EMPOWERED WELL-BEING

Balancing Health, Happiness, and Community

FEBRUARY 2026

Tip: If you're a beginner in any sport, take lessons. And if possible, rent equipment in case you end up not liking an activity.

Winter Olympics: Do Your Own

Want to make winter a lot more fun? Stage your own Winter Games with family and friends, or choose a cold-weather sport that motivates you to get moving. Regardless, the rewards are great for your mind and body.

Most winter sports require a combination of balance, endurance, strength and coordination, so make sure you're in shape before you begin. Engage in cardio activities, such as running, biking or swimming, at least 30 minutes a day as well as exercises that involve strength training, balance and flexibility. **Tip:** Dress warmly and in layers.

Get started on your gold medal journey:

Downhill and cross-country skiing are great ways to enjoy the outdoors.

Gear: For downhill or alpine skiing — a proper-fitting ASTM-certified helmet, skis, bindings, poles, boots and goggles. For cross-country skiing — cross-country skis, boots, bindings, gloves and poles.

The beauty of ice skating is that you can glide across the ice indoors and outdoors.

Gear: Proper-fitting hockey or figure skates that support your ankles. Children and beginners should wear helmets. **Tip:** A skating aid such as a metal trainer can help children gain confidence on the ice.

Snowboarding is wildly popular, especially for those who love the outdoors.

Gear: Snowboard, bindings, ASTM-certified helmet, waterproof gloves, goggles and boots. Like skiing, you can rent until you're sure you want to invest in gear.

Curling is a fast-growing sport, and curling clubs are popping up around the country. It's a fun way to socialize and compete with friends or family.

Gear: Rubber-soled shoes, curling broom, gloves, slider and gripper for shoes (or invest in curling shoes). **Optional:** helmet and stabilizer.

City **Events**

Guided Meditation for Aligning Heart and Mind
Monday, February 2
9:00 am - 10:00 am
Register here

Your Plan is on the Move - Deferred Compensation
Thursday, February 5
10:00 am – 11:00 am
Join here

Technology & Exercise
Thursday, February 5
11:00 am - 12:00 pm
Register here

Adapting to Management and Leadership Change
Thursday, Tuesday, February 10
11:30 am - 12:30 pm
Register here

Developing a Growth Mindset
Thursday, February 12
12:00 pm - 1:00 pm
Register here

Love Your Heart
Monday, February 16
12:00 pm - 1:00 pm
Register here

Communicating Change to Employees
Tuesday, February 17
12:30 pm - 1:30 pm
Register here

High Blood Pressure
Tuesday, February 17
9:00 am - 10:00 am
Register here

Smart Moves Toolkit: personalbest.com/extras/26V2tools. Printable download: Heartbreakers You Can Live Without.

Dementia-Hearing Loss Link

By Eric Endlich, PhD

Hearing loss, one of the most common health issues of aging, is more than just an inconvenience. Recent research shows that if you start losing your hearing, you also have a higher chance of developing dementia. Even mild hearing loss nearly doubles the risk of dementia, and the risk of dementia increases sharply with the severity of hearing loss.

Scientists have a few theories about why this happens:

- Decreased hearing forces the brain to work harder to process sound, diverting resources away from memory and other mental functions.
- Hearing loss may cause the brain to shrink faster.
- Those with untreated hearing loss often withdraw socially, and social isolation can further accelerate mental decline.

Not all types of hearing loss are treatable, and in fact sometimes hearing loss is an early symptom of dementia. But for many people, preventing and treating hearing loss can make a difference. Studies show that people who use hearing aids have a lower risk of dementia compared to those who leave hearing problems untreated. And wearing ear protection in loud environments can reduce the chance of hearing loss in the first place.

The bottom line: Protecting your hearing may also help protect your brain. Regular hearing checks and early use of hearing aids are not only vital for communication and quality of life — they may also be an important step in keeping your mind working at its best.

The Truth About Celiac Disease

Celiac disease is an immune disorder that can damage the small intestine when someone eats gluten, a protein in wheat, barley and rye. Everyday favorites, such as bread, pasta and cookies, usually contain gluten, along with many other products you might not expect, such as some lip balms, toothpastes and supplements. Celiac disease is often misunderstood.

Here are some common celiac disease myths and the truth behind them:

Myth: Children usually outgrow it. **Truth:** Celiac disease is lifelong and requires a gluten-free diet for life. It can be diagnosed at any age, but it is most commonly diagnosed in adults between ages 40 and 60. It is hereditary, meaning it runs in families.

Myth: It is rare. **Truth:** Celiac affects about two million Americans and one in 100 people globally. Many people with celiac haven't been diagnosed so the number could be much higher.

Myth: It only affects the gastrointestinal system. **Truth:** Unfortunately, the disease is hard to diagnose because symptoms vary among individuals. While it can cause GI symptoms, such as gas pain, diarrhea, constipation and bloating, celiac can also cause migraines, joint pain and brain fog.

Myth: You can transfer gluten through kissing. **Truth:** A 2025 Columbia University study found that it is unlikely that enough gluten will transfer by kissing someone who has eaten a gluten-containing product.

Myth: Everyone can benefit by going gluten free. **Truth:** According to health experts, avoiding gluten if you don't have celiac disease (or a wheat allergy or gluten intolerance) is not necessary or healthy. In fact, some gluten-free products may not contain enough fiber, vitamins and minerals for a healthy diet.

Myth: If you feel sick after eating gluten, you have celiac disease. **Truth:** While this is possible, some people have non-celiac gluten sensitivity, which is a different condition that does not trigger antibodies or cause intestinal damage.

Ever feel lightheaded?

The sensation is usually not linked to a serious health condition, but it can be annoying and sometimes frightening.

Besides anxiety and low blood sugar, common lightheadedness causes include:

Dehydration: If you aren't drinking adequate amounts of fluids, blood volume can drop, decreasing blood flow to the brain and producing lightheadedness.

Orthostatic hypotension: This type of low blood pressure triggers lightheadedness if you stand up too quickly.

Medications: Lightheadedness can be a drug side effect. Contact your health care provider to see if you should change or stop a medication. Also, ask your provider or pharmacist about any over-the-counter medications you take that might cause lightheadedness.

Talk to your health care provider if lightheadedness is chronic or worsening. It may be a symptom of anemia, hypoglycemia or another health condition.

Study: Walk More to Lower High Blood Pressure Risks

Walking can be great medicine for people with high blood pressure. That's the conclusion of a study of more than 32,000 people diagnosed with hypertension who were enrolled in the UK Biobank Database.

The research, published in the European Journal of Cardiology, found that men and women with high blood pressure who walked with greater intensity and speed lowered their risk for serious cardiovascular problems, according to the Mackenzie Wearables Research Hub at the University of Sydney, Australia.

The researchers found people without high blood pressure also significantly reduced their odds of having future heart attacks, heart failure and strokes by taking more than 3,000 daily steps and walking at a faster pace.

tip of the month

Milk and Bone Health

Did you know that 99% of calcium in your body is stored in your bones? This essential mineral helps keep your skeleton strong, and you need to eat calcium-rich foods daily to support bone health and reduce osteoporosis risk. Aim for 1,000 to 1,200 mg of calcium daily. Dairy-based foods, such as milk, yogurt and cheese, are natural calcium sources (milk has 300 mg of calcium per cup). Plus, most milk is fortified with vitamin D, which helps your body better absorb calcium. Dairy also supplies protein, another component for healthy bones. Not a dairy fan? Get the winning calcium and vitamin D combo from canned fish with bones, such as salmon or sardines.

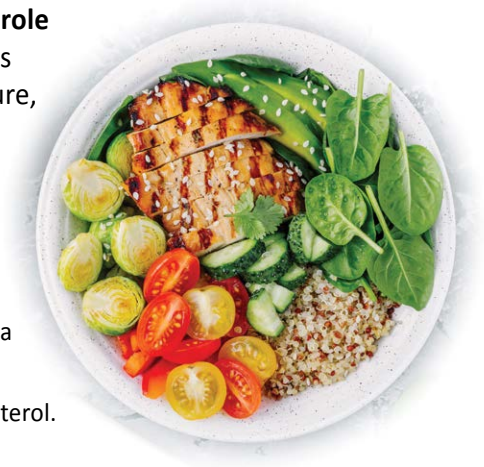
eating smart

Heart Disease Prevention on a Plate

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

February is American Heart Month.

Research shows that what you eat can play a powerful role in preventing heart disease. A heart-healthy diet focuses on nutrient-rich foods that support healthy blood pressure, blood sugar, cholesterol and weight management.



As you plan your diet, you'll want to think about ingredients in nutritious meals and snacks. Build healthy plates with:

Fruits and vegetables: These are packed with fiber, vitamins, minerals and antioxidants that reduce inflammation and protect the heart. Aim for a variety of fresh, frozen or canned options in a rainbow of colors daily.

Whole grains: Fiber in whole grains helps lower LDL (bad) cholesterol. Try oats, pot barley and whole wheat.

Lean proteins: Choose poultry, fish and dairy foods such as Greek yogurt. Enjoy fatty fish, such as salmon and sardines, twice a week for the cardio-protective omega-3 fats. Beans, lentils and tofu are excellent plant-based options, too.

A balanced plate made of half fruits and vegetables, one-quarter whole grains and one-quarter lean protein is a proven way to lower heart disease risk and support lifelong health.

When snacking, include the foods listed above in fun combinations, such as berries with yogurt, hummus with vegetables or whole-grain crackers with mashed salmon. Or snack on a small handful of nuts, which are linked to a 25% lower risk of heart disease and an 18% lower risk of stroke.

You can also cut back on foods and drinks linked to an increased risk of heart disease:

- **Sugary drinks and sweets** — Excess sugar contributes to obesity, diabetes and heart disease.
- **Ultra-processed foods** — Items high in refined carbs, sugar and salt are linked to increased heart disease risk. Cut back on fast food, salty snacks and baked goods.
- **Alcohol** — Excessive alcohol intake can lead to high blood pressure, heart failure or stroke.

easy recipe

Healthy Ranch Dip with Vegetables

1 cup plain non-fat Greek yogurt
½ teaspoon garlic powder
½ teaspoon onion powder
½ teaspoon dried dill
¼ teaspoon salt
1 tsp extra-virgin olive oil
¼ teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
1 tbsp fresh chopped chives (or green onions)
1 cup fresh sliced cucumber
1 cup carrot sticks

In a serving bowl, mix Greek yogurt with garlic powder, onion powder, dill, salt, oil and Worcestershire sauce. **Stir** to combine. **Top** with chives and serve with cucumber and carrot sticks for dipping.

Makes 2 servings. Per serving:

121 calories | 8g protein | 3g total fat | 0.5g saturated fat | 2g mono fat | 0.5g poly fat | 16g carbohydrate | 13g sugar (0g added sugar) | 2g fiber | 435mg sodium

News & Notes

Plan Transition: The City of Seattle Voluntary Deferred Compensation Plan and Trust will transition from Nationwide to Empower on February 5, 2026. See the Transition Guide, FAQs and schedule of Empower Transition meetings on **City of Seattle Voluntary Deferred Compensation Plan - Human Resources | seattle.gov**. Questions? Contact Deferred Compensation plan staff at **deferredcompquestions@seattle.gov**.

Watch for the 1095-C Tax Form: Form 1095-C will be mailed to your home early February. Keep this "Healthcare W-2" for your records.

2025 Health and Day Care Flexible Spending Account (FSA) Claims: File any remaining 2025 FSA claims by March 31, 2026, with Navia Benefit Solutions. Submit paperless claims online or through the MyNavia mobile app.

Double Your Chances of Quitting for Good: Quit for Life is available to you and your covered adult family member at no cost to you as part of your employee benefits. With free nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) options like patches or gum, you can double your chances of quitting tobacco and nicotine for good. Visit **quitnow.net** or call **1-866-QUIT-4-LIFE**, TTY 711 (1-866-784-8484).

expert advice

Q: What is a silent heart attack?

A: A silent heart attack is a heart attack without the typical symptoms. No symptoms, mild symptoms or atypical symptoms, such as heartburn or flu-like symptoms, may occur. Since the signs normally associated with a heart attack, such as chest pain or trouble breathing, do not happen, people often do not know they've had a heart attack.

How to detect it: Health care providers may diagnose a silent heart attack, sometimes weeks or months later, using blood tests, an electrocardiogram, echocardiogram or a nuclear stress test.

The cause: A silent heart attack is usually caused by a blocked coronary artery. This damages the heart muscle just like during a regular heart attack. Afterward, there is an increased risk of having another heart attack, impaired heart function or heart failure.

Risk factors: Much like a regular heart attack, factors that increase the risk for having a silent heart attack include diabetes, obesity, smoking, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and a family history of heart disease.— Elizabeth Smoots, MD

Protect Your Treasures

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

Whether you own rare stamps or coins, trading cards, art or vintage memorabilia, it's important to proactively safeguard your assets against losses from theft, damage or market fluctuations.

Here are steps you can take to protect yourself from loss:

Appraisals are generally necessary for an insurance company to offer a policy on your assets. Keep documentation of the purchase prices, certificates of authenticity (where applicable), and prior appraisals in a secure place.

Insure your collection. Most homeowner or rental insurance policies have a low coverage cap: for example, $1,500 for jewelry. Consider purchasing a rider for your policy that increases the coverage amount for specific items. You may also want to purchase a specialty collectibles insurance policy, which can often be customized to fit your specific collection and its appraised value.

Maintain a detailed digital record of your collection, including photos, descriptions, serial numbers (if applicable) and valuation records.

Is Your Babysitter Emergency-Ready?

You've stocked the fridge and given your number to your babysitter, but do they know what to do in an emergency? Even the best child minders need a quick rundown on what to do if something unexpected happens.

Here's a list you can provide:

- ✓ Your phone number, as well as numbers for a trusted friend, neighbors or a relative as a backup.
- ✓ Your address and cross streets in case the babysitter needs to call emergency services.
- ✓ Other important phone numbers, such as poison control, the children's doctor, police and fire departments.
- ✓ House rules, such as viewing media and bedtimes.
- ✓ Medical information regarding the children's health issues, allergies and medications.
- ✓ Rules regarding play equipment such as trampolines. **Note:** If you have a pool, make sure your babysitter knows the rules, and knows they are never to take their eyes off the children, not even for a minute.
- ✓ Show the babysitter where the fire extinguisher, flashlights and first aid kits are located. Point out different exits to use for emergency escape routes. If you have a family fire plan, including a meeting place, share it.
- ✓ Provide where you'll be and what time you expect to be back. Update as necessary.
- ✓ Let them know if you are expecting someone or a delivery; otherwise, instruct them to not open the door to anyone without approval.

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