

# HealthyLife®

## LETTER



MARCH  
2023



## Prevent back pain

Back pain is one of the most common medical complaints in the U.S. And a lack of fitness may increase your risk.

Try these four exercises to keep your back healthy. Hold each one for several breaths and repeat 3-4 times to build strong core muscles.

- **Superman:** Lie on your belly with your arms at your sides. Firm your abdominal muscles and slowly lift your legs, arms, and chest off the floor.
- **Bird dog:** Begin on hands and knees, lift and extend one arm forward and the opposite leg behind. Firm the abdominal muscles, so your belly doesn't sag. Switch sides.
- **Bridge:** Lie on your back with your knees bent, feet flat on the floor, and arms alongside your body. Lift your hips into a bridge position.
- **Toe taps:** Lie on your back with your knees aligned over your hips and shins parallel to the floor. Alternate tapping one foot and then the other on the floor for 10-15 repetitions.

# Healthy aging: Joint care

Aging comes with its share of physical changes. Changes in the muscles and bones may make your joints vulnerable to discomfort. But joint pain is not an inevitable part of aging.

Caring for your joints can slow or prevent joint problems from limiting your mobility over time.



## CAUSES

- Arthritis. Inflammation or breakdown of the cartilage in the joint.
- Osteoporosis. The bones become brittle and may compress.
- Stiffness and loss of flexibility
- Being overweight may put more strain on your joints.
- Loss of muscle mass
- Injury causing a strain or sprain
- Bursitis or tendonitis from overuse
- Lupus. Autoimmune disease that attacks the joints.



## TREATMENT

There are many ways to address joint pain. Some things you can do at home, and some require professional medical care. Your doctor may recommend the following:

- Resting the joint
- Keeping the joint raised
- Medication to reduce swelling
- Exercise therapy
- Treatment to address an underlying condition

## SELF-CARE

Joint self-care involves addressing the risk factors for joint pain that are within your control:

- Get regular moderate exercise to help keep joints strong and mobile.
- Lose weight and maintain a healthy weight to prevent excess strain on the joint.
- Eat a balanced diet with plenty of calcium for bone health.
- Protect your joints from injury by choosing safe, low-impact activity.
- Avoid overuse and repetitive injury by varying your movement.



## WHEN TO SEE A DOCTOR

Your doctor is your best resource for problematic joint pain. They can assess the severity of the issue and give targeted recommendations for how to address it. You should talk to your doctor if you have any of these symptoms:

- A high amount of joint pain, numbness, or swelling
- Unable to put weight on the joint
- Pain or swelling from an old injury
- Joint feels unstable or abnormal

# Understanding bursitis

Bursas are small, fluid-filled sacs that cushion two body parts to move against each other. Joints, tendons, ligaments, muscles, and bony prominences have bursas to allow for smooth movement.

When a bursa becomes inflamed and swollen, it is known as bursitis. This often painful condition can be frustrating and may restrict mobility. But, bursitis is very treatable, and most people fully recover.



## SYMPTOMS

The most common sites of bursitis are the knee and elbow joints. However, bursitis can occur anywhere a bursa undergoes excessive stress.

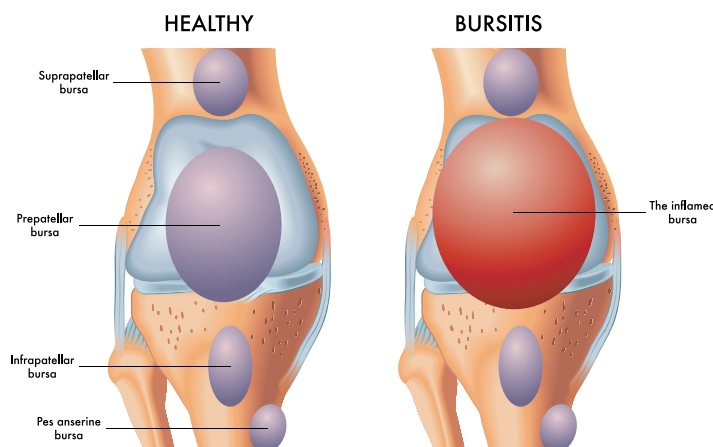
Common symptoms include:

- Pain when the area is touched or moved
- Achy or stiff joint
- Sudden change in the ability to move a joint
- Swelling or redness of the skin

## CAUSES

Anything that irritates a bursa can cause bursitis. The bursas at joints are particularly vulnerable. The most common causes include:

- Overuse
- Repetitive stress
- Kneeling or leaning on the elbows for extended periods
- Injury
- Infection
- Trauma



## TREATMENT

A majority of cases of bursitis will heal on their own. Early care can reduce pain and speed up a return to normal activity. Your doctor will likely recommend:

- Rest for the joint
- Protection from further overuse or trauma
- Ice to reduce swelling
- Over-the-counter anti-inflammatory pain medication

For more severe cases of bursitis, or those that do not respond to conservative treatment, your doctor may recommend further evaluation and treatment.

## PREVENTION

If you had bursitis in the past or currently do activities that stress your joints, there are things you can do to reduce your likelihood of bursitis:

- Warm up before you exercise.
- Take regular breaks during repetitive activity.
- Use knee or elbow pads as a cushion.
- Use good posture during daily activities.
- Start new exercises or sports slowly to allow the body to adjust.

# Put herbs on the menu

Herbs add flavor and interest to food. But they are also plants with potential health benefits. Some herbs have been used in cooking or as medicine for hundreds of years.

Using herbs to season your meals provides a delicious boost of plant nutrients.

## TYPES OF HERBS

- **Basil:** often used to flavor sauce and pesto
- **Oregano:** goes well with meat, vegetables, and tomato-based dishes
- **Rosemary:** strong flavor that complements potatoes, meat, soups, vegetables, and dressings
- **Sage:** goes well with pork, beef, stuffing, and sausage
- **Parsley:** adds a bright taste to savory dishes
- **Cilantro:** goes well with spicy food such as salsa, stir-fries, and curry

## HEALTH BENEFITS

Though commonly used in small amounts, herbs are a rich source of nutrients called polyphenols. These compounds may provide anti-oxidant, anti-inflammatory, and anti-cancer benefits. More research is needed to clarify their potential, but when consumed regularly, benefits may include:

- Lower blood pressure
- Boosted immune system
- Lower risk of diabetes
- Improved mood
- Lower cholesterol
- Protected brain health

## TIPS ON USING HERBS

- Use fresh or dried herbs. One tablespoon of fresh herbs is equal to 1 teaspoon dried or ¼ teaspoon powdered.
- When using fresh herbs, use a knife to cut the leaves and help release their flavor.
- When herbs are used in cold dishes, allow time for the flavors to blend.
- When using fresh herbs in hot dishes, add them closer to the end of cooking to preserve their flavor.
- Dried herbs can be added to hot dishes early in cooking for better flavor.
- Whole spices and dried herbs lose potency over time. Purchase them in small quantities, so they don't sit in your spice cabinet for years.



# Start gardening

Gardening is a great way to get outdoors, relieve stress, and enhance your diet with delicious homegrown food. If you're new to gardening, it's easy to get overwhelmed by all there is to know.

But experienced gardeners will tell you it's best to keep it simple and build your skills over time. Whether you have room for a small herb garden or plan a large vegetable plot, here are the first steps to get started.



## SELECT LOCATION

Most plants need 6-8 hours of full sun each day. Less than that means your plants may struggle or produce little food. Providing the best location is essential to success.

## PLAN

Based on space, plan what you will grow. It's helpful to create a diagram of how you will fill the available space. Different plants need different amounts of space, so find information online or check your seed packet to determine what you can fit.

## PREPARE SOIL

Raised beds often require less work; however, if cost is a concern, growing directly in the ground can save money upfront. Whichever method you choose, prepare your soil by ensuring it is fluffy, rich in nutrients, and mulched to hold water.



## PLANT

It's time to grow. For new gardeners, it's often simplest to buy plants from the store that have a headstart in growing. However, if cost is a concern, many plants grow well from seed and will only cost a few dollars a packet.

## MAINTAIN

Once plants are in the ground, monitor growth and watch for signs of problems. Visit your garden daily to examine plants and check for signs of bug infestation or poor growth. Gardens also require at least an inch of water a week.

## HARVEST

Different plants mature and are ready for harvest at different times of the year. Most seed packets tell you the number of days to harvest once your plant starts growing.

# What to do when thoughts intrude

If you've ever had a strange or disturbing thought pop into your head seemingly out of nowhere, you may have had what's known as an intrusive thought.

Knowing how to handle these thoughts can make them less disruptive. Instead of being alarmed, you can put it in its proper place and carry on with life.



## WHAT ARE INTRUSIVE THOUGHTS?

An intrusive thought most often meets these criteria:

- **It isn't something you would typically think about:** For example, you stand near a height and suddenly think, "what if I jumped?" That's a very common intrusive thought and not something you would think normally.
- **The thought bothers you:** If you feel alarmed or disturbed by the thought, it's likely intrusive.
- **The thought is hard to control:** Often, the more you try to get it to go away, the more it seems to stick in your mind.



## WHERE DO INTRUSIVE THOUGHTS COME FROM?

Because intrusive thoughts can be strange or disturbing, it's common for people to worry it's a sign they want to actually do what pops up in their mind. But these thoughts occur to most people, though it's rarely discussed. It doesn't mean anything more than that the brain is a creative, imaginative organ that sometimes sends mixed messages.

For most people, these thoughts are not harmful, though they can feel upsetting at the time. A few things may increase intrusive thoughts:

- Stress and anxiety
- Hormone shifts, such as after childbirth
- Trauma or PTSD

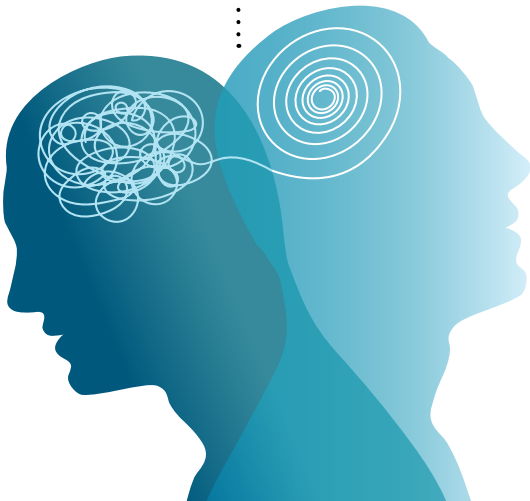


## WHAT TO DO

When an intrusive thought pops into your head, try these steps:

- Acknowledge that it is an intrusive thought.
- Don't try to make it go away. Just let it be, and don't fixate on it.
- Be kind to yourself. Don't judge the thought or give it meaning.

If intrusive thoughts happen frequently or begin to affect daily life, a mental health professional can help. There are effective therapies that teach you to manage your thoughts and not be disturbed by them.



# Suicide prevention at work



BECAUSE COWORKERS SPEND A LARGE PORTION OF THEIR TIME TOGETHER, THEY MAY BE THE FIRST TO NOTICE WHEN SOMEONE IS IN CRISIS. EARLY SUPPORT & INTERVENTION CAN SAVE A LIFE.



#### Risk factors

Substance abuse, depression, social isolation, serious illness, and high-conflict relationships are among the common risk factors for suicide.

#### Protective factors

A person may be less likely to turn to suicide if they feel connected to their friends, loved ones, and community, have access to quality mental health care and learn effective coping skills.

#### Warning signs

Watch for additional warning signs such as expressing hopelessness, mood swings, neglecting responsibilities, talking about being a burden, and being isolated. If someone talks about or has a plan to end their life, act immediately.

#### Ask questions

Find a private place to ask your coworker questions. Express why you're concerned about them and offer support.

#### Call or text 988

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline is staffed by trained professionals who provide guidance in a crisis. Anyone can call 988, whether they are in crisis, or are worried about a coworker, loved one, or friend.

#### Additional support

Connect your coworker with resources for further support. The National Alliance on Mental Illness at [nami.org](http://nami.org) offers many resources and access to local help.

# Domestic abuse - how to help

If you're concerned someone you know may be experiencing domestic violence, there are ways to help. While you can't control whether someone walks away from abuse, you can offer valuable support.



- **Listen without judgment.** As a support person, you are there to listen without making them feel shame or guilt.
- **Acknowledge the difficulties they face.** Let them know you see what they are going through and that the abuse is not their fault.
- **Don't try to "rescue" them.** They are the only ones with the right to choose to leave. Support them regardless of what they decide.
- **Help them create a safety plan.** A safety plan is a set of actions to lower their risk of experiencing partner violence. Visit [thehotline.org](https://www.thehotline.org) for more information.
- **Help them avoid isolation.** Get them involved with family and friends, so they have supportive relationships.
- **Connect them with those who can help.** Find counselors, legal representatives, or other support providers who are trained in domestic violence situations.