

# Personal Best

HOPE Health Letter<sup>®</sup>

MAY 2024

## Bone-Building Exercises

By Elizabeth Smoots, MD

**The saying “use it or lose it” applies not only to your muscles, but also to your bones.** Low bone density, or osteoporosis, afflicts 54 million people in the U.S. To maintain bone mass and prevent osteoporosis, the National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases recommends the following physical activities for adults.

**Weight-bearing exercises:** The stress placed on bones during weight-bearing exercises stimulates bone formation and repair. Jogging, brisk walking with or without weights, stair climbing, step aerobics, racquet sports, and dancing are excellent activities for promoting stronger bones. Aim to get at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise or at least 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity exercise every week.

**Resistance training:** The pull of muscle against bone signals your bones to get stronger and denser. Weight-lifting machines, free weights, calisthenics and resistance bands are popular options. Include two to three sessions each week of at least moderate-intensity strengthening exercises of all major muscle groups.

**Balance activities:** They are especially important for older adults and can improve your balance and prevent falls. Walking on an unstable surface, such as a wobble board or foam mat, can help. So can shifting your body weight backward and forward while standing with both feet together or on one foot. Step-ups, lunges and walking backward are other ways to improve your balance. The martial arts practice of tai chi can help, too.

**Older people and those with low bone density are at increased risk** from activities that compress the spine, such as jumping, deep forward bending and heavy lifting. Consult your health care provider before increasing your level of exercise; ask if any physical activities are unsafe for you. Then get moving for healthier bones.



### BEST bits



#### ■ May is Asthma and Allergy Awareness Month.

Asthma and allergies have much in common. Although different ailments, they often occur together and allergy triggers are frequently linked to asthma symptoms. An allergic response occurs when your immune system detects a harmless substance, such as pollen, as an invader and releases chemicals, resulting in a stuffy nose, sneezing, watery eyes and other symptoms. For those with asthma, this reaction affects the airways and lungs, causing wheezing. **Asthma and Allergy Awareness Month** is an opportunity to learn about reducing exposure to pollen and other triggers for both ailments. Talk to your health care provider about medications, including new treatments, that can help asthma and/or allergy symptoms.



#### ■ May is Skin Cancer and Prevention Awareness Month.

Skin cancer is the most common malignancy in the U.S. Every day, about 9,500 Americans are diagnosed with the disease. Most types of skin cancer, if found early, can be treated successfully, even potentially deadly melanomas. **Important:** Check your skin regularly. Report any skin changes, especially changes in the shape or color of moles, to your health care provider. To help prevent skin cancer, the American Academy of Dermatology recommends seeking shade instead of sun bathing, wearing sun-protective clothing, and using a broad-spectrum, water-resistant sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or higher. Avoid tanning beds. Tanning is a sign of skin damage, not good health.

## TIP of the MONTH

### Mediterranean Diet and Alcohol

You may know that red wine is part of the Mediterranean diet, but it's not mandatory. When wine is consumed, it's used with meals in moderate amounts. The **2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans** define moderate drinking as two standard drinks or fewer daily for men and one standard drink or less daily for women. **A standard drink of wine is five ounces.** Recent studies suggest there is no safe amount of alcohol to drink, and research is ongoing to determine if red wine should be included in the Mediterranean diet. Amounts above the recommendations may increase the risk of liver disease and breast cancer. If you don't drink, don't start.

5 oz.



# The Truth About Weight Loss Supplements

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

Many weight loss products promise more than they can deliver. Those that “guarantee” fast weight loss may be hard to resist. Do they deliver what they promise? And are they safe?

*Note: This article is about supplements, which are not the same as prescription weight loss drugs.*

**All dietary supplements, including those promising weight loss, are consumed by mouth and are not pharmaceutical medications.**

Common ingredients are vitamins, minerals, fiber, caffeine, herbs and other plants. They may claim they can build muscle or burn fat, but they are not a cure-all for overweight and obesity.

**While dietary supplements don't require FDA approval,** if a supplement is found to be unsafe, the FDA can issue warnings or request it be withdrawn from the market. The FDA can also act against companies that make false or unsupported claims to sell their supplements.

**You also need to know that dietary supplement manufacturers rarely carry out clinical trials on these products.** As a result, we have little scientific evidence to show that they work to aid weight loss.

**Interactions with your medicines?** Some supplements can cause problems if taken along with certain medicines. For example, antioxidants, such as vitamins C and E, might make some chemotherapy medicines less effective. Taking many different supplements can increase the risk of side effects, especially when taken with medications.

**Consider these safeguards when shopping for and using weight loss supplements:**

- ♦ **Research your weight loss supplement before buying.** Check credible websites, such as those run by the U.S. Office of Dietary Supplements and the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health. Also keep in mind that the FDA doesn't regulate supplements.
- ♦ **Always consult your health care provider before taking any supplement.** This is especially important if you have health problems, take prescription medications, or are pregnant or breastfeeding. Your provider may prescribe a supplement if you have a vitamin or mineral deficiency.



## Tuscan Tuna and Bean Salad

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1 can (15 oz.) no-salt-added white kidney, navy or cannellini beans, drained | 1 red onion, thinly sliced                     |
| 2 cans (5 oz. each) albacore or skipjack tuna, drained                       | 3 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil                  |
| 1 cup cherry tomatoes, sliced in half  | 3 tbsp fresh lemon juice                       |
| 2 tbsp capers  | 6 cups mixed greens                            |
|  | ½ cup fresh chopped basil or flat leaf parsley |
|  | Pinch each salt and pepper                     |

In a large bowl, combine beans, tuna, tomatoes, capers and onion. **Drizzle** with oil and lemon juice, and toss to combine. **Scatter** mixed greens on a platter and add the tuna mixture on top. **Garnish** with herbs, salt and pepper, and serve.

**Makes 4 servings. Per serving:** 290 calories | 21g protein | 12g total fat | 2g saturated fat | 8g mono fat | 2g poly fat | 26g carbohydrate | 2g sugar (0g added sugar) | 8g fiber | 356mg sodium

## EASY recipe





# Coping with an Empty Nest

By Eric Endlich, PhD

**Most parents hope and expect** that their children will one day become independent and move out of the family home, yet it can be a big adjustment when that day finally arrives. The change is a positive one for many parents, but others may feel sad, lonely or directionless when faced with an empty nest. Some even lose motivation or notice changes in their appetite or sleep.

## Parents who are at highest risk for empty nest syndrome:

- Are especially close to their children.
- Base their identity or sense of self primarily on being a parent.
- Have few other interests, hobbies or activities.

## If you are having difficulty dealing with your children's absence, here are some potentially helpful approaches:

- Accept your reactions and be patient. Your feelings are probably quite normal and will subside over time.
- Maintain a mutually agreeable level of contact. Initiating too many calls or messages could drive your child away.
- Look to others for support. Consider expanding your social network through classes, clubs or volunteer work.
- Notice what you've gained. You probably have more time to devote to other pursuits, which may include a marriage or romantic relationship.
- Embrace your child's progress. Be prepared to allow your child more freedom.
- Practice good self-care. Proper nutrition, sleep and exercise are key to helping you feel emotionally balanced.
- Try new things. This could be the perfect time to explore an activity you've always wanted to do.



This observance is part of a national movement to provide support and information to those with mental illness and to fight the stigma associated with mental health conditions, which include depression, anxiety, eating disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, schizophrenia and many others. Mental illness can affect thinking, mood and functioning. Appropriate treatments and therapies offer hope to the millions of Americans affected by mental health challenges. To learn more, visit [samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline](https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline) or [nimh.nih.gov](https://www.nimh.nih.gov).

**Note:** If you or someone you know is possibly suicidal, call or text **988** to the **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline** to be connected with crisis counselors for emotional support and other services. Help is also available via web chat at [988lifeline.org](https://www.988lifeline.org) and immediately by texting **741-741** to reach a free, trained counselor.

# Ease Sunday Night Anxiety

By Eric Endlich, PhD

**Sunday night should come and go like any other night of the week**, but for many people, it's the occasion for the Sunday scaries. This spike in anxiety, often affecting sleep and moods, may be triggered by:

- **Dread** of returning to work or school on Monday.
- **Worries** about being able to complete tasks well or on time.
- **Feeling** overwhelmed by weekday demands.
- **Weekend** behaviors, such as sleeping late, or heavy eating or drinking, that may hamper readjustment to the weekday schedule.

**To prevent this pattern from repeating week after week**, here are some strategies to help get your anxiety under control:



- **Create a routine.** Give yourself things to look forward to on Sunday night and Monday morning.
- **Get adequate sleep.** Go to bed early enough to ensure that you can sleep seven to nine hours by Monday morning.
- **Address your worries.** Brainstorm solutions if you are concerned about a valid issue; if your worries are groundless, distract yourself with engaging activities.
- **Set boundaries.** Avoid checking work-related messages on Sunday night, if possible.
- **Get ready.** Prepare your lunch, select your outfit and map out your schedule in advance.
- **Take care of yourself.** Stay active, eat nutritious meals and try something calming (e.g., yoga, meditation or a nature walk) over the weekend.
- **Consider professional help.** Consult your health plan, employee assistance program or health care provider for a psychotherapy referral if you need help.

**Finding the right balance of fluid intake can improve sleep and overall health, according to the Sleep Foundation.** Drinking too many fluids in the evening, including plain water, can result in waking up for frequent sleep-disrupting trips to the bathroom. But going to bed dehydrated can cause dry mouth, headaches and sleep-wrecking muscle cramps. Drink fluids mostly during the day (or night if you work shifts) and a not-too-large glass of water if you are very thirsty before bed. Being well hydrated may also decrease your risk of atrial fibrillation and other cardiac arrhythmias because your electrolytes are more likely to be in balance.

## Q: Coping with infertility?

**A:** When couples wish to have children but are unable to conceive, they often experience strong emotional reactions, including disappointment, grief, anger and shame. The National Infertility Association recommends the following steps to cope:

- **Educate** yourself about your own situation, and about infertility in general.
- **Understand** that it's normal to be upset, and give yourself permission to feel whatever you're feeling.
- **Educate** those around you about infertility, and let them know what responses you would find helpful.
- **Understand** that your partner may not react or cope the same way you do.
- **Let** your partner know how they can support you, whether it's alone time, affection or a shoulder to cry on.
- **Limit** the amount of time you spend discussing and focusing on the topic.
- **Try** a support group. [Resolve.org](https://www.resolve.org) provides a list of in-person and virtual groups on their website.

— Eric Endlich, PhD



## TIAs: Warning Strokes

**A TIA (transient ischemic attack) happens quickly, causing stroke-like symptoms.** TIAs can cause weakness or numbness on one side, vision disturbances, a severe headache, and difficulty speaking. These symptoms result from a temporary blockage of blood flow to the brain due to a blood clot which quickly dissolves or moves.

**TIA symptoms often disappear in a few minutes (although they can last up to 24 hours).** But the quick return to feeling normal after a TIA doesn't mean the episode should be ignored. While a TIA doesn't cause permanent damage, it's a warning that a full-blown stroke could be ahead.

**In fact, nearly one in five people who have a TIA suffer a stroke within 90 days,** according to the American Stroke Association. What's more, when people who have experienced TIA symptoms are given appropriate imaging tests, scans reveal about two in five have had strokes instead of TIAs.

**Call 911 immediately if you have TIA symptoms or head to an emergency room.** When possible, a comprehensive evaluation, including imaging of blood vessels in the head and neck, should be done within 24 hours of a TIA, according to Cleveland Clinic stroke specialists. A neurologist will use these, other tests, and your health history to assess your risk of a future stroke.

**Good news:** You can work with your health care provider to lower the risk of a future stroke by treating high blood pressure, controlling blood sugar if you have diabetes, keeping weight under control and not smoking.



## Q: What is dyspepsia?

**A:** **Dyspepsia is the official term for an upset stomach or indigestion.** The symptoms include discomfort or a burning sensation in the upper abdomen. Feelings of fullness early in a meal or long after the meal can occur. Other symptoms include upper abdominal bloating or a feeling of nausea. Belching, vomiting or heartburn happen less often.



**Causes of indigestion.** Eating too much or too quickly can cause dyspepsia. Common culprits include gastroesophageal reflux disease, spicy or fatty foods, caffeine, alcohol, obesity, eating close to bedtime, and smoking. Other possible causes include irritable bowel syndrome, ulcers, celiac disease, gallstones, pancreatitis, stomach cancer, diabetes and pregnancy.

**When to seek medical care:** Get a medical evaluation if your symptoms last longer than two weeks. Contact your health care provider right away if the pain is severe or you have weight loss, recurrent vomiting, black stools, vomiting blood, trouble swallowing, weakness or fatigue. Call 911 immediately if you have chest pain lasting more than a couple minutes, shortness of breath, sweating or pain radiating to the arm, neck or jaw.

— Elizabeth Smoots, MD

**Month.** Knowing your blood pressure levels could save your life. High blood pressure (hypertension) affects one in three Americans and is one of the leading causes of death in the U.S. It's often called the silent killer because hypertension may not cause any obvious symptoms until a heart attack or stroke occurs. Make sure you get your blood pressure checked regularly by your provider. Although hypertension is dangerous, it's highly treatable with lifestyle changes, such as regular exercise and cutting back on salt, as well as medication.

**Note:** It's important to take your blood pressure medications every day and don't stop them unless your health care provider says it's okay to do so.

## Balance Lessons

**Balance is key to performing your best at almost anything.** Whether you're playing sports, reaching for an item on a grocery shelf or just walking, balance is involved. It's your ability to manage your center of gravity, and stay upright — and it involves not only coordination between your muscles, but with your eyes and brain, too.

**Whether you walk daily,** hit the gym regularly to lift weights, or admit to being a couch potato, there are some simple but effective ways to improve balance. Harvard University balance experts advise using a few of these exercises two or three times a week for best results:

**Practice standing on one leg.** When you feel unsteady, switch to the other side. Repeat several times, until you feel muscle fatigue.

**Stand up from a seated position using your legs only,** not your hands. Repeat two to three times.

**Walk heel to toe in a straight line.** You will likely only be able to walk a short distance at first before you feel off kilter. With practice, balance will improve.

**Take yoga or tai chi lessons.** Both forms of exercise involve balance and stability.

**Do bicep curls for balance.** For a more challenging balance exercise, stand with feet apart. Hold a dumbbell in one hand while you lift the opposite leg off the floor, bent back at the knee, for a few seconds. Repeat with the other side.



**If you have severe balance problems,** or an orthopedic condition, talk to your health care provider before starting any new exercise routine.

Stranded on the side of the road isn't on anyone's list of favorite places to be.

Roadside assistance plans are helpful and can save money in an emergency. Here are a few tips to remember as you search for options:

**1. Check with your auto insurance company.** Many auto policies offer add-ons for roadside assistance for less than purchasing a standalone plan. Plans are also offered through credit cards, extended warranties and auto manufacturers.

**2. Review the offered coverage for features you need.** Towing, changing tires, providing gasoline, battery jumpstart, and lockout assistance are all common features. With towing coverage, is there a limit on the number of miles the plan will cover? Is the amount reasonable?

**3. Whom or what does the plan cover?** Plans may insure you or your vehicle. The distinction is important. If you are covered, features should be available whether you are in a rental car, a friend's car or your car. If your car is covered, features will only be available if you are driving your car.

**4. Consider premium features and potential limits.** Plans may offer specialty services, such as winching, rekeying if you lose your keys, battery replacement and membership discounts. Possible limits may include towing distance and number of calls covered per year.

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

# 5 Outdoor Lightning Precautions

**Did you know?** About 40 million lightning strikes happen each year in the U.S., according to the CDC. Outdoor work or recreational activities can put you at higher risk of being hit by lightning, although the odds in any year are less than one in a million. Another surprising fact from the CDC: About one-third of lightning injuries happen indoors.

Nevertheless, in a lightning storm, the best way to stay safe is to stay inside. However, if you are caught outdoors, follow these safety rules:

**Find a safe enclosed shelter as soon as you hear thunder.** Safe places can be homes, offices, buildings or hardtop cars with the windows rolled up. Avoid open spaces, picnic pavilions, porches, gazebos and baseball dugouts. Stay in a safe shelter for 30 minutes after the last sound of thunder.

**Never lie flat on the ground in a storm.** Instead, crouch down with your head between your knees.

**Avoid tall structures,** hilltops, lone trees, bodies of water, power lines, fences and concrete floors or walls. Lightning can travel through any metal wires or bars in concrete walls or flooring.

**Separate from a group** to reduce the number of injuries if lightning strikes.

**Avoid touching anything metal,** including farm equipment, motorcycles, bicycles and golf carts.

**Stay indoors** until weather forecasts announce the storm has ended.

**Most deaths from lightning happen in the summer, especially in July.** If you are with someone who is struck by lightning, call 911 immediately and follow instructions for helping the person until EMTs arrive. Learn first aid and CPR.

**Good to know:** Nearly 90% of people struck by lightning survive, according to the CDC.



## CORNER

SAFETY

## Heatstroke

**It's hot and your coworker starts acting confused and says he feels nauseated — normal? No.** These are symptoms of heatstroke. Take the following symptoms seriously, call 911 immediately, get the person to a cooler place, and reduce the person's temperature with cool cloths and ice. Do not give fluids.

### Heatstroke symptoms:

- Dizziness
- Nausea and vomiting
- Confusion
- Hot, dry skin
- Flushed skin
- Rapid breathing and pulse
- Throbbing headache
- Hallucinations
- High body temperature
- Slurred speech



To learn more, visit [cdc.gov/disasters/extremeheat/warning.html](https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/extremeheat/warning.html).

# Make the Most of the Mediterranean Diet

By Elizabeth Smoots, MD

**The Mediterranean diet is a sensible eating and lifestyle plan** that has provided health and longevity for people in Italy, Greece and southern France for thousands of years. What benefits does it offer us today? Eating a modern version of the Mediterranean diet can help curtail some of the most common health issues in the U.S.

**The past several years have seen a rise in heart attacks, strokes, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes and obesity** — conditions linked to the food we eat and the lifestyle we live. Fortunately, the Mediterranean diet has been shown to help prevent a number of chronic conditions. It's associated with a reduced risk of arthritis, asthma, cancer, depression, diabetes, elevated cholesterol and inflammatory bowel disease as well as high blood pressure and cardiovascular disease.

**The benefits of the Mediterranean diet have been demonstrated through numerous studies.** One study, a meta-analysis of 35,000 people at risk for heart disease, examined the health effects of seven different diets. The study found the Mediterranean diet reduced the risk of death from all causes by 28%, death from heart disease by 45%, stroke by 35% and heart attack by 52%. The researchers concluded the Mediterranean diet was the most effective diet in the study.

## Dietary Ingredients

**What foods are in the Mediterranean diet?** The diet emphasizes eating whole, unprocessed plant foods, such as fruits, vegetables, beans, whole grains, nuts and seeds. These foods are low in saturated and trans fats and high in natural plant substances, such as antioxidants and phytochemicals that reduce inflammation.

**The main source of fat is olive oil.** Animal protein is eaten in low to moderate amounts. Red meat is eaten sparingly. Instead, choose plant-based proteins, or animal proteins, such as fish, chicken, dairy or eggs. Sweets and baked goods are eaten less frequently; fresh or dried fruit is a preferred dessert instead. Water is the most important beverage. Lean red meat and sweets are eaten only infrequently. People of the Mediterranean often enjoy delicious fresh or dried fruit for dessert. Water is the most important beverage.

## Mediterranean Lifestyle

**Findings presented at an American Heart Association meeting** last year indicate nondietary lifestyle factors may play a role in the success of the Mediterranean diet. Researchers studied 110,000 middle-aged and older adults in England, Scotland and Wales who adopted the diet and lifestyle habits of the Mediterranean region. Their study followed participants for nine years.

**The scientists analyzed the health effects of physical activity, relaxation, rest, and social activities in addition to diet.** Researchers started off asking many questions: How often did participants eat meals with family and friends? How frequently did they participate in physical activities with other people, such as walking or sports? How often did they get together with family and friends? How much time did they take for relaxation? How many hours did they sleep? How often did they nap?

**The results indicated that people who adhered most closely to the Mediterranean diet and lifestyle had the lowest risk of death from cancer or any cause.** Specifically, they had a 28% reduced risk of death from cancer and a 29% reduced risk of death from any cause compared to those with the lowest compliance with the Mediterranean diet and lifestyle.

**Other studies show that heart attack and stroke risks increase with social isolation and decrease with social interaction.** Those research participants who exercised daily, relaxed and socialized with friends lowered their risk of death from cardiovascular disease. Scientists believe all of the diet and lifestyle habits that comprise the Mediterranean foodway work together to prevent disease.



May is Mediterranean Diet Month.

## DR. ZORBA'S corner

### Proton Pump Inhibitors

**Proton pump inhibitors (PPIs) are the go-to medications for treating acid reflux.** Some people take them occasionally when their stomach is upset while others need them every day. All medications have side effects. One long-term risk is increased risk of osteoporosis-related fractures. If you have osteoporosis, ask your health care provider about taking alternatives to PPIs. Also, some people in nursing homes and memory care units were found to have an increased risk of pneumonia if they were taking a PPI. And finally, PPIs are so effective at reducing stomach acid that you can get iron deficiency anemia. You need stomach acid to absorb iron. If you do have iron deficiency anemia and are taking a PPI, ask your health care provider about switching to another treatment for acid reflux.

— Zorba Paster, MD

### STUDY: Survey findings on prescription medication use

**People born in 2019 can expect to take prescription drugs** for half their lives, according to a recent study in *Demography*, a journal of population research. During a lifetime, women are expected to take prescription drugs for 48 years, on average, and men for 37 years. Medication use in the U.S. has also reached an all-time high. The number of women and men who take five or more drugs has grown substantially. Statins, antihypertensives and antidepressants are some of the most commonly used medications.

**Why are Americans taking more drugs for a longer time?** Key factors include the growing frequency of chronic disease and obesity, the medicalization of health conditions, and the intensification of treatment, the study found. Aging of the population is another important contributor. Increased medication use has brought with it growing concerns about overuse, higher costs and a greater frequency of drug interactions and side effects.

### STUDY: Risks of Weight Loss Medications

**Certain diabetes drugs may cause harm when taken for weight loss** in people who don't have diabetes, concluded a study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. Glucagon-like peptide-1 receptor (GLP-1) agonists, such as semaglutide or liraglutide, were originally developed to treat diabetes (agonists are drugs or natural substances that activate physiologic receptors to produce a reaction). Now millions of prescriptions for the drugs are written each year to address overweight and obesity, an off-label use. But sometimes adverse effects can occur.

**The drugs are associated with an increased risk of serious gastrointestinal disorders**, such as stomach paralysis, pancreatitis and bowel obstruction. While the adverse effects are rare, widespread use of the drugs causes thousands of people to have the side effects each year. The study involved 16 million people in the U.S. who took GLP-1 agonists for weight loss between 2006 and 2020. Researchers from the University of British Columbia who conducted the study excluded people with diabetes.

— Elizabeth Smoots, MD

**The Smart Moves Toolkit**, including this issue's printable download, **Take the Pressure Off**, is at [personalbest.com/extras/24V5tools](https://personalbest.com/extras/24V5tools).

#### Stay in Touch. Keep those questions and suggestions coming!

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