

## Portion sizes: How much is too much?

By Teddi Dineley Johnson

**A**re your eyes bigger than your stomach? These days, most people's are, because portion distortion is on the rise.

### Portion creep

Since the mid-'70s, restaurants have been dishing up increasingly larger portions of food. Consumers, exhibiting a trait as American as apple pie, have been trained to eat what's placed in front of them, including the entire apple pie if it's served to them as one big slice.

But portion distortion isn't limited

to restaurants or fast-food establishments. All things food-related have gotten bigger in the last 30 years, from the muffin tins and pizza pans in your kitchen cabinets to the cup holders in your car, which have grown larger to accommodate mega-sized soda cups. Even recipes in cookbooks have been altered to yield bigger portions than identical recipes printed in the same books 30 or more years ago.

"Your eyeballs get trained to larger portions, and you get used to it," says Dawn Jackson Blatner, RD, a spokeswoman for the American Dietetic Association. Eventually the larger portions look normal to us, Blatner says.

And there's this: Plates themselves have grown larger. Anyone who has inherited their great-grandmother's china can tell you how hard it is to pile spaghetti on those tiny dishes.

Studies show that expanding portion sizes

are probably contributing to America's expanding waistlines, which since the '70s, have grown in tandem with portion sizes.

To get an idea of how portion sizes have grown, take the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute's Portion Distortion Quiz online. You might be surprised to learn that the 350-calorie, six-inch bagel you ate this morning would have been three inches smaller in 1986, and a mere 140 calories. The same goes for the 610 calories you got from that 6.9-ounce serving of fast-food fries at lunch.

Twenty years ago, 2.4 ounces of fries would have looked normal to you, and the 210 calories they delivered would have filled you up just fine. And a cheeseburger 20 years ago only packed 333 calories. Today's cheeseburger? Closer to 600. It's not yet suppertime but you've already consumed 777 calories more than you would have gotten from those same three foods in 1986.

So how do you train your eyes to spot a rational ration when you see it?

Nutritionists recommend using visuals. For example, try thinking of your meal as a picnic plate with three compartments. A quarter of the picnic plate would be whole grains, such as whole-grain bread, whole-wheat pasta or brown rice. Another quarter would come from lean proteins, such as chicken, turkey, fish or low-fat milk. Half of the picnic plate would be produce, such as fruits and vegetables.

Even if people don't get the measurements exactly right, "but it's proportioned that way on their plate, it will be a very low-calorie meal," Blatner says, "and a good actionable visual to change behavior."

### Use visuals

The American Cancer Society offers additional visuals that can ease the strain of portion distortion. For example, the amount of meat recommended as part of a healthy meal is 3 ounces to 4 ounces, which is about the same size as a deck of cards. A proper portion of peanut butter is about the size of a ping pong ball. Planning on pasta tonight? Visualize a tennis ball and serve the linguine to match. Cheese? Visualize four dice before slicing into the sharp cheddar.

If you are dining out tonight, the National



Heart, Lung and Blood Institute offers a handy serving-size card online. Simply print, laminate and tuck the card into your purse or pocket to help you visualize portion sizes when you're out and about.

### Resources

For more information:

**Portion Distortion Quiz**

<http://hp2010.nhlbihin.net/portion>

**Serving size card**

<http://hp2010.nhlbihin.net/portion/servingcard7.pdf>

**Eating right**

[www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)

[www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org)

[www.nhlbi.nih.gov](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov)

[www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov)

## did you know?

### Downsize your serving spoon

How much you eat can be directly related to the size of the spoon you're using to serve yourself.

In a recent experiment using a free bowl of candy, obesity researcher Andrew Geier of the University of Pennsylvania demonstrated that most people eat as much as fits in the provided serving utensil. If it's a tablespoon, they'll load it up and call it a portion. Ditto if it's a quarter-cup scoop. The phenomenon, called "unit bias," is the tendency to believe that a single unit of food is the right amount.

"The environment has a major impact on how much we're eating," Geier says.



 **American Public Health Association**

Download free copies of Healthy You each month at [www.thenationshealth.org](http://www.thenationshealth.org)

## Reducing allergy, asthma triggers at home is key

By Teddi Dineley Johnson

**B**e it ever so humble, there's truly no place like home to soothe weary souls — and soles. But before you kick off your shoes and breathe that deep, sweet sigh of relief, you might want to consider what you're breathing in. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, the air inside your home can be two to five times more polluted than the air outside, and indoor air pollution can trigger symptoms for people living with allergies and asthma.

Allergies are diseases of the immune system that cause an overreaction to substances called "allergens." Allergies, as well as the most common type of asthma, are triggered by year-round inhaled allergens such as dust mites, pet dander and mold.

Asthma is a chronic pulmonary condition in which the airways become blocked or narrowed when stimulated by allergens or other environmental triggers.

If you suffer from allergies or asthma — or both — you aren't alone. Asthma and



### Furry Fact

Almost all pets, furry or feathered, can trigger asthma and allergies. Pets that trigger symptoms should be removed from the home, allergists say. Otherwise, keep them out of the bedroom. As lovable as they are, they all leave dander on beds, floors and furniture.

allergies strike 25 percent of Americans. Asthma, however, is even higher among blacks, who have more asthma attacks than whites and are more likely to be hospitalized for the disease.

"Studies have shown that if the major indoor triggers of asthma were all eliminated, asthma attacks could be decreased by 60 percent," says Norman H. Edelman, MD, chief medical officer for the American Lung Association.

What's at the top of the hit list?

"Cigarette smoke," Edelman says. "Any home in which a person with asthma and allergies lives should be absolutely off limits to smoking, with no exceptions made."

### Factoid:

Asthma and allergies affect

**25%**

of Americans

### 1 FIGHT THE MITE

Enclose pillows and mattresses in allergen-impermeable covers, or wash your pillows every week in hot water and dry thoroughly. Also, consider removing wall-to-wall carpeting and replacing it with tile or wood floors.

If that's not an option, vacuum often with a vacuum cleaner equipped with a high-efficiency purifying air filtration system, also known as a HEPA system. And don't forget to toss the bag in the trash after vacuuming, because dust mites can escape.

### 2 BUST THE DUST

Thousands of microscopic spiders, called dust mites, live in a pinch of house dust. Dust mites feed on skin flakes and can be found throughout the home. The tiny pests produce airborne particles that can trigger allergic reactions or asthma attacks when inhaled.

Dust mites thrive in moist air, so reducing moisture is your best weapon. Use a dehumidifier to maintain the relative humidity in your home below 50 percent, says Steven Kernerman, DO, an asthma and allergy specialist in Spokane, Wash.

An inexpensive device known as a hygrometer, available at hardware stores, is handy for measuring relative humidity, Kernerman says.



Indoor allergens such as dust, cigarette smoke, pets or bugs can make allergies or asthma worse.

### 3 PUT MOLD ON HOLD

High indoor humidity can encourage the growth of mold, another common culprit of allergy and asthma symptoms. Indoor mold is commonly found in basements, bathrooms, closets, attics, old mattresses, pillows and blankets. Limit opportunities for mold to grow by removing carpeting and wallpaper in basements and bathrooms. Use diluted bleach to eliminate visible mold growth in showers and on shower curtains.

### 4 PLUG THE BUGS

Cockroaches leave droppings that can trigger allergic reactions and asthma episodes when inhaled. A study funded by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases found that the combination of cockroach allergy and exposure to the creatures is a major cause of asthma-related illness and hospitalizations among children living in densely populated urban areas.

Keep cockroaches at bay by plugging up crevices around the house, storing food and garbage in closed containers and mopping the kitchen floor at least once a week.



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## Protecting your noggin a no-brainer

By Teddi Dineley Johnson

**T**oo hard-headed to wear a helmet when bicycling or motorcycling? If so, think again — while your brain is still intact. Crashes happen, and riders who stubbornly refuse to protect their noggins might unwittingly find that they have much in common with a raw egg rolling off the kitchen counter.

In the biking world, helmets are often called “brain buckets” and “cranium catchers,” and with good reason: Helmets are the single most effective means of preventing a head injury that can lead to death or permanent disability.

According to the Brain Injury Association of America, wearing a properly fitted helmet for any recreational activity that incorporates speed and your head — including in-line skating, skiing, horseback riding and a host of other sports — is a preventive step that can greatly decrease the risk of suffering a potentially serious or fatal head injury.

A helmet is sort of like an additional skull that works like a brake or a shock absorber.

### making an impact

#### Don't scramble your brains:

“A brain injury is life altering,” says Richard O'Brien, MD, FACEP, an emergency physician at Moses Taylor Hospital in Scranton, Pa., and national spokesperson for the American College of Emergency Physicians.

“No one should get on any two-wheeled vehicle, whether it is a Schwinn or a Harley, without a helmet,” O'Brien says.

Bicycle helmets are nearly 90 percent effective in preventing brain injuries, according to the American College of Emergency Physicians. They also prevent tens of thousands of scalp and face injuries annually.

“So take all the time you need to decide, while your head is hurtling towards the pavement at 55 miles per hour, whether or not you need a safety helmet,” O'Brien says.

Consider the alternative.



Blessed with lush locks? The heat and humidity inside your helmet will leave you with a condition called “helmet hair.” But better to have your hair poke out in all directions than your brain, right?

#### ● Scooter chic

Today's scooters, with their fast wheels and sleek designs, put young scooter users at greater risk of losing control and crashing.

Requiring your child to wear a helmet when riding a scooter reduces the risk of head injury by as much as 85 percent, according to the American College of Emergency Physicians.

When a helmet, with a head inside, slams into an unyielding object, such as a rock, a wall or the pavement, the force of the impact is spread over the hard outer shell.

The soft inner liner crushes and breaks, which uses up a lot of the energy. That said, isn't it smarter to let your helmet absorb the impact, instead of your brain?

The National Highway Transportation Safety Administration estimates that helmets saved the lives of 1,546 motorcyclists in 2005. An additional 728 road warriors could have been saved if all motorcyclists had worn helmets.

The passage of helmet use laws has been found to be the most effective method of increasing helmet use. When states abandon or weaken mandatory helmet laws, deaths go up. Right now, all but four states — Colorado, Illinois, Iowa and New Hampshire — require some or all motorcyclists to wear helmets.

Not sure which helmet to wear for which sport? The Brain Injury Association of America, in partnership with the Consumer Product Safety Commission, promotes the use of appropriate safety helmets through a free, downloadable brochure, “Which Helmet for Which Activity?” available online at [www.biausa.org](http://www.biausa.org).

#### ● Heads up

Bald? Try wearing a bandanna under your helmet to absorb sweat and minimize the rubbing of your helmet against your scalp.

**Factoid:**  
Bicycle helmets are 90% effective in preventing brain injuries.

#### ● A good fit matters

Over its lifetime, the average helmet's protective abilities come into play for only about two to four milliseconds. The rest of the time it's just going to sit on your head looking cool, so a comfortable fit is important. Helmet manufacturers recommend trying on several before making a purchase. The chin strap should fit around your ear and under your chin snugly and comfortably, and the helmet should not shift on your head. Also, a helmet is meant to be worn low on the forehead, just above your eyebrows. When in doubt, ask a store representative for help.

For more information on helmet safety, visit [www.helmets.org](http://www.helmets.org).



 American Public Health Association

## Healthy outdoor air: You are what you breathe

By *Teddi Dineley Johnson*

**I**t's a beautiful morning. You're in your car, headed for work. At the light, you come to a stop directly behind a school bus — close enough to smile at some kindergartners waving at you. The light turns green, the bus begins to move and you suddenly find yourself engulfed in a cloud of black diesel soot.

Sound familiar? For many Americans, gulping carbon monoxide or diesel exhaust along with their coffee is an accepted part of the morning routine, but it comes with a price. Long-term exposure to air pollutants is linked with both heart disease and lung cancer.

Clean air is essential to your day-to-day and long-term health, but millions of Americans live in places where outdoor air pollution makes

breathing difficult — even dangerous.

"Sources of air pollution exist in every community, every place there's a car, a power plant, a factory," says Paul Billings, a spokesman for the American Lung

Association. "You can't completely escape air pollution."

Ozone and particle pollution are the two most dangerous airborne health hazards. Ozone, found in smog, is often worse on hot summer days because sunlight and hot weather cause ground-level ozone to form in harmful concentrations in the air.

Some scientists have compared ozone's effect on the lining of the lung to the effect of sunburn on the skin.

Particle pollution, found in haze, smoke and dust, is often worse in the winter and is considered to be the most dangerous of the two. Particle pollution comes from a variety of sources, including cars and trucks, industry, fireplaces and power plants. The size of the particles is directly linked to their potential for causing health problems, and they can be much smaller than you'd suspect — even smaller than the width of a human hair.

**Factoid:**  
U.S. air is cleaner now than 30 years ago, thanks to better laws and technology



vice. The index tells you how clean or polluted the air in your community is, and what associated health effects might be a concern for you. The index is color-coded to make it easy to understand. For example, orange means conditions are unhealthy for sensitive groups, such as people with asthma, while red means conditions may be unhealthy for everyone.

### Make a difference

One way you can help reduce air pollution is to use your car less. As much as you love your car, keep in mind that cars are a major source of air pollution in the United States. Nationwide, 75 percent of carbon monoxide emissions come from motor vehicles. But your own personal driving habits can make a big difference in the amount of pollution your car produces.

To keep your car's emissions low, avoid unnecessary driving and maintain your car properly. Consider trading in your old clunker for a cleaner hybrid model. Cut driving miles by mapping out your errands before you get behind the

wheel. Whenever possible, consolidate trips, carpool, use public transit and choose clean alternatives, such as biking or walking. Your car will last longer, you'll save money and you'll be doing the air a big favor as well.

>> For more healthy air tips, visit [www.airnow.gov](http://www.airnow.gov) or [www.lungusa.org](http://www.lungusa.org).



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### Bad air days: Dos and Don'ts

#### What can you do to stay healthy when the air is bad?

**DO** check the Air Quality Index before planning your outdoor activities and heed warnings.

**DO** listen to what your body is telling you. Pay attention to asthma or breathing problems that occur up to day after being outdoors and discuss them with your health provider.

**DO** speak out! Identify sources of air pollution in your community and choose where you live carefully. Work with community groups and lawmakers to clear the air.

**DON'T** run or jog on congested streets. Pollution levels can be elevated up to 50 feet from the roadway, so take to the side streets.

**DON'T** exercise in the middle of the day or in the afternoon. Exertion causes you to breathe harder and faster, taking more air into your lungs.

**DON'T** schedule children's recreational activities, such as soccer games or softball practice when the air is bad. Children are especially sensitive to unhealthy air.

### Respect the color code

Outdoor air pollution can affect everyone's health, but certain groups, including people with asthma or other respiratory conditions, or heart disease, are more seriously affected.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, air pollution can make it harder to breathe and can also cause other symptoms, including coughing, wheezing, chest discomfort and a burning feeling in your lungs.

So, should we all don protective masks?

"No," Billings says. "Most masks aren't going to help you because the particles are so small they get past the body's defense mechanisms and penetrate deep in the lungs. The solution is reducing the sources of pollution, not having people run around with gas masks."

Start protecting yourself from outdoor air pollution by consulting the Air Quality Index each day. Many newspapers, TV and radio stations carry the index information as a community ser-



## Preparedness: Better to be safe than sorry

By Teddi Dineley Johnson

**D**isaster. The word alone can strike fear in your heart, and these days there are plenty of natural and manmade disasters to fear — earthquakes, extreme cold and heat, hurricanes, power outages, terrorism, tornadoes and tsunamis, to name a few. Of course, if you live in the middle of Kansas, chances are pretty slim that a tsunami will hit your town, but as Dorothy and Toto — two legendary Kansans — learned, tornados

happen, and escaping to Oz is not a practical disaster preparedness plan.

So what should you do to prepare for the worst? For starters, you don't have to prepare for each potential threat individually. The American Red Cross suggests an "all-hazards approach" to preparedness planning, says spokeswoman Tara Lynch, so don't get bogged down in the alphabet threat soup. There are three basic things you can do, she says, that are simple and effective and can apply to any disaster:

- 1 Have an emergency preparedness kit ready
- 2 Create a family communications and evacuation plan
- 3 Be informed

"Get to know the types of disasters that can happen in your community," Lynch says, "and be aware of the risks that could occur in your business, at your child's school, or in your community."



Make sure your family knows where to meet and how to reach one another in an emergency >>

The American Red Cross suggests you hold a family meeting to discuss the kinds of disasters that can happen. In an emergency, your family might be forced to evacuate, so decide on one or two spots where everyone will meet, such as just outside the house or apartment building, or at the entrance to the neighborhood. Also, ask an out-of-state friend or relative to be your family's contact person, and make sure everyone in the family knows the contact person's phone number.

**Safety tip:**  
In the event of a disaster such as a flood or hurricane, tap water may be unsafe to drink, so be sure to keep bottled water on hand.

But whether you're ordered to evacuate or shelter-in-place — a fancy term for "stay put" — you'll need to have some essential supplies on hand, so find an easy-to-carry container, such as a duffel bag or plastic trash can, and start preparing a disaster supply kit today. Just as you wouldn't begin a family trip without some prior planning and packing, you wouldn't want to find yourself in the midst of a disaster situation without an emergency kit!

### What to put in your emergency kit

The thought of packing an emergency supply kit overwhelms many people, Lynch says, but it shouldn't. The American Red Cross recommends doing it in stages rather than all at once.



You can start today by grabbing an extra bottle of water or batteries the next time you go to the grocery store.

"You'll be amazed at how much progress you can make," Lynch says.

But whatever you pack, into the mix must go the "big six," which the American Red Cross says are absolutely imperative: bottled water; non-perishable food; a battery-operated or hand-cranked radio; flashlights (make sure you have extra batteries for both the radio and flashlight); medications, including first aid supplies; and copies of important documents, such as your driver's license and insurance papers, in a resealable plastic bag.

There are many other items you'll think of based on your family's needs, including extra clothes, blankets, diapers, pet food, denture needs, contact lens solution or insulin and other prescription drugs. If you have a condition that requires refrigerated medications, talk to your doctor and plan accordingly.



### Food for thought

**T**o be prepared, you need to store at least a three-day supply of non-perishable food and water. Plan on one gallon of water per person per day.

Remember: The power might be out, so steer clear of foods that require refrigeration or cooking, or foods that require water for preparation. If you're a potato chip or pretzel addict, keep in mind that water will be in short supply, and salty foods will make you thirsty. Still, choose foods you'll want to eat, Lynch says. For example, "If you hated peanut butter anyway, you're not going to want to eat it in the middle of a disaster," she notes.

Here's a shopping list to get you started: Canned food, nuts, dried fruit, peanut butter, crackers, cereal, energy bars, bottled water, juice boxes, and non-perishable pasteurized milk.

And don't forget to put a hand-operated can opener in your emergency food kit!

### Protecting your pets

Just as Dorothy looked out for Toto when she evacuated — tucking him into her basket — you, too, should plan ahead for your pet's needs. Like humans, pets require at least a three-day supply of food and water. Pet food should be stored in an airtight, waterproof container. When packing, consider each pet's needs, such as litter for the cat, or bedding for the bunny. If you must evacuate, take your pets with you. Keep in mind, however, that many disaster shelters don't accept pets, so you'll need to plan ahead for a safe haven. For more information about disaster preparedness for pets, visit the Humane Society of America's Web site at [www.hsus.org](http://www.hsus.org).



>> For more preparedness tips, visit [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov) or [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org).



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## Learn to be the MVP on your own health care team

By Teddi Dineley Johnson

**T**he doctor knows best. In the not-so-distant past, that phrase pretty much summed up the relationship between doctors and patients, but times have changed. Today, in many ways, doctors may acknowledge that you, the patient knows best — especially in regard to your symptoms, health history and personal information. Your doctor wants you to become an engaged and informed member of your own health care team. But doctors are busy people, and a routine visit doesn't last much longer than 15 minutes. As an active team member, you'll want to score as many points during those 15 minutes as possible. Unlike football, however, that quarter-

hour doesn't come with timeouts, so grab your play book and plan your strategy in advance.

### Pick your team

The American Medical Association recommends that you devote a lot of time and energy to finding a physician who's just right for your needs — a physician with whom you can have a lasting relationship. Once you have the names of several physicians, learn as much about them as you can, such as their credentials and qualifications. Some of this information can be obtained from your county or state medical society, or the American Medical Association's Directory of Physicians in the United States, which is available online and at most libraries. And don't hesitate to ask your doctor's office about fees.

### On your mark...

Find out the basics. Does the doctor you've chosen participate in your health plan? Will your cholesterol test or chest X-ray be handled by a laboratory or radiology service that doesn't participate in your health plan? Where is the doctor's office? What time should you arrive? Where will you park? Do you need to bring your insurance card or a referral? Your doctor and her or his staff will appreciate the time you take to get organized.

### ...get set...

To serve you effectively, your health care provider needs information about you. Your preparation will contribute greatly to your doctor's ability to make a proper diagnosis, spare you from undergoing unnecessary procedures and speed up your recovery. Before you leave for your appointment, make a list of questions. Write down any medications you are taking, including over-the-counter drugs and herbal remedies. Write down all of your concerns and symptoms, beginning with the most serious symptoms. Your health care provider will want to know when the symptoms first appeared, how often they occur and how long they last. Also, consider compiling a family health history. The time you invest preparing

for your visit will come back to you in terms of extra time with your physician.

### ...go!

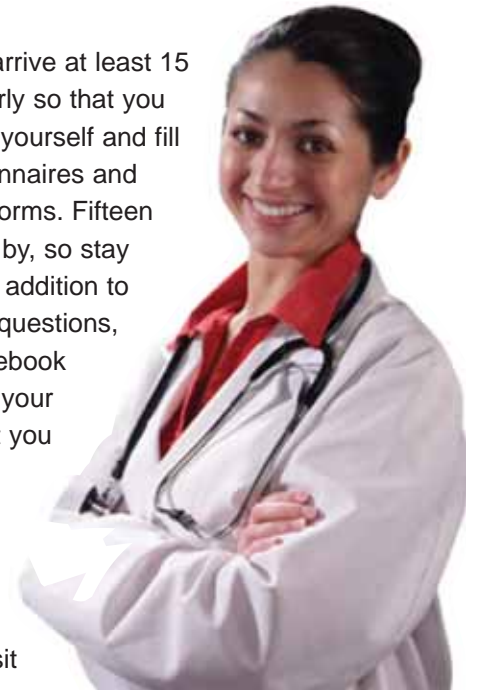
Plan to arrive at least 15 minutes early so that you can collect yourself and fill out questionnaires and insurance forms. Fifteen minutes fly by, so stay focused. In addition to your list of questions, bring a notebook and pen to your visit so that you can take notes. Bringing a friend or relative to a doctor visit can help you relax, and your companion can remind you of questions you forgot to ask or help you remember what the doctor said. Answer your doctor's questions accurately and completely. Be honest about your lifestyle, even if it means shooing your mother-in-law out of the room for a while. Listen carefully and speak up if you have questions.

By the end of the visit, you should have a clear understanding of your symptoms and condition, the treatment and medication options and the risks and benefits of each option. Be sure and make a note which tests you received, and follow-up with your health care provider if you don't hear back on your results.

### Hit a homer on your meds

In any given week, four out of five adults in the United States will use prescription medicines, over-the-counter drugs or dietary supplements of some kind. Tell your doctor about every drug you're taking and don't forget to list any herbal remedies you take, whether it's Omega 3 or extract of octopus. Simply stated, being an engaged consumer means understanding what you're taking, why you're taking it and how to take it. Read labels, be honest with your health care provider and pharmacist and take your medication exactly as directed.

>> For more tips, visit [www.ahrq.gov/consumer](http://www.ahrq.gov/consumer) or [www.familydoctor.org](http://www.familydoctor.org).



**Fact:**  
Half of all Americans have difficulty understanding their health information

### Stay in the game: Practice prevention

When it comes to your health, the best defense truly is a good offense. To keep your ball in play:

Get regular screenings. A number of easy tests can help prevent or lessen the incidence of cancer, stroke, heart disease, diabetes and osteoporosis. Ask your doctor what screenings are right for you.

Get regular physicals, including dental, hearing and vision check-ups.

Eat a healthy diet and be physically active.

Stay up to date on your vaccinations, including your seasonal flu shot.

And remember: When it comes to your family's health, you're not just the coach, you're also a vital part of the team!



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# Healthy You

By Teddi Dineley Johnson

**Y**our body was made to move. Daily physical activity reduces the risk of heart disease by improving blood circulation throughout your body. It also can keep your weight under control, improve blood cholesterol levels, prevent and manage high blood pressure, relieve stress, improve self-image, boost energy levels, increase muscle strength, prevent bone loss and increase optimism by countering depression. In older people, exercise helps delay or prevent chronic illnesses and diseases associated with aging and maintains quality of life and independence longer.

Vigorous aerobic activities are best for improving the fitness of your heart and lungs. These include brisk walking, running, swimming, skiing, bicycling and jumping rope. But even low-intensity activities, when done for as little as 30 minutes a day, will improve your health. So grab a rake and till the garden, or scrub the kitchen floor. You might even borrow your neighbor's poodle and go for a stroll, or dance!

## Break out your walking shoes

Walking is the easiest and most convenient form of exercise, and here's the best part: it's free! Studies show that women who walk four or more hours per week have 41 percent fewer hip fractures than women who walk less than one hour a week. Also, a study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* showed that sedentary women ages 65 and older who began walking a mile a day cut their rates of death from all causes by 50 percent.



Unfortunately, many people who start a new exercise program drop out within a couple of months, claiming they're too busy or simply bored with the routine, says American Council on Exercise spokeswoman Debi Pillarella, MEd, CPT.

"If it's not fun, then the likelihood of it becoming part of life for the long haul is significantly reduced," Pillarella says. To counter the boredom, she suggests taking a class. "Research shows that people who take exercise classes do a better job adhering to their exercise program than those who go it alone."

Or play. Exercise isn't just push-ups, sit-ups and walking on a treadmill. Playing softball, joining a tennis league, running around with your kids, "all are great ways to get exercise in a fun way," she says.

Finally, providing yourself with realistic exercise goals and rewarding yourself for achieving those goals makes working out a lot more fun. To reward herself, Pillarella puts \$1 in a jar each time she works out and sets a goal of four to six workouts a week. "This allows me to get a pedicure almost monthly," she says.

But whatever you decide to do, keep in mind that if you've been sedentary for a long time, are overweight, have a high risk of coronary heart disease or some other chronic health problem, the American Heart Association recommends that you see your doctor for a medical evaluation before beginning a physical activity program.

**MYTH: You have to be a marathoner to see health benefits**

**FACT:** Research continues to show that any amount of exercise, at any age, is always better than no exercise. In general, the more you do, the greater the benefits. "Many newcomers to exercise can begin to achieve health benefits by accumulating a minimum of 60 minutes in a week," Pillarella says.



>> For more easy exercise tips, visit [www.acefitness.org](http://www.acefitness.org) or [www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/physical/everyone.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/physical/everyone.htm)

**MYTH: It's too late for me to start**

**FACT:** You don't want to jump from the couch to the treadmill all at once, but it's never too late to start exercising. In older adults, a little exercise goes a long way toward imparting health benefits, and the more you do, the greater the health benefits. Of course, if you have a chronic condition, such as heart disease, cancer or diabetes, you'll want to check with your doctor first for any precautions you'll need to take.

**MYTH: No pain, no gain**

**FACT:** A sensible exercise program might be uncomfortable, but it should not be painful. If exercise hurts, you're doing something wrong.

**MYTH: Exercise takes up way too much of my free time**

**FACT:** Exercise doesn't have to be done in one long session. You can break it up throughout the day, or sneak it into your activities. Instead of jockeying for the best parking spots, choose the ones farthest away. Carry that gallon of milk to your car instead of using the cart. Take the stairs instead of the elevator whenever you can. During TV commercials, get up and walk around the house or run-in-place for two minutes. At the office, when you need to talk to co-workers, do it the old-fashioned way — get up out of your chair and visit them in person. They'll be pleasantly surprised and you'll benefit from the movement.

**Fact**  
Nearly 40 percent of Americans ages 55 and older report no leisure-time physical activity



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