rather than more potentially harmful artificial replacements. Single-serving containers of Greek yogurt are high in calcium, protein, and probiotics. Pair nut butter with apple slices and whole-grain crackers for a satisfying snack with healthy fats and protein.

Create another fun snack by cutting celery sticks and filling

them with peanut butter. An easy-to-make energy-boosting trail mix includes nuts, dried fruits, seeds and a few chunks of dark chocolate. Pre-cut vegetables like carrots, bell peppers and cucumber and then pair them with dipping hummus. The results are balanced and crunchy. String cheese is also portable, offering protein and calcium on the go.

OFF THE BEATEN PATH

Offbeat snacks like roasted chickpeas can also help us eat smarter. They're rich in fiber and packed with essentials such as vitamins, minerals, iron, folate, magnesium, copper, phosphorus and manganese. Other snack options might include edamame, roasted watermelon seeds, baked tofu, cottage cheese, chia pudding, lentil salad and overnight oats.

Eye Strain in the Digital World

Whether for work or fun, phones, computers and tablets provide portals to the outside world. Most of us are now spending numerous hours staring at these screens.

This constant exposure can lead to digital eye strain. Fortunately, we can promote better eye health by making a few simple adjustments. That starts with practicing mindful habits.

DEFINING THE TERM

The official name for digital eye strain is “computer vision syndrome.” The American Optometric Association describes the syndrome as a “group of eye- and vision-related problems that result from prolonged computer, tablet, e-reader and cell phone use.” Doctors have seen a sharp rise in these symptoms over the past few decades as the average American worker spends seven hours a day on the computer. The viewing distance for this type of work is often much closer than other reading tasks, and that ends up placing additional demands on our eyes.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Begin by implementing new settings that are suitable for



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your eyes. Create an ergonomically friendly workspace and make sure the screen isn't too bright or too dark. Next, begin taking regular breaks. There are special eye exercises that may help. It all works in concert to prioritize the well-being of eyesight so you can continue to experience the world around you with comfort and clarity.

SCREEN SETTINGS

Adjust your screen settings to your eyesight throughout the day. Adjust the brightness to match your environment. A screen that's still set to outdoor brightness will strain your eyes if you shift to a darker indoor environment. Opt for larger text and more readable fonts if you find yourself squinting. Continue adjusting until

everything on your screen is comfortably readable. If glare is a problem, consider activating blue light filters on your screen. Many devices offer this as a built-in option; you can also download blue light filter apps.

TIME AWAY

It's important to give your eyes a break during long

periods of screen time. Experts recommend a simple 20/20/20 approach: Every 20 minutes, look at something 20 feet away for at least 20 seconds. This simple exercise provides rest and a chance to refocus for your eyes, reducing strain. Try to focus on blinking regularly if your eyes become dry and itchy since that promotes hydration. Take a few deep breaths, too.

Don't Forget the Water

Self-care is often presented as a multi-tier collection of complex, often expensive actions. Yet one of the most important aspects of good health is also one of the simplest and least costly: remaining hydrated.

WHY IT'S SO IMPORTANT

It's difficult to overemphasize the importance of water, which serves as a crucial building block for life. Proper hydration supports bodily functions, aids in circulation and digestion, promotes cognitive function and helps with temperature regulation. Water helps with cell creation and creating the fluids that are necessary to keep the body functioning.

Dehydration can result in reduced energy levels, while those who drink plenty of water report improved concentration, mental sharpness and memory. Water assists in digestion, aiding in the transportation of nutrients and waste through the digestive system. This can help prevent problems like constipation. Staying hydrated enhances physical performance by supporting muscle function.

Drink plenty of water to support emotional health and maintain a positive mindset. Insufficient intake can



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influence your moods, leading to irritability. Water consumption even affects your appearance and well-being by contributing to healthy skin. Well-moisturized skin looks can reduce the visibility of wrinkles.

HOW MUCH IS NEEDED?

Experts say women should drink 11 ½ cups of water daily while men should drink 15 ½,

but some people's needs may vary. Doctors generally suggest consuming a half ounce to an ounce of water for every pound of body weight. If you find plain water unappealing, try infusing it with healthy options like slices of fruit or vegetables. Other natural flavors are available that create a refreshing taste without added artificial ingredients and sugars.

GETTING ON SCHEDULE

Some may find it difficult at first to create and maintain a schedule. Start by keeping a reusable water bottle within easy reach.

Then work to incorporate regular hydration into your daily routines. For instance, you could drink a glass of water when you wake up, prior to meals and before you

go to bed. Phone reminders are a helpful tool, as well.

With every gulp, you are helping to ensure that your body operates at its peak. If you're unsure whether you're getting enough water, monitor the color of your urine. A light yellow color indicates proper hydration, while darker urine may indicate the need for more fluids.



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Why Sleep Is Important

Those who don't get enough sleep don't just risk dozing off in an important afternoon meeting. There are serious health implications, particularly over the long term.

The reasons for these struggles with rest vary widely. Some simply struggle to quiet their minds, while others may opt to sacrifice sleep hours to get more done each day. Others may suffer from a physical condition that keeps them from easily falling or remaining asleep.

Work and family obligations may compound the issue. Whatever the cause, this is a situation that needs to be addressed before the lack of sufficient sleep becomes a far more serious issue.

WHY IT MATTERS

Sleep plays a crucial role in metabolism, immunity and other essential brain functions like memory. It plays a key factor in learning, too – and not just because those who get more rest often find it easier to concentrate. Studies show that deep, restorative sleep enables our brains to more easily process new information and store it away for retrieval later. Not getting enough sleep can lead to an over-reliance on

caffeine, and that can have its own adverse effects if consumed in high enough doses.

HOW MUCH IS NEEDED?

We have seen significant advancements in sleep technology over the years, including adjustable mattresses and memory pillows. Yet an unbroken night of restful sleep can remain elusive. The amount you need varies depending on age. For newborns, the range is 14 to 17 hours a day. For older adults, it's 7 to 8 hours. The general rule is to simply listen to your body to determine how much sleep you need.

GETTING TO SLEEP

Try to maintain a consistent bedtime

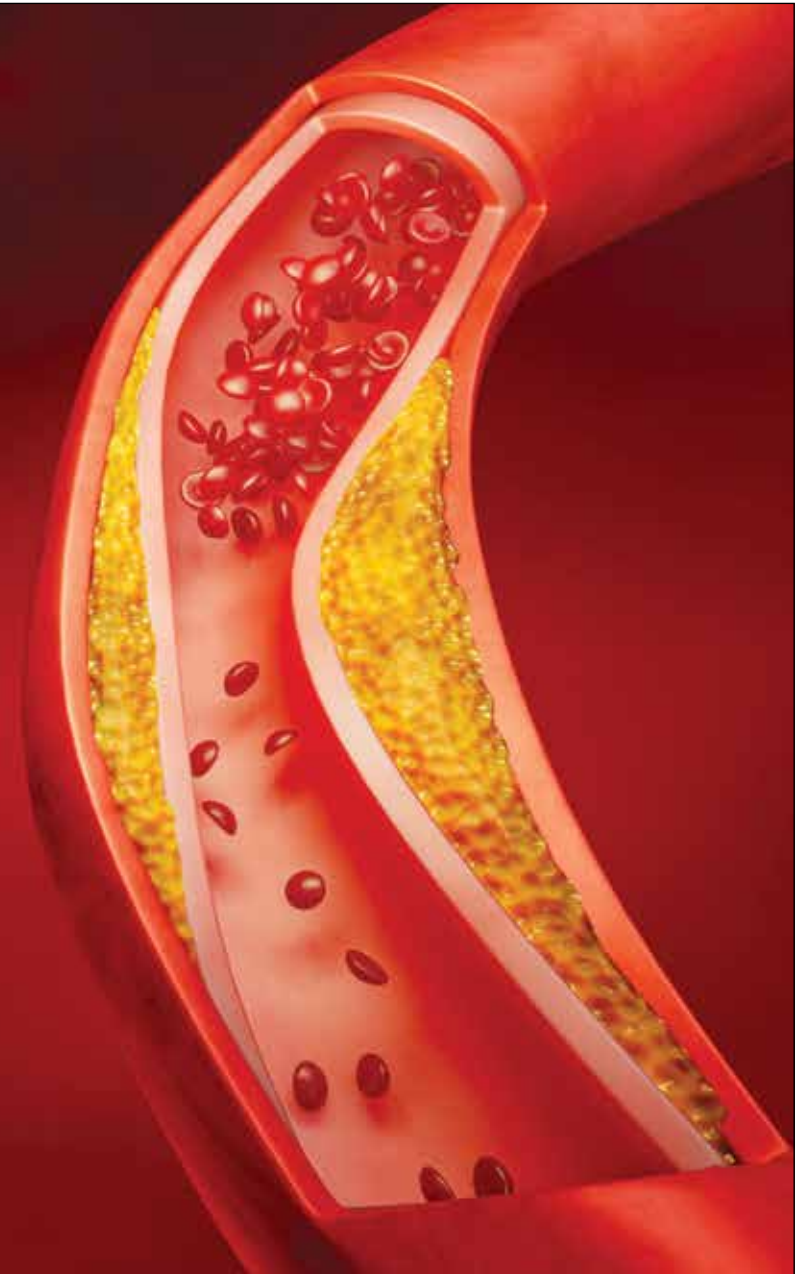
and wake-up time — even on weekends. Experts advise against taking late-afternoon naps, while recommending that all naps be kept under 20 minutes.

Avoid consuming caffeine and alcohol, particularly late in the day. Engaging in daily physical activity can help.

When preparing for sleep, turn off all screens — including your phone — at least an hour before bedtime. This kind of visual input can have a direct effect on your sleep. If you are still having trouble, take a deeper look at your sleep environment. Factors like noise and light may be playing a role. If you continue to feel sleep-deprived, see your doctor.

Controlling Cholesterol

Cholesterol is a part of our daily lives.
The question is: How much?



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Our bodies naturally produce the necessary amount of cholesterol, but various outside factors can lead to a dangerous excess. Keeping these levels under control is crucial for reducing the risk of heart issues and strokes.

WHERE IT COMES FROM

Cholesterol is present in animal-based foods such as red meat, dairy products and poultry. When consumption of these high-fat foods gets out of balance, the liver produces more cholesterol. This can then accumulate in our arteries, causing a strain on the heart as it pumps blood throughout the body. If one of these pieces of plaque

dislodges, it may cause blockages that result in a stroke. Blockages near the heart can lead to a heart attack.

KNOW THE RISKS

Excess cholesterol isn't determined solely by dietary choices. There are serious health risks associated with lifestyle choices like smoking, including high blood pressure. Diabetes in turn can increase the risk of heart disease. Excess cholesterol can potentially lead to the development of atherosclerosis.

DIFFERENT TYPES

Different types of cholesterol play their own roles in our health. While

high levels of "bad" low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol can pose a risk, insufficient levels of "good" high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol can also be problematic. Triglycerides, another type of fat produced by the body, are also regularly monitored by doctors. Factors such as lack of exercise, obesity, diabetes, excessive alcohol consumption, smoking and a diet high in fats or carbohydrates can contribute to elevated cholesterol levels. Your levels may also be influenced by age, gender and family history.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Help reduce cholesterol by eating

heart-healthy foods. Reduce saturated fats and eliminate trans fats. Exercise can improve cholesterol, raising your "good" numbers. Most doctors recommend doing at least 30 minutes of exercise five days per week. Quit smoking, or never start. If you drink alcohol, aim for moderation.

Unfortunately, healthy lifestyle changes aren't always enough to lower cholesterol levels. Your doctor may recommend one or more prescriptions to help lower your numbers.

Take these medications as directed while continuing the make lifestyle changes. That can help keep your doses lower.

Taking an Alternate Path

If you've seen a series of doctors and tried even more medications but still suffer from chronic pain, it might be time to take the alternate path of acupuncture.

In practice for more than 2,500 years, this form of physical therapy involves the insertion of thin needles into specific areas of the body. The needles are usually manipulated by hand, although some practitioners may employ heat or small electrical currents. Relief is finally achieved for many.

As a result, acupuncture has become more and more mainstream. The National Institutes of Health now reports that acupuncture is practiced in more than 100 of the 129 countries that have supplied data. In some cases, insurance companies and even Medicare might cover treatments.



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TWO SEPARATE APPROACHES

Western acupuncturists use needles to stimulate nerves, muscles and connective tissue in hopes of enhancing the body's natural pain-relieving mechanisms. On the other hand, traditional Chinese medicine uses acupuncture to balance the flow of energy, known as chi or qi, through the body's various meridians. Needles are inserted along these

meridians to help restore energy balance.

HOW IT WORKS

Researchers have made progress in understanding the effects of acupuncture, but there is still much to learn. Studies suggest that acupuncture affects nervous system function, while directly affecting the tissues where needles are inserted – particularly

connective tissue. There is evidence to suggest that acupuncture can alleviate joint pain caused by medications taken by those with breast cancer.

The practice may help with seasonal allergy symptoms, labor pain, menstrual cramps, dental pain, nausea and vomiting, and stress incontinence in women. Some patients with back pain, headaches and

osteoarthritis have continued to experience positive results up to a year after treatment with acupuncture, according to the National Institutes of Health.

BEFORE YOU GO

The procedure is generally safe, but complications are possible – particularly with unqualified practitioners. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has put industry mandates

in place but there is still the risk of infections, injury to the central nervous system and even punctured organs if you don't seek out a qualified, licensed acupuncturist. Common side effects may include soreness at insertion sites or minor bruising. Ask about the cost of the service, the proposed procedure and whether your insurance is accepted before moving forward.