

## What's So Bad About **Sitting**?

by Diane McReynolds, Founder, Personal Best Healthlines

**Are you sitting down?** Better stand up as you read this: Sitting has joined the list of major risk factors for chronic disease in America, along with high blood pressure, smoking and unhealthy cholesterol.

Researchers have connected lengthy sitting to obesity, metabolic syndrome and premature death from any cause, apart from other risks, such as smoking, even in people who regularly exercise. When you're sitting, your muscles aren't moving, so metabolism slows down.

➔ Continued on page 4.

take charge



## Building **Health Care** Savings

As medical care costs continue to climb, chances are your out-of-pocket share for health care is rising, too – in the form of higher premiums, deductibles or copayments, or all 3.



How can you manage this huge expense while protecting the quality of your care? There are several ways you can save and stretch your health dollars.

**Get to know your plan** to ensure the services you are about to use are covered. Take advantage of your plan's preventive screenings. **Tip:** Check your plan's online tools for assistance.

**Confirm the need for prescribed medicines, tests and procedures.**

Always discuss alternative solutions with your health care providers.



**Find cheaper drugs.** If available, use your plan's lower-cost mail order drug service. Consider lower-cost generic prescription drugs if available. **Tip:** Shop for store-brand over-the-counter drugs, often 25% to 30% less than name-brand versions.

**Follow your health care provider's advice fully.** If not, you risk having to restart your medication or treatment, which can cost time and money.

**Fund tax-advantaged accounts to pay for many health and medical expenses:**

✓ **Health savings account** – In an eligible high-deductible health plan, the current contribution maximum is \$3,300. Any unused funds grow tax-free from year to year.

✓ **Flexible spending account** – If your company offers it, you can pay for out-of-pocket health expenses, such as co-pays and deductibles with pre-tax dollars.

**Join workplace wellness programs** (if available) such as smoking cessation or diabetes prevention.

**Stay healthy.** Improving health habits for life is the single best way to save thousands on health expenses.

## best bits



**Celebrate Nutrition Month in March by exploring**

**a new cuisine.** Many popular cuisines, such as Vietnamese, Indian, Spanish and beyond, can be inexpensive and healthful. They emphasize wholesome plant foods with only small amounts of animal protein. Enjoy the flavors unique to each country.

■ **Having a bad workday?** Feel like you'd rather hide than deal with coworkers, customers and disputes? Recognize you're not at your best and, despite a bad mood, keep a cool head. Don't raise your voice, place blame or say things you'll regret. Listen first, learn the facts and focus on solutions.

■ **How to cut heart disease and stroke risk by half if you're overweight or obese?** Improve your blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar levels, based on a review of studies involving 1.8 million people worldwide by Harvard's School of Public Health. The greatest threat to overweight and obese people is high blood pressure, which raises the risk for heart disease 31% and for stroke 65%. About 3.4 million people worldwide die each year due to overweight and obesity.



“A healthy outside starts from the inside.” – Robert Urich

### This Edition

- ➔ Can we prevent colon cancer?
- ➔ Sprain or Strain?
- ➔ Maximize Online Learning
- ➔ Poison Prevention



## Sprain or Strain?

A sprain is a stretched or torn ligament – the tissue connecting your bones to your joints. Sprains often result from a sudden, twisting motion that causes mild tears to complete ruptures. Joints most susceptible to sprains are ankles and knees.

**A strain is a stretched or torn muscle or tendon.** Tendons connect your muscles to your bones. Strains are caused by twisting or pulling tendons, resulting in minute tears in the tissue or more severe damage. Strains are very common in the back and leg muscles.

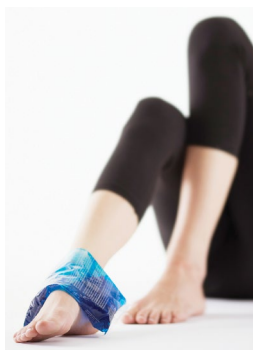
**A sprain or strain may cause pain,** some swelling or difficulty moving the injured area. Sprains can take longer than strains to heal, and they may weaken the joint.

**Get some relief.** Avoid using the injured area. Rest it elevated, and ice it several times a day for 10 to 15 minutes. Anti-inflammatory medicine may reduce pain and swelling.

**Seek medical care if:** The injury is numb or deformed, or becomes weaker, more painful, swollen or discolored. Severe injuries might require physical therapy.

**Preventing sprains and strains:** Many people get injured playing sports or doing things that are too physically demanding. Be cautious.

- ✓ Avoid exercise or sports when you're tired or in pain.
- ✓ Be fit enough to perform your sport or exercise.
- ✓ Wear protective equipment when playing.



March is Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month.

## Can we prevent colon cancer?

**Yes. Even though scientists are not sure of the exact cause of colon (colorectal) cancer, it is a form of cancer that we can often avoid with regular screening.** The colon, or large bowel, is where food is processed to supply energy and rid the body of waste.

**How does screening help fight the disease?** Colon cancer almost always starts with a slow-growing polyp on the lining of the colon or rectum. You can fight colon cancer by detecting and removing polyps before they become cancerous.

Begin colon cancer screening at age 50, or sooner if you have these increased risks:

- A personal history of colorectal cancer or adenomatous polyps.
- A personal history of inflammatory bowel disease (ulcerative colitis or Crohn's disease).
- A strong family history of colorectal cancer or polyps.

Talk with your provider about the screening options best suited to your health profile.

**Studies suggest obesity may raise your risk of colon cancer.**

In addition to losing excess weight, aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity, such as walking, on 5 or more days a week. Vigorous activity for 45 minutes 5 or more days a week, such as running, offers even more protection.

## Food Labels:

### Qualified Health Claims

**Food labels are crowded with details.**

Among them are FDA-approved health claims, such as *low-sodium foods support heart health* or *calcium may reduce osteoporosis*. These claims are supported by credible scientific evidence that shows a direct relationship between product ingredients and health-related conditions.

**Watch out for unsubstantiated claims that aren't FDA approved.**

You might see something such as: *Yogurts improve immunity and digestion*. *Cereals with omega-3 fats unclog arteries*.

**So what is qualified?** The FDA must authorize health claims on food labels. The list of approved foods, food components or nutrients that can be advertised as aids in the prevention of various diseases or conditions includes:



- Tomatoes and pancreatic cancer
- Calcium and colon cancer
- Folic acid and neural tube birth defects
- B vitamins and vascular disease
- Walnuts and heart disease
- Omega-3 fatty acids and coronary heart disease (CHD)
- Monounsaturated fatty acids (from olive oil) and CHD
- Unsaturated fatty acids (from canola oil) and CHD

> **For the entire list,** search "Summary of Qualified Health Claims" at [www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov).





# Maximize Online Learning



Online learning is a convenient way to acquire new skills and stay up-to-date on the knowledge you need for your job. Log on and let learning come to you on your laptop or tablet.



Get the most out of the online learning experience:

**Set up a schedule.** Online courses and training sessions often require hours of work. Decide before you start how much you can realistically absorb at a computer and sessions when you are alert and ready to learn.

**Stay engaged.** Since you are learning online rather than in a live classroom, it's easy to tune out. Follow along with downloadable classroom materials, engage in virtual discussions with classmates and instructors, and do whatever else helps you focus.

**Apply what you've learned.** Take the lessons from online classes and brainstorm ways you can use them in your everyday work to improve processes, sharpen skills, become more efficient, advance in your job and keep productivity high.



## Cooking Tip: Roasted Asparagus

Roasting is a fast, easy way to bring out the maximum flavor of vegetables. Try this: Wash and dry a bunch of asparagus; toss them with a teaspoon of olive oil. Lay spears on a nonstick cookie sheet, single layer, and roast at 410°F for 8 to 10 minutes, depending on the thickness of the stems.



eating smart

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

# Love Your Vegetables

From hearty salads to creative stir-fries, putting more vegetables on your plate is a smart idea.



**Why? Like fruits, vegetables have a high-fiber and high-water content, which helps you feel full.** And they're low in calories with virtually no fat – great for helping you reach and maintain a healthy weight.

**Raw or cooked,** vegetables provide a wide array of vitamins, minerals and antioxidants that may help ward off disease. Their nutrients have been linked to a lower risk of developing heart disease, type 2 diabetes and certain types of cancer.



**Steam or stir-fry to retain nutrients in vegetables.** Most of the nutrients in boiled vegetables end up in the water, which tends to be discarded. Soup is a good option because you consume the liquid that the vegetables are cooked in. And, avoid deep frying your vegetables (sorry, onion rings and fries). Bonus: Heat kills harmful microbes.

**Enjoy vegetables daily at every meal – and don't forget snacks.** Some ideas: Try raw beets in salad, a steamed broccoli side dish or soup made from roasted butternut squash. Snack on raw carrot sticks. Sauté chopped spinach in garlic and olive oil and add to whole-grain pasta.



**Good to know:** The current trend on restaurant menus is to replace lettuce with thinly sliced crunchy vegetables such as button mushrooms, celery, beets, carrot coins and fennel. *Enjoy!*



## 15-Minute Frittata

## EASY | RECIPE

From Personal Best®

- 1 tbsp **olive oil**
- 1½ cups small **broccoli florets** (parboiled 2 minutes)
- 1 cup sliced fresh **mushrooms**
- 4 large **eggs**
- 3 large **egg whites**
- ½ cup (2 oz) **skim milk**
- mozzarella cheese**, grated
- ¼ tsp **nutmeg**
- ½ red **bell pepper**, chopped

- 1.** Preheat oven broiler. Parboil broccoli 2-3 minutes; drain well.
- 2.** Heat oil in a medium ovenproof skillet over medium heat.
- 3.** Add broccoli and mushrooms and sauté 5 minutes, until tender.
- 4.** Meanwhile, whisk whole eggs with whites; blend in cheese and nutmeg. Pour mixture into skillet.
- 5.** Cover and cook over medium-low heat 5 minutes or until almost set.
- 6.** Remove cover and broil 5 minutes or until set and lightly browned.
- 7.** Cool 3-4 minutes before slicing; top each slice with chopped bell pepper.

**Makes 4 (1 slice) servings. Per serving:**

154 calories | 12g protein | 9.4g total fat | 2.8g sat fat | 4.6g mono fat | 1.4g poly fat | 190mg cholesterol | 4.7g carbohydrate | 1.9g sugar | 1.5g fiber | 169mg sodium

## Stay in Touch

Keep those questions and suggestions coming!

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### top safety

## Poisons: Take Care



According to Poison Prevention.org, more than 2 million poisonings are reported each year to poison control centers nationwide. More than 90% of these poisonings occur in the home. Here's how you can reduce that statistic:

- ✓ **Buy** products with child-resistant packaging when available.
- ✓ **Store** all medicines and vitamins locked and out of reach.
- ✓ **Keep** products in original containers.
- ✓ **Use** cabinet locks wherever you keep cleaning products, toiletries, makeup and medicines.
- ✓ **Store** purses out of the reach of young children, especially if you carry makeup or medicines in them.
- ✓ **Don't** grow poisonous or toxic plants if you have small children at home.

✓ **Put** the Poison Control Center's number (1-800-222-1222) on speed dial on your home and cell phones. Post it on the refrigerator or family message board.



National Poison Prevention Week is March 16 to 22.

## What's So Bad About Sitting?

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Your back may be the most obvious sign you're sitting too long. Sitting exerts more strain on your back than standing, increasing spinal pressure that often leads to chronic backache, disc problems, headache, muscle stiffness and fatigue.

**Bottom line:** Get up and move more every day. During long periods of sitting:

- Stand up, stretch and walk a few steps.
- Stand up while talking on the phone.
- Get off the couch while watching TV.
- Schedule 10-minute activity breaks a few times a day.
- Take a break to do some chores.



- Combine meetings with walking.
- Position a work surface above a treadmill.

You could set a timer to remind you to get up often, until you make it a habit.

While researchers say daily exercise can't reverse the effects of sitting, regular physical activity is still the key to better health – provided we don't sit down the rest of the time.

### expert advice

By Eric Endlich, PhD

## Q: Self-massage tips?

**A:** From head to toe, you can ease pain and tightness in your body. Use these tips:

### For “knots” in back or shoulders:

Tennis balls are great for this. Sit on the floor with knees bent. Place the ball behind you, and then gently lower your back toward the ball. Move back and forth so that the ball rolls and kneads the problem area. To massage the muscles along the spine, use 2 tennis balls inserted into a sock.

### For aching feet:

Place a tennis ball or frozen water bottle (fill bottle  $\frac{3}{4}$  full, cap tightly and freeze) on the floor and roll it with the sole of your foot.

### For tight leg muscles after post-exercise stretching:

Massage muscles with a rolling pin, or place a foam roller on the floor and move your body on it to relieve tension.

**Note:** If discomfort persists, see your health care provider.