

Personal Best

HOPE Health Letter[®]

AUGUST 2023

Protect Your Medical Identity

Did you know? Your health information is worth 50 times more than your credit card number to data thieves. Health records contain sensitive personal and financial data, making them valuable to cybercriminals, who use the data to pay for prescriptions, medical equipment and treatment or file fake medical claims. These crimes cause chaos and stress for the hackers' victims, especially when debt collectors call.



When it comes to your medical care and personal health information, take steps to protect your privacy against hackers. Medical apps, patient portals and telehealth services are widespread, and while convenient for coordinating your care, they give hackers more opportunities to steal your sensitive data. Avoid using obvious passwords (e.g., your birthdate) and always log out when you're done. Never use electronic health services in a public place and make sure security on all of your devices is current.

You may not think you need to worry because the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) governs how health insurance companies, health care providers, clinics, pharmacies, hospitals and other medical services manage and protect patient medical data.

While HIPAA does provide some protection, you need to stay vigilant. Watch for unexpected charges on your health care bills, another possible sign of hacking. Data breaches do happen, so pay attention to alerts from your care provider if their records are hacked. Carefully review all medical bills and explanation of benefits statements (EOBs) from your health insurance company to spot abnormalities, and report anything suspicious without delay.

And if you use your credit or debit card for copays and other out-of-pocket charges, check records regularly. Call your bank or credit bureau to freeze your account if you see transactions you don't recall.

The Smart Moves Toolkit, including this issue's printable download, [Checkup Time](#), is at personalbest.com/extras/23V8tools.

BEST bits



■ **August is Immunization Awareness Month** — a good reminder to schedule your annual flu shot and COVID-19 booster. Studies conducted throughout the COVID-19 pandemic indicate it's safe to get both vaccinations at the same visit, now a commonly recommended medical practice. To schedule your COVID-19 vaccine appointment, visit a vaccine provider's online scheduling service. The CDC notes self-reported data from nearly one million Americans show an 8% to 11% higher rate of mostly mild symptoms following a double vaccination. For questions, contact your health care provider.



■ **Psoriasis Awareness Month in August** raises awareness of this chronic skin disease and helps those affected feel supported. This disease typically causes inflamed, itchy, scaly rashes, commonly on the knees, elbows, trunk and scalp; it can flare up for a few weeks or months at a time. It can also cause destructive swelling and pain in the joints, which is called **psoriatic arthritis**. More than eight million Americans are afflicted with psoriasis. While there is no cure, there are effective treatments to alleviate symptoms. Learn more at psoriasis.org.

■ **Good grip, good health.** Recent studies suggest having good wrist and hand strength indicates good overall muscle strength, mobility and cognitive ability. Low-grip strength may indicate increased risk of functional limitations and disability as we get older. One study reported in the National Library of Medicine found that grip strength among people without diabetes or high blood pressure was significantly higher than those diagnosed with either or both diseases.

Stay Well Menu

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

From apples to salmon to zucchini, it turns out that choosing the right diet can help you live well for longer. Research shows an eating pattern that includes a good variety of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, nuts and protein sources, such as fish, can reduce your risk of an early death by almost 20%.

This dietary pattern provides all of the nutrients your body needs for disease prevention — including generous amounts of fiber, omega-3 fats, vitamins and minerals. When combined, the foods that comprise this eating style help reduce the risk of the main causes of death in North America, including cancer and heart disease.

Brain health is also vitally important as we age, and this dietary pattern helps protect cognition and reduce the risk of dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

How can you follow an eating pattern to stay well for longer? There's no need to count calories. The easiest way to follow this plan is to:

- Fill half your plate with vegetables and some fruit. They can be fresh, frozen, raw or cooked — they are all great.
- Fill a quarter of your plate with whole grains. Try oats, whole wheat, brown rice and quinoa.
- Fill the remaining quarter of your plate with protein-rich foods, such as fish, poultry, tofu, nuts, eggs, dairy, beans and lentils.

This dietary pattern aligns with USDA's My Plate, the Mediterranean diet, the DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) diet and other healthy eating patterns.

In addition to which foods to choose, there's also some advice about foods to cut back on. Eat fewer ultra-processed foods that are high in salt, sugar and additives, as they are linked with a greater risk of heart disease, cancer and dementia. This includes fast food, salty snacks, pastries, candy and soft drinks. Also minimize alcohol: If you don't drink, don't start.

Lime-Cilantro Chicken Thighs

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| ½ cup freshly chopped cilantro | 1 jalapeño pepper, seeded and diced |
| Lime zest + 1 tbsp lime juice | ½ tsp salt |
| ¼ cup plain 3% Greek yogurt | 1½ lbs (680g) boneless, skinless chicken thighs |
| 1 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil | |
| 1 clove garlic, minced | |

Add cilantro, lime zest, lime juice, yogurt, oil, garlic, jalapeño and salt to a blender or food processor, and combine until smooth. **Add** chicken to a large bowl and coat with cilantro-lime marinade. **Stir** to combine, then cover and refrigerate for an hour. **Preheat** grill to 400°F. **Grill** chicken about 5-6 minutes per side or until internal temperature is 165°F. **Serve** with lime wedges.

Makes 4 servings. Per serving: 245 calories | 35g protein | 10g total fat | 2g saturated fat | 4g mono fat | 4g poly fat | 1g carb | 0g sugar (0 added sugar) | 0g fiber | 443mg sodium



TIP of the MONTH

Intermittent Fasting

Intermittent fasting is a popular weight loss diet, but a new study shows that simply reducing overall calories and eating fewer large meals may be just as effective for reducing weight. The study assessed the diet of 550 adults for six years. Participants logged their food choices and meal timing with an app. Researchers found that the time interval from the first to last meal was not associated with weight change. They did find that consistently eating meals with more than 1,000 calories was associated with weight gain during the six-year study.



QuikRisk™ Assessment: Productivity Checkup



Being productive on the job is about identifying and meeting your priority obligations — as well as planning and protecting your work time. When analyzing ways to improve your job productivity, consider measuring it by these positive traits:

- You **know what's important** and avoid being bogged down with trivial tasks. Productivity is about getting the *right* things done.
- You **identify your job priorities** to determine specific goals and timeline.
- You **plan your day** — on the day before you report to work, feeling ready to take charge.
- You **get back on track quickly** when your work is interrupted.
- You **resolve problems** by identifying what's needed in a positive manner.
- You **stay well-organized** to quickly locate information you need, saving time.
- You **simplify tasks** by breaking larger projects into smaller practical tasks.
- You **know your supervisor's expectations** even as they change.
- You **keep learning**, and when you don't have answers, you work to find them.
- You are a **team player** and enlist feedback from your coworkers.
- You maintain a **clean, organized workspace**.
- And most important, **you enjoy your work** — at least most of the time.

How did you do? If you checked most of the boxes, you're likely doing well at work. Focus on the traits you didn't mark to get more out of your workday.

How's your workspace? Hopefully, it's tidy, comfortable and mostly free from frequent distractions. During work time, it can be helpful to take short breaks, move around, stretch, maybe turn on some music and eat lunch with your coworkers.

Horticulture at work? A study by the American Society for Horticultural Science found that workers who maintained plants in their workspaces reported feeling less stressed and more productive.

Research shows why massage is a stress buster. Massage, an ancient form of hands-on healing, lowers stress hormones. That calms blood pressure and slows your heart rate, according to University of Miami research. Studies show stress-relieving massage lessens pain, muscle tightness and increases relaxation, too. The Mayo Clinic and other medical centers are increasingly prescribing massage therapy to help people cope with stress and pain from cancer, stomach problems, heart disease and fibromyalgia. If you have a health condition, ask your health care provider if massage is right for you. Before making a massage appointment, ask about the therapist's training, experience, credentials and fees.

Pare Down Your Stuff

Are your closets and drawers packed with too many things you don't use? If the answer is “yes,” you likely have a clutter problem. And you aren't alone. In a 2020 survey, 63% of Americans said they had too much stuff.

Recognizing you have too many possessions — whether it's clothing, knickknacks, kitchen gizmos and most anything else you don't need — is the first step in paring down your excess stuff and making headway on a more organized life. But you need a plan. So, get some boxes or bags and fill them with what you don't need.

Six steps to releasing what you don't need:

1. Focus on one room at a time. Begin with the easiest so your progress can inspire you.
2. Start with what you can see — items on the floor, shelves and cabinet tops. Quickly toss what you don't need.
3. Set a timer and try decluttering daily for even ten minutes a day. You'll see a big difference in a week.



4. As you go through your stuff, ask: Do I need it? Do I use it?
5. Only keep decorative items that have strong personal meaning.
6. After a decluttering session, don't go through your boxes and bags of stuff again. Take them to a charity or consignment shop, recycle anything you can and throw away the rest.

As you make progress, consider why you collected so much stuff in the first place. Was it out of boredom? Loneliness? Do you buy things because you like them? Aim to buy only what you *need* from now on — not items you simply want — so your clutter won't return. You'll save money, too.

Wake-up call: Oversleeping can impact your health.

A good night's sleep is important for your health; however, it's possible too much sleep can harm your health. A recent study found that excessive sleep can increase risk for developing an infection. Long-term effects from oversleeping may be linked to medical problems, such as a higher risk of developing type 2 diabetes, obesity, heart disease, headaches and depression. Sometimes medication, alcohol use or an underlying health condition can cause oversleeping. See your health care provider if you feel the need to sleep more than nine hours a night. Adults should get seven to nine hours of sleep daily.

Q: How to deal with boredom?

A: Occasional boredom is normal, especially when you're not engaged in something meaningful or rewarding. These strategies can help:

- **Monitor your moods.** Keeping track of when boredom usually strikes allows you to make effective changes.
- **Reward yourself.** If boredom occurs during routine, necessary tasks, having a prize to look forward to will add to your enjoyment.
- **Take up a new hobby or skill.** You're less likely to be bored when you're pushing yourself into uncharted territory.
- **Reconnect with friends.** Other people can provide vital support as well as new perspectives.
- **Be productive.** Tackle tasks you've been avoiding.
- **Get moving.** Exercise can stimulate your brain and improve your mood.
- **Take a media break.** Endless screen scrolling, despite the apparent variety of content, often promotes boredom.
- **Explore creative pursuits.** Music, visual art and poetry may provide a refreshing alternative to your daily routine.

— Eric Endlich, PhD



August is Breastfeeding Month.



Breastfeeding Guidelines Update

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has revised its breastfeeding recommendations. The AAP now recommends breastfeeding exclusively for the first six months after a baby's birth. Research reinforces that breastfeeding and human milk should be the standards for infant feeding and nutrition. After six months, breastfeeding should be maintained along with nutritious, complementary foods.

The AAP also supports breastfeeding for as long as mutually desired by mother and child for two years or beyond. Initial research data affirms that continuing to provide human milk in the second year of life helps growing toddlers increase immunity and provides a significant source of macronutrients. The new recommendations closely align with the World Health Organization's guidance.

Birth hospitals and centers, pediatricians, health care providers and workplaces are advised by the AAP to provide more support for breastfeeding mothers. Health care professionals should know the benefits of breast milk and also provide resources for birth mothers and adoptive parents. The AAP also advocates for more encouragement for gender-diverse parents to use breast milk.

**Here's how breast milk and breastfeeding benefit mom and baby:**

- Breast milk has all the nutrients, calories and fluids your baby needs.
- Breastfeeding can reduce the risks of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) by up to 64% and overall infant death risks by as much as 40%.
- Breast milk is free and there's no preparation.
- Breast milk is easy for babies to digest.
- Breast milk improves the child's immunity.
- Long-term breastfeeding can help return the mother's uterus to its pre-pregnancy size more quickly and can protect the mother against diabetes and high blood pressure as well as breast and ovarian cancers.

Q: What are migraine auras?

A: Auras consist of flashing lights, shimmering stars, floating zigzag lines, blind spots or other visual changes that commonly occur before the onset of migraine headaches. Occasionally, the symptoms may include tingling in a hand or face or difficulty speaking. The aura is usually followed by a severe throbbing headache on one side of the head.

Seek medical care immediately if you have new symptoms of an aura, such as vision loss, trouble speaking or understanding language, or muscle weakness on one side of the body. These symptoms could indicate another condition, such as a stroke.

Treatment for migraine with aura is usually the same for migraine headaches without aura. Pain medications work best when taken soon after the aura begins. Consult your health care provider about other drug options, including triptans, dihydroergotamine and anti-nausea medications. Treatments are also available to prevent frequent migraines with or without aura. Stress management and relaxation techniques can also help treat and prevent migraines.

— Elizabeth Smoots, MD



More than 45 million Americans wear contact lenses — and not always safely. Contact-related eye infections and injuries can cause vision damage and health problems. However, most of these problems are preventable with good contact lens hygiene, according to the CDC. For example, cleaning and handling contact lenses safely can help prevent eye infections and injuries as can *never* sleeping while wearing contact lenses. And don't assume you can wear the same contacts indefinitely. Have your eyes and contact lens prescription checked by your optometrist once a year. Learn more at [cdc.gov/contactlenses/protect-your-eyes.html](https://www.cdc.gov/contactlenses/protect-your-eyes.html).

QuikQuiz™: Hydration

Hydration is more than simply quenching your thirst.

Your body needs water for every cell, tissue and organ to work properly. Test your knowledge:

1. Everyone needs just six to eight 8-ounce glasses of water and other fluids every day. T F
2. If you feel bloated or suffer from reflux, you may be overhydrated and need to cut back on fluids. T F
3. If urine is a dark yellow or amber color, you are likely drinking enough fluids. T F
4. While some foods, such as melons and tomatoes, are naturally juicy, eating them frequently doesn't significantly help hydration. T F
5. Staying hydrated can help keep you from eating when you're not hungry. T F

ANSWERS:

1. **False** — This number is just an estimate and may not reflect your personal hydration needs. How much fluid you need depends on your food intake (food also contains fluid), exercise level, sweat loss, climate, altitude, medications and medical conditions.



2. **False** — If you aren't drinking enough water, you may have irregular bowel movements, gas, bloating, heartburn and reflux. Drinking more fluids helps break down soluble dietary fiber, which helps digestion.
3. **False** — If urine is pale or light yellow, you're well hydrated. Dark urine can indicate dehydration.
4. **False** — Eating juicy, healthy whole foods regularly contributes to fluid intake and helps with hydration. Examples: Watermelons, peaches, celery and tomatoes.
5. **True** — Thirst is often confused with hunger (but real hunger isn't satisfied by drinking water). If you think you're hungry between meals, try drinking water first. If you still feel hungry, have an apple and a handful of nuts or any other whole food.

dollars&sense

Virtual Currencies: Know the Risks

The Commodity Futures Trading Commission labels virtual currency as a commodity. This label is noteworthy because, by definition, a commodity is a basic good, such as a barrel of oil, that is interchangeable with another product of the same type. This means virtual currency is the same no matter who is selling it.

Virtual currencies are not backed by any government or central bank, and their value is completely driven by supply and demand. While trendy, it is critical for potential investors to know the risks associated with using and holding virtual currency. Here are a few:

- You have high exposure to cyber risks, such as wallet hacking.
- Virtual currency is an unregulated market without protection or supervision of government agencies (e.g., no recourse if your virtual currency is stolen).
- The market can have volatile swings.
- Platforms trading virtual currency can manipulate the market by selling their own accounts and driving the value down.

If you are considering virtual currency as an investment, be aware of these potential scams:

- Offers that promise high guaranteed returns with little or no risk. Investments with higher returns typically are riskier than those with a lower return.
- Unlicensed sellers. Check for license and registration status at [investor.gov](https://www.investor.gov).
- Pressure to buy immediately. Take time to research the investment before transferring any money.

— Jamie Lynn Byram, PhD, CFP, AFC, MBA

safety solutions

August is Children's Eye Health & Safety Month.



Kids and Sunglasses

Children receive more annual sun exposure than adults and that means they are at an increased risk of eye damage from UV light. Wearing sunglasses can help protect their still-maturing eyes, even for children under one year old. Here are some guidelines on selecting sunglasses and getting your kids to wear them:

Choose large, wraparound sunglasses that block 99% to 100% of UVA and UVB rays.

Ensure sunglasses have unbreakable frames and impact-resistant polycarbonate, scratch-proof lenses.

Let the kids pick the frames from a selection of safe sunglasses.

Keep the sunglasses when children aren't using them to make sure they are properly stored and not lost.

Consider your children's activities when selecting sunglasses. Amber or green lenses can increase contrast, which may be useful for sports.

Set a good example by always wearing sunglasses outdoors. Remember, even cloudy days in the winter can expose your family's eyes to harmful rays.



5 Ways To Prevent Chemical Exposure

If you work with chemicals or toxic materials, protect yourself from exposure. OSHA offers the following ways to control hazards at workplaces where you or coworkers are exposed to chemicals and other toxic substances.

1. **Substitute with safer alternatives.** See if a safer alternative exists and use it to eliminate the chemical hazard. OSHA offers a **Transitioning to Safer Chemicals** toolkit at [osha.gov/safer-chemicals](https://www.osha.gov/safer-chemicals).
2. **Read Safety Data Sheets** before using hazardous materials.
3. **Use the personal protective equipment** required for the job to reduce exposure.
4. **Utilize engineering controls.** This can mean changing the process to minimize contact, isolating or enclosing the process, using fume hoods and other measures.
5. **Talk to your supervisor** about adjusting your work schedule or rotating assignments to prevent you from being overexposed to hazardous chemicals.



What Your Gut is Telling You

By Diane McReynolds, Executive Editor Emeritus

The gut refers to your entire gastrointestinal tract.

It starts at the mouth, travels through your esophagus, stomach, small intestine, large intestine (colon) and ends at the anal canal (rectum). With such a complex system and pathway, it's bound to give us trouble now and then.

The health of your gut is partially determined by the levels and types of bacteria in your gastrointestinal tract. The gut is the primary home to trillions of microbes, collectively known as the **human microbiota**. These microbes help with digestion, manufacture certain nutrients and release substances that have wide-ranging health effects.

How the gut is key to good health: Harvard Health describes the gut as the second brain, since it produces many of the same **neurotransmitters** — chemicals that are released by nerves needed for communication with your other nerves and tissues. Your gut and brain are also connected by sharing biochemical signals between your gastrointestinal tract and central nervous system: a good reason to pay attention to your digestive symptoms. And here's something you may not know: 70% to 80% of the immune system is in the gut.

Recent research suggests maintaining a healthy gut may help protect your heart. The best way to achieve this is to follow a plant-based diet, such as the Mediterranean diet or similar eating plans — limiting red meat and eating plenty of fiber-rich foods.

Poor gut health can result from ongoing:

- High stress levels.
- Too little sleep.
- Consumption of a diet high in processed and high-sugar foods.
- Unnecessary use of antibiotics.
- Heavy alcohol intake.

Gut health can impact these health concerns:

- Immunity.
- Hormone levels.
- Weight.
- Fatigue.
- Heart disease, cancer and respiratory illness.

In time, poor gut health can contribute to mental health problems (emotional and social well-being) and autoimmune diseases as well as endocrine and gastrointestinal disorders.

Signs of a troubled gut: Frequent discomfort, bloating, gas, constipation, diarrhea and heartburn likely indicate that your gut is having a hard time processing food and eliminating waste. You feel tired more often than not. People with **chronic fatigue disorder**



(a long-term illness that affects many systems in the body) may have digestive imbalances in the gut. If you are experiencing these signs, it's time to check in with your health care provider.

Before visiting your provider: Make a detailed list of symptoms and when they typically occur; record your diet in recent weeks and any issues that are causing you stress.

Lifestyle changes: Some simple and some challenging steps can help improve your gut microbiome and benefit your overall mental and physical health.

1. Choose a plant-based diet that includes fermented foods (yogurt, sauerkraut, kimchi) and fiber from fruits and vegetables of all colors.
2. Get seven to nine hours of sleep daily.
3. Manage your stress levels. Exercise regularly, make time to relax whenever you can and try to avoid overscheduling.

These are important ways to support a healthy gut. If you want to adopt a healthier lifestyle, start easy with small dietary changes and build from there.

Good for your gut — a small sampling:

- Whole grains, such as oats, brown rice and whole-grain bread.
- Fiber-rich fruits, such as berries, avocados and pears.
- Vegetables.
- Nut butters or nuts.

DR. ZORBA'S corner

Long COVID

Long COVID is something no one wants. The good news? You can lower your risk for it. Long COVID is characterized by persistent symptoms or new symptoms appearing four weeks after being diagnosed with primary COVID-19, and the symptoms aren't caused by another condition. The symptoms that bother people the most are loss of taste and smell, shortness of breath, weakness, dizziness and cognitive impairment. However, most of these cases get better within a few months, but for some people it can take up to one year. One study showed unvaccinated people had a higher risk for lingering shortness of breath than those who were immunized and boosted. If you're not up to date on your COVID-19 vaccinations, do it.

— Zorba Paster, MD

August Fill-in-the-Blank Puzzle

Find out how well you know the topics covered in this issue of the newsletter.

- 1 Eat fewer ultra-processed foods that are high in salt, sugar and additives, as they are linked with a greater risk of heart disease, cancer and _____.
- 2 Simply reducing overall _____ and eating fewer large meals may be just as effective for reducing weight.
- 3 Researchers found that workers who maintained _____ in their workspaces reported feeling less stressed and more productive.
- 4 In a 2020 survey, 63% of Americans said they had too much _____.
- 5 The Mayo Clinic and other medical centers are increasingly prescribing _____ therapy to help people cope with stress and pain from cancer, stomach problems, heart disease and fibromyalgia.
- 6 The AAP now recommends breastfeeding exclusively for the first _____ months after a baby's birth.
- 7 Sometimes medication, alcohol use or an underlying health condition can cause _____.
- 8 Thirst is often confused with _____.



You'll find the answers at personalbest.com/extras/Aug2023puzzle.pdf.

The Smart Moves Toolkit, including this issue's printable download, Checkup Time, is at personalbest.com/extras/23V8tools.

Stay in Touch. Keep those questions and suggestions coming!

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