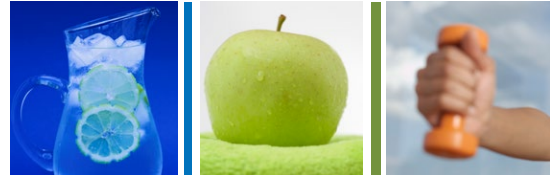


TAKE CHARGE!



December 2024

Keep Your Holiday Health on Track

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD



The holiday season brings happy times with parties and family gatherings. But it can also bring gift shopping stress and changes to your regular eating habits. Take proactive steps to stay as healthy as possible while enjoying the holidays.

Holidays are the time of excess.

It's common to spend too much, drink too much and miss out on sleep. The good news is that you stay on track by being aware of your habits.

Listen to your appetite. It's fine to have a small serving of all your favorite holiday foods — that's a great part of social events. Just eat until you feel mildly full instead of way too full. Enjoy leftovers instead of overeating at any single meal.

Enjoy your usual meals and snacks. Don't skip daily meals to save up the calories for the big party later. Eating well all day reduces overeating at the party.

Be active. Step away from the holiday hustle and bustle and go for a walk or do your preferred exercise.

Drink moderately. Moderate alcohol use is two drinks a day for men and one drink for women. Consistently drinking above this amount increases the risk of several chronic diseases, including heart disease and cancer.

Set a budget and stick to it. The health of your finances is important, too. Holiday stress — including credit card debt and finding the perfect gift — can be exhausting, lower immunity to viruses and trigger headaches. Stressed trying to find the perfect present? Send gift cards.

Get enough sleep. Give yourself permission to say no to extra activities when you are tired. Take a nap and aim for seven to nine hours of sleep per night.

The Smart Moves Toolkit, including this issue's printable download, [Why Are You So Tired?](#), is at personalbest.com/extras/24V12tools.

city events

Understanding Personality Types
Wednesday, December 4
12:00 pm – 1:00 pm
Register [here](#)

Deferred Compensation

Deferred Comp End of the Year Check in
Thursday, December 5
12:00 pm – 12:30 pm
Register [here](#)

Distributions From the Plan
Wednesday, December 11
12:00 pm – 12:30 pm
Register [here](#)

Introduction to Deferred Comp
Tuesday, December 17
12:00 pm – 12:45 pm
Register [here](#)

Managing up for Professional Success
Monday, December 9
11:30 am – 12:30 pm
Register [here](#)

Kindness
Wednesday, December 11
12:30 pm – 1:30 pm
Register [here](#)

Managing Emotions Surrounding Layoff Conversations
Wednesday, December 17
12:00 pm – 1:00 pm
Register [here](#)

Non-Verbal Communication
Wednesday, December 17
12:00 pm – 1:00 pm
Register [here](#)

Fair Play: Equitable Household Management Strategies to Strengthen Relationships
Thursday, December 18
12:30 pm – 1:30 pm
Register [here](#)

SUGAR MYTHS

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

Sugar is a controversial topic in the world of nutrition. It's often painted as the ultimate dietary villain due to its connection to several conditions, such as diabetes and hyperactivity. So, how much of what we hear about sugar is true? Here are the most common myths about sugar, along with the science-based truth.



MYTH: Honey is healthier than white sugar.

Truth: All types of sugar can be harmful when eaten in excess. The type of sugar or syrup matters less than the amount you eat. Aim for fewer than 12 teaspoons (48 grams) of any added sugar per day. There are dozens of examples of added sugars, from honey to white sugar to many different syrups. There is no “healthier sugar” when you consume too much of it.

MYTH: Sugar causes cancer. **Truth:** Sugar is not classified as a carcinogen (a cancer-causing agent). However, eating too much sugar can increase visceral fat around the waistline, and can prompt the body to make more of certain hormones, such as insulin and estrogen. Excess visceral fat and hormones can increase the risk of developing some types of cancer. So, while sugar is not a carcinogen, it plays an indirect role in cancer development. A little bit of sugar is okay, but more than 12 teaspoons per day can be harmful in the long term.

MYTH: Sugar causes hyperactivity in children. **Truth:** More than a dozen studies have examined this and cannot prove that sugar causes hyperactivity. Picture your typical holiday setting or birthday party. It's probably raucous and joyful, with games or pool time or music. Yet with all that excitement, sugar is blamed for making kids hyper. The truth is, it's usually the party that contributes to the hyper mood, and it's probably not the sugar.

MYTH: Sugar causes type 2 diabetes.

Truth: Eating sugar does not directly cause type 2 diabetes. But diets that are low in vegetables, fruits and fiber, and high in sugar, fat and ultra-processed foods, are linked to an increased risk of developing type 2 diabetes. It's a complex disease, so sugar consumption is not the sole reason why it develops, but can be a contributing factor.



MYTH: Fruit contains harmful sugar.

Truth: Fruit contains fructose, a natural fruit sugar. Fruit also contains fiber, vitamins and minerals, and the value from these essential nutrients outweighs the bit of sugar in fruit. Few people consume too much fructose from fruit. It's the opposite: 80% of Americans do not eat enough fruit and should eat a lot more of it. Aim to eat two cups of fruit per day.

MYTH: I need to quit eating sugar entirely.

Truth: Excessive sugar intake is problematic but having a little bit of added sugar — fewer than 12 teaspoons a day — can be part of a balanced diet. Sugar has a lovely, sweet flavor, and is an important ingredient in many dishes. Sugar does not need to be entirely avoided and can be enjoyed in moderation simply because it tastes nice and brings joy. Plus, trying to cut out sugar entirely will lead to cravings and possibly overeating when you finally give in. Enjoying a small, sweet treat is a better idea.

Gift Card Shopping Savvy

Gift cards are an easy choice if you need ideas for that special someone. Use these tips for giving gift cards as presents:

- 1 Read the fine print.** Does the card have an expiration date? Does the card have a monthly fee if not used over time?
- 2 Buy from reputable sources.** Stick to large, well-known retail chains or companies when buying gift cards. Doing so will steer you away from buying fake or expired cards. Avoid auction sites or discounted sites, where verifying authenticity is a challenge.
- 3 Keep your receipts.** Ask for a gift receipt to give with the card and keep your receipt as well. This will give you and the recipient proof of purchase if issues arise with the card.
- 4 Inspect the card before you buy it.** Has the code covering been scratched off, or is the card packaging damaged? Barcodes are targeted, too. Scammers take empty cards from a store, cover the barcode with a sticker and then repackage the card. That sticker has a barcode linked to a card the scammer owns. When you add money at checkout, that money goes to the scammer's card instead.
- 5 Make sure the person who's getting the card uses it.** Surprisingly, some people don't. Millions of dollars go unspent each year on unused gift cards. Give them a card you know they'll use, such as their favorite grocery store or restaurant.
- 6 Know what to do if the card is lost or stolen.** Treat gift cards as cash. However, some companies may offer replacement cards if they can trace card numbers and verify remaining balances.

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

STUDY: Friendship and Healthy Aging

Socializing with friends regularly can boost health through the years. In fact, in-person, quality friendships can promote health benefits, including longevity, comparable to those associated with the Mediterranean diet, according to several recent studies.

The research comes at a time when many people are trading in-person friend visits for socializing online. But it could be healthier to see friends in real life, especially as we age. University of British Columbia researchers collected information from 13,000 volunteers, all older than 50 years old, to see how many friends the study participants had and how they interacted with their buddies. The results revealed that during four years, face-to-face get-togethers at least once a week were strongly linked to better physical and mental health.



TIP of the MONTH

Raw Dough Warning

Most people know that they should not eat raw cookie dough due to the risk of food poisoning. Raw eggs in cookie batter may contain Salmonella, a harmful bacterium that can cause vomiting and diarrhea. But did you know that raw wheat flour can be as harmful as raw eggs? Flour needs to be baked before being consumed, since heat kills germs like E. coli and Salmonella. **Bottom line:** Bake your cookie batter, and only eat raw cookie dough if it is made with pasteurized raw eggs and heat-treated flour.



Cooking for Special Diets

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

eating smart

Holiday eating may mean you are serving food to friends and family members with different dietary needs. Some knowledge will help you feel more prepared when feeding guests with special diets. Here's what you need to know.

Gluten-free: This diet is medically necessary for people diagnosed with celiac disease (1% of the population), or gluten intolerance (6% of the population). Guests need to avoid wheat, rye, barley and anything made with these ingredients, including pasta and bread.

What's on the menu: vegetables, fruit, chicken, fish, potatoes, corn and rice.

Important: Watch out for condiments that contain gluten. Use dedicated gluten-free utensils to avoid cross-contamination.

Vegetarian: About 4% of the population are vegetarian and skip meat, poultry and seafood. About 1% are vegan and avoid meat, poultry, seafood, dairy and eggs.

What's on the menu: vegetables, fruit, grains; vegetarian proteins, including tofu, chickpeas, lentils or beans.

Low carb: About 7% of people follow a keto or low-carb diet to help manage weight or blood sugar levels.

What's on the menu: fish, chicken, cheese and eggs; vegetable side dishes; nuts, seeds and avocados.

Here are some tips to help accommodate several diets at one table:

- ➔ Ask guests to bring potluck dishes so people with special diets can bring their own safe food.
- ➔ Place a list of ingredients next to each dish (use place cards or name tags) so people following special diets know what's in each dish.
- ➔ Serve condiments and dressings on the side, so people can eat plain food if needed.
- ➔ Plan menus with lots of variety so there are a few foods that everyone enjoys.
- ➔ Opt for large charcuterie boards (with or without meat) with a variety of plain foods: sliced vegetables and fruit, cheese, nuts, gluten-free crackers, etc.



Sticky Tofu Bowl

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 cup quinoa | 2 packages (200g each) tofu, cut into cubes |
| ¼ cup tahini (sesame seed paste) | 2 medium carrots, shredded |
| 2 tsp honey | 1 ripe avocado, sliced |
| 3 tbsp reduced-sodium soy sauce or tamari | 4 cups shredded purple cabbage |
| 1 tbsp lemon juice | |
| ½ tsp garlic powder | |

Preheat oven to 375°F. **Line** baking sheet with parchment paper. **Cook** quinoa according to package directions. **In** a blender or food processor, combine tahini, honey, soy sauce, lemon juice and garlic powder. **Blend** to combine and thin with water if needed. **Add** tofu and half of the sauce to a bowl and stir well. **Reserve** remaining sauce. **Spread** tofu onto baking sheet and bake 30 minutes, stirring once. **In** each of 4 serving bowls, add a layer of quinoa. **Top** with sections of tofu, carrot, avocado and purple cabbage. **Drizzle** with remaining sauce and serve.

Makes 4 servings. Per serving: 551 calories | 31g protein | 28g total fat | 4g saturated fat | 15g mono fat | 8g poly fat | 50g carbohydrate | 6g sugar (<1g added sugar) | 13g fiber | 509mg sodium

EASY recipe

Keep those questions and suggestions coming!

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EXPERT advice

— Elizabeth Smoots, MD

Q: What is RSV?

A: Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is a common cause of respiratory tract infections. It can infect the upper respiratory tract and lungs of both children and adults. The symptoms are typically mild and self-limiting in most adults and older children.

Some people are susceptible to more severe disease, such as breathing problems that can lead to hospitalization. Infants younger than 12 months, especially premature babies, are more vulnerable. So are older adults and people with chronic heart or lung conditions. In addition, people of any age with a weak immune system may get sicker from RSV.

An RSV vaccine can help prevent more serious disease. The CDC recommends the vaccine for the following:

- Everyone 75 years of age or older.
- People ages 60 to 74 with certain chronic health conditions, such as chronic heart or lung disease.
- Adults who live in nursing homes.
- Pregnant women at 32 to 36 weeks to prevent RSV in their infants during the first six months after birth.

News & Notes

• **Use Your 2024 Health and Daycare Flexible Spending Account (FSA):** Are you looking for creative ways to spend your remaining Health FSA balance by December 31, 2024? See eligible expenses [here](#) or search [FSAstore.com](#) for 100% FSA-Eligible products. If you want to use your remaining Daycare FSA balance, see eligible expenses [here](#). Navia Benefits will carry over up to \$610 of unused 2024 Health FSA balances by the end of January 2025. There is no carry-over provision for the Daycare FSA.

• **Access Your Digital ID Card with Delta Dental.** Skip the paper and access your Delta Dental member ID digitally through the MySmile portal. Easily view your benefits, find a provider, and manage your dental plan on the go, all without needing a physical card. Join the many members who have already made the switch for a more convenient experience. Go to [DeltaDentalWA.com](#) and click the “Register now” button to create an account.

• **Hinge Health’s Pelvic Health Program:** This program combines gentle exercise with 1 on 1 support from an expert clinical care team and coach. Get help with bladder control, pelvic muscle strengthening, pelvic muscle relaxation and control. Hinge Health is a wonderful program for preparation for and recovery from childbirth. The Hinge Health benefit is available to employees with Most benefit coverage at no additional charge. To join, go to [hingehealth.com/cityofseattle](#).

Too Stressed to Think?

By Eric Endlich, PhD

You may have heard that chronic stress can be bad for your blood pressure and other health measures. But did you know it can impact your ability to think clearly, too?

Brain fog is a common complaint among those who experience a great deal of anxiety. A recent study found that when stress levels are higher, ability to recall items tends to be lower. The body’s built-in emergency response, triggered by stress, primes us to make simple split-second decisions (e.g., fight or flight) but is not well-suited to more complex mental tasks.

Brain fog symptoms include:

- Forgetting what you were planning to do next.
- Completing tasks more slowly.
- Frequent distraction.
- Tiredness while working.
- Difficulty recalling words.
- Disorganization.
- Confusion.

Naturally, if your symptoms don’t improve or if you are concerned, it’s a good idea to consult your health care provider to rule out any nutrient deficiencies or other medical conditions that could be affecting your mental functioning.

Strategies to manage stress and brain fog include:

- Getting good-quality nourishment, sufficient hydration, adequate sleep and regular exercise.



Designate a worry time when you can jot down your concerns in a journal, and put it away until the next scheduled time.

- Taking breaks from challenging activities.
- Reaching out to friends, loved ones or mental health professionals for support.
- Learning a relaxation technique, such as deep breathing, meditation or guided imagery.
- Practicing mindfulness by focusing on what your senses can perceive right now.
- Using organizational tools to improve time and task management.

Watch for Black Ice. Black ice can look like a wet road, but if you see vehicles in front of you skidding or notice tire skid marks or shiny spots, slow down. Here are some tips if you encounter black ice:

➔ **Brake** with care. If you start skidding, apply firm pressure on your brakes to activate the anti-lock brake system (ABS). If your vehicle doesn’t have ABS, gently pump the brakes.

- ➔ **Remove** your foot from the accelerator and coast across the ice until you regain traction.
- ➔ **Shift** to a lower gear if feasible.
- ➔ **Try** to keep the steering wheel straight. If you start to skid, steer in the direction of the skid if your back end is sliding. If it’s your front end, steer in the opposite direction.
- ➔ **Remove** all distractions, including mobile phones — you need to fully focus on driving.