

Fall 2009

# HealthHints

## Fall Is Family Immunization Time!

Back to school and flu vaccines can protect your family's health

Getting immunized against illness is a life-long activity beginning from when you or your children are very young and continuing throughout life. Getting recommended vaccines is important not only for your health but also to help protect those around you from getting sick.

Some vaccines are given once and protect for life while others must be given several times over a lifetime. Your unique health situation will help determine which vaccines are right for you.

### The Flu Vaccine\*

The flu is a bad infection that can spread from person to person. Most people who get the flu are sick for one to two weeks, but some can get seriously ill or even die from complications. Those at greatest risk are women who are pregnant, young children, people who are older, smokers and people with health conditions like asthma, diabetes and heart disease.

Getting a flu vaccine is the best way to avoid getting the flu and giving it to family and friends. People in high risk groups or caring for someone in a high risk group should get a flu vaccine if it's medically appropriate.

Because the flu changes each year, you must get a new shot annually to be protected. That means, even though you got a flu shot last year, you need one this year.

### Back to School Vaccines

Because of vaccination programs, childhood diseases like polio and measles have become rare. In order to keep it that way, it's important to have children vaccinated on schedule. Several of these vaccines must be given to children before they can start school. Talk to your child's doctor about a recommended vaccination schedule.

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov);  
National Foundation for Infectious Diseases, [www.nfid.org](http://www.nfid.org), 8/09

\* The annual flu is not the same as the H1N1 or "swine" flu. Annual flu vaccines do not offer protection for H1N1.



### Vaccines are for adults too!

To find out more about adult vaccines, take the 30-second CDC quiz at: [www.cdc.gov/nip/foradults.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nip/foradults.htm) then talk with your doctor about a family immunization schedule.



### If You're Sick, Stay Home!

If you're not feeling well and suspect you have the flu or another contagious illness, avoid spreading germs to friends and co-workers by staying home until you feel better.



## Living With A Chronic Condition

Having a chronic health condition like diabetes, heart disease or asthma among others means dealing with your illness for months, years or even a lifetime. Having to pay special attention to your health can affect your life – and your emotional health – in many ways. You may feel depressed, frightened, stressed or even angry. You may not be able to do all the things you want to do. And you may not always feel well.

Learning to live with an illness means taking steps to manage both your physical and your mental health. Here are some tips to help:

- Learn all you can about your condition from your doctor and state or national associations.
- Be wary of information from internet sites that are not credible sources.
- Ask questions when you don't understand a treatment or medication decision.
- Follow your doctor's plan of care.
- Take medications as directed.
- Make recommended lifestyle changes including healthy eating, physical activity and weight control.
- Speak up if you feel that something isn't working or it makes you feel worse.
- Share your thoughts and concerns with a trusted friend or family member.

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov); American Diabetes Association, [www.diabetes.org](http://www.diabetes.org), 8/09

## For Your Comfort

Being uncomfortable during a workout is just no fun. It can distract you from your activity and lead to injury as well. Whether your physical activity routine has you indoors or out, there are some key elements to consider for your comfort:

### Dress For Success

Wear clothing that doesn't restrict your movement. If it's cold, dress in layers. Exercise generates a lot of heat making you feel 20 to 30 degrees warmer than it actually is. Having layers means you can be comfortable at the start of your workout, shed clothes as you start to sweat and then add them back as you finish your cool-down. If it's warm, wear lightweight clothing. If you're outside, remember a hat for sun protection.

### Wick Away

Avoid cotton next to the skin and instead choose a fabric that wicks moisture away.

### Getting Off On The Right Foot

No matter what your activity, be sure to choose appropriate footwear with support and traction. Keep your shoes in good shape and replace them as needed.

### Hydrate

In both warm and cold temperatures, keeping hydrated helps your body work its best. Drink plenty of water before, during and after your workout, even if you don't feel thirsty.

Source: Mayo Clinic, [www.mayoclinic.com](http://www.mayoclinic.com), 8/09

## Ten Ways To Keep Your Exercise Plan On Track

1. Set goals you can reach in a short period of time.
2. Write your goals down and post them where you can see them.
3. Track your progress.
4. Start slowly to avoid injury.
5. Mix things up with different activities to keep it interesting.
6. Make physical activity a daily thing.
7. Find a friend or other support network or class.
8. Reward your success – in a healthy way.
9. Be flexible if you miss a workout. Adjust your schedule to get back on track.
10. Make it fun by finding activities you enjoy.

Source: Mayo Clinic, [www.mayoclinic.com](http://www.mayoclinic.com), 8/09

## What Is Pre-Diabetes?

Did you know that even before a person develops diabetes, their health could be at risk because of a condition called pre-diabetes? More than 50 million Americans with pre-diabetes have blood glucose (sugar) levels that are higher than normal but not yet high enough to be called diabetes. Having this condition means they're likely to develop full-blown diabetes within 10 years unless they take steps to prevent it. And some damage to the heart and circulatory system could already be happening.

Both pre-diabetes and diabetes are serious health conditions that can cause complications such as vision loss, kidney failure and heart disease. That's why it's so important to know your risks and take steps to improve them through regular physical activity, a healthy diet and maintaining a healthy weight.

## What's Your Risk?

If you're overweight or you have high blood pressure or high cholesterol, you may be at an increased risk for pre-diabetes or diabetes. To learn about other risk factors you may have, take the American Diabetes Association diabetes risk test at [www.diabetes.org/food-nutrition-lifestyle/lifestyle-prevention/risk-test.jsp](http://www.diabetes.org/food-nutrition-lifestyle/lifestyle-prevention/risk-test.jsp). Be sure and talk with your doctor about your results.

Sources: National Diabetes Information Clearinghouse, [www.diabetes.niddk.nih.gov](http://www.diabetes.niddk.nih.gov); American Diabetes Association, [www.diabetes.org](http://www.diabetes.org); Virginia Department of Health, [www.vahealth.org](http://www.vahealth.org), 8/09

## Picture Your Plate For Better Portion Control

Healthy eating is not only about the foods you choose but how much you eat. It's not always easy to judge whether you're putting too much on your plate. To help, think of mentally dividing your plate into sections:

**½ Plate Of Vegetables** – fill half your plate with an assortment of colorful low-starch veggies such as spinach, carrots, squash or broccoli. Don't put potatoes, corn or yams here. Although they're veggies, they're high in starch and go on the starch side of your plate

**¼ Protein** – choose low-fat proteins including eggs, beans and nuts. Bake, broil or grill instead of fry.

**¼ Starches** – Look for whole-grain starches such as brown rice or whole-wheat bread or pasta to help you feel full longer.

Source: WebMd, [www.webmd.com](http://www.webmd.com), 8/09

## Time's On Your Side

### Three Steps To Take Charge Of Your Day

When it comes to getting things done, we all have the best of intentions. That is until we're derailed by whatever the moment happens to bring. Most of us start each day with more to do than time to do it. And from there, time seems to work against us.

Instead, practice these three steps, make them habits, and watch time come around to your side.

**Step 1 – Create a Daily Plan.** Each day before you turn on the computer, make a phone call or start a chore, write down the one or two major things you need to accomplish to make your day a success. Keep it realistic. Now block off the time needed, starting with the hardest or most important task at the beginning of the day. If the entire task doesn't fit into a day, break it down further into smaller tasks and schedule those.

**Step 2 – Manage your day hour-by-hour.** Set your phone, watch or computer to ring each hour. When it does, take a quick break, look at your list and ask yourself if you're still making progress on the things you decided were critical to the day's success. If not,

## Fitting Comfort Foods Into A Healthy Eating Plan

- **Tweak recipes.** Instead of whole milk and cheeses, use non- or low-fat versions. Use a little less butter, oil or sugar than called for in a recipe. Choose lean cuts of meat. Switch to whole-grain ingredients whenever you can. Bake or grill instead of frying.
- **Add in some benefits** by looking for ways to add healthy ingredients like beans or vegetables to recipes.
- **Eat high fat or high sugar recipes less often.** If every Monday means Aunt Martha's high-calorie casserole, try cutting calories by serving it fewer times each month.
- **Eat smaller servings.** Fill most of your plate with healthier choices and serve just a small amount of your family favorite.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov), 8/09

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use this mini-break to get back on track and recommit to the important tasks at hand.

**Step 3 – Review.** End your day and close up shop by taking a minute to reflect on the day and what you accomplished. Think about what worked and where you may have been distracted. Think about what you will do the next day to avoid a similar situation.

Source: *Harvard Business Review*, [www.harvardbusiness.org](http://www.harvardbusiness.org), 8/09

## What's Your Fire Safety Plan?

In Virginia there are more than 24,000 fires each year. That's why it's important to have a family fire safety plan that includes the following steps:

- 1. Install smoke detectors** on every level and sleeping area of your home. Test them each month and replace batteries regularly.
- 2. Keep fire extinguishers throughout the house**, particularly in the kitchen.
- 3. Remove fire hazards.** Keep lighters and matches out of children's reach. Don't leave candles unattended and have regular maintenance done on home heating equipment. Keep space heaters at least 3 feet away from anything that might catch fire.
- 4. Have a fire escape plan and practice regularly.** Your fire escape plan should include having a safe place outside where your family should meet. Practice how to get out of the house in a fire. Teach everyone how to "stop, drop and roll" if clothing catches on fire.

Source: *Virginia Department of Health*, [www.vahealth.org](http://www.vahealth.org), 8/09



## Wash Hands To Avoid Illness

The simple act of washing your hands can be one of your most effective protections against getting sick and spreading germs to those around you. Here are some tips to make the most of your time at the sink.

- Wash with soap and clean running water for 20 seconds. Try humming "Happy Birthday" twice. You're done!
- Use warm water. Rub hands together to make a lather and scrub all over, including under the nails. Rinse and dry well.

No soap and water handy? Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Pour it into the palm of your hand and rub it all over your hands and fingers until dry.

Source: *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov), 8/09

## Participate In The Great American Smokeout® This November

Since 1977, every third Thursday of November is the American Cancer Society's Great American Smokeout®. Each year, many people mark the event by quitting for the day or even for good.

If you're planning on quitting, here are some tips to help:

- 1. Decide to quit.** Nobody but you can make the commitment to give up smoking.
- 2. Choose a quit plan.** Studies show that people are most successful if they have support. Talk with your doctor about a plan that's right for you.
- 3. Have a withdrawal plan.** There are physical and mental hurdles to overcome when giving up nicotine. Look into nicotine replacement and avoid people, places and habits that tempt you to smoke. Recognize excuses to smoke and don't give in to them.
- 4. Keep it up.** Think ahead to when you might be tempted to smoke and plan how you will cope. Remember too, that if you slip and smoke you still have the power to renew your commitment to kicking the habit.

For more information on how to quit, visit the American Cancer Society's web site at [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)

Source: *American Cancer Society*, [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org); 8/09

*This information is intended for educational purposes only and should not be interpreted as medical advice. Please consult your doctor for advice about changes that may affect your health. Trade names of commonly used medications and devices are provided for ease of education but are not intended as particular endorsement. Your doctor may choose to use items not represented here. Some services may not be covered under your health plan. Please refer to your Health Plan Group Certificate and Schedule of Benefits for details concerning benefits, procedures and exclusions.*