

# Socializing Boosts Your Health

**Research shows that our friendships and social connections directly help maintain our health** and may increase our longevity. Maybe you had a physical exam from a health care provider this year, but did you talk about your social life?

**High-quality relationships reduce the risk of chronic disease and illnesses**, including heart disease, stroke, dementia and depression, according to the CDC. Some of the research on the importance of social connection comes from studying loneliness. About one in three adults in the U.S. reports feeling lonely. This is regarded now as so important, your provider may ask if you regularly spend time with friends.

**People are naturally social** and look to others to feel a sense of belonging and importance. We look for community to help us survive and thrive.

**Friends help with your emotional and physical health.** If you just lost someone important to you, a friend can listen while you talk about your grief. Or if you just had surgery, a friend may bring you groceries or help take care of you while you recover.

**Social connections extend beyond just friends.** They include your neighbors, schools, workplaces, places of worship and other larger communities. And don't forget book clubs, interest groups and volunteering.

**Here are some tips** from the National Institute on Aging for how to build social connections:

- ➔ **Try** to make the most of your social time spent in person.
- ➔ **Find** an activity you enjoy, start a hobby or take a class to learn something new.
- ➔ **Schedule** a time each day to reach out to others by email, text or voice.
- ➔ **To** help you keep connected with someone who lives far away, use video chat.



Friendships and social connections improve health and help people live longer.

## WMI notes

### No longer eligible? It's time to drop your insurance coverage.

There are many ways to lose coverage under a group health insurance policy (e.g., termination of employment, reduction of hours, loss of dependent eligibility through divorce or reaching the limiting age). Once eligibility is lost, it may be tempting to remain on the policy; however, here are a few good reasons why that's a bad idea (and, in many cases, it's also against the law):

- **If a person stays on a plan** after losing eligibility, they violate the terms and conditions of the policy, and claims may be denied.
- **Special enrollment rights** into a new plan and extension of coverage rights under federal COBRA law or various state laws are time sensitive. Delaying coverage termination may result in a forfeiture of those rights entirely.
- **Ineligible individuals are not covered by reinsurance**, so an employer who allows an ineligible individual to remain on the plan or the ineligible participant may be liable for payment of high-dollar claims.
- **Remaining on the plan after losing eligibility** may constitute insurance fraud and the perpetrator may be subject to civil and/or criminal penalties.

## tip OF THE month

### Protein Powder

Some recent headlines may have overstated the risk of lead in protein powder used as an additive to drinks.



Researchers tested protein powders and used a strict lead limit of 0.5 mcg/day, so many products exceeded this amount. But the FDA allows up to 10 micrograms a day of lead, meaning those same products would have passed under government standards. Still, it's smart to keep lead exposure as low as possible since it's linked to kidney issues, high blood pressure and cognitive harm. If you use protein powder, choose wisely: Ask manufacturers for testing results; look on the product label for certification from a third-party organization, such as NSF International or U.S. Pharmacopeia. **Tip:** Consider whey protein, which typically contains less lead than plant-based powders (e.g., soy, pea or hemp). Many people get enough protein by choosing protein-rich foods, such as tofu, lean meat and poultry, fish and seafood.

# Protein Needs for Adults

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

**Protein is an essential nutrient found in many foods**, including chicken, tofu and yogurt. Your body uses protein to build and repair muscle, support immune health, make hormones and more.

**You can't store protein in the body**, so you need to eat protein-rich foods regularly throughout the day. This ensures there are always enough amino acids (building blocks of protein) available to meet the body's needs.

### Protein-rich foods include:

- Poultry — chicken, turkey, etc.
- Meat — beef, lamb, pork, etc.
- Fish and seafood.
- Dairy foods — milk, cheese and yogurt.
- Soy foods — tofu, edamame and soy beverages.
- Legumes — lentils, beans and chickpeas.
- Nuts, seeds and nut butters.
- Eggs.

**An easy way to ensure you're getting enough protein** is to choose one of these protein-rich foods at every meal. It should fill about ¼ of your plate, which will provide 20 to 30 grams of protein per meal.

**The National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine** (the organization that sets nutrient intakes in the U.S. and Canada) recommends adults get 10% to 35% of calories from protein each day. That's equal to 50 grams to 175 grams of protein per day (on a 2000-calorie diet).

**It's a very general range of amounts**, because protein needs vary based on your gender, age, height, weight, activity levels, medical conditions and other factors. Men typically need more protein than women due to larger body size and muscle mass (on average and not always the case). Physically active people need more protein to help repair and build muscle after exercise. Children need adequate protein since they aren't just maintaining tissue; they're building new tissue as they grow.

**If you are unsure of how much you need**, get personalized advice from a dietitian (check your insurance coverage first).



## easy recipe

### Turkey Lettuce Cups

- |                                                    |                                      |
|----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 2 tsp extra-virgin olive oil                       | 2 tbsp hoisin sauce                  |
| 1 lb. lean ground turkey                           | 1 tbsp reduced-sodium soy sauce      |
| 2 cloves garlic, minced                            | 1 tbsp rice vinegar                  |
| 1 tbsp fresh ginger, minced                        | 1 tsp toasted sesame oil             |
| 1 medium carrot, peeled and grated                 | 1 large head Bibb or iceberg lettuce |
| 1 (8 oz.) can water chestnuts, drained and chopped | 3 green onions, sliced               |



**Heat** oil in pan over medium heat. **Add** turkey, garlic and ginger. **Cook** until turkey is browned, breaking up turkey into crumbles, about 6-8 minutes. **Stir** in carrot and water chestnuts. **Cook** 1 minute. **Set** aside. **In** a small bowl, whisk together hoisin sauce, soy sauce, rice vinegar and sesame oil. **Drizzle** over the turkey mixture and toss to coat. **Add** some turkey mixture to each lettuce leaf. **Top** with green onions and serve.

**Makes 4 servings. Per serving:**

332 calories | 25g protein | 12g total fat | 3g saturated fat | 5g mono fat | 3g poly fat | 31g carbohydrate | 5g sugar (3g added sugar) | 2g fiber | 389mg sodium

# Tech Neck Relief

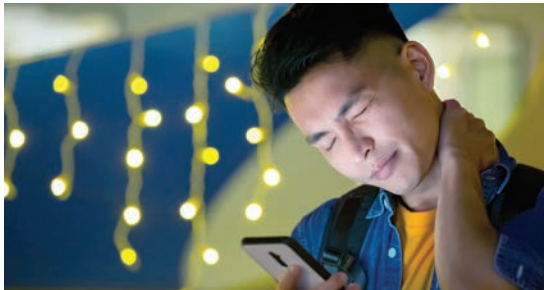
If you're reading this on your phone or tablet, you may already have tech neck — pain and stiffness in the back of your neck, caused by constantly looking down at devices. An adult's head weighs roughly ten to 12 pounds, and your neck supports it with ease when you're looking straight ahead.

However, when you tilt your head downward, say when you're scrolling through messages on your phone, that stress on your neck can increase up to 50 to 60 pounds, which can lead to neck pain, stiffness or numbness. Other symptoms include headaches and shoulder tension. Even worse, not addressing tech neck symptoms can lead to long-term problems such as chronic neck pain, muscle imbalances, joint degeneration and herniated discs.

**Here are some tips to help you prevent tech neck:**

**Limit your screen time.** If you can't, take frequent breaks (every 20 to 30 minutes) to stand up, stretch and adjust your position. Set a timer as a reminder.

**Make sure your workspace is ergonomically correct:** screen at eye level, feet flat on floor and knees at a 90° angle. Use a chair with lumbar support and arm rests.



**Consider using a stand** for your phone, tablet or laptop so that it is eye level while viewing it.

**Think about getting a separate monitor** for your laptop and setting it up so that it is eye level and 20 to 40 inches away.

**Perform stretching exercises** for your shoulders and neck regularly to alleviate stiffness. Contact your health care provider for suggestions. (For more on stretching, see "Guide to Stretching" on page 7.)

You may wonder what the word *palpitation* means.

It's the feeling of having a fast-beating, irregular-beating or pounding heart. If you feel something strange, you can help your health care provider by having answers to the following:

- 1 When did the feeling begin?
- 2 How long did it last? You may feel a speeding heart during a stressful situation, but it quickly fades. Others may feel irregular beats over days.
- 3 Do you feel lightheaded or out of breath during an episode?

## Quick Risk Assessment™: Your Social Media Life

By Eric Endlich, PhD

Adults spend an average of more than two hours a day on social media, and teens often spend even more. While users sometimes feel more connected to loved ones or discover entertaining content, excessive use can worsen anxiety, depression and low self-esteem.

**Assess the impact of your habits by answering the questions below.** For each question, select from 1 (rarely) to 5 (very often).

- |                                                                                                   |                                                                                             |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>❶ I check social media first thing in the morning or last thing at night.</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5</p> | <p>❽ Notifications interrupt my time with friends or family.</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5</p>           |
| <p>❷ I lose track of time while scrolling.</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5</p>                                   | <p>❾ I feel lonelier after spending time online.</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5</p>                       |
| <p>❸ I compare myself to others online.</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5</p>                                      | <p>❿ I replace in-person interactions with texting or commenting.</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5</p>      |
| <p>❹ Seeing others' posts leaves me envious or dissatisfied.</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5</p>                 | <p>⓫ I focus on capturing or sharing moments instead of enjoying them.</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5</p> |
| <p>❺ I post mainly to get likes or attention.</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5</p>                                | <p>⓬ I've tried unsuccessfully to use social media less.</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5</p>               |

### Tally your score:

**10 to 20:** You likely have a balanced relationship with social media.

**21 to 35:** Social media may sometimes affect your mood or relationships.

**36 to 50:** Social media use could be undermining your well-being.

### For healthy social media habits:

- ✓ **Set daily time limits.** Use a monitoring app if needed.
- ✓ **Designate social media-free times** (e.g., family meals) to help you engage in real life.
- ✓ **Notice how you feel** before and after scrolling through content.
- ✓ **Unfollow people or topics** that make you feel worse about yourself.
- ✓ **Spend time daily** on screen-free activities you enjoy.



### Q: Exercise good for brain chemistry?

**A:** Exercise triggers the release of many feel-good chemicals, such as endorphins, which boost mood and decrease pain sensitivity. Other brain chemicals that increase with exercise include neurotransmitters, such as dopamine, serotonin and epinephrine, which may positively impact attention, motivation and emotions. Cortisol, a substance associated with stress, appears to decrease with exercise.

One recent study showed that any amount of moderate to vigorous exercise improved scores on memory tests the next day. Researchers believe this results from increased blood flow to the brain, as well as higher levels of neurotransmitters. Exercise also raises the levels of brain-derived neurotrophic factor, which encourages the growth of new neurons (brain cells).

While experiments have shown that even a single bout of exercise can improve functions, such as concentration and creativity, a sustained pattern yields even more benefits. Over time, consistent exercise helps regulate sleep, reduce anxiety and depression, as well as keep cognitive abilities strong.

— Eric Endlich, PhD



### Many people suffer from acid reflux.

The stomach makes strong acid and enzymes to digest food.

But when this acid escapes up from the stomach into the lower part of the esophagus, it's called gastroesophageal reflux disease or GERD. Symptoms of GERD include heartburn or pain in the middle of the chest. Other symptoms include: belching, regurgitating food, nausea, difficulty swallowing, and a sore throat.

GERD increases risk of esophageal cancer, although most GERD patients don't develop the disease. Nine out of ten cases of this cancer are in people 55 or older. Men are at higher risk than women.

**Other major risks:** Using tobacco products, including cigarettes, pipes and chewing tobacco, and drinking alcohol can increase chances of this cancer.

**Note:** Diets high in fruit and vegetables might lower the risk, but the exact reasons for the diet relationships are not clearly understood. Also, exercise may help protect your esophagus.



## Alcohol and Injury Recovery

If you have an injury, maybe a broken leg or a strained muscle, it may not occur to you that consuming alcohol could slow your recovery. The less you drink, the faster you'll heal.

### Ongoing research has revealed ways alcohol use may interfere with healing:

First, your immune system needs help to repair your tissues, and alcohol disrupts that. It can prolong swelling. Drinking alcohol can also disrupt protein synthesis, the process that occurs when your body is getting ready to rebuild an injured muscle.

Your bones heal differently from your muscles and ligaments. Heavy drinking can prolong bone healing by one to two weeks, according to research

Your entire body, not just the injured area, is part of the communication system that sets you up for healing. That system includes hormones, the chemical messengers that help signal for tissue repair. Testosterone and growth hormone are also part of this process. Alcohol lowers your levels of both.

In a different way, alcohol raises a hormone called cortisol. It's a signal of stress to your body. Elevated cortisol is responsible for your body's fight or flight response. Spikes in cortisol take energy away from other things in your body, as if there is an emergency happening. This diverts energy from repair and recovery.



### April is Alcohol Awareness Month.



**Note:** Drinking alcohol while taking pain medication for an injury can have serious side effects. These include liver damage, gastrointestinal bleeding, impaired coordination, dizziness and drowsiness. Ask your health care provider if you need to avoid alcohol. And always read warnings on the medication label and instructions.

## Q: Treatment for childhood hypertension?

**A:** **Childhood hypertension is usually treated with lifestyle changes** and, if necessary, antihypertensive medications. High blood pressure in children is defined as blood pressure readings that exceed the 95th percentile for age, height and sex. This diagnosis usually requires several abnormal readings. Risk for the condition goes up with excess weight, excess salt (sodium) consumption, inadequate exercise, diabetes, preterm birth, low birth weight and family history.

**Lifestyle modifications:** Diet and exercise can help overweight or obese children achieve a healthy weight. The Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension diet is often recommended. Engaging in 30 to 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity at least five days a week is often beneficial; first get the child's health care provider's approval. Stress reduction with breathing exercises or meditation may also help lower blood pressure.

**Blood pressure medications:** Antihypertensive drugs may be necessary if lifestyle changes do not sufficiently lower blood pressure. For children with persistently high readings, medication options include angiotensin-converting enzyme inhibitors, angiotensin receptor blockers, calcium channel blockers and diuretics.

— Elizabeth Smoots, MD



For happier feet, rethink the high heels.

**It might be time to trade a few inches of style for the freedom to move without pain.** Podiatrists say that regularly wearing high heels, especially shoes with a narrow toe box, can cause more than discomfort; it can lead to lasting foot damage. High heels put a lot of pressure on the balls of your feet, which can result in foot problems such as neuroma (nerve damage), stress fractures, tight Achilles tendons, bunions and hammertoe. If you have foot pain, it might be time to rethink your footwear. Instead, choose supportive, low-heeled shoes with a wider toe box.

## Medication Disposal the Right Way

**Got old prescriptions or outdated over-the-counter medications cluttering your cabinets?** The easiest way to dispose of them is through your local Drug Take Back program or mail them through a prepaid drug mail-back envelope — some pharmacies may offer these envelopes at no cost. Ask your pharmacist for take back dates and locations near you. Some locations may sponsor take back events while others offer year-round drop-off locations.

**No Drug Take Back location near you? No problem. Just follow these steps to safely discard medicated liquids and pills:**

- 1 **Take** your meds out of their original containers and mix them with something unpleasant such as dirt, coffee grinds or cat litter. This makes them less tempting for kids or pets who might find them. **Note:** Aerosol or spray inhaler medications have specific handling instructions. Contact your local trash or recycling facility to learn about local laws and regulations.
- 2 **Seal** the mixture in a closeable container such as a resealable storage bag or old container with a lid. Toss it in the trash.
- 3 **Remove** personal information on empty prescription bottles or boxes before throwing them away or recycling them.



Use a Drug Take Back program for easy disposal, or follow these tips to discard medications safely.

**Important:** Never flush anything down the toilet except toilet paper and bodily waste. Doing so helps reduce chemical contamination in the environment, according to wastewater agencies. While the FDA has a Flush List for medications it considers safe, it's better to use the methods described at left.

# CAUTION: Flying with Phones

The tiny lithium-ion batteries that power our phones can pose a threat at 30,000 to 40,000 feet. If the batteries are damaged, improperly charged, counterfeit or poorly manufactured, they can overheat (called thermal runaway) and trigger an explosion or fire.

**Lithium battery fires can spread quickly** and burn incredibly hot, causing major damage in seconds. They're also tougher to extinguish than most types of fires. According to the Underwriters Laboratories Standards & Engagement's research, an average of two flights per week had a thermal runaway occurrence in 2024, and 52% of these incidents happened when the plane was cruising.

## What can I do to prevent thermal runaway incidents?

### Learn which of your devices use lithium-ion batteries.

According to ULSE, 60% of people don't know that these batteries power many products they use. Almost all airline passengers (96%) fly with at least one rechargeable device usually containing

about four lithium-ion batteries. The most common are smartphones at 81%, laptops at 40%, headphones at 38% and tablets at 35%. Other devices include portable chargers or power banks, rechargeable toothbrushes and vapes.

**Never pack lithium-ion battery-powered devices** and spare batteries in checked baggage. Always pack them in your carry-on luggage.

**Keep your devices within arm's reach** on the plane — don't store them in the overhead bin.

**Ask a flight attendant for help** if one of your devices gets lodged under or between the seats.

**Examine your devices and batteries** before packing them, and don't fly with a damaged device. Even a cracked screen can cause a device to overheat.



## safety corner

# Flash Flood Warning

**Flash floods remain one of nature's most underestimated threats**, catching even experienced drivers off guard. When authorities issue flash flood warnings listen and act accordingly.

**Flash floods can pop up fast** — usually just a few hours after heavy rains or if a dam breaks. They can form in minutes and quickly intensify, with strong currents that can carry vehicles and tons of debris. Just six inches of water can knock a person off their feet, and one foot is enough to carry a car or truck off the road.

## What should you do when confronted with a flash flood while driving?

➡ **The National Weather Service says: "Turn around, don't drown."** If you see water covering the road or a low spot that looks flooded, don't risk it, especially at night when it's hard to tell the water's depth. Turn around and find another way to your destination. And don't travel unless you absolutely need to.

➡ **If your vehicle stalls**, abandon it and seek higher ground such as a building, a hill or a tree.

➡ **Keep a car escape tool in your vehicle.** Make sure it can cut a seatbelt and break a window. Aim for a corner where the glass is weakest.

**Important:** Never ignore an evacuation warning. Stay informed of weather conditions and evacuation orders.



## dollars & sense

### Q: Tax prep tips?

**A:** **Doing your taxes is probably one of your least favorite tasks.** But these steps can help you get through tax season.

#### 1 Collect all relevant paperwork.

Don't wait until the last minute to begin gathering records, receipts and other papers you'll need. If you wait until filing day, you could overlook some items.

#### 2 Store all tax-related records for three to seven years.

You never know how important those documents are until you're asked for them and you've thrown them away.

#### 3 Prepare to file as soon as you can.

People who file early will get their returns much sooner than those who wait. If you can file early, do it.

#### 4 File before the deadline.

If you file and pay late, the IRS can fine you a 5% monthly fee of tax owed. If for any reason you can't file on time, then you need to file form 4868 for a six-month extension, which gives you until October 2026.

#### 5 Review new tax rules on credits and deductions.

Tax laws change every year. Read up on potential increases on credits and deductions to guarantee the greatest impact.

#### 6 Report income earned from side jobs.

If you earned more than \$600 in income from additional work, you must report the money as income. Third-party payment companies are required to report payments they have processed for business account holders.

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

**If you can file early, do it.**

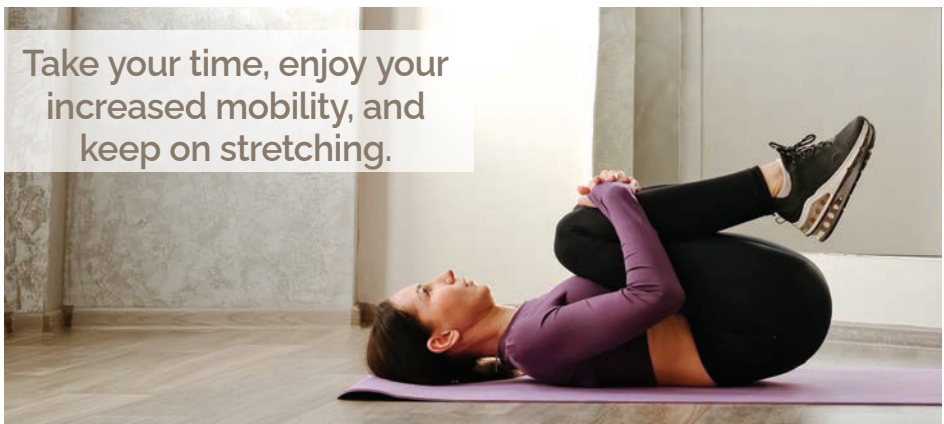
# Guide to Stretching

Most of us know that feeling when our muscles are tight, and we know there is a better feeling when we have just finished stretching, and everything feels soft and loose. Maybe you feel tight after driving for hours in a car or sitting too long at your desk.

Here's a guide for adding stretching to your exercise routine at home, in a gym or while traveling.

- ✓ **Before you begin stretching**, warm up with five to ten minutes of a light activity. You might walk in place, or use an exercise bike if you have one. If you have any medical condition, discuss stretching with your health care provider.
- ✓ **For every stretch**, experiment to find a position that gives you a slight pull in the muscle and then hold it for about 30 seconds. Repeat the stretch on both sides of your body two to four times. Aim to stretch two to three days per week.
- ✓ **Of course, there are many muscles one can stretch** and joints where you might want to increase your mobility, such as the hips and shoulders. **Examples:** calf, hamstring, quadriceps, IT band, lower back, shoulders and neck.
- ✓ **Remember**, stretching is intended to gently extend your range of motion but should not cause sudden pain. For each stretch below, remember to change sides and repeat.

If you practice this sort of stretching routine regularly, you will find which parts of your body need the most work. Some stretches may become your favorites. You may wish to customize your own routine according to where you feel the most satisfying work. Depending on your activity, you do specific stretching for that. For example, if you play a racquet sport, such as tennis or pickleball, you may want to add more shoulder and arm stretches.



## Calf:

**Stand** at a wall and put one foot behind the other. **Slowly** bend the front leg toward the wall. **Keep** the back leg straight and your back heel on the ground. **You** are in a lunge position.



## Hamstring:

**Lie** on the floor facing a wall. **Raise** your left leg with the knee slightly bent so your heel rests against the wall. **Gently** straighten your leg until you feel a stretch in the back of your left thigh and hold for 30 seconds.



## Quadriceps:

**Stand** near a wall or hold a sturdy chair with one hand. **Standing** on one leg, bend the other knee until you can hold that ankle. **If** this is tricky, use a strap or short towel to wrap around your ankle. **Pull** the foot toward the back of your thigh, and you should feel the front of your thigh stretch.



## Iliotibial band:

**This** tissue runs on the outside of your hip, thigh and knee. **Stand** near a wall or sturdy piece of furniture. **Cross** your left leg over your right at the ankle. **Reach** your left arm above your head, and sway slightly to the right. **You** should feel a stretch all along your left hip.



## Lower back:

**Lie** down flat on a mat or towel. **Bend** your knees, and reach to pull your knees toward your chest at any amount. **Everybody** has a different range. **Some** people find it helpful to sway a little left and right as they do this.



## Shoulder:

**Cross** your left arm across your body, and hold that arm with the right. **You** can do this above or below the elbow.



## Neck:

**Bend** your head forward and then bring it slightly right. **With** your right hand, hold your head and pull slightly. **Feel** the stretch along the opposite side of the neck.



## Zorba's corner

### Trigger Finger

**Trigger finger makes a finger get stuck in a bent position,** and then it may snap straight suddenly — like pulling and releasing a trigger. It can affect any finger, although the ring finger and thumb are most common. The problem comes from inflammation in the tendon sheath (the wrapper around the tendon), which prevents the tendon from sliding smoothly.

**Causes include** repetitive gripping or squeezing, and sports such as tennis, pickle ball or golf. Some medical conditions — such as diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, gout or low thyroid — also increase risk of trigger finger.

**Treatment usually starts** with splinting, gentle stretching, and anti-inflammatories. If this fails, the next step is a steroid injection to reduce the swelling. And if this fails, then a short outpatient procedure can be done to release the tight tissue and restore smooth movement.  
— Zorba Paster, MD



### Study: Walking Matters

**Walking at least 4,000 steps in a day once or twice a week** reduces the risk of death and heart disease in women, according to a study reported in *Medpage Today*. Researchers studied 13,000 women who were 62 years old or older. Reaching that number one or two days per week was linked to a 26% lower mortality risk, and a lower risk of heart disease, compared with zero days per week.

**It did not seem to matter** whether the person walked just once or twice a week. But they did find that people who walked 4,000 steps three days per week had a 40% reduction in mortality.

**Researchers were surprised** that the frequency of walking did not seem to matter as much as the total steps — up to 4,000 — in a day. Further study is needed to understand why that number is significant.

### Study: Med Diet and Psoriasis

**The Mediterranean diet is getting attention again,** not just for promoting heart health but also for its potential to relieve psoriasis. A randomized clinical trial, published in *JAMA Dermatology*, found that people with mild to moderate psoriasis who followed the Mediterranean diet saw improvement in their skin after 16 weeks.

**Of the 38 study participants,** those on the diet showed a noticeable drop in psoriasis severity, while those who didn't change their diet saw no improvement. Nearly half of the people eating the Mediterranean diet had their symptoms improve by 75%.



**Diet participants also needed less topical medication** and showed better blood sugar control compared to those who didn't change their eating habits. **Bonus:** Depression symptoms improved.

**The Mediterranean diet focuses on fruits, vegetables, whole grains, fish, nuts and healthy fats such as olive oil** — all known to reduce inflammation and support overall health. It is based on traditional eating habits and culinary customs (foodways) in Mediterranean countries, such as France and Spain.

#### stay in touch

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