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Your Mind Matters In Health Outcomes

Self-care Leads To Optimum Health

How To Avoid Severe COVID-19

How To Support Metabolic Health

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ROCKFORD EDITION

VOL. 35, NO. 2

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How To Mind Your Mental Health

When we explore ways to improve our health, it's often our physical health that we focus on. But mental health benefits from our attention, too. Taking steps to improve and maintain your mental well-being is equally important.

In fact, your mental health can play a critical role in your physical health. Stress, anxiety and other manifestations of mental and emotional distress can trigger physiological responses in your body that may erode your health over time. For example, if you're continually under a high level of stress, chances are your blood pressure runs higher than it should, and that in turn poses a risk for heart disease and related conditions.

Renew your commitment to self-care and managing your mental health with these tips.

Set realistic goals. Having something to work toward and look forward to is a healthy way to occupy your mind. Decide what you'd like to achieve this year and identify milestones toward your ultimate goal. Celebrating when you achieve each milestone can keep you motivated and help measure your progress along the way.

Nurture personal relationships. Loneliness is a major contributor to mental health struggles, and having even a couple close relationships can help provide you with an essential sense of connection

and belonging. Whether you talk in person, by video or text, make time to talk to family and friends. If you find your circle is smaller than you'd like, try taking a class or joining an organization where you can meet others who share your interests.

Alleviate stress. A little bit of pressure can push you to do your best, but living in a constant state of stress can be bad for your health. Take time to understand your stress triggers and actively work to avoid them. If that's not fully possible, dedicate a portion of each day to de-stressing and clearing your mind. You might choose meditation, exercise, reading or listening to music, all of which let you relax your mind and focus your attention on something else.

Sleep more. Getting enough sleep means 7-9 hours each night, according to most experts, as it's one of the best ways to protect your overall health and ensure you're in the right frame of mind to approach the day. When you're sleep-deprived, you're less capable of problem-solving, making decisions and managing your emotions and behavior. Studies have also shown poor sleep habits are linked to depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder and other mental health conditions. If winding down is an issue, try creating a bedtime routine that makes it easier to get to sleep.

Find more tips to promote healthy living at eLivingtoday.com.

Story courtesy of Family Features.

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Self-Care Is At The Heart Of Optimum Health

Committing to better self-care is the perfect starting point for new habits and a new approach to protecting your overall wellness.

Self-care takes many forms. Maintaining a well-balanced diet and getting plenty of exercise are some ways to promote your physical health. So is taking good care of your body's largest organ: your skin. When it comes to mental health, getting organized is a surprisingly effective way to manage stress and keep your goals on track so you feel a sense of accomplishment.

Start working toward a lifestyle where your wellness is front and center with these ideas for simplifying and personalizing your journey. Look for more lifestyle advice and helpful wellness tips at eLivingtoday.com.

Prepare for Healthier Eating Habits. Portion control is a common challenge when you kick off a healthier eating plan. One way to keep your meals on the modest side is preparing them ahead of time. Meal prep containers make it easy to have freshly prepared foods in moderate portions ready whenever you're ready to eat. Look for compartments that let you enjoy a main dish and at least one side, and be sure the containers seal tightly to keep food fresh and prevent leaks.

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Put Your Best Foot Forward. If stepping up your fitness game will improve your self-care efforts, be sure to start on

the right foot with the right footwear for the job. Runners in particular should be conscious of quality shoes. Look for ample cushion, comfortable ankle support, overall quality construction and a snug fit that gives your toes some wiggle room. Even slight variations can affect your comfort, so trying on different options is likely your best path toward finding the perfect fit.

Introduce Weights for Your Workout.

Whether you've hit a plateau or you're just bored with your workout, adding dumbbells can introduce a whole new dimension by helping build muscle and burn more fat. Rotating muscle groups lets you give your muscles a chance to recover between workouts. The options are nearly endless, so think about how you'll use them, where you'll store them, whether shape or color matters and how much you want to spend.

Make Skin Care a Personal Priority. Your skin tells an important story about your overall health. Protecting it from harsh elements and sun damage can help ensure your skin stays supple and strong, providing the barrier it's meant to as it protects the rest of your body. Even seemingly minor irritations like dry skin can be problematic as scratching or cracking can lead to wounds and infection. Rely on a regular moisturizer and be conscious of applying sunscreen whenever you'll be outdoors.

Plan for Smoother Success. Give yourself a boost toward tackling your goals by getting organized. A planner can help you keep important information at your fingertips while making it easy to keep tabs on appointments, deadlines and more. You can even track progress against new habits or journal your way toward a healthier diet. Some people prefer physical planners they can write in and update manually while others find a digital version in a smart device is more convenient.

Story courtesy of Family Features.

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What To Expect If You Experience A Warning Stroke

Diagnosing a transient ischemic attack (TIA), sometimes called a "warning stroke," can be challenging because symptoms often disappear within an hour. However, it's important to seek emergency assessment to help prevent a full-blown stroke.

While a TIA, which is a temporary blockage of blood flow to the brain, doesn't cause permanent damage, nearly 1 in 5 people who have a suspected TIA will have a stroke within three months, according to a scientific statement published in the American Heart Association journal "Stroke." Additionally, almost half will occur within two days – which is why TIAs are often described as warning strokes.

People with cardiovascular risk factors, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity, high cholesterol and smoking, are at high risk for stroke and TIA. Other conditions that increase risk include peripheral artery disease, atrial fibrillation, obstructive sleep apnea and coronary artery disease. In addition, a person who has had a prior stroke is at high risk for TIA.

TIA symptoms are the same as stroke symptoms, only temporary. They begin suddenly and may have any or all these characteristics:

*Symptoms begin strong then fade

*Symptoms typically last less than an hour

*Facial droop

*Weakness or numbness on one side of the body

*Trouble finding the right words or slurred speech

*Dizziness, vision loss or trouble walking

The F.A.S.T. acronym for stroke symptoms can also be used to identify a TIA: F – face drooping or numbness; A – arm weakness; S – speech difficulty; T – time to call 9-1-1, even if the symptoms go away.

Given the appropriate scan, 2 in 5 people will learn they actually had a stroke rather than a TIA, according to the scientific statement, which highlights the importance of seeking prompt medical attention. Upon arrival to the emergency room, a series of tests may be completed after assessing symptoms and medical history, including a CT scan, MRI and blood tests.

CT Scan – a non-contrast scan used to look at the blood vessels in the head and neck to rule out brain bleeding and TIA mimics (conditions that share some signs with TIAs but are due to other medical conditions such as low blood sugar, seizure or migraine). A CT scan may also be used to assess the neck arteries; nearly

half of people with TIA symptoms have narrowing of the large arteries leading to the brain.

MRI – The preferred way to rule out a brain injury, such as a stroke, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) is typically done within 24 hours of symptoms beginning. Because some emergency rooms may not have access to an MRI scanner, patients may be admitted to the hospital or transferred to a center. About 40% of patients who go to the emergency room with TIA symptoms are diagnosed with a stroke based on MRI results.

Blood Tests – Blood work will typically be completed to rule out conditions that may cause TIA-like symptoms, such as low blood sugar or infection, and check for cardiovascular risk factors like diabetes and high cholesterol.

Once a TIA is diagnosed, a cardiac checkup should be completed within a week of having a TIA, if not done in the emergency room. Consultation with a neurologist should also be completed within 48 hours (no longer than one week) after experiencing a TIA, as early consultation with a brain specialist is associated with lower death rates after a TIA.

To learn more and find additional resources, visit Stroke.org.

Story courtesy of Family Features.

Ways To Support Your Metabolic Health And Why It Really Matters

Good metabolic health is the backbone of great overall health. Unfortunately, many Americans misunderstand what metabolic health is and are not aware of its importance.

A recent poll from Metavo/Harris Poll Study reveals that nearly three in four North Americans have experienced at least one issue related to metabolic health in the past year, while only 52% have heard, read or seen information on metabolic health issues.

What's more, only 30% of North Americans know that metabolic health is not the same as gut health, and many falsely believe that metabolic issues mostly occur in those who are overweight.

"This knowledge gap plays a factor in why many health issues related to metabolic health, such as brain fog, food cravings and energy slumps, often go unaddressed," says Dr. Paul Spagnuolo, associate professor in the Department of Food Science at the University of Guelph, whose research includes finding new ways for people to proactively support their metabolic health.

Issues related to metabolic health can take a toll on your mental well-being, your ability to perform your job, and even your social life and person-

al relationships, making it critical to nip them in the bud. To improve your metabolic health and feel your best in 2024, consider these tips:

Get active. Whether you're hitting up the gym for a weight training session or simply going for a longer walk during your day, daily physical activity is recommended to support your metabolic health. Find activities, daily movement and workouts you enjoy and stick with them.

Prioritize proper sleep. Maintaining proper sleeping habits can help to keep your insulin and hormone levels balanced.

Fuel often. Fueling more frequently can boost your metabolism. Being sure to eat smaller portions at regular, consistent times every day and drinking plenty of water can also help improve metabolic health. Set alerts on your phone, or even use a hydration app, to help you remember to drink up.

Explore supplements. Consider taking a daily supplement designed to support metabolic health and activate metabolism naturally, like Metavo. Featuring the proprietary avocado compound Avocatin B, also known as AvoB, Metavo Advanced Glucose Metabolism Support activates your metabolism naturally at the cellular level.

"Having a flexible metabolism at the cellular level enables the body to properly metabolize fats, proteins and carbs to help improve insulin sensitivity, glucose tolerance and energy," says Dr. Spagnuolo, whose research led to the development of Metavo.

The brand also carries Metavo Advanced Weight Support, a supplement featuring clinically proven ingredients that help burn fat, support weight loss, and provide increased energy, as well as Metavo Advanced Weight Support Meal Replacement Powders, which are designed to be the perfect "metabolic" meal, with 20 grams of complete protein and whole food vitamins and minerals. These supplements can complement GLP-1, or other medications that treat obesity and diabetes. Plus, there is Metavo Glucose Metabolism Support with Berberine, which targets metabolic inflexibility to increase insulin sensitivity, support healthy glucose metabolism, cardiovascular support and more. To learn more, visit www.metavo.com.

When it comes to metabolic health, consistency is key. Make physical activity, healthy eating, proper sleep and the right supplements a regular part of your self-care routine..

Story courtesy of Statepoint.

ON OUR COVER

Getting to the Heart of Health

Good health is more than just the absence of illness. In this issue we explore ways to boost well-being, both physical and psychological.

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IT'S HEART HEALTH MONTH

In its 100th year, the American Heart Association offers tools and information to keep you well and thriving. Visit www.heart.org and click on Healthy Living for more

Understanding The Impacts of LDL Cholesterol

About 38% of American adults have high cholesterol, which can be caused by poor lifestyle habits or genetics, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Having a high low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol number – considered “bad” cholesterol – can contribute to fatty buildups (plaque) and narrowing of the arteries.

LDL cholesterol is also the type of total cholesterol most closely associated with an increased risk for a heart attack or stroke. In fact, 75% of heart attack and stroke survivors reported having high cholesterol, according to a Harris Poll survey conducted on behalf of the American Heart Association, yet less than half (49%) prioritize lowering their cholesterol.

“There’s a pervasive lack of public awareness and understanding around



bad cholesterol and its impact on your cardiovascular health,” said Joseph C. Wu, MD, PHD, FAHA, American Heart Association volunteer president and di-

rector, Stanford Cardiovascular Institute and Simon H. Stertz, MD, professor of medicine and radiology at Stanford School of Medicine. “As bad cholesterol

usually has no symptoms, we often find that many patients are walking around without knowing they’re at risk or how to mitigate it.”

To learn about LDL cholesterol, its impact on heart health and the steps you can take to maintain a healthy number, consider this information from the Lower Your LDL Cholesterol Now initiative, nationally sponsored by Amgen.

Get to Know Your LDL Number. According to the survey, nearly half (47%) of heart attack and stroke survivors are unaware of their LDL numbers. While cholesterol levels can vary by race and ethnicity, with higher levels of LDL seen most often among Asian men and Hispanic women, various research studies on LDL have shown “lower is better.”

For healthy adults an LDL at or below 100 mg/dL is ideal for good health. If you have a history of heart attack or stroke and are already on a cholesterol-lowering medication, your doctor may aim for 70 mg/dL or lower. In addition to race and ethnicity, family history, age, sex, tobacco use or exposure to secondhand smoke, eating habits, lack of physical activity, heavy alcohol usage and obesity can impact LDL numbers.

Understand How Often to Check Your Numbers. Because high LDL does not typically cause symptoms, it’s important to have your number checked by your health care professional. Ask your doctor for the right frequency for you. Generally, healthy adults ages 20-39 should have their cholesterol checked every 4-6 years. Adults over age 40, or those who have heart disease (including prior heart attack) or other risk factors, may need their number checked more often.

Learn Risks Associated with LDL. Too much LDL cholesterol can lead to a buildup of fatty deposits inside your arteries – a condition known as atherosclerosis – which can narrow arteries and reduce blood flow. If a piece of the plaque breaks free, it might travel into the bloodstream and block a blood vessel to the heart or brain, causing a heart attack or stroke. This narrowing also elevates the risk of peripheral artery disease.

Take Steps to Manage High LDL. Managing high cholesterol is not one size fits all. Talk with your health care professional to map out the right treatment plan for you. According to American Heart Association guidelines, lifestyle habits can help control your cholesterol, including:

- *Eating a healthy and balanced diet (emphasizing fruits, vegetables, nuts and seeds, lean protein and fish)
- *Staying active and aiming to get at least 150 minutes of moderate activity each week (such as brisk walking)
- *Managing stress
- *Eliminating tobacco use

However, some individuals, especially heart attack and stroke survivors, may want to have a conversation with their doctor about cholesterol-lowering medications.

Talk to your doctor about getting your cholesterol tested and visit heart.org/LDL for more information.

Story courtesy of Family Features.

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Things To Know To Avoid Severe COVID-19

Although COVID-19 is not as prevalent as it was at its peak, it's still something to be mindful of - especially if you have chronic conditions that might leave you more vulnerable to its effects.

There are things you can do to help prevent contracting COVID-19 - and if you are more high-risk, there are ways to help avoid severe illness.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), factors that increase your risk of severe COVID-19 include:

- * Those with other medical conditions
- * Those with weakened immune systems or who are immunocompromised
- * Older adults
- * Pregnant or recently pregnant individuals

Here are three things to be aware of to help you protect yourself from severe illness of COVID-19.

Vaccinations are a key line of defense against COVID-19. Even if you do manage to get COVID-19, vaccinations can help prevent severe illness, help limit the spread of disease, and potentially shorten your recovery time. Compared to those who are up-to-date with COVID-19 vaccinations, if you're unvaccinated you're more



likely to be hospitalized or have severe complications from COVID-19, including death. Boosters are also available, and can help restore protection that might have decreased since a previous vaccination.

COVID-19 treatment is available.

Paxlovid is an oral antiviral drug, fully approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), that has been shown to treat adults with a mild or moderate case of COVID-19 and help protect those who are at high risk of hospitalization or severe effects.

Beginning Dec. 1, 2023, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) made Paxlovid accessible as a \$0 COVID-19 treatment through 2024 for eligible individuals without commercial insurance. Remember, treatment must begin as soon as possible and within 5 days after symptoms arise in order to be effective.

Stay vigilant on prevention efforts. For those with elevated risk of COVID-19 complications, consider taking extra precautions to help avoid illness. This may include:

- * Improving ventilation and air filtration indoors or spending more time outdoors
- * Staying home if you suspect you may have COVID-19
- * Avoiding others who may be sick and wearing a high-quality mask, if that's not possible, such as an N95
- * Avoiding crowded areas or increasing space and distance with others
- * Washing your hands often and avoiding sharing items with others

It's good to be prepared and know what your options are if you contract COVID-19. Contact your health care provider if you have specific questions about your risks.

Story courtesy of Brandpoint.

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Your Mind Matters In Health Outcomes

By Dawn Williams, Senior News Editor-in-Chief

Health is much more than the absence of illness. Research is showing the impact that your state of mind and satisfaction in life have on physical well-being. The correlation is strong between various measures of well-being – positive feelings, a sense of purpose, meaningful things, and satisfaction in life – and reduced incidence or risk of a number of serious conditions. In other words, your mind matters when it comes to your physical health.

In one study, volunteers were exposed to a virus that causes the common cold. Those who rated highly in psychological well-being were less likely to have developed any cold symptoms after 7 days. In the same study, people who showed high levels of positive emotions developed fewer and less intense symptoms.

Another study showed strong correlations between optimism and heart health. In fact, investigators discovered that among people in their study, every stepwise increase in optimism correlated with further reduction in incidents of CV disease. Cardiovascular disease and the conditions that lead to it also are less likely in people who measured high in positive affect and other factors of well-being.

There is also evidence that psychological well-being is connected to slower disease progression and a better prognosis for those with a chronic health condition. As with previously cited studies, positive emotion and optimism seemed to have a protective effect against future hospitalizations and mortality

from cardiac events. Another study showed patients with HIV experienced slower disease progression when positive emotion and optimism were high.

Researchers are also looking at the link between psychological well-being and longevity. Optimism, positive emotion, satisfaction in life, and happiness are associated with longer life. In addition, purpose in life, life meaning, and life engagement scores were also correlated with greater longevity.

Taken as a whole, this research makes a compelling argument for building psychological wellness as a necessary component of physical well-being. But what exactly does psychological well-being look like? And how do we improve it?

One way to understand psychological wellness is by considering the PERMA model. The acronym stands for positive emotions; engagement; relationships; meaning; and accomplishments. People who pay attention to building and maintaining each of these areas are said to be flourishing. What's especially useful about this model is that it isn't just a philosophical theory. The science behind why each of these areas contributes to wellness is compelling. More importantly, the science also suggests ways to build each of these aspects.

Read about each of these elements, then consider incorporating some of the practices for building them into your self-care routine, similar to the way we improve physical health by exercising.

Positive emotions include happiness, as

you would expect, as well as joy, love, gratitude, hope, pride, and enjoyment. Ongoing research since the turn of the century has shown that we can increase positive emotions, which in turn builds greater resilience and resistance to distress. Savoring is a very effective way to increase positive emotion. You can also engage in hobbies you enjoy, or listen to uplifting music. And finally, thinking about and expressing gratitude for what's going well in your life increases positive emotion.

Engagement is fully immersing yourself in a project or task. This complete immersion is also known as a flow state. Self-awareness and thoughts of the past and the future take a back seat to the present moment. For flow to occur, the task must be interesting to you and include a bit of a challenge. To increase your engagement, you can choose from a variety of activities that research shows can help. Spend time doing things that you're good at, and that you truly enjoy. Work on developing your strengths regularly. Take time to be in nature, paying attention to the sights and sounds around you.

Positive relationships are important in general, and they become even more important as we get older. Your relationships are positive when they make both parties feel valued and supported. You can improve the quality of your relationship by being genuinely interested in what's happening in the other person's life, celebrating their positive moments, and sharing your own.

Meaning looks different for each of us,

because it stems from what we value and believe in. When we hold meaningful beliefs, it becomes our reason for getting up in the morning and gives us a sense of purpose. For some, the tenets of their religion creates a meaningful life. Others find meaning in their work, or their efforts toward a cause they believe in. Meaning is usually found in something that benefits the greater good, rather than just ourselves.

Accomplishments are the final element needed to flourish. Your accomplishments won't all be related to awards, promotions, or possessions; in fact, the achievements that matter most where well-being is concerned are the ones you worked toward for the sake of growth and self-improvement. Think about the goals you reached already, and savor the satisfaction the achievement brought you. Work consistently on what you want to achieve, whether it's changing habits for the better, learning a new skill, writing a book, or painting a picture. Record and celebrate each accomplishment, and savor the sense of pride in what you have achieved.

Each of these elements is part of what makes life worth living. The evidence suggests Using this model to build a happier, more meaningful life contributes to having a longer, healthier life as well.

In addition to serving as Editor-in-Chief of SN50, Dawn Williams is a certified positive psychology coach. She uses her science-based training to help others rise above their challenges and live their best life. Learn more by visiting dawnwilliamscoaching.com.

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Medicare 411

Reader Joanne B. asks “I keep seeing all these commercials about making sure I get all my benefits with Medicare, and to call an 800 number to get more information. I find it confusing and am wondering if there is something I might be missing?”

Joanne, we hear this everyday! With the baby boomers turning 65 at over 10,000 people every day in the USA, Medicare Insurance has become a big business. The commercials are directing people to 800 number call centers where the person’s job on the other end of the line is to sell you something. And, all the “benefits” they talk about on the commercial do not exist in any single plan in every area of the country that the commercials run.

So, if you want to be sure that you have all the benefits you should have you really need to speak with a local independent health insurance agent



that will take the time to go through the plan/s line by line and make certain you know exactly what you are enrolling in, including costs and network as well as how to use the plan. That local person will also be there when you have questions instead of you having to call an insurance company. The call centers DO NOT service, only sell.

So, Joanne, if you or anyone you know still has questions about their 2024 Medicare coverage, you can reach out to us at anytime at 815-329-6937 and we are local, not a call center!

Until next time dear readers, STAY WELL!

Tracey Fults is a Medicare expert with over 20 years experience, and founder of Medicare 411. For more information, you can reach her by phone at 815-329-6937 or via email to trac-ey@medicare411co.com.

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Have Fun, Stay Active And Be Bold At Any Age

No matter your age or fitness level, experts agree that physical activity brings multiple benefits to your mind and body. If you wonder how being more active as you get older can help you live a happier, healthier life - and how to get started - taking small, simple steps to boost your activity level can make a big impact.

“Age is just a number, and we’ll make sure it never slows you down, so why not begin the new year on the right foot by finding activities you love to do,” said Julie Logue, M.P.H., training manager at SilverSneakers. “You can ‘act your age’ by having the time of your life, whether you’re dancing, walking or playing pickleball with friends.”

Remember, before starting any new exercise, it’s recommended to consult your health care provider.

Here are a few benefits of exercise that may inspire you to move a little more.

Protect your bones and joints. Stronger muscles help protect your bones and joints as you age. But if you think lifting heavy weights is the only way to strengthen your muscles, you’re in for a pleasant surprise. If you haven’t been active, you can begin strength exercises by starting slowly, using little to no special equipment, and gradually improving your strength over time.

It’s best to seek classes or programs



specifically designed for seniors, such as SilverSneakers by Tivity Health - the nation’s leading fitness program for older adults that offers in-person and virtual classes. You can find classes for all levels focused on building strength and flexibility, along with cardio exercises to get your blood pumping.

Help prevent falls. About one in four Americans aged 65 and older will fall each year, according to the Centers for

Disease Control and Prevention. Regular exercise that builds strength and improves balance is one of the best ways to help prevent falls or recover from a fall.

Classes like those offered by SilverSneakers can help strengthen your ankles, knees and hips for a sturdy foundation. Plus, they can help you improve your core strength and upper-body posture - to help you stay upright and steady.

Learn about injury prevention. Injuries

can happen at any age, but a few simple precautions can help to keep you moving injury-free. If you’re a beginner, choose instructors and exercise programs that start slow - even seated - and build your strength and flexibility gradually, so you can continue improving your fitness without risking injury. SilverSneakers even offers virtual classes designed for beginners to help get you started.

Enjoy socializing. One valuable benefit of being active is finding a class or community of people you enjoy spending time with. Taking classes together is a fun bonding activity that will help you stay motivated and may inspire you to create your own group of friends for walking or doing activities together.

Improve mindfulness and reduce stress. Physical activity can reduce stress, help you stay more present throughout your day and enjoy your life to the fullest.

SilverSneakers members can enjoy workouts at thousands of gyms, community centers and other participating fitness locations nationwide, as well as on-demand virtual exercise classes and educational workshops.

If you have a Medicare Advantage plan, it may already include SilverSneakers. Learn more at SilverSneakers.com.

Story courtesy of Brandpoint.

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Lunch Shows:
April 11
October 17



Lunch Show:
May 17

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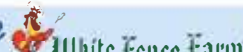
Lunch Show:
June 6
Dinner show:
August 9



Lunch Show:
July 25

Olivia Newton-John Tribute

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Lunch Shows:
May 3, Sept. 24
Dinner Show:
June 28



Lunch Show:
August 29

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Lunch Shows:
Dec. 12
Dec. 13



Lunch Show:
Dec. 3

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Practical DIY Projects to Complete Over a Winter Weekend

While many home renovation projects are best tackled during the warmer months, there are specific minor repairs and tasks that can be addressed while we're waiting for winter to pass.

These quick projects are easy to complete in a weekend and will make for a more cozy, organized winter home.

Service the Furnace. It's easy to get behind on regular home upkeep duties during the busy holiday season. But now that the holidays are over, it's time to take stock of your furnace. During winter months, dirt and debris buildup on the furnace air filter can keep your home from being heated efficiently. If you haven't already, replace the old filter and be sure to swap in a new one every three to six months to ensure proper heating and cooling.

Tend to the Woodpile. If you plan to use a fireplace this season, protect your woodpile from the harsh elements, like sleet and snow. Store the wood in an open storage area that allows the wind to pass through and cover the top of the pile with a tarp to keep the wood from getting wet. Secure the tarp with The Original Duck Tape brand Duct Tape for

a long-lasting and durable hold. The easy-to-tear tape will create a strong hold that will keep your logs dry and in place throughout the cold season.

Reorganize the Basement. Before packing up all your holiday décor, head to the basement and sort through other seasonal items and clutter. Fix and seal broken storage bins or tree and wreath bags with Duck Max Strength brand Duct Tape. You also can use this time to update labels to ensure belongings are properly stowed away and can be found quickly the following year.

Keep the Cold Out. Stop chilly air from seeping into your home by checking areas where drafts are most common, such as around doors and windows. To prevent the cold air from coming in and the heat from escaping, seal the gaps around windows with weatherstrip seals, and the openings under doors with a draft seal. This simple DIY project will keep rooms warm and cozy and can even save you money on your heating bill.

Taking advantage of downtime over a winter weekend to catch up on these routine maintenance projects will ensure your home continues to run smoothly from season to season.

Story courtesy of Statepoint.



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Lunch Shows

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Crossword solution

T	E	S	L	A		D	A	B		S	E	R	F
A	P	H	I	D		E	G	O		F	U	S	E
N	I	O	B	E		M	O	O		L	E	A	V
S	C	O	R	P	I	O		T	A	U	R	U	S
		A	T	M			I	S	L	E			
T	H	O		S	A	C	S		I	N	D	E	B
O	A	R	S		G	R	O	W		T	H	R	E
P	L	E	A		O	A	T	H	S		A	N	T
A	L	A	R	M		B	O	I	L		L	I	O
Z	O	D	I	A	C		P	R	A	Y		E	N
						D	U	P	E		K	E	A
						P	I	S	C	E	S		C
A	O	R	T	A		A	L	L		T	O	R	S
C	R	E	E	P		L	E	A		A	N	I	S
R	E	S	T			M	O	W		S	E	A	R

Sudoku solution

8	1	4	3	9	7	5	6	2
9	6	3	5	8	2	4	1	7
2	7	5	6	1	4	3	8	9
1	8	9	4	2	6	7	3	5
6	4	7	8	3	5	9	2	1
3	5	2	1	7	9	6	4	8
7	3	8	9	6	1	2	5	4
5	2	1	7	4	3	8	9	6
4	9	6	2	5	8	1	7	3

CROSSWORD

1	2	3	4	5		6	7	8		9	10	11	12	
13						14				15				
16						17				18				
19					20			21	22					
		23					24							
25	26	27		28		29			30		31	32	33	34
35			36		37			38		39				
40					41			42		43				
44				45		46				47				
48					49		50			51		52		
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	57	58	59					60				61	62	63
64						65	66			67				
68						69				70				
71						72				73				

THEME: ZODIAC SIGNS

Solution on page 12

ACROSS

1. NASDAQ's TSLA
6. Meme dance move
9. Feudal laborer
13. Plant louse
14. Inflated feeling
15. Signaling flare
16. She turned to stone, Greek mythology
17. Barn call
18. L in AWOL
19. *Zodiac sign for those born on Halloween
21. *Ford "Zodiac"
23. Cash machine, acr.
24. Island
25. Short for although
28. Cul de ____, pl.
30. Owing something (2 words)
35. Argo's propellers
37. Mature
39. Passed
40. Guilty, e.g.
41. Presidential promises, e.g.
43. Those against
44. Waker-upper
46. Skin infection
47. King of beasts
48. *1960s California serial killer
50. Address a deity
52. Short for ensign
53. Hoodwink
55. New Zealand parrot
57. *Fish sign
60. *Half man/half horse sign
64. Blood vessel
65. This is well if it ends well
67. Body trunk
68. Move like ivy
69. Grazing field
70. Plant with liquorice-flavored seeds
71. Catch one's breath
72. Trim the lawn
73. Roebuck's partner

DOWN

1. Sun kisses
2. Colossal
3. Pest command
4. *Zodiac sign or Don DeLillo's 1988 novel
5. One who is skilled at something
6. Visual presentation
7. "Four score and seven years ____"
8. Dora the Explorer's simian friend
9. Court petitioner
10. Genesis twin
11. RPMs
12. Extra charge
15. Like a native speaker
20. Insect, post-metamorphosis
22. Prince in Disney's "Aladdin" movie
24. Heavy hydrogen, e.g.
25. *Birthstone for some born under Scorpio or Sagittarius
26. Hello, alt. sp.
27. Mountain nymph
29. *Cancer crustacean
31. Lentil soup
32. Golfer Els
33. Take a chance (2 words)
34. *Gemini
36. Delhi dress
38. Sound of a fan
42. Satisfy, as in thirst
45. Eccentric one
49. Pool tool
51. Gossipy ones
54. Religious song
56. Make amends
57. Skin opening
58. Wraths
59. Proofreader's mark
60. Old-fashioned bathtub foot
61. Vocal piece for one
62. Brezhnev's domain
63. Fish eggs, pl.
64. Acronym, abbr.
66. *#47 Across, in the sky

Social Security News

By Megan Forristall, Social Security Public Affairs Specialist

Sharing is caring. This Valentine's Day, take time to remind your loved ones that Social Security helps people in all stages of life. Using our online services, you can assist friends and family members to:

1. Apply for Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Check if the person you are helping is eligible for SSI – and start the process online – at www.ssa.gov/ssi.
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3. Create a personal my Social Security account. If your loved one is planning for retirement or interested in estimating their future benefits, they can create a free and secure my Social Security account at www.ssa.gov/myaccount and view their benefit estimates.
4. Check the status of a pending application for benefits. Checking the status of an application is quick and easy with a personal my Social Security account.
5. Appeal a decision for benefits. If someone you know was denied Social Security benefits or SSI, they can request an appeal at www.ssa.gov/benefits/disability/appeal.html.

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- Complete the application process at your local office.

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Want to replace your card? The Card Replacement Screener on our Replace Social Security card webpage at www.ssa.gov/number-card/replace-card helps you determine the best way to do so. Choose "Answer a few questions" on the Replacement Card webpage at www.ssa.gov/number-card/replace-card to get started. Even if you can't complete the process online and must visit an office, you can still save yourself time by starting the application online.

Sudoku

8			3					
	6	3		8	2		1	
	7							
				2	6			5
	4	7				9	2	
3			1	7				
							5	
	2		7	4		8	9	
					8			3

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Fill in the blank squares in the grid, making sure that every row, column and 3-by-3 box includes all digits 1 through 9.

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Many Americans Feel Cozy Living in Small Spaces

When it comes to the home, bigger doesn't always mean better. More than half of Americans living in a small space say they feel cozy and comfortable as opposed to cramped. This finding was discovered following a survey from Duck brand, which offers products that provide simple, imaginative and helpful solutions for a variety of tasks around the home

"We often assume that a larger home is the most desirable, but that's not always the case," says Chaffy Assad, product manager at Shurtape Technologies, LLC, the company that markets the Duck brand. "In fact, nearly half of the survey respondents enjoy living in a small space, which most defined as a two-bedroom home or smaller."

A more intimate space offers many benefits: 61% say it's easier to clean, 54% say it costs less and helps save money and 52% say it's easier to maintain. Additionally, 57% plan to continue living in their home for the foreseeable future.

While there are many benefits to tinier homes, there are some challenges to living with less space. Fifty-nine percent of Americans say the biggest downside is the lack of storage, with 48% of people feeling it's harder to keep small spaces clean and organized compared to larger spaces.

Which areas prove to create the biggest cleaning conundrums? The kitchen ranks number one as the hardest room to keep neat and tidy, with the living room a close second, followed by the bedroom in third. The belongings that are the most difficult to make space for are cookware, bags, shoes and gym equipment.

That being said, Americans are good at finding ways to make the most of their home by keeping clutter to a minimum and getting creative with organizing, the survey finds. Duck brand offers a variety of organizing ideas and solutions that help people tidy up, from the EasyMounts Mounting System that can transform a disorganized entryway, closet or garage, to the versatile EasyLiner Brand Shelf Liner that can make surfaces stylish and mess-free.

"No matter how limited your space is, there is always a way to maximize it," Assad adds. "Making minor and affordable changes, like mounting removable hooks on the wall, easily adds extra storage to hang such items as cooking utensils or a purse, while installing shelf liner on kitchen shelves or in bathroom drawers protects surfaces and makes it simple to wipe up spills or messes."

Story courtesy of Statepoint.

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Tech Time with Tony: Aging In Place

By Tony LaPalio, Founder and CEO of Senior Tech Support

Recently, I tuned in to an NPR program that was discussing the concept of ‘aging in place,’ inspired by an insightful article in the Sun Times. As the host engaged in a conversation with her two guests, I was intrigued as they explored various aspects of traditional aging in place concepts, from the installation of safety equipment like shower grab bars to employing plug-in LED lights in hallways and on stairways to prevent falls. They emphasized the importance of having a communication plan for emergencies, ensuring that those choosing to age in their homes have a way to reach out to loved ones or first responders if the need arises.

The discussion also touched on how to determine the correct timing for seeking additional assistance from in-home care companies, which offer services ranging from personal care and bathing to meal preparation, laundry, grocery shopping, and light housekeeping. My sister owns one of these types of companies, Wisdom Eldercare which serves clients throughout the greater Chicagoland area, so I have direct experience with the remarkable level of care and services she and her caregivers provide to their clients. Undoubtedly, these types of services play a crucial role in supporting individuals who wish to maintain their independence at home.

While the conversation covered these essential considerations, it surprised me that neither the host nor the guests mentioned

the significance of embracing and understanding technology to assist in the aging-in-place journey even once. Although I attempted to bring this perspective into the conversation through a call-in, I unfortunately wasn’t selected to participate in the conversation. Since I couldn’t bring the technology component of aging in place to that conversation,

I’d like to share some of my thoughts and insights on leveraging technology for successful aging in place here.

In recent years, the term ‘Smart device’ has become increasingly prevalent, reflecting a lucrative market where companies aim to capitalize on producing ‘smart’ products. Everywhere you turn, be it on TV, radio, or the internet, you encounter references to Smart Speakers, Smart Assistants, Smart TVs, Smart Watches, Smart Lights, Smart Doorbells, Smartphones, and more. At its core, a ‘Smart’ device is simply one that can connect to the internet. The importance lies in their capacity to assist, and I want to highlight a few ways in which they can enhance the aging-in-place experience.



Smart Speakers are a category of smart devices that I find to be among the easiest to incorporate into your home, offering a wide range of features that prove immensely beneficial for aging in place. Companies like Apple, Amazon, and Google have introduced Smart Speakers such as Apple HomePod, Ama-

zon Echo, and Google Nest devices, each equipped with their own Digital Assistants – Siri and Alexa for example. These devices can answer queries, from simple ones like checking the weather to assisting with more complex tasks like controlling lights, locking, or unlocking doors, accessing security cameras, and even instructing a robot vacuum to clean the kitchen.

For Smart Assistants, via Smart Speakers, to interact effectively, the other connected devices with which they are communicating and controlling must also be ‘Smart.’ Incorporating Smart LED lights, door locks, cameras, and even robot vacuums into your home offers a seamless integration of additional Smart Devices. Picture someone ringing your doorbell,

and with a simple voice command through a Smart Speaker, you can engage in a conversation with them, see the visitor, and even unlock the door—all made possible through the wonders of Smart Devices. Or imagine a scenario where your dog has knocked over their bowl of kibble and hundreds of tiny pieces of dog food are scattered all over the kitchen floor. With one simple voice command to your Smart Speaker, you can instruct your robot vacuum to clean it up eliminating the need to get out the broom and dustpan.

As we consider the various elements contributing to successful aging in place, let’s not overlook the tremendous potential of technology. Integrating Smart Devices into your home can empower you, providing a level of convenience, safety, and independence that complements the more traditional measures previously discussed. Embracing technology ensures that you not only adapt to the changing times but also thrive in them, creating a blend of modern innovation alongside the desire for a comfortable and secure home environment.

And, as we navigate the ever-evolving landscape of technology, let us not forget the profound impact it can have on our lives—ushering in a new era where the golden years are not just lived but lived exceptionally well, thanks to the synergy of thoughtful planning, caregiving, and cutting-edge innovation.




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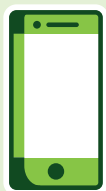
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