

BETTER HEALTH

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Did you know?

Cruciferous vegetables (broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, collard greens, kale, radishes, turnips, etc.) are an excellent source of fiber, vitamins, and phytochemicals which may prevent against some types of cancer.

Try steaming or use them in a stir-fry dish. You could also try lightly coating in olive oil and adding herbs and seasonings for flavor and throw them on the grill (in a basket). You could also try adding them to soups, casseroles and pasta dishes.

Meet the new editor of Better Health

We're excited to announce that beginning in 2025, Kelly Menke will be the new editor of Better Health!

Kelly joined Concordia Plans in May 2022 as our Health and Wellness Educator. She holds a Master of Science in Public Health from Southern New Hampshire University and a Bachelor of Arts in Health Education with a Minor in Healthcare Administration from Ashford University.

Kelly has nearly two decades of experience in a variety of health and wellness-oriented roles. As a military spouse (retired) and mother of three, she has seen first-hand the health challenges and successes of people from all over the country and throughout the different stages of life one can experience. No matter her roles over the years, her primary focus has remained constant: encouraging overall healthy lifestyle choices for prevention and improved management of health concerns.



Kelly currently resides in Wentzville, Mo. with her husband, children and two large dogs. They enjoy a very active lifestyle - and strive to bear witness to what it means to be well to serve well.

Kelly looks forward to sharing insightful resources that cover a wide range of health and wellness topics, as well as sharing how her faith plays an important role in the decisions she makes for her personal and family's health.

Food for thought



According to researchers at the National Institutes of Health, staying well-hydrated may be associated with a reduced risk of developing heart failure. **Researchers found that drinking at least 40 ounces of water daily can cut the risk of dying from a heart attack by 41% for women and 54% for men.** The connection to drinking water and your heart health is this: being adequately hydrated helps to lower sodium levels, minimizing this precursor to heart failure.

Source: Harvard Health Publishing

Don't drink and fly



A small study shows that consuming alcoholic drinks while flying can put a strain on your heart. Researchers at the Institute of Aerospace Medicine found that the low cabin air pressure in a plane tends to decrease oxygen levels in the blood and increase the heart rate – and alcohol does the same thing.

The researchers had 48 people, ages 18 to 40, spend two nights in an altitude chamber: one night after drinking alcohol and the other after no alcohol was consumed. The combination of alcohol and high-altitude conditions led to a reduction in sleep quality, long periods of low-blood oxygen levels, and ultimately a strain on the cardiovascular system.

Source: The Week and NBCnews.com

Climbing stairs helps your heart

A combined nine studies involving 480,479 participants found that regularly climbing stairs plays a role in reducing the risks of cardiovascular disease and premature death. **Compared with not climbing stairs, stair climbing was associated with a 24% reduced risk of dying from any cause and a 39% lower likelihood of dying from cardiovascular disease.** Stair climbing was also linked with a reduced risk of cardiovascular disease including heart attack, heart failure and stroke.

The participants in the studies included both healthy people and those with a previous history of heart attacks. Ages ranged from 35 to 84 years old and 53% of the participants were women.

Climbing stairs also burns calories – up to four times as many as walking for the same amount of time.

The conclusion by researchers was this: if you have a choice of taking the stairs or taking an elevator, choose the stairs because doing so will help your heart.

Source: Science Daily



Health claims meet reality

In the quest to stay healthy and ward off diseases we may be swayed by diets that promise amazing results. Oftentimes, the claims aren't true.

CLAIM - A fruitarian diet will help slow the aging process, improve your immunity, give you more energy and help you lose weight. A fruitarian diet consists of eating nothing but fresh, raw fruits, seeds, and nuts. Avocados and tomatoes are often included as part of this fruit diet because they contain seeds.



REALITY - Restricting your diet to fruit alone puts you at risk for malnutrition. A fruit diet will leave you deficient in protein, iron, calcium, vitamin B (including B12) vitamin D, zinc and omega-3 fatty acids – many of the nutrients your body needs. You may also experience anemia, fatigue and a reduced immune system. Over time, the lack of calcium can also lead to osteoporosis. This “only fruit” regimen could especially be harmful for diabetics due to the large amount of natural sugar that would be consumed. Too much fruit sugar could also contribute to weight gain and complications with pancreatic and kidney conditions.

Eating fruit should be a part of your daily diet, but doctors and nutritionists recommend that consuming fruit should be no more than 25-30% of your total food intake to avoid nutritional imbalances.

CLAIM - Okra water can help with weight loss, improved digestion, and hydrated skin. Okra water is made by soaking okra pods (the edible part of the plant) in water for several hours or overnight.



REALITY - The real benefit of okra is eating it, not drinking okra-flavored water. Okra contains beneficial antioxidants, vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients. Okra is also high in fiber which has several benefits including improved digestion. The water may have traces of the micronutrients but will contain none of the fiber.

Drinking okra water may contribute to weight loss, but even tap water is known to have weight loss effects, particularly when swapped for high-calorie drinks such as soda. Drinking okra water – or any water for that matter – will help keep you hydrated.

The bottom line is that it's unclear how many nutrients pass into okra water and in what amounts. More research is needed to determine if the okra water does any good besides getting you to drink more water.

Source: American Heart Association & News Medical



High alcohol use increases heart disease risk, especially for women



Men and women who reported drinking eight or more alcoholic beverages per week - on average more than one per day- were significantly more likely to develop coronary heart disease compared with those who drank less. That's the finding of a study presented at the American College of Cardiology's Annual Scientific Session. The study involved 243,000 men and 189,000 women (with an average age of 44 years old) who did not have heart disease at the start of the study.

The findings mirror other research showing that excessive alcohol intake can lead to high blood pressure, heart failure or stroke as well as contribute to cardiomyopathy, a disorder that affects the heart muscle.

For the study, researchers categorized a person's overall alcohol intake in the following categories:

Low (one to two drinks per week for both women and men).

Moderate (three to seven drinks per week for women and three to 14 drinks per week for men).

High (eight or more drinks per week for women and 15 or more drinks per week for men).

Within four years after the start of the study, 3,108 participants were diagnosed with coronary heart disease. Within that group, researchers found that:

Women who reported high alcohol intake had a **45%** higher risk of heart disease compared with those reporting low intake and a **29%** higher risk compared with those reporting moderate intake.

Men with high overall intake were **33%** more likely to develop heart disease compared with men who had moderate intake.

Source: American College of Cardiology and Johns Hopkins Medicine

Live longer with three health habits

According to a new study published in "JAMA Network Open," three achievable lifestyle habits increase the chances of living to 100 years old:

3 HEALTHY HABITS

Physical activity | Never smoking | A healthy diet

More precisely, exercise was associated with a 31% higher likelihood that a person would become a centenarian, followed by never smoking (25% higher chance) and then a healthy diet (23% more likely).

The study involved 5,200 people with an average age of 94, and 62% of them were female.

Interestingly, researchers found that while moderate alcohol use or a person's BMI didn't contribute to living to 100 years old, those two factors also didn't greatly inhibit the likelihood of living to 100 - particularly when the top three health habits were present.

The good news is that it's never too late to start making healthy lifestyle changes. Adopting the three habits at any age can have an impact on longevity and quality of life.

Making the time to be physically active is the key to exercising, and as for a healthy diet, health experts recommend:

- Eating more plant-based foods such as vegetables, fruits, legumes, whole grains, seeds and nuts.
- Limiting animal meats high in saturated fats, as well as limit cheese and sugar.
- Consuming seafood two or three times per week and eat fish that is high in omega-3 or omega-6, such as salmon, sardines, herring, trout and sea bream (a "white" fish similar to sea bass).
- Choosing high fiber alternatives such as whole wheat pasta, brown rice or a potato with the skin on.
- Limit ultra-processed foods such as chips, cookies and crackers.

Source: Everyday Health and Healthline

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Sweetened drinks associated with Afib



Sugary sodas and artificially sweetened drinks may raise the risk of atrial fibrillation by 20% according to a study published in "Circulation: Arrhythmia and Electrophysiology." Atrial Fibrillation is a heart rhythm disorder that can lead to blood clots and strokes.

For the study, researchers examined dietary questionnaires and genetic data for more than 200,000 adults who began the study without any history of atrial fibrillation. After a

10-year follow-up, nearly 9,400 participants developed atrial fibrillation. Researchers found that those who drank six cans of soda per week were 20% more likely to develop atrial fibrillation compared to those who didn't drink any beverages with added sugar or artificial sweeteners.

Even when people limited their consumption of sugary drinks to the equivalent of three cans of soda each week, they still had a 10% higher risk of atrial fibrillation than those who didn't consume any sugary drinks.

Researchers acknowledged that the study relied on participants accurately recalling and reporting their eating and drinking habits which doesn't always provide an accurate picture. While more research is needed to confirm the connection between sweetened beverages and atrial fibrillation, their recommendation is to reduce or even avoid sugar-sweetened beverages whenever possible and drink the best alternative - water.

Source: American Heart Association & News Medical



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