

Stay Well Menu

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

From apples to salmon to zucchini, it turns out that choosing the right diet can help you live well for longer. Research shows an eating pattern that includes a good variety of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, nuts and protein sources, such as fish, can reduce your risk of an early death by almost 20%.

This dietary pattern provides all of the nutrients your body needs for disease prevention — including generous amounts of fiber, omega-3 fats, vitamins and minerals. When combined, the foods that comprise this eating style help reduce the risk of the main causes of death in North America, including cancer and heart disease.

Brain health is also vitally important as we age, and this dietary pattern helps protect cognition and reduce the risk of dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

How can you follow an eating pattern to stay well for longer? There's no need to count calories. The easiest way to follow this plan is to:

- Fill half your plate with vegetables and some fruit. They can be fresh, frozen, raw or cooked — they are all great.
- Fill a quarter of your plate with whole grains. Try oats, whole wheat, brown rice and quinoa.
- Fill the remaining quarter of your plate with protein-rich foods, such as fish, poultry, tofu, nuts, eggs, dairy, beans and lentils.

This dietary pattern aligns with USDA's My Plate, the Mediterranean diet, the DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) diet and other healthy eating patterns.

In addition to which foods to choose, there's also some advice about foods to cut back on. Eat fewer ultra-processed foods that are high in salt, sugar and additives, as they are linked with a greater risk of heart disease, cancer and dementia. This includes fast food, salty snacks, pastries, candy and soft drinks. Also minimize alcohol: If you don't drink, don't start.



Protect Your Medical Identity

Did you know? Your health information is worth 50 times more than your credit card number to data thieves.

Health records contain sensitive personal and financial data, making them valuable to cybercriminals, who use the data to pay for prescriptions, medical equipment and treatment or file fake medical claims. These crimes cause chaos and stress for the hackers' victims, especially when debt collectors call.

When it comes to your medical care and personal health information, take steps to protect your privacy against hackers. Medical apps, patient portals and telehealth services are widespread, and while convenient for coordinating your care, they give hackers more opportunities to steal your sensitive data. Avoid using obvious passwords (e.g., your birthdate) and always log out when you're done. Never use electronic health services in a public place and make sure security on all of your devices is current.

You may not think you need to worry because the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) governs how health insurance companies, health care providers, clinics, pharmacies, hospitals and other medical services manage and protect patient medical data.

While HIPAA does provide some protection, you need to stay vigilant. Watch for unexpected charges on your health care bills, another possible sign of hacking. Data breaches do happen, so pay attention to alerts from your care provider if their records are hacked. Carefully review all medical bills and explanation of benefits statements (EOBs) from your health insurance company to spot abnormalities, and report anything suspicious without delay.

And if you use your credit or debit card for copays and other out-of-pocket charges, check records regularly. Call your bank or credit bureau to freeze your account if you see transactions you don't recall.



Breastfeeding Guidelines Update

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has revised its breastfeeding recommendations. The AAP now recommends breastfeeding exclusively for the first six months after a baby's birth. Research reinforces that breastfeeding and human milk should be the standards for infant feeding and nutrition. After six months, breastfeeding should be maintained along with nutritious, complementary foods.

The AAP also supports breastfeeding for as long as mutually desired by mother and child for two years or beyond. Initial research data affirms that continuing to provide human milk in the second year of life helps growing toddlers increase immunity and provides a significant source of macronutrients. The new recommendations closely align with the World Health Organization's guidance.

Birth hospitals and centers, pediatricians, health care providers and workplaces are advised by the AAP to provide more support for breastfeeding mothers. Health care professionals should know the benefits of breast milk and also provide resources for birth mothers and adoptive parents. The AAP also advocates for more encouragement for gender-diverse parents to use breast milk.



August is Breastfeeding Month.



Here's how breast milk and breastfeeding benefit mom and baby:

- Breast milk has all the nutrients, calories and fluids your baby needs.
- Breastfeeding can reduce the risks of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) by up to 64% and overall infant death risks by as much as 40%.
- Breast milk is free and there's no preparation.
- Breast milk is easy for babies to digest.
- Breast milk improves the child's immunity.
- Long-term breastfeeding can help return the mother's uterus to its pre-pregnancy size more quickly and can protect the mother against diabetes and high blood pressure as well as breast and ovarian cancers.

Q: What are migraine auras?

A: Auras consist of flashing lights, shimmering stars, floating zigzag lines, blind spots or other visual changes that commonly occur before the onset of migraine headaches. Occasionally, the symptoms may include tingling in a hand or face or difficulty speaking. The aura is usually followed by a severe throbbing headache on one side of the head.

Seek medical care immediately if you have new symptoms of an aura, such as vision loss, trouble speaking or understanding language, or muscle weakness on one side of the body. These symptoms could indicate another condition, such as a stroke.

Treatment for migraine with aura is usually the same for migraine headaches without aura. Pain medications work best when taken soon after the aura begins. Consult your health care provider about other drug options, including triptans, dihydroergotamine and anti-nausea medications. Treatments are also available to prevent frequent migraines with or without aura. Stress management and relaxation techniques can also help treat and prevent migraines. — Elizabeth Smoots, MD



Wake-up call: Oversleeping can impact your health.

A good night's sleep is important for your health; however, it's possible too much sleep can harm your health. A recent study found that excessive sleep can increase risk for developing an infection. Long-term effects from oversleeping may be linked to medical problems, such as a higher risk of developing type 2 diabetes, obesity, heart disease, headaches and depression. Sometimes medication, alcohol use or an underlying health condition can cause oversleeping. See your health care provider if you feel the need to sleep more than nine hours a night. Adults should get seven to nine hours of sleep daily.



August is Immunization Awareness Month — a good reminder to schedule your annual flu shot and COVID-19 booster. Studies conducted throughout the COVID-19 pandemic indicate it's safe to get both vaccinations at the same visit, now a commonly recommended medical practice. To schedule your COVID-19 vaccine appointment, visit a vaccine provider's online scheduling service. The CDC notes self-reported data from nearly one million Americans show an 8% to 11% higher rate of mostly mild symptoms following a double vaccination. For questions, contact your health care provider.



The **Smart Moves Toolkit**, including this issue's printable download, **Checkup Time**, is at personalbest.com/extras/23V8tools.

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