



# Wellness-Fitness Program Newsletter

January 2008



## Thyroid Awareness Month

Over 27 million Americans have overactive or underactive thyroid glands, but more than half remain undiagnosed.

This is because, with the exception of the obviously enlarged thyroid gland, many of the symptoms -- fatigue, muscle weakness, weight loss/gain, irritability, and insomnia -- are often attributed to normal aging. Unfortunately, undiagnosed thyroid disease can eventually lead to cardiac damage.

One way to look at the thyroid's function is to think of it like a thermostat that keeps the body in balance. If the thyroid is overactive, the condition is called hyperthyroidism and you may feel anxious, lose weight, your heart may race, and you may have trouble sleeping. Too little thyroid activity is called hypothyroidism and you might feel fatigued, sluggish, develop dry skin and hair, experience muscle cramps, and gain weight.

The thyroid gland is a bowtie-shaped organ in the neck, below the Adam's apple. It makes thyroid hormones, which are chemicals that affect the function of the body's organs, including the brain, kidneys, and skin.

The thyroid also controls heart rate, digestion, the speed at which you burn calories, even how much you sweat. If your thyroid is not working properly, neither are you!

### What you should know about thyroid disorders:

- More than 8 out of 10 patients with thyroid disease are women.

- Fifteen to 20 percent of people with diabetes and their siblings or parents are likely to develop thyroid disease (compared to 4.5 percent of the general population).
- The incidence of hypothyroidism increases with age. By age 60, as many as 17 percent of women and 9 percent of men have an underactive thyroid.
- Thyroid disorders are more common among women.
- Thyroid disorders tend to run in the family.
- Fatigue is a common complaint for both under and over active thyroid conditions.

Your doctor can help diagnose a thyroid malfunction with a physical exam and a simple blood test for thyroid-stimulating hormone (TSH). Your doctor can also prescribe a treatment plan if necessary.

An under-active thyroid usually is treated with a daily thyroid hormone medication. An over-active thyroid is usually treated with medication that blocks the thyroid's ability to produce the thyroid hormone.

You can give yourself a "neck check" to look for signs of enlargement. Learn how at the American Thyroid Association at <http://www.thyroid.org>.

Learn all about thyroid diseases at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Website at: [nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/thyroiddiseases.html](http://nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/thyroiddiseases.html)

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## Walking: Right For Every Age

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In the next 30 years, one out of every five people in this country will be over the age of 65.

Research on the aging process has dispelled notions that aging inevitably means becoming frail, unhealthy, or impaired. Whether you are in your 30s, 40s, or older, you can adopt positive, healthy habits (e.g., regular exercise) or quit unhealthy habits (e.g., smoking) that will ensure a healthy and independent life well into your older years.

### "Use it or lose it"

We now have plenty of evidence that inactivity is bad for your health because it increases the risk of chronic disease and disability. But you don't need to run a 10K to stay healthy. In fact, a recent study published in the December issue of the American Journal of Cardiology found less may be better.

In this study, overweight people who met at least three of the risk factors for Metabolic Syndrome, experienced significant reductions in these risk factors after just six months of moderate-intensity exercise such as walking 30 minutes per day six days per week.

Metabolic Syndrome is a cluster of risk factors that greatly raises your risk for heart disease and type 2 diabetes. The more of these risk factors you have, the more likely it is that you will eventually develop type 2 diabetes and heart disease.

According to the American College of Cardiology, the risk factors that make up Metabolic Syndrome are:

- A high level of triglycerides -- more than 150 \*mg/dL.\*
- A low level of HDL ("good") cholesterol -- below 40 mg/dL for men or 50 mg/dL for women.
- High blood pressure -- 130/85 or greater.
- High blood sugar that is classified as pre-diabetes or diabetes -- 100 mg/dL or greater

Walking is a tremendously good activity. It's cheap, it's simple, and almost anybody can do it. For tips about adopting a walking program, visit the Weight-control Information Network (WIN)<sup>†</sup> at <http://win.niddk.nih.gov/publications/walking.htm>.

Remember to check with your participating FOH work-site Health Center or Wellness/Fitness Center for more information on moderate intensity exercise options.

\* *Milligrams per deciliter*

<sup>†</sup> *WIN is a service of the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK) of the National Institutes of Health (NIH).*

"Continuous effort -- not strength or intelligence -- is the key  
to unlocking our potential."

- Liane Cardes

## 5 Tips for a Fresh Start at Eating Healthy

It's a new year, and many of us will have made a resolution – but only one in ten will actually succeed in realizing their goals. Don't give up on your resolutions. Instead, give yourself every opportunity to succeed.

If you have made a New Year's resolution to maintain a healthy weight and eat more nutritious foods, try these smart strategies to make changes that you can sustain for a lifetime.

### Get support

It's hard to change lifelong habits so take advantage of people with the expertise to support you. A multidisciplinary team approach will give you the best shot at success. See your doctor, consult a dietitian, ask family and friends for support, and join support groups. You don't need to do it alone. Also, many health insurance policies now cover a variety of health improvement change efforts.

### Eat less

Portion sizes have tripled over the past few decades. Try these strategies to eat less food.

- Don't clean your plate. Leave a little bit on the plate at every meal.
- Use smaller plates and bowls
- Resist getting second helpings.
- Eliminate spontaneous eating decisions by planning meals and bringing along portable healthy snacks.

### Make better food choices

Eat lots of vegetables and fruits. Choose lean proteins and reduced-fat dairy products. Be sure to eat fish at least twice a week. Finally, opt for whole grains.

Make changes gradually and be sure they fit into your lifestyle. If you don't really enjoy cooking and normally eat a lot of prepared foods, find out which are the healthiest foods you can order at your favorite restaurants, or buy frozen or prepackaged. However, if you love to cook, find out how to alter your favorite recipes to make them more healthful.

To find out more about healthful eating, visit these Websites:

- The 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans: [health.gov/dietaryguidelines](http://health.gov/dietaryguidelines).
- Nutrition for Everyone: [cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/nutrition/nutrition\\_for\\_everyone/index.htm](http://cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/nutrition/nutrition_for_everyone/index.htm).

### Keep it simple

It's easy to get discouraged when dietary changes seem complicated. Keep it simple by making a gradual transition to the American Institute of Cancer Research's (AICR) "New American Plate."

Here is how it works. Imagine a picnic plate (it's smaller in size and divided into 3 portions), use the biggest 1/2 of the plate for veggies, place healthy whole grains/legumes (brown rice, beans) on 1/4<sup>th</sup>, and place lean protein on 1/4<sup>th</sup> of the plate,



*The old American plate*      *The New American Plate*

The message is clear: make veggies, healthy grains, and legumes the mainstay of your diet.

Learn all about the New American Plate at the American Cancer Research Institute's Website at [http://www.aicr.org/site/PageServer?pagename=pub\\_nap\\_materials](http://www.aicr.org/site/PageServer?pagename=pub_nap_materials).

### Move more

Get out and just move to raise the metabolism. This goes beyond exercise. While physical activity and exercise are often used interchangeably, they are not synonymous. Physical activity is any movement that involves the contraction of muscles and leads to an expenditure of energy.

Exercise is a subcategory of physical activity that includes structured, deliberate, repetitive movement to maintain some level of fitness. To stay healthy, regular exercise is clearly necessary. However, just increasing your physical activity is recommended to increase metabolism through use of muscles.

And remember, when it comes to health goals, be flexible and acknowledge your efforts. You may not accomplish your stated goal in just the way you may have imagined. But try to recognize partial successes at every step. Your goals are accomplished in many small increments along the way. Give yourself credit for these incremental successes as they come.

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## Cervical Health Awareness Month

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About 14,000 American women are diagnosed with cervical cancer and more than 3,900 die from this disease each year. To raise awareness and promote preventive care, the United States Congress designated January as Cervical Health Awareness Month.

Cervical cancer often does not show obvious symptoms in its early stages. This is why it is so important for women to have a Pap test annually.

According to the American Cancer Society, between 60 and 80 percent of women who have been diagnosed with cervical cancer had **not** had a Pap test in the five years preceding the diagnosis.

The Pap test is used to detect cervical cancer or abnormal cells that may lead to cancer. If abnormal changes in the cells are found with the Pap test, the doctor will perform other tests to confirm the diagnosis of cervical cancer.

Women should begin having a Pap test about three years after becoming sexually active and no later than 21 years of age. After age 30, women may have the Pap test every three years, however, women

should talk with their doctor to determine how often the test should be performed for them.

A virus—the human papillomavirus, or HPV, is the most common cause of cervical cancer. HPV is a common sexually transmitted virus. Most people with HPV never even know they have it. HPV usually goes away on its own without intervention. However, sometimes HPV remains present and causes the development of abnormal cells. If these abnormal cells are not found and treated, they may develop into cancerous cells.

In 2006, the FDA approved a vaccine which prevents many types of cervical cancer. The vaccine, called Gardasil, has been approved for administration to girls from ages 9 through 26 who have not begun sexual activity.

The vaccine, which works by building immunity against HPV, was found to be effective in preventing almost three-quarters of all cervical cancers. If you are not sure whether you are a candidate for the vaccine, check with your doctor.

Read all about cervical cancer and HPV at the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Website at [cdc.gov/cancer/cervical/](https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/cervical/)

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### FOH, the Occupational Health Provider of Choice for the Federal Government

**T**he mission of FOH is to improve the health, safety, and productivity of the federal workforce. Created by Congress in 1946, FOH is a non-appropriated service agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Program Support Center.

Federal agencies throughout the U.S. and overseas can access FOH services. FOH provides worksite health services, Wellness/Fitness, Employee Assistance Programs (EAP), Work/Life, Environmental Health and Safety, Organizational and Professional Development, and Training and Education.

Contact FOH at **(800) 457-9808** or visit us at [www.foh.dhhs.gov](http://www.foh.dhhs.gov).

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