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It Gets Easier

"This is the perfect time of year to start a healthy new habit."

Did you know that it can take up to six weeks to form a new habit? That means any new exercise routine you want to start, any healthy meal plan you conceive, any new outlook on life you want to try can take up to six weeks to be really cemented into your daily life.

At the start of something new, six weeks can feel like a really long time. But time is relative. It takes us longer to put out one issue of *The Art of Growing Young* than it takes you to make a new habit. The more committed you are, the faster the days will go by. And the effort you put into making a healthy new habit will reward you many times over. Once you’ve crossed that invisible line, it will be much easier to stick to your healthy routine because habits are hard to break.

This is the perfect time of year to start a healthy new habit. There are no busy holidays to add stress to your life, the kids are on vacation with fewer obligations and the days are longer with more sun giving your body a dose of feel-good vitamin D. During this relatively calm time of the year, you might find you have the time and energy to get past those first six weeks. So I’d like to encourage you to start a new healthy habit right now.

Find a calendar, look six weeks ahead and make a note that says, “It gets easier here.” Focus on that idea and chances are, when that day comes, you will have already formed your healthy new habit because for some of us, a habit is formed in only three weeks.

To ensure your new routine is an unbreakable habit after six weeks, make sure you pick something you enjoy. If you enjoy walking around the neighborhood, make a habit of walking every evening. If you like cooking new foods, make a habit of cooking a healthy dinner every night.

The best time to start a new healthy habit is right now. So let’s all find something new to try and have a fun and healthy new habit formed before the next issue comes out.

Dwight L. McKeon, M.D.
Thinking about tying the knot but not sure if it’s right for you?

Here’s one benefit you might not have considered—you’ll live longer. According to research, marriage can extend life by up to 30 percent. One reason is marriage tends to put a stop to reckless and dangerous behavior. But getting hitched also provides a constant companion, which contributes to good health in a number of ways: it prevents loneliness, which can lead to depression; offers support during times of stress; and contributes to general happiness, which is good for a healthy mind and body.

Nutritional News

Sleeping

Sleeping your life away may contribute to a shorter life span, according to some preliminary research. The study found that the optimal amount of sleep for most people is 7 to 8 hours every night. Either too little or too much contributed to health problems that can actually lead to a shorter life.

Junk food cravings

When junk food cravings strike, focus your mind on the food to avoid eating it. Although this sounds contradictory, according to a seven-week study, a group of participants used “mindfulness meditation” to successfully suppress food cravings. By learning to recognize, accept and experience cravings rather than simply suppressing them, participants were more successful at holding those cravings off. Researchers believe this is more effective because using willpower alone often leads to an obsessive preoccupation with the food.

Help fight chronic stress

by relaxing with mellow music. According to a recent study published by the National Institutes of Health, daily sessions of music-guided, slow breathing significantly reduce blood pressure. During the study, people who inhaled and exhaled rhythmically to slow, soothing music for 30 minutes a day were able to lower their systolic blood pressure by four points after just six months.

Phytosterols

There’s finally a food additive that might be good for you. More and more manufacturers are adding phytosterols to their products. A recent review of more than 80 studies discovered that getting about two grams of phytosterols every day helped lower bad cholesterol by as much as 8.8 percent in most studies. The nutrients came from both enriched foods and supplements. Nuts, seeds, whole grains and plant-based cooking oils—such as olive, peanut and sesame oils—also naturally contain phytosterols.
“Stretching exercises can help improve your flexibility, which may help improve your performance and decrease your risk of injury during exercise.”
When it’s time to exercise, how much emphasis do you put on stretching before you begin? And how often do you go through a little stretching exercise as you get out of bed in the morning? Many of us are guilty of ignoring the importance of stretching before and after exercise. Stretching hamstrings and calves should be more than just an afterthought if you have a few extra minutes. Even if you’re going to spend only a few minutes on a treadmill, taking time to stretch properly first will help improve your workout.

Stretching exercises can help improve your flexibility, which may help improve your performance and decrease your risk of injury during exercise. But it can also enhance your workout in ways you may not have realized. Whether it involves a yoga or tai chi class or simply a series of stretches, flexibility exercises benefit the body in numerous ways. But you want to be careful when you are doing your stretching. Never try to extend your stretch beyond what is comfortable to you. Too great a stretch can be just as injurious as over exercising.

Regular stretching will help keep joints flexible and create a wider range of movement, which can enhance many physical activities—runners who stretch may have longer, smoother strides; weight lifters can find the movements required for certain lifts easier; swimmers may find they can better perform a once-difficult stroke.

It’s also been shown that a little bit of light stretching before an exercise can increase blood flow to muscles. Once your exercise routine really starts to get going, these same muscles will need to be supported with more oxygen. Since oxygen is carried throughout the body by blood cells, stretching can actually help the body meet this big increase in demand.

Even though it may increase blood flow when you need it a little bit later, don’t think of stretching as a warm-up. Spend a few minutes performing low-intensity exercises such as walking or light jogging before you start stretching. Some research even suggests stretching after exercise is far more important than before. Whenever you choose to do your stretching, be sure to include all major muscle groups. Focus on your calves, thighs, hips, lower back, neck and shoulders. Pay special attention to the muscles and joints you will use most during your workout.

Stretching should be slow and smooth. Do not “bounce” to maximize your stretch length. This can create small tears in your muscles and ligaments. Instead, gently increase your stretch and hold for 30 seconds and then release. Feeling tension is to be expected, but if you feel pain release the stretch slightly. Repeat each stretch several times.

Stretching can improve your workout routine, but it has other benefits as well—especially as you age. It’s simply easier to reach the top shelf if you can fully extend your arms and legs. Regular stretching activities throughout life will help keep this possible.

Stretching also helps maintain balance. Activities such as yoga and tai chi are especially great for this. These low-impact activities gently stretch and strengthen muscles and joints—two critical elements related to balance. Without taking measures to safeguard against it, balance tends to deteriorate with age, which contributes to falls. Exercise helps maintain muscle mass for strength, and stretching helps maintain balance, both of which help safeguard against dangerous falls and strains.

Stretching will not magically prevent all injuries. But regular and proper stretching will go a long way toward maximizing the effectiveness and safety of your exercise routine, which will benefit you now and for years to come.
The two biggest reasons we eat are to fill our stomachs when we are hungry and occupy our minds when we’re unhappy. From a health and nutrition standpoint, eating for nourishment when we are hungry is the only time and the only healthy reason for turning to food. But that’s not always why we snack. We often look at food as a way to find comfort (consciously or unconsciously) when we are feeling sad, dealing with a problem, overly stressed or simply bored.

To simplify things, we can say that emotional eating tends to happen for one of three reasons: a person is emotionally upset, a person is celebrating happiness or a person is bored. Although this is an oversimplification, putting your feelings into these three categories will help you better recognize and transform your mood without turning to food for relief.

It’s not a coincidence that the strongest cravings for junk food occur when you are at your lowest point emotionally. Food is one of the most powerful mood altering substances sought by people in distress. We binge on comfort foods such as ice cream, candy bars and deep-fried meals because we find pleasure in tasting these unhealthy foods. It might provide some relief in the short term, but turning to food for emotional reasons is far from the healthiest way to deal with stress. In fact, research has shown that foods high in fat, salt and sugar activate the brain’s dopamine reward system, just as addictive drugs such as cocaine and nicotine do, and may truly be addictive for people born with, or who have developed, low dopamine systems in their brains.

Emotional eating is not necessarily always due to negative thoughts. Have you ever had a slice of cake you didn’t need during a birthday party or celebrated a promotion with a big meal at a restaurant? In cultures all over the world, food is very much a part of celebrations. In many western societies, the foods we bring out for celebrations are the least healthy options available. In times past, celebratory foods were scarce, and therefore not often consumed.

Food can certainly add a delicious kick to a celebration. And there is no reason not to let yourself enjoy the taste sensations of birthday cake on occasion. Just remember not to overdo it, and don’t let the food become the focal point.

Eating out of boredom can be as harmful as eating out of emotional distress. Everybody finds himself or herself idly snacking on junk food from time to time. Have you ever found yourself, on a Saturday afternoon, looking through the refrigerator for a snack, only to realize you’re not even hungry?

No matter what the cause, once the binge is over and we’re faced with the empty ice cream carton, we often feel worse than before. Unfortunately, this negative feeling can stay with a person until the next meal occurs and cause yet another unhealthy choice. When you are in this mode, it will help to try to remember the last time you did this and how bad you felt after you overate. Then try to remember a nonfood experience that left you feeling satisfied and happy.

There are many ways to transform your mood without turning to food. Before you can change your emotional eating habits, you must first become more aware of your feelings. During quiet times throughout the day, take a moment to assess your current mood. When you begin to monitor your mood on a more regular basis, you may be surprised by what you find, how you feel and what actions you have been taking to deal with those feelings.

As you become more in tune with your feelings, you will simply be more aware of how you feel at different times of the day. Eventually you will see patterns and be able to better
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Mix together in blender.
predict how you will react in different situations. The next time you crave a snack or find yourself reaching for a pint of ice cream, stop and take a moment to assess your current mood. Are you bored or unhappy? If so, you may have just caught yourself turning to food as a way to boost your mood. Don’t worry if you find yourself in this situation. It is exactly where you want to be because it means you are aware of your actions. Now it is time to make a healthy change.

When you realize you are looking for food to boost your mood, make a conscious effort to avoid snacks. Start by removing yourself from the situation. Get away from the snack bar or junk food aisle. Instead, talk to a friend, get some exercise, listen to music, breathe deeply or employ any other stress-reducing, happiness-inducing activity that you find helpful.

Exercise is a wonderful way to beat the blues because it occupies your mind and causes the body to release natural “feel good” chemicals. Listening to uplifting music, meditating, reading a favorite book, treating yourself to a massage—there is literally no wrong activity to turn to as long as it boosts your mood and helps you stay away from junk foods.

As for eating out of boredom, the best way to cut down on those cravings is to occupy your mind. It helps to be aware that these cravings tend to strike on lazy afternoons when there isn’t much to do. If you find yourself beginning to feel listless, be proactive. Go for a walk, read a book, call a friend, turn on your favorite music—do anything to remove yourself from your current state of mind. Physically removing yourself from your current surroundings will help even more. Just taking a short walk can profoundly shift your mood.

“A healthy diet can also help you avoid the dietary missteps that sometimes come with feeling down. There are several nutrients linked to mood. Both vitamin D and omega-3 fatty acids have received attention in studies due to this link. One study specifically on omega-3 fatty acids found that participants with the lowest amounts of these unsaturated fats were more likely to report symptoms of depression and view the world negatively. Moreover, a generally healthy diet will provide your body with the nutritional support it needs to more effectively deal with stress and sadness, which in turn will help cut down on the amount of times you feel the need to turn to food for comfort.

Finally, if you do find you are eating for the wrong reason, don’t let yourself feel guilty. Feelings of guilt and self-loathing are mental poison. Instead of beating yourself up over a candy bar, live in the moment and acknowledge the satisfaction that comes from the treat. Embrace that feeling and look forward to your next chance to make a healthy choice.”
“It’s not a question of which one is best, but of how to use both to maximize your health and reach your goals.”
Is it easier to lose weight and get fit by dieting or by exercising? Who says it has to be one or the other? Diet and exercise have been put in two separate categories for far too long. The truth is a healthy diet will complement a good exercise routine, and physical fitness will impact your dietary needs. It’s not a question of which one is best, but of how to use both to maximize your health and reach your goals.

Eating healthy to cut calories out of your diet is a surefire way to reach a smaller dress size. But it’s entirely possible to be thin and unhealthy. Similarly, running five miles a day can keep weight off, but it doesn’t necessarily mean your cholesterol level will be as low as it should be. That’s why it’s important to combine diet and exercise to keep your body healthy all over.

The basis of any healthy diet should be primarily fresh fruits and vegetables. Regularly eating a wide range of these natural foods will help ensure your body has the nutritional support it needs to stay healthy. Fruits and vegetables are rich in antioxidants, which are needed to combat oxidative stress. Because a particularly stressful workout can increase the body’s need for antioxidants, eating fruits and vegetables is just one of the many ways diet and exercise go together.

Protein from chicken, fish, lean deli meats or high-quality protein supplements provides the body with the amino acids it needs to build and repair muscle mass after a workout. While resistance training is known to be primarily responsible for building new muscle, your strength-building workout will not be nearly as effective without a diet that contains these critical amino acids—and the best time to consume them is 30 minutes after a workout.

From getting dressed in the morning to driving home from work or running on the treadmill—when it comes down to it, every action throughout the day requires energy. The more intense the action is, the more energy it takes. The only way to supply your body with the stamina it needs for a healthy workout is to eat foods that provide a long-lasting source of energy.

Carbohydrates provide the body with energy. Simple carbohydrates from sugar, junk foods and refined wheat products are rapidly converted into blood sugar, which gives the body a quick burst of energy followed by a sluggish lull known as a sugar crash. On the other hand, complex carbohydrates take much longer for the body to convert into energy, which means they give the body a longer lasting, much steadier source of energy. This is what you need for an effective workout. Complex carbohydrates are found in whole grains, fruits, vegetables and legumes.

Exercise affects diet too. The more physically demanding your lifestyle, the more calories your body will be able to burn. Most adults need to consume between 1,600 and 2,000 calories per day. This number changes naturally throughout life and can fluctuate dramatically depending on lifestyle. An Olympic or professional athlete may consume as many as 10,000 calories every day. That’s far more than is needed by the average person who is concerned about his or her health. But it demonstrates the need to properly balance caloric intake with physical activity level.

Your personal goals will change how you use diet and exercise to complement one another. If your goal is strictly to lose weight, you will need to exercise more and consume fewer calories. If your goal is to build muscle mass, you will need to focus on consuming lean sources of protein while engaging in resistance training.

Diet and exercise can either complement one another, making both more effective, or they can work against each other, making both less effective. Don’t focus on just one aspect of healthy living. Utilizing both to maximize your health and wellness will help you reach your fitness goals much faster than you thought possible.
In the wild, animals eat a natural diet consisting largely of grasses. They may also forage for legumes, shoots, leaves, cacti, acorns, fruit and other plants native to the area—but their principal diet is often grass. This diet is what gives venison, bison and other animals a healthy ratio of omega-6 to omega-3 acids. It’s also a far cry from what most commercial farms feed their animals. In some respects, the meat we consume from beef raised on a farm is not very natural at all. But to really understand why this is so important, we need to look far back into history.

The human body requires a balance of omega-6 and omega-3 fats. Our hunter-gatherer ancestors most likely lived on a ratio near 1:1. After agriculture was developed some 10,000 years ago, the ratio rose to about 4.1 (omega-6 to omega-3). Today, it’s between 20:1 and 50:1. This is due in large part to our practice of fattening our meat animals with grain. When animals are sold by the pound, fattening them with grain is a cheap and easy way to make more money. This process is unnatural and changes the nutritional content of the animal’s meat. While animals that are raised on a natural diet of grasses have a ratio of omega-6 to omega-3 of about 4:1, animals that have been raised on corn and grain have a ratio close to 20:1. That’s a big difference, and it can have a major impact on your body’s omega-6 to omega-3 ratio. If you also consume warm-weather vegetable oils, such as corn, soy, sesame, sunflower and safflower—essentially all except olive and macadamia nut (which are omega-9) and coconut and palm (which are saturated oils)—it’s easy to get your diet up to a scary 50:1 ratio of omega-6 to omega-3; that’s fertile ground for inflammation!

Venison, elk, bison and other wild game generally have a much healthier omega-6 to omega-3 ratio. But you don’t have to be a hunter to find these healthier sources of meat. As public demand for better options has grown, so have the number of farms dedicated to organically raised animals raised on a natural diet of grass. These products may cost a little more, but as demand continues to rise and more supply is developed, the prices will go down. And the little bit extra you pay at the register is worth far more to your body.

Most people who are concerned about their health know that fish is an omega-3-rich alternative source of protein to beef. In fact, the omega-3 content of fish is probably its biggest selling point. However, you might not be aware that, just like beef, the omega-3 content of fish depends greatly on diet. Omega-3 fatty acids start in algae, which is consumed by small fish, which are in turn consumed by bigger fish. This goes on with each successive fish containing a higher concentration of omega-3, until a fisherman catches the tuna, salmon or mackerel that you buy at the store.

Fish that are farm-raised are fed a mixture of corn and soy, which renders them almost completely void of omega-3 fatty acids. So in terms of the fat you get from them, they are not much different from farm-raised beef. It’s important to take the time to inspect packaging to see if fish is farm-raised or wild. Or, if you buy fresh fish from your supermarket’s meat counter, ask the attendant if the fish is wild. If it’s farm-raised, you might be better off skipping it.

Why is a healthy omega-6 to omega-3 balance so important? The simple answer is because not all fat is harmful. Some fats, such as omega-3s, are actually quite healthy. For example, the native Inuit people of Greenland consume a diet that is extremely rich in fatty fish and seal and whale blubber. At first glance, a diet so rich in fat would seem unhealthy. However, these foods are full of omega-3 fatty acids. Studies have shown that the omega-3-rich diet eaten by the Inuit people tends to result in relatively high concentrations of omega-3 fatty acids in their blood. Even though their staple foods are high in fat content, it is the health-supporting omega-3 fat.

Good fats are an essential part of any healthy diet. Avoiding an excess of saturated fats and all trans fats is equally as important. One way to help ensure you consume the right amount of the good fats and avoid as much of the bad ones as possible is to find sources of wild fish and natural, grass-fed meat. This will help keep your body at the omega-6-to-omega-3 ratio it needs to thrive.
“Make your own fresh-brewed iced tea, and sweeten it with a splash of 100 percent fruit juice instead of sugar. The fruit juice has natural sugars and will add a dash of flavor to your drink.”
Cutting calories doesn’t require days on end of eating nothing but salad. There are lots of small ways to cut calories. As the days and weeks add up, these small ways can yield big results. Here is a list of 15 easy and painless ways to cut calories from your daily diet.

1. Instead of using whole milk in your cereal, coffee and recipes, switch to nonfat milk. If you just can’t make that change, switch to 2 percent first. Once you are used to the taste and consistency of 2 percent, step down to 1 percent and then again to nonfat for the lowest calorie milk option.

2. Share your dessert. If you find yourself ending a meal with a sweet treat, offer half of it to your dining companion. This will instantly cut by half the number of calories you would have eaten. Better yet, get one dessert and share it with the whole table. Also consider sharing your main course at restaurants. Often, the portions they serve are more than most people would eat at home anyway.

3. Cut out one fast food meal a week. Start eliminating fast food meals by substituting one homemade meal for a purchased one every week. Just doing this once a week will help, but the more times you are able to substitute a healthy, homemade meal in place of a drive-through meal, the more calories, fats, sugars, salt and unnatural ingredients you will avoid eating.

4. Control snack sizes by pouring your serving into a bowl rather than eating straight from the bag. It’s easy to accidentally overeat when munching straight from the container. By putting your snack into a bowl, you will have greater control over the number of calories you take in.

5. Read food labels. You can learn a lot from the nutritional information on food labels. Pay attention to serving size and you may realize you’ve been eating three or four servings of a snack when you wanted only one. Comparing labels on several choices will also help you find the healthiest option.

6. Make your own fresh-brewed iced tea, and sweeten it with a splash of 100 percent fruit juice instead of sugar. The fruit juice has natural sugars and will add a dash of flavor to your drink.

7. Satisfy a sweet tooth with fruit instead of candy. Apples, oranges, watermelon and other fruits are sweetened with natural sugar and provide a bounty of micronutrients, and they are far healthier than a candy bar full of refined sugar and saturated fats and no micronutrients.

8. Cut soda intake by drinking sparkling water with a dash of fresh lemon or lime. You will still get the carbonation you are used to but with only a fraction of the sugar and calories. Once your palate no longer craves soda, switch again to fresh, pure water for the healthiest option.
Boost your skin’s health and maintain its balance while addressing the signs of premature aging. Revive your skin to reveal a vibrant, healthy glow and rediscover skin that is healthy, balanced and youthful.
9. Trim all excess fat off your meat before cooking it. Or if you are eating at a restaurant, be sure to trim the fat off your steak or pork chop and set it aside before you begin eating.

10. Don’t deep fry anything. Bake, broil or grill fish and chicken instead of deep frying. If you just can’t go without the fried flavor, coat your meat in a spice rub, olive oil (use a spray) or nut crumbles and bake it to make “oven fried” chicken or fish. Your taste buds won’t know the difference, but your heart and waistline will.

11. Ask for a to-go box as soon as your meal arrives at a restaurant. Immediately put half of your order in the box and set it aside for later. Meal sizes at restaurants have ballooned in recent years adding hundreds of extra calories to plates. Splitting one order into two meals is an easy way to cut back.

12. Start your meal with a salad. According to recent research, eating a small salad before the main course can reduce the amount of calories in a meal. Be careful of creamy and sweetened salad dressings. Their calorie content can fool you. Basic vinegar and olive oil are usually the best for you.

“Start your meal with a salad. According to recent research, eating a small salad before the main course can reduce the amount of calories in a meal.”

13. Stop eating when you are full, not when your plate is empty. As children, many people were told to clean their plates. This concept carries over into adulthood, but it’s not healthy when your plate consists of a burger and fries, or even just too much food. Stop eating when you are full and you will avoid extra fat and calories at every meal.

14. Drink a full glass of water before you begin eating. You won’t eat as much if there is less room for the food. The water not only takes up space in your stomach but also aides in the digestion process.

15. Buy light and fat-free versions of foods, but read the labels carefully. Many of these processed foods have carbohydrate substitutes in them. Switching to these healthier options is a painless way to cut down on calories.
Herbs & Supplements
Vitamin E is well known as an important nutrient because of its antioxidant properties. Modern science has revealed the secret behind this powerful nutrient. Vitamin E includes eight different compounds (four tocopherols and four tocotrienols), each of which has unique actions that complement and support one another.

The tocopherols and tocotrienols in vitamin E are fat-soluble antioxidants, which means they are able to travel through the areas of the body that are made of lipids. Among these areas are the brain, nervous system and eyes—as well as the membranes surrounding all 100 trillion cells in our bodies. Due to its ability to permeate eye tissue, vitamin E has been extensively studied for its role in age-related macular degeneration. One of the reasons vitamin E is considered such a powerful antioxidant may be due to the ways in which the tocopherols and tocotrienols complement, support and balance one another after they enter the human body.

The tocopherols in vitamin E are named simply alpha, beta, gamma and delta. Research has shown that while the alpha, beta, gamma and delta tocopherols were all effective antioxidants, when they were combined in a specific ratio they displayed far better antioxidant properties and were absorbed much better. This shouldn’t be surprising because scientists have observed time after time the synergistic effects of combining antioxidant complexes.

The tocotrienol compounds are equally important in vitamin E, although until recently they have been studied far less than tocopherols. In research involving many conditions from diabetes to cholesterol levels, the effects of tocotrienols on the body have been examined by scientists in numerous ways. While further research is needed to understand fully how these compounds affect the body, many doctors and nutritional experts believe these studies show much promise.

It’s easy to think of vitamin E as a single compound. Most of the time that’s all we see on nutritional information labels. Fortunately, even though there are actually eight compounds in vitamin E, the sources remain the same. Many forms of wheat and nuts and their oils are rich in vitamin E. Palm oil is an especially rich source of tocotrienols. So are dark green leafy vegetables, broccoli, mangos, tomatoes, kiwi and other fruits and vegetables.

Despite its many health benefits and the abundance of sources, many people do not consume the recommended amount of vitamin E. It’s generally recommended that people consume between four and 15 milligrams of vitamin E per day, depending on age. If your diet doesn’t contain enough vitamin E-rich fruits and vegetables, it may be prudent to take vitamin E supplements to ensure your body is receiving the nutritional support it needs to function at optimum levels.

Antioxidants such as vitamin E are critical to combat free radicals, which are molecules that have lost one electron of a pair. These unstable molecules will steal electrons from other molecules in the body, causing a damaging chain reaction—what we call oxidative stress. To prevent and protect against oxidative stress, our bodies need antioxidants to combat these free radical attacks.

Oxidative stress from free radicals has been associated with nearly every disease related to aging. In some cases, the problems we once thought were unavoidable side effects of aging are actually more related to free-radical buildup and a lack of antioxidant protection. It’s clear that the antioxidant compounds in vitamin E, as well as other antioxidants and nutrients, can be of great benefit to the body.

As with many nutrients, to understand fully how it works, we have to look much deeper. The further we look, the better we understand how the eight compounds in vitamin E affect our health for the better.
“It’s often recommended that children eat two servings of fresh fish every week.”
Because children’s bodies are rapidly growing and developing, their daily diet must contain everything needed to support these changes and promote healthy growth. One important nutrient is the omega-3 fatty acid, docosahexaenoic acid (DHA). Although it’s only one of the many nutrients your child needs, it is an especially critical one because DHA has been linked to healthy brain function and development.

DHA is important even before your child is born. In the womb, the critical nutrient passes from mother to fetus through the umbilical cord. Increased DHA intake by mothers may help a fetus to develop a healthy, functioning nervous system because DHA is found throughout the entire nervous system. This includes the brain and synapses, which are specialized junctions in nerve cells that send signals to each other and other parts of the body, including muscle tissue.

DHA continues to be important after birth. Several recent studies have shown infants who are exposed to omega-3 fatty acids through their mother’s breast milk may grow up with stronger mental faculties. If true, this is likely due to the fact that a significant portion of the brain is comprised of DHA.

Closely related to cognitive function, DHA has been linked to mood as well (as has the related omega-3 fatty acid, EPA). Higher amounts of DHA intake have been associated with elevated moods in people of all ages, which means an omega-3-rich diet could be especially important during the tumultuous teenage years when depression and moodiness are common—also a time when junk foods tend to invade teenage diets.

It’s becoming a widely accepted concept that for healthy emotional and intellectual development during childhood when rapid brain growth takes place, DHA must be present in adequate quantities.

There are high levels of DHA in the eyes too, specifically the retinas. A DHA deficiency during infancy could negatively impact eyesight. This is one reason it is critical that breast-feeding mothers have an adequate intake of DHA (at least 500 mg/day).

To help your child consume adequate amounts of DHA, make fish a regular meal. It’s often recommended that children eat two servings of fresh fish every week. Unfortunately, fish can sometimes be a tough sell because many children are picky eaters. Try different approaches such as fish tacos, tuna sandwiches, salmon patties and oven “fried” (baked with nut crumbles or something similar) fillets. Don’t go heavy on tuna, as it tends to be one of the higher mercury-containing fish; canned light tuna usually has less mercury than albacore tuna. Limit tuna to no more than once a week. Small fish, such as herring and sardines, have the lowest mercury and other environmental toxin content.

Lean cuts of meat from animals that have been grass fed can also contain DHA. Although it may not be in as high a concentration as fish, these meats can contribute to a DHA-healthy diet.

Some parents are worried about consuming too much fish themselves because of pollution, let alone feeding it to their children. But there are enough low-mercury sources of seafood available to give your child a selection of tastes, including salmon, trout, halibut, cod, herring and sardines—if they acquire tastes for these foods as young children, they will like them when they are older as well. If you are still concerned about the safety or your child just can’t stomach the thought of fish for dinner, there are several high-quality DHA-specific omega-3 supplements on the market that are made specifically for children. In general, high quality fish oil supplements that have been molecularly distilled have much lower levels of environmental contaminants than the fish they were derived from. For vegetarian and vegan families, there are algae-based DHA supplements available too. There is simply no reason your child can’t experience the benefits of DHA.

There are certain nutrients that every parent has heard a child needs—whether it’s calcium and vitamin D for strong bones or iron for red blood cells. Many doctors and nutrition experts now believe that the omega-3 fatty acid DHA should be just as important and well known.
Practitioners of Earthing believe that the natural electric and magnetic energies within the Earth have a health-promoting effect on the body. The Earth puts out electric and magnetic fields, which are easily transferred to the human body as long as they make direct contact with the skin, or through natural materials such as leather, cotton, silk, rayon or wool. Unfortunately, modern synthetic-soled shoes, houses, office buildings and other barriers prevent the flow of free electrons into the body.

The free electrons on the surface of the Earth are easily transferred to the human body as long as there is direct contact. Unfortunately, synthetic-soled shoes act as insulators so that even when we are outside, we do not connect with the Earth’s electromagnetic field. When we are in homes and office buildings, we are also insulated and unable to receive the Earth’s balancing energies.

Earthing experts say that once the body is grounded by direct skin contact, it will absorb free electrons until equilibrium is reached with the Earth’s natural energies, which is enough to restore what is lost in the body’s metabolic processes.

Earthing is natural and simple. There is no fancy equipment needed. In fact, the less you have, the better. If you can take your shoes off, you can experience Earthing. To begin with, find a comfortable patch of grass, sand, dirt or rock. Simply remove your shoes and stand with your feet touching the ground. That’s all it takes. The Earth’s natural energies will do the rest.

In their book *Earthing: The Most Important Health Discovery Ever?* Clinton Ober, Stephen T. Sinatra, M.D., and Martin Zucker discuss the many benefits they believe Earthing can deliver. They also go into depth about how to go about the practice. But it all comes down to directly touching the earth. How long has it been since you took a few moments and laid down on the warm summer ground and just relaxed?

For many people, this act alone is enough to feel a difference and experience a connection to the ground. But even if you can’t find a safe or comfortable place for this to occur, you can still experience the benefits. There are special Earthing devices that allow you to make that connection, no matter where you are. From bed sheets to desk pads, there are devices that can plug into any outlet on any structure that is properly grounded. These will filter and direct the earth’s energies to you.

Earthing is all about connecting to the natural, subtle energies resonating from the surface of the Earth. As beings of energy ourselves, it makes sense that connecting to that force can be a positive factor in life. If you feel a connection might be missing in your life, it may be time to connect to the Earth.
Making Fitness Fun for Kids

Childhood obesity is reaching epidemic proportions throughout the world. This startling problem has been created by a combination of unhealthy eating habits, increased time spent in front of the television or playing video games (rather than being active and running, playing and taking part in sports and other traditional activities), and the lack of a fundamental understanding of the basics of health and nutrition. As scary as this problem may seem, a big part of the solution can be easy for many people. We need to raise our children in homes where healthy eating and regular physical activity are seen not just as a normal part of daily life but as something fun to look forward to.

Regular physical activity is important for people of all ages. There is scarcely anyone alive who wouldn’t benefit from exercise. Unfortunately, even just the word “exercise” is enough to make many people cringe. This is one reason it is important that, as adults, we show children that exercise isn’t a chore. If children are taught that physical fitness is a fun, exciting and healthy part of living, they will be much more likely to grow into healthy adults who continue to engage in regular physical activity.

Children don’t need gym memberships or expensive exercise equipment to get fit. Before there were computers, video games and televisions in every home (sometimes even in every room), children spent much more of their time outside playing. Instead of sitting on the couch in front of cartoons, they were outside riding bikes. Rather than drinking soda and playing video games, they were drinking water and playing tag. Getting back to this lifestyle will help ensure your child is healthy throughout life. But if you want your child to stay interested, you must remember to make it fun.

Kids are naturally full of energy. Just helping them find an activity they enjoy will be enough to give them an opportunity to release that energy and get physically fit. For many families, all it takes is setting aside a few hours a week for playing in the park, riding bikes around the neighborhood, hiking in the woods and other fun activities that get everyone moving.

School and community sports are a great way for kids to get exercise. But if your children don’t enjoy the competitive nature of traditional sports, work with them to find out what physical activities they would enjoy doing and work with that. If your child enjoys nature, take him hiking at the park. If your kid likes horses, sign her up for horseback riding lessons.

Above all else, make your child’s active time fun. If your child enjoys bike riding, don’t try to force him or her to enjoy swimming just because you think it may be a better option. Focus on the enjoyment of the activity. If you are going for a bike ride, don’t focus on counting the number of calories you are burning. Put the emphasis on how much fun the family is having. Because kids are so naturally energetic, the workout will come naturally.

Due to safety concerns in some areas, it’s a sad reality that the days of kids playing outside with each other in the neighborhood all afternoon are gone. If you live in an area where you are just not comfortable sending your child out on his or her bike alone for the afternoon, many schools and community organizations offer programs that give kids a safe place to be active after school. If there is not one in your area, try talking with other parents to start your own program. Parents can take turns supervising the neighborhood kids in the afternoon.

It’s never too late to help your child discover the joys and benefits of an active life. Even the least athletically inclined child will feel a difference after a bike ride around the neighborhood or a walk around the park. If you start simple and keep the emphasis on having fun, nothing can go wrong. Before you know it, your child will stop asking to watch more television and start asking if it’s okay to go outside and play.
“The most beneficial breakfasts are rich in protein and complex carbohydrates, which will keep you feeling full longer and provide a steady source of energy that will come in handy when it’s time to work out later.”
One of the biggest keys to successful weight management is managing your metabolism. The higher your metabolic rate, the better your body will be able to burn fat and calories. Let’s take a look at some common metabolism builders and busters that can help you get a head start on your fitness goals.

You can jump-start your metabolism and start your day off right by eating a healthy breakfast. People who don’t eat breakfast are as much as 4.5 times as likely to be obese as people who do eat breakfast, according to a study at Johns Hopkins. The most beneficial breakfasts are rich in protein and complex carbohydrates, which will keep you feeling full longer and provide a steady source of energy that will come in handy when it’s time to work out later.

The term basal metabolic rate refers to the number of calories you burn at rest. The muscles in your body are slowly and constantly burning calories even when you are asleep, but once you get them moving, the rate increases dramatically. So the more lean muscle mass you have, the more calories your body will burn. Resistance training will build calorie-burning muscle mass.

Lifting weights is the most common form of resistance training. But don’t feel that you need to go to the gym for the bench press to get this metabolism-boosting benefit. Any load-carrying exercise will build muscle. From strapping on ankle or wrist weights to doing push-ups and squats, there are countless activities that will give your muscles the resistance they need to grow.

Aerobic exercise may not build calorie-burning muscle, but it can help ramp up your metabolism. A good workout can keep your metabolic rate elevated for hours afterward. You don’t need to subject yourself to a grueling run to stoke your metabolic fire. It is true that the harder you are able to push yourself, the more calories you will burn. However, even a relatively slow jogging session will burn calories. The important thing is to exercise at the level you are comfortable with and avoid overdoing it. Or you may end up with a pulled muscle that prevents you from doing anything for a few days.

Once your workout is complete, grab a high-quality protein shake. After a strenuous workout, your muscles are actually slightly damaged—don’t worry; this is healthy because the body then repairs and rebuilds the muscles bigger than they were before the workout. To do this effectively you need the amino acids found in protein because those compounds form the basic building blocks of muscle tissue.

Lean deli meats or a serving of chicken or fish will help deliver these amino acids to your body. However, many people may prefer protein shakes because they are quick and portable. The best shakes contain protein from multiple sources to deliver the widest range of nutrients possible. Consuming a protein shake that contains complex carbohydrates 30 to 40 minutes after a workout will help maximize the body’s ability to rebuild itself. The complex carbohydrates will also help boost energy and keep you from experiencing a post-workout slump.

One of the biggest secrets to boosting your metabolism is to eat more—not bigger portions, but more often. Some people find that eating four to six small meals a day helps keep their metabolic rate much steadier than the traditional three larger meals a day. However you choose to eat your meals, don’t skip them. People often think they can skip a meal to cut calories. They don’t realize that skipping a meal can slow the metabolic rate. Your body doesn’t know that you plan on eating later, thus the signals it receives from an empty stomach lead it to react by going into “starvation mode,” which slows the metabolism and conserves energy. This makes it that much harder to lose weight.

Regular physical activity (both aerobic exercises and weight training) will help burn fat, build muscle and boost your metabolism. Eating the right foods before, during and after a workout will give your body the support it needs to maximize your workout potential.
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Can antioxidants help my lungs?

Free radicals can accumulate in any area of the body, including the lungs. Your lungs can be especially susceptible because they come in direct contact with any pollutants that you inhale—whether it’s cigarette smoke, smog, car exhaust, pesticides or any other source of free radicals. That makes vitamin C, vitamin E, OPCs and other antioxidants a vital component of lung health. A diet rich in a variety of fresh fruits, vegetables, herbs and spices will help to provide your body with this protection.

Is pure water really better than tap water?

Yes. Tap water is often disinfected with chlorine or chloramines, which are potent oxidants that kill bacteria and viruses. While we don’t want to consume these illness-causing microorganisms, the problem with drinking chlorinated tap water is that even the minute amounts of leftover chlorine can harm the beneficial bacteria living in our intestines. It also can increase oxidative stress from free radicals throughout the body, placing a greater demand on antioxidant reserves. Fresh, pure water from a filter will grant the body all the benefits of staying properly hydrated without introducing unwanted chemicals into the digestive system.

What is AMD, and how can I support healthy vision?

AMD, or age-related macular degeneration, is a degenerative disorder that leads to deterioration of the central portion of the retina. It is one of the leading causes of blindness in people over the age of 55. However, there is evidence from some researchers that people who consume diets rich in nutrients such as lutein and zeaxanthin greatly reduce the risk of developing macular degeneration. Other studies have shown that antioxidant vitamins C and E, as well as the nutrients carotene and zinc, have a positive effect on healthy vision. Antioxidants are important throughout our lives because free radicals, if not neutralized, tend to accumulate in the eyes as we age. Avoiding a high intake of saturated fat and cholesterol is also important because unhealthy diets have been linked with an increased risk of developing macular degeneration.
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