



# EMPOWERED WELL-BEING

*Balancing Health, Happiness, and Community*

JANUARY 2026



## IDEA:

Try one health hack each day for two weeks.

## 13 Health Hacks

Did you know that **making small changes in your lifestyle can lead to better health over time**? Here are 13 ideas to try. Start by adding one healthy habit until you get used to it, and then add another.

- 1** Skip the elevator and take the stairs instead.
- 2** Eat an extra serving of fruits and vegetables at one meal daily.
- 3** Pre-pack healthy snacks, such as almonds, berries or cut vegetables to take to work.
- 4** Explore the outdoors or enjoy a hobby.
- 5** Exercise at least 30 minutes daily. You can even incorporate exercise into watching your favorite show by working out while you're streaming it. Walk briskly, jog in place or run on a treadmill.
- 6** Take a daily five-minute break from everything. Close your eyes and let your mind wander.
- 7** Park far away or get off at a stop a little farther from your workplace and walk.
- 8** Apply SPF 30 sunscreen before you venture outdoors, all year long.
- 9** Practice diaphragmatic breathing — taking deep breaths to expand your abdomen — throughout the day.
- 10** Stick to a regular bedtime schedule by getting up and going to bed at the same time every day — even on weekends.
- 11** Spend more in-person time with friends, and use your phone less to keep in touch.
- 12** Use a timer to remind you to get up and move every hour when you are in front of a screen.
- 13** Hydrate first thing in the morning and throughout the day. Buy a refillable, stainless-steel container to use at work or play.

Always get your health care provider's okay first before changing your eating habits or physical activity level.

## City Events

### Sleep: An Essential Component of Health and Well-being

Wednesday, January 14

11:30 am – 12:30 pm

[Register here](#)

### WW: The Unstoppable Start – A Guide to Imperfect Progress

Thursday, January 15

10:00 am – 10:30 am

[Register here](#)

### After the Holidays: Managing that Debt

Wednesday, January 28

12:00 pm – 1:00 pm

[Register here](#)

### Healthcare Navigation Simplified Week

#### Hinge Health 101: Program Overview

Thursday, January 26

11:00 am – 11:30 am

[Register here](#)

#### Exercise as You Age

Monday, January 26

1:00 pm – 2:00 pm

[Register here](#)

#### Strength & Support: Kaiser MSK Programs

Tuesday, January 27

10:30 am – 11:00 am

[Register here](#)

### Unlocking Physical Therapy Benefits at the City

Tuesday, January 27

1:00 pm – 2:00 pm

[Register here](#)

### Reducing and Managing Pain

Wednesday, January 28

10:00 am – 11:00 am

[Register here](#)

### Navigating MSK Care with Accolade

Wednesday, January 28

1:30 pm – 2:30 pm

[Register here](#)

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# Postpartum Sleep Problems

**Sleep deprivation, at least for a while, is often an unavoidable part of being a parent of a new baby.** For those who have just given birth, sudden shifts in hormone levels, accumulated fatigue from pregnancy and childbirth and round-the-clock caring for a new baby can take a toll on energy yet also disrupt sleep. You may need naps during the day but then find it hard to sleep at night, especially for the first several weeks after having your baby.

**In fact, it's not unusual to have postpartum anxiety and depression,** marked by low energy and sometimes outright exhaustion and mood swings from sleep deprivation and late-night feedings. If you find yourself feeling worn down, ask your partner, a friend or a babysitter to care for your baby for an afternoon now and then. Take a break with a book or have a needed, non-interrupted nap. If you have the energy and someone to watch your baby, taking a walk between feedings may help you sleep better at night, too.

**On an emotional level,** lack of sleep can increase the risk of postpartum anxiety and depression after giving birth. Talk to your health care provider to see if a checkup would be a good idea. Pregnancy and childbirth cause hormonal shifts, including low estrogen levels, which can cause hot flashes and sleep-disrupting night sweats after childbirth. Sometimes simply knowing what's causing discomfort and restless nights and that it will pass can go far to help you get through the tough times.



**The Sunday Scaries are real.**

A LinkedIn study reported that 80% of U.S. professionals experience them. While we may love our jobs, the notion of work-week stress and responsibility can wreak havoc on our brains.

**Calm yourself by:**

- Planning your work week to prioritize tasks.
- Focusing on the here and now. Practice relaxation techniques such as meditation, long walks and breathing exercises.
- Organizing fun activities on Mondays. Plan on binge watching a favorite show or stopping for coffee at a new café.
- Talking with someone about your feelings.

# Loneliness and Food Cravings

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

**It's common to eat when we feel hungry or when something tastes good.** But sometimes food choices go beyond general hunger and cross over into feeding emotional or psychological needs. This is known as emotional eating and may be caused by overwhelming feelings of loneliness, grief, sadness or boredom.

**Negative moods influence appetite** and may cause some people to eat more or less than usual. This behavior can affect body weight and lead to eating disorders eventually.

**Overeating in response to emotions** usually leads to choosing foods that are high in calories but low in essential nutrients — think chips, ice cream and fries. Research shows that when we feel sad or lonely, our bodies may produce more cortisol (a stress hormone). Elevated cortisol, along with changes in hunger-regulating hormones, such as leptin and ghrelin, increases appetite and makes you crave foods high in sugar, fat and salt.

**These cravings are the body's way of seeking comfort when social support is missing.** Eating foods rich in refined carbs temporarily boosts dopamine and serotonin, which are linked to mood regulation. This creates a short-lived sense of relief. However, if emotional eating becomes a frequent coping strategy, it can lead to weight gain, which has implications for increased risk of heart disease and some types of cancer.

**The good news?** There are healthier ways to cope. Building social connections can reduce loneliness and cravings. Shared meals, phone calls, video chats or community activities can provide socialization. Practicing mindfulness



**Emotional eating often fills a need for comfort, not hunger.**

can also help. When a craving strikes, ask yourself: "Am I truly hungry or is this an emotional need?" Work with a therapist to hone this important skill.

**A chronic condition** is a long-lasting health issue that usually develops slowly and persists for months or years, often for life. These conditions typically need continuous medical care, regular monitoring and medications to keep them in check. Examples of chronic conditions include diabetes, arthritis, high blood pressure and cancer. While some conditions aren't curable, they can be managed with proper treatment and monitoring. Monitoring with home monitors and apps can help spot potential problems early so your health care provider can adjust treatment plans and prevent complications that could lead to a hospital stay — and the high costs that come with it.

## Healthy Eating in Midlife

**Longevity isn't just about living longer;** it's about living well and staying healthy for longer. And your diet may be the key. A Harvard-led study that tracked more than 105,000 adults for 30 years found that people who followed healthy diets in midlife were more likely to reach age 70 with good physical, mental, and cognitive health.

**A healthy dietary pattern** was described as being rich in plant-based foods such as vegetables, fruit, whole grains and legumes, while still including some healthy animal-based foods such as fish and dairy. The healthy diet minimized ultra-processed foods such as sweets, salty snacks and soda. Higher intake of processed meat, sugary drinks and diet beverages was associated with lower chances of healthy aging.

# JUST THE FACTS: Seed Oils

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

## Many social media influencers warn against using seed oils.

This term refers to a group of vegetable oils, including:

- Canola.
- Cottonseed.
- Sunflower.
- Grapeseed.
- Corn.
- Soybean.
- Safflower.
- Rice bran.

**What's the controversy?** Critics say that seed oils are toxic because they are extracted using chemical solvents (hexane) and contain lots of polyunsaturated omega-6 fatty acids, which may promote inflammation and raise heart disease risk.



**What's the science?** While hexane is used to extract oil from seeds, the final oil contains only trace amounts of hexane, which are well below safety limits. These oils are not toxic or poisonous. If you are worried about even trace amounts, choose cold-pressed seed oils, which don't use hexane for extraction.

**Omega-6 is an essential fat that we need.** You can certainly get too much, especially if you eat many oily ultra-processed foods. But research consistently shows that replacing saturated fats (e.g., butter) with polyunsaturated fats (omega-3 and omega-6) from oil reduces cholesterol levels and lowers heart disease risk.

**How can I use seed oils safely?** Using a drizzle of seed oil while cooking is not cause for concern. The bigger issue is eating lots of ultra-processed food (fried snacks and packaged baked goods) that contain seed oils. Some influencers suggest the oils themselves make these foods unhealthy. But science shows it's the combination of sugar, fat, salt, additives and artificial ingredients that link ultra-processed foods with increased disease risk. Rely on whole foods more than ultra-processed foods.

**What about animal fats?** Some influencers suggest switching to butter or beef tallow. Science says no, since these are high in saturated fat, which may increase heart disease risk. Remember, making fries or pies with beef tallow will not make them healthier.

**Where does olive oil fit?** Olive and avocado oil are pressed from fruit, not seeds. They are high in heart-healthy monounsaturated fat and lower in omega-6 fat. Both are healthy choices.

## easy recipe

### Spicy-Sweet Peanut Noodle Bowl

12 oz whole-grain spaghetti	¼ cup lime juice
1 tsp extra-virgin olive oil	2 tbsp toasted sesame oil
1 red pepper, seeded and diced	1 tbsp maple syrup
1 carrot, grated	2 tbsp reduced-sodium soy sauce
2 cups frozen shelled edamame	1 tbsp balsamic vinegar
1 cup purple cabbage, shredded	Sriracha, to taste
½ cup peanut butter	Peanuts and cilantro for garnish



**Cook** noodles according to package direction. **Drain** and set aside in a serving bowl.

**In** a frying pan set over medium heat, add oil. **Sauté** red pepper, carrot, edamame and cabbage 6-7 minutes until vegetables are softened. **Add** to noodles. **In** a small bowl, combine peanut butter, lime juice, toasted sesame oil, maple syrup, soy sauce and vinegar. **Whisk** together, and then add to noodles. **Toss** to coat and top with sriracha, peanuts and freshly chopped cilantro.

**Makes 6 servings. Per serving:**

419 calories | 19g protein | 14g total fat | 2g saturated fat | 6g mono fat | 5g poly fat | 58g carbohydrate | 6g sugar (1g added sugar) | 9g fiber | 210mg sodium

## News & Notes

**Check Your 2026 Annual Benefits Summary:** Directions for checking your 2026 benefits summary in Workday, along with required annual notices, will be sent by U.S. mail on January 15. Please ensure that your records, such as screenshots taken during Open Enrollment, match the City's information. Contact your department's benefits reps if you have any questions.

**Announcing "Healthcare Navigation Simplified":** SHR Benefits has selected Healthcare Navigation Simplified as the 2026 guiding theme to support employees and families. This year's resources will focus on clearer paths to care through practical tools, education, and benefits awareness starting with Q1: Musculoskeletal Support. Join one of our curated webinars [during kickoff week January 26 – 30](#).

**Deferred Compensation Plan Transition:** Effective February 5, 2026, the City of Seattle Voluntary Deferred Compensation Plan and Trust will transition from Nationwide to Empower. Watch for more information in the mail by the end of January.

**Grow Your Career in Just One Hour:** Career Quest Flash Mentorships are one-hour conversations that connect City employees across departments and job levels. Be a mentor, mentee, or both – [because one hour can have a big impact](#).

**Make it Your Best Year Yet.** You and your eligible adult family members can join WeightWatchers for as low as \$9.75 per month. Get access to tracking tools, understand your food choices with nutritional insights & macro guidance, check a vast library of recipes, workouts, and find mindset content to fuel your progress. To learn more, visit [www.com/cityofseattle](http://www.com/cityofseattle).

City Events Continued from page 1>>

### The Low Back Pain Playbook

Thursday, January 29  
10:00 am – 11:00 am  
[Register here](#)

### Ergonomics with Hinge Health

Thursday, January 29  
1:00 pm – 1:30 pm  
[Register here](#)

### Workday Workouts

Friday, January 30  
12:30 pm – 1:30 pm  
[Register here](#)

## expert advice

### Q: What is the spectrum-disease connection?

**A:** A spectrum is a cluster of diseases with similar characteristics that vary widely in symptoms and disease severity. This often includes conditions that were once considered distinctly different diseases until research revealed similarities. Disease severity may differ a lot between individuals with similar conditions within a spectrum. Here are a couple of examples.

**Autism spectrum disorder** includes autism, Asperger's syndrome, childhood disintegrative disorder and pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified, among others. These developmental problems affect one's ability to communicate, socialize with others and function in society. Each person may have a unique blend of symptoms and distinctly individual ability to function.

**Parkinson's spectrum disorder** consists of neurodegenerative conditions that share particular movement problems such as tremor, slowness and rigidity. They are often associated with cognitive and behavioral decline. Disorders within this spectrum include Parkinson's disease, Parkinson's disease dementia, vascular Parkinsonism, Lewy body disease, progressive supranuclear palsy, corticobasal syndrome and multiple system atrophy.— Elizabeth Smoots, MD

**Sucralose**, a zero-calorie artificial sweetener, may not help with weight loss. In fact, unlike sugar, sucralose doesn't activate hormones that promote the feeling of fullness. Instead, sucralose increases activity in the hypothalamus that can potentially boost hunger, according to a study from the University of Southern California Diabetes and Obesity Research Institute. The research, published in *Nature Metabolism*, involved 75 participants about equally divided by gender and whether they were normal weight, overweight or obese.

**On three visits**, the volunteers consumed plain water or a drink sweetened with sucralose or sugar. MRI brain scans, blood samples and hunger ratings were taken before and after the volunteers consumed the drinks. The findings showed that while sugar triggered feelings of fullness, sucralose boosted hunger, especially in people with obesity. That suggests sucralose may negatively influence long-term eating habits, according to Kathleen Alanna Page, MD, who headed the research.

## Kerosene Heater Dos and Don'ts

**Kerosene heaters can keep you warm but there are hazards when using them.** Here are some dos and don'ts to keep in mind:

- ➔ **DO** use fresh 1-K grade kerosene when filling your tank. Never use gasoline.
- ➔ **DO** follow all instructions on how to operate.
- ➔ **DO** open the doors to the room when operating. **Tip:** Crack a window at least one inch to keep fresh air flowing.
- ➔ **DO** install and test smoke alarms before using the heater.
- ➔ **DO** keep a fire extinguisher nearby.
- ➔ **DO** use a battery-operated lighter. Never use a match.
- ➔ **DON'T** mix gasoline with kerosene — store them in separate containers that are labeled.
- ➔ **DON'T** fill the tank in the house. Always fill it outdoors.
- ➔ **DON'T** use the heater while you are sleeping or if you leave the house.
- ➔ **DON'T** use them in bedrooms.
- ➔ **DON'T** attempt to move a lighted heater.

**Also, kerosene heaters come in radiant and convective models. Research which type is best for you.**

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# Healthcare Navigation Simplified

**Kickoff Week: January 26 - 30**

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MON

11:00 am: Hinge Health 101 - Program Overview

1:00 pm: Exercise as You Age

27

TUES

10:30 am: Strength & Support: Kaiser MSK Programs

1:00 pm: Unlocking Physical Therapy Benefits

28

WED

10:00 am: Reducing and Managing Pain

1:30 pm: Navigating MSK Care with Accolade

29

THU

10:00 am: The Low Back Pain Playbook

1:00 pm: Ergonomics (with Hinge Health)

30

FRI

12:30 pm: Workday Workouts



Healthcare Navigation Simplified SharePoint