



May 2007

May Month: Get Moving for Your Health

May is National Physical Fitness and Sports Month. This year during "May Month," join with the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports. Their goal is to challenge Americans to "get moving for health and to get active and fit."

Americans of all ages need to incorporate more movement and activity in their daily lives. Adults need at least 30 minutes of activity for five days of each week. It's easy if you do it gradually by taking it a step at time. Try biking instead of driving, taking stairs instead of elevators, or using a "push" lawnmower instead of riding one.

Twenty to thirty minutes of vigorous physical activity three times a week can greatly improve health. These activities include sports, aerobics, weight training, or jogging. But if you don't have the time or opportunity, you can still benefit if you break it up into shorter increments of ten or fifteen minutes throughout the day to greatly improve your health.

For information about the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, go to www.fitness.gov.

To start a physical activity and fitness program, log on to www.presidentschallenge.org and sign up to take the President's Challenge.

Allergies: Nothing to Sneeze About

One in every five Americans suffers from allergies, an immune system disorder that makes people hypersensitive to things that are harmless to most people.

For people with allergies, microscopic particles of dust, mold, and pet hair can trigger anything from itchy skin, watery eyes, or a runny nose to severe, even life-threatening, symptoms. These substances that trigger allergic responses are called allergens.

Normally, allergies are categorized by the allergen that triggers them, time of year, or by the symptoms. For example, now that spring is here, the "seasonal" allergies (also called "hay fever") begin to appear. There are also food and drug allergies, insect allergies, skin allergies, and eye allergies.

Having an allergy is nothing to sneeze at. They can be expensive and debilitating.

- Americans spend about \$6 billion per year (\$5.7 billion for medications and \$300 million for doctor visits).
- Allergies are a major cause of work absenteeism and productivity loss, and result in nearly 4 million lost workdays each year.

Allergy proof for your health

If you have an allergy, check with your doctor to determine if there are medications that will alleviate your symptoms. Allergy sufferers can live and work more comfortably by making some modifications at home and at work.

Dust

- Keep doors and windows closed to reduce indoor exposure to outdoor allergens.

- Clean and vacuum frequently. Change vacuum bags often and use a HEPA filter.
- Eliminate carpet, upholstered furniture, and drapery.
- Keep knickknacks, stacks of books, and papers to a minimum in living/sleeping areas.
- Exterminate regularly pests and consider treating carpets with tannic acid or benzyl benzoate to kill dust mites.
- Use wooden, vinyl, or leather furniture.
- Cover mattresses and pillows with impermeable, plastic covers. Use fiberfill pillows and quilts. Wash sheets, mattress covers and blankets in hot water.

Mold

- Clean and disinfect bathrooms weekly.
- Run the exhaust fan during/after a shower.
- Eliminate carpet and upholstered furniture, and drapery.
- Keep under-sinks areas dry and fix leaks immediately.
- Wash towels often using hot water.
- Use a dehumidifier when dampness is a problem.

Pets

- Don't own very furry pets and keep them out of the bedroom.
- Wash pets regularly.
- Wash your hands after touching animals.
- Keep your distance from pet birds. Their cages contain numerous allergens.

Learn more about Allergies at

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/allergy.html>

The Lowdown on High Blood Pressure

High blood pressure (or hypertension) is known as "the silent killer" because you can have it and not even know it. High blood pressure has no symptoms, and for many, the first sign of high blood pressure could come in the form of a heart attack, a stroke or kidney failure.

However, high blood pressure is easily detected, and it can be controlled. But it's up to you to take action to detect it, prevent it, and control it.

Be aware: Get checked

The easiest way to detect high blood pressure is to have your blood pressure checked at least once a year.

Blood pressure is made up of two measurements. The first is the force of your blood pushing against artery walls when your heart beats. This is called *systolic* pressure. The second is the pressure between heartbeats, which is lower. This is called *diastolic* pressure.

A normal blood pressure reading is less than 120/80. If your blood pressure is higher than 120/80, it means your heart is working harder than it should.

Risk and prevention

Risk factors for high blood pressure are divided into two categories: those you can't control and those you can.

Uncontrollable risk factors include gender, race, and family history. Age is also a factor. Over half of all men and women between 65 and 74 have high blood pressure. High blood pressure can also be related to a medical condition such as an abnormal kidney.

The more uncontrollable risk factors you have, the more important it is to make the right decisions regarding those risk factors you can control (known as *lifestyle* factors) like diet, activity level, stress, weight, and tobacco use.

Remember to consult your health care provider about making lifestyle adjustments to eliminate these controllable risk factors:

- Reduce salt. Water retention from a high sodium diet increases blood volume and pressure in the arteries. Keep sodium intake around 2,200 mg per day.
- Maintain a healthy weight. Losing weight can often lower blood pressure.
- Get regular exercise. Regular aerobic exercise tones your heart, blood vessels, and muscles and keeps your blood pressure low.
- Manage stress. For some, stress can increase blood pressure.
- Don't smoke. If you smoke, quit. Smoking increases blood pressure and the risk for heart attack and stroke.

Living with high blood pressure

If you have high blood pressure, work with your doctor to control it to reduce the risk of heart attack, stroke or other complications.

Fortunately, by simply doing the things your doctor recommends, you can lower your blood pressure and your health risks.

- Make sure your doctor knows about any prescription and over-the-counter drugs that you take.
- Never stop taking a medicine without consulting your doctor.
- Never skip a dose. Keep taking your medicine even when you feel well.

Controlling your high blood pressure is something you need to continue forever. But you can do it. It's a lifelong task that can make your life longer.

Learn more about high blood pressure from the National Institutes of Health at:

<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/hbp/dash/index.htm>

"We are what we repeatedly do."

Aristotle

Melanoma/Skin Cancer

Detection and Prevention Month

With more than a million new cases diagnosed each year, skin cancer is the most common type of cancer in the United States.

Melanoma is least common form, causing about 4 percent of skin cancer cases. However, it is also the most dangerous form of skin cancer and causes the most skin cancer-related deaths. The good news is that when detected and treated in its earliest stages, melanoma is often curable.

Causes of melanoma

Melanoma begins in the melanocytes, the cells in the skin that give skin its color. So this type of cancer usually develops in a mole or a spot that looks like a mole.

Invisible radiation from the sun (and tanning beds) penetrates deep into the layers of the skin. Over time, it is this repeated exposure that not only changes the DNA of skin cells but also damages the immune system which would normally repair that damage.

The risks

Overexposure to sunlight is by far the biggest single risk factor for developing skin cancer, and the risk increases if you've been sunburned at a very early age.

Although anyone can get skin cancer, people with certain risk factors are particularly at risk. The main risk factors for melanoma include:

- Unusual moles, change in existing mole, new moles
- Exposure to sunlight, especially severe sunburn before age 18
- Have used tanning booths
- Family or personal history of melanoma
- Being white and older than 20 years
- Red or blonde hair, light-colored eyes, light skin color
- White or light-colored skin and freckles
- Blue eyes

Self-check for health

Physicians recommend that you conduct a self skin exam once a month. In men, melanoma is most often found on the area between the shoulders and hips or on the head and neck. In women, melanoma often develops on the lower legs.

The most common symptom is a new growth on the skin or a sore that does not heal in the usual time. The first sign of a melanoma is frequently a change in the shape, color or size of an existing mole, or the appearance of a new mole.

It is important to look for changes in existing moles and new moles. You can remember what type of changes to look for in an existing mole by remembering the **ABCD** rule:

- **A**symmetry: The shape of one half of the mole is different from the other half
- **B**orders: The outside edges of the mole are ragged
- **C**olor: The mole has different shades of colors, such as brown, black, tan, red and blue
- **D**iameter: The size of the mole has changed

If you notice any of these changes in a mole or the growth of a new mole, or a mole begins to bleed or ooze fluid, see your doctor. Skin cancer is usually diagnosed by a biopsy.

Prevention

Always remember to avoid excessive sunlight, wear protective clothing, and use sunscreen to help protect you from further skin damage.

Visit the American Academy of Dermatologists Website at <http://www.aad.org/public/News/DermInfo/DInfoABCDsMelanoma.htm>, and learn the ABCDs of melanoma detection.

For tips on how to perform a skin self exam visit <http://www.afraidtoask.com/skinCA/skinexam.html>