

Healthy U @ Work

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The Importance of Relationships

Summertime activities often include picnics, barbecues, and other get-togethers with friends and families. In fact, other than the holiday season, most people find it's easier to schedule social outings in the summer, when children aren't in school and vacation time is common. Spending time with those we care about is fun, as well as a healthy activity. Strong relationships can help reduce stress, improve health, increase our self-esteem, and are considered essential for mental and emotional well-being.

Strong relationships are ones in which we feel listened to and valued for who we are. These relationships may be with family members but could develop with friends and even co-workers. A number of studies have shown that healthy relationships reduce the risk of mortality from coronary artery disease (*Psychosomatic Medicine* 2001) and a lack of strong social connections is associated with increased progression of certain conditions, including high blood pressure, cancer, and healing delays (*Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 2009). In fact, a lack of good relationships has also been shown to increase inflammation and lower immune system responses (*Annual Review of Psychology* 2002). Those who have a set of good friends are less likely to become depressed following an accident or illness. Time and again, studies have confirmed that having a robust social network, one you connect with regularly, is essential for long-term physical and mental health.

So, what makes a relationship strong? Mutual respect is the cornerstone of a healthy relationship, and good communication is a must. Spending time together is important, but staying connected via phone, email, texts, or social media can be good as well. Shared interests and shared values help relationships to grow and develop. For those who don't have a strong social network, finding a church or club can help, as can having a pet. These activities offer many of the same health benefits and can put you in a position to meet others with similar interests.

Take time this summer to spend time with others. Also, look out for anyone near you who may be isolated due to age or physical limitations. Reaching out in kindness towards others is another way to strengthen the social connections you have and increase your quality of life and theirs. Enjoy your summertime fun!



Gout (Inflammatory Arthritis)

Joint pain is a common symptom, one many associate with old age or osteoarthritis. However, another frequent cause of joint pain is gout. Gout is classified as a type of arthritis, one caused by excessive uric acid in the blood stream. Gout can occur in any joint but is most commonly developed in the big toe. It can come on suddenly and present itself as red and swollen, causing moderate to extreme pain.

There are certain conditions that can increase the risk of gout, including diabetes, obesity, metabolic syndrome, and kidney disease. Other risk factors include alcohol use or alcoholism, family history, overconsumption of sugary foods and drinks, and excessive intake of certain meats and shellfish (foods containing purine). Foods high in the compound purine are known to produce uric acid that could exacerbate gout symptoms.

Gout can be diagnosed by a doctor based on the reporting of symptoms and an examination, including a blood test to measure uric acid. Once diagnosed, the doctor may prescribe rest and NSAIDs (nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) or possibly joint aspirations where the doctor removes excess fluid from the joint with a needle and syringe. A healthcare provider may also discuss recommended changes in diet to help manage gout symptoms including reduced consumption of sugar, alcohol, and purine-rich foods. While gout may resolve itself within a week or two, if left untreated gout increases the risk of joint damage and could lead to a chronic condition. It is important to see a doctor if you suspect gout as the cause of your joint pain.



Produce of the Month

Tomatoes

You may be growing them in your garden or picking up a pint at the grocery store or farmer's market. Either way, tomatoes are a staple in most every cuisine. Though available throughout the year, tomatoes are considered in season from July to September. Tomatoes are low in calories and high in key nutrients, including lycopene, the cancer-fighting pigment that gives the tomato its red color.

The Basics: Available in red, yellow, green and orange, tomatoes are technically the *fruit* of the plant (because of how it grows on the plant and contains its seeds) but are considered vegetables because of how they are often used. When buying tomatoes, choose ones that have the deepest color, indicating better taste and more lycopene. They should be smooth, heavy and firm (not hard) and without blemish. If you wish, buy organic tomatoes, which have a greater amount of lycopene. Store tomatoes at room temperature on the counter, out of direct sunlight to maintain the best flavor and texture. Tomatoes last about 1 week from purchase and freeze well, too, in case you plan to use them later for cooking. To prepare your tomato, wash before using and slice or chop according to your recipe. If you wish to peel your tomato for a recipe, slice an "X" on the bottom of the tomato and place it in boiling water for 15-30 seconds. Remove the tomato and place in an ice bath (bowl of cold water with ice cubes). After 2-5 minutes (depending on the size of the tomato), the skins should come off easily.

Try This: The ripest tomatoes taste best when eaten with the fewest ingredients. Slice your ripe tomato and place on a plate or platter. Drizzle with extra virgin olive oil, a good balsamic vinegar, some salt and pepper, and fresh basil leaves, chopped or sliced *just* before serving. For a heartier dish, add sliced fresh mozzarella cheese to each tomato.

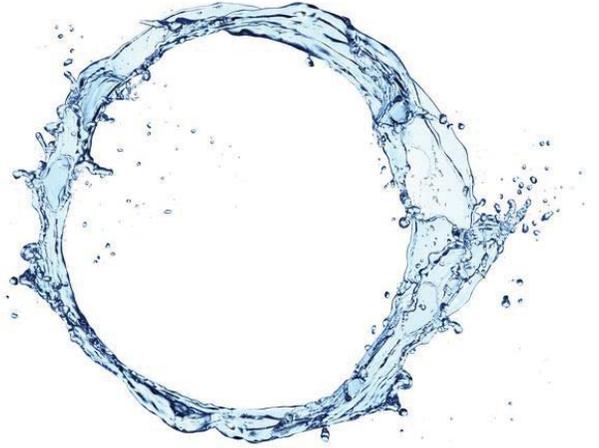
The Facts: Besides lycopene, tomatoes are also high in vitamin A, vitamin C and vitamin K. They provide fiber, potassium, chromium, vitamins B1, B2, B6, folate, and iron, too. Tomatoes are associated with a reduced risk of many different cancers and may reduce the risk for heart disease.

Healthy Hydration: What Are You Drinking?

We know it's important to stay hydrated, especially during the hot summer months. But it's also important to avoid drinks that are high in sugar, calories, and caffeine. Here are some tips for staying healthy and hydrated!

Limit juice

While juices can provide needed vitamins and hydration - a steady diet of juice does little more than add unnecessary calories and sugar. Drinking large amounts of juice can increase blood sugar levels and put stress on our pancreas. Whole fruits provide fiber, which aids in the absorption of sugar and is better for gut health. Enjoy a small glass of juice with breakfast if you like (a 4-ounce glass is one serving) but eating the whole fruit (an orange instead of orange juice) provides the same vitamins along with added fiber.



Limit or eliminate soda and sweetened drinks

According to the Harvard School of Public Health, sports drinks and soda are a significant factor in the obesity epidemic in our country, especially in children. The National Institute of Health reports that 50% of the U.S. population drinks a sugary beverage every day. Worse still, the average size of beverages has increased over the past 25 years and, now, according to the *American Journal of Public Health*, the average soda size is *twice* what the FDA recommends. Sodas are less expensive than milk, juice, and bottled water, but have no nutritional value and are considered "empty calories."

Avoid or limit soda and watch the portion size when you do enjoy it. Diet soda has been the subject of a number of articles concerning the safety of artificial sweeteners, the relationship between diet soda and obesity, and more. While research is ongoing and not yet settled, it is safe to say that diet soda is not a substitute for plain water and should also be limited. As for sports drinks, they are not a necessary drink and often contain added sugars and artificial colorings. Water is usually sufficient. If you need to replace electrolytes after a workout, stick to coconut water or watermelon water as a more healthy, natural choice.

Limit or eliminate alcohol

Alcohol carries a pretty big calorie punch, depending on what you choose and how much you drink. While "light beer" and wine are relatively low in calories, mixed drinks can be as much as a dessert. Drinking alcohol can also lead to unhealthy food choices, especially "junk food" or bar food. Most importantly, alcohol provides no nutritional value and is linked to a number of health issues. If you choose to drink alcohol, limit your consumption to less than 1 drink a day.

Choose coffee drinks wisely

Whether it's a national chain or local coffee spot, many locations offer specialty coffee drinks that contain large amounts of sugar, fat, and caffeine. A simple cup of coffee - even one *with* a little cream and sugar - has been replaced by something that resembles a dessert. Caffeine is a known diuretic, meaning too much caffeine can dehydrate you. If you crave a cup of joe, limit the amount and drink it black or with a *touch* of cream and/or sugar.

Make water your beverage of choice

The best bet for staying hydrated is water. To avoid artificial sweeteners, stay away from flavored water. You can add fresh or frozen fruit, vegetables, and herbs to add a little variety such as lemon, cucumber, or mint. Consider buying a pitcher that filters water or a filter that attaches to your faucet. Drink plenty of water throughout the day!

35 Ways to Burn 100 Calories

Small habits add up! By adding just one activity below every day, you could lose more than 11 pounds in the next year. Some activities are as short as 6 minutes but can make an impact on your daily activity and health.

- Basketball, shooting hoops: 20 minutes
- Biking: 23 minutes of casual cycling
- Bowling: 30 minutes
- Carrying an infant: 24 minutes
- Cleaning, moderate effort: 26 minutes
- Cooking: 34 minutes
- Darts: 35 minutes
- Doing dishes: 40 minutes
- Elliptical: 8 minutes
- Jumping rope: 9 minutes at a moderate intensity
- Kickball: 13 minutes
- Lifting weights, vigorously: 15 minutes
- Mopping the floor: 20 minutes
- Mowing the lawn: 20 minutes
- Pilates: 24 minutes
- Playing Frisbee: 30 minutes
- Playing soccer, casual: 13 minutes
- Pushing a stroller: 35 minutes
- Raking leaves: 23 minutes
- Rowing machine: 13 minutes
- Running stairs: 6 minutes
- Running: 9 minutes of running at a 6-mph pace
- Softball or baseball: 18 minutes
- Sweeping: 23 minutes
- Swimming: 15 minutes moderate intensity
- Volleyball, recreational: 26 minutes
- Walking stairs: 11 minutes
- Walking the dog, 26 minutes
- Walking: 20 minutes of walking at a 3-mph pace
- Washing the car: 20 minutes
- Water aerobics: 23 minutes
- Water skiing: 15 minutes
- Weeding the garden: 18 minutes
- Yoga: 20 minutes
- Zumba: 11 minutes





Q: Hi Erin! I am currently dealing with what I think is a sciatic issue. From the research I have done, it appears I have all the symptoms. I work at a desk all day long and I know that doesn't help. Do you have any suggestions on how to get rid of this issue or to help alleviate some of the discomfort? Thank you!

Jenelle S.

A: Hey Jenelle! Thank you for reaching out. What you are going through is a very common issue and I deal with this with clients all the time. I have even had it myself. There are quite a few things you can do on your own to help with the discomfort. First, I recommend consulting your doctor to see if a sciatic issue is what you are dealing with and to rule out other causes of your pain.

A little back story on the sciatic nerve. This nerve runs from the lower spine to the buttocks and down through the legs and into the feet. It supplies sensation and strength to leg and foot muscles. The nerve can become irritated if it gets "pinched" from a tight muscle (such as the piriformis muscle located in your buttocks) or a herniated or bulging disc in the back. There are a few other structural issues that can cause sciatica such as stenosis or spondylolisthesis.

Here are a few things you can do. If you are currently exercising and you feel the pain worsen while doing so, discontinue that particular exercise for the time being. One thing to concentrate on, if you do exercise, is to strengthen the back, hip and glute muscles along with increasing flexibility in these muscles. Since you do sit at a job all day long make it a priority to get up every hour if you can and walk for a minute or two and perform some strategic stretches that will bring you some relief. Stretching is a great thing to start doing a few times a day, I've worked with clients with this issue that after a few weeks of consistent stretching got rid of the pain.

For the flexibility portion, we want to really work on stretching the legs. With you sitting all day those muscles can become very tight. One of the main muscles that can affect the sciatic nerve is the piriformis, a stretch for this muscle can really help. To perform a piriformis stretch, do the following: Lie on your back with your knees bent. Lift right foot and cross right ankle over left knee. Pull left leg toward your chest with right foot still over left knee. Hold 30 seconds and do two repetitions. I would recommend doing this a few times a day. You can also do this sitting in a chair at work. Hamstring and quadricep stretches can help as well.

Ask the Trainer: Sciatic Pain

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Foam rolling is another great option for you to try. I love to have clients foam roll but sometimes this can be too much pressure on certain areas so I will suggest using a muscle massage roller. You can find a foam roller and massage roller at many local retailer or do a quick search online. These techniques help massage knots out of the muscles which can help release that nerve. Check out your wellness portal for videos on how to foam roll effectively.

I hope this gives you a few ideas to try.

Dedicated to your success,

Erin M Long, B.S., NSCA-CPT



1

A piriformis stretch can be performed lying on your back or sitting in a chair.



3

You can use a strap or scarf to help you perform a lying hamstring stretch or a side-lying quadriceps stretch.



2

Foam rolling is a great way to release muscle tension and to warm up your muscles before exercise.



Want to Know More? Contact Working Well for more information on wellness programs and how they can help you reduce healthcare costs and improve employee wellness.



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