

Get Started on **Your Wellness Journey**



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Introduction

Leading a healthy lifestyle is a great way to prioritize your overall well-being, keep chronic conditions at bay and potentially reduce your health care costs. However, if you're not sure where to start, it can be easy to get overwhelmed with the wide variety of health and wellness information out there. With fad diets, detox drinks and "quick-fix" workouts being promoted in all corners of the internet, if you're not careful, you could put yourself at risk for injury or illness.

Sorting through all that information and trying to separate fact from fiction can be tricky—and it can also be discouraging. That's where this guide comes in handy. It's designed to help you get started on your wellness journey and focuses on tried-and-true healthy lifestyle practices, including visiting your doctor, eating a well-balanced diet, exercising, prioritizing sleep and managing stress.

This guide should be used for informational purposes only and should not be construed as medical advice. Please consult a doctor with any questions and before making changes to your lifestyle.

Visit Your Doctor

Going to see your doctor at least once a year is essential to living a healthy life. If you don't already see your doctor for an annual checkup, it's not too late to start. Most insurance companies cover an annual visit at no cost to you, but it's always best to double-check with your insurance provider before scheduling a service. Additionally, many insurance companies have a directory of doctors on their website who are in your plan's network, which can help you find a doctor if you don't already have one.

Preventive Care 101

Preventive care's focus isn't on treating sickness, but rather on maintaining wellness and good health. It occurs before you feel sick or notice any symptoms and is designed to prevent or delay the onset of illness and disease. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) asserts that treatment for chronic diseases works best when they are detected early.

In its broadest definition, preventive care includes making healthy life choices, exercising, dieting and trying similar efforts. Preventive care in a medical setting includes a variety of health care services, such as physical examinations, screenings, laboratory tests, counseling and immunizations.

Why You Should See Your Doctor Annually

Visiting your doctor for an annual checkup is a large part of practicing prevention. Regular health evaluations will help keep you healthy and prevent more serious problems later. During your annual checkup, you'll undergo a series of routine screenings to gauge your health. Your doctor will also ask how you've been feeling and if you have any concerns about your health.

Tell your doctor about your health history, your family's health history, symptoms, medications and any allergies you have. If you don't share relevant information, your doctor may never ask or may assume there is nothing important he or she needs to know. Likewise, if you don't ask questions, your doctor will likely assume that you understand everything.

Keeping your doctor informed will help him or her better detect any potential issues with your health. In addition, it can help when determining whether an activity or lifestyle change will help or harm you. For example, if you're not regularly active, but want to start exercising more, your doctor will most likely advise you to start slowly to prevent an injury.

By being transparent about your health, you'll be well on your way to establishing a trusting relationship with your doctor. Having a well-established, trusting relationship with your doctor is crucial to your long-term health, and can also save you money in the long run. Moreover, research shows that patients who have a good relationship with their doctor receive better care and are happier with the care they receive.

Eat a Well-balanced Diet

Eating a well-balanced diet is a key component in living a healthy life because it helps you fuel your body with the vitamins, minerals and nutrients it needs. In addition, eating healthy can help you fight off chronic conditions, boost your immunity, give you energy, improve your sleep and support brain function. Although it may seem daunting to make the switch to a well-balanced diet, the truth is that it's easier than you think.

What's Included in a Well-balanced Diet?

The key word in "well-balanced diet" is balance. Unlike fad diets, which often cut out or severely limit certain food groups like carbs and fats, a well-balanced diet includes all recommended dietary food groups. Making sure that you're getting your daily dose of essential macronutrients, such as fats or carbohydrates, is crucial to your overall health. A diet with balance provides the body with the proper proportions of carbohydrates, fats, proteins, vitamins, minerals and liquids.

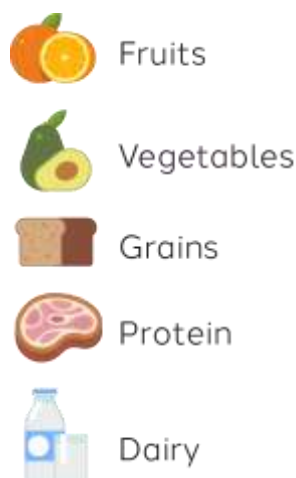
According to the most recent version of the [Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#), a government-provided resource for healthy eating, a well-balanced diet should:

- Emphasize fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products
- Include lean meats, poultry, fish, beans, eggs and nuts
- Be low in saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, sodium and added sugars
- Include oils that are rich in fatty acids and vitamin E
- Stay within your daily calorie needs, as determined by your doctor

Be sure to talk to your doctor about your specific health needs and how you can achieve them through a well-balanced diet.

MyPlate and the Food Groups

Although many American adults grew up with the food pyramid as their example for a well-balanced diet, the pyramid has been replaced with MyPlate. The MyPlate format and the Dietary Guidelines for Americans focus on five food groups as building blocks for a well-balanced diet. The five food groups that MyPlate focuses on are:



MyPlate breaks down some of the food groups into subgroups and offers examples of foods that fall into each category, as explained in the table below.

Food Group	Subgroup(s)	Examples of Food In This Category
Fruits	Whole fruit	Apples, bananas, cherries, cantaloupe, grapes, grapefruits, berries, melons, pineapples, mangoes and 100% fruit juices
	Fruit juice	
Vegetables	Dark green vegetables	Spinach, romaine lettuce, collard greens and broccoli
	Beans and peas	Black beans, chickpeas, kidney beans, lentils and split peas
	Starchy vegetables	Corn, potatoes and green peas
	Red and orange vegetables	Sweet potatoes, tomatoes, red peppers and carrots
	Other vegetables	Summer squashes, avocados and mushrooms
Protein	Meat, poultry and eggs	Eggs, chicken, turkey, pork and beef
	Seafood	Tilapia, crab, salmon, tuna and shrimp
	Nuts, seeds and soy	Nut butters, seeds, soy products and nuts
Grains	Whole grains	Whole-wheat bread, oatmeal, popcorn and brown rice
	Refined grains	White bread, pretzels, grits and regular pasta
Dairy	Milk, yogurt and cheese	Milk, yogurt, cheese and kefir

It's important to note that the Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends that you consume more whole fruits than fruit juice and more milk and yogurt than cheese. Additionally, whole fruits and vegetables include fresh, canned, frozen, dried, cut up and pureed forms of a fruit or vegetable.

Daily Recommended Amounts

Your personal daily recommended amounts of each food group, as well as your recommended caloric intake, will vary based on your age, weight and level of activity. Be sure to talk to your doctor to come up with a healthy eating plan that’s right for you.

Here’s a sample of a well-balanced meal plan for the average adult following a 2,000-calorie diet, including examples of what counts as a serving or cup of a certain food group.

Group:	Fruits	Vegetables	Protein	Grains	Dairy
Recommended daily amount:	2 cups	2 ½ cups	5 ½ ounces	6 ounces	3 cups
What counts as a cup or 1 ounce?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 cup raw, frozen, cooked or canned fruit - ½ cup dried fruit - 1 cup 100% fruit juice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 cup raw, frozen, cooked or canned fruit - 2 cups leafy salad greens - 1 cup 100% vegetable juice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 ounce cooked, canned lean meat, poultry or seafood - 1 egg - 1 Tbsp. peanut butter - ¼ cup cooked beans or peas - ½ ounce nuts or seeds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 slice of bread - 1 ounce ready-to-eat cereal - ½ cup cooked pasta, rice or cereal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 cup milk - 1 cup yogurt - 1 cup calcium-fortified soy beverage - 1 ½ ounces natural cheese or 2 ounces processed cheese

In addition to the recommended daily servings listed above, sodium, saturated fat and added sugars should be limited. Specific amounts include:

- Sodium—2,300 mg per day
- Saturated fat—22 g per day
- Added sugars—50 g per day

Again, the example above is based on the needs of the average adult following a 2,000-calorie diet. This may not be the right eating plan for you and your needs. Be sure to consult your doctor before implementing a structured healthy eating plan.

Don’t Forget About Water

There are many health benefits from drinking water, including weight loss and reduced fluid retention. But, above all, the body simply cannot function without it. Despite its importance, many Americans aren’t getting enough water.

Water is your body's principal chemical component, comprising, on average, 60% of your weight. Every system in your body depends on water. For example, water flushes toxins out of vital organs, carries nutrients to your cells and provides a moist environment for ear, nose and throat tissues. Lack of water can lead to fatigue, dizziness, cramping and other symptoms of dehydration.

One way to counter this is by replacing the normal amount of fluids you typically lose each day. On average, two liters of water or other beverages a day (a little more than eight cups) along with your normal diet, will replace lost fluids.

Another approach to staying hydrated is to follow basic dietary recommendations. On average, men should consume three liters (about 13 cups) of water a day and women 2.2 liters (about nine cups). As a rule of thumb, if you drink enough fluids to rarely feel thirsty, and always produce colorless or slightly yellow urine, your fluid intake is most likely adequate. It's important to remember, however, that you may need to modify your total fluid intake depending on how active you are, the climate you live in, your health status and whether or not you're pregnant or breastfeeding.

Get Enough Exercise

Exercising improves your health by reducing the amount of time you're sitting or sedentary. Sitting or remaining sedentary for extended periods can make you more susceptible to chronic disease. Increasing your exercise level is also likely to help you relax and be more energetic as you go about your day.

Don't begin your exercise program too ambitiously. The key to success is to start slowly and increase the difficulty of your workouts as you become more fit. Those who overdo it often experience muscle soreness, become discouraged and quit. Rather than trying to run three miles on your first day, begin by running a mile and increasing your distance as your fitness level improves.

Most importantly, remember that feeling dizzy or ill is your body's way of telling you that you're working too hard. If this happens, take a break or stop your workout for the day.

Elements of an Exercise Program

Exercise is more than just cardiovascular activity. In fact, a complete exercise regimen should include aerobic exercise, strength training and stretching. Learn more about each of these elements below.

Aerobic Exercise

Aerobic exercise is a type of physical activity that you can sustain for more than a few minutes, with the end goal being improved cardiorespiratory fitness. Commitment to a regular physical activity program is more important than the intensity of your workouts. Choose exercises you're likely to pursue and enjoy, such as these activities:



Walking



Running



Biking



Rowing



Swimming

Read on to learn more about how you can get started on a walking program.

Walking

If you're looking for an easy and inexpensive way to stay healthy or lose weight, you need nothing more than your own two feet. Walking is an ideal form of exercise—it's free, and you can do it almost anytime and anywhere. Walking is also a great way to maintain a healthy weight or to shed those extra pounds.

You can walk to maintain your health or as part of a weight-loss program. To get moving, experts advise beginners to start with a 15- or 30-minute walk daily, adding five or 10 minutes to the walking session time per week. More specifically:

- To maintain your health, walk 30 minutes a day most days of the week at a “talking” pace, which means you're able to carry on a conversation comfortably while walking.
- If you're walking for weight loss, walk 45 to 60 minutes a day at a medium to fast pace. In addition, don't skip more than two days per week.

For aerobic and cardiovascular fitness, walk 20 minutes at a very fast pace (you should be breathing hard) three to four days a week.

After walking, gentle stretching can help keep your muscles from being sore. It's also wise to warm up before walking fast or going a long distance.

Running

Running is an energizing activity that is free and requires no equipment when done outside. Running can even fight aging, assist in weight loss, alleviate stress and reduce blood pressure. Beginning a running or exercise program can seem a bit overwhelming, but by following the steps listed below, you'll be on your way to long-lasting success.

- Determine your baseline and measure your current fitness level. How long does it take you to complete one mile?
- Create a plan for your running program.
- Identify your goals. Consider your baseline and be realistic.
- Determine where running can fit into your daily routine.
- Gear up. Wearing the right type of shoes for support can help you avoid potential problems, such as shin splints.
- Create a running log to track your progress.
- Remember to stretch before and after your run to help prevent sore muscles.
- Document your success. How long does it take you to run a mile after six weeks of following your program? Re-evaluate your goals based on your results.

Strength Training

Strength training is another component of a well-rounded exercise program. Regular resistance training can decrease the risk of heart disease by lowering body fat, decreasing blood pressure, improving cholesterol and raising your overall fitness level.

Aim to strength train your whole body at least twice every week. The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) states that strength training can be accomplished with traditional free weights and dumbbells, weight machines, body weight, medicine balls, or even common household products like milk jugs filled with sand or soup cans.

For a complete workout, be sure to do eight to 10 different types of exercises. The ACSM recommends doing one to three sets of eight to 12 repetitions of each exercise for beginners or two to six sets of one to eight repetitions of each exercise for more advanced lifters. Between each set should be a rest period of two to three minutes for higher intensity exercises that use heavier loads or one to two minutes between the lower intensity exercises with light loads.

Examples of different strength training exercises you can try include:

Muscle Group	Free Weights	Machine	Body Weight
Chest	Dumbbell bench press	Seated chest press	Pushups
Back	Bent-over barbell rows	Lat pulldowns	Pullups
Shoulders	Dumbbell lateral raise	Shoulder press	Arm circles
Biceps	Dumbbell bicep curls	Cable bicep curls	Reverse grip pullups
Triceps	Dumbbell kickbacks	Pushdowns	Tricep dips
Abs	Weighted crunches	Ab machine crunches	Planks
Quads	Back (full) squats	Leg extensions	Bodyweight lunges
Hamstrings	Stiff-leg deadlifts	Leg curls	Hip-ups

As with any program, be sure to speak with your doctor prior to beginning. In addition, remember to progress slowly to avoid injury.

Stretching

Flexibility training is important too, but it's frequently neglected, resulting in increased tightness as you age and become less active. It's also the final step of a workout to reduce your risk of injury. Stretching is safest with sustained gradual movements lasting a minimum of 15 seconds per stretch. At a minimum, strive to stretch every day.

Before You Stretch

Before you stretch, you should always warm up to loosen stiff muscles and help prevent injuries. Start your warmup with these movements, which all begin in a neutral position:

- Stand straight
- Look forward
- Place feet hip-width apart
- Keep knees slightly bent

Repeat each movement six to eight times. The second part of your warmup should involve some movement to get your blood pumping. It can be as easy as walking briskly for two to three minutes—or even doing a few jumping jacks.

Time to Stretch

After a quick warmup, you're ready to stretch. Here are some simple stretches to get started with.

Upper Back and Shoulders

- Move your arms over your head in a climbing motion. Repeat this exercise 10 times for each arm.
- Grab your right elbow with your left hand and stretch your arm across your chest. Hold this position for five seconds, then repeat the stretch with your other arm.
- Reach around your chest and grasp your left shoulder blade with your right hand and your right shoulder blade with your left hand. Give yourself a hug and hold for five to 10 seconds.
- Hug your legs with your arms while sitting, allowing your chest to rest on your legs.

Lower Back

- Bend to one side while sitting in a chair. Hold this position for 10 seconds and then repeat the stretch on the other side.
- While standing, rotate your torso to one side, keeping your legs facing forward, and hold this position for 10 seconds. Then, do the same on the other side.
- Stand up with your hands supporting your lower back. Then, arch your back slightly backward for five seconds. Repeat three to five more times.

Stretch within your own limits. If a stretch causes you extraordinary pain, stop. Also, don't bounce while holding a stretch—this can result in torn muscles.

Don't Get Discouraged

Incorporating a well-rounded exercise program into your daily routine can help you live a healthier, longer life. However, be sure to consult your doctor before starting an exercise program to prevent any injuries.

Prioritize Sleep

Did you know that 1 in 3 American adults don't get the recommended seven hours of sleep? While this might not seem problematic, consistently failing to get enough sleep can put you at risk of significant health problems. In fact, not getting enough sleep is linked to a variety of chronic conditions like Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, depression and obesity. Moreover, failing to regularly get enough sleep can lead to chronic fatigue, which can increase the risk of productivity issues at work and distracted driving crashes.

How Much Sleep Is Enough?

According to the CDC, adults ages 18 and older should get seven hours or more of sleep per night. The CDC also stresses that all sleep isn't created equal, and that good sleep quality is essential to your health and well-being.

To determine your sleep quality, evaluate if you're waking up multiple times throughout the night, if you wake up feeling unrested (even if you slept for seven hours) or if you experience breathing problems while you're sleeping. While your sleep quality may be improved by implementing better sleep habits, it's not a guarantee. Sometimes, symptoms of poor sleep quality may be attributed to a sleep disorder, for which you should see your doctor to discuss treatment options.

Benefits of Getting Enough Sleep

Sleep is essential for maintaining a healthy, productive and low-stress lifestyle. Here are a few other benefits of getting a good night's sleep:

- **Increased productivity and work performance**—Giving your body enough time to go through all the sleep stages is necessary for energy, muscle repair, improved memory and the regulation of your body's essential hormones.
- **Decreased weight gain**—According to the National Sleep Foundation, not allowing your body enough time for rest and regulation can lead to an increased appetite. The particular hormones that give you the feeling of being full or hungry can become irregular without rest, which may cause increased feelings of hunger that lead to weight gain.
- **Improved mental health**—Getting enough sleep can help alleviate feelings of fatigue that may contribute to stress, depression and anxiety. Symptoms of fatigue include drowsiness, loss of energy and mood swings.

Tips for Improving Your Sleep Habits

If you're experiencing trouble getting enough sleep every night, the following five tips may help you:

1. **Eat nutritiously.** Good eating habits can help you sleep better and feel energized all day. Also, avoid big meals right before going to bed.
2. **Exercise regularly.** This also helps your sleep quality and daytime energy level. Just be sure to avoid vigorous exercise close to bedtime.
3. **Avoid stimulants like caffeine before bed.** Stimulants like caffeine and nicotine promote alertness, which can make it difficult for you to fall and stay asleep, so it's important to avoid them for three to four hours before bed.

4. **Stick to a schedule, even on the weekends.** Try to go to bed and wake up at the same time each day to keep your body on a consistent schedule.
5. **Put the electronics away.** Blue-light emitting electronic devices can stop you from getting a good night's sleep. To reduce the effects of these sleep-stealing devices, refrain from using them for at least an hour before bed.

Getting at least seven hours of sleep every night will help keep costly chronic conditions at bay and combat fatigue. For more information on how to improve your sleep habits or to address sleep issues, contact your doctor today.

Manage Your Stress

According to a Gallup poll, 55% of Americans experience stress on a daily basis—making the United States one of the most stressed-out nations in the world. Unfortunately, chronic and long-term stress can greatly increase your risk of developing a serious health condition.

What Is Stress?

Stress is your body's natural response to any type of demand. It's a feeling of emotional or physical tension in response to an event or thought that causes you to be angry, nervous or frustrated. For example, you may feel stressed about meeting a deadline or when traveling.

While short-term instances of stress are not typically harmful, prolonged stress that isn't addressed can become a serious health concern and can lead to burnout. Examples of chronic and long-term stress factors include ongoing financial troubles and heavy workloads. Stress that is left unchecked can contribute to health problems like heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure and obesity.

What Are the Symptoms of Stress?

Stress affects your mental health, but it can show itself in other ways too. Back pain, poor focus and headaches can all be symptoms of stress. Here are some other signals that you may be feeling stressed:

- Trouble sleeping or fatigue
- Feelings of anxiety, depression, irritability, restlessness or anger
- Upset stomach
- Change in appetite
- Social withdrawal
- Chest pain

How Can You Address Stress?

While it may not be possible to eliminate all the stressors in your life, there are plenty of ways to reduce their effects. Recognizing the signs of stress is the first step to improving your health. Consider these tactics to keep stress at bay:

- Plan and prioritize your most important responsibilities.
- Limit interruptions so you don't have to refocus each time you're distracted. Some ways to limit distractions include using a Do Not Disturb function on your phone or scheduling time on your calendar to finish a project.
- Take breaks away from your workstation to mentally regroup. Consider going for a short walk to reenergize your mind.
- Listen to relaxing music to help you calm down.
- Take time off from work to clear your mind.
- Avoid caffeine, as this stimulant has been proven to worsen feelings of stress.

- Get some exercise to work off your stress. Exercise releases endorphins that can help you relax.
- Try meditating. Meditation is an activity that can calm your mind and keep you focused on the present.
- Learn to say no. Often, we overschedule ourselves, which can lead to feelings of stress. Don't be afraid to say no to taking on a project or going to an event if you need a break or time for yourself.

Where Can I Learn More?

If you still have trouble coping with stress, talk with your doctor about treatment options. Don't wait too long before seeking help, or you'll risk letting the stress pile up.

Summary

Getting started on your wellness journey is a choice that you won't regret in the long run. Making the decision to visit your doctor annually, eat a well-balanced diet, get enough exercise, prioritize sleep and manage stress can help improve your overall health and lower your health care costs.

Although there's an abundance of information and misinformation on the internet, these lifestyle changes aren't complicated. Keep the strategies discussed in this guide in mind and you'll be well on your way to living a healthy, happy life.

For more information about how you can improve your health and wellness, contact your doctor today.