

Personal Best

HOPE Health Letter[®]

NOVEMBER 2023

Mind Your Food Environment

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD



Food advertisements, social media and grocery stores all influence our daily food choices.

Of the \$14 billion food companies spend on advertising each year, more than 80% promote ultra-processed foods, such as sugary drinks, fast food and candy. Unfortunately, high consumption of these foods is linked with an increased risk of developing heart disease, type 2 diabetes and cancer.

Studies show that limited access to nourishing foods contributes to poor diet and increased disease risk. Many areas of the country have **food swamps**, which means an overabundance of convenient, tasty, ultra-processed food, or **food deserts**, which have limited access to nutritious options. This is especially common in lower-income areas, where it is easier and cheaper to buy chips and candy than carrots and bananas.

Here are some things you can do to navigate a fast food-heavy environment:

- **Swap the soda.** Water is healthier and is sold near sugary beverages. Choose water most often.
- **Find alternatives.** Fast food is fine on occasion, but fast-casual restaurants that offer salads, sandwiches and grain bowls are often better options.
- **Take a snack.** It's easier to ignore the lure of candy bars and donuts if you've packed a satisfying snack, such as trail mix or an apple.
- **Grocery shop with a list.** Marketing is abundant in supermarkets. You'll make fewer impulse purchases if you stick with your shopping list.
- **Limit exposure to food advertising.** Block social media ads promoting ultra-processed food. Watch ad-free programming when possible.
- **Be skeptical.** Value-sized packages, upsized portions or the allure of fast-food places being open late are marketing tactics that tempt us to overconsume ultra-processed foods.

The **Smart Moves Toolkit**, including this issue's printable download, **Tips to Prevent Burnout**, is at personalbest.com/extras/23V11tools.

BEST bits



■ **Smoking numbers in the U.S. up or down?** More than 50 years ago, 42% of U.S. adults smoked. In 2021, an estimated 11.5% (28.3 million) of U.S. adults smoked cigarettes. However, smoking remains the leading cause of preventable disease and death in our country, killing more than 480,000 Americans annually. It's never too late to quit smoking. Quitting improves your health and reduces your risk of heart disease, cancer, lung disease and other smoking-related illnesses. Read tips from former smokers who quit at [cdc.gov/tobacco/campaign/tips](https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/campaign/tips). If you smoke and want to quit, consider starting on **November 16**, the **Great American Smokeout**.



■ **November is Healthy Skin Month — a reminder to take care of your skin and keep it healthy.** The American Academy of Dermatology offers steps for a lifetime of healthy skin, hair and nails. One of the tips from physicians regarding wrinkles: Sun damage and age are big culprits — and sleeping on your side or stomach may contribute to sleep lines on your face, neck and chest. If you can, sleep on your back — a simple step that may reduce formation of these lines.

■ **Besides aging, studies suggest the causes of cognitive decline include age-related changes in the brain or brain injury, along with genetic and lifestyle factors.** Maintaining a healthy lifestyle may help reduce your risk of mental decline, according to the National Institute on Aging. There may be a relationship between cognitive decline and vascular conditions, including heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, diabetes and obesity. An estimated 6.7 million Americans age 65 and older are living with Alzheimer's in 2023; 73% are age 75 or older. (See "Q&A: Can I reduce my risk for Alzheimer's?" on page 4 of this issue.)

Omega Fat Matters

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

Omega-3 and omega-6 fats are two types of essential polyunsaturated fats. *Essential* means we need to get them from food since the body can't make them on its own.

North Americans get plenty of omega-6 fats from corn and soybean oils, which are abundant in the food supply. But omega-3 fats are harder to come by. While it would be ideal to get a ratio of 4:1 omega-6 to omega-3 fats, most people get closer to 20:1. This high ratio has been linked to heart disease, obesity, asthma and inflammation.

How can you get more omega-3 fats?

There are three main types of omega-3 fats in foods:

- Alpha-linolenic acid (ALA).
- Docosahexaenoic acid (DHA).
- Eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA).

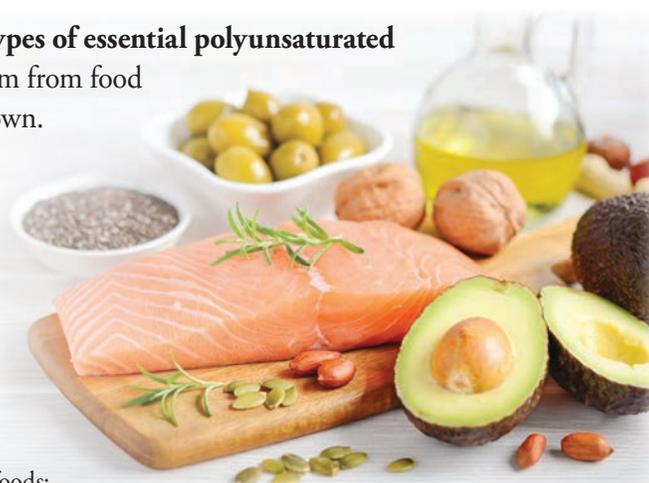
ALA omega-3 fats are found in plant-based foods, such as walnuts, canola oil, chia and flax seeds.

DHA and EPA are abundant in fish, such as salmon, trout and sardines. Vegans can get DHA and EPA from algae or seaweed. **Did you know?** Fish are high in omega-3 because they eat so much algae.

To fix the ratio, any of those omega-3 sources are fine. But for advanced health, most research focuses on EPA and DHA, which have more health benefits than ALA.

During pregnancy and infancy, DHA is important for the normal development of the baby's brain, eyes and nerves. In adulthood, DHA and EPA are important for reducing the risk of heart disease, high blood pressure and stroke. For older adults, sufficient DHA and EPA correlates with a lower risk of developing Alzheimer's disease and cognitive decline.

Aim to eat two to three servings of fatty fish each week. If you don't enjoy fish, speak with your health care professional about DHA and EPA supplements.



TIP of the MONTH

Comfort Food Caveat

If you've ever turned to food in times of stress, new research reveals it may not be as comforting as you think. Scientists have discovered that stress interferes with the brain's fullness cue, and eating comfort foods makes us want to eat even more. Stress can also override the pleasure that comes from comfort food, so a tub of ice cream is not your best option. What helps most? **Nature.** Next time you're stressed, go for a quick walk outside and see if that helps more than comfort food.

One-Pan Chicken Parmesan Pasta

EASY recipe

- | | |
|--|---|
| 2 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil | 1 box (16 oz.) whole-grain pasta (penne or fusilli) |
| 18 oz. boneless, skinless chicken breast | 2 cups broccoli florets |
| 2 tsp Italian herb seasoning, <i>divided</i> | 1 cup shredded mozzarella |
| ½ tsp garlic powder | ½ cup grated Parmesan |
| 3 cloves garlic, minced | ½ seasoned Italian-style bread crumbs |
| 1 jar (24 oz.) tomato marinara sauce | ½ cup chopped fresh basil |
| 4 cups water or chicken broth | |



Set a large oven-proof pan over medium heat and add olive oil. **Add** chicken, 1 tsp Italian herbs and garlic powder. **Cook**, stirring, 5 minutes. **Transfer** to plate and cover to keep warm. **Add** garlic to same pan and sauté 1 minute. **Add** tomato sauce and water and bring to a boil, then reduce to simmer. **Add** remaining Italian herbs, pasta, broccoli and chicken. **Stir** to combine. **Cook** 12-15 minutes or until pasta is tender. **Top** pan with mozzarella, Parmesan and bread crumbs. **Transfer** to oven and broil for 1-2 minutes until cheese browns. **Garnish** with basil and serve.

Makes 8 servings. Per serving: 418 calories | 28g protein | 11g total fat | 3g saturated fat | 4g mono fat | 3g poly fat | 56g carb | 8g sugar (0 added sugar) | 10g fiber | 467mg sodium

QuikRisk™ Assessment: Screen Time

By Eric Endlich, PhD

Do you ever wonder if you're spending too much time viewing screens? Answer the questions below:

1. Smartphones, TVs or other screens keep me from getting a good night's sleep. T F
2. I'd get involved in other activities if I weren't using screens so much. T F
3. Social media use, computer games or other online activities make me less productive at work. T F
4. Even when not working, I spend six or more hours daily using screens. T F
5. At mealtime, I don't really notice the amount or taste of my food because I'm busy watching screens. T F
6. I become irritable or impatient when I can't use electronic devices. T F
7. Screens often distract me during conversations. T F
8. When I'm bored or upset, I cope by using electronic devices. T F
9. I exercise less than I should because of my screen use. T F
10. My screen use often substitutes for in-person social contact. T F



If you answered True to some of these questions, examine your screen use. Excessive screen time — especially more than six hours per day — has been linked to depression. Consider carving out screen-free times (e.g., mealtimes) and enjoying unplugged activities, such as exercising and socializing.



Thanksgiving Day is also National

Family Health History Day.

Gathering with relatives for this American tradition is an opportunity to learn about health problems that run in your family. Even if you miss Thanksgiving dinner, call relatives and find out how they are doing. For example, have relatives had cancer, diabetes, heart disease or osteoporosis? Share information about your relatives' medical history with your health care provider. Find out if you need more frequent checkups or need to modify your lifestyle to lower your risks for certain health problems. To learn more, search for **Family Health History** at [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov).

When Siblings Don't Get Along

What should you do if your kids argue, tease and even fight?

There isn't a simple answer because much depends on their ages and the reasons siblings are in conflict. Brothers and sisters may compete for a parent's attention or argue about toys or movies, who has the best bedroom or countless other issues.

The good news is most siblings will eventually get along. In the meantime, here are some tried-and-true strategies that can help:

- **For elementary school-aged kids, timers can help them take turns.** Meg Glick, a clinical social worker affiliated with the Child Mind Institute, notes timers let children anticipate what's coming next. Clear posted visual schedules can help, too.
- **For older children, try written contracts.** Work on getting a collaboration going with common goals by asking the siblings to calmly resolve an issue, such as how to share a space to play video games.
- **Look for ways your kids can enjoy spending time together.** Laurie Kramer, a clinical psychologist and professor at Northeastern University, who researches how to stoke sibling harmony, advises introducing your kids to puzzles, sports and other non-screen activities that can be shared and added to your family's routine.



- **Teach them to take increasing responsibility for solving arguments on their own.** Thomas Lickona, a developmental psychologist, advises having a place at home where your kids can sit down and work out a fair solution.



November is COPD Awareness Month.

Breath-robbing chronic obstructive pulmonary disease affects almost 16 million Americans. It restricts air flow in and out of airways. Smoking is the main cause, but multiple respiratory infections and exposure to various air pollutants can also result in COPD. Talk to your health care provider if you have possible COPD symptoms. While there's no cure for COPD, early diagnosis and treatment can improve the quality of life. To learn more, search for **COPD** at lung.org. If you have COPD and have tried older inhalers unsuccessfully, ask your provider about trying a newer one.

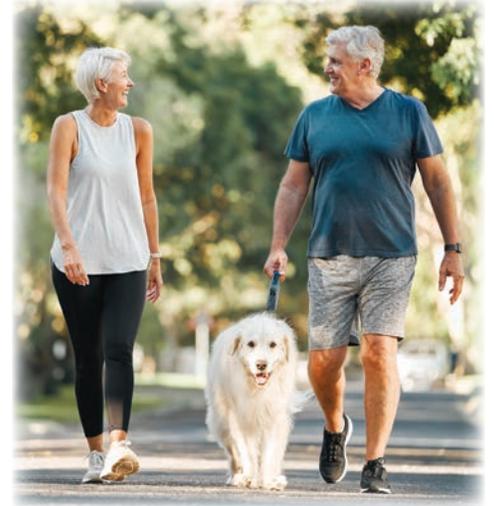


November is Alzheimer's Disease Awareness Month.

Q: Can I reduce my risk for Alzheimer's?

A: **There is no known cure for Alzheimer's disease,** a progressive form of dementia which involves memory loss and affects more than six million Americans. However, experts believe that you may reduce your risk by taking these steps, including:

- Preventing and managing high blood pressure through lifestyle changes and medical treatment.
- Maintaining a healthy weight.
- Staying physically active.
- Managing blood sugar levels.
- Avoiding or quitting smoking.
- Preventing or correcting hearing loss.
- Avoiding excessive alcohol use.
- Getting enough sleep.
- Keeping your mind active by socializing, reading, playing games, solving puzzles and learning new things.



The first three steps — blood pressure management, obesity prevention and physical activity — are believed to be the most critical. While there's no surefire way to prevent Alzheimer's disease, keeping your brain and body healthy and active is your best option.

— Eric Endlich, PhD

Practice Safe Winter Exercise

You can still exercise in chilly outdoor weather. Just bundle up and be sure to practice safety. The National Institute on Aging offers these tips:

1. **Warm up before and cool down after muscle or aerobic exercise.** Stretch or jog in place for three minutes to prepare and restore your muscles.
2. **Wear multiple layers of clothing** to trap warm air between each layer. Wear a waterproof coat, especially if it's rainy or snowy; add a hat, scarf and gloves.
3. **Be cautious around snow and icy pavement** to avoid slipping and falling. Wear sturdy shoes for better footing and traction.
4. **Check the forecast.** If it's too windy, cold or wet outside, why not choose an indoor routine? Consider online videos.

Know the signs of hypothermia in cold temperatures: uncontrolled shivering, exhaustion, confusion, memory loss, drowsiness and slurred speech. For first aid treatment for yourself or another person, the CDC advises you to:

1. Get into a warm room or shelter.
2. Remove any wet clothing.



3. Get the center of the body warm (chest, neck, head and groin) using an electric blanket or heater, if available, or apply dry layers of blankets, clothing, towels or sheets.
4. Consume warm drinks to help increase body temperature, but avoid alcoholic drinks. Do not try to give beverages to an unconscious person.
5. Keep the person dry by wrapping the head and neck in a warm blanket after their body temperature has increased.

Seek medical attention as soon as possible.



Lung cancer is the second most common

cancer after skin cancer and is also the leading cause of cancer deaths worldwide. Each year, about 218,500 people in the U.S. are affected by lung cancer, with 142,000 lives lost to the disease. This disease can be hard to identify; many people don't have symptoms until the cancer is advanced and fatal. Early lung cancer screenings are recommended if you have a history of smoking or have quit within the past 15 years. This **Lung Cancer Awareness Month**, vow to encourage those around you at risk for the disease to seek medical care. **Note:** Smoking also causes cancer of the voice box (larynx), mouth, throat, esophagus, urinary bladder, kidney, pancreas, cervix, colon, rectum, liver, stomach and a form of blood cancer.

Q: Flu vaccine safety?

A: The flu shots recommended each fall for everyone aged six months and older have an excellent safety profile, according to the CDC. You cannot catch the flu from a flu shot since they're prepared from inactivated viruses. The nasal vaccine will not cause influenza either since it contains live, weakened viruses.

Despite the good safety record, adverse effects can occur. Most common are injection site redness or soreness, fever, muscle aches, headache or fatigue. The side effects are usually mild and resolve on their own in a few days. Patients can report adverse reactions to the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System at vaers.hhs.gov/reportevent.html.

Certain people should not get a flu shot. Talk to your health care provider if you have an allergy to eggs or other vaccine ingredients, or if you have ever had Guillain-Barre Syndrome. The CDC also advises those who are moderately or severely ill should wait until they recover before receiving a flu vaccine.

— Elizabeth Smoots, MD



November is Bladder Health Month.



Overactive Bladder Solutions

Overactive bladder (OAB) is a common condition that causes a sudden or frequent urge to urinate. This may be an inconvenience and lead to sleep disruption or embarrassment, especially if it results in the unintentional loss of urine.

Overactive bladder signs and symptoms: Involuntary contraction of the bladder muscles occurs in OAB, even when urine volume is low. This may cause an urgent need to urinate that is difficult to control. Frequent urination is common — often eight or more times per day, or more than twice at night. Sudden unintentional urinary leakage is also not uncommon. See your health care provider for an evaluation if you have these symptoms. The risk of OAB increases with age.

Beneficial lifestyle measures: Behavior modification is often an effective treatment for OAB, and usually has the fewest side effects. You can learn to do Kegel exercises that strengthen the muscles of the pelvic floor and urinary sphincter, improving your control over when you void. Techniques, such as gradually training the bladder to delay voiding and scheduling toilet trips every two to four hours, are often beneficial. Wearing absorbent clothing or pads can also help you manage any unforeseen accidents.



Overactive bladder

Additional treatment options: In postmenopausal women, vaginal estrogen therapy can often help with OAB. Medications, such as tolterodine or oxybutynin, work to relax the bladder. Bladder injections, nerve stimulation or surgery can sometimes provide relief for severe OAB that does not respond to other treatments.

Q: Personal finance mistakes?

A. There are many missteps you can make with your money. Here are some of the most common:

1. Spending without a plan.
2. Being irresponsible with credit cards.
3. Spending beyond your means.
4. Carrying too much debt.
5. Ignoring your credit report.
6. Not having an emergency fund.
7. Not having adequate insurance.
8. Putting off saving for retirement.
9. Relying only on your employer's plan when saving for retirement.
10. Borrowing money from your retirement accounts.

Adopt these habits instead:

1. Develop a plan for a financial future.
2. Start a savings plan or increase savings.
3. Follow a budget.
4. Control and reduce (if necessary) living expenses.
5. Minimize personal debt.
6. Pay credit card bills in full each month.
7. Comparison shop.
8. Set aside an emergency fund equal to six months of essential living expenses.
9. Calculate how much money you need for retirement.
10. Participate in your employer's retirement plan.

To learn more, visit the Consumer Finance Protection Bureau at [consumerfinance.gov](https://www.consumerfinance.gov).

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

Smart Wheelchair Moves

Unless you know someone who uses a wheelchair, you might not always think about your actions around people who rely on them. For example, always ask someone if they want assistance before helping them, and never touch or move a wheelchair without the user's permission.

Some other guidelines:

Remember that bathroom stalls designed for wheelchairs should be left for wheelchair use. Bathrooms can be a huge source of stress for people who use wheelchairs.

Stay cognizant of your surroundings if you are pushing someone in a wheelchair. Watch for obstacles that could catch on the chair, wheels or foot rests.

Keep in mind that if someone in a wheelchair asks for directions, they will need to know the distance and any possible physical obstacles that may affect their travel.

Be especially careful when pushing a wheelchair downhill. **Tip:** On a steep hill, go down backward slowly to prevent the person in the wheelchair from being tipped forward.

Always lock the brakes or turn off power when stopping a wheelchair for a period of time.

Never lean on someone's wheelchair.

Avoid hanging heavy loads on the back of a wheelchair. Keep loose objects away from the wheel spokes.

Never let children play on a wheelchair.



Space Heater Precautions

When there's a chill in the air, a space heater can be a great help. However, space heaters have dangers, such as electrical shock and fire hazards. Follow these precautions to stay safe:

- Check the space heater's label to see if a qualified testing laboratory recognizes it.
- Read all instructions and warning labels before using a space heater.
- Always check for damaged or cracked plugs and wires. Don't use the heater if they are damaged.
- Never use space heaters for anything except providing supplemental heat. Don't use them for drying clothing, thawing pipes or cooking food.
- Place space heaters on a flat, level surface at least three feet away from flammable materials, such as drapes, papers, rugs and clothing. Never place a space heater on top of a table or other furniture.
- Never leave a space heater unattended. Turn it off when leaving a room or going to sleep.
- Keep children and pets away from space heaters.
- Don't use extension cords or power strips with space heaters. These can overheat and cause a fire.



November is Diabetes Month.



Prediabetes Action Plan

By Diane McReynolds, Executive Editor Emeritus

If you have prediabetes, your blood glucose (sugar) levels are higher than normal, but not yet high enough to be diagnosed as diabetes. That makes prediabetes a serious condition — one that can lead to type 2 diabetes, heart disease and stroke.

Prediabetes, which is on the rise in the U.S., usually begins with insulin resistance — when the liver, fat and muscle cells do not use insulin properly. Eventually, the body needs more insulin than it can produce, causing blood glucose to rise and causing serious health problems without proper management.

Risk factors for developing prediabetes:

- Obesity, an underlying cause of insulin resistance.
- Age beyond 45.
- Exercising fewer than three times a week.
- Family history of type 2 diabetes.
- Giving birth to a baby that weighed more than nine pounds.
- Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), a hormonal disorder in women.

The good news? Prediabetes can often be reversed to lower the risk of developing type 2 diabetes — a condition that can cause serious health complications. These include heart disease, chronic kidney disease, nerve damage and other problems with feet, oral health, vision, hearing and stress.

Note: The American Diabetes Association (ADA) recommends diabetes screening before age 35 if you're overweight and have additional risk factors for prediabetes or type 2 diabetes. Discuss with your health care provider. Check out the online prediabetes test at cdc.gov/prediabetes/risktest.

If you are diagnosed with prediabetes, here are six actions to take now:

- 1. Get moving.** Target at least 30 minutes of physical activity most days of the week, and you will notice improvements in weight control, mental health and energy to help keep you motivated toward positive, ongoing health choices. Include strengthening workouts.
- 2. Eat nutritious foods.** A diet rich in fruits, vegetables, beans, nuts, whole grains and olive oil is linked with a lower risk of developing prediabetes. Cut back on ultra-processed foods, such as soda, salty snacks and fast food.
- 3. Lose excess weight.** Extra pounds can lead to the development of insulin resistance. If you're overweight, losing just 5% to 7% of your body weight — about 14 pounds if you weigh 200 pounds — can significantly reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes when you maintain the weight loss.
- 4. Get adequate sleep.** Experts recommend seven to nine hours daily.
- 5. If you smoke, quit.** Smokers are 30% to 40% more likely to get diabetes than nonsmokers, according to the FDA.
- 6. Check out support groups:** defeatdiabetes.org/get-healthy/diabetes-support-groups.



For children: The American Diabetes Association recommends prediabetes testing for children who are overweight or obese and who have one or more of the other primary risk factors for type 2 diabetes:

- Family history of type 2 diabetes.
- Low birth weight.
- Being born to a mother who had gestational diabetes.

Tests for Diagnosing Diabetes

Your health care provider will have you take one or more of the following blood tests to confirm a diagnosis:

A1C test measures your average blood sugar level in the past two or three months. An A1C below **5.7%** is normal; **between 5.7% and 6.4%** means you have prediabetes; **6.5% or higher** indicates you have diabetes.

Fasting blood sugar test measures your blood sugar after fasting overnight. A fasting blood sugar level of **99 mg/dL** or lower is normal, **100 to 125 mg/dL** means you have prediabetes and **126 mg/dL or higher** is a diagnosis of diabetes.

Glucose tolerance test measures your blood sugar before and after you drink a liquid that contains glucose. You'll fast overnight before the test and have your blood drawn to determine your fasting blood sugar level. Then you'll drink the liquid and have your blood sugar level checked one hour, two hours, and possibly three hours afterward. At two hours, a blood sugar level of **140 mg/dL or lower** is considered normal, **140 to 199 mg/dL** means you have prediabetes and **200 mg/dL or higher** is diabetes.

DR. ZORBA'S corner

Diabetes and Sugary Beverages

In a recent study, Harvard researchers followed more than 15,000 middle-aged and older adults with diabetes for nearly 19 years. They discovered that people who drank coffee, tea, low-fat milk or water lived longer than those who consumed sugary drinks. They also had a 24% reduced risk of dying from a heart attack. The sugary beverage drinkers had up to a 20% higher risk for premature death and a 29% higher chance of cardiovascular-related death. **Note:** Because participants reported what they drank (an observational study), the research didn't prove avoiding sugary drinks will improve the health of people who have diabetes. However, soda and other sugar-heavy beverages are also a major factor in adult and childhood obesity — a risk factor for type 2 diabetes.

— Zorba Paster, MD

November Fill-in-the-Blank Puzzle

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

- 1 North Americans get plenty of _____ fats from corn and soybean oils.
- 2 There is no known cure for _____ disease.
- 3 Know the signs of _____ in cold temperatures: uncontrolled shivering, exhaustion, confusion, memory loss, drowsiness and slurred speech.
- 4 _____ is the main cause, but multiple respiratory infections and exposure to various air pollutants can also result in COPD.
- 5 _____ cancer is the second most common cancer after skin cancer and is also the leading cause of cancer deaths worldwide.
- 6 Financial advisers recommend setting aside an _____ fund equal to six months of essential living expenses.
- 7 Prediabetes, which is on the rise in the U.S., usually begins with _____ resistance.
- 8 Place space heaters on a flat, level surface at least _____ feet away from flammable materials.



You'll find the answers at personalbest.com/extras/Nov2023puzzle.pdf.

The Smart Moves Toolkit, including this issue's printable download, Tips to Prevent Burnout, is at personalbest.com/extras/23V11tools.

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