

Healthy *Thanksgiving*

INSIDE:

**Treating Autism
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Local Doctors Treating Autism

When the NeuroSensory Center of Eastern Pennsylvania opened in the fall of 2007, they painted their walls dusty rose and hung paintings of flowers, expecting their patients to include mostly women suffering from fibromyalgia, migraines, and other neurosensory disorders. Imagine the doctors' surprise when their patient list was filled with children suffering from autism.

The NeuroSensory Center of Eastern Pennsylvania, located in Kingston, is a specialty facility designed to diagnose and treat even the most complicated disorders of the nervous system. The Center, one of ten sites around the country, has customized applications and specialized equipment to assist in the diagnosis and treatment of autistic spectrum disorders as well as migraines, dizziness, vertigo, vision abnormalities, headaches, post concussion syndrome,

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The staff of the NeuroSensory

Center of Eastern Pennsylvania includes a neurodevelopmental optometrist, a neuropsychologist, a registered nurse, diagnostician and therapists. The team approach enables each patient to see the practitioners most able to help him or her. In addition to certification as NeuroSensory Specialists, Dr. Jeffrey Becker, OD and Nurse Sheila Becker, RN, have been trained in the DefeatAutism Now! Approach. Dr. Becker notes, "We're so happy with the successes we've seen with our patients, reducing pain and improving the quality of life. It's incredibly gratifying to see a previously non-verbal child begin to speak."

Parents of children with autism who are patients at the NeuroSensory Center of Eastern Pennsylvania have noted improvements in the following areas: aggression, anxiety, appetite, attention, behavior,

cognition, concentration, depression, distractibility, emotionality, eye-contact, fine/gross motor skills, focus, hyperactivity, hyperacusis (hearing sensitivity), imbalance, irritability, physical performance, processing difficulties, sleep, and speech.

The Center also had added VETA -- Vision Enhancement Therapy for Athletes -- and NeuroTherapy to its tools to help patients.

The Doctors at the NeuroSensory Center of Eastern Pennsylvania are thrilled to be helping so many children with autism and are excited by the results. Though still painted dusty rose, the waiting room is now filled with Thomas the Tank engine toys and children's books.



Dr. Jeffrey Becker of the NeuroSensory Center of Eastern Pennsylvania has been recognized locally, nationally, and internationally as an expert on autism.

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Dr. Jeffrey Becker, his wife, Sheila Becker, RN, and (center) Actress and Activist Jenny McCarthy met at an autism conference.

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NeuroSensory Center™
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Healthy ~ Lower Calorie Thanksgiving

Many people count their blessings on Thanksgiving. Few, however, count their calories. Over-indulging at the dinner table is a Thanksgiving tradition, and often paves the way for a season of poor nutritional habits with longlasting ramifications.

The American Council on Exercise says that the average adult consumes 3,000 calories and 229 grams of fat at a typical Thanksgiving meal. That is well above the USDA-recommended guidelines of 2,000 calories and 65 grams of fat that most adults should consume in an entire day.

With so many options available on the Thanksgiving buffet table, it is easy to see how overeating is commonplace. Rather than wearing elastic-waisted pants and succumbing to too many fattening foods, individuals can make smart food substitutions that won't compromise taste but will cut calorie intake.

Fill up on lean protein. Turkey is the cornerstone of the Thanksgiving meal and is a lower-fat, lean source of filling protein. Rather than indulge in too many starchy side dishes, have turkey be the bulk of your Thanksgiving dinner. When preparing turkey, use fresh herbs and low-fat vegetable stock to keep the meat moist and flavorful, avoiding butter and oils, which just tack on extra calories. Serve steamed veggies. Rather than sweet potatoes covered in butter and marshmallows or breaded and fried vegetables that are unrecognizable, serve produce lightly steamed so it retains its nutritional value and flavor.

Swap out white starches for whole grains. Stuffing is a popular side dish on Thanksgiving. But stuffing can be full of empty

calories. Instead of serving white rice or bread stuffing, make your own using brown rice and whole grain breads. Add protein-rich nuts and dried fruits to add flavor and fiber as well.

Skip double-crust pies. Two-crust pies with a bottom crust and a top layer have more calories than ones with just a crust on the bottom. Opt for low-calorie pumpkin pie or add a little gelatin to fruit filling and skip the top crust on traditional two-crust pies. Dessert also can be pared down to fresh fruit tarts or low-fat gelatin trifles.

Cut down on courses. Having an excess of food is not only unhealthy but wasteful. Trim courses from the Thanksgiving meal to save time, money and calories. Does anyone really show up for

the cheese and crackers appetizers? Focus on the main course and chances are no one will miss the extra food. Plus, their waistlines won't miss it either.

Dilute ciders and juices. Liquid calories quickly add up. Offer plenty of fresh water and keep sugary drinks to a minimum. When serving apple juice or cider, dilute it with water, which will stretch it out further and cut down on the calories.

Take frequent breaks. It can take anywhere from 15 to 30 minutes for the body to register that it is full. Failure to give the stomach time to send messages to the brain that you are full could mean you eat more than is necessary. Making a few changes to favorite foods can make the holiday more healthy.

Figuring the Turkey to person ratio

Thanksgiving holds different meanings to different people. Some feel it is a day for being generous or giving thanks through unselfish deeds. Others feel it is a time to sit around with family sharing stories of the year. Still many others simply look forward to the day for football. No matter how you view Thanksgiving, one thing is for sure, filling up on turkey is an integral part of the holiday.

If turkey is the centerpiece of your celebration - as it should be - then be sure to have enough turkey on hand to adequately feed all of your guests. Although they will be filling up on trimmings and side dishes as well, the first thing they will spear with a fork is a nice slice of juicy turkey.

There is some conventional wisdom with regards to how big a turkey to buy. Most chefs or home cooks say that having a pound to one-and-a-half pounds for each adult at the holiday table is adequate. Children will likely eat a half or quarter of that amount. If you want to ensure leftovers, then you can increase the size of the turkey slightly.

Therefore, if 10 adults and 5 children will be at Thanksgiving dinner, multiply 10 by 1.5. That equals 15. Multiply 5 x .5, which equals 2.5. Add the two totals together, and you're left with 17.5 pounds. A turkey in that range should be adequate to feed guests. If your guests are known to be hearty eaters or if leftovers are essential, round up to a 20-pound bird. Keep in mind it will be necessary to check the size of your oven prior to purchasing the turkey to ensure the bird will fit inside with a roasting pan. Otherwise, you may have to downsize on the turkey and cook more side dishes.

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Treat Yourself ... Dining for Thanksgiving

Dining out for the holidays is a tradition for many families. Dining out has many advantages, including no cleanup once the meal is over and a more varied menu that provides guests more choices than the standard holiday fare.

Dining out can also prove less expensive for the holiday host. The tab at the end of a night on the town can be split among the guests, whereas the food bill when hosting a holiday dinner at home is often left to the host and the host alone.

But dining out for the holidays does require some work, even if none of that work involves scrubbing dirty dishes or finding extra seats for guests. When planning a holiday dinner at a restaurant, consider the following tips.

Do your homework. A favorite restaurant might be tops on your list, but do some comparison shopping before settling on a restaurant. Prices can vary greatly when it

comes to private parties, and some might not even be capable of accommodating the kind of large party that might accompany you for a holiday dinner. Start shopping well before the holiday season to see who offers the best menu, the most affordable prices, the best accommodations and the restaurant isn't booked up if you wait until the last minute.

Choose a restaurant that's accessible to everyone. Guests can stay overnight when a holiday dinner is at a relative's house. However, guests will almost certainly be driving home after a holiday dinner at a restaurant. Make everyone's post-meal commute home as easy as possible by choosing a centrally located restaurant that's convenient from everyone's home.

Inquire about a restaurant's pricing flexibility. There might be room for negotiation regarding the menu, including choices on

the food and beverages being offered, but you'll never know if you don't ask. Traditional holiday fare will likely be available, but discuss alternatives to such menu items, including if there is anything for vegetarians or if there is a gluten-free meal option. In addition, some restaurants might be willing to negotiate price, especially for large parties.

Be an early bird. If the responsibility of planning or hosting the dinner has fallen on your shoulders, then get to the restaurant before your guests. This gives you time to ensure everything is ready and increases the chances your holiday dinner will go according to plan.

Don't forget invitations. Treat the holiday dinner like you might treat a wedding reception or a birthday party, inviting guests several weeks in advance so everyone has time to plan their day or trip.

Thanksgiving & drunk driving

Many people mistakenly assume that New Year's Eve is the holiday responsible for the most drunk-driving accidents. Although champagne and other alcoholic drinks are often free-flowing on December 31, New Year's Eve holds a distant second place to Thanksgiving for the most drunk driving-related fatalities. This is perhaps because Thanksgiving is a family holiday, and many people often feel pressure to drink more when family are around to have a good time.

Be safe during the Holiday Season — Don't Drink & Drive!

Make this Black Friday a safe one

There are many people who get the ultimate rush by waking up early and waiting in line for some amazing doorbuster deals at the stores. Although Black Friday is one of the most anticipated shopping events for shoppers to score momentous deals, it has also proven a recipe for disaster. Stampeded masses of eager shoppers has been all too common on Black Friday through the years. Coupled with anticipation of impending sales and the sheer volume of shoppers waiting outside of stores, mob mentality often prevails. It's survival of the fittest as some shoppers push, shove and run inside of doors to nab the must-have products on sale.

Although "Black Friday" really refers to a store's profit margin and their ability to be "in the black" when tallying end-of-year sales, the name does seem to have an ominous feel to it. "Black Friday" seems to conjure up images of something bad happening. When unruly mobs race into stores, something bad just may happen.

Individuals shopping can also do their part. While Black Friday shopping has become a tradition for many, oftentimes better deals can be had at different points in the holiday season. Some argue that shopping on Thanksgiving Day yields better sales and that those doorbusters are only ways to draw you into the store for other products that don't have the same wow factor. Keep in mind that many online retailers also offer Black Friday sales that are comparable and you don't have to wait outside in the cold to get them.



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Stay Healthy for the Holidays

The holiday season is upon us once again, and with it comes the season's notoriously hectic pace. With crowded social calendars and the stress of holiday shopping, it's easy to feel overwhelmed once the season hits full swing.

Unfortunately, many people have trouble staying healthy through the hectic holiday season. With so much to do, it's easy to put health on the back burner during the holidays. But however hectic the holiday season can be, there are ways to keep the family happy and healthy this holiday season.

Encourage kids to wash their hands. Germs are often spread most quickly through our hands, which are in constant contact with hotbeds for germs, including doorknobs. While adults might be quick to wash their hands after they sneeze or cough, kids are often lax in the hand washing department. But washing hands thoroughly is an effective way to ward off winter germs that attach to hands after we sneeze, cough or simply touch a doorknob. Encourage kids to be

diligent about washing their hands, not only after they use the restroom but whenever they sneeze, cough or arrive home from school.

Keep indoor air crisp and clean. Bringing home airborne germs, such as sickness-causing bacteria and other contaminants, is inevitable during the holiday season. The kids' school is a breeding ground for such germs, as is the nearby shopping mall filled with holiday shoppers. While it might be impossible to avoid bringing home these unwanted holiday guests, it's not impossible to fight them off once they do get home.

Circulate indoor air. Stagnant air indoors can also increase the likelihood of cold and flu. Central heating can dry the body out and lead to dehydration, making it harder for the body to flush out poisons and germs during the winter months.

Get outdoors. Even if the weather outside is frightful, it can be beneficial to spend some time outdoors during the winter months. While it's best to obey the local weather authority and advisories,

if there's no restrictions on spending time outdoors, getting outside can help the body fend off cold and flu. Because few people spend time outdoors in the winter, germs can gather inside and circulate among those who spend significant time indoors. As a result, those who spend all their time indoors are more vulnerable to cold and flu. When possible, bundle up and spend some time outdoors in the fresh air.

Squeeze in some daily exercise. While the holiday season is certainly hectic, adults and kids alike should still find time to fit in daily exercise. Kids might get their daily dose in gym class, but adults need to make time as well. Exercise can prove a great means to relieving holiday stress, and a body that's strong and fit will be prove more capable of defending itself against airborne germs and bacteria.

Avoid succumbing to cold and flu season

Winter's arrival coincides with the arrival of other things as well. The holiday season. Snow days from school. Weekends spent skiing and snowboarding with family and friends.

While each of those things is something to look forward to, one thing also synonymous with winter is never welcomed with open arms. Cold and flu season impacts many households each winter, forcing kids and adults alike to put life on hold as they rest and recover. To many people, flu shots are enough to keep them going strong through cold and flu season, but not everyone has access to flu shots. Even those who do, might still get colds if they don't take steps to stay healthy when the mercury drops. This winter, people wanting to avoid the worst of cold and flu season can take a few precautions making the home safer and reducing their risks of getting a cold or the flu.

Sanitize door knobs, kitchen counters, kitchen appliance handles and hard surfaces with a disinfectant. Do the same for items that maybe used frequently by everyone in the household including remote controls, telephones, cell phones, computer mouse and computer keyboard.

Keep sanitizing wipes in a convenient place in your vehicle for washing off the steering wheel, car keys and areas where viruses can be transmitted. And don't forget a travel-size hand sanitizer when spending time shopping, picking up items in a store, or after handling money.

We can't eliminate the potential for catching the seasonal cold or flu virus, however by using some precautionary practices, we may be reducing chances.



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Keeping your eyes healthy

Possible ways to reduce risks for cataracts

While doctors still don't know exactly what causes cataracts, there might be ways men and women concerned about their eyes can reduce their risk for cataracts. Though the following tips can't guarantee a person won't get cataracts, they might just help individuals reduce their risk.

Address existing medical conditions. Certain medical conditions increase a person's risk of getting cataracts. These conditions include diabetes, high blood pressure and obesity. Men and women with diabetes should closely follow their treatment plan to reduce their risk of cataracts. Those who are obese

or have high blood pressure should adopt a healthier lifestyle to lose weight and lower their blood pressure.

Get routine eye examinations. Routine eye examinations can help doctors find cataracts and additional visionary ailments at their earliest stages. Should any sudden changes, such as blurriness or double vision, occur, visit an eye doctor immediately.

Maintain a healthy weight. As mentioned above, obesity is a risk for cataracts. But men and women who can maintain a healthy weight with daily exercise and a healthy diet might reduce their risk for cataracts.

Adopt a healthy diet. A healthy diet will ensure people are getting enough vitamins and nutrients. Such a diet should include plenty of fruits and vegetables, which are

loaded with antioxidants that may prevent damage to the eye's lens.

A healthy diet will also help men and women maintain a healthy weight and can also help them successfully manage any preexisting conditions.

Wear sunglasses. Excessive exposure to sunlight can increase a person's risk of cataracts. When going outside during the daytime, wear sunglasses that block ultraviolet B rays.

Stop smoking. Smoking can lead to a slew of medical ailments and can even be tied to cataracts. High blood pressure is a risk for cataracts, and men and women who smoke should know that smoking has been linked to high blood pressure. By quitting smoking, individuals are reducing their risk for a host of ailments, including cataracts.

Vision Problems Can Affect Children's Learning Ability

Vision problems are more than just a nuisance for children. Impacted vision can have serious effects on a child's ability to learn in the classroom. Imagine trying to read a textbook or see the chalkboard with words dancing around or vision doubled. What if the words were blurred or even backward?

These are the problems thousands of students face. Poor grades or an inability to pay attention in class may be incorrectly attributed to other learning or behavioral issues when really they could stem from poor vision. Most vision screenings at school do not check for tracking, focusing, eye teaming, or perceptual skills. They simply check for visual acuity. Therefore, students with certain vision impairments may be sent on their way with a 20/20 bill of health. An optometrist or ophthalmologist will be able to diagnose vision problems that are not apparent in school exams.

The American Optometric Association recommends comprehensive eye exams each year before a child enters school and parents should make this a part of annual physical exams when taking kids for yearly wellness visits.

Without proper diagnosis, children can experience low self-esteem and feelings of inadequacy in school. With repeated admonishments from educators and parents, children may view themselves as "stupid" or unable to learn. This could impact them throughout their entire lives.



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Sugar substitutes for diabetics

Monitoring glucose levels in the blood to ensure they are at an acceptable level is a vital task in a diabetic's life. Unstable levels can mean the difference between living a healthy life or illness and even death.

Eating a healthy diet, staying hydrated with plenty of water and possibly using medication or insulin injections are a few of the ways to maintain one's glucose levels.

When a diabetic eats, the sugar in his or her food is digested into glucose. Sugar is normally used by cells for energy. Insulin is a hormone that is secreted by the pancreas and helps to regulate the metabolism of carbohydrates and fats while removing excess glucose from the blood, which could prove toxic. Individuals who have no insulin production (type 1 diabetes) and those whose insulin is inefficient at moving sugar out of the bloodstream (type 2 diabetes) may have to take insulin and regulate their sugar intake to keep the body in balance.

Although having diabetes means a lifelong regimen of watching what you eat, it does not mean you can't enjoy your diet. Thanks to a wide variety of sugar substitutes, most diabetics can indulge in desserts and other foods in moderation.

For those ready to satisfy their sweet tooth, here are some sweeteners that are approved by the American Diabetes Association.

Sucralose: This sweetener, which often goes by the brand name Splenda, is one of the more popular supplements. The body does not recognize sucralose as a carbohydrate or a sugar, which means it will not be metabolized as such. Sucralose is heat-resistant, which means it can be used for cooking and baking.

Stevia: Relatively new to the commercial market, stevia is an all-natural sweetener, unlike many of the other sugar substitutes. It comes from a South American plant of the same name and has a strong track record of safety. The sweetener has zero calories and no glycemic index.

Saccharine: Saccharine is also safe, but diabetics must only consume it in small amounts. It also can be mixed with hot or cold food.

Aspartame: This sweetener also has zero calories and is found in many foods and beverages. However, aspartame is best avoided when baking because it loses sweetness when heated.

Acesulfame potassium: A little goes a long way with this product because it is much sweeter than sugar. It is also usually combined with other sweeteners because it can have a bitter aftertaste.

Not all sugar substitutes are good for diabetics, however. The Mayo Clinic warns that sugar alcohols, particularly mannitol, sorbitol and xylitol, can increase blood sugar levels. These products also may cause stomach discomfort and diarrhea. Before trying sugar substitutes, diabetics should consult with their physicians to see if it is safe and discuss potential side effects or usage restrictions, as some artificial sweeteners can cause allergic reactions in some people.

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Insulin pump delivery systems help manage diabetes

Diabetics who participate in insulin therapy often face hundreds of needle pricks a month in order to keep their sugar levels in check. However, insulin pumps reduce the amount of manual work and the pain involved.

Diabetes is a condition where the body doesn't produce enough insulin or it cannot use it properly. The American Diabetes Association says that 25.8 million children and adults in the United States -- 8.3 percent of the population -- have diabetes.

There are two main types of diabetes. Type 1 diabetes occurs when the body's pancreas doesn't produce any insulin. Type 2 diabetes occurs when the pancreas either doesn't produce enough insulin or your body's cells ignore the insulin. The majority of people living with diabetes have type 2 diabetes.

Insulin is important because it enables glucose from the foods eaten to enter cells as a form of energy. When there is no insulin or insufficient levels, glucose remains in the bloodstream instead of entering the cells. Too much glucose in the blood can lead to a host of problems. Diabetics who take artificial insulin do so to keep their glucose levels in check.

According to FamilyDoctor.org, the amount of insulin needed will be determined by the type of diabetes as well as diet and sugar levels. A doctor will work with you to develop a plan of insulin injections that will best work for controlling glucose. In some cases the dose will need to be adjusted depending on diet. Some people with diabetes have to take insulin once or twice a day, while others need it three or four times. That can be up to 120 needle injections per month, not factoring in needle pricks to test for blood sugar levels.

As an alternative, diabetics can turn to an insulin delivery system. Although these systems do offer an automatic stream of insulin, the device isn't completely hands-off, but it does reduce the margin of error with insulin delivery. An insulin pump is a small device (about the size of a cell phone) that contains insulin. The pump is programmed to deliver a basal rate of insulin to keep blood glucose in the desired range for the patient. The insulin is delivered through a small tube with a cannula at the end that is inserted beneath the skin. The insertion only needs to be done about 10 to 12 times a month, otherwise the tube remains inserted in the skin.

During mealtimes, the patient enters nutritional information about the foods eaten so that the pump can issue an additional dose of insulin to counteract the glucose produced during digestion. These pumps can help diabetics live more normal lives relatively free from the strict insulin shot regimens of the past. The pumps also help avoid the wide ranges of glucose that can occur if you forget a shot or during the overnight hours. The pump delivers a constant stream of insulin just as the body normally would do.

Many people find the pump helps them to have more control over their eating schedules. They aren't bound to when they eat or what. Although a careful diet is still helpful when using an insulin pump, there is more freedom in diet and when you eat by using the pump.

Insulin delivery pumps can help diabetics better manage the disease and live healthier, happier lives. Consult with your doctor to learn more about the options available.



Bon Voyage!

Punta Cana, where palm trees dot the landscape, is one of the most beautiful areas on the east coast of the Dominican Republic. Located 800 miles southeast of Miami, with Cuba to the west and Puerto Rico to the east, is the second largest island in the Caribbean.

The official language is Spanish and the currency is the peso. Government of the Dominican Republic is a representative democracy with a president, similar to that of the United States. Santo Domingo is the capital.

With a trifecta of sugar white sand beaches, pleasant climate and palm trees, it's a beach lovers paradise with an average temperature of 80 degrees. It is surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean to the north and the Caribbean Sea to the south. There are many daily activities to keep you busy, such as jeep or monster truck safari, catamaran cruise and snorkeling, dune buggy adventures, zipline, deep sea fishing or choose a dolphin encounter.

All inclusive resorts are the most common type of accommodations found in Punta Cana, which include meals and drinks. Many of the resorts offer spa services, casinos, an amazing selection of dining options, on-site weddings, swimming pools and a kids club.

With the cold, drab winter months upon us, if you could imagine yourself on the pristine white sand beaches lapped by the warm blue waters, give us a call to schedule your winter getaway!

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Tips to make Holiday Eating Habits Healthier

Holiday eating habits are often characterized by overindulgence. From the first taste of turkey on Thanksgiving Day till the last pig in blanket hors d'oeuvre on New Year's Eve, holiday eating habits are not always healthy.

Unhealthy eating and overindulgence during the holidays is something many people accept as a staple of the season. But it's just as easy to enjoy a healthy diet during the holidays as it is to go overboard. All it takes is a nip and tuck here and there to make holiday eating habits healthier.

Contribute healthy items when attending social gatherings. Many holiday parties are pot luck, where in each guest brings a dish to the party. Instead of contributing

another batch of holiday cookies, bring a healthy dish, like a large salad that makes for a great appetizer or a low-fat and low-calorie dessert that everyone can enjoy.

Don't forget vitamins and minerals. There's no way to control the menu when attending holiday functions like office parties or even when traveling to visit family and friends. But, when cooking during the holiday season, add more healthy foods to existing recipes to make up for any lost nutritional value. Include more vegetables in the menu, and don't be afraid to add nuts, fruits or beans to meals as well.

Limit alcohol consumption. Overindulging during the holidays does not just pertain to eating too

much turkey. It's easy to overindulge with alcohol as well. In addition to being dangerous, overindulging with alcohol is also very unhealthy. Many drinks are high in calories, even if the drinks are four ounces or less. A 3.5-ounce martini, for instance, is well over 100 calories. When consuming alcohol during the holidays, limit yourself to one drink. It's not only safer to do so, but it also benefits the waistline.

Thanks to the hectic nature of the season, it's easy to skip a meal or two, especially if there's a holiday party later in the day. But skipping meals will only increase the likelihood of overeating at gatherings, which, as mentioned earlier, often feature less healthy foods.

8 Ways to Eat Better Now

1. Use a smaller plate. This will trick the eye and brain into thinking you are eating a lot.
2. Make vegetables a priority, not an afterthought. Fill up on vegetables and make meat and other higher-calorie foods the after thought.
3. Avoid family style meals. That means placing large serving dishes full of food directly on the table. It encourages going in for seconds when you really may not be hungry. It takes the brain at least 20 minutes to register feeling full.
4. Switch to skim products. It is widely known that dairy products are an important component of healthy living. However, whole-milk varieties tend to be heavy on calories and saturated fat.
5. Rely on seafood protein. Eating fish once or twice a week is an excellent way to cut calories and enjoy a food that is rich in essential fatty acids.
6. Experiment with herbs, not salt. A lot of sodium in a diet may not be good for blood pressure and it can lead to water retention.
7. Go sparingly on dressings and sauces. You can quickly turn a healthy salad into an unhealthy meal if you drizzle on too much creamy salad dressing.
8. Indulge once in a while. Depriving yourself of everything that is tasty can lead to binge eating or overeating. Just remember to keep the portions modest.

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“Winter Blues” Might Be Something More Serious

The arrival of winter brings with it many things besides just the Holidays, families and friends gathering, gift giving and the likely potential of over-eating. Another image the winter months is that of winter weather, complete with its short days and snowstorms. While the official arrival of winter isn't until December, for many the unofficial start of the colder weather and shorter days, means having the blues.

Though winter has its aficionados, for many people winter can be a difficult time of year, one characterized by feelings of depression and indifference. For those who find themselves with those feelings each year, the cause could be a condition known as Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), which most commonly begins to occur during late fall, extending into the winter months. In fact, many simply assume the symptoms of SAD are the “winter blues,” a common misconception that could be masking a larger issue. However, understanding and recognizing SAD could be the first step for those looking to have a more enjoyable winter.

What is SAD? SAD is a type of depression that is cyclic, affecting a person during the same season each year. The symptoms of SAD will arrive and go away at the same time each year. As mentioned earlier, the majority of people who suffer from SAD will begin to experience symptoms in late fall, and those symptoms will continue through the winter months.

What are the Symptoms of SAD? Symptoms of SAD often start out mildly and become more

severe as the season progresses. Those symptoms can include: Feelings of sadness, anxiety, withdrawal from social activities and situations. Loss of interest in usual activities, feelings of hopelessness, and over-sleeping. Weight gain, difficulty concentrating, craving of carbohydrates, such as bread and pasta.

While SAD is most common in late fall and early winter, it can also occur in spring and summer. This is called summer-onset seasonal affective disorder. Symptoms of this type of SAD are, in some cases, the opposite of winter seasonal affective disorder. Symptoms may include: irritability, insomnia, weight loss, and poor appetite.

What Causes SAD? It is still uncertain as to the specific causes of SAD. Experts, however, have theorized that lack of sunlight might be a contributing factor. A reduction in sunlight can cause a drop in serotonin, a neurotransmitter in the brain that influences mood, appetite, sleep, and a host of other behaviors. An imbalance in serotonin is believed to influence mood in a way that leads to depression. That lends credence to the theory that a lack of sunlight and its subsequent depletion of serotonin could be a cause of SAD.

Changes in season can also disrupt the balance of melatonin, a natural hormone that plays a role in sleep patterns and mood.

What are Risk Factors for SAD? According to the Mayo Clinic, there are a handful of factors that may increase a person's risk of SAD. Those include, but are not limited to: Gender. Studies

have shown that SAD is more commonly diagnosed among women than men. However, the same research has indicated that men often have more severe symptoms.

Geography. Where a person lives is also a risk factor for SAD. The further a person lives from the equator, be it north or south, the higher the risk factor for developing SAD. That's likely due to the harsh decrease in sunlight during the winter months in areas far from the equator.

Family history. In general, depression tends to run in families. Because SAD is a type of depression, family history can also be a risk factor.

Are Treatment Options Available? First and foremost, persons suspecting they or a loved one are suffering from SAD should consult a physician and get a diagnosis. Persons diagnosed with SAD do have treatment options available to them, including light therapy and medications.

A study conducted by VU University Medical Center found that low levels of vitamin D may be linked to depression and other psychiatric illnesses.

The Amsterdam research, which tracked over 1,200 people, showed that blood vitamin D levels were 14 percent lower in individuals with major and minor depression compared with non-depressed participants.

If you feel that you have signs of SAD or depression, talk to your physician or healthcare provider for the best advice and recommendation.



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Stress - physical and mental impact

Many people know that stress can be bad for your mental health, but as it turns out, it can also be bad for your physical health.

Researchers have linked behaviors associated with stress, such as drinking alcohol, using drugs, or even binging on comfort foods, with the deterioration of the adrenal gland. The adrenal gland releases stress hormones that signal to the body whether to fight or get out of the situation (flight). If mollifying substances are introduced into the body, it negatively affects the delicate way the stress system works, and the adrenal gland eventually putters out. That means the body can be in a constant level of stress, or a person can feel stressed even over minor things. This also impacts the heart, liver, blood pressure, and a number of other factors.

Keeping stress in check is important, but it shouldn't be done in a way that does more harm than good.

Daytime Drowsiness

Daytime drowsiness Do you find yourself reaching for a can of soda or a cup of coffee during the day to banish fatigue? Many do. But you may want to grab a bottle of water instead. Research indicates that lack of water is the No. 1 trigger of daytime fatigue. Therefore, not only can drinking adequate supplies of water keep you refreshed, it can also help to keep you more awake - even during a boring business meeting.

Easing the Burn ... Recognize Causes of Heartburn

After a big meal, many people experience a feeling of burning behind the breastbone that seems to extend all the way back up to the mouth. Although it feels like the heart and lungs are on fire, heartburn actually has nothing to do with the heart at all. Heartburn can be a symptom of GERD, or Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease. More than 60 million American adults experience acid reflux and heartburn at least once a month. Roughly 25 million adults suffer daily from heartburn and experience severe refluxes.

When stomach acid rises and comes in contact with the esophagus, or the tube in the throat that connects the mouth to the stomach, it can cause irritation. This irritation creates a burning sensation. Sometimes a foul taste occurs in the mouth, and sometimes it can feel like food is at the back of the throat.

Heartburn can be caused by a few different factors. A person may eat a meal that simply causes stomach upset. Sometimes spicy foods or rich meals can be the culprit. When the lower esophageal sphincter muscle (LES) is weakened or relaxed, it cannot do its job of keeping stomach acid inside of the stomach.

Pressure on the stomach, such as tight clothing or bending over, may result in acid reflux. Stress can too cause an over-abundance of stomach acid and a slowing down of the emptying of the stomach. Eating large meals right before bedtime. Oftentimes, making dietary changes or modifications to habits can alleviate heartburn. Reducing the consumption of fatty, fried foods or foods that can weaken the LES may alleviate symptoms.

Individuals who have very frequent heartburn and acid reflux may need to take medication to help their symptoms. Proton-pump inhibitors are a series of medications that reduce the production of gastric acid. There are other ways to alleviate symptoms.

Eat smaller meals and more slowly. Don't eat large meals before bed. Wait at least three hours after eating to retire for the night. Stop smoking because nicotine can weaken the lower esophageal sphincter. Wear looser-fitting clothes. Lose weight - because even a few extra pounds can contribute to heartburn.

With any questions about your healthcare, it's always best to talk to your physician and / or healthcare professional for the best information and what's right for you.



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