



January 2006

January is Glaucoma Awareness Month

Glaucoma is a pattern of optic nerve damage that can lead to irreversible vision loss and eventual blindness if left untreated and affects approximately 3 million Americans aged 40 and over. Because of its gradual onset, most people suffering from glaucoma don't know it until after they begin to experience noticeable vision loss. This is why glaucoma is called the "sneak thief of sight." Damage from glaucoma is irreversible; however, vision loss can be prevented if it's detected early and treated in time. Therefore everyone, especially those with increased risk factors, should have regular eye exams.

Risk factors for glaucoma are:

- A family history of glaucoma
- Age over 45
- African-American descent
- Diabetes

How do you know if you have glaucoma? In the advanced stages, symptoms include:

- Loss of peripheral vision
- Difficulty focusing on close work
- Seeing colored rings or halos around lights
- Headaches
- Eye pain
- Difficulty adjusting to the dark

Learn more about glaucoma by visiting the National Institutes of Health web page at http://www.nei.nih.gov/health/glaucoma/glaucoma_facts.asp.

Winter Sports Try Them Out

As temperatures drop, so can the motivation to exercise as people head indoors to escape the cold. But the winter chill is no excuse to avoid staying active – all it takes is a sense of adventure and some planning. You can always work out indoors at a health center. But if you are ready to try something new, there are plenty of outdoor winter options available. How about taking up a winter sport?

Depending on where you live, you can take advantage of the facilities at your nearest state park. Most are open year-round, and offer a variety of winter recreation opportunities such as hiking, cross-country skiing, snow sledding, and snowmobiling on safe and well-maintained designated trails. Some state parks also allow ice skating on their lakes.

For outdoor activities, keep the following tips in mind.

- Layer clothing to keep warm. Layering allows you to remove the top layer if you get too hot.

Surface layers should be wind resistant, inner layers that are close to the skin should allow moisture to be wicked away.

- Keep your head warm. Half your body's heat escapes through your head so wear a hat.
- Stay hydrated. This is just as important in the winter as it is during the summer months.
- Never sled or skate alone.
- Wear a proper helmet when skiing, sledding, snowboarding, or skating.

Winter activities are fun with friends and family. And there is much to be gained by staying active throughout the winter. Check with your national and state parks to find out more about winter activities that are available to you. You can start with the guide to national parks at <http://www.nps.gov/parks.html>.

Whats NEW

About the “New” Food Pyramid?

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans, published jointly by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), must be revised every five years. The Guidelines set the standards for all federal nutrition programs, including the school lunch program, and Americans rely on them for sound nutritional information. Over a decade ago, to supplement the Guidelines, the USDA created an image which has endured as a powerful visual cue for healthy eating; the Food Pyramid. The Pyramid’s shape clearly illustrated which foods people should eat more often and which to eat only rarely or in moderation.

The 2005 revision of the Dietary Guidelines made sweeping changes, including changes to the Food Pyramid graphic. The new pyramid literally turned the old one on its side, creating vertical food groups that extend each food group the entire length of the pyramid, with each color representing a different group. Another change is the addition of an image of a figure walking up steps on the side of the new pyramid to reflect the new emphasis on physical activity.

The new pyramid, or the “interactive food guidance system,” is now web-based and users can log on and access tools and resources, and get personalized dietary information. Some of the major changes of the Dietary Guidelines are highlighted below and include:

- A recognition of the health benefits of certain types of fat as well as a recommendation to get between 20% and 35% of calories from fats
- Removal of the term, “complex carbohydrates,” which was frequently misunderstood. The new recommendation is to limit sugar intake and increase the intake of good quality *whole* grains.
- Elimination of the term “servings.” New recommended amounts are shown in cups or ounces.
- An emphasis on physical activity with a recommendation for adults to engage in at least 30 minutes of moderately intense

physical activity on most, preferably all, days of the week.

One important change is that breads and other starches are no longer considered equally healthy. The new Guidelines suggest Americans reduce their use of sugar and increase their intake of whole grains. This means that you must read food labels and learn to distinguish between types of grain-based foods. Below are some tips to help you.

- Hot cereals: Select old-fashioned (not instant) or steel-cut oats.
- Cold cereal: Select those that list whole wheat, oats, barley, or other grains *first* on the ingredient list.
- Breads: Select whole-grain breads. Make sure that whole wheat or other whole grain is the first ingredient listed on the label.
- Grains: Eat brown rice. Look for grains like bulgur, millet, or hulled barley.
- Pasta: Select from the varieties of whole wheat pastas. If whole-grain pasta doesn’t satisfy you, look for pastas made with half whole-wheat flour and half white flour.
- Sugars: Limit foods with sugars listed as the first or second ingredients.

To find out more about the new pyramid – and to build a customized food plan to fit your age, gender, and level of physical activity – visit the website at mypyramid.gov



“I think I should have no other mortal wants, if I could always have plenty of music. It seems to infuse strength into my limbs and ideas into my brain. Life seems to go on without effort, when I am filled with music.”

- George Eliot

Music And Your Mood

Music may not soothe the savage beast but does it strike a chord when it comes to your mood? Anybody who has ever watched a scary movie or stopped at a traffic light next to a driver with their stereo blaring knows that it does! Music is actually experienced physically by the body. Sound waves trigger tiny cells in the ears, which vibrate; sending nerve impulses directly to the brain. We may consciously try to ignore music but the body and brain cannot.

The effects of music are widely recognized. Certain kinds of music can increase or decrease the heart rate; music can trigger happy memories or bring you to tears; and educators have known for years that turning lessons into song works as a potent memory aid. Also, calming music is an integral part of meditation and some forms of relaxation therapy. It is also an effective way to set the tone for different settings like dance events, malls, restaurants, and sporting events.

But just how does music affect mood? Researchers are looking into how music affects blood pressure, healing, brainwaves, and memory. They have found that the tempo of music can actually make you tense. For example, exciting, up-tempo music can actually produce anxiety while listening to calm music seems to reduce it.

Some kinds of music do seem to induce relaxation. Certain selections of Classical music appear to be better suited for this – especially Bach, Mozart, Brahms, Handel, and Vivaldi. Some New Age music has also become popular for stress reduction. The best selections from this genre are those that use a wide variety of instruments with a minimum of vocals. But if you cannot endure Classical or New Age music it won't be relaxing at all. Most important is that you take pleasure in the music, so if you want to improve your mood or reduce stress, listen to music with calm tempos that you enjoy.

New Year's Resolutions: Stick to it!

Albert Einstein once said, "It's not that I'm so smart, it's just that I stay with problems longer." With the New Year just around the corner, you may have resolved to tackle some problem or change something in your life. However, less than 30 percent of these resolutions are carried through to success. Why is that? Sometimes resolutions are not well defined, too broad, or unrealistic. Or resolutions can be so strict or drastic that even minor setbacks can be seen as failures. For example, if you've smoked for 20 years, a resolution to simply "quit smoking" is likely to fail if your plan is to go "cold turkey" on January 1st.

If you have a problem to address, a personal goal, or a change you want to make, there are some steps you can take so you won't become one of the many who, by February, have all but lost their *resolve*. Sticking to a New Year's resolution can be tricky. That is because most require that you either start doing something new (exercising, improving diet, or saving money) or quit a habit (stop smoking, eat less, quit drinking). The trick is in realizing that nobody develops habits overnight so you must approach these changes step-by-step, planning for setbacks, identifying

milestones, and rewarding yourself for successes. And if Einstein's observation has any merit, it means that it will take commitment, hard work, and a high level of perseverance. Below are some tips to help you realize your goals for 2006.

- **Make the goal realistic:** For example, "lose weight" may be too vague and hard to implement. "Lose 40 lbs" may be too strict. When dealing with weight loss or addictions, set a goal that does not exceed the limits of human physiology like "lose 4 lbs per month."
- **Put your plan in writing and keep track:** A goal without a plan is just a wish. Make a plan and outline specific steps. Also, all goals need short and long term milestones. So, "Lose 40 lbs," can be "Lose 4 lbs per month and 12 lbs in 3 months." These are goals you can track.
- **Persevere and be flexible:** You may need to redefine your goal from time to time. Circumstances change and so may your goals. Don't abandon goals, refine them. Anticipate setbacks and plan for them.