

HealthyLife[®]

LETTER



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Gardening to feel better

If you ask any committed gardener, they will likely tell you how important their garden is to their well-being. Research shows that gardening can increase resilience and decrease stress. Accessing these benefits can be as simple as growing flowers in pots on your porch or as extensive as a large backyard vegetable garden.

Spending time in nature, including gardening, has many health benefits:

- Boosted vitamin D levels from exposure to sunlight (don't forget sunscreen and a hat to prevent burning!)
- Increased focus and attention
- Reduced levels of the stress hormone cortisol
- Reduced mental fatigue
- Increased social connection and engagement with community gardening
- Regular physical activity
- Increased access to nutritious plant food
- Elevated mood and feelings of happiness
- May reduce blood pressure

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Keep those bowels moving

Bowel movements are an important way your body completes the process of digestion. Going regularly is a sign that everything is in good working order.

Constipation is common in our modern culture and can become more of a problem as we age. Promoting healthy bowel movements is a lifelong self-care measure that protects your bowels for your whole life.



DEFINING CONSTIPATION

Everyone's bowel movement pattern is different. What may be normal for one person can be constipation for someone else. When evaluating your bowel movements, pay attention to patterns over time and how comfortable your bowels feel on a day-to-day basis.

In general, constipation is defined as:

- Having less than three bowel movements per week
- Dry, hard, or lumpy stools
- Difficulty passing stools or pain when going
- Feeling as though not all the stool has passed

CAUSES

Constipation occurs when your bowels are slow to move stool through your intestines. This can happen for a variety of reasons, many of which are treatable. Some of the most common causes of constipation are lifestyle related and simple to address:

- Not drinking enough water
- Insufficient physical activity
- Lack of fiber in the diet
- Certain medications and supplements
- Changes in habits or routines, such as when traveling
- Medical conditions such as bowel disease or pelvic floor dysfunction

KEEP BOWELS MOVING

The goal is for bowel movements to be regular, effortless, and comfortable.

- Drink plenty of water. Try using a water bottle to track how much you drink each day.
- Eat more fiber. Fruits, vegetables, and whole grains should feature prominently in your diet. Aim for at least one serving of each at every meal.
- Avoid or limit high-fat processed foods, such as fast food, fried food, chips, and processed meats.
- Move more. Regular exercise doesn't just move your muscles. It helps your bowels move, too.

Warning signs of dementia

It's normal to become a bit more forgetful as you age. But how can you tell if occasional forgetfulness is normal aging or a cause for concern?

Dementia occurs when the brain experiences a cognitive decline that interferes with daily life. It's important to know the difference between normal forgetfulness and the early warning signs of dementia.



EARLY WARNING SIGNS

It's easy to want to dismiss the early signs of cognitive decline as normal aging. However, many people live long lives without significant cognitive decline. It's not normal for forgetfulness to interfere with daily life.

Early signs of dementia include:

- Getting lost in familiar areas
- Misplacing common items and struggling to find them
- Tripping, spilling, or dropping things more often than usual
- Relying on more and more memory aids to keep things straight
- Unusual behavior changes, such as becoming more anxious or suspicious
- Trouble completing everyday tasks
- Difficulty with words when speaking or writing
- Losing track of dates, seasons, and the passing of time



CAUSES

Dementia is caused by a loss of brain cells (neurons) to the extent that areas of the brain begin to struggle. While it's normal to lose some neurons as we age, people with dementia experience greater loss of brain cells, which eventually damages brain function.

RISK FACTORS

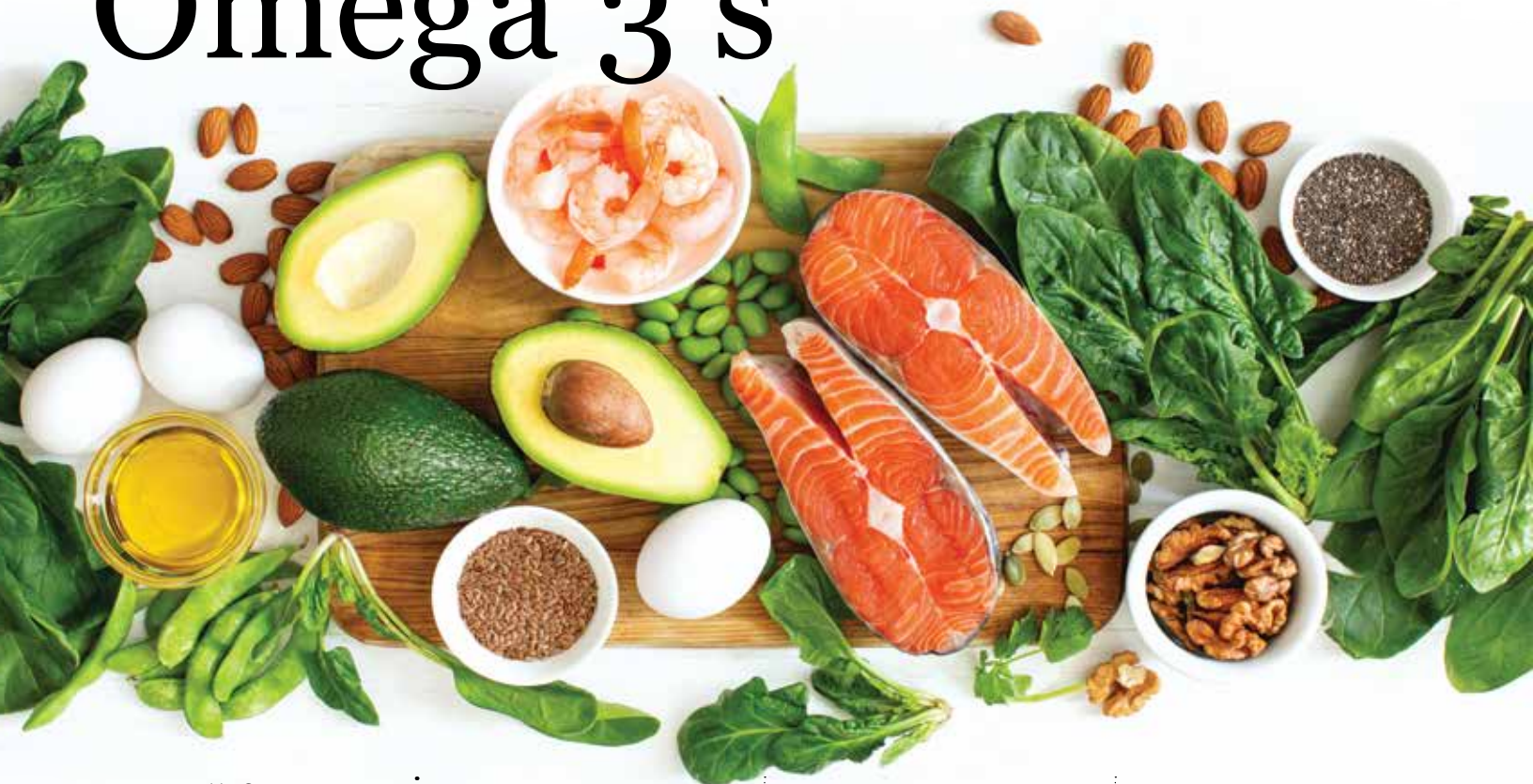
- **Age:** Being over 65
- **Genetics:** Having a parent or sibling with dementia
- **Race/ethnicity:** Older Hispanic and African Americans have higher rates of dementia
- **Heart health:** Hypertension, high cholesterol, and smoking
- **Traumatic brain injury:** Risk is increased after a head injury.

WHAT TO DO

It can feel scary to observe warning signs in yourself or your loved ones. But reaching out for help is the best next step. The problem won't go away if you ignore it.

- Talk to your doctor about your concerns. They may recommend further testing to evaluate brain health. They may also encourage healthy lifestyle changes to protect your brain against further decline. These may include:
- Stop smoking.
 - Address high blood pressure.
 - Increase physical activity.
 - Achieve and maintain a healthy weight.
 - Get enough quality sleep.
 - Be active in a social community.
 - Manage blood sugar levels.

Why you need Omega 3's



Not all fats in your diet are the same.

Omega 3 fats are an essential type of dietary fat that can be good for you. However, many of us don't eat enough of the types of foods that supply this healthy fat.

WHAT ARE OMEGA 3'S?

Omega 3's are a type of essential polyunsaturated fat. The body uses omega 3 fatty acids to build hormones, decrease inflammation, provide energy, and as part of the structure of cell walls. Because your body cannot make polyunsaturated fatty acids, you have to get them from your food.

The three most common omega 3's are alpha-linolenic acid (ALA), eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA), and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA). Each of these fatty acids performs different beneficial functions.

BENEFITS

Fats often get a bad rap, but every cell in the body relies on a certain amount of fat to function.

Ongoing research has shown many potential benefits to a diet with adequate EPA and DHA. These include:

- Better heart health
- Proper infant growth and development
- Lower risk of cancer
- Decreased risk of dementia
- Decreased risk of age-related macular degeneration
- Relief of dry eye symptoms
- Reduced symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis

EAT MORE OMEGA 3'S

For more of the omega 3's EPA and DHA, choose:

- Fatty fish. Choose those lower in mercury, such as salmon, mackerel, anchovies, and sardines.

For more of the omega 3 ALA, choose:

- Ground flax seeds and flax oil
- Chia seeds
- Walnuts
- Canola oil
- Soy foods such as soybean oil, tofu, and edamame
- Hemp seeds

Talk to your doctor if you are thinking about taking an omega 3 supplement to see if it's right for you.

Move more for your brain

Movement doesn't just support physical health. It boosts mental health, too. The more you get your body moving, the more benefits you get from all those feel-good chemicals soothing your mental space—just another good reason to get moving every day.



A BIT ON BRAIN CHEMISTRY

Your brain relies on a complex network of chemical signals to function. The cells of your brain, called neurons, “talk” to each other using chemical messengers known as neurotransmitters. There are neurotransmitters that regulate sleep, memory, learning, and stress, among other things.

Imbalances in neurotransmitters can impact your mental health. If you regularly deal with stressful situations, your brain releases more neurotransmitters that signal stress. You may feel:

- Fatigue
- Difficulty concentrating
- Anxious
- Trouble sleeping
- Depression
- Difficulty experiencing joy and happiness



EXERCISE CAN HELP

When you move your body and get your blood pumping, it has an immediate impact on your brain. Over time, those benefits add up and can improve mental health.

Movement stimulates the release of neurotransmitters that improve your mood. It also decreases chemical signals that promote anxiety and depression. The result is a brain that feels better and resists succumbing to stress.

Those positive brain chemicals are like free medicine for the brain. You may feel:

- Increased energy
- Better sleep
- Alert and focused
- Fewer feelings of anxiety or depression
- More connected to the world around you
- Greater enjoyment of life

GET MOVING

While all movement is good, some types of movement provide more brain-boosting benefits. Aerobic exercise is particularly effective at improving mental health. A minimum of 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous exercise each week is recommended. Consistency is key to getting the most benefits for your mental and emotional health.

Aerobic exercise is the type that gets your heart rate up and your blood pumping. You should feel like you're working hard but still be able to carry on a conversation. Examples include:

- Taking a brisk walk
- Jogging
- Biking
- Playing a sport
- Dancing
- Taking an aerobics class



Teens & the risk of Fentanyl

Teen drug use is a national health concern. And more recently, the drug Fentanyl is raising the risk of drug use and accidental overdose.

Having honest conversations about drugs during the teen years is the first step to protecting kids. However, it's essential to know the signs your teen may be using drugs. The sooner you intervene, the better.



RISK FACTORS

Fentanyl is a highly potent opioid intended for the medical management of pain. It is 50 to 100 times more potent than morphine.

Fentanyl is now being illegally produced and added to many illicit drugs. Its potency presents a unique danger of overdose, especially as many drug users are not aware they are taking it.

It is very risky for teens.

- Pills laced with Fentanyl may be brightly colored and more attractive.
- Risk-taking is a normal teen behavior, and they may see it as a one-time experiment.
- Teens may think they are taking a prescription medicine that is "safe."

SIGNS OF DRUG USE

It's normal for teens to have mood swings and behavior changes as they develop into adulthood. But, certain behaviors should be warning signs that drug use is involved:

- Spending excessive amounts of time alone
- Trying to keep family members out of their room
- Secretive about time spent with new friends
- No longer spending time with childhood friends
- Asking for money without a clear reason
- Missing or skipping school
- Grades dropping
- Taking less care in grooming or their appearance
- Changes in appetite or weight



HOW TO INTERVENE

- Be calm. Approaching your child with fear and anger may make them defensive and disengaged.
- Ask questions. Start by telling your child what you've noticed and why you're concerned.
- Listen to your teen and don't interrupt or jump to judgment.
- Set boundaries for acceptable and unacceptable behavior.
- If your child admits to drug addiction, look into rehab programs and consider counseling.
- The medication Naloxone is a lifesaving drug that counteracts Fentanyl overdose. Get some from the pharmacy and keep it on hand.
- Contact the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services (SAMSA) at [samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline](https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline) or 1-800-662-HELP (4357) for more information.

Avoiding lifestyle inflation

LIFESTYLE INFLATION HAPPENS WHEN A PERSON'S SPENDING GOES UP EVERY TIME THEIR INCOME INCREASES. BUT, IF EXPENSES CONTINUALLY INCREASE, YOUR ABILITY TO SAVE MONEY & MEET FINANCIAL GOALS MAY BE COMPROMISED.



PREVENT LIFESTYLE INFLATION

- Follow a budget and review it each month to make sure you're not spending more than planned.
- Budget money for savings and retirement and set it up to automatically deposit into a savings or retirement account.
- Know your long-term financial goals and map a plan to get there.
- When you get a raise or a new job, update your budget and increase how much you save.
- Budget carefully for lifestyle upgrades such as a new home, new car, or luxury items.
- Keep your monthly fixed expenses as low as you can.
- Set aside money to treat yourself, within reason.

Keeping work-from-home in its place

Traveling home from work at the end of the day is a clear signal to transition from work mode to home mode. But, what happens when you work from home and you never truly leave your “office?”



Protecting Home Life from Work Encroachment

1. **Create a “starting work routine.”** Set up clear signals that you are moving from home mode to work mode. This includes whatever you need to do to intentionally “show up” to work in the morning.
2. **Have a plan for your work day.** Treat your work-from-home day similar to a day in the office. Have a plan for what you hope to accomplish and, most importantly, when your work day ends.
3. **Schedule breaks to step away.** Plan when you will take breaks and step away from your computer. Save any chores or home tasks for those scheduled times.
4. **Set boundaries with loved ones.** It’s essential for your productivity to have times when you work without interruption. Ask your loved ones to save time together for lunch breaks and off hours.
5. **Establish an end-of-work-day ritual.** Create a signal that you have finished work for the day. You can make a priority list for the next day, check in with your boss, or tidy your desk to signal the day is over.
6. **Turn off your computer and work email.** You’ll be a more productive and valuable employee if you care for yourself by using your non-work hours for things that matter most to you.