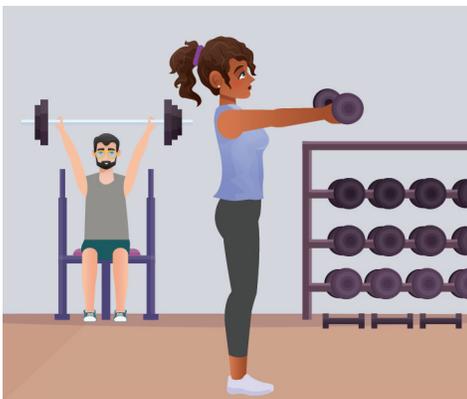


BETTER HEALTH

Spring 2023 | Volume 39 | Number 1



Did You Know

Regularly lifting weights in addition to physical activity has been linked to a lower risk of death from any cause except cancer. The research – based on a 10-year analysis of nearly 98,000 participants – was published in the British Journal of Sports Medicine.

Researchers found that:

- Working out exclusively with weights (without any moderate or vigorous physical activity) was associated with a 9% lower risk of death.
- Engaging in moderate to vigorous physical activity (without any weightlifting) reduced the risk of death by 32%.
- Regularly engaging in BOTH weightlifting and physical activity had a 41% lower risk of death from any cause.

Source: Medical News Today

Hold on Tight to Maintain Brain Function

Handgrip strength (a measure of how strongly you can grip something or open a jar) may be tied to an increased likelihood of dementia and other forms of cognitive impairment.

A large study published in 2022 by the Journal of the American Medical Association found that poor handgrip strength in midlife was associated with cognitive decline a decade later. More than 190,000 dementia-free men and women (average age 56) were involved in the study and were followed for at least 10 years. Participants took tests that measured handgrip strength, problem-solving skills, memory, and reasoning abilities, and they also underwent brain imaging.

Compared with people who'd had higher handgrip strength scores at the start of the study, people with lower grip scores were more likely to later have problems with thinking and memory and had brain imaging markers of vascular dementia.

The study was observational and doesn't prove that poor handgrip strength caused cognitive decline, but studies have linked grip strength as an indicator of other health factors. For instance, researchers have found that having a weak grip strength is associated with a risk of heart failure and is a strong predictor of cardiac death.

To improve your handgrip strength, squeeze a stress ball or a tennis ball with your entire hand for as many reps as you can until your hand gets tired. Rest for 90 seconds and repeat as necessary. You can also take a small, thin towel and go through the motion of twisting it like you're wringing water out of it. Do these exercises once or twice a week.

Source: Harvard Health





Money Matters

Managing your finances can at times seem like an ongoing unsolved mystery: never quite knowing how much you can spend during any given month and always wondering how it disappears so quickly! One solution to solving your money mystery is by creating a budget. Having a budget gives you a clue about the money coming in and where it's going. Once you know how much money you have to work with (after giving to your church and paying bills) you can start to make your money work for you such as paying off a debt or starting an emergency fund.

For active workers enrolled in the Concordia Retirement Plan, budgeting just got easier through the new BeFine App. This free app securely links your bank accounts so you can track how your money is being spent. All this is done using security technologies to keep your data safe. In addition, the app can also help with your retirement planning by prepopulating your Concordia Plan benefit information.

On your laptop or desktop, go to befineapp.com/concordia-plans or download the app on your phone using the QR code:



Artificial Sweeteners Aren't Good for Your Heart

According to a recent study published in the *British Medical Journal*, artificial sweeteners were associated with a 9% higher risk for heart attack and an 18% greater chance of stroke.

The study followed more than 100,000 adults, mostly female, with an average age of 42. Participants completed a series of food and drink questionnaires during the first two years of the study with a follow-up 10 years later. At the start of the study, none of the participants had a history of cardiovascular disease or diabetes, and none were diagnosed with these conditions during the first two years.

The results showed that the annual risk of cardiovascular disease was 314 cases per 100,000 people among participants who didn't consume artificial sweeteners, compared with 346 cases for those who consumed the highest amount of sugar substitutes. Certain risks were higher with specific sweeteners. For example, aspartame (under the product names of NutraSweet and Equal), was associated with a 17% higher risk of stroke.

The researcher concluded that sugar substitutes should not be considered a healthy and safe alternative to sugar.

Source: *British Medical Journal*



Health Myths Meet Reality

Diet and nutrition myths often exist because what was once true may have changed due to more research, or simply because only half of the story is being told. Here are two of the more longstanding health claims:

MYTH – Cutting back on carbs can help you lose weight.

REALITY – Carbohydrates come in two forms: simple and complex. Simple carbs that are found in foods such as cookies and candy lack vitamins, minerals, and fiber. Foods with complex carbs such as whole-wheat bread, beans, and fruit, have lots of nutrients. By cutting back on simple carb foods (that typically have more calories) there is the potential to lose weight, but another factor in the weight-loss equation is the overall number of calories you take in. If you cut back on foods with simple carbs, but then add too many additional calories to your diet through other foods – even those with complex carbs – the weight may not come off and you could gain more. Cutting back on simple carbs is still a great way to eat healthier. Just keep in mind that you aid weight loss by eating fewer calories than you burn.



MYTH – MSG is bad for you.

REALITY – MSG (monosodium glutamate) is a naturally-occurring flavor enhancer that is added to many foods such as canned vegetables, soups, deli meats, salad dressings, and Asian food. While there are some people who are sensitive to MSG, it's generally not harmful. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has classified MSG as a food ingredient that's safe. The only real danger MSG presents is raising your sodium level, which also happens when you consume salt. Be mindful not to eat too much food with MSG (or salt) as part of a healthy diet.

Source: *MedicinePlus.gov and MayoClinic.org*

Hidden Caffeine May Affect Your Sleep

Not getting enough sleep often starts with not being able to fall asleep. If that describes you, consider what you may be eating or drinking in the evening that may be interfering with your sleep patterns – particularly food sources that unknowingly contain caffeine. Keep in mind that your body typically needs 5-6 hours to eliminate just half of the caffeine in one 8-oz. cup of coffee.

Even though many food manufacturers add caffeine content to their product labels, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) doesn't require them to do so.

To help you fall asleep faster, you may want to avoid these caffeinated products close to bedtime:

Chocolate: Chocolate is made from naturally-caffeinated cocoa beans. Dark chocolate (containing 45% - 85% cocoa) will be the most caffeinated because it is made with a higher cocoa content. Milk chocolate (containing 10% to 30% cocoa) has a lower amount of caffeine. White chocolate typically has no caffeine.



Ice Cream: Flavored ice creams such as coffee, mocha, or chocolate may contain caffeine. For example, an 8-ounce serving of coffee-flavored ice cream contains between 50 and 83 grams of caffeine, or about the same amount as half a cup of coffee. A cup of chocolate ice cream will have much less – around 6 milligrams of caffeine.

Hot chocolate: A packet of hot cocoa mix from the grocery store usually has about 9 milligrams, but a 16-oz. cup of Starbucks' hot chocolate contains 25 milligrams.



Decaffeinated Coffee: "Decaf" doesn't mean zero caffeine. To be classified as decaffeinated, the FDA only requires coffee manufacturers to remove 97% of the caffeine from coffee beans. An 8-ounce cup of decaf coffee might still contain up to 15 milligrams of caffeine. (For comparison purposes, 8 ounces of Coke contains 21 milligrams.)

Snack Bars: Protein or energy bars are often high in calories and carbohydrates, but they can also contain caffeine.

Pain Relievers: Several over-the-counter brands of ibuprofen and acetaminophen have added caffeine. Check the label before taking them at bedtime. Some contain between 100 milligrams and 150 milligrams of caffeine per a two-tablet dose.

Source: WebMD

Choose Treats Wisely

Sugar consumption can work against our best efforts to care for our health. For those times when you feel the need to have something sweet, choose an occasional treat that has a bit more to offer than just calories from sugar. Here are three options to quench your sweet treat desires:

- **Snickers ("fun size"):** The peanuts provide protein and fiber which can make you feel full and satisfied. Each "fun-size" bar contains 80 calories, 9 g sugar and 1 g protein.
- **Peanut M&M's ("fun-size"):** The peanuts provide protein and fiber, and limiting yourself to one pack helps with portion control. Each pack contains 90 calories, 9 grams of sugar, and 1.5 g of protein.
- **Reese's Peanut Butter Cup (one cup):** This snack also provides a combination of protein and a little fiber. Buying a bag of single cups helps with moderation and portion control. Each cup contains 110 calories, 11g sugar, and 2.5 g protein.



Source: Everyday Health



Food for Thought

Asparagus provides a host of health benefits. Eating asparagus on a regular basis:

- **Aids Weight Loss** – A half cup contains 20 calories (it's about 94% water), but this high fiber food takes time to digest so you feel full for a longer period of time between meals.
- **Helps Lower Blood Pressure** – Asparagus contains potassium, an important nutrient for managing blood pressure by reducing the negative impact of sodium. Asparagus also contains a compound called asparagine, which may help improve blood flow, in turn lowering blood pressure.
- **Provides Vitamin K** – One half cup provides 57% of the recommended dietary intake for Vitamin K which is an essential nutrient involved in blood clotting and bone health.

Source: Health



Editor's Pulse *by Steve Gruenwald*

It's a Small World After All

Being a child grants one a certain amount of naïveté. For example, as kids we assumed there would be an eventual maturing process of our classmates, and that the mean, or rude kids we dealt with on a day-to-day basis would one day grow up to be more well-mannered adults. With that thought, perhaps we imagined a much nicer, gracious, respectful adult world in which to live.

Gone would be the playground days of bullies getting their way either through intimidation or force simply because they were older or bigger or stronger. Gone would be the whining shouts of "not fair" when dividing up the birthday cake or heard when report cards were issued and the grades (based on solid tangibles such as performance) weren't favorable to some. Gone would be the hurtful remarks that kids sometimes say to one another to make themselves feel more important, to act tough, or just for the fun of it. Gone would be the unsanitary bathroom practices that somehow seem characteristic of young children, but certainly not of adults.

Jumping ahead several decades is the realization that due to our sinful natures, sadly little has changed in the adult world. Bullies still insist on getting their way, but now money

or pride, or simple arrogance becomes the intimidator. Cries of "not fair" are still being bellowed, as some insist on being treated equally in society regardless of how well they perform. Hurtful remarks are still hurled at others on the roadways, at ball games, and even in our churches and schools. Not even bathroom habits have improved with age since about a third of all women and men still don't wash their hands after using the bathroom despite the outbreaks of Hepatitis B and other diseases. I guess it's true: everything we learned – or didn't learn – started in Kindergarten.

So where does this lead? To anger, anxiety, and despair about the state of our sinful world? No. It leads to the cross and empty tomb where Christ's death and resurrection forgives me and all sinners of our irksome, sometimes childish ways. These child-like habits show us that sin is still present and a part of who we are no matter our age – from birth to death. This leads us to His Word so that through the Spirit our faith may mature. This leads us to a yearning for the paradise that is to come that will take us away from the childish practices of sin and into a mature world of His heavenly realm.



Published by Concordia Plans of The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod. Articles are available in text format for use in your newsletter. Please inquire. Scan the QR code or visit our website at ConcordiaPlans.org/BetterHealth to see more issues of Better Health. Please contact Steve Gruenwald, editor, with your comments.

Phone: 314-885-6718 or toll-free: 888-927-7526
Email: Steve.Gruenwald@ConcordiaPlans.org