

# THE HEALTHY CPA

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## Health from Head to Toe

### Ready for your routine health checkup?

As a standard baseline examination practiced for decades, this review can inform you and your health care providers about your current health condition, needs and goals — from head to toe. It typically includes an evaluation of your circulatory, digestive, muscular, respiratory and nervous systems as well as your mental health status.



**Regular checkups can lead to the detection and treatment of chronic diseases**, such as high blood pressure and elevated cholesterol levels which can lead to cardiovascular problems, and identify the need for screenings, such as a colonoscopy or a mammogram.

**Preparing for your routine checkup?** Most of the time, there's nothing special you need to do to prepare for your physical. If you are having blood work done, you may be asked to fast and drink only water for a specified period of time before your appointment. Provide a list of prescription and over-the-counter medications and supplements you take regularly.

**It's never too late to establish daily habits that will benefit your overall health and well-being.** Research and talk to your provider about possible dietary changes and suitable exercise routines that you enjoy and can help with weight loss or health goals.

**Practical ways to improve your health from head to toe:** Pick one lifestyle habit that requires changing. Maybe it's a change to your dietary pattern, exercise routine, sleep schedule or how you cope with stress. Formulate a plan to implement change. It takes a few weeks for a new habit to stick. Once the new healthy habit becomes routine, add another new habit if needed.

**Tip:** Bring a list to your checkup with the three most important concerns you have about your health.

The Smart Moves Toolkit, including this issue's printable download, [Personalized Weight Loss Plan](#), is at [personalbest.com/extras/24V1tools](https://personalbest.com/extras/24V1tools).

## BEST bits

### • Do you still need to worry about COVID?

It's been several years since the outbreak of COVID-19, and while it is not in the news as much, it is still here and still contagious and can lead to serious complications and even death. Hospital stays due to COVID have decreased, and those who are hospitalized aren't getting as sick as people did during the pandemic, especially if they have been vaccinated. **Note:** Many people who get symptoms don't get tested or use home tests, which are not reported to the CDC. If you have COVID, isolate yourself at home and take other steps as your health care provider advises, especially if you have a weakened immune system.

### • The Ask Me 3 program encourages people to ask their health care provider about their health. The three questions:

- u What is my main health problem?
- v What do I need to do?
- w Why is it important for me to do this?

To learn more, search for **Ask Me 3** at [ihi.org](https://ihi.org).

**• When it comes to skin care products labeled "natural" and "clean," most are not — and may contain allergens.** Among 1,651 so-called "natural" skin care products, researchers found that most of them contained ingredients that can produce **allergic contact dermatitis** — an inflammatory skin disease caused by a hypersensitivity reaction. If you have very sensitive skin, choose products labeled **fragrance free** or **hypoallergenic**. Soaps, lotions and fragrances labeled as clean and natural may still cause skin irritation. Look for products that have the fragrance-free notation on the EPA's Safer Choice label.

## STUDY: High Blood Pressure and Alcohol

A single alcoholic drink a day is linked to high blood pressure (hypertension) in some people. An analysis of seven studies involving 19,000 adults in the U.S., Korea and Japan found an association between the number of alcoholic beverages consumed daily and increases in systolic blood pressure, the upper blood pressure reading number.

Systolic blood pressure increases with age and is a risk factor for cardiovascular disease. In the analysis, blood pressure readings climbed more rapidly through the years as the number of daily drinks increased. The analysis of adults with no prior history of hypertension or heart disease was published last year in *Hypertension*, the journal of the American Heart Association (AHA).

Drinking alcohol for potential health benefits is a myth, according to the AHA. The Association advises limiting alcohol intake; if you don't drink already, don't start.

## TIP of the MONTH

### Plastic Food Packaging

#### Storing food at home?

Some people are turning to glass, stainless steel or ceramic containers instead of plastic. Studies show that some plastic polycarbonate containers break down over time, and bits of plastic may leach into food when the containers are heated. The chemicals that get into food have been linked to hormonal issues and infertility. If you're concerned, you can choose glass or ceramic containers with lids, especially if you often reheat leftovers in the microwave.



# Curb Nighttime Eating

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

**It's common for healthy eating plans to go awry in the evenings.** Snacking while watching TV often leads to distracted and mindless eating. Chances are that means your fullness cues are ignored and portions are larger than usual. If you're pulled in by the allure of potato chips and ice cream after 8 p.m., here are eight ways to deal with the nightly snack attack.



1. **Assess your appetite.** Are you snacking because you're truly hungry, or is it out of habit or boredom? Rate your hunger on a scale from 1 to 10 and eat a portion to satisfy your true hunger level.
2. **Grant yourself permission.** If you're always hungry in the evening, listen to your body. Make an evening snack a standard part of your daily eating habits, and choose a satisfying, nourishing mini-meal instead of a large quantity of ultra-processed foods.
3. **Enjoy an evening treat but control the portion.** Serve yourself one portion on a plate or bowl, rather than eating out of the product container.
4. **Snack on whole vegetables and fruit (not juice).** They are filled with fiber and fluid, which can help you feel full and satisfied for relatively few calories.
5. **Prevent distractions.** Mute the TV or put down your phone while eating. Focus on enjoying your food instead.
6. **Eat regularly.** Sometimes night snacking is an indication that you're not eating enough during the day. Make sure to have regular meals and snacks.
7. **Choose wisely.** Stock the kitchen with nourishing snacks, such as fruit, vegetables, yogurt, nuts, seeds, popcorn, edamame and hummus, etc.
8. **Do something else!** If you aren't hungry at night but eat due to boredom, change it up. Go for a walk, call a friend, create a games night or book club, try yoga or prep for your next meal.

## Lentil and Mushroom Stew

2 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil  
3 cloves garlic, minced  
1 onion, diced  
2 medium carrots, peeled and diced  
2 celery stalks, diced  
3 cups button mushrooms, sliced  
1 tsp each dried thyme and oregano  
2 tbsp flour

3 tbsp balsamic vinegar  
2 tbsp reduced-sodium soy sauce  
2 cups no-salt-added tomato sauce  
3 cups water  
2 cups baby potatoes, quartered  
1 can (15 oz.) no-salt-added brown lentils, drained and rinsed  
½ tsp salt, or more to taste

In a large pot, heat oil over medium. Add garlic, onion, carrots and celery. Stir and cook about 7-8 minutes. Add mushrooms and herbs. Cook 3-4 minutes, adding flour to coat vegetables. Stir in vinegar, soy sauce, tomato sauce and water, and stir well. Add potatoes and lentils. Simmer, stirring occasionally until potatoes are cooked through, about 20 minutes. Salt to taste and serve.

**Makes 8 servings. Per serving:** 353 calories | 16g protein | 8g total fat | 1g saturated fat | 4g mono fat | 3g poly fat | 58g carbohydrate | 14g sugar (0g added sugar) | 15g fiber | 578mg sodium

eating smart

# Balancing Work, Life and Caregiving

**Caregiving is common. Many employees are not just caring for children, but elderly relatives, too.** Nearly 18 million individuals in the U.S. are caring for someone age 65 and older who needs help because of limitations in their physical or mental abilities. And many of them do so while trying to earn a living.

**Working caregivers often report ongoing health problems,** depression and lower productivity at work as well as financial hardships. If you are a caregiver who is frequently distracted at work, feeling emotionally and physically exhausted, we hope the following steps and reminders can lead to work-life solutions and help ease your stress.

**1. Practice good organization.** It can ultimately reduce stress, boost your energy and create more time for you. Use a notebook or an online equivalent (e.g., patient portal, calendar app) to schedule and remind you of necessary tasks and appointments.

**2. Have a contingency plan for disruptions.** For example, your child becomes ill and you need to attend an important meeting at work. Reach out to family, friends, your supervisor or coworkers who might be able to provide last-minute solutions. Try to identify your options before emergencies happen.

**3. Set aside time to rest and relax and recharge and manage stress.** List activities and then do ones that can boost your physical and mental energy. Exercise, relax with a good book or meet friends for a meal or movie. Positive actions can help you feel more positive.

**4. Find support and ask for help.** With the high number of caregivers in the workplace, you may find others like you — juggling job needs, caregiving and personal time. You might compare notes, gain advice and help support each other emotionally.



**5. Learn your employer's leave policies.**

Determine if you can use personal, sick or vacation days for caregiving. If your company provides an Employee Assistance Program, it may offer caregiver benefits.

**6. Explore possible scheduling options at your workplace.** For example, you might begin working later so you can assist your loved one earlier in the day. Another option: You work four long shifts and get the fifth day off for caregiving.

**To learn more, search for resources for caregivers at [hhs.gov](https://www.hhs.gov).** For help in locating eldercare, visit [eldercare.acl.gov](https://www.eldercare.acl.gov). The AARP also lists caregiving help and services by state: Search for **Caregiving Resources in Your State** at [aarp.org](https://www.aarp.org).

## Lunge into Health

**If you want to strengthen your legs, take a plunge and lunge.** The lunge can improve your lower body strength, balance and stability. It's a body resistance exercise that especially targets the quadriceps and hamstring muscles in your thighs, lower leg muscles and your glutes (the gluteal muscles in your buttocks), according to the Mayo Clinic.

**Lunges engage your core muscles, too, including those of the pelvis, lower back, hips and stomach.** This exercise is a good way to train if you play sports that involve lunging, such as tennis, basketball and soccer.

**The lunge requires no exercise equipment and no trips to the gym.** If you are ready to try lunging, follow these steps recommended by Mayo's lunge exercise experts:

1. Start by standing up comfortably, then step ahead with one foot and lean forward until your knee reaches a 90-degree angle to the floor, keeping it centered over your foot.
2. Lower your rear knee until the shin is parallel to the floor or ground.
3. Then return to your starting position. You should feel some tension, but not pain, in your legs.

**Can't lower your knee to a 90-degree angle?** Just go as low as it feels comfortable. Do as many repetitions as you can, but stop if you are tired or feel muscle fatigue.

**To learn more, search for five lunge variations for leaner legs at [acefitness.org](https://www.acefitness.org).** Of course, always check with your health care provider before starting any new exercise if you have any health conditions, such as heart disease, or you're not used to regular physical activity.



**If you use your smartphone constantly,** chances are you may develop **text neck**. Symptoms include shoulder pain, neck aches and headaches. They develop from hours spent slumped in a chair or leaning over a table or desk with shoulders hunched forward and your head tilted toward your phone or another device. For relief, roll your shoulders back and don't tilt your head forward toward the phone's screen (use a docking port). And about every 20 minutes, take a break from your mobile device. Stand, roll your shoulders and gently move your neck from side to side and up and down to increase blood flow. Consider reducing your screen time.





## Stay in Touch

Keep those questions and suggestions coming!

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The Employee Benefit Hotline is a member resource for health benefit questions.

[Learn More](#)

## EXPERT advice — Elizabeth Smoots, MD

### Q: Pre-surgery consultation tips?

**A:** A pre-op checkup for major surgery is often required, usually within a month before the surgery. This gives your health care provider time to treat any medical problems you might have before surgery.

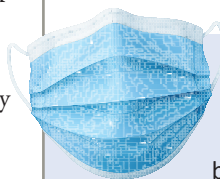
**Your provider will likely review your medical history** and perform a physical exam. Further evaluation may be needed if you have diabetes, sleep apnea, heart problems, high blood pressure, clotting problems or other disorders. A history of heavy smoking or difficulty walking up the stairs may also require appraisal. Some hospitals may also require you to talk to an anesthesia nurse or physician before surgery to discuss your health.

**Your surgeon or provider may recommend certain tests before surgery.** These tests can depend on your age, general health, risk factors, medical problems, and the type of surgery. Common tests include a complete blood count, blood sugar and tests of kidney and liver function. A chest X-ray or an electrocardiogram to check your heart may be recommended. In certain situations, other testing may include a heart exercise stress test, lung function tests, or an endoscopy of your colon. Get your pre-op checkup at the earliest opportunity.

## 2024 Safety Resolutions

It's a new year and making resolutions to stay safe should be on top of your list. Here are some ideas:

- **Be proactive.** Make a plan for your tasks or where you are going. Address hazards before an injury occurs.
- **Pay attention to personal safety.** If something doesn't feel right, step back, review your surroundings and stay cautious. **Tip:** Pay attention and avoid using your phone while walking or driving; view it when you get to your destination. Carry a personal alarm.
- **Stop rushing.** Accidents happen when we hurry. Slow down on the job and at home. A few minutes usually won't make a difference.
- **Know and understand safety precautions before you start working on a task.** Make sure you are familiar with and follow all safety procedures, including what **PPE** to wear, what the **Safety Data Sheets** state and what to do in an emergency.
- **Inspect all safety gear and PPE.** Make it a point to inspect everything before you start your job.
- **Keep your work area clean and uncluttered.** Organize your work area at the end of each shift.
- **Be a safety role model for others.** Your coworkers will notice if you take time to wear the appropriate PPE and follow instructions. They will also notice if you don't.



**When should you still mask up?** Anybody with symptoms or a recent positive test or exposure to someone with COVID-19 should wear a mask to protect others from possible infection. While masking is no longer required by your state, health care facilities may individually choose to require masking for employee and patient safety. There are also circumstances in health care when masks are needed to prevent the spread of other infectious diseases, such as colds and flu. You might consider masking in nursing homes, public transport and crowded places indoors even where they're not required if you feel safer wearing a mask or if you are infected with any infectious disease, but well enough to go out.