

Educational Benefit Cooperative

Personal Best

HOPE Health Letter®

MAY 2023

Build a Better Body Image

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

Having a healthy body image means that you feel good about how you look.

The next time you look in the mirror, compliment yourself. Good self-esteem starts with kindness. Maybe you love the shape of your face, the color of your eyes or your arms that can hug loved ones.

It may sound silly, but positive self-talk can be very helpful. If you tend toward negative self-talk, ask yourself, “Would I be this harsh if I was talking to my friend?” Treat yourself with the same kindness you give to others.



Negative self-talk is linked to having a negative body image or poor self-esteem, which can lead to:

- Eating disorders.
- Depression.
- Anxiety.
- Social isolation.
- Substance abuse.
- Suicide.

If you struggle with a negative body image, take steps toward self-care. Seek a therapist or dietitian who specializes in intuitive eating, compassion-focused therapy or cognitive behavioral therapy to learn techniques for self-acceptance.

Here are three tips that may also help:

1. Steer clear of fad diets. The billion-dollar weight loss industry is built on false promises. Instead, work on building good eating habits and being active with exercise you enjoy.
2. Avoid harmful social media. Studies show social media posts with idealized images have a negative effect on body image. Fill your feeds with realistic tips on eating well and staying active; avoid digitally altered bodies, unrealistic diets and influencers who promote unhealthy behaviors.
3. Focus on the positive. Download an app with daily positive affirmations, keep a journal with inspiring self-talk or leave yourself notes with uplifting sentiments.

There are many things to love about yourself. Start looking and see what you find.

The **Smart Moves Toolkit**, including this issue's printable download, **Coping with Chronic Health Problems**, is at personalbest.com/extras/23V5tools.

BEST bits



■ **HIV Vaccine Awareness Day is on May 18.** The aim is to increase awareness about AIDS, the need for a vaccine, and how to prevent HIV infection. There is no vaccine to prevent the virus. Approximately 1.2 million people in the U.S. have HIV. About 13% of them don't know it and need testing. Learn more about HIV services in your area at locator.hiv.gov.



■ **Fact or fiction? A tan is healthier than a sunburn.** Answer: Fiction.

A tan may look healthy, but it's a sign of skin damage and a risk for skin cancer. One in five Americans will get skin cancer, most often caused by overexposure to the sun's ultraviolet rays (UVA and UVB). Every year, nearly five million in the U.S. are treated for skin cancer. Don't Fry Day on May 26 is a good reminder to use a water-resistant sunscreen that has at least 30 SPF and broad-spectrum coverage (protects against UVA and UVB). Learn more at skincancerprevention.org.



■ **If you think food allergies are minor problems, think again.** For

2% of adults and up to 8% of children in the U.S., food allergies cause symptoms ranging from hives and vomiting to life-threatening anaphylaxis. Those affected must always stay vigilant to avoid reactions. During Food Allergy Awareness Month learn more at foodallergy.org.

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.

Sugar: Just How Bad Is It?

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD



TIP of the MONTH Translating Grams

Nutrition guidelines say to limit sugar to no more than 12 teaspoons per day. But when you look at the Nutrition Facts panel on a packaged food, the sugar content is listed in grams. That's not very helpful if you're curious how many teaspoons of sugar it contains. **Tip: Every teaspoon of sugar is 4 grams.** So if you want to know how much added sugar is in your packaged food, simply divide the added sugars amount on the Nutrition Facts panel by 4. For example, if your cookie has 12 grams of added sugar, divide $12/4 = 3$. That cookie contains 3 teaspoons of sugar.

Added sugar is found in about 65% of products on grocery store shelves, and North Americans tend to consume a lot of the sweet stuff. The trouble is that high-sugar diets — defined as more than 12 teaspoons of added sugar per day — are linked to an increased risk of heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, unhealthy blood cholesterol and some types of cancer.



However, small amounts of sugar appear to be okay. If you add a few teaspoons of sugar to coffee or tea, and enjoy the occasional cookie or bowl of ice cream, there's no cause for concern. Studies show that problems begin when you routinely consume in excess of 48 grams (12 teaspoons) of added sugar per day.

While many celebrities and social media influencers extoll the virtues of their sugar-free diet, going to extremes to cut every granule of sugar is unnecessary and can add excess stress to your life. Stress is linked to lower immune function, so stressing about sugar isn't good for you, either. Obsession about healthy eating is called **orthorexia nervosa**, and it's a mental health concern.

Instead of overdoing or eliminating sugar, find a happy medium. It's okay to enjoy some sweet indulgences, but don't go overboard.

On average, most Americans consume about 77 grams of sugar daily, which is too much. The No. 1 source of added sugar is sweet beverages; a can of regular cola contains 40 grams (10 teaspoons) of added sugar. The simplest way to cut back on sugar is to drink water instead of soda, fruit drinks, iced tea or other sweet beverages.

And it's important to note that natural sugar from fruit does not count toward that 12-teaspoon daily total. Fruit is packed with fiber, vitamins and minerals, and those beneficial nutrients outweigh the natural sugar content.

Baked Fish with Herb-Olive Salsa

EASY recipe

- | | |
|---|---|
| 2 cups fresh chopped cilantro | 1 clove garlic, minced |
| ½ cup fresh chopped parsley | 4 (6 oz) skin-on fish fillets, such as cod, trout or bass |
| 3 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil, <i>divided</i> | Pinch salt and pepper |
| ¼ cup pitted black olives, chopped | 1 lemon, sliced into wedges |
| 3 tbsp chopped sundried tomatoes | |



In a medium-sized bowl, add cilantro, parsley, 2 tbsp olive oil, olives, sundried tomatoes and garlic. **Stir** to combine and set aside. **Season** fish fillets with salt and pepper. In a large pan, heat remaining 1 tbsp oil. **Add** fish fillets, skin side down. **Cook** 2-3 minutes, then flip and cook until opaque, about 2-3 more minutes. **Add** fish to serving platter and top with salsa and lemon juice.

Makes 4 servings. Per serving: 275 calories | 32g protein | 14g total fat | 2g saturated fat | 5g mono fat | 5g poly fat | 5g carb | 2g sugar (0 added sugar) | 1g fiber | 398mg sodium

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is the ability to identify and manage your emotions in positive ways. Also known as **emotional quotient (EQ)**, it can be as important as IQ in your personal life and your work.

Learning to regulate your emotions when necessary and helping others to do the same is key to EQ, according to the American Psychological Association. For example, if you are angry about a disagreement at work or in your home life, listening carefully to other points of view and controlling your emotions to work on constructive ways to resolve the problem can have a far better outcome than losing your temper.

In fact, a high emotional intelligence or EQ can help you lead and motivate others. And managing your emotions can lower stress levels, reducing the risk for health problems, including hypertension, heart disease and depression.

Tips for strengthening your emotional intelligence:

- **Identify your emotions.** If you stop and think specifically about what you are feeling before you act and judge people or situations, you'll learn to better regulate your emotions.
- **Understand why you are feeling that emotion.** Consider why you react a certain way to individuals. Is it jealousy? Did that person hurt your feelings in the past? Or does a coworker remind you of a former partner who was consistently critical? Recognizing reasons behind your emotions can help you change your perspective in what could otherwise be stressful interactions.
- **Consciously work to regulate your emotions.** That doesn't mean ignoring them. But instead of acting on anger or ruminating for hours about a disappointment, find ways to calm yourself — through exercise, music, spiritual practices or relaxation videos.



Is fear of missing out (FOMO) wasting your time and stressing you?

Checking social media constantly and comparing your activities to others can become almost addictive. In fact, Kristin Fuller, MD, writing in *Psychology Today*, notes instant gratification from giving and getting likes on social media increases dopamine, the feel-good neurotransmitter in brains. And studies show many people so fear missing out that they stay glued to their phones and social media even while on vacation. Fuller advises discovering the joy of missing out (JOMO) by unplugging from technology regularly — treasure being in nature, spending time with friends in person and living each day your way. No one's life is perfect, and while getting likes can be fun, you can certainly thrive without them.

National Women's Health Week is May 14 to 20.



Postpartum Depression

By Eric Endlich, PhD

Popular culture often highlights the joy of becoming a parent, but it can also be challenging and exhausting. Some degree of anxiety and moodiness is normal. In fact, 50% to 75% of new parents have a period of sadness and crying known as the baby blues, which may appear in the first few days after birth, subsiding within about two weeks.

Postpartum depression (PPD), a more serious condition, can begin anytime during the first year after delivery. Symptoms affect up to one in seven new mothers and include:

- Disturbed sleep.
- Marked change in eating habits.
- Irritability.
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities.
- Impaired concentration or decision-making.
- Feeling guilty, worthless or hopeless.

Of course, sleep disruption and other changes are very common after childbirth. When these symptoms are especially numerous, intense or prolonged, an evaluation for PPD may be appropriate.



Risk factors for PPD include:

- History of depression or PPD.
- Family history of depression.
- Lack of social support.
- Being a teen or single mother.
- Pregnancy or delivery complications (e.g., premature birth).
- Other life stressors, such as relationship conflict, financial problems or recent losses.

Postpartum psychosis, a much rarer condition marked by confusion, paranoia, hallucinations and agitation, should be treated as an emergency.

PPD can improve with psychotherapy, support groups, home nurse visits or medication. Mothers who have thoughts of hurting themselves or their babies should seek immediate medical care.



May is National Stroke Awareness

Month. Strokes are a leading cause of death and disabilities in the U.S., but up to 80% of them can be prevented. The American Heart Association has these tips to lower your stroke risk:

- Don't smoke.
- Move more. New to exercise? Start with regular walks.
- Lose excess pounds.
- Eat a healthy diet rich in vegetables, fruit and whole grains; skip excess salt, as well as ultra-processed and fast foods.
- High blood pressure, unhealthy cholesterol, diabetes and other conditions raise stroke risk.
- Don't skip medications or health care checkups and screenings.
- If you feel like you have an irregular heartbeat, consult your health care provider to check you for atrial fibrillation, which is a leading cause of stroke.

body&mind

Q: How to recover from burnout?

A: If you feel exhausted and overwhelmed, more often than not, you may be experiencing burnout. When the demands on you seem excessive and you don't have the support you need, it's easy to lose motivation.

Top tips for managing burnout:

- Give yourself time to recover. Seek out soothing activities, such as meditation, yoga or nature walks.
- Get the help you need, whether from colleagues, loved ones or professionals.
- Take care of your body with quality nutrition, regular exercise and adequate sleep. Avoid unhealthy coping strategies, such as excessive alcohol use or overeating.
- Set appropriate limits. You can't do it all, and it's okay to say no sometimes.
- Develop a plan that will work in the long term. Decide what are your top priorities, and make sure you take regular breaks to recharge.

Seek professional help if needed, and if you have persistent physical symptoms, such as fatigue, ask your health care provider to rule out medical causes.

— Eric Endlich, PhD



May is National Physical Fitness and Sports Month.



Bicycling Benefits

Spring is a perfect time to start bicycling. Although it probably brings back memories from childhood, bike riding is not just for kids. In fact, most people at any age can enjoy bicycling.

While it's great to cycle and enjoy the outdoors, you can also use an indoor stationary bike when the weather isn't great. If you bicycle regularly to visit a friend or run an errand, you'll boost your physical fitness goal almost effortlessly.

Bicycling regularly is a great way to burn calories and lose excess weight. It also builds muscle strength — especially in the legs — and improves balance. Bike riding is low-impact and raises your heart rate slowly. It also puts less pressure on your joints than high-impact workouts.

Because it's an aerobic exercise, bicycling helps strengthen your heart, blood vessels and lungs and can lower your risk for cardiovascular disease. What's more, bicycling has been shown to reduce stress and help relieve anxiety and depression.

If you are new to exercise or have any chronic health problems, talk to your health care provider before bicycling. And practice cycling safety. Wear a good-quality, certified bike helmet, obey all traffic signs and rules and wear bright or reflective clothes so drivers can see you.

Q: How to talk about weight with your kids?

A: Making judgmental statements about your body or your child's can result in lasting harmful effects on your child's body image and relationship with food, according to the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. Handle weight concerns sensitively and age appropriately with these tips:

Welcome open conversations. Explain that people come in a variety of shapes and sizes and reassure your child that your love is unconditional. Avoid bribing or punishing children about food or weight or making negative comments about their appearance.

Highlight health more than weight. Practice eating better and moving more without explicitly talking about it all the time. Just be a role model. Provide your family with a nutritious diet and opportunities to do activities they enjoy.

Seek medical care when appropriate. Discuss any concerns about your child's health or weight privately with your child's health care provider. **Note:** It's dangerous for a growing child to be put on a restrictive weight-loss diet. Consult with a pediatric dietitian who has a non-diet, weight-neutral or body-positive approach.

— Elizabeth Smoots, MD



May is Hepatitis Awareness Month.

Hepatitis can be serious and even deadly. The good news is effective vaccines prevent the most common viral types of liver disease: hepatitis A (caused by fecal-oral contamination from contaminated hands or water) and hepatitis B (spread by sexual contact, sharing needles or from mother to baby at birth). Hepatitis B, once contracted, can become chronic and cause liver cancer. Hepatitis A and B vaccinations are available for babies, children and adults. Talk to your health care provider to make sure you and your family are current on hepatitis protection.

QuikQuiz™: Your Eye-Q



It's Healthy Vision Month. Take this quick true-or-false vision quiz to see how much you know about eye health.

1. Children need eye exams just before starting school, but rarely before then. T F
2. What you eat plus certain vitamin supplements can benefit eye health. T F
3. Spending a lot of time looking at screens can cause dry eyes. T F
4. Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is common in older adults, causing blurred central vision and wavy lines, which give an early warning of the problem. T F
5. Cataracts only develop in the elderly. T F

ANSWERS

1. **False** — The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO) recommend all children have an eye exam as a newborn and at all routine well-child visits. Begin vision screenings about age 3 and each year at ages 4, 5 and 6. After that, screen at ages 8, 10, 12 and 15. Kids at any age should see an eye specialist for any eye injury or unusual symptoms.
2. **True** — Choose a regular diet rich in dark, leafy greens, such as spinach, kale and collard greens, for eye health. Also consume fish



high in omega-3 fatty acids, such as salmon, tuna and halibut. Several large studies show taking supplements of vitamin C, vitamin E, lutein, zeaxanthin, zinc and copper may slow progression of potentially vision-robbing, age-related macular degeneration (AMD).

3. **True** — Limiting screen time, drinking plenty of water and using eye drops can help relieve dry eyes. However, severely dry eyes can lead to damage to the cornea (the clear outer layer in front of your eyes).
4. **True** — Getting regular eye exams can spot AMD before you have vision problems. Early treatment can help slow vision loss.
5. **False** — Yes, most cataracts are related to aging and about 50% of Americans have had a cataract or cataract surgery by age 80. However, middle-aged adults can develop cataracts. So can babies, and young children; those cataracts are either present at birth or related to other medical conditions.

dollars&sense Monitor Autopay

Automatic payments, also known as autopay, ease the stress of paying monthly bills; however, you must pay attention to accounts and details. If you use automatic payments, follow these steps to keep on top of your money:

1. Ensure you have enough money in the account to cover bill payments. With most banks, if an automatic payment hits your account and you can't cover it, the company may charge a fee in addition to bank fees.
2. Verify that the correct payment amount is taken from your account. Check for overcharges and duplicate billing. Notify your bank right away if you disagree with a payment from your account.
3. If the automatic payment is for a subscription, make sure you are still using the service. If you aren't, cancel it before the renewal date. Download a subscription manager to monitor subscription renewals.
4. Watch for hidden fees. Some companies charge to stop automatic payments. Check for charges associated with automatic payments.

TOP DOLLAR DICTIONARY: Compound Interest

Compound interest is earned on principal added to principal. Principal is the amount of money initially deposited into an account. That money earns a rate of return that is paid as interest. With compound interest, interest earned on principal is converted into principal at the beginning of the next compounding period. For example, an investor has \$1,000 in an account earning 5% interest compounding annually. The \$1,000 is the principal, the 5% is the rate of return and one year is the length of time. At the end of the year, the account grows from \$1,000 to \$1,050. The new balance at the beginning of the next period is now \$1,050 and the rate of return will be earned on \$1,050 instead of \$1,000: \$1,050 multiplied by 1.05 is now \$1,102.50.

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

safety solutions

May is Older Americans Month.



Choosing a Medical Alert System

As Baby Boomers age, and more medical alert systems are on the market, it can be hard to choose the appropriate one for your or a loved one's needs. There are different types of monitored and unmonitored systems: at-home, wearable on-the-go, traditional or specialized.

Monitored: Depending on the type you choose, these systems connect you to a 24/7 call center that fields calls for help, dispatches emergency medical services and contacts loved ones. They frequently offer features, such as fall detection, activity tracking and medication reminders. Monitored systems usually have a monthly charge.

Unmonitored: These systems have no monthly fees. They do not use a call center and do not provide additional tracking services. They will connect directly to 911 or your contacts, but they usually lack fall detection, activity tracking, medication reminders and wellness checks.

Use these tips to choose the right system:

- Check your insurance policy for coverage.
- Be aware of possible fees, such as monthly, annual, shipping, activation and up-front device charges.
- Check for a warranty, a money-back guarantee or a contract.
- Consider these key features before buying: emergency medical call buttons, automatic fall detection, GPS tracking, landline or mobile connection, water-resistance, device mobility, in-home range, two-way communication and monitoring.
- Optional features to consider include activity tracking, lockbox, medication reminders, remote answering, spouse monitoring and wellness checks.

To learn more, search for **medical alert systems** at [ncoa.org](https://www.ncoa.org).



National Safe Boating Week is May 20 to 26.

Boating Basics



National Safe Boating Week is a great time to review boating basics when it comes to safe sailing. Here are a few guidelines designed to anchor your safety on the water:

Take a boating course to understand nautical rules. You can take in-person and online courses designed for beginners and experts.

Get your boat checked out before you take to the water. The U.S. Coast Guard offers free vessel safety checks.

Know the weather conditions before each water excursion.

Use a pre-departure checklist to make sure you have everything on board and intact.

Designate an assistant skipper in case of emergency.

Tell someone when you are leaving, where you are going and when you are expected to return.

Wear life jackets. Everyone needs to wear them. Check your state's rules for more information about life jacket use.

Avoid using alcohol or drugs while boating.

Take swimming lessons if you don't know how to swim.



May is Mediterranean Diet Month and High Blood Pressure Education Month.



The Best Eating Plans

By Diane McReynolds, Executive Editor Emeritus

While many diets may help you maintain your well-being, the key is finding one you enjoy long term. There's no need to starve yourself. Here is an introduction to two reigning nutrition plans that are scientifically proven effective for good health and eating satisfaction.

Mediterranean Diet

Imagine a non-drug way to lower the risk of heart attacks, strokes, type 2 diabetes, depression and possibly some forms of cancer and dementia. To top it off, this preventive therapy involves eating foods that most people find delicious.

If you think this sounds like a too-good-to-be-true bit of unproven quackery, think again. It's not a health fad but the way of eating long popular in Mediterranean countries.

The Mediterranean Diet is especially effective for protecting heart health. In addition to promoting plenty of vegetables and fruits, it includes fish, poultry, whole grains, legumes, dairy products and extra-virgin olive oil.

So, why is the Mediterranean Diet good for you? It emphasizes whole, minimally processed foods and filling most of your plate with plants. It leans on herbs and spices rather than salt.

Mediterranean dining in ten practical steps:

1. Make vegetables dominate your meals every day.
2. Choose plant-based proteins instead of animal-based proteins a few times per week.
3. Enjoy fish and seafood twice weekly; oily fish, including salmon, mackerel and sardines are good for heart and brain health.
4. Enjoy calcium-rich dairy foods, such as Greek yogurt and fermented cheese (feta, Swiss, Parmesan, ricotta).
5. Include whole grains, such as barley, brown rice, whole wheat and oats.
6. Choose vegetables, fruits or a small handful of nuts as between-meal snacks.
7. Snack on fresh fruit and vegetables often.
8. Use extra-virgin olive oil for cooking and salad dressings. Other healthy fats are also found in avocados, nuts and seeds.
9. Add flavor with herbs and spices; limit salt.
10. Save red meat and sugary desserts for special occasions. Your heart will thank you for it.

Note: The Mediterranean Diet can be adapted to comply with kosher and halal dietary requirements.

Learn more at oldwayspt.org/traditional-diets/mediterranean-diet.



DASH

The Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) eating plan is popular among physicians and other health professionals for treating and preventing heart disease, our deadliest illness among men and women. High blood pressure (hypertension) is a big contributing factor to heart disease and affects an estimated 50% of adults in the U.S.

Fortunately, research has found that following the DASH plan can help lower blood pressure in patients with *resistant* hypertension — blood pressure that remains elevated despite medication.

Switching to DASH involves dietary changes that are flexible and proven nutritionally sound. No special foods are required. DASH meets basic daily and weekly nutritional goals five ways:

1. Eating vegetables, fruits and whole grains.
2. Including fish, poultry, beans, nuts, vegetable oils and low-fat dairy products.
3. Limiting foods that are high in saturated fat, such as fatty meats, full-fat dairy products and tropical oils, such as coconut, palm kernel and palm oils.
4. Limiting sugar-sweetened beverages and foods, such as candy.
5. Limiting sodium, but getting enough potassium, calcium and magnesium (from fruits, vegetables and dairy foods).

Use this quick guide for the daily DASH plan:

- 6 to 8 servings of grains
- 6 or fewer servings of meat, poultry or fish
- 4 to 5 servings of vegetables
- 4 to 5 servings of fruits
- 2 to 3 servings of low-fat or fat-free dairy products
- 2 to 3 servings of fats and oils
- 1,500 to 2,300 mg of salt to help lower blood pressure

Learn about portion sizes at nhlbi.nih.gov/education/dash-eating-plan.

DR. ZORBA'S corner

We'd all love to see a cure for COVID-19. But when it comes to alternative COVID "cures," the rule applies: If it sounds too good to be true, it is too good to be true. There are a bunch of *fake* cures, including herbal teas, essential oils, colloidal silver and electronic bio shields, which cost up to \$500. The only drugs that have proven effective against COVID are prescription drugs, such as Paxlovid and Remdesivir. Alternative remedies do not cure or treat COVID; they just rob your wallet. The best way to keep from getting COVID, especially a serious case which might land you in the hospital, is to be fully immunized and boosted. And remember, even if you don't like it, masking up in public might just save your life. Talk to your health care provider before trying any "cure" you see advertised.

— Zorba Paster, MD

May Fill-in-the-Blank Puzzle

Find out how well you know the topics covered in this issue of the newsletter.

- 1 _____ is found in about 65% of products on grocery store shelves.
- 2 Every teaspoon of sugar is _____ grams.
- 3 If you feel exhausted and overwhelmed, more often than not, you may be experiencing _____.
- 4 _____ builds muscle strength — especially in the legs — and improves balance.
- 5 Up to 80% of _____ can be prevented.
- 6 About _____ of Americans have had a cataract or cataract surgery by age 80.
- 7 Hepatitis _____, once contracted, can become chronic and cause liver cancer.
- 8 _____ interest is earned on principal added to principal.



You'll find the answers at personalbest.com/extras/May2023puzzle.pdf.

The Smart Moves Toolkit, including this issue's printable download, **Coping with Chronic Health Problems**, is at personalbest.com/extras/23V5tools.

Stay in Touch. Keep those questions and suggestions coming!

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