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A Focus on Self-Care

Today most of us are placing even more value on health and wellness than before. If we take care of ourselves, we have a better chance of staying healthy now and in the future.

Here are some ways to start taking care of yourself, your health and well-being:

- **Assess your current health behaviors.** Do you eat a healthy diet? Do you exercise? How's your sleep?
- **Take small steps to improve.** For the best chance of success, choose only one behavior to focus on to start and set a specific goal. For example, you may decide to walk 30 minutes each day, sleep at least 7 hours a night or eat three servings of vegetables daily.
- **Focus on what you can control.** You cannot control many things in life, but you can control the steps you take to keep you and your family healthy. For example, things like using seat belts when driving and wearing eye-protection for certain chores or sports will go a long way.
- **Stay connected with friends and family.** Don't isolate yourself – reach out to friends and family by phone, email, text or other social media platforms, like Zoom or FaceTime.
- **Tweak your diet.** Maintaining a healthy diet is always important. Making huge changes to your diet may add to your stress, but since you are eating at home more, think about some healthy modifications, such as reducing processed foods, cutting down on sugar and unhealthy fats, and eating less meat and more fruits and vegetables.

Keep reading for more tips on taking care of yourself this year, like getting preventive care exams, exercising, saving for retirement and practicing gratitude.

Don't Wait – Get Your Preventive Care

If you put off a check-up or screening in the past, you're not alone. Many Americans have delayed preventive care, but it may be more important than ever right now.

Preventive care keeps minor health issues from becoming major problems. Without screenings and checkups, arteries have more time to clog, tumors can grow or spread, and depression can spiral out of control. The earlier you identify a disease, the better your chances of getting treated. What's more, the healthier you are, the better prepared you'll be to battle any other health crisis that comes your way.

Preventive services are 100% covered by most medical plans when you visit an in-network provider. These include defined screenings, well visits, and immunizations.



Get Moving!

Exercise is potent medicine. It can enhance the way you look and feel and help you manage your weight. Most notably, being active helps you stay healthy and live a longer life. Science has proven that active people are less likely to develop major illnesses such as heart disease, diabetes and colon cancer. Being inactive raises your risk of heart attack or stroke by two times, which is the same amount as smoking.

However, **recent studies show that people in the United States are sitting a lot more since the COVID-19 pandemic.** Exercise may not feel like a priority right now, but it is important to stay active. Exercise relieves stress, helps reduce anxiety and depression and boosts your immune system.

Many people think only vigorous exercise counts. But there is strong proof that moderate activity also provides health benefits and prevents illnesses; for example:

- Break up sitting time by getting up and walking for at least 2–3 minutes every hour.
- Walk outside if you can maintain a distance of at least 6 feet from others.
- Do vigorous housework like vacuuming and sweeping or cleaning out the garage.
- Follow an online exercise class.

Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity activity every week (or 75 minutes of vigorous intensity) with two sessions of strength building activities per week. That's about 30 minutes of movement, five times per week. It's also okay to break it up. Two 15-minute workouts or three 10-minute workouts can benefit you just as much.

Being Sedentary Can Increase Back Pain

Need another reason to get moving? Sedentary behavior (sitting for hours each day) can lead to chronic back pain as the back becomes stiff, weak, and deconditioned. As the pain increases, many people reduce their activity and exercise levels, creating a vicious circle of back pain and deterioration of the spine.

Here are some steps you can take for a healthy back:

- **Move.** If you are in pain, this may be the last thing you feel like doing, but it's one of the best things you can do to strengthen your back.
- **Keep good posture.** Pay attention to the way you hold your back when you sit, stand, walk, sleep, or do day-to-day activities. Good posture is when all the bones in your spine are correctly aligned. Poor posture can leave your back stiff and tense. This often leads to back pain.
- **Maintain a healthy weight.** Being overweight can increase strain on your lower back, especially as you age. Follow your doctor's recommendations for diet and exercise and aim to keep your weight within a healthy range for your height.
- **Relax.** Back pain can be linked to stress, tension, and other non-physical problems. Yoga, meditation, massages and acupuncture are a few ways to help lift your mood, stretch your muscles, and help you relax.

If you have chronic pain for four weeks or more, see your doctor!



Protect Your Eyesight

It's important to have an annual eye exam to allow your doctor to identify medical conditions, such as glaucoma or age-related macular degeneration, before they become serious.

According to the World Health Organization, glaucoma is the second leading cause of blindness around the world. Glaucoma is a disease that damages your eye's optic nerve. It usually happens when fluid builds up in the front part of your eye. That extra fluid increases the pressure in your eye, damaging the optic nerve. But blindness from glaucoma can often be prevented with early treatment.

Many forms of glaucoma have no warning signs. The effect is so gradual that you may not notice a change in vision until the condition is at an advanced stage. The signs and symptoms of glaucoma vary depending on the type and stage of your condition.

January Is National Glaucoma Awareness Month

Find out more about this sight-stealing disease by going to glaucoma.org.

Open-angle glaucoma	Acute angle-closure glaucoma*	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Patchy blind spots in your side (peripheral) or central vision, frequently in both eyes▪ Tunnel vision in the advanced stages	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Severe headache▪ Eye pain▪ Nausea and vomiting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Blurred vision▪ Halos around lights▪ Eye redness

* If you have any of the symptoms of acute angle-closure glaucoma listed above, go to an emergency room or an eye doctor's (ophthalmologist's) office right away.

The 401(k) Advantage

The earlier you start saving in your 401(k) account, the more you can take advantage of compounding. This means that over time, your investments can generate earnings, and those earnings can generate even more earnings. It's a powerful way to grow your savings.

You can contribute up to the IRS limits each year.



Want Better Health and Well-being? Practice Gratitude

Did you know that science shows that people who cultivate a habit of gratitude are happier, have increased mental strength, build a stronger immune system—and are more likely to be successful?

One effective way to incorporate this practice into your life is to **start a gratitude journal**. **Each morning or evening**, take 5–10 minutes (or at least 3 times a week) to jot down at least 3 things you are grateful for that day.

Here are some ideas to get you started.

- What is something that made you smile today?
- What is a favorite memory of a loved one?
- List something silly your kids did today.
- Describe a family tradition that you are most grateful for.
- Look out the window, what's something you're grateful for outside?
- What is something you're looking forward to?

There are no rules, so write whatever makes you happy. Enjoy and be well!