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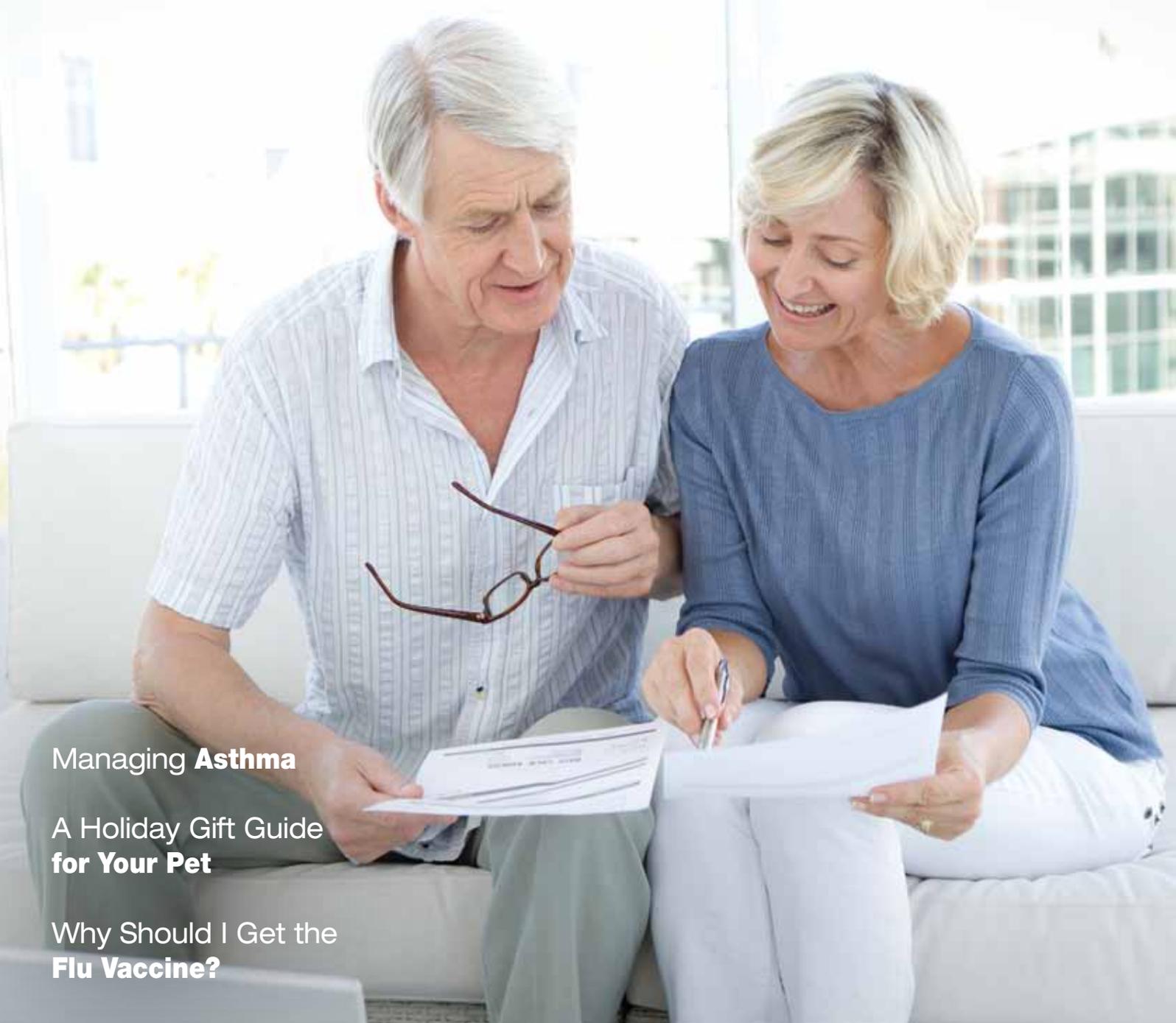
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Mission: The objective of *Healthy Cells Magazine*® is to promote a stronger health-conscious community by means of offering education and support through the cooperative efforts among esteemed health and fitness professionals in the Mid-Illinois area which includes Springfield, Decatur, Jacksonville, Taylorville, and Lincoln.

# A Perfect Fit

By Patrick Miller

Stephen Plambeck of Forreston, Illinois, has a gift. When it comes to handling and caring for dogs, he is a natural, but finding the opportunity to use this ability to his benefit (and the benefit of our four-legged friends) was a challenge. He is currently putting his powers to good use at the Carlson Canine Camp, a doggy daycare in Freeport, Illinois, but it took effort to find his calling.

Before working at Carlson Canine Camp, Stephen, like so many others, was seeking direction. Struggling with a severe learning disability, his options seemed limited. He was surviving on Social Security, but sometimes merely surviving is not enough, and a more purposeful existence can push surviving into thriving — especially for an energetic, young man. His mother suggested he contact the Illinois Department of Human Services Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS).

This contact initiated Stephen's work with DRS counselor Dawn Gimple. Dawn's mission was to find Stephen employment he was both interested in and could excel at. In other words, they set out to find the perfect fit.

Dawn began by looking into Stephen's interests and discovered he had an affinity for dogs. When an opportunity arose at Carlson Canine Camp, Dawn saw the potential for success and put Stephen in touch with them.

Stephen had his foot in the door, but it was the patrons of the doggy daycare who opened it the rest of the way. As it turned out, dogs have an affinity for Stephen, too. His natural talent and patience with dogs of all sizes and varieties was readily apparent, and even the shiest animals warmed to him. A person who instills calmness and trust in a situation where the animals are frequently stressed by unfamiliar surroundings is an asset, and Stephen provides this ability with intuitive ease.

Stephen's days are now filled with the daily care of a large number of canines in a professional kennel environment. Beyond the less glamorous aspects of the job that include cleaning and disinfecting enclosures, he is also responsible for feeding, providing



medication, and, perhaps most importantly, regularly exercising the animals in a safe environment.

He not only has employment, but he is doing something he genuinely cares about, and has a passion and talent for. Stephen had hurdles to overcome, but with the help of Dawn Gimple and DRS, he was able to find a situation where needs were fulfilled for himself, his employer, and a whole lot of dogs.

The success of Stephen at his new vocation is summed up best by his employer, Jan Carlson, Owner of Carlson Canine Camp. In a letter to Dawn, she wrote, "Thank you so much for the work you do and helping both my business and Stephen to find a way to come together for a great match."

*DHS's Division of Rehabilitation Services is the state's lead agency serving individuals with disabilities. DRS works in partnership with people with disabilities and their families to assist them in making informed choices to achieve full community participation through employment, education, and independent living opportunities. To learn more, call 1-877-761-9780 Voice, 1-866-264-2149 TTY, or 312-957-4881 VP, or go to [www.drs.illinois.gov/success](http://www.drs.illinois.gov/success).*



# Managing Asthma: Learn to Breathe Easier

Submitted by Vono Medical Supplies

Most people have little trouble climbing a flight of stairs or taking a brisk walk, but these simple activities can be tough for someone with asthma. Although there's no cure, you can breathe easier by knowing how to keep the condition under control.

Asthma is a common, long-lasting disease that affects the lungs. It can begin in childhood or adulthood. More than 25 million Americans have asthma, including seven million children. Without proper care, asthma can become serious, even deadly. But most people with asthma learn to manage the disease so they have few symptoms, or none at all.

Major symptoms of asthma include wheezing (a whistling sound when breathing), shortness of breath, coughing that's worse at night and early morning, and chest tightness. These symptoms arise from reactions that narrow the airways, the tubes that carry air into and out of your lungs. When symptoms flare up, it's called an asthma attack.

The airways of people with asthma are prone to inflammation, which causes the airways to swell and narrow. They become extra sensitive to certain substances that are breathed in. These are called "triggers."

Asthma triggers can worsen inflammation, and cause the muscles around the airways to tighten, further shrinking air passages and making it harder to breathe. Cells in the airways might also produce excess mucus (a sticky, thick liquid), making the airways even narrower.

Common asthma triggers include cigarette smoke, air pollution, mold, house dust mites, and furry animal dander. Other asthma triggers include weather changes, exercise, stress, and respiratory infections, like common colds.

"Preventing such infections is important," stresses Dr. Stewart Levine, an asthma expert at NIH. "People who have asthma should also obtain a flu shot, as they may be at higher risk for flu-related complications."

Asthma is one of the most common causes of chronic (long-term) illness in children — and some symptoms appear more often in children than in adults. "Children have smaller airways, so if they have asthma, they tend to wheeze more often, particularly during the night," says Dr. Robert Lemanske, Jr., a pediatric asthma expert at the University of Wisconsin.

Some preschool age children frequently wheeze when they get colds, but don't go on to develop chronic asthma. "But some kids start wheezing at age three, and the problem continues," says Lemanske. "These kids also tend to be more allergic."

A doctor will test for asthma by doing a physical exam and asking about your medical history to learn when, and how often, your symptoms occur. Your doctor may also ask you to breathe in and blow out into the tube of a spirometer. This device measures how much air you can breathe out, and how fast you can do it.

"It's sometimes tough to do a spirometry test on young children," says Dr. Michelle Freemer, an NIH asthma expert. For youngsters, a doctor will do a physical exam, and may perform other tests to identify possible asthma triggers.

Whether you're younger or older, it's important to know how to manage your asthma. Work with your doctor to develop a written asthma action plan. Your action plan should spell out the daily treatment plan to help control your asthma. This may include recommendations for medications, and for avoiding exposure to your triggers. The action plan should also give specific instructions for what to do when asthma symptoms start, and what actions to take if symptoms worsen, including when to seek medical attention, go to the hospital, or call an ambulance.

For some patients, Freemer notes that a hand-held device, called a peak flow meter, can help you monitor your asthma. You blow into the device to measure how strongly your lungs can force air out. If the meter shows that your air flow is lower than normal, you can use your action plan to adjust your treatment.

"There are two main types of medicines for managing asthma: quick-relief and long-term controllers," says Levine. Quick-relief medicines — such as short-acting bronchodilator inhalers — are used to relax the muscles in the airways to make it easier to breathe within a few minutes. If exercise is an asthma trigger, doctors may recommend taking this medicine five to 15 minutes before exercise or strenuous activity.

Long-term control medicines — such as inhaled corticosteroids — are used every day to help control symptoms and prevent asthma attacks. "Inhaled corticosteroids are recommended as the preferred long-term control medications for most children and adults," says Freemer. "Taken daily, they help reduce inflammation to control the disease."

If young children have trouble taking inhaled medications, there are masks and other devices that can help. Some kids are given a nebulizer, a portable machine that releases medicine in a mist.

A small percentage of people with asthma have a hard time controlling their symptoms, even when they take their medicines regularly. Their airways become extremely inflamed, and particularly sensitive to asthma triggers. They wheeze more, wake more throughout the night, and are at greater risk for breathing failure and trips to urgent care. If your asthma is severe, see a specialist to identify the most appropriate, personalized treatment.

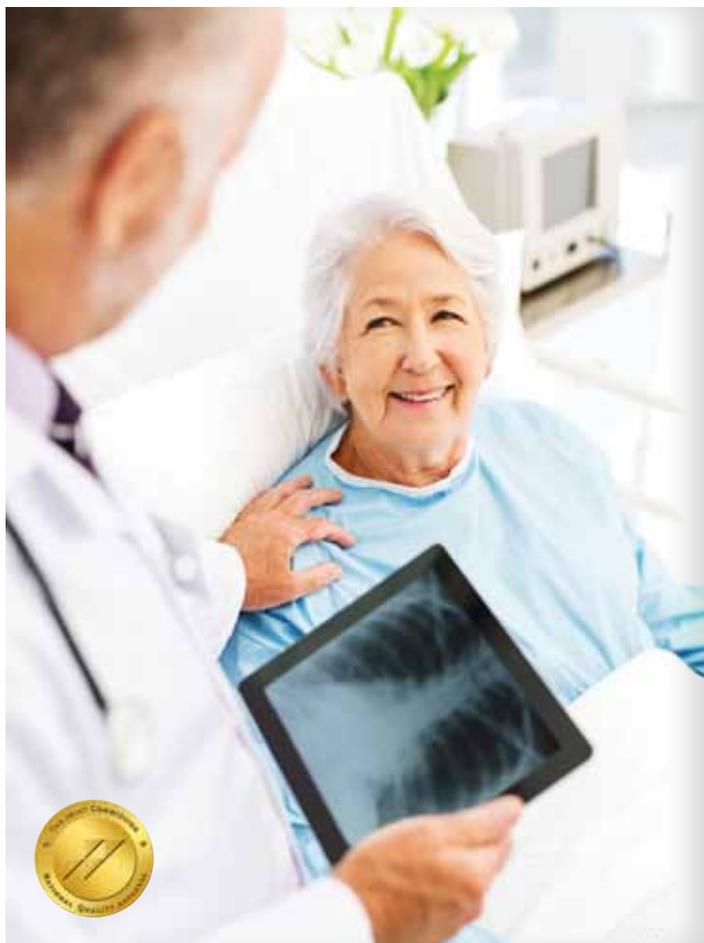
The underlying causes of asthma are still unclear. Researchers believe asthma is caused by a combination of your genes and environmental factors. If you have allergies, or a parent who has asthma, you're at increased risk for the disease. Obesity and exposure to cigarette smoke may also raise the risk of developing asthma. NIH scientists are continuing to investigate the causes of this disease.

If you or your loved ones have asthma, identify your triggers, and try to avoid them. Monitor your symptoms, and take prescribed medications regularly.

"For most people with asthma, if you take your prescribed medicines, and stay away from the triggers, you'll do well," Levine says. Keep your asthma under control so you can keep living life to the fullest.

*Vono Medical Supplies carries nebulizers to help with your asthma needs. Stop by our store in Springfield at 400 N 1st Street, or in Litchfield at 913 W. Union. We can also be reached at 217-522-2403, or online at [www.vono.com](http://www.vono.com).*

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# Battling Depression

## Hope and Help for Happy Holidays

By Holly Schurter



The holiday season is coming, and everyone is happy, right? Wrong. For many of us, the holiday season brings stress, even depression. Instead of excitement and anticipation, we feel overwhelmed and drained. Just the thought of another holiday concert, party, or family event makes us want to hide, and our to-do list, bulging with shopping lists, menu plans, and reminders about cards, gifts, and visits overpowers our holiday cheer. In addition, the holidays can bring to the forefront difficult family dynamics, or remind us of the loss of a loved one.

Seasonally-induced holiday stress or depression, sometimes called the “holiday blues,” is most often temporary, and is usually the result of tension and pressure. It can be managed by simplifying

holiday plans, or adjusting expectations. Once the holidays are over and the pressure lessens, we regain our emotional balance, and life gets back to normal.

But clinical depression is different. According to Dr. Anjum Bashir, “Depression is a serious medical illness that significantly interferes with a person’s behavior, physical health, and interaction with others. People with depression are often unable to carry out and enjoy the normal activities of everyday life. The additional demands of the holiday season can make it even more difficult to cope with the illness.”

Common symptoms of depression are feelings of worthlessness, loss of interest in pleasurable activities, fatigue, difficulty concentrat-

ing, irritability, and social withdrawal. It's easy to see why the holiday season can aggravate symptoms that people with depression already experience on a daily basis. Who wants to shop for gifts when it's a struggle to just make it to the grocery store? The prospect of decorating the house requires extra energy that simply isn't there. And it may be impossible to make it through a holiday party with a smile plastered on your face, when all you feel inside is hopelessness and pain.

Whether you find yourself suffering from the "holiday blues," or have a more serious depressive disorder, following are some tips to reduce stress, and experience the joy of the season.

- **Set reasonable expectations.** Focus on the things that are most important to you and your family. Remember that perfect celebrations only happen in magazines!
- **Budget your time as well as your money and other resources.** What is reasonable, given your circumstances? Talk over your plans with a family member, trusted friend, or a mental health therapist.
- **Enjoy the small pleasures of the season.** De-stress after a shopping trip with a cup of cocoa, or listen to music you love while you take on a chore that stresses you. Be deliberate in looking for the positive or humorous aspects of your responsibilities.
- **Get help.** If you are seeing a mental health professional, consider scheduling a few extra sessions. If not, this is a good time to begin. Talking with someone skilled at identifying and treating issues of stress and depression can relieve symptoms, and keep things from getting worse. In addition, be sure to continue taking any prescribed medication, and don't skip doses.
- **Pay attention to your physical well-being.** Regular exercise is more important than ever, along with eating healthy, well-balanced meals — certainly a challenge during the holiday season! Make sleep

a priority. Don't stay out too late or skimp on sleep in order to get everything accomplished.

Depressive illnesses, even the most severe cases, are highly treatable disorders. As with many illnesses, the earlier that treatment can begin, the more effective it is, and the greater the likelihood that a recurrence of the depression can be prevented. Typical treatments for depression are antidepressant medications and talk therapy (psychotherapy.) There is a new treatment option for depression, called Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (TMS), which does not involve any type of drugs or medication. Instead, TMS delivers focused magnetic stimulation to the part of the brain involved in regulating mood. Well-tolerated by most patients, TMS has been effective in treating depressive disorders in adults who have not responded well to antidepressant medications.

Whether you suffer from the holiday blues, or something more serious, taking steps to manage your symptoms appropriately will help you survive and thrive during the holiday season, and into the New Year.

*For more information on mental illness, TMS Therapy for depression, or Quotient Testing for ADHD diagnosis, please contact Anjum Bashir, MD at 217-422-0027 or 309-808-2326. He is one of the few physicians in Central Illinois offering TMS Therapy and Quotient Testing. His Decatur office is located at 1900 E Lake Shore Drive, Suite 201, and he also has an office in Bloomington. Most insurance companies, including BC/BS, UBH, and Medicare, cover TMS therapy.*

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# Seven Foods to Supercharge Your Gut Bacteria

By Meghan Jardine, MS, MBA, RD, LD, CDE

**D**id you know we are only 10 percent human? Ninety percent of our cells are nonhuman microbial cells. Since our diet influences our microbes, it's true: we really are what we eat.

The good news is that you can cultivate a new microbiota, formerly known as gut flora, in just 24 hours — by changing what you eat. Bacteria that live in our intestinal tract, also known as gut bugs, flourish off of colorful, plant-based foods.

The latest studies on microbiota continue to show us how the process works, which explains why the mere mention of gut bacteria sparks conversations in both research labs and newsrooms.

Healthy gut bugs act like quarterbacks in our intestinal tracts: they call the shots and control the tempo by helping our bodies digest and absorb nutrients, synthesize certain vitamins, and rally against intruders, such as influenza and toxic cancer-forming carcinogens. In addition to boosting our immune system, microbiota send messages to our brain, and help regulate metabolism.

## Gut Bacteria Diet

Over time, microbiota form colonies to combat obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, autoimmune disease, and even certain forms of cancer.

**The bottom line: The more diversity you have in your gut bacteria, the better off you'll fare in the long run.**

Here are seven gut bacteria foods to help you get started:

### 1. Jerusalem Artichokes

*Benefits:* High in inulin, strong prebiotic potential

*Background:* Inulin, an insoluble fiber, travels through our bodies from the small to large intestine, our colon. Once this insoluble

fiber finds its way to the colon, it ferments into healthy micro flora. Other good sources of inulin include asparagus, leeks, onions, and bananas. Note: it's good to ease into eating Jerusalem artichokes, as they may cause distress to people with sensitive digestive tracts.

### 2. Bananas

*Benefits:* Restores health of the bacterial community, may reduce inflammation

*Background:* Like a peacemaker, bananas work to maintain harmony among microbes in the bacterial community, known as phyla. This is one reason bananas are a standard prescription for an upset stomach. Bananas may also reduce inflammation, due to high levels of potassium and magnesium.

### 3. Polenta

*Benefits:* This high-fiber, corn-based complex carbohydrate has a fermentable component

*Background:* Corn, the base of polenta, earns credit for fostering a healthy gut. Polenta's insoluble fiber travels directly to the colon, where it ferments into multiple strands of gut flora. It's good to note that polenta, like kombucha, varies in fermentable components.

### 4. Broccoli and Other Cruciferous Vegetables (kale, cabbage, and cauliflower)

*Benefits:* Cruciferous vegetables contain sulfur-containing metabolites, known as glucosinolates, which are broken down by microbes to release substances that reduce inflammation, and reduce the risk of bladder, breast, colon, liver, lung, and stomach cancer.



Background: Like a game of Pac Man, glucosinolates latch onto carcinogenic intruders in our colon, and kindly show these pathogens the way out. Over the long run, this pays big dividends: studies show people who eat the most cruciferous vegetables reduce their risk of colorectal cancer by 18 percent. One more reason to load up on leafy greens!

### 5. Blueberries

*Benefits:* Can modify the microbiota to enhance immune function

*Background:* Our eyes are naturally drawn to anthocyanins, the pigment that gives blueberries a bold color, for good reason. We're not sure if it's the antioxidants, vitamin K compounds, or fiber that gives blueberries clout as a super-food, but we're impressed with the results. Studies continue to show blueberries may help strengthen our memory, improve our immune system, and diversify our gut bacteria.

### 6. Beans

*Benefits:* Any legume will help release short-chain fatty acids (SCFA) that strengthen your intestine cells, improve absorption of micronutrients, and help with weight loss.

*Background:* Beans feed good gut bugs, which in turn, revs up your immune system. Calorie for calorie, beans offer the most nutritional bang for your buck. They are packed with fiber, protein, folate, and B vitamins, which play a role in regulating a healthy gut and brain.

Bonus: Researchers from Toronto just published a study in the journal Obesity that finds beans (pulses) improve weight loss by enhancing satiety.

### 7. Fermented Plant-based Foods (sauerkraut, kimchi, tempeh, and soy sauce)

*Benefits:* Fermented foods, such as beet radish kimchi, or pickled ginger sauerkraut, are trending for a reason. They directly inoculate your gut with healthy live microorganisms that will crowd out the unhealthy bacteria, improve the absorption of minerals, and improve overall health.

*Background:* Fermented plant-based foods are probiotics that have been found to improve the health of the intestinal cells, improve immune function, decrease allergies, reduce the risk of colon cancer, and treat diarrhea. You can make fermented foods at home, and just as easily pick them up from a local grocery or health food store.

*Meghan Jardine, MS, MBA, RD, LD, CDE, is the associate director of diabetes nutrition education at the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine, a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting effective medical practice, higher standards in research, and preventive nutrition. For more information, visit [www.pcrm.org](http://www.pcrm.org).*

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# Support Group Helps Amputees Get the Most Out of Their Prosthetics

By David Heitz



The “Limbs Up Crew” amputee support group meets the second Friday of every month at the CPO Peoria office.

When someone loses a limb, a prosthetic can restore the independence and mobility an amputee may have feared they forever lost. But living with a prosthetic doesn't come easy at first. It takes a lot of hard work learning how to use it properly, and people with prosthetics need support and encouragement from fellow amputees. They are finding it with prosthetic support groups in Peoria, Rockford, Springfield. Jerry Tibbs, a 63-year-old farmer who lost both legs below the knee, helped found the Peoria group, also known as the 'Limbs Up Crew' last year. It meets the second Friday of the month at the Peoria CPO (Comprehensive Prosthetics and Orthotics) office.

Tibbs lost both of his legs below the knee after lengthy heart surgery resulted in circulatory problems. “I had a lot of visions of me being in a wheelchair the rest of my life, and it literally scared the crap out of me,” Tibbs said upon coming out of the fog of surgery, and realizing he had lost his legs. “I couldn't work on my farm and do my tractors or feed my goats; or all of the things I wanted to do, so I worked double-triple-extra hard when I got my new legs.”

As a bilateral amputee with prosthetics, Tibbs said he had to learn how to walk all over again. “There's no balance there. You've got to program your mind to do your balance on your legs. It would be like walking on stilts all the time.”

These days, Tibbs tends to his 16-acre farm just as he did before he lost his legs, from changing the oil on his tractor to feeding his goats. He provides inspiration to others in the Limbs Up Crew who may have just received their prosthetic and are struggling with getting the hang of using it. About 10 people regularly attend the monthly Peoria meeting, Tibbs said, ranging in age from the early 20s to late 70s. The group discusses things such as phantom pains that occur where their limbs used to be, to dealing with excessive sweat from a prosthetic in the summer months. “We try to encourage them that there's life beyond their amputation,” Tibbs said. “You can still live a normal life.”

They even talk about how to handle stares from people who may be curious about their prosthetic. “If you see them staring at you, you just go up and explain it to them,” Tibbs said. “Kids are

“We try to encourage them that there’s life beyond their amputation, you can still live a normal life.”

— Jerry Tibbs

really interested. They say, ‘Where did you get those robot legs?’ I tell them I didn’t eat my vegetables when I was a young kid, and that’s how I lost my legs.”

Susan McAllister lost her leg above the knee more than 30 years ago in an accident. She said it took many years for her to get around as well as she does now. She said newcomers to the group often don’t realize that it takes a lot of work to perfect getting the most out of their prosthetic.

“A lot of it is answering questions like, ‘If this is wrong, how do you fix this?’ and ‘Is this normal?’ or ‘Why is this happening?’”

McAllister explained. She said guest speakers regularly visit the Peoria support group. Visitors have included representatives from the Secretary of State’s office to discuss disability driving, experts regarding the Americans with Disabilities Act, providers of services to make cars handicapped accessible and other speakers encouraging more independence.

“A big part of it is mental,” McAllister said, of living with a prosthetic. “Once (the limb) is gone, you can’t get it back. A doctor may say you will walk normal like before, but it’s never going to be like before.”

Tibbs said for the first four or five weeks, he had to practice walking on his legs every day, plus he attended therapy three times a week. “I remember being really scared at first. I had no balance unless I was holding on to those bars. You learn to trust your legs. You have to trust your legs.”

Tibbs and McAllister say they have made the most of their amputations by having prosthetics, and could not imagine life without them. “My socket is a socket I kind of designed myself,” Tibbs said. “It has a Farmall print around it. I’m a collector. I say I’m a Farmall man from head to toe.”

*CPO has more than 20 locations including offices in Peoria, as well as the cities where the support groups meet. CPO offers innovation in prosthetics, orthotics, and pedorthics, with compassionate care and attentive customer service. You can learn more about Comprehensive Prosthetics and Orthotics, as well as find a directory of all of their locations, at [www.cpousa.com](http://www.cpousa.com); or call them for more information at 217-717-9221.*

Photo courtesy of Comprehensive Prosthetics and Orthotics

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# When a Part of Your Brain Dies

By Sapan S. Desai, MD, PhD, MBA, Vascular Surgeon and Vice Chair of Research, Department of Surgery, Southern Illinois University

Imagine if you woke up one morning and could no longer move the left side of your body. Your arm and leg are frozen. You consciously tell your fingers to move, but nothing happens. Nightmare? Yes, but one from which many people won't recover. This is a major stroke, and it is the fourth leading cause of death in the United States. Stroke is an \$80,000,000,000 (BILLION!) problem, and that is just the healthcare costs. Lost productivity and disability lead to billions of dollars more in cost to society. In fact, only one in ten people who have a stroke will ever return to their original level of functioning.

Averaged out, someone has a stroke every minute of every day. Almost 90 percent of these 600,000 strokes per year have to do with defects in the blood supply to the brain. One of the leading causes of stroke is the buildup of plaque within the arteries that provide blood to the brain. Known as the carotid arteries, almost one in ten people have disease within these vessels by the age of 65.

The warning signs for stroke include sudden numbness or weakness in an arm, a leg, or both; slurred speech or difficulty getting your words out; and sudden, often temporary, blindness in one of your eyes. These signs indicate that you may be having a temporary loss of blood flow to part of your brain, and is a serious warning that you may be having a stroke. If you experience any of these symptoms, you need to seek medical attention immediately, even if they resolve (which is referred to as a mini-stroke or transient ischemic attack).

Diagnosing carotid artery disease is straightforward. A noninvasive, 20-minute ultrasound can tell doctors whether or not you have the disease, and, if so, how severe the plaque buildup is. If the degree of plaque accumulation is severe enough, you may benefit from a surgery that can dramatically reduce your chances of developing a stroke. In

some situations, such as with patients having previous neck cancers or severe heart disease, carotid stenting may be preferred over surgery. In most cases, however, surgery is the preferred option, having half the risk of peri-procedural stroke as is seen with carotid stenting.

Surgery for carotid artery disease is done via an incision in the neck, which can often be hidden within the skin folds. The artery is opened, the plaque removed, and the artery patched closed to allow blood to flow to the brain normally. The entire operation usually takes about two hours, and most people go home the next day.

It is possible to decrease your risk of stroke. Eat healthy and exercise — that helps every part of your body. If you smoke — stop. There are a lot of resources to help you quit smoking, and this is one of the biggest favors you can do to your body. You may benefit from being on medications that lower your cholesterol (statins), and most people benefit from taking a baby aspirin every day. As always, consult with your physician before starting any diet or exercise plan, or starting any new medications.

*Dr. Desai is a vascular surgeon and the vice chair of research in the department of surgery at Southern Illinois University. He is the author of dozens of textbooks in medicine, and has published numerous peer-reviewed publications on a variety of topics in vascular surgery. He has a pet dog and a pet bird, but because of their heart-healthy diet and exercise routine, he doesn't think they will ever need carotid artery surgery. SIU Vascular Surgery Clinic is located at 340 W. Miller Street, Level 1 in Springfield. To schedule an appointment, call 217-545-8000; or check them out online at [siumed.edu/vascular](http://siumed.edu/vascular).*

Photo credit: RapidEye/iStock

# Memorial's Festival of Trees Returns Millions to Community for Health Initiatives

Submitted by Memorial Medical Center

Most people are familiar with Memorial's Festival of Trees, one of the most popular holiday traditions in central Illinois, with more than 30,000 visitors each year.

What they may not know is that since the festival began in 1989, it has raised more than \$3.9 million for healthcare-related projects and programs within Memorial Health System, and in the Springfield community.

The festival is sponsored by the Memorial Medical Center Foundation. Each year, the foundation awards hundreds of thousands of dollars in health-related grants for community and health system initiatives. Proceeds from the Festival of Trees are one of the primary sources of revenue for these grants.

Earlier this year, for example, the foundation awarded more than \$500,000 in grants for 30 projects. The foundation's grants are distributed only to central Illinois organizations with 501(c)(3) classifications in communities served by Memorial Health System. Grants are not awarded to individuals.

One of this year's grants went to Southern Illinois University School of Medicine's Department of Surgery-Otolaryngology. The more than \$52,000 grant provided listening and spoken language services via teletherapy to children who are deaf or hard of hearing, and their families.

These services will help these children and their families to overcome obstacles due to travel distances, transportation challenges, and patient/family financial hardships. Teletherapy services will allow children with hearing loss the opportunity to learn to listen and talk at a level comparable to their hearing peers.

Teletherapy involves video conferencing over a secure internet connection directly into a family's home. The grant will support the provision of listening and spoken language therapy to children in low-income families in Illinois, and the purchase of 12 iPads to be loaned to these families to support these home services.



*Since 1989, Memorial's Festival of Trees has raised more than \$3.9 million for healthcare-related projects and programs within Memorial Health System, and in the Springfield community.*

The iPads are programmed to only permit access to this teletherapy initiative. The therapy program provides weekly one-hour therapy sessions for each child for 42 weeks.

Another grant for more than \$23,500 will help the Memorial Weight Loss & Wellness Center obtain recognition from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as a diabetes prevention recognition program. The center will develop a community-based program to prevent or delay the onset of diabetes through lifestyle changes.

There are five CDC-certified programs in Illinois, but none of them are in central Illinois. Prediabetes is a serious health condition that increases the risk of developing Type 2 diabetes; a person with prediabetes has higher than normal blood sugar levels, but not high enough for a diagnosis of diabetes. In 2012, 35 percent of U.S. adults aged 20 and older had prediabetes; most were not aware of their condition.

*Memorial's Festival of Trees will be held Nov. 21 – 29 at the Orr Building on the Illinois State Fairgrounds. For more information, visit [MemorialsFestivalOfTrees.com](http://MemorialsFestivalOfTrees.com).*

Photo credit: Kara Slating/Memorial Health System



John Sigle,  
DPM, FACFAS

# Diabetics at Higher Risk for Foot Problems

By John M. Sigle, DPM, FACFAS, Foot & Ankle Center of Illinois

This year marks the 75th Anniversary of the American Diabetes Association (ADA). Each November, tens of thousands of Americans join the ADA's crusade to heighten the nation's awareness on diabetes, and to inspire millions of people who are impacted by the disease to live healthy and active lifestyles.

This year's theme focuses on healthy eating. Recipes and cooking techniques from noted chefs and cookbook authors will be featured throughout the month on the ADA website. Although eating well and being active are essential ingredients for managing diabetes, it is also important to recognize that diabetics are at a higher risk for developing foot problems than non-diabetics. Here is a basic overview of the foot problems that are related to diabetes, and simple preventive measures.



## Peripheral Neuropathy

Peripheral neuropathy is a predisposing factor for diabetic foot complications and development of foot ulcers. A progressive and irreversible disease, it damages nerves and lessens the ability to sense heat, cold, and pain. A loss of feeling leads to injuries, like blisters and infection. It also affects moisture in your skin, causing dryness and cracking. Unhealed sores can turn into gangrene, and lead to amputation. Nerve damage can lead to changes in the shape of your toes and feet.

## Peripheral Vascular Disease

Diabetes damages the blood vessels, and leads to poor blood flow to the lower extremities. As the blood vessels narrow and harden, it makes it more difficult to fight infection and heal. Poor circulation decreases sensation, making it difficult to gauge temperatures. Walking can cause intermittent claudication (pain in calve muscle). The combination of peripheral neuropathy and vascular disease cause major problems. Unhealed sores can turn into gangrene and amputation.

## Foot Ulcers

Ulcers usually appear on the bottom of the feet. Treatment depends on the nature of the ulcer. X-rays can determine if bone is infected. The site can be cleaned by removing dead tissue, and antibiotics may be administered. Treatment by a vascular surgeon may be necessary

if an ulcer is due to poor circulation. Special wound treatment may be required if a wound fails to heal. Special therapeutic shoes are usually prescribed to prevent ulcers.

## Skin changes

The nerves that control moisture and oil production in the foot are flawed. Consequently, skin becomes dry, and prone to crack and peel.

## Calluses

Diabetics are prone to calluses because there are high-pressure areas under the foot. Often, they turn into open sores, if they are not properly treated in a timely fashion. Improper removal of calluses and corns with chemical agents or unsterile tools can lead to serious consequences. Skin moisturizers need to be carefully applied to avoid infection.

## Toenail Fungus

Toenail fungus can lead to further infection and complications for diabetics if left unchecked. It can also lead to complications if it is in conjunction with an ingrown toenail. There is a wide range of conventional treatments and medications available, with varying success rates. New laser treatments are available, and have higher success rates (70-80 percent) of eradicating the fungus with no side effects from medications.

## Foot Deformities

Foot deformities, such as hammertoes, claw toes, and bunions, can increase the risk of calluses, corns, blisters, ulcers, and infections. Increased friction from shoes can cause problems. Therapeutic shoes are prescribed to accommodate changes in foot shape. In some cases, operative treatment is necessary.

## Amputation

Diabetics have a much higher chance of having their foot or leg amputated than non-diabetics, because peripheral arterial disease (PAD) restricts blood flow. It is estimated that 73,000 lower-limb amputations were performed in 2010.

## Prevention

Most of us pay little attention to our feet compared to other parts of our body. This is a problem, especially if you have diabetes. Regular inspection of your feet is essential on a daily basis. It won't cost you a nickel, and it is one of the best ways to prevent foot complications. There are many other things you can do to care for your feet. Here are some tips:

- Wash your feet daily
- Keep circulation flowing in your feet when inactive
- Be active, and exercise regularly
- Always protect your feet by wearing socks and shoes
- Protect your feet from extreme temperatures
- Moisturize your skin regularly
- Trim your nails carefully
- Wear comfortable shoes that fit properly

The National Diabetes Education Program (NDEP) recommends that diabetics receive foot checks at least twice a year. Frequent visits may be required for the treatment of open wounds or conditions that are more chronic.

Ask your podiatrist about Medicare's Therapeutic Shoe Program for diabetics. This is a fantastic program, and one of Medicare's successes. The program provides one pair of diabetic shoes, and three pair of special sole inserts every year for free. The shoes and inserts will help prevent a callus and ulcer from developing. Eligibility requirements require a medical confirmation that you have a foot ulcer, nerve function problem, reduced blood flow, previous amputation, or foot deformity, such as a hammertoe, claw toe, or bunion. Prescription shoes are a safe and effective way to minimize your risk of chronic problems.

Podiatric technology continues to advance every day. Many of the recent innovations in wound care and operative care are bringing new hope to diabetics.

*Contact Dr. Sigle or Dr. Gonzalez at the Foot & Ankle Center of Illinois if you are interested in learning more about wound care advancements for chronic ulcers, and cutting-edge pain free lasers to treat skin grafts, ulcers, wounds, and diabetic neuropathy. The Foot & Ankle Center of Illinois has clinic locations in Springfield, Decatur, and Carlinville, IL. Call (217) 787-2700 for an appointment, or visit the patient library at [myfootandanklecenter.com](http://myfootandanklecenter.com) for more information.*

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# Health Alliance **MEDICARE**<sup>SM</sup>

## Coaches Medicare and Other Members Through Important Healthcare Coverage Decisions

By Gemma Long



**T**he team at Health Alliance treats you like a person, not a policy. The goal is to deliver top-notch insurance that fits with your individual needs and budget. Health Alliance has tens of thousands of doctors in its network, hundreds of network hospitals, more than 400,000 members, and 600-plus Health Alliance employees, all here to serve you.

Health Alliance provides health insurance to all kinds of people, whether you're getting insurance through an employer, or purchasing your own, because you're 65 and older and on Medicare, or younger and self-employed.

Sue Lange and Carolyn Williams are longtime employees of Health Alliance. Sue has been with the company for eight years, and worked in the insurance industry for 20; and Carolyn, who has worked in insurance for almost two decades, has spent 14 of those years with Health Alliance.

Carolyn says this is a very busy time of year for Health Alliance. "The Annual Election Period (AEP) for Medicare is set for this time every year; between October 15 and December 7, when people can make a change to their existing plan, or enroll in a new plan. We are getting a lot of calls. Every year, we can start talking to customers



about Medicare from October 1, but we cannot accept applications until October 15, as per Medicare guidelines,” says Carolyn. New Medicare plans are effective January 1, 2016.

For non-Medicare 2016 coverage, the Open Enrollment Period (OEP) is November 1, 2015 to January 31, 2016. People may qualify for Special Enrollment Periods, allowing them to enroll outside of OEP, if they have certain life events, like getting married, having a baby, or losing other coverage. This kind of coverage is for people without Medicare who don’t get their coverage through an employer.

Health Alliance prides itself on being based locally, in Champaign-Urbana, with fully-trained staff on hand to take calls or meet with members and potential members in person. “When we talk to a customer on the phone and go over the benefits of an appropriate plan, we always give our extension number so that person is able to call us back and speak to the employee who knows their situation. All of our conversations are documented, so if the person who has taken the call is not available, whomever the customer speaks to will be able to quickly grasp the details of the situation and help them,” says Carolyn.

Health Alliance staff have the time and know-how to walk customers through the application process as required. Sue says the customer service is second to none. “We are here to help. We listen carefully to each and every person as they’re talking, so that we know the questions to ask them in order to give them the coverage they need.”

What is most impressive about Health Alliance is its high members retention, says Sue. “We have a 98 percent rate of membership retention with our Medicare Advantage members.”



**Carolyn Williams**



**Sue Lange**

Both agreed there is now a greater need to educate customers on the ins and outs of health insurance because of the Affordable Care Act. “It’s the law. They must have insurance. We can help them choose a plan that is good for them, and with subsidies, it’s not going to cost them as much as they first think. A lot of people think they don’t need health insurance, so really much of what we are doing now is about changing people’s attitude toward insurance in general,” says Sue.



Those seeking health insurance are able to find the advice they need, thanks to Health Alliance, because its staff takes the time to walk customers through the plans, and put them at ease about these important decisions.

Carolyn says anyone is welcome to call for information. “We do not ask for any personal information upfront, other than the county in which they live, how old they are, and whether or not they are a tobacco user.” This applies to non-Medicare customers.

Sue added those calling for information about a plan may be asked their estimated income for the following year to see if they are eligible for help paying for their plan. “You might be surprised to learn that we don’t ask any health-related questions on the applications, and there are no issues with insuring those who are pregnant,” said Sue.

The team at Health Alliance is so flexible, they’ll not only correspond with you over the phone or in person, but also on email. Ordinarily, the phones are manned Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., but during Medicare enrollment, between October and mid-February, there will be someone available to take your call between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m., seven days a week. Outside of these times, customers are invited to leave a message, and a member of the team will respond the next business day.

You can rest assured you will be speaking to someone who understands clearly the plan they are presenting to you. Health Alliance staff are from all walks of life, all ages, and backgrounds. “We pride ourselves on the fact that when you call us, you will get to speak to a real

person. We often hear from people who have called other health plans, and they have had to punch in many numbers to speak to someone on the phone, having to then leave a message,” said Sue.

In fact, Health Alliance believes so strongly in the importance of education that it puts on Medicare seminars throughout central and southern Illinois, so customers can go over plans details and ask questions.

**In Illinois, Health Alliance offers employer group plans, individual and family plans, Medicare Advantage plans, Medicare group plans, Medicare Supplement plans, Dual-Eligible Special Needs Plans, Medicaid-only plans, State of Illinois Employee plans, and State of Illinois Retiree plans through Total Retiree Advantage Illinois. Health Alliance is located at 206 W. Anthony Drive in Champaign; just off Interstate 74 and Neil Street, near Alexander’s Steakhouse. Members can log on to [YourHealthAlliance.org](http://YourHealthAlliance.org) and have instant access to tools and info to help them better manage their coverage. For individual plans, call 1-877-686-1168, group plans 1-800-851-3379, ext. 8024 and Medicare 1-888-382-9771 (711 TTY/TDD).**

Health Alliance Medicare is an HMO and PPO plan with a Medicare contract. Enrollment in Health Alliance Medicare depends on contract renewal.  
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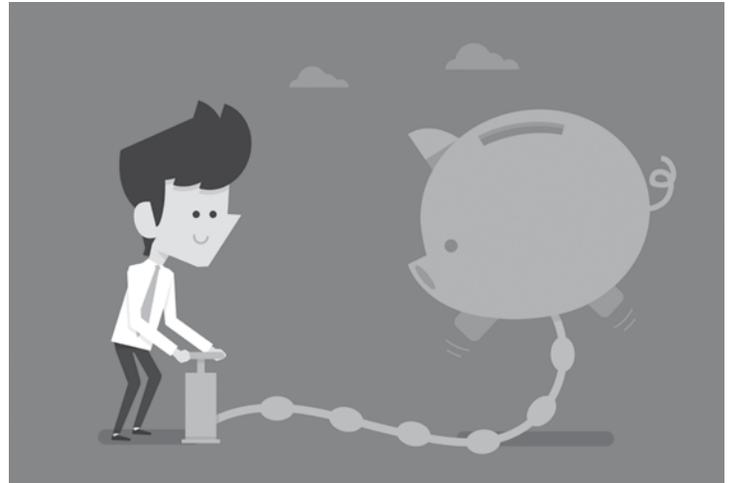
# Are Your Savings Accounts Hurting Your Retirement?

By Tim Ippel, Thrivent Financial

**D**o you have a significant amount of money in conservative savings accounts? Conservative savers often want to avoid volatility in the market, so they may be willing to accept low interest rate offerings. However, with today's low interest rate environment, they may be missing out on potential growth opportunities in the market.

Saving money is one of the best things you can do for yourself and your family. Insuring against a catastrophe or major issue is a critical part of a healthy financial picture. However, you may want to have a little of both — protection of principal and potential for growth.

A fixed indexed annuity (FIA) is one such option. A FIA is an insurance contract with a combination of accounts available; one fixed account with a guaranteed minimum interest rate, and an indexed account where interest is linked to the performance of an external index (like the S&P 500®). The benefits of these products are that you're protected against loss should the index have a negative return, and you can potentially realize some growth when the index is having strong



“Insuring against a catastrophe or major issue is a critical part of a healthy financial picture.”

performance. The interest on the indexed account is capped at a maximum percentage. The maximum percentage, or cap, may vary based on the surrender charge period, and can change annually. The interest credited to the indexed account will not exceed the maximum cap; however, you will be protected against loss should the index perform poorly. In years where the index performance is negative, no interest will be credited.

In exchange for this protection, you sacrifice some liquidity. When you purchase a FIA, you choose a surrender charge period between five and nine years. During that time, you will pay a surrender charge if you decide to withdraw your money. A FIA may work best if you have a portion of retirement savings you know you won't need for several years, but still want some potential growth.

If you're someone with lots of assets in conservative savings accounts, exploring options like fixed indexed annuities might help you realize some market growth while maintaining asset protection.

*Tim Ippel is a local Thrivent Financial representative. He is available to answer questions about your retirement. He can be reached at 217-787-1877. He has offices at 983 Clocktower Court in Springfield, and 332 W Marion Street in Forsyth, IL.*

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# Why Should I Get the Flu Vaccine?



Wendy Meachem, RN

Submitted by Wendy Meachem, RN, Infection Control Nurse, Vibra Hospital of Springfield

I'm glad you asked! Influenza, or "the flu," is a highly contagious disease of the respiratory system. The flu season peaks between October and May, but can occur during the off season, too. The flu is spread by close contact — such as when someone with the flu sneezes or coughs in your presence, or if you touch a surface used by someone who has the flu.

Influenza can cause a multitude of symptoms, and can last for several days. Some symptoms include coughing, sneezing, runny nose, head and muscle aches, sore throat, fever, and chills. Influenza can also lead to worse medical conditions. Severity depends on a person's age and immune system. The flu can be more dangerous in children, the elderly, pregnant women, and in persons with weak or compromised immune systems. Some people die from the influenza virus.



While hand washing is the best way to stop the spread of any disease, the addition of the flu vaccine can save your life, keep you from suffering needlessly, and further help you from spreading the flu to your family and friends. If you would happen to get the flu, the vaccine can lessen symptoms. So why are you still waiting?

Have you heard people say that they got flu from the vaccine? That is a common myth, and is not true, as the flu vaccine is derived from a dead virus that has no capability of causing any disease. The flu vaccine does not "make" people sick. If someone gets sick directly after the flu vaccine, they had to have already been exposed to the virus sometime earlier, as most illnesses have a period of time from when you were exposed until you begin developing symptoms.

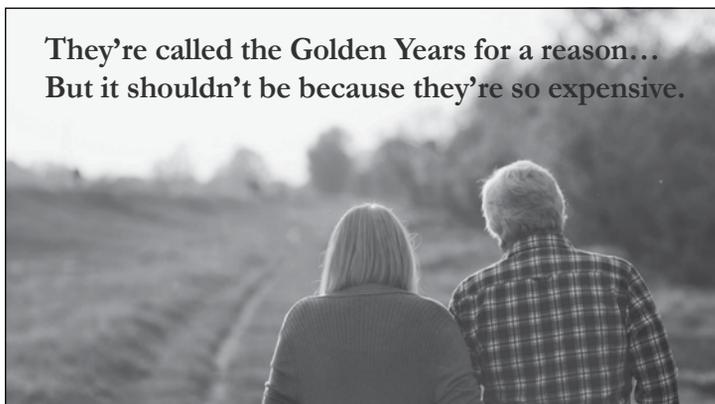
I should tell you, though, that there are some people who should not receive the vaccine. Anyone who has ever experienced a severe reaction to a past vaccine, or has Guillain-Barré syndrome (a paralysis), can have life threatening reactions to an ingredient in the vaccine. Also, if you are feeling "under the weather," it's okay to wait until you feel better. However, the earlier you take the vaccine, the earlier you will be protected during the peak flu season — which is now.

There are plenty of good reasons to protect yourself and those you love by getting the flu vaccine. So remember folks, handwashing and the flu vaccine are your best defenses against the flu.

*Vibra Hospital of Springfield is a 50-bed Long Term Acute Care Hospital, licensed by CMS and fully accredited by the Joint Commission. Located at 701 North Walnut Street in Springfield, Illinois, Vibra Hospital of Springfield offers 24-hour on-site physician coverage for added peace of mind. Please visit our website at [www.vhspringfield.com](http://www.vhspringfield.com) for more information.*

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# It's a Kid's Job

## Playing Helps Kids Learn and Grow



What would childhood be without time to play? Play, it turns out, is essential to growing up healthy. Research shows that active, creative play benefits just about every aspect of child development.

Play is behavior that looks as if it has no purpose," says NIH psychologist Dr. Stephen Suomi. "It looks like fun, but it actually prepares for a complex social world." Evidence suggests that play can help boost brain function, increase fitness, improve coordination, and teach cooperation.

Suomi notes that all mammals — from mice to humans — engage in some sort of play. His research focuses on rhesus monkeys. While he's cautious about drawing parallels between monkeys and people, his studies offer some general insights into the benefits of play.

Active, vigorous social play during development helps to sculpt the monkey brain. The brain grows larger. Connections between brain areas may strengthen. Play also helps monkey youngsters learn how to fit into their social group, which may range from 30 to 200 monkeys in three or four extended families.

Both monkeys and humans live in highly complex social structures, says Suomi. "Through play, rhesus monkeys learn to negotiate, to deal with strangers, to lose gracefully, to stop before things get out of hand, and to follow rules," he says. These lessons prepare monkey youngsters for life after they leave their mothers.

Play may have similar effects in the human brain. Play can help lay a foundation for learning the skills we need for social interactions. "If human youngsters lack playtime, social skills will likely suffer," says Dr. Roberta Golinkoff, an infant language expert at the University of Delaware. "You will lack the ability to inhibit impulses, to switch tasks easily and to play on your own." Play helps young children master their emotions and make their own decisions. It also teaches flexibility, motivation and confidence.

Kids don't need expensive toys to get a lot out of playtime. "Parents are children's most enriching plaything," says Golinkoff. Playing and talking to babies and children are vital for their language development. Golinkoff says that kids who talk with their parents tend to acquire a vocabulary that will later help them in school. "In those with parents who make a lot of demands, language is less well developed," she says. The key is not to take over the conversation, or you'll shut it down.

Unstructured, creative, physical play lets children burn calories and develops all kinds of strengths, such as learning how the world works. In free play, children choose the games, make the rules, learn to negotiate and release stress. Free play often involves fantasy. If children, say, want to learn about being a fireman, they can imagine and act out what a fireman does. And if something scary happens, free play can help defuse emotions by working them out.

"Sports are a kind of play, but it's not the kids calling the shots," says Golinkoff. It's important to engage in a variety of activities, including physical play, social play and solitary play. "The key is that in free play, kids are making the decisions," says Golinkoff. You can't learn to make decisions if you're always told what to do.

Some experts fear that free play is becoming endangered. In the last two decades, children have lost an average of eight hours of free play per week. As media screens draw kids indoors, hours of sitting raise the risk for obesity and related diseases. When it comes to video games and other media, parents should monitor content, especially violent content, and limit the amount of time children sit.

There's also been a national trend toward eliminating school recess. It's being pushed aside for academic study, including standardized test preparation. "Thousands of children have lost recess altogether," says child development expert Dr. Kathryn Hirsh-Pasek of Temple University. "Lack of recess has important consequences for young children who concentrate better when they come inside after a break from the schoolwork."

Many kids, especially those in low-income areas, lack access to safe places to play. This makes their school recess time even more precious. In response to these changes, some educators are now insisting that preschool and elementary school children have regular periods of active, free play with other children. The type of learning that happens during playtime is not always possible in the classroom. School recess is also important because of the growing number of obese children in the United States. Running around during recess can help kids stay at a healthy weight.

Play also may offer advantages within the classroom. In an NIH-funded study, Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff and their colleagues found a link between preschoolers' math skills and their ability to copy models of two- and three-dimensional building-block constructions. Play with building blocks—and block play alongside adults—can help build children's spatial skills so they can get an early start toward the later study of science, technology, engineering or math.

"In a way, a child is becoming a young scientist, checking out how the world works," says Hirsh-Pasek. "We never outgrow our need to play." Older children, including teens, also need to play and daydream, which helps their problem-solving and creative imagination. Adults, too, need their breaks, physical activity and social interaction.

At the NIH Clinical Center in Bethesda, Maryland, "Recreation therapy services are seen as essential to the patients' recovery," says Donna Gregory, chief of recreational therapy. She and her team tailor activities for both children and adults. Games can get patients moving, even for just minutes at a time, which improves their functioning.

Medical play helps children cope with invasive procedures. A two-year-old can be distracted with blowing bubbles; older kids can place their teddy bear in the MRI machine or give their doll a shot before they themselves get an injection. It gives kids a sense of control and supports their understanding in an age-appropriate, meaningful way.

Without play and recreation, people can become isolated and depressed. "There's therapeutic value in helping patients maintain what's important to them," says Gregory. "When you are physically and socially active, it gives life meaning."

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# A Difficult Diagnosis

Information provided by the National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases

**D**iagnosing lupus can be difficult. It may take months or even years for doctors to piece together the symptoms to diagnose this complex disease accurately. Making a correct diagnosis of lupus requires knowledge and awareness on the part of the doctor and good communication on the part of the patient. Giving the doctor a complete, accurate medical history (for example, what health problems you have had and for how long) is critical to the process of diagnosis. This information, along with a physical examination and the results of laboratory tests, helps the doctor consider other diseases that may mimic lupus, or determine if you truly have the disease. Reaching a diagnosis may take time as new symptoms appear.

No single test can determine whether a person has lupus, but several laboratory tests may help the doctor to confirm a diagnosis of lupus or rule out other causes for a person's symptoms. The most useful tests identify certain autoantibodies often present in the blood of people with lupus. For example, the antinuclear antibody (ANA) test is commonly used to look for autoantibodies that react against components of the nucleus, or "command center," of the body's cells. Most people with lupus test positive for ANA; however, there are a number of other causes of a positive ANA besides lupus, including infections and other autoimmune diseases. Occasionally, it is also found in healthy people. The ANA test simply provides another clue for the doctor to consider in making a diagnosis. In addition, there are blood tests for individual types of autoantibodies that are more specific to people with lupus, although not all people with lupus test positive for these and not all people with these antibodies have lupus. These antibodies include anti-DNA, anti-Sm, anti-RNP, anti-Ro (SSA), and anti-La (SSB). The doctor may use these antibody tests to help make a diagnosis of lupus.

Some tests are used less frequently, but may be helpful if the cause of a person's symptoms remains unclear. The doctor may order a biopsy of the skin or kidneys if those body systems are affected. Some doctors may order a test for anticardiolipin (or antiphospholipid) antibody. The presence of this antibody may indicate increased risk for blood clotting and increased risk for miscarriage in pregnant women with lupus. Again, all these tests merely serve as tools to give the doctor clues and information in making a diagnosis. The doctor will look at the entire picture — medical history, symptoms, and test results — to determine if a person has lupus.

## Diagnostic Tools for Lupus

- Medical history
- Complete physical examination
- Laboratory tests: complete blood count (CBC), erythrocyte sedimentation rate (ESR), urinalysis, blood chemistries, complement levels, antinuclear antibody test (ANA), other autoantibody tests (anti-DNA, anti-Sm, anti-RNP, anti-Ro [SSA], anti-La [SSB]), anticardiolipin antibody test
- Skin biopsy
- Kidney biopsy



Other laboratory tests are used to monitor the progress of the disease once it has been diagnosed. A complete blood count, urinalysis, blood chemistries, and the erythrocyte sedimentation rate test (a test to measure inflammation) can provide valuable information. Another common test measures the blood level of a group of substances called complement, which help antibodies fight invaders. A low level of complement could mean the substance is being used up because of an immune response in the body, such as that which occurs during a flare of lupus.

X-rays and other imaging tests can help doctors see the organs affected by SLE.

*For more information on lupus and other musculoskeletal health issues, visit [www.niams.nih.gov](http://www.niams.nih.gov). Join us next month for part 4 of the series on lupus.*

Photo credit: tetmc/iStock

# Improve Your Mental Sharpness

Submitted by Villas of South Park

Staying active physically is important as you age. But exercising the brain can also have some important health and disease-prevention benefits.

In fact, a 2014 study conducted by the Wisconsin Alzheimer's Disease Research Center found that participants who reported playing memory games at least every other day performed better on standard memory tests compared to those who played less frequently. The study assessed 329 older adults who were free of dementia, but at increased risk of Alzheimer's based on family history.

## Trumping Alzheimer's

According to the Alzheimer's Association, the number of people with the disease may nearly triple to 16 million by 2050, barring the development of medical breakthroughs to prevent, slow, or stop the disease. For older individuals, getting involved in social and cognitively stimulating activities, such as the game of bridge, is more important than ever.

"In our study, we found that individuals who participated more frequently in activities such as card games, checkers, and crossword puzzles have increased brain volume in areas that stimulate memory, and affect the development of Alzheimer's disease," said Dr. Ozioma Okonkwo, assistant professor of medicine at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

## Bridge

The card game of bridge is one of the most popular games of skill and memory, involving math and social skills, as the players deal the cards, auction, play the hand, and score the results.

According to the American Contract Bridge League (ACBL), an estimated 25 million people in the U.S. play the game socially in clubs or homes, competitively at tournaments, or online.

Many ACBL members are senior citizens, who have been playing at local bridge clubs for most of their lives, such as 103-year-old Lily Hansen of Ludington, Michigan. Hansen, who serves as a director of her club, recently told AARP Bulletin that playing twice a week helps her stay sharp and active. She has been playing bridge for nearly nine decades. "Duplicate is competitive. It keeps your brain working. I honestly believe that."

With more than 167,000 members and 3,200 clubs nationwide, the ACBL offers a number of programs developed to make learning the game simple. Visit [learn.ACBL.org](http://learn.ACBL.org) for sessions on how to play, or to find a club in your area.

The game also attracts business-oriented minds, including two of the smartest men in America — Warren Buffet, 84, and Bill Gates, 59. The duo has been particularly supportive of promoting bridge among youth, given the game's competitiveness and unlimited series of complex calculations.

## Other Mind-Sharpening Activities

In addition to card games, research shows there are a number of other activities that help boost brainpower. For example, a game



of checkers, or a crossword puzzle, can offer plenty of mental exercise, forcing the brain to be curious and engaged. Remember to mix up these mental exercises often, which will call on different parts of the brain.

Whether you prefer a rousing game of cards with friends, or a peaceful crossword puzzle alone, engaging in such activities can help sharpen your mind, which can help you to better enjoy life for many years.

*Villas of South Park offers many social and recreational activities including bridge. They are located at 10000 S. Main Street in Chatham, IL across from Chatham Christian Church; or call 217-508-8527.*

Photo courtesy of Getty Images (cards in hand)

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# Black Seed – Part III

“Hold onto the use of the black seed for in it is healing for all illnesses except death.”

By Mike King, Mari-Mann Herbs™



*The last issue discussed the benefits of black seed, but here's more!*

## **Diabetes**

Black seed reduces fasting glucose, reduces glycosylated hemoglobin (HbA1c) in human subjects, and decreases insulin resistance. It also protects against the damaging effects of diabetes such as neuropathy and kidney damage, plus helps with regenerating and healing of the pancreas.

## **Digestion/Ulcers**

Black seed is commonly used for treating digestive tract conditions including gas, colic, diarrhea, dysentery, constipation, and hemorrhoids. It also possesses clinically useful anti-H. pylori activity, the cause of 80 percent of all ulcers, and is comparable to triple eradication (antibiotic) therapy.

## **Epilepsy**

Black seeds were traditionally known to have anticonvulsive properties. A 2007 study with epileptic children, whose condition was refractory (resistant) to conventional drug treatment, found that a water extract significantly reduced seizure activity.

## **Infections/Immune**

Black seed has antibacterial activity against clinical isolates of methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus (MRSA). It is also effective against tonsil and pharyngeal inflammation, reducing pain. Black cumin seed is now known to modulate the immune system in both directions. In addition to suppressing dangerous chronic inflammation, black cumin seed oil has been shown to boost appropriate immune function. The result is enhanced protection against both infections and cancer.

## **Inflammation/Arthritis**

One of the earliest recorded uses of black cumin seed oil was for the prevention and treatment of arthritis. A human study of black cumin seed oil has proven an overall reduction of symptoms in 42.5 percent of the patients. Black seed oil has been shown to be effective in experimental models of osteoarthritis, the most common form of arthritis in humans. Treatment with thymoquinone from black seed, reduced levels of a protein-melting enzyme, known as MMP (matrix metalloproteinase), that destroys bone and joint tissue in osteoarthritis.

Other notable benefits of black seed include preventing lead-induced brain damage (lead poisoning), anti-psoriasis properties, helps with opi-

ate addiction/withdrawal, and prevents morphine dependence/toxicity (makes you wonder if it could be useful for any addiction/withdrawal), prevents brain pathology associated with Parkinson's, and decreases surgical adhesions/scarring.

#### Possible Side Effects

Black seed is a most powerful herb! As with any herb or botanical, individuals with skin sensitivity or allergies should use caution. According to Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, black seed can greatly lower blood pressure in individuals also taking pharmaceuticals. Due to its effective stone cleansing, those with kidney and gall bladder issues should use it only under a qualified health care practitioner's advice.

Pregnant women shouldn't take black seed for any purpose, due to the fact that it may induce contractions.

Black seed also contains two compounds, nigellin and melathin, which can be cleansing in small doses, but toxic in very high doses. So any extremely high dose, over 25g, is not recommended, although most supplements are at the 0.5g level. Sloan Kettering also cautions use with most chemotherapy medications and radiation due to black seed's high healing antioxidant activity.

Black seed is a powerful anti-inflammatory agent capable of suppressing the chronic inflammation that underlies aging and its many symptoms. Now it is showing tremendous promise at combating the immune function loss. These twin properties give black seed unprecedented dual coverage as an age-preventing, health-promoting supplement.

One source wisely stated, "The most pertinent point to be made about black seed is that it should be regarded as part of an over-

all holistic approach to health and ideally should be incorporated into one's everyday lifestyle. In this way, the many nutritional and healing properties contained in the seed can help build the body's immune system over time, supplying it with the optimum resources it needs to help prevent and fight illness."

I have written much about the healing properties of curcumin and now black seed. Today there are available supplement combinations of black seed with curcumin. Unlike pharmaceuticals, which can be dangerous when combined, when herbs are combined they generally have a synergistic or more powerful effect on healing. Imagine all the possible benefits in these new supplements! Next, we will learn all about the medicinal form of oregano — "A gift from God!"

*Mari-Mann Herbs™ carries a wide variety of high quality supplements. Mike King is a medical researcher, nutraceutical scientist, and medicinal herb specialist. He also owns and operates Mari-Mann Herbs located at 1405 Mari-Mann Ln., Decatur, IL 62521. There is a health food store/gift shop and herb garden, which are open daily.*

*For more information on leading supplements/nutraceuticals and alternative health care items, please call 217-429-1555. Mari-Mann is also a tourist attraction and is recognized as an official Illinois Herb Garden.*

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Sources available upon request.

This information is for educational purposes only and is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease.

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# A Holiday Gift Guide for Your Pet

By Rachael Pearce, Laketown Animal Hospital



The holiday season is here. Have you started your gift list yet? You probably have some idea of what you need to get for your family — you may have even started a list — but have you thought about your furry family members? Pet stores and online shopping sites advertise all kinds of toys and treats for your four-legged friend. As a pet owner, it can be overwhelming deciding what is safe and appropriate for your pet. This gift guide is here to help you this holiday season and make your holiday shopping that much easier!

Edible toys and treats are one of the most popular choices for pets. Dogs and cats love a yummy treat, but these can be very harmful to your pet if you aren't careful in selecting what you buy, and where you purchase it from. Rawhide treats and animal antlers are everywhere in pet and farm stores. Rawhide is not naturally digested by dogs, and therefore must exit the body in the same form it is swallowed. When your dog chews off a piece of rawhide, it can become stuck in their throat or intestinal tract and cause choking, vomiting, diarrhea, lethargy, and other serious health problems. Deer and elk antlers are very hard because they are made of bone. Allowing your dog to chew on antlers puts them at risk of breaking a tooth or choking. Many rawhide chews and treats made from animal product are produced in other countries, where they are exposed to bacteria and harsh chemicals. Choose an easy-to-digest and reputable U.S. treat brand, such as Milk Bone or Greenies.

Toys made with string, rope, or streamers are another popular holiday gift that can be hazardous. Many holiday-themed cat and dog toys have brightly colored pieces dangling from them. Any toy has the potential to fall apart after it has been played with and chewed on, no matter how well it is made. When the toy starts falling apart, your pet could swallow the pieces of string or streamers attached. This can cause vomiting, diarrhea, lethargy, and other health problems. Instead, try purchasing something safe and more useful — like a sweater for cool temps, a new food bowl, or an automatic waterer. Cats love flowing water because it makes drinking more playful and fun.

*For more information on pet health and safety tips, contact Laketown Animal Hospital at (217) 529-4211. You can also visit us on the web at [www.laketownanimalhospital.com](http://www.laketownanimalhospital.com), or check us out on Facebook. We will be hosting pet photos with Santa on Saturday, December 5th at our facility on Stevenson Drive in Springfield from 10:30 to noon. There will be refreshments for you and your pet! This event is free and open to the public — we hope to see you there.*

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# How to Talk to Your Doctor or Nurse

Waiting in your doctor's office can make you feel nervous, impatient, or even scared. You might worry about what's wrong with you. You might feel annoyed because you're not getting other things done. Then when you see your doctor or nurse, the visit seems to be so short. You might have only a few minutes to explain your symptoms and concerns. Later that day, you might remember something you forgot to ask. You wonder if your question and its answer matter. Knowing how to talk to your doctor, nurse, or other members of your health care team will help you get the information you need.

## Tips: What To Do

- List your questions and concerns. Before your appointment, make a list of what you want to ask. When you're in the waiting room, review your list and organize your thoughts. You can share the list with your doctor or nurse.
- Describe your symptoms. Say when these problems started. Say how they make you feel. If you know, say what sets them off or triggers them. Say what you've done to feel better.



- Give your doctor a list of your medications. Tell what prescription drugs and over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, herbal products, and other supplements you're taking.
- Be honest about your diet, physical activity, smoking, alcohol or drug use, and sexual history. Not sharing information with your doctor or nurse can be harmful!
- Describe any allergies to drugs, foods, pollen, or other things. Don't forget to mention if you are being treated by other doctors, including mental health professionals.
- Talk about sensitive topics. Your doctor or nurse has probably heard it before! Don't leave something out because you're worried about taking up too much time. Be sure to talk about all of your concerns before you leave. If you don't understand the answers your doctor gives you, ask again.
- Ask questions about any tests and your test results. Get instructions on what you need to do to get ready for the test(s). Ask if there are any dangers or side effects. Ask how you can learn the test results. Ask how long it will take to get the results.
- Ask questions about your condition or illness. If you are diagnosed with a condition, ask your doctor how you can learn more about it. What caused it? Is it permanent? What can you do to help yourself feel better? How can it be treated?
- Tell your doctor or nurse if you are pregnant or intend to become pregnant. Some medicines may not be suitable for you. Other medicines should be used with caution if you are pregnant or about to become pregnant.
- Ask your doctor about any treatments he or she recommends. Be sure to ask about all of your options for treatment. Ask how long the treatment will last. Ask if it has any side effects. Ask how much it will cost. Ask if it is covered by your health insurance.
- Ask your doctor about any medicines he or she prescribes for you. Make sure you understand how to take your medicine. What should you do if you miss a dose? Are there any foods, drugs, or activities you should avoid when taking the medicine? Is there a generic brand of the drug you can use? You can also ask your pharmacist if a generic drug is available for your medication.
- Ask more questions if you don't understand something. If you're not clear about what your doctor or nurse is asking you to do or why, ask to have it explained again.
- Bring a family member or trusted friend with you. That person can take notes, offer moral support, and help you remember what was discussed. You can have that person ask questions, too!
- Call before your visit to tell them if you have special needs. If you don't speak or understand English well, the office may need to find an interpreter. If you have a disability, ask if they can accommodate you.

Source: [www.womenshealth.gov](http://www.womenshealth.gov).  
Photo credit: tonivaver/Thinkstock

# Seven Key Reasons to Keep Exercising

By Mike Stapenhurst

If you still have problems making up your mind about exercising, here are seven good reasons why you shouldn't delay any longer.

## 1. You'll live longer.

People who exercise regularly can expect to live longer. In fact, people who get a good workout almost daily can add nearly four years to their life spans, according to several studies.

## 2. You'll look younger.

Studies have shown that regular exercise, both aerobic and strength training, will help you look and feel younger. Another study of seniors who exercised regularly showed that their genetic profile was more like that of young people than old people.

## 3. Exercise helps you burn fat.

It is common knowledge that exercise can help you lose weight. The golden rule is that you need to burn more calories than you consume by eating in order to become slimmer. You burn more calories when you exercise than when you don't, so the solution to your weight problem is to exercise regularly.

## 4. Exercise can prevent diseases.

Exercise can prevent you from becoming a victim to several diseases, such as cancer, diabetes, heart problems, and strokes. Not only are some diseases improved by exercise, but some are even healed. Regular exercise can help decrease your HDL cholesterol level, triglyceride levels, and your blood pressure, thus significantly lowering your risk of having a stroke or heart attack. The risk of prostate cancer for men, of breast and uterine cancer for women, and several other risks of diseases can definitely be reduced by exercising regularly.

## 5. Exercise boosts self-confidence.

You'll usually feel better about yourself after a workout. Because your body will be more fit and toned, you'll feel better about yourself, including the way you look. With your newfound confidence, you'll be encouraged to meet new people and socialize more often. Exercise has also been found to improve sexual drive.

## 6. Exercise can improve your mood.

Endorphins are released with a stronger intensity in the human body during a period of regular exercising. These chemicals have the ability to counteract depression and induce a sense of happiness. Endorphins are released only minutes after you begin a workout.

## 7. Exercise helps overcome problems.

Exercise will help you become familiar with the whole idea of conquering obstacles and achieving goals. No matter what your goal is, you will know that you can reach it by working hard.



Now that you've read all the great things that exercising regularly can do for you, do you still have any more second thoughts about working out? You can go to a gym, or you can exercise at home. There are numerous ways to exercise, so go with the ones that appeal to you. Even if you devote just a fraction of your time each day to exercising, you stand to gain a lot in the long run.

*Mike Stapenhurst is a long-time fitness enthusiast, runner, and walker. He is co-author of the book "Marathon Training Tips". Mike is also the developer of customized training logbooks for athletes at [www.personallogs.com](http://www.personallogs.com) He maintains a website "26.2" about marathon information and training at [www.marathon.ipcor.com](http://www.marathon.ipcor.com) and is a contributing author to the Get In Shape website [www.getinshape.ipcor.com](http://www.getinshape.ipcor.com).*

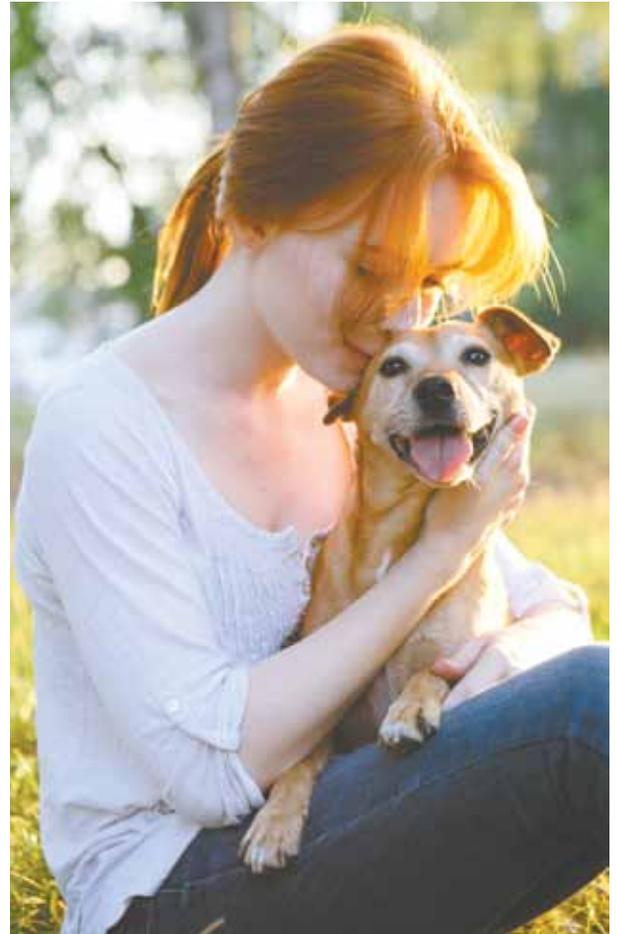
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# Financing Fluffy and Fido



Julie Hale-Miller, CASL®

By Julie Hale-Miller, Country Financial Representative



It's no secret Americans love their pets. In fact, eight out of 10 pet owners think of their cat or dog as family. However, Fluffy and Fido will also need some lovin' from your wallet, too.

We're talking about potentially thousands of dollars in animal care over your pet's lifetime. In fact, forty-three percent of Americans say their dog or cat cost them more than anticipated. In 12 months, thirty percent spent over \$1000, and ten percent spent over \$2000. 23 percent of pet owners say they would be willing to decline a necessary health expense for their cat or dog.

Here are a few simple steps to make the cost of welcoming a pet into your home easier:

- Research the unique needs that different pets have. For example, certain breeds have health or grooming needs that can quickly become costly.
- Budget before you bring home your new pet. Understand how much you will spend on food, toys, grooming, and other needs, and if it's an additional monthly expense you can take on.
- Plan for emergency and unexpected costs by contributing a portion of your income to a savings account. These extra funds can be used for surprise bills that may happen over the course of your pet's life.

“We’re talking about potentially thousands of dollars in animal care over your pet’s lifetime.”

You can't predict your furry friend's future, but a little planning can keep you and man's best friend happy.

For more information, please contact Julie Hale-Miller, COUNTRY(r) Financial, at 217-483-4355.

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