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Printing out this Live Well Planner is recommended. If you prefer to print out the planner on a month-by-month basis, please follow these instructions:

1. Choose the “Print” option from the “File” menu.
2. Under the “Settings” option, click on the arrow next to “Print All Pages” to access the drop-down menu. Select “Custom Print,” and enter the page number range you would like to print, or enter the page number range you would like to print in the “Pages” box.
3. Click “Print.” For more information,   
   please visit the [Microsoft Word printing support page.](https://support.office.com/en-us/article/Print-a-document-in-Word-591022c4-53e3-4242-95b5-58ca393ba0ee)

These days, you may feel overwhelmed with all the health information available to you. However, there are really only a few basic tips to keep in mind for your optimal health. According to experts, leading a healthy lifestyle can help you achieve total wellness and keep costly, chronic conditions at bay.

Living a healthy lifestyle, though, is easier said than done. That’s where the Live Well Planner comes in. The Live Well Planner provides you with   
the tools you need to feel and live healthier than ever before. Each month features exercise, diet and overall wellness articles, while each week provides you with plenty of space to plan your meals, log your workouts, plan your daily activities and appointments—or all of   
the above!

Each week also offers a “Tip of the Week” designed to help you stay on track and includes a section where you can write down your goals for each week. As an added bonus, the last page of every month will feature two healthy, easy and delicious recipes for you to try. The nutritional facts for these recipes are also included.

Staying organized; planning your days, workouts or meals; and having access to wellness information and healthy recipes is a great way to get yourself on track to achieve your wellness goals. However, please remember that you should speak with a medical professional before you begin a diet and fitness regimen. You and your doctor together can decide the best diet and fitness plan, create reasonable goals and establish a safe, tenable timeline for you to achieve your wellness goals.

Beware: New Year = New Fad Diets

Jan. 1 signals a new calendar year, and for many Americans, a “new year, new me” mentality. In fact, according to Business Insider, getting in shape is consistently the most popular New Year’s resolution in the United States. While making lifestyle changes, as approved by a doctor, is not a bad thing, turning to a fad diet to achieve a resolution of getting in shape is not ideal or healthy.

What’s a fad diet?

Fad diets typically promise quick weight loss, oftentimes through unhealthy and unbalanced dieting. A diet can be considered a fad if it:

* Claims to help you lose more than 1-2 pounds per week
* Promises that you’ll lose weight and keep it off without giving up fatty foods or starting an exercise program
* Bases its claims only on “before and after” photos
* Limits your food choices and encourages you to only eat a specific set or type of food

What are the dangers of fad diets?

Fad diets can lead to things like gout, poor athleticism, heart disease and—ironically—poor, long-term weight-loss control. If you’re looking to get in shape or lose weight this year, you should make lifestyle changes that encourage portion control, exercise more, avoid empty calories and eat a well-balanced diet. Keep in mind that forming healthy dieting practices now will keep you on track with your long-term weight-loss goal.

Avoid Winter Illnesses

Did you know that over 200 different viruses can cause the common cold? According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), American adults will get two to four colds per year, while children can get between five and 10 annually. The CDC also reports that winter is peak cold season. This should come as no surprise when you think about how many people you see sneezing and coughing during the colder months. Fortunately, you can keep these illnesses at bay and stay healthy with a little effort. Here’s how:

* Avoid close contact with people who are sick, and stay away from others when you feel under the weather.
* Wash your hands often using soap and warm water to protect against germs.
* Get plenty of sleep, stay physically active and drink plenty of water to keep your immune system strong.
* Manage your stress, and eat a nutritious diet rich in healthy grains, fruits, vegetables and fiber.
* Don’t touch your eyes, nose or mouth if your hands aren’t clean.

Take a “before” picture and save it. Not only will this help motivate you to achieve your goals, but it will also help you track your progress if you take “check-in” photos and compare them to your before snap throughout the year.

Diet and exercise are equally important. To get the best results, it is imperative that you eat well and exercise consistently.

Start off slowly and simply with exercise. Overdoing it with exercise will not help you reach your goals. It might actually set you back if you try to do too much too fast and end up hurting yourself.

Reduce the amount of processed and packaged foods you consume. Generally speaking, the fewer ingredients, the better the food.

Ease into your healthy eating plan. Going cold turkey and cutting out all of the “bad” foods from your diet at once sounds like a good plan, but in reality, it isn’t. Slowly cutting the bad foods out of your diet will help improve the chances of you sticking to it (and not being miserable).

Exercise Your Way to a Healthier Heart

Every year, the United States recognizes February as American Heart Month. Heart disease is the leading cause of death for both women and men in the United States, causing about 610,000 deaths annually. Heart disease is also an extremely expensive disease—costing the United States about $207 billion annually in health care, medications and lost productivity. Fortunately, heart disease can often be prevented by living a healthy lifestyle and properly managing health conditions.

In addition to eating healthy and avoiding cigarettes, exercising is an important contributor to cardiovascular health. In order to make exercise an effective tool for cardiovascular health, the American Heart Association suggests that you get at least 150 minutes of moderate exercise per week or 75 minutes of vigorous exercise per week. An easy way to keep track of your exercise is to aim for 30 minutes a day, five times a week.

Do You Know Your Family’s Cancer History?

World Cancer Day occurs every Feb. 4, and aims to raise awareness and educate the public about cancer. Early detection of most types of cancer greatly increases the chances for successful treatment. Some cancers are caused by an abnormal gene that is passed along from generation to generation. This is known as family cancer syndrome. Knowing your family cancer history enables you to talk with your doctor about your personal cancer risk and establish a screening process to detect cancers that may run in your family.

Before you determine whether cancer runs in your family, be sure to carefully evaluate each situation. For each case of cancer, ask the following questions:

* Who is affected? How are we related?
* What type of cancer is it? Is it rare?
* How old was this relative when he or she was diagnosed?
* Did this person get more than one type of cancer?

Asking these questions for each case of cancer will help you determine if a certain type of cancer runs in your family. As always, consult your doctor if you’re concerned about your family’s cancer history or your personal risk of developing cancer.

Eat healthy away from home. Choose fat-free or low-fat milk, water or diet drinks. Opt for steamed, broiled or grilled dishes, and ask for your dressing or sauce to be served on the side.

Choose a way to celebrate small wins without involving food. Buy a new workout outfit or pair of running shoes, or share your success with friends.

Move your body every day of the week and remember to think of movement as exercise. This could include standing for 10 minutes at work or going on short walks throughout the day.

Eat smaller portions and eat slowly—especially when you are eating an indulgence food. It can take up to 20 minutes for your brain to recognize that you are full. Eating slowly helps you make sure that you don’t overeat.

Eating Healthy Doesn’t Have to Be Expensive

Eating a well-balanced diet is a key component of living a long, healthy life. Many Americans think that eating healthy means they have to empty their wallets, which isn’t necessarily the truth. Keep the following money-saving tips in mind next time you’re grocery shopping:

* **Make a weekly meal plan.** Before you go to the store, think about what meals and snacks you want for the week. Read recipes thoroughly so you can make an accurate list of everything you need, reducing the risk that you’ll have to run back to the store later in the week.
* **Create a list—and stick to it**. Make a detailed list of what you need to buy before you go to the store. When you get there, don’t buy anything besides what’s on the list.
* **Plan where you’re going to shop**. Many grocery stores run sales or offer coupons for various healthy foods. Check out the ads and plan your grocery list around what’s on sale.
* **Shop seasonally.** Fresh fruits and vegetables that are in season are usually easier to get and may be a lot less expensive.
* **Cook at home as often as possible**. Many foods prepared at home are cheaper and more nutritious. Go back to the basics and find a few simple and healthy recipes that your family enjoys.

Are You Getting the Nutrition You Need?

The United States Department of Agriculture created MyPlate, a symbol for healthy eating that is designed to provide a simple visual reminder to help people make healthy food choices. Listed below are suggestions and guidelines for fulfilling the food groups represented on the plate.

* **Fruits**—Any fruit or 100% fruit juice counts for this group. Fruits may be fresh, canned, frozen or dried, and may be whole, cut up or pureed.
* **Vegetables**—Any vegetable or 100% vegetable juice counts for this group.
* **Grains**—Examples of grains include bread, pasta, oatmeal, breakfast cereals, tortillas and grits. Grains are divided into whole grains and refined grains.
* **Protein**—All foods made from meat, poultry, seafood, beans, peas, eggs, processed soy products, nuts and seeds are considered protein.
* **Dairy**—Fluid milk products and many foods made from milk are in this group, such as cheese and yogurt. Choose mostly fat-free or low-fat dairy products.

Get enough sleep. How much you sleep and quite possibly the quality of your sleep may silently orchestrate a symphony of hormonal activity tied to your appetite. Bottom line—a lack of sleep can make you hungry.

Create a fail-safe environment in your home by not stocking it with foods that tend to be your downfall.

Don’t forget about your rest days. While you don’t have to skip working out altogether, these days should be minimal impact or activity to give your body time to recover. Take a walk. Do a gentle yoga class. Just do something that’s less intense than what you do for exercise the other six days of the week.

Most importantly, don’t get discouraged. Everyone has their off-days, and just because you have one bad day doesn’t mean that you have to give up or overcompensate by starving yourself the next day or pushing yourself too hard in the gym.

Add some muscle-building activities to your weekly workouts. Free weights, resistance bands, muscle sculpt classes and using your body weight with pushups, planks and squats all work.

Don’t Let a Bad Day Get You Down

Life is full of unexpected frustrations. Running late, spilling coffee on yourself or getting into an argument can start your day off on the wrong foot. The good news is that you can control your mood and prevent these obstacles from ruining your entire day.

The most important thing you can do is to focus on the positive. Studies show that when you’re positive, you have 23% fewer health-related effects from stress, you’re 31% more productive, you’re 40% more likely to receive a promotion and your creativity levels triple.

Here are a few ways to turn a bad day around:

* Pinpoint the concrete reason for your frustration and address it immediately.
* Write down or recite three things you are grateful for.
* Choose **not** to be a victim of your frustration. Make a conscious effort to be positive.
* Set realistic expectations for your day.

5 Healthy Snacks to Satisfy Your Workday Hunger

Snacking can be an important part of a healthy diet. Healthy snacks can provide midday energy boosts and fuel for exercising, and can help decrease your hunger and the odds of overeating at mealtime. Try incorporating these five simple snacks into your meal plan.

1. Almonds—1 ½ ounces of almonds (about 35 nuts) provides enough fiber, protein and good fats to keep you feeling full until your next meal.
2. Greek yogurt parfait—1 cup of Greek yogurt with berries is a great way to get protein, calcium, fiber and antioxidants.
3. Blueberries and mini Babybel cheese—1 cup of fresh blueberries has only 80 calories. When paired with two mini Babybel cheeses, you get a high dose of fiber, antioxidants, protein and calcium.
4. Apple and ½ cup roasted chickpeas—Apples are fat-, sodium- and cholesterol-free. What’s more, one medium-sized apple has less than 100 calories. When paired with ½ cup roasted chickpeas, you get a snack that provides protein, and good fats and carbs.
5. Veggies with hummus—Snacking on raw, fiber-rich vegetables during the day can help keep you full between meals. For extra protein, eat your veggies with hummus. Be sure to check the serving size on your hummus container to keep your portion size in check.

Schedule exercise like an appointment. Life can get in the way of exercising regularly. An easy way to prevent this from happening is to write down exactly when you are going to work out in your calendar or planner.

Make sure to get enough protein in your diet—not only will this help you build muscle, it will help keep you feeling fuller for longer!

Shop the perimeter of your grocery store where food tends to be the healthiest and isn’t primarily packaged and processed.

Treat yourself! A pizza or a cupcake every now and then isn’t going to totally derail your diet and exercise routine, it just has to be done in moderation. Consider adding a “cheat meal” or a “treat meal” to your eating plan once a week when you indulge your unhealthy cravings to help you stay on track.

A Breath of Fresh Air

Cigarette smoking is a life-threatening habit, decried by every major health organization across the globe. The tobacco epidemic is so pervasive that the World Health Organization (WHO) supports World No Tobacco Day, held annually on May 31. This day is meant to “demonstrate the threats that the tobacco industry poses to the sustainable development of all countries,” according to the WHO website.

The largest threat comes from preventable deaths, with about 6 million people dying each year from tobacco use. Do your part to help curb tobacco consumption with these cessation tips:

* Think of the innumerable benefits to quitting, like saving more money, lowering your cancer risks and feeling healthier overall.
* Think about when you smoke and why you smoke—keep track of when you light up. Identifying your triggers can help you prepare to quit.
* If you are using medication to help you quit, make sure to follow the instructions carefully.

One-minute Office Workouts

Squeezing a workout into a busy schedule isn’t always easy. But scattering one-minute workouts throughout your day can help combat the effects of long-term sitting—which can lead to a number of health concerns.

* **For lower body strength**—Sit in your chair and extend one leg out in front of you. Hold it straight for five seconds. Raise it as high as you can and hold for five more seconds. Switch legs and repeat, for a total of three times on each side.
* **For your core and arms**—Sit in your chair with your legs crossed in front of you (like a pretzel) and your feet on the seat. Place your hands on the armrests, engage your core and raise yourself a couple inches above the seat. Hold for 10 seconds. Rest a few seconds, and repeat five more times.
* **For your biceps**—Sit tall with your abs pulled in. Hold a dumbbell or filled water bottle in one hand, with your arm stretched out straight and your palm facing the ceiling. Curl it up toward your shoulder and then back to the starting position 15 times. Alternate arms and repeat. Complete one more set of 15 reps with each arm.
* **To stretch stiff muscles and relieve tension**—Sit straight, facing forward and turn your head to the left while turning your torso to the right. Hold for five seconds. Keep alternating sides for a total of 60 seconds.

Keep in mind that the impact of movement—even a leisurely walk—can be beneficial. The muscle activity needed to move the body triggers important processes related to the breakdown of fats and sugars.

Use consistency to compound your results. It’s not what you do once in a while that counts, it’s what you do each day. Approach each day as an opportunity to be consistent with healthy habits.

Cross-train. You still want cardiovascular exercise to stay in the schedule, but change the activity you are doing. Try a new cardio class at the gym or community center once a week. Hop on an elliptical cross-trainer. Step into the world of biking if your feet are always on the ground. Anything different is going to be good.

Eat monounsaturated fatty acids (MUFAs). MUFAs are good-for-you fats that promote heart health and can help reduce belly fat. Avocados, nuts, seeds, olive oil, olives and dark chocolate are all MUFAs.

Invest in a high-density foam muscle roller. Also known as “myofascial release,” foam rolling is an easy way to benefit your entire body. This leads to tension- and pain-free muscles, which function better so you perform better. Be sure to roll for five minutes before your workout.

View each day as a clean slate. To practice self-compassion means ditching beating yourself up at the slightest transgression.

Cook Out Safely

During the summer, stovetops and ovens get swapped for grills. It’s important to not forget about food safety guidelines while grilling out:

* Don’t cross-contaminate. Keep raw and cooked foods separate by not using the same platters or utensils.
* Cook your food thoroughly. Cooking on a grill often results in quicker browning of the meat on the outside, but the inside can remain raw. Use a food thermometer to ensure your meat is cooked properly.
  + All raw beef, pork, lamb and veal steaks, chops and roasts should be cooked to a minimum internal temperature of 145 F.
  + All ground beef, pork, lamb and veal should be cooked to a minimum internal temperature of 160 F.
  + Poultry should be cooked to a minimum internal temperature of 165 F.

The Connection Between Financial and Physical Wellness

We all know that financial stress can be a burden, but it can also have a negative effect on your health. Financial stress often causes anxiety, depression and hopelessness, and that stress can also contribute to heart disease, high blood pressure, insomnia, more frequent colds and minor illnesses.

Here are healthy ways to cope with that stress and make it more manageable:

* Recognize your unhealthy coping methods and find alternatives, such as meditation, exercising or talking with a friend.
* Take care of yourself. Get enough sleep, eat right, drink plenty of water and exercise regularly.
* Talk to an advisor regarding your financial troubles. You won’t be able to fix them overnight, but having a plan of action can help you feel in control and minimize feelings of hopelessness.

Eat mindfully. Pay attention to what you are eating. Ask yourself if you really are hungry or if something else is going on that’s causing you to turn to food.

Cross-train. You still want cardiovascular exercise to stay in the schedule, but change the activity you are doing. Try a new cardio class at the gym or community center once a week. Hop on an elliptical cross-trainer. Step into the world of biking if your feet are always on the ground. Anything different is going to be good.

Be true to form. It doesn't matter how many pushups you can do in a minute if you're not doing a single one correctly. Perfect your technique, then later add weight and/or speed. This is especially important if your workout calls for performing “as many reps as possible” during a set amount of time. Choose quality over quantity, and you can stay injury-free.

Use Sundays as prep days to eat healthy all week. Get enough produce and staple foods needed for the week. Make double or triple portions of your meal, and freeze the extra for future use.

Don’t Let Ticks Ruin Your Summer

The warm summer months mean you’ll likely be spending more time outside. Unfortunately, summer is the season when ticks are the most active, putting you at a higher risk for tick-borne illnesses. The best way to avoid contracting a tick-borne disease is to practice proper preventive measures, which include the following:

* Wear light-colored clothing, including long-sleeved shirts and pants when in wooded areas, and tuck pant legs into socks or boots. Keep long hair tied back.
* Wash your body and clothing after all outdoor activities.
* Look periodically for ticks if you have been outdoors, especially if you have been in wooded areas or gardens.
* Remove ticks within 24 hours to greatly reduce the risk of contracting disease.
* Talk with your veterinarian about tick repellent for your pet.
* If you have a pet, check your pet’s coat if it has been in a possible tick-infested area.

How to Overcome a Weight-loss Plateau

When you first start a new exercise routine, your body tends to shed excess water weight, so it appears as though you are trimming the fat easily and quickly. But these “easy” pounds are usually the only ones to go fast. After the water-weight loss, your body builds muscle while also burning fat. So, although you may not see a change in your weight according to your scale, your workouts are still facilitating many beneficial changes for your body.

To lose more weight, you need to either increase your physical activity or decrease the number of calories you eat. Using the same approach that initially worked may maintain your weight loss, but it won't lead to additional slimming.

To overcome a weight-loss plateau, try using one of the following three tips.

1. Increase your exercise regimen. As you drop the weight, you burn fewer calories in the same amount of time.
2. Mix up a regular workout routine by adding intervals into your 30-minute run, increasing speed during your bicycle ride or adding an exercise class to your weekly workout schedule.
3. Add strength training to your workouts, which will boost your metabolism, help your body burn more calories and build muscle.

Savor the season. Eating fruits and veggies that are in season means that they will likely be from local sources, cheaper and more flavorful.

Sign up for a 5K to motivate you to train. Plus, you just may find out that the energy of the supportive crowds motivates you to keep jogging long after the race.

Watch your fruit intake—while it’s important to eat a diet rich in fruits and vegetables, you should be careful to not eat too much fruit. Fruits are high in sugar and carbs, so even though they’re sweet to eat, make sure you keep it in check.

Change up your workout. Create a challenge every time you exercise. Use a little more weight, rest five to 10 seconds less between sets, add a few more reps or do another set. Incorporating these small variations into your routine is a recipe for change.

Healthy Portion Sizes

A portion is the amount of a specific food an individual eats for a meal or snack. Many factors affect food portions, such as age, gender, activity level, appetite, and where or when the food is obtained and eaten.

A portion is the amount of food you choose to eat. There is no standard or correct portion size. A serving is a standard amount used to give advice about how much to eat, and to identify how many calories and nutrients are in a particular food.

For a general idea of the amount of food you should be consuming, use the following recommendations:

* One serving of meat is about 2 or 3 ounces—about the size of the palm of your hand.
* One serving of grains is equal to one slice of bread, 1 ounce of cereal, or half a cup of pasta or rice.
* One serving of fruit or vegetables is equal to one piece of fresh fruit or vegetable, half a cup of chopped fruit or vegetables or three-quarters of a cup of either juice. In general, it’s not as necessary to be vigilant about vegetable and fruit intake, as any amount is healthy—just be aware of the sugar content in fruit.

Prevent Heat Illness

According to the CDC, over 600 people die from extreme heat and heat-related illness each year. These preventable deaths illustrate how important preparation is during extreme temperatures. Whether you are swimming at the beach or lounging in the park, you should be prepared for extreme heat conditions.

Stay Prepared

The CDC provides three easy steps to prevent heat-related illnesses: stay cool, stay hydrated and stay informed. This summer, make sure you have shade wherever you are going and wear attire like a sun hat or a thin, long-sleeved shirt to avoid direct contact with the sun. Be sure to drink lots of water—more than you usually do. Your body loses fluids in the summer more quickly, which can lead to illness. Finally, stay informed by monitoring the local weather forecast, and prepare accordingly for outdoor activities.

Know the Signs

The two most dangerous heat-related illnesses, besides dehydration, are heat exhaustion and heatstroke. Heat exhaustion is exhibited through cold, clammy skin, heavy sweating and nausea. If you or someone else shows these symptoms, move to a cooler location and sip water. If you or someone else has a rapid pulse, hot and red skin, and loses consciousness, this could mean heatstroke, and you should call 911 immediately. In this latter scenario, do **not** give fluids to the person showing the symptoms. **Do**, however, move them to a cooler location and lower their temperature with cool cloths.

Be prepared for the morning frenzy. Freeze a few fruit smoothies to grab on the way out the door in the early mornings.

Don’t overdo it on cocktails. Liquid calories add up fast, so try to choose a cocktail wisely. Opt for something like a vodka soda, gin and tonic, or other low-calorie options, and make sure to limit the number of drinks you have so that you stay on track.

Circuit-training helps you burn calories and increase muscle. Circuit-style workouts supercharge your metabolism and help you shed pounds. By getting your heart rate up and working each muscle group, you can create a lean and sleek physique.

Don’t try fads and gimmicks. If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Losing weight takes time and hard work, but you can do it.

Swap a bad decision with a good one. If you have a giant plate of pasta or a big donut—whatever your splurge may be—connect it to exercise. The bigger your splurge, the bigger your workout.

Get Back Into Your Routine With Breakfast

Transitioning from summer to fall can be tough. Whether you spent the summer traveling and enjoying the outdoors and are returning to a regular work schedule, or you’re a parent trying to get your kids adjusted to a school schedule, it’s not fun or easy. Making eating breakfast a staple in your morning routine can offer structure in addition to setting you up for a focused, productive day.

Eating breakfast helps to control snacking and binge eating throughout the day. Typically, when one skips breakfast, hunger takes control, leading to unwise food choices later in the day—including excessive calorie intake. In addition, studies have shown kids who skip breakfast are twice as likely to be overweight.

A “balanced” breakfast should include a substantial amount of fiber (which can include fruit or vegetables), low- or nonfat dairy, whole grains and some lean protein. A good breakfast might be a high-fiber fortified cereal with milk, eggs, and an apple or orange. This breakfast alone provides the essential vitamins B, C and D, calcium, folic acid, protein and iron.

Curb Your Caffeine Consumption

Did you know that 90% of Americans consume some form of caffeine regularly? Caffeine has many effects on the body’s metabolism, including stimulation of the central nervous system. It can make one feel more alert and provide a boost of energy.

For most people, the amount of caffeine in two to four cups of coffee a day (200 to 400 mg) is not harmful. However, too much of it can make one feel restless, anxious and irritable. It may also prevent a good night’s sleep, and cause headaches and abnormal heart rhythms. Furthermore, if heavy caffeine use stops, it can cause withdrawal symptoms. Certain circumstances call for reducing the amount of caffeine you consume. If any of these situations apply, you should cut back:

* You consume unhealthy amounts, more than 500 to 600 mg a day.
* You have caffeine sensitivity. People with smaller body masses, those who do not usually consume caffeine and those who are overly stressed will feel the effects of caffeine consumption sooner.
* You are not sleeping well. Caffeine interferes with the ability to get a good night’s sleep.

Be sneaky! Trick your mind by eating meals off of smaller plates. This will give the illusion that you are eating more than you actually are and can help you feel fuller quicker.

Have healthy snacks on-hand at all times. Put healthy snacks like baby carrots, a handful of almonds or sliced apples in pre-portioned baggies and carry them with you to avoid going through the drive-thru in hunger desperation.

Make a list of positive affirmations that work for you. Here’s a few to get you started: I love to exercise. I want to live a healthy life and eat real healthy foods. I am strong. I am getting more fit each day.

Never skip the most important meal—your post-workout meal. Consuming a combination of 10 to 15 grams of protein and 20 to 30 grams of carbohydrates within 30 minutes of your workout will help to refuel your body, promote muscle recovery, amp up your energy and build a leaner physique.

Get Ahead of the Flu

Flu season typically runs from October to May. However, most flu cases occur between December and February. That’s why the CDC is strongly recommending that you get vaccinated as early as possible.

Each year, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) works with the WHO to create a vaccination that contains three or four different strains of the flu. Most of the shots available provide protection against four different flu strains. The CDC recommends that everyone older than 6 months should get the flu vaccine.

You can get vaccinated against the flu at your doctor’s office, in a clinic or pharmacy, and maybe even your employer. Some urgent care clinics or local health departments will provide flu vaccines as well. Visit the [HealthMap Vaccine Finder](http://flushot.healthmap.org/" \t "_self) to locate where you can get a flu vaccine.

The Truth About Sugar Substitutes

With obesity rates skyrocketing and excess sugar in diets blamed as a major culprit, many people have turned to artificial sweeteners to satisfy their sweet tooth instead. Remember, just because a product contains a sugar substitute does not necessarily mean it is calorie-free or even healthy.

A sugar substitute is a low-calorie sweetener or artificial sweetener. Sugar substitutes provide a sweet taste without the calories or carbohydrates that accompany sugar and other sweeteners. They are hundreds of times sweeter than sugar, so it takes much less of them to create the same sweetness. Therefore, the resulting calorie count is insignificant. This is why many dieters choose artificial sweeteners over sugar.

There has been much controversy surrounding the safety of sugar substitutes. Some contend that sugar substitutes may cause cancer or brain tumors. However, the FDA dismisses these claims, insisting that there have been extensive studies done to alleviate any concern. There are even some organizations endorsing sugar substitutes, such as the American Diabetes Association, which refers to foods with artificial sweeteners as “free foods” because they make foods taste sweet, yet have essentially no calories and do not raise blood sugar levels.

Follow the 80/20 rule. Eat healthy 80% of the time. Indulge occasionally, but make sure most of your choices are healthy.

It’s not too early to think about flu prevention. Flu vaccinations are typically available by October, and the CDC urges everyone older than 6 months to get vaccinated as early as October.

Eat alkaline-promoting foods. Research suggests that eating too many acidic foods can damage our lungs and kidneys. Balance out the acidity with foods like root and cruciferous vegetables, garlic and cayenne pepper.

Remember, protein is your best friend. Protein fills you up faster than carbs do, making it less likely that you’ll overeat. It also helps rebuild muscles and increase fat burning.

Emotional Eating

Food is commonly used as a coping mechanism for sadness, depression and anger. Emotional eaters can get back on track if they figure out what triggers are causing their need to eat.

* Learn to identify real hunger. If you ate only a few hours prior and your stomach is not rumbling in response to hunger, then you probably should wait to eat.
* Identify triggers. Emotional eaters should keep a food journal and write down everything that they eat, how they felt emotionally right before they ate and how they felt when they were done eating. It is also beneficial to note how hunger played into the eating. Then, analyze what emotions accompanied food intake to determine what is causing the need to eat.
* Find comforts outside of food. Pick up a hobby, watch a movie, listen to music, take a walk or visit a friend instead of eating when you feel particularly blue.
* Remove unhealthy foods from the home. If junk food is not there, you can’t eat it.
* Snack smart. Instead of reaching for unhealthy foods when feeling hungry, eat a piece of fruit or vegetables.

Plan Today for a Stress-free Holiday

While the holiday season brings joy and togetherness, it can also bring stress for many individuals and families. Top holiday stressors include staying on a budget, managing multiple commitments and finding the perfect gift. Fortunately, by getting organized and planning out what you can ahead of time, you can reduce your holiday stress.

* Write down any known commitments. Making a list of your commitments will help you plan your time and help you avoid double-booking yourself.
* Create your budget now. If you’re stressed about how your holiday spending will impact you after the holidays are over, you’re not alone. Set a realistic budget and don’t go over it.
* Start shopping early. Do you already know what you want to get some people on your list? Don’t be afraid to shop early. Sometimes, you can get great deals on presents even before the holiday season hits.

Go outdoors. A study by the National Institutes of Health found that people could burn up to 7% more calories outside in cooler weather.

Sweat it out with others. Even if you are the most independent exerciser around, give a group fitness class a shot at least once a week—you may find that you enjoy it more than sweating solo.

Hit the weights. Strength training is the best way to trim down, tone up and get into tip-top shape. Add two or three compound barbell lifts (such as a squat, deadlift or press) to your weekly training schedule, and increase the weight used on each lift by two to five pounds a week.

Incorporate jump-roping into your routine. Not only is it inexpensive, portable and easy-to-use almost anywhere, you’ll burn about 200 calories in 20 minutes and boost your cardiovascular health while toning, just by jumping rope.

Sprint through the finish line—don’t let up. When you're in the homestretch of your workout, kick it up a notch.

Don’t Drink Your Calories

Just like food, beverages may contain hidden calories, especially your favorite holiday drinks. The calories in beverages add up quickly and may be causing you to gain weight. By making a few changes to your beverage choices, you could be healthier this holiday season.

You don’t have to entirely give up your favorite beverage in order to cut back on the calories you’re consuming. Here are some tips on how to cut back without cutting something out of your diet completely:

* Request that your coffee drink be made with low-fat or skim milk instead of whole.
* Order the smallest size available, even if it’s a child’s size.
* Skip extra flavorings (vanilla, hazelnut or caramel)—they are sugar-sweetened and will add calories.
* Say no to whipped cream on top as it adds calories and fat.
* Ask for your smoothie without sugar added—the fruit is naturally sweet.

Wintertime Workouts

Whether you’re in full-out hibernation mode or stressed-out and busy from the holidays, your exercise routine might be one of the first casualties of the season. Whatever your reason, use some of the following tips to get moving this winter.

No Motivation

The holidays are busy, and winter brings fewer daylight hours and colder temperatures. Try mixing up your routine by doing new workouts, experimenting with winter sports, or working out with a friend or family member.

Limited Time

If you’re busy with holiday preparation and parties, sometimes you need a quick, unscheduled workout idea. Jumping rope for a few minutes, or even incorporating bodyweight exercises like walking lunges or squats into your daily routine can help you stay on track.

Cold weather and busy holidays don’t have to be an insurmountable obstacle for fitting in a workout. If you keep exercising during the holiday season, you’ll feel better, stay healthier and be able to justify that extra dessert.

Don’t sweat it if you can’t get to the gym—the holidays are a hectic time, and finding time to go to the gym might not be possible. However, the internet has hundreds of reliable websites that detail effective at-home workouts you can do—some of which are family-friendly!

Take a progress picture and compare it to your “before” snap from months ago. Doing so will remind you how far you’ve come and give you motivation to stick to your plan through the holidays.

Never go to a holiday party hungry. Don’t make the mistake of saving up your calories for the end of the day when you head to a party. When you are hungry, your portion control goes out the window.

Reflect on all the progress you made in 2020 and get ready to set more goals to achieve for 2021!