

New Year's Health Check

Hoping to achieve better wellness in the new year?

Move into 2022 by looking forward to strengthening your physical and mental health. This is where an annual exam can be vital for detection and prevention of medical problems.

First, review and identify your primary goals,

such as weight loss, increased exercise, less stress and a more positive attitude.

Some practical steps might include:

- Moving more and sitting less.
- Eating fruits and vegetables daily.
- Avoiding sweet beverages.
- Taking more time for self-care.
- Trying meditation.
- Avoiding eating out so much.
- Limiting screen time.
- Enjoying the outdoors.

Other changes critical to health include limiting alcohol and quitting smoking.

A regular checkup can assess your overall health — the frequency may depend on your age, typically starting by age 40. In a thorough physical exam, your health care provider will review your family medical history and current health risk factors; check your heart and respiration rate, blood pressure and other vital signs; and ensure your vaccinations are current.

The exam might call for cancer screening, depending on your age and risk factors. For men, a testicular cancer check and a prostate exam are important. Women may require a pelvic exam, a Pap smear and a mammogram (frequency varies).

Make the most of this valuable health care benefit. Come to your checkup with a list of concerns and questions, and the reassurance of spending time with a trusted health professional that is focused on your health and how to maintain it.

Note: Your annual checkup might include virtual options, such as a phone or video call.

“The most important thing in communication is hearing what isn't said.”

— Peter Drucker



BEST bits

■ Too late to get your flu shot?

A seasonal influenza (flu) vaccination in the fall is best, but as long as flu viruses are circulating, vaccination generally continues, even in January or later. Getting an annual flu vaccine is now more important than ever. Flu vaccines will not prevent COVID-19, but they can reduce the burden of flu illnesses and hospitalizations on our health care system and help conserve medical resources for the care of people with COVID-19. Recent studies show that flu vaccination reduces the risk of flu illness by 40% to 60% among the overall population when most circulating flu viruses are well-matched to the vaccine.

■ **A diet that's vegetarian with flexibility is called flexitarian.** It is a semi-vegetarian, plant-based diet that includes dairy and eggs and occasional meat. The emphasis is on eating plant foods for the health benefits associated with a vegetarian diet without adopting a meatless eating plan. While meat is not off-limits, the flexitarian goal is to increase the consumption of plant or plant-based foods over time, while limiting meat (eating it less frequently and/or in smaller portions). With an emphasis on nutrient-dense foods, the flexitarian diet tends to reduce the intake of saturated fat, added sugars and sodium.

■ **Have the January blahs got you down?** Maybe you're tired after the holidays, you've packed on some extra pounds or watched once-enthusiastic New Year's resolutions disappear. Take heart and take action to avoid the blahs: • Unless conditions are dangerous, go outside and get fresh air and sunshine. • Exercise. Even a brief walk boosts feel-good endorphins and energy. So do stretching and home workouts. • Perk up with new interests. Learn a language online or try out new recipes.

Note: Due to production lead time, this issue may not reflect the current COVID-19 situation in some or all regions of the U.S. For the most up-to-date pandemic information visit [coronavirus.gov](https://www.coronavirus.gov).

Losing Weight with Smart Devices

Exercise is an effective way to lose weight. And modern innovation offers many tools, apps and gadgets to assist with your fitness pursuits. They can help you lose weight by tracking your progress and keeping you motivated — provided you research your options before investing in them. Following is a quick review of some practical aids for losing weight and improving fitness.

Fitness trackers are especially popular, wearable tools that monitor your activities so that you see your performance results and continue to improve them. Such smart devices can analyze the muscle-to-fat tissue ratio in your body, track heart rate, steps, calories burned, sleep and even your mood. Trackers can identify and monitor different types of activities, such as walking, moving at work or training at various levels of difficulty. Choose a tracker that communicates via Wi-Fi or Bluetooth with your smartphone so you can monitor your results.

Smartwatches can encourage wearers to jog or walk regularly and include the basic functions of a step counter, lap counter and calorie tracker. Like smartphones, they use touchscreens, offer apps and may record your heart rate and other vital signs.

Weight loss apps have helped many people with the motivation and discipline needed to lose weight and keep it off. Whether you're looking to count calories, log meals or track your workouts, you'll find apps for smart devices.

The weight loss technology market continues to expand, and you can find many options for health and fitness pursuits, including millions of apps. However, not all devices are worth owning; some can be flawed, unfinished or useless.

Also, before you buy, learn how devices and apps handle your private information, including name, contact information and your location. Read the privacy policy and information about how the app uses your personal data. The same goes for places you may share your data (e.g., miles walked or calories burned), such as social media. Review the app's permissions, and limit location permissions. Don't use your social network account to sign into an app. Doing this often allows the app and the social media platform to collect information from each other. To learn more, search for **protect and secure health information** at [healthit.gov](https://www.healthit.gov).

Studies published in recent years have shown promising results for digital weight management among different populations. However, more research is needed to determine how successful weight loss devices and apps are in the long term and to analyze their use among racial and ethnic minorities.



Wheelchair Workouts

Using a wheelchair needn't keep you from pursuing physical activities — and staying mobile is essential to your health and enjoyment of life. Regular exercise will help preserve or build muscle strength so you can do everyday tasks more easily. And it helps reduce your risk for heart trouble and weight gain, while it eases depression and anxiety.

Just getting started? Focus on upper-body strengthening. Here are two simple key exercises to get you motivated:

Ball squeeze — Sitting up straight in your chair, hold a medicine ball or basketball up to your chest. The more you squeeze the ball, the harder you will be working your chest and arm muscles. Push the ball out in front of you until your elbows are nearly straight, and continue to squeeze the ball for a count of five. Moving slowly, repeat ten times.

Knee rise — With your feet flat on the ground or flat on your footplate, slowly lift one of your legs as far as you can comfortably manage and bend your knee back toward you. Hold that pose for five seconds. Then lower your foot and repeat the exercise with your other leg; do ten times with each leg.



Alternate your activities to avoid overuse injuries, particularly neck and shoulder pain. You might also check out online workouts and try calming yoga sessions. Before starting any new physical activities, check with your health care provider; consider working with a physical therapist.

Weekly activity goals for adults with disabilities:

1. Aim for 150 minutes of moderate-intensity cardiovascular activity with each session lasting for at least ten minutes.
2. Do two or more sessions of moderate- or high-intensity strength-training activities involving all major muscle groups.

If you cannot meet these guidelines, aim for regular physical activity according to your ability and avoid inactivity whenever possible.

Seasonal Flavors

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

It's a smart idea to add more vegetables and fruit to your diet, yet about 90% of Americans fall below the recommended intake for vegetables, and 80% don't eat enough fruit. Aim for two and a half cups of vegetables and two cups of fruit per day.

When possible, choose vegetables and fruits that are in season, which means they will likely cost less, and be nutrient-rich when you buy them, since they have not lost nutrients in transit from overseas. Here's a guide to buying vegetables and fruit in each season:

- **Winter:** Broccoli, cauliflower, leafy greens, citrus fruits and root vegetables, such as carrots, beets and turnips.
- **Spring:** Asparagus, peas, Swiss chard, rhubarb, radishes, leeks and lettuce.
- **Summer:** Berries, corn, cucumber, tomato, zucchini, peaches, cherries, melon and green beans.
- **Fall:** Apples, pears, butternut squash, pumpkin, sweet potato and Brussels sprouts.

In the off-season when variety wanes, head to the grocer's freezer for a wonderful assortment of vegetables and fruit. Frozen at the peak of ripeness, these items retain as many vitamins and minerals as fresh and sometimes more. Canned fruits and vegetables are also a good option, but try to find varieties without added sugar or salt.

Ask the supermarket staff or the purveyors at the farmer's market for ideas about how to prepare vegetables. If your usual diet isn't filled with produce, find ways to flavor your vegetables so you love the taste. You can add herbs, spices, salad dressing or grated cheese to bump up the flavor, and can experiment with raw, roasted, grilled, baked and stir-fried textures to see which you prefer.

If you have a green thumb, plant a small garden on your windowsill or in your backyard. Tomatoes, lettuce, herbs, zucchini, peas and cucumbers are among the easiest to grow.



Medication errors kill 7,000 to 9,000 Americans annually.

To avoid medication mistakes, be proactive. Ask your health care provider and pharmacist about possible side effects of drugs you're prescribed, as well as interactions with any other prescriptions you are taking. Find out how to store the medication (e.g., refrigeration). Keep a list of all over-the-counter drugs, supplements, herbs and other prescriptions you take. Share the list with your provider and pharmacist; ask about possible interactions with your new medication. If you experience unexpected reactions from a drug, call your provider or pharmacist immediately. Keep your medications in their labeled containers to avoid confusing them.

TIP of the MONTH

Shop Smart

Looking to save a few dollars at the supermarket? Here are three important tips:

1. Buy no-name or store brands, which offer the same quality as brand names at lower prices.

2. Use apps, coupons and flyers to look for sales.

3. Cut and chop foods yourself. A whole chicken is less expensive than chicken parts; whole carrots are cheaper than grated or baby carrots, and a brick of cheese costs less than shreds.



Sheet Pan Chicken Fajitas

EASY recipe

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1½ lbs (24 oz.) skinless chicken breast strips | 3 sweet peppers, seeded and cut into strips |
| 1 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil | 1 red onion, sliced into rounds |
| 2 tsp chili powder | 8 corn tortillas |
| 1 tsp each cumin, smoked paprika and dried oregano | ¼ cup salsa |
| ½ tsp each salt and garlic powder | 1 cup fresh chopped cilantro |
| | 1 lime, quartered |



Preheat oven to 400°F. **Line** a baking sheet with parchment paper. **Place** chicken strips in a wide bowl, and coat with olive oil. **Add** chili powder, cumin, smoked paprika, oregano, salt and garlic powder. **Stir** to coat chicken evenly with spice mixture. **Transfer** chicken to lined baking sheet. **Add** sweet peppers and onion around chicken in single layer. **Bake** 20-25 minutes, or until chicken reaches 165°F internal temperature. **Serve** with tortillas, salsa, cilantro and lime wedges.

Makes 4 servings. Per serving: 395 calories | 46g protein | 8g total fat | 1g saturated fat | 4g mono fat | 2g poly fat | 39g carbohydrate | 7g sugar | 9g fiber | 452mg sodium

Stay in Touch

Keep those questions and suggestions coming!

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EXPERT advice — Eric Endlich, PhD

Q: How to cope with return-to-work anxiety?



A: If you've been away from the workplace while working remotely, coming back can be a big adjustment. Here are some things to keep in mind:

- Accept your feelings. Even if you're happy to see your coworkers again, it's normal to be anxious, too.
- Address any concerns about COVID-19 risks. Ask your employer what health measures they are taking.
- Consider how your schedule will be impacted. If you commuted before switching to remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic, allowing extra time for travel may take some adjustment.
- Explore flexible options. Perhaps you can work remotely for part of the week.
- Synchronize your sleep schedule in advance. Make sure you'll be alert and refreshed during your work hours.

Q & A: Travel During COVID-19

Travel resumed several months ago, yet many people are still being cautious — and rightly so. Here's what you should know about traveling while COVID-19 infections continue.



Q: I'm thinking about traveling; what precautions should I take before going?

A: First, get vaccinated. Some destinations require proof of being vaccinated. Traveling increases your chances of getting or spreading COVID-19 because of crowded rest stops, packed planes or trains as well as full hotels and restaurants.

Q: Do I need to quarantine after traveling domestically?

A: If you are unvaccinated, the CDC recommends quarantining after travel for seven days with a negative test or ten days untested. Of course, if you develop symptoms after travel, follow the CDC's COVID protocol at [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov). Recommendations and requirements may change, so check for updates before you go. **Best strategy:** Unless you're medically unable to do so, get vaccinated. Most deaths in the U.S. are among the unvaccinated. Get a booster shot as recommended.

Q: How do I know where it's safe to travel and who requires proof of vaccinations?

A: The U.S. Department of State has COVID-19 country-specific information at travel.state.gov.

Q: What are the regulations for traveling abroad?

A: Each country has its own regulations. For the U.S., go to [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov) or travel.state.gov.

Q: What are some other precautions I should take?

A: Continue to follow safe practices, including staying home when you are sick, social distancing, washing your hands often, carrying plenty of hand sanitizer, and always wearing a mask when you leave home.



Did you know? Food is the best way to get more fiber. Excellent high-fiber foods include vegetables, fruits and legumes. Whole grains, nuts and seeds are good sources, too. In contrast, refined foods, such as white bread, pasta and juice, are much lower in fiber than unprocessed whole foods. Some people may need a supplement if food is inadequate. First check with your health care provider since fiber supplements may interact with your medications or health conditions. Start them in small amounts and drink ample liquids to reduce gas.