Your Health
Flu Season

This vaccine is the most effective method to avoid the dangerous illness that becomes a problem in the autumn months.

THE FLU SHOT

Each fall you probably notice the heightened flu-vaccine awareness in your area. Hospitals, health clinics and even employers hold their own clinics to offer the important vaccination. Do yourself, your family and others in your community a favor by taking advantage of the flu shot. The shot works by causing important blood proteins called antibodies to develop in your body.

Working together with viruses contained in the vaccine, these antibodies create an effective level of protection against flu infection.

These antibodies begin developing about two weeks after receiving the vaccine, so it’s important to get vaccinated early in the fall before the flu season in full force.

OTHER METHODS OF PROTECTION

While a vaccination is a proven method of protection from the flu, it still is possible to contract the illness. Factors such as age and your current health can lessen the level of effectiveness. That’s why it also is extremely important to take other measures to keep you and yours healthy this flu season.

Below are some tips from the CDC on how to do just that.

• Avoid close contact with people who have developed a contagious illness;
• If you feel like you are experiencing flu symptoms, stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone without the usage of fever-reducing medications;
• Wash your hands with soap and water often; and
• Keep surfaces and objects clean with bacteria-killing disinfectants.

SYMPTOMS AND RISKS

Commonly known as the flu, influenza is a respiratory illness caused by a virus. Symptoms can range from mild to severe, but the flu can lead to death if left untreated. Most cases of influenza include a fever, sore throat and fatigue. If you haven’t been vaccinated and notice these symptoms during the flu season, seek medical help immediately.
Brains are working hard while at a desk job, but the rest of the body is quite inactive. Special efforts are needed to stay healthy in this case. Why bother?

Because studies show that sedentary lifestyles can lead to health issues such as obesity, diabetes and mobility issues.

We owe it to ourselves, our co-workers and our families to get up from the chair every once in a while and keep our bodies moving. The success of our careers may depend on it.

THE RISKS OF INACTIVITY

If you have a desk job, there could be physical consequences down the road even if you stick to a regular exercise routine.

That means that no matter how often you try to hit the gym, your work situation may be hampering you in the long run.

Long periods of inactivity can put stress and strain on the whole body. Over time, according to Blue Cross Blue Shield, people who sit for a long time without moving are more likely to have joint, bone and posture problems. They also have increased risk of obesity and related conditions such as heart disease, diabetes and stroke, among others.

The physical effects will eventually lower energy levels and mental alertness. This sluggishness could affect your productivity at work. Develop a plan that you can realistically stick with over the course of months and years.

MOVING AT WORK

We need to move to stay healthy, so we have to think of creative ways to incorporate more movement during those eight hours at the desk.

The experts at BCBS suggest these tips:

- Take the stairs, not the elevator for a healthy burst of movement.
- Walk to a co-worker’s desk rather than calling or emailing. This simple step — or steps — can make a huge daily difference. You may be more productive, too.
- When someone comes to your desk, stand up to talk and use the opportunity to stretch your legs and arms.
- Take a brisk morning and afternoon walk around your building. Your lunch break can make for the perfect time for a walk.
- If you run errands during lunchtime, walk briskly to and from your car. Park far away from your company’s entrance if possible.
Donating Blood

People donate blood for many reasons. Maybe they are returning the favor after a friend or family member received blood. Maybe they do it for the health benefits. No matter the thinking, everyone can agree that blood donations are critical to our healthcare system.

THE BENEFITS

There are actual benefits to donating blood besides feelings of good will. Before a donation, blood donors receive a mini-physical that comes with a full report.

According to the Red Cross, these aspects are reviewed during these checks:
- pulse;
- blood pressure;
- body temperature; and
- hemoglobin.

Why is this such a great benefit? During this check, it’s possible that blood donation professionals may find underlying health issues. You could be alerted to something you didn’t know about and prompted to follow-up with your physician for next steps.

THE PROCESS

The process of blood donation has been refined and improved over the years. There are different kinds of blood donation, and depending on what you are participating in, you will be given information on all of the related processes.

According to the Red Cross, these are the basic requirements for donors:
- Be in good general health and feeling well;
- Be at least 17 years old in most states, or 16 years old with parental consent if allowed by state; and
- Weigh at least 110 pounds. (Additional weight requirements apply for donors 18 and younger.)

Thinking of donating? The Red Cross recommends the following steps:
- Have a light meal and plenty to drink;
- Bring your donor card, driver’s license or two other forms of identification;
- Bring the names of medications you are taking;
- Wear a comfortable top that can be rolled up easily; and
- Bring a support person if you feel a little apprehensive.
Autumn Allergies

Allergies affect Americans all year round, but symptoms can become especially troublesome during the fall. People who are sensitive to mold and ragweed pollen may experience heightened exposure, causing itchy eyes, sore throats and runny noses.

Talk to your doctor to acquire the medication so you can enjoy the beautiful autumn weather.

Pollen levels are raised during autumn due to plants releasing small grains that fertilize other plants. Grasses, trees and different species of weeds all contribute to spreading these small grains through the wind. According to the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, grasses are the most common cause of fall allergy.

TREATMENTS

Luckily, there are many over-the-counter and prescription medicines to help reduce the level of pollen-allergy symptoms you experience.

The AAFA has listed several helpful medicines that your doctor might recommend for relief:

• Antihistamines: You might find this in pill, liquid or nasal spray form. Antihistamines are helpful in reducing the symptoms of a runny nose and reducing itchiness in the nose and eyes.
• Decongestants: These work by shrinking the lining of nasal passages to relieve stuffy noses. They’re available in pills, liquids, nasal sprays and even drops.
• Nasal corticosteroids: A powerful nasal spray that reduces inflammation in the nose and blocks allergy reactions.
• Immunotherapy: For those who can’t find relief with medications, immunotherapy is a treatment used to reduce or prevent the symptoms of allergies. You will typically see this method performed with a series of shots or in tablet form.

NATURAL METHODS

While medication is certainly an effective way to avoid the symptoms of fall allergies, there are still other methods you can use to limit your risk of reactions.

Individual pollen grains are typically too small to see with the naked eye. That doesn’t mean they aren’t surrounding and even attaching to you while outdoors. It is crucial to take extra care while you are outside this autumn.

Be sure to wear sunglasses and a hat while enjoying the great outdoors. These are both effective ways to protect your eyes and hair from pollen intrusion.

Once you’re inside, be sure to change and wash the clothes you wore while outside.

Don’t dry your clothes on a clothesline during pollen season if you experience allergies.

You also should bathe and shampoo your hair before bed so your bedsheets don’t get buildup from the grains that stuck to you.

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Fall Fitness

Autumn brings cooler temperatures and creates new exercise opportunities that might not have been possible in the blazing heat of summer. It’s time to get outdoors and enjoy the beautiful views and crisp air that autumn offers.

Now that you might be spending more time exercising outdoors, consider freezing your gym membership.

Some gyms may require you still pay a small monthly premium to retain your account, but you will avoid paying expensive startup fees once you sign up again. Inquire with the experts at your local gym about their policies on the matter.

ENJOY THE VIEWS

Autumn hiking affords you beautiful views of changing leaves and wildlife. Hiking is a great activity to take in all the views and get some fantastic cardiovascular exercise.

The American Heart Association credits walking briskly with lowering the risk of high blood pressure, dangerous cholesterol levels and even diabetes. Hiking trails can have different levels of difficulty that might include more hills or rugged terrains.

Start slowly, but once you become a hiking expert, you may enjoy the more rigorous trails.

Check with your local wildlife refuge for the best trails for your hiking experience.

Make sure to use a map when you get started to avoid becoming lost.

KEEPING WARM

Exercising outdoors in autumn can make finding the proper clothing tricky. You will benefit from dressing in layers, as you might find yourself overheating as your body temperature rises.

Remaining comfortable is crucial during a workout and can lead to longer performance.

The layer that is against your skin should be an undershirt made from a wool blend or a synthetic material called polypropylene. Both materials make it possible for your sweat to escape.

For your warm layer, you’ll want to wear a loose-weave wool sweatshirt. This fabric allows for maximum air flow and will keep you dry even if it gets wet itself.

STAY SAFE AT NIGHT

As it begins getting dark earlier in the day, you should either adjust your workout schedule or take extra safety precautions.

Be sure you are wearing reflective clothing if you are jogging near a road. For bikers, consider installing a headlight on your bike, and be sure you are using reflectors.
Thanksgiving Food Safety

For many Americans, the tradition of Thanksgiving is packed with delicious food and family get-togethers. If you’re the one cooking, be sure to do it safely to avoid making yourself and guests ill. Avoid the dangers of undercooked turkey so you can enjoy this special time of the year with your loved ones.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that salmonella causes 1 million cases of foodborne illnesses in America each year.

The people most at risk for an infection are children under 5 and older adults with weakened-immune systems.

Salmonella symptoms usually cause fevers, diarrhea and abdominal cramps that may start as soon as 12 hours after an infection. The CDC states this illness usually dissipates within four to seven days without medical treatment.

However, if the symptoms don’t get better, it is critical to see your doctor. Severe cases can lead to death if not properly treated with the right antibiotics.

THAWING YOUR BIRD

Don’t be afraid to purchase your turkey weeks before Thanksgiving. Freezing your bird will keep it safe until you are ready to prepare it. Do be careful during the thawing process, as that’s where dangerous bacteria can begin growing.

Never thaw a turkey at room temperature. After about two hours, its temperature will likely reach the danger zone — 40 to 140 degrees Fahrenheit. Instead, plan to let it thaw in the refrigerator or in a sink of cold water that is changed every 30 minutes.

STEPS FOR FOOD SAFETY

Once your turkey is thoroughly thawed, you will want to follow the CDC’s four-step guide to food safety.

• Cook: Allow your bird to cook to its correct internal temperature. The United States Department of Agriculture recommends turkey be cooked to 165 degrees Fahrenheit.

• Clean: Wash your hands and cooking surfaces often to rid areas of illness-causing bacteria.

• Chill: Refrigerate promptly. Bacteria can form in only two hours in many foods.

• Separate: Make sure to keep raw foods away from your already cooked items. It is easy for bacteria to spread from one to another.

LEFTOVERS

Thanksgiving typically provides Americans with plenty of leftovers. Make sure they are refrigerated as soon as possible. Foods at room temperature can develop Clostridium perfringens, which is the second most common bacterial cause of food poisoning.

Your leftovers should be stored at 40 degrees Fahrenheit temperatures at the highest, to prevent dangerous bacteria from forming.

Dr. Mary Ellen Marranca

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A Healthy Winter

Autumn is a nice break between summer’s blazing heat and winter’s brutal cold. While you are enjoying the comfortable temperatures during the fall, it is important to spend some time preparing yourself and your home for the upcoming cold.

Doing so can ensure a healthy winter season safe from the potential dangers that come with cold, icy temperatures.

BREATHING HEALTHY AIR

You might put much thought into your furnace during the summer and fall months. Before turning it on during colder weather, it will likely require some maintenance to ensure you are breathing healthy air.

Set up a thorough inspection with a local heating and air professional to ease your mind and make sure everything is working properly. A technician’s assessment of your system might include your ductwork, which over time can build up moisture, mold and mildew. An inspection can also uncover sediment buildups that can weaken your furnace’s efficiency and create a fire hazard.

If your furnace is over 15 years old, the United States Department of Energy recommends replacing it with a new, efficient system. A unit that features the Energy Star logo can be 15 percent more efficient than other units.

PREVENT CARBON MONOXIDE (CO) EMERGENCIES

Carbon monoxide is a colorless, odorless gas that can cause serious health issues. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend installing a CO detector to alert you of the presence of CO in your home. This fall, be sure to check the batteries in your detector to make sure it is in proper working order.

Learning the symptoms of CO poisoning can help you act quickly in the face of an emergency. These include headache, dizziness, weakness, upset stomach, vomiting, chest pain and confusion. Exit your home and call 911 immediately if you believe CO poisoning is affecting you or someone you love.

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