

# LET'S Talk

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HEALTHY BODIES • SOUND MINDS • A SAFE PLACE TO WORK

## Posture Perfect

At some point, most people will suffer from some form of temporary back pain. For these individuals, simple activities like carrying groceries, driving or sitting for long periods of time, or bending to pick up something can cause wrenching back pain.

Often, back pain\* is due to either poor posture habits or strain from improper bending or lifting. In these cases, strains usually heal completely. However, pain and strain are likely to recur if bad habits continue.


With some simple changes, you can improve your posture while protecting and strengthening your back. Try these simple suggestions.

### Posture perfect habits

- Get in the habit of standing and sitting upright without slouching or rounding your shoulders.

\*About 10 percent of back pain can be due to serious conditions such as degenerative disk disease or herniated disks in the spine. See your doctor to rule out these conditions. Always consult a physician before beginning any new exercise program.

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## 5 Lessons for a More Healthful School Year

**IT'S BACK-TO-SCHOOL TIME** — the perfect time to set up more healthful school-day routines at home.

Consider these five strategies your “new school-year resolutions” for minimizing stress and maximizing well-being.

**1 ORGANIZE THE NIGHT BEFORE.** A mad morning rush starts everyone's day stressfully. Skip the drama by taking a few unhurried minutes in the evening to load backpacks and lay out school clothes. Are there forms to be signed? Do snacks or lunches need packing?

**2 SET A BEDTIME AND STICK TO IT.** School children need 9 to 11 hours of sleep. Kids who don't wake easily, often seem irritable or lack daytime energy need more sleep. Getting enough sleep is important for so many things, from overall growth to learning and concentration at school.

**3 MAKE BREAKFAST.** If your child hasn't eaten since dinner the night before, there's no energy to draw from — the gas tank is empty. Kids learn better with food in their stomachs.

**4 TEACH SAFETY.** Think through your child's day from the moment she leaves for school to the time she gets home. How can she stay safe — from wearing a bike helmet to avoiding strangers to keeping doors locked at home?

**5 SPELL OUT EXPECTATIONS.** Discuss appropriate classroom behavior, a homework policy, balancing social time and schoolwork, and grade goals. Set the path for them, and they'll know when they're on track.

Putting these strategies into practice can make the school experience more enjoyable for you and your child.

# Late Breaking Health News

**>>Sixty-two percent of sexual assaults in the United States are drug-facilitated,** and 5 percent of the victims are given “date rape” drugs, according to a new study at the University of Illinois in Chicago (UIC).

An estimated 100,000 sexual assaults are committed in this country each year, and the FBI says that number could be three times higher if all cases were reported, says Adam Negrusz, associate professor of forensic sciences at the UIC College of Pharmacy and the study’s lead author.

“Individuals who use drugs, with or without alcohol, are thought to be at significantly higher risk for sexual assault,” says Negrusz. “In some cases, the substances are taken voluntarily by the victims, impairing their ability to make decisions. In other cases, the substances are given to the victims without their knowledge, which may decrease their ability to identify a dangerous situation or to resist the perpetrator.”

**>>Having an “apple” body shape increases your risk for diabetes and heart disease,** and the risk may be accelerated if you also eat trans fat, according to a six-year study at Wake Forest University School of Medicine.

“Diets rich in trans fat cause a redistribution of fat tissue into the abdomen and lead to a higher body weight, even when the total dietary calories are the same,” says Lawrence L. Rudel, Ph.D., professor of pathology and biochemistry and head of the Lipid Sciences Research Program.

Trans fat is found in vegetable shortenings, some margarines, crackers, cookies, snack foods and other foods made with or fried in partially hydrogenated oils. Unlike other fats, the majority of trans fat is formed when food manufacturers turn liquid oils into solid fats, such as shortening and hard margarine, by adding hydrogen.



**>>Most people with arthritis don’t exercise enough,** and more than a third of adults with arthritis don’t exercise at all, according to a study of 27,500 people published in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*.

Even though exercise has been shown to decrease pain, delay disability and improve walking ability, people with arthritis are even more likely to be inactive than adults in the general population.

Just 37 percent of adults with arthritis met the least stringent physical activity guidelines established by a panel of experts on arthritis, physical activity and public health in 2001 — a percentage similar to people without the disease.

Twenty percent of people with arthritis reported performing some type of activity to strengthen their muscles. Both aerobic and strengthening exercises have been shown to help.

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# A Holiday Preparedness Primer

**FALL SIGNALS THE START OF A BUSY TIME OF YEAR**, from Halloween to Thanksgiving to the December holidays — delicious food, much-anticipated visitors and a change from the normal routine.

It's supposed to be a time of warmth, joy and excitement. And for many people, it is.

Still, the anxiety of having too much to do in too little time, the pressure of unrealistic expectations and the tendency to overeat and overspend can easily overshadow holiday happiness.

Here's a primer to help you enjoy the season to its fullest with a minimum of stress.

## Eat smart

The holiday season has strong ties to food and, sometimes, eating too much. To keep from overindulging:

- Don't arrive at a party starving; you're likely to overeat. Instead, before you leave home eat a piece of fruit, a small salad or a cup of low-fat yogurt.
- Avoid handfuls of anything. At the appetizer table, fill your plate three-quarters full with fresh vegetables and fruit. Reserve the remaining quarter for anything you want, even if it's high in fat, so you don't feel deprived.
- Don't feel obligated to eat everything on your plate or to have dessert.
- If you overeat, get right back into your normal routine the next day.

## Keep an eye on your finances

Come the holidays, many people carelessly throw caution and budgets to the wind. But fiscal responsibility is essential this time of year. To reduce anxiety:

- Write down expenses as they occur.
- Know how much you owe on your credit cards before you start charging.
- Give yourself plenty of time to



complete your holiday shopping. Shop with an itemized list of what you'll buy for each person and a ballpark figure of what you'll spend.

- Brainstorm for gift ideas. If you're stumped, consider what's important to the gift recipient. Consider homemade gifts if money's tight.

## Enjoy social events

The holidays are about spending time with people and doing things all of you enjoy. To simplify your schedule:

- Keep parties less stressful by having a buffet instead of a formal sit-down dinner. Serve uncomplicated dishes (made with six ingredients or fewer) that you've made before.
- Buy nonperishable party items days, even weeks, in advance. These include groceries, beverages, candles, napkins and decorations. Save the day before to buy items with a short shelf life, such as fresh fruits, vegetables and flowers.
- Cook ahead. On the day before your party, prepare salad dressings, stews, casseroles, cold sauces, soups,

desserts and dips. That way, during the party, you can spend as much time as possible with your guests.

## Take care of yourself

At holiday time, there's a tendency to let go of your regular habits. But sleeping too much, exercising less and eating lots of rich foods can lead to weight gain and sluggishness. To get the most out of the holidays:

- Get enough sleep.
- Continue your regular exercise routine.
- Eat sensibly.

## Know your stressors

Be aware of the things that may cause you anxiety, and do your best to avoid or be prepared for them. Different people respond to holiday stress in different ways. Things that distress some people are pleasurable for others.

Overall, by managing the holidays sensibly and including only the activities you and your family truly enjoy, you'll have the happy holiday you want.

# The 4 A's of Workplace Change

**CHANGE IN THE WORKPLACE EVOKES FEAR** in most people. They wonder: Will I be adequate for this new position? Will I be able to get along with my new boss? Will the downsizing allow me to keep my job?

Major changes, such as new management or downsizing, can result in a feeling of panic.

These suggestions can help you adjust and respond positively to change.

## Understanding change

When something changes, suddenly your routine is broken and you don't know what to expect.

Even if the change is for the better, the transformation can be difficult. During this time, you may feel disoriented, frustrated, angry and powerless.

One way to prepare for change is to practice the following four A's of coping with change:

- 1 AWARENESS.** Since uncertainty about the future creates the most fear and stress during a change, try to learn as much as you can about your situation. The more you learn, the less uncertainty you'll experience.
- 2 ACCEPTANCE.** You may not like the change, but if you accept it,



instead of fighting it or complaining about it, you'll feel less frustrated.

**3 ATTITUDE.** Are you being fearful or are you thinking about the possibilities for improvement the change might bring?

**4 ACTION.** This is where you do have some control over the situation. It's how you prepare and respond to change.

- DEVELOP A NETWORK.** Stay in contact with managers and coworkers from former jobs.
- LEARN NEW SKILLS.** Learn a new computer program. Take a class. Learn to make presentations.
- ASK ACTION QUESTIONS.** Whom can you talk to if a situation is getting difficult to cope with? How can you get to know a new boss or coworker?

The key to coping with change is resilience. Resilience means making the best of change in spite of setbacks, barriers or limited resources.

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- Use your abdominal muscles to hold your belly in — tighten these muscles to keep your belly from protruding, which puts excess stress on your spine.

## When seated

- Select chairs that have a straight back and low-back support.
- Keep your knees a bit higher than your hips. You may need to use a low stool to raise your feet.
- To turn while seated, don't twist at the waist; move your whole body.
- During long drives, move the seat forward and maintain a straight back.

## No strain, no pain

- Don't bend over to lift. Instead, bend your hips and knees and squat to pick up the object. Remember to keep your back straight, hold the object close to your body and never twist your body during the lift.
- If you must move a heavy object, push rather than pull when you can.

## Everyday advice

- Women should wear flat shoes or shoes with low heels (1 inch or lower).
- Exercise several times a week; a sedentary lifestyle contributes to back pain.

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