

TAKE CHARGE!



September 2024

LOWER YOUR RISK: Metabolic Syndrome

Metabolic syndrome raises the risk for heart disease, stroke, hypertension, type 2 diabetes and other potentially serious health problems.



About one-third of U.S. adults have metabolic syndrome, which means they have at least three of these conditions:

Abdominal obesity:

Waist measures more than 40 inches (men) or 35 inches (women).

Elevated blood pressure:

Blood pressure is at least 135/85. The higher the level, the higher the risk for heart disease.

Higher than normal blood sugar:

Fasting blood glucose level is 100 to 125 mg/dL (prediabetes).

Low (good) HDL cholesterol:

HDL cholesterol is less than 40 mg/dL (in men) or 50 mg/dL (in women).

High triglycerides (a type of blood fat).

While scientists don't know what causes metabolic syndrome, insulin resistance* and abdominal obesity are thought to be major factors. The good news is, metabolic syndrome is treatable. While you can't change your age or genes, there are lifestyle changes that can help potentially prevent or reverse metabolic syndrome.

You can reduce your metabolic risk factors with these lifestyle changes:

Get serious about eating healthy. Eat mostly vegetables, fruits, protein-rich lean foods and whole grains.

Out of shape? Get moving regularly, even if it's just a daily walk. Resistance exercises boost metabolic health, too. If you're unaccustomed to exercise, get your health care provider's okay before beginning a physical activity routine.

Don't skimp on sleep. Adults need seven to nine hours a night.

Get help for chronic stress. Ongoing stress can interfere with the body's use of calories and nutrients. Talk to your health care provider about counseling or other stress-reducing therapy.

If you smoke, quit. Smoking harms your blood cholesterol, blood sugar and blood pressure numbers.

**Insulin resistance occurs when cells become less sensitive and eventually resist insulin, the hormone the pancreas manufactures to make it easier for your body to use blood glucose (sugar).*

The Smart Moves Toolkit, including this issue's printable download, QuikRisk™ Assessment: When Your Head Hurts, is at personalbest.com/extras/24V9tools.

city events

Political Anxiety

Thursday, September 5
11:00 am – 12:00 pm
Register [here](#)

Psychological Avoidance and its Impact on Your Mental Health

Tuesday, September 10
12:00 am – 1:00 pm
Register [here](#)

Deferred Compensation Webinars

SeattleDCP Website Overview

Tuesday, September 10
12:00 pm – 12:45 pm
Register [here](#)

Nearing Retirement

Thursday, September 19
12:00 pm – 12:45 pm
Register [here](#)

Withdrawals From Deferred Compensation

Wednesday, September 25
12:00 pm – 12:30 pm
Register [here](#)

Helping Troubled Teens

Thursday, September 17
11:30 am – 12:30 pm
Register [here](#)

Letting Go of the Things That Hold You Back

Tuesday, September 19
7:40 am – 3:20 pm
Register [here](#)

Back to the Grind: Effective Wellness and Work-Life Balance Strategies

Thursday, September 19
10:00 am – 11:00 am
Register [here](#)

Flexible Spending Accounts Information

Monday, September 30
11:30 am – 12:30 pm
Register [here](#)



Effective Shiftwork Sleep Strategies

More than 22 million Americans work nontraditional hours, including rotating, night or on-call shifts. This can be challenging in many ways — especially when it comes to getting enough sleep. Here are some strategies for getting productive shut-eye:

Maintain consistency in your sleep schedule even on your days off if you work a constant shift schedule. If you work a rotating shift, use a gradual plan to adjust your sleep time before a scheduled change to give your body time to adapt.

Create an environment conducive to sleeping. This can mean sleeping in a darkened room with an eye mask or using a sound machine to drown out noises.

Turn off your phone at least 30 minutes before going to sleep unless you're on call. Blue light can keep you from falling asleep and constant noise from your phone can interrupt your much-needed rest.

Practice relaxation techniques to wind down. These can include taking a hot shower or bath, practicing meditation or reading.

Establish a bedtime routine. This prepares your brain and body for rest.

Eat three regular, nutritious meals throughout the day. Important: Don't eat your largest meal within three hours of your bedtime.

Avoid alcohol and caffeine before sleep. Alcohol disrupts sleep patterns and causes fragmented sleep. Intake of caffeine less than four to six hours before bed can make it difficult to fall asleep.

Talk to your health care provider about taking melatonin supplements. Caution: It is unknown whether long-term melatonin use is safe.

STUDY: Long COVID

There's new evidence multiple COVID-19 vaccinations can prevent long COVID. Long COVID is an often debilitating condition. It's associated with fatigue and muscle and joint pain, which can continue for months after COVID infection. But a growing body of evidence not directed at long COVID research shows being vaccinated and boosted regularly can help prevent both a serious COVID infection and ongoing long COVID.

Early in the pandemic, UK researchers found the risk of developing long COVID was 50% lower in those who were double vaccinated. And now a huge University of Hong Kong study of almost 1.2 million people has documented the protective effect of multiple COVID-19 vaccinations against long COVID.



The new research, published in *Nature Communications*, found that when vaccinated people did contract COVID, the study participants who received three or more doses of vaccines had the highest protection against experiencing any ongoing long COVID symptoms.

“Our findings provided real-world evidence supporting the effectiveness of the COVID-19 vaccines in the prevention of long-term health consequences following SARS-CoV-2 infection,” the researchers concluded.

Trendy Tests to Skip



Full-body scans can reveal countless things to worry about needlessly and cost thousands of dollars.

Many clinic and medical imaging facilities market whole-body CT (X-ray computed tomography) screening to the public with claims they can spot signs of heart disease, blood clots and cancer to stop potentially deadly health problems at the earliest stage. But the FDA says CT scans involve significant radiation exposure and there's no scientific evidence that whole-body scanning of symptom-free people offers more benefits than harms.

You can also get a full-body MRI (magnetic resonance imaging). One company selling the test says their scan can image more than 500 different health conditions, including cancer. But doctors warn that they're not always accurate. A recent report in the *American Journal of Roentgenology* concluded the average person is far more likely to be harmed on some level by a whole-body MRI scan than benefited by detecting a disease extremely early.

What about a “simple, painless, ultrasound screening” of your carotid arteries in a van or recreation center? Ultrasound is used to image the arteries that run up each side of your neck. These arteries can become clogged with plaque, causing neurological symptoms or stroke. But screening for this problem (carotid stenosis) is best done at a medical center with the most advanced equipment. Even if the screening supposedly shows something worrisome (which is unlikely, if you have no symptoms), you'll be out a couple of hundred dollars and still need to have another scan at a medical facility.

Time-Restricted Eating: Heart Disease Risk

Time-restricted eating may be a health risk instead of a benefit, according to a Shanghai Jiao Tong University study of 20,000 U.S. adults who self-reported what and when they ate as participants in the 2003-2018 National Health and Nutrition Examination Surveys. Eating across less than eight hours per day raised heart disease risk by more than 90%

But it's important to note this is preliminary research. It doesn't include information on the quality of the diets typical of the participants. So, there's no way to determine if nutrient density might be an alternative explanation for increased heart disease, according to Christopher D. Gardner, Ph.D., Stanford University professor of medicine. In addition, previous studies have found intermittent fasting improves blood pressure, blood glucose levels and cholesterol levels, according to the American Heart Association.

TIP of the MONTH



September is Whole Grains Month

Whole grains are a nourishing addition to the diet, since they contain fiber, protein and a host of vitamins and minerals. Since they still have their fibrous coat intact, they may take a while to cook. Plan ahead. Allow at least an hour when you're making brown rice, wild rice, sorghum or hulled barley. For quick-cooking whole grains, choose quinoa, buckwheat or millet, which cook in 15 to 20 minutes. Or choose whole-grain breads, which require no cooking.



eating smart

Ancient Grains, Modern Nutrition

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

You're probably familiar with the most popular grains in North America, which are wheat, corn and rice. But if you want something different to fill the whole grains portion of your plate, try an ancient grain, such as quinoa, teff or amaranth.

These grains are called *ancient* because their origins go back thousands of years. They come from ancient civilizations, such as the Incas, Aztecs and Egyptians. These grains have remained largely unchanged in the past few hundred years and are not modified by modern breeding techniques.

Ancient grains that you can try include:

- Wheat, such as spelt, einkorn, farro, emmer and kamut.
- Blue corn.
- Black barley.
- Red or black rice.
- Quinoa.
- Teff.
- Amaranth.
- Sorghum.
- Millet.
- Buckwheat.

Many of these grains are available in their whole, unrefined form. Plus, when these grains are ground into flours, the whole grain is used. The resulting flour has more fiber, vitamins and minerals than refined grains (e.g., white flour or white rice).

Pseudocereal grains, such as quinoa and amaranth, are seeds, but they are used as grains when cooking. They are always in their whole form (they cannot be refined) and are a nutritious option.

Ancient grains are often more sustainable than other grains. They typically require fewer inputs, such as water and pesticides. **Cool fact:** Quinoa is naturally coated in a bitter seed coat called saponin, which keeps pests away. It reduces the need for pesticides but can have a bitter taste. Always rinse quinoa before cooking.

Fortunately, finding ancient grains has become easier as their popularity has grown. They are in most grocery stores, health food stores and online retailers.

Mixed Vegetable and Quinoa Salad

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------|
| 1 cup quinoa, rinsed | 2 green onions, chopped |
| 2 cups water | 1 cup chopped fresh parsley |
| 1 can (15 oz.) red kidney beans, drained | 3 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil |
| ½ English cucumber, diced | 3 tbsp lemon juice |
| 1 yellow pepper, seeded and diced | 1 clove garlic, minced |
| 1 medium carrot, peeled and diced | ½ teaspoon salt |

Combine quinoa and water in a saucepan over medium heat. **Boil**, then reduce heat and simmer about 15 minutes, until quinoa absorbs all the water. **Remove** from heat, cover, rest 5 minutes, then fluff with fork. **Allow** to cool. **In** a serving bowl, combine beans, cucumber, pepper, carrot, onion and parsley. **Add** cooled quinoa and stir to combine. **In** a small bowl, whisk together oil, lemon juice, garlic and salt. **Pour** over quinoa and vegetables. Stir to combine and serve.

Makes 6 servings. Per serving: 203 calories | 8g protein | 9g total fat | 1g saturated fat | 6g mono fat | 1g poly fat | 26g carbohydrate | 5g sugar (0g added sugar) | 7g fiber | 443mg sodium

EASY recipe



Stay in Touch

Keep those questions and suggestions coming!

Phone: 800-871-9525

Fax: 205-437-3084

Email: PBeditor@ebix.com

Website: personalbest.com

Executive Editor: Susan Cottman • Advisers: Patricia C. Buchsel, RN, MSN, FAAN; Jamie Lynn Byram, PhD, CFP, AFC, MBA; Eric Endlich, PhD; Kenneth Holtn, MS; Reed Humphrey, PhD; Gary B. Kushner, SPHR, CBP; Zorba Paster, MD; Cara Rosenbloom, RD; Elizabeth Smoots, MD; Margaret Spencer, MD • Editor: Aimie Miller • Designer: Sheila Nupen

The content herein is in no way intended to serve as a substitute for professional advice. Sources available on request. © 2024 Ebix Inc. All rights reserved. Unauthorized reproduction in any form of any part of this publication is a violation of federal copyright law and is strictly prohibited.

Personal Best® 1 Ebix Way, Johns Creek, GA 30097 • 800-871-9525 • fax 205-437-3084.

EXPERT advice

— Eric Endlich, PhD

Q: Does caffeine cause stress?

A: The relationship between caffeine and stress is somewhat complex.

Here are a few key points to keep in mind:

- Not everyone metabolizes (processes) caffeine the same, so the effects on individuals can vary.
- Caffeine can raise heart rate and blood pressure temporarily, so for some people, this may cause jittery feelings, especially in larger amounts.
- Suddenly stopping caffeine use after regular intake can lead to withdrawal symptoms, such as headaches and fatigue.
- An excess of caffeine, especially late in the day, can interfere with sleep for some people, which could become a source of stress.
- Modest doses of caffeine can boost one's mood, potentially reducing stress levels.

The bottom line: It can be a matter of trial and error, and each individual needs to figure out what level of caffeine — if any — is best for them.

News & Notes

- **Start Calculating the Right 2025 FSA Contribution for You:** Review your 2024 out-of-pocket expenses and ask, “Did I have enough or too little?” Do you have any anticipated healthcare costs in 2025? Consider office copays, deductibles, prescriptions, dental, and vision expenses that an FSA can offset. The maximum contribution in 2025 will be \$3,200. Remember, up to \$610 from 2024 can carry over to 2025 if it results in a health care FSA with a \$120 minimum balance.
- **Looking for One-on-One Support?** Consider working with a ComPsych EAP coach or well-being coach. A counselor is licensed, clinical, coping-oriented, helps to identify and treat problems, is solution-focused, and seeks to address presenting issues and concerns. A coach is certified, non-clinical, action-oriented, helps to set and achieve goals, is client-driven, seeks to empower, and asks “what’s possible.” All City of Seattle and their household members are eligible for ComPsych services at no cost. To make an appointment, call **1-800-858-6715** or visit www.guidanceresources.com; registration web ID: SeattleEAP.
- **Save the Date!** Open Enrollment for 2025 Benefits runs **Monday, October 7, through Friday, November 1**. Make benefit changes through Workday for an effective date of January 1, 2025. Mark your calendar and look for more information in October.
- **Embrace a Happier, Healthier You:** WeightWatchers fits the busiest lifestyles — so you can find your happy + healthy sweet spot. All regular City of Seattle employees on City-sponsored medical plans and their covered spouses, domestic partners, and children aged 18 and over can join for as low as \$9.75/month. Learn more at ww.com/CityofSeattle.

Avoid Exercise Injuries

All of your hard work to get in shape could be offset if you're injured while exercising. Exercise injuries can stem from overuse, improper form and inadequate warm-ups. Prevent injury by taking these steps:

Get a health checkup. If you haven't been exercising regularly, schedule a checkup with your health care provider first to advise you of anything that could limit your exercise plan.

Start slowly. Don't jump into a heavy exercise program. Take time to acclimate your body to its new routine.

Warm up before and cool down after working out. Spend five to ten minutes doing dynamic (active) warm-ups, such as walking slowly and leg lifts. After exercising, incorporate static stretches.

Consider consulting a personal trainer. These fitness specialists can teach you new techniques, refine your form, vary your workouts and safely guide you to higher levels of performance.

Cross train. Switch up your routine so that you aren't running or lifting weights daily; it's the best way to gain strength, get in shape all over and give muscles time to rest.

Listen to your body. If you even feel a twinge of pain, stop what you are doing. Pushing through the pain is not a good thing. Instead, evaluate what you are doing wrong, adjust your form or just take a break.

Hydrate more. Once you start an exercise routine, drink more water than you usually do during the day.

Drink eight ounces 20 to 30 minutes before your workout, take sips during it and have eight ounces no more than 30 minutes after you exercise.

More may be needed in hot weather.

