

2 News Briefs

- Why women respond to opioids differently than men.
- Exercise lowers stress and reduces heart disease risk.
- Many people unaware of winter sunburn potential.

3 Healthy Aging

Physician house calls improve life quality and longevity for people who struggle with getting to the doctor.

4 Exercise

From down dog to plank pose, yoga helps you age better. There's an approach for every body.

6 Cancer

There are noninvasive colon cancer screening options but there are important caveats to know.

7 Recipe of the Month

Texas Chili with Sorghum, a new spin on a winter favorite.

8 Ask Dr. Leonard

- Why do I struggle so much with sleep?
- How can I improve my immune system?

Five Ways to Boost Memory

Maintain your memory and enjoy a vibrant, fulfilling life well into your later years.

As we age, many of us worry about memory loss. While some cognitive changes are natural, memory loss isn't inevitable. However, just like it takes effort to maintain the physical body, it requires attention to maintain the brain. Consistency is key. "Engage in both mental and physical activities regularly," advises geriatric psychiatrist Helen Lavretsky, MD, MS, UCLA Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior. "Include a variety of activities that require new learning. Doing some of these with friends adds the benefit of social support and reduces loneliness."

1 Embrace Variety
Novel experiences encourage neuroplasticity—the brain's ability to reorganize and form new connections. Variety is particularly beneficial because it stimulates different areas of the brain. For example, chess focuses on strategic planning and problem-solving, a computer program stresses visual comprehension, keyboard dexterity, and recall, a new language leans on verbal and written skills, and a lot of exercise activities are multipurpose too—requiring thinking as well as motor control and physical balance.

2 Good for the Heart, Good for the Brain
Large-scale studies have long shown a strong connection between cardiovascular health and brain function. Aerobic exercise increases the heart rate, which stimulates blood flow, delivering vital nutrients to the body and the brain. Activities like brisk walking, swimming, or pickleball can improve heart health and cognitive function. Aerobic exercise also lowers the risk of heart disease and diabetes, which impact brain health.



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From strategic chess games to exercise to nourishing foods, protecting memory take a multifaceted approach.

Aim for at least 30 minutes a day, five times a week. "The best activities are the ones you enjoy," says Dr. Lavretsky "A sense of joy and excitement can increase your dopamine and endorphins, improving your motivation."

3 Social Engagement

A study published in *The American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry* found that older adults with strong social connections have a lower risk of depression, anxiety, and cognitive decline. That's because socialization stimulates mental engagement, which can help slow memory loss and cognitive aging. Engaging in conversations, spending time doing chores with others, playing games with loved ones, and volunteering can help you stay sharp, feel connected to others, and reduce feelings of isolation.

4 Nourish Your Brain

Nutrient-rich foods like fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and healthy fats support brain health. For example, studies have shown that omega-3 fatty acids in fish and the antioxidants in berries help protect against cognitive decline. The popular Mediterranean diet continues to get high marks for maintaining overall health because it includes the aforementioned whole foods, multicolored fruits and vegetables, and lean proteins—which support heart and brain health and can help boost mood, too.

Continued on page 7

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B *Healthy Years*
(ISSN # 1551 4617)
is published
monthly for \$39
per year by Belvoir
Media Group, LLC,
535 Connecticut
Avenue, Norwalk, CT 06854-1713.
Robert Englander, Chairman and
CEO; Timothy H. Cole, Chief
Content Officer; Philip L. Penny,
Chief Operating Officer; Greg
King, Chief Marketing Officer;
Ron Goldberg, Chief Financial
Officer; Tom Canfield, Chief
Circulation Officer. © 2025 Belvoir
Media Group, LLC. Postmaster:
Send address corrections to
Healthy Years,
PO Box 8535, Big Sandy, TX
75755-8535.

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\$49 per year (Canada)

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Men and Women Process Pain Differently

Synthetic opioid drugs, such as morphine and fentanyl, are the most powerful class of painkilling drugs available. But they also carry a significant risk of dependence and addiction, especially for women. A recent study from the University of California San Diego School of Medicine shed light as to why that might be when they found that men and women use different biological systems to manage chronic lower back pain. Researchers reported that men rely on the release of endogenous opioids—natural painkillers produced by the body—while women use non-opioid pathways to relieve pain. This difference helps explain why women tend to respond poorly to opioid-based pain medications like morphine or fentanyl, which bind to the same receptors as the body's natural opioids. Therefore, women may need higher doses of these drugs for relief, potentially increasing their risk of addiction. In the study, 98 participants, including healthy individuals and those with chronic pain, underwent meditation training and then practiced it while being exposed to painful but harmless heat stimuli. Researchers blocked the opioid system using naloxone, which stops both natural and synthetic opioids from working, to see how it affected meditation-based pain relief. They found that blocking the opioid system with naloxone stopped meditation-based pain relief in men, suggesting that men rely on endogenous opioids to reduce pain. Conversely, naloxone increased meditation-based pain relief in women, suggesting that women rely on non-opioid mechanisms to reduce pain. In both men and women, people with chronic pain experienced more pain relief from meditation than healthy participants. According to the researchers, the findings clearly show sex-based differences in pain processing. Because women may benefit more from non-opioid therapies, a sex-specific approach could lead to better pain management and reduced reliance on opioids.

Exercise Lowers Stress-Related Brain Activity, Reducing Heart Disease Risk

New research from Massachusetts General Hospital shows that physical activity reduces cardiovascular disease risk by lowering stress-related brain activity. The study, published in the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*, found that people with stress-related conditions, such as depression, benefit the most from regular exercise. Researchers analyzed data from 50,359 participants, including a subset of 774 who underwent brain imaging to measure stress-related brain activity. Over a 10-year follow-up, people who met physical activity guidelines had a 23% lower risk of developing heart disease compared with those who didn't. The study found that people who exercised more had lower stress-related brain activity, particularly in the prefrontal cortex, a part of the brain that controls decision-making and helps manage stress. These brain changes partly explained the cardiovascular benefits of exercise. Interestingly, participants with depression experienced roughly twice the cardiovascular benefit from physical activity compared with others, suggesting that exercise's impact on the brain may be especially valuable for those with stress-related conditions. The findings suggest that regular physical activity not only improves physical health but also has important brain effects, particularly for those struggling with stress or depression.

Many People Unaware of Winter Sunburn Potential

If you didn't know you could get sunburned in winter, you're not alone. According to a recent American Academy of Dermatology (AAD) report, about one in five adults don't realize they can get sunburned during the winter months and so they don't use sunscreen to protect themselves from harmful ultraviolet (UV) rays. If you're a winter outdoor sports enthusiast, know that harmful UV rays are reflected by snow, water, and sand. In fact, UV rays are always present, regardless of the season, cloud cover, or time of day, so it's important to use sunscreen in all seasons. Up to 80% of the sun's harmful UV rays can penetrate through the clouds. Without protection, UV light increases your risk of skin cancer and can prematurely age your skin, causing wrinkles and age spots. Skin cancer is one of the most common and easily preventable forms of cancer. And sun exposure is the most preventable risk factor for skin cancer, including melanoma, the deadliest form of skin cancer. The AAD recommends sunscreen with an SPF of 30 on sun-exposed skin and advises checking expiration date because sunscreen's effectiveness can expire. ■

Doctor House Calls Can Improve Aging at Home

You may be eligible for Medicare-covered personalized care in the comfort of your home.

Physician home visits offer an invaluable service to Medicare recipients nationwide who may find it difficult to visit a doctor's office regularly. Under Medicare, physician home visits are covered when deemed medically necessary by your healthcare provider. With the right support and regular medical attention, home medical visits can help qualified older adults maintain their independence and enjoy a higher quality of life.

"We know that our program at UCLA has been very successful in allowing people to age in place," says Patricia Harris, MD, MS, Director Medical Home Visit Program, UCLA David Geffen School of Medicine. "Very few of our patients have transferred to custodial nursing homes since we started this program."

Who Can Benefit?

Medical home visits can address a range of medical needs, including routine checkups, management of chronic conditions, and follow-up care after hospitalization. "Some home visit programs are physician based, some are nurse practitioner based, and some have both," explains Dr. Harris. "Typically, the program will share primary care services between both a physician and a nurse practitioner."

Home visits are particularly beneficial for individuals who face challenges with mobility or those who have complex medical conditions such as the following:

➔ **Limited Mobility:** Those who struggle with mobility issues, such as arthritis, Parkinson's disease, or balance problems, may find it difficult to leave their homes to visit a doctor's office. Physician home visits allow these individuals to

receive care without the stress of traveling.

- ➔ **Chronic Conditions:** Managing chronic conditions like diabetes, heart disease, or COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease) often requires frequent check-ups and medication adjustments. Home visits enable healthcare providers to monitor and manage these conditions more closely, helping to prevent complications.
- ➔ **Post-Hospitalization:** After a hospital stay, some people may need ongoing or follow-up care. Home visits can provide the necessary medical attention, wound care, or therapy in the patient's own environment, reducing the need for hospital readmission.
- ➔ **Cognitive Impairments:** People with dementia, Alzheimer's disease, or other cognitive impairments often find it challenging to navigate doctor appointments. An in-home healthcare provider administers care in a familiar setting, which may reduce confusion and anxiety.

More Individualized Care

One of the most obvious advantages is the convenience home visits provide. Patients don't have to arrange transportation, wait in crowded offices, or deal with the stress of leaving home.

"This service allows us to provide care across the continuum when people can no longer make it to clinic," says Dr. Harris. "However, providers can run into uncertain clinical conditions in the home, or into traffic when traveling. Patients need to expect to receive windows of time, and be OK with waiting."

Home visits enable providers to spend more time with people and



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If you or your loved one has difficulty getting out of the house to see the doctor, receiving care in your own home may be possible.

develop a deeper understanding of individual health needs. For example, providers recommend changes to improve home safety, such as removing tripping hazards or adding grab bars in bathrooms. They can also provide tailored advice on diet, exercise, and medication management based on the patient's living situation. This personalized care can help prevent falls, reduce medication errors, and improve the patient's quality of life.

"Physicians can order home health when appropriate, to have a skilled nurse, physical therapist, occupational therapist, and sometimes a social worker or home health aide for a short period of time," adds Dr. Harris. "If appropriate, providers can assist with Medicare-funded durable medical equipment, such as a hospital bed."

Accessing Care

To qualify for physician home visits under Medicare, the visits must be medically necessary and ordered by your healthcare provider. Medicare Part B typically covers physician home visits, but may not cover every service provided during the visit. You may be responsible for copayments or deductibles. Check with Medicare or your healthcare provider to understand the specific coverage details.

Your current primary care provider or your health insurance provider may be able to help you find physician home services. There is also a nationwide listing of providers at the American Academy of Home Care Medicine website at AAHCM.ORG. Click on the "House Call Finder" tab near the top of the page. ■

Aging Gracefully with Yoga

Build strength, power, and flexibility through this ancient practice.

Prioritizing physical health becomes increasingly important for maintaining independence, reducing the risk of injury, and promoting overall well-being as we age. Yoga offers an excellent way to improve strength, power, and flexibility, all while being gentle on the body. “Yoga reminds us to bend, so that we don’t break,” says Julie Rowland, Integrative Medicine Yoga Therapist at UCLA Women’s Cardiovascular Center. “As we collect birthdays the muscles can stiffen, especially with inactivity. When we practice yoga, we remind the muscles of their elasticity.”

If you’re looking for a safe, effective way to stay strong and flexible, yoga might be the perfect solution.

Strength: Building a Solid Foundation

Use it or lose it is a common adage in the fitness industry, with good reason. Everyone naturally loses some muscle mass through time. Unless you do something about it, this loss of strength can lead to difficulties in everyday tasks, such as climbing stairs, lifting groceries, or even maintaining balance. A regular yoga practice can help combat muscle loss, support joints, and improve overall strength. “A joint is as healthy as its neighboring muscles,” explains Rowland. “Practicing yoga can strengthen muscles, especially holding a pose.”

Many yoga poses (also known as asanas in Sanskrit) involve weight-bearing exercises that target various muscle groups. For example, poses like Plank (see page 5) require you to support your body weight using your arms, shoulders, and core muscles. Through time, this pose, and others help build strength in areas that might otherwise weaken with age. Yoga encourages full-body engagement, ensuring that muscles work together harmoniously.

Yoga also is practiced with controlled movements, avoiding rapid, jerking actions that can lead to injuries. Poses are held steadily and transitioned between smoothly, which not only builds strength but also improves coordination and control over the body. Concentrating on the breath through conscious inhales and exhales helps support each pose and focuses the mind, too. “You can have some control over your musculoskeletal and respiratory systems,” says Rowland. “We practice yoga to remind ourselves of this inner strength.”

Power: Enhancing Speed and Movement

While strength is about being able to lift and carry, power is about the ability to move quickly and forcefully. This combination of speed and strength is vital because it is essential for activities that require quick reactions, such as catching yourself if you trip or turning quickly when driving. Yoga can help improve power by integrating dynamic movements and poses that challenge the body to engage and release energy efficiently.

Styles of Yoga

There are many types of yoga classes. For example, a more vigorous style known as vinyasa yoga emphasizes fluid, continuous movement from one pose to the next, promoting cardiovascular health and building power. Moving through a series of poses in sync with the breath increases the heart rate, improves circulation, and keeps muscles and joints supple. With modifications that allow for more or less intensity depending on your abilities, this type of yoga can be tailored to suit any level of fitness.

Poses that focus on balance are integral to yoga, and Rowland



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Downward facing dog is a yoga pose that helps lengthen and strengthen muscles.

advises caution when approaching them. “While balance poses are good for improving cognitive and physical function, falls can occur while practicing,” she says. “Focus on function over form. For example, from a seated position, lifting one foot off the floor is a way to practice balance.”

There are also some poses that people with certain health conditions should not do. For example, if you’ve been diagnosed with glaucoma, avoid inversions (e.g., downward dog) and be careful with forward bending and twisting motions if you have osteoporosis. If you are unsure about which poses are best or ill-advised for you, see a physical therapist before taking a class.

Flexibility: Moving with Ease

One of the most significant benefits of yoga is the improvement in flexibility. Lack of flexibility can limit your range of motion, making it harder to perform daily activities, such as reaching for objects on a high shelf or bending down to tie your shoes. Yoga gently lengthens the muscles and connective tissues, increasing your range of motion. For example, poses such as a forward fold lengthen muscles in the back, legs, and arms, promoting elasticity and reducing stiffness. Improved flexibility not only makes everyday movements easier but also helps prevent injuries like muscle strains and sprains.

Regular practice also can help improve joint health, which is critical for maintaining mobility. Yoga



encourages the slow, controlled movement of joints, keeping them lubricated and less prone to stiffness or discomfort. Flexibility isn't just about being able to stretch or bend deeply. It's about having a healthy, functional range of motion that allows you to move through life with ease. With improved flexibility, you're more likely to maintain good posture and balance, which can further reduce the risk of falls.

Mental and Emotional Well-Being

While the physical benefits of yoga are impressive, the practice also has a profound impact on mental and emotional health. Yoga encourages mindfulness, which can help you manage stress, anxiety, and depression. The focus on deep breathing and meditation in yoga promotes relaxation, reduces tension, and fosters a sense of calm and inner peace.

"Practicing yoga at any age reminds us of the peace and wholeness that is always within," says Rowland.

Concentrating on aligning your body, holding poses, and syncing your breath with your movements requires mental engagement and helps improve cognitive function. Studies have shown that yoga can improve memory and attention, contributing to better mental health as you age.

Furthermore, yoga can provide a sense of community. Whether

practiced in a group class at a studio or virtually with others online, yoga brings people together. It fosters connection, socialization, and a sense of belonging, which is vital for emotional well-being.

Accessible to Everyone

Yoga is highly adaptable to individual needs. If you're just starting or have physical limitations, consider chair yoga, or gentle yoga

classes, which are modified to be low-impact and accessible. Chair yoga, for example, allows you to perform many of the same poses while seated, making it easier for those with mobility challenges.

If you're in the LA area, Yoga Rowland leads free live and virtual classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays that require no previous yoga experience and no yoga mat (see box for more information). Open to all, the classes are medically approved regardless of health conditions and can be done while seated in a chair (even at your desk). "As long as you're breathing, you can practice yoga," Rowland says.

Whether you're new to yoga or have practiced it before, it's never too late to start reaping its benefits. With regular practice, you'll notice improvements in your physical health and mental well-being. So, take a deep breath, and start your journey toward a healthier, more flexible, and more powerful you. ■



VIRTUAL YOGA THERAPY

CULTIVATE YOUR RELAXATION RESPONSE

Yoga therapy blends gentle physical postures with breathing techniques and meditation to achieve union of mind, body, and spirit.

Practice from your home, office, or outdoors. *No mat needed.*

The classes are led by **Julie Rowland**, C-IAYT, Certified Yoga Therapist.

Classes are FREE

Time: 12:00pm–12:30pm PST
Tuesday and Thursday

Meeting Information
uclahs.zoom.us/j/98332866743

Meeting ID: 983 3286 6743

Or visit: UCLAhealth.org/integrative-medicine/

PLANK

- Take a position on the floor or mat resting on your elbows and toes, head and neck in line with your body.
- Tighten your abs and position your body so it forms a straight line.
- Work up to holding that position for 5–10 seconds.
- Rest and complete 2–3 sets.

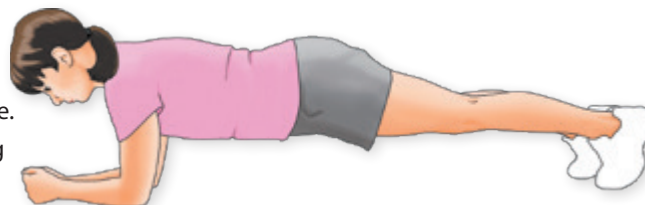


Illustration by Alayna Paquette

Modification for beginners: Hold the straight-line position for 3–5 seconds or as long as you can. Or hold the position on your knees instead of your toes.

Understanding Options for Colon Cancer Screenings

Advances in noninvasive screenings offer more options, but there's an important caveat.

Colon cancer, also known as colorectal cancer, is the third most commonly diagnosed cancer in men and women. While younger adults can develop it, it's much more common after age 50. Like any cancer, the earlier you detect it, the better. Thanks to recent advancements in screenings, the outlook for those at risk or diagnosed with the disease is more hopeful than ever. New, less invasive screenings are helping to detect colon cancer earlier, offering people a greater chance of recovery and long-term survival.

When the disease is found localized in the bowel, the five-year relative survival rate is 91%. In localized rectal cancer, it's 89%. When these cancers spread to nearby lymph nodes or metastasize to other regions of the body, survival rates drop, all of which makes adhering to the updated screening guidelines so much more important.

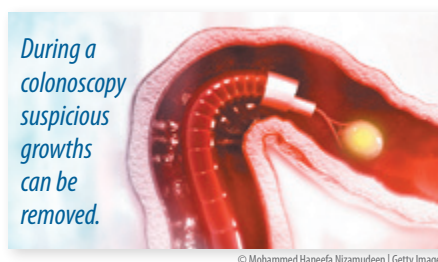
"Colon cancer often has no symptoms until its late stages, which is why screening is so important," adds Elliott Birnstein, MD, a UCLA Health gastroenterologist. "Talk to your doctor if you experience changes in bowel habits or stool appearance, blood in the stool, anemia or changes in weight and appetite."

Screening Options

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommends that people ages 45 to 75 who are at average risk for colorectal cancer get screened for the disease regularly. How often they should be screened varies by screening test. For example, with colonoscopy, if the initial test is negative, people can wait 10 years to get screened again. Tests that use stool

samples, by comparison, should be repeated every one to three years.

Colonoscopies remain the gold standard for screening. A colonoscopy is a procedure in which a gastroenterologist examines the colon with an endoscope. During this painless, outpatient procedure, the physician can view colon tissue to detect signs of cancer and most importantly remove any precancerous polyps. However, people may avoid the procedure because it is time-consuming, requiring a full day of preparation that many people find unpleasant. It also involves sedation and logistical considerations, including the need for a ride home after the procedure.



"There's a certain 'ick factor' when it comes to colorectal cancer tests," acknowledges Fola May, MD, UCLA Medical Center. "That may explain why a third of the target group for screening delays or refuses screening."

The noninvasive fecal immunochemical (FIT) test works by detecting blood in stool samples that can be collected at home. One type of FIT test, (sDNA-FIT or Cologuard), can also detect genetic changes linked to colorectal cancer. Neither the FIT test nor the Cologuard test is as accurate as colonoscopy. And when the results of these tests are positive, people still need a colonoscopy to find and remove any suspicious growths. FIT tests are more convenient, less complicated and cheaper

than colonoscopy, so they do play an important role in getting more people screened.

New Blood Screening Test

Developing blood-based cancer screening tests has been an active area of research, with researchers and device companies developing different ways of identifying clues in blood that can potentially detect cancer early. In July of last year, the Food and Drug Administration approved the Shield test to be used as a primary screening tool for people at average risk for colon cancer. The test works by detecting specific DNA changes in the blood, known as cell-free DNA, which indicate the presence of tumors or precancerous growths in the colon.

A study of nearly 8,000 people showed that Shield detected about 83% of colorectal cancers, but it was much less effective at identifying precancerous growths, finding only about 13% of them. Colonoscopy, on the other hand, not only detects growths but can also remove them during the procedure, helping to prevent colon cancer.

Because nearly one-third of people who are eligible for colorectal cancer screening don't get screened, some experts are excited about the Shield blood test because it could encourage more people to get screened. But there are still questions about how it fits into current options, such as colonoscopies and other non-invasive tests. There's also uncertainty about how frequently the test should be done and what it will cost. Another key question that remains is whether the Shield test will effectively reduce colon cancer deaths.

While new methods are making screening more accessible and less invasive, it's crucial to understand that a colonoscopy will be needed if these tests are positive. Because with these tests, "You're not removing polyps," Dr. May emphasizes, "so it cannot prevent cancer unless patients with abnormal results return for colonoscopies." ■

Brain boosters—cont. from page 1

Since the brain is around 75% water, even mild dehydration can interfere with its function. Dehydration can cause lack of focus, difficulty concentrating, fatigue and headaches. While some hydration is derived from foods (e.g., watermelon, cucumbers, apples), drinking plenty of water throughout the day is still essential.

5 Sleep and Stress Management

Good-quality sleep is essential for memory. During sleep, the brain processes and stores new information, making it easier to recall later. Prioritize sleep by getting seven to eight hours a night. Creating a calming bedtime routine, reducing screen time before bed, and keeping the room cool and dark helps ensure a comfortable environment that can help improve sleep quality.

Stress, particularly chronic stress, can affect memory and cognitive

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Misplacing items like car keys and reading glasses, and forgetting where you parked the car are common occurrences. Dr. Lavretsky offers these tips that can help:

“Taking a few extra steps to improve remembering can help you develop strategies for improving your memory. Using multiple sensory inputs like visualization of the place where you put your keys or glasses or parked your car, or the smell of the place, or the positioning of your body when leaving your glasses can enhance memory and serve as reminders. When in doubt, take a picture of your car parked to remember where to find it. Some cell phone apps have a ‘find my’ feature that can guide you to the location, too.”

—Helen Lavretsky, MD, MS, UCLA Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior



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health. Practicing relaxation techniques, such as meditation, deep breathing, or mindfulness, can help manage stress levels and protect your brain from its negative effects.

As we age, the brain changes just like everything else in the body. For example, it can sometimes be difficult to find the right word, to remember a name, or recall where you placed the car keys. These can be annoying, but

they are usually brief and there are strategies that can help you (see What You Can Do).

To what extent you can actually influence your cognitive future, researchers don't precisely know yet. But healthy living can help protect your mind and memory. It's never too late to adopt a healthy lifestyle and reap the benefits of doing so. ■

RECIPE OF THE MONTH: TEXAS CHILI WITH SORGHUM

Sorghum is a plant-based protein that is high in fiber, and rich in antioxidants. This grain can be cooked like rice and helps thicken the chili as well as adding important nutrients.

INGREDIENTS

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>2 cups dried black beans
 1½ cups dried whole-grain sorghum
 4 cups water
 4 cups reduced-sodium vegetable broth
 3 stalks celery, diced
 1 large onion, diced
 3 cloves garlic, minced
 1 green bell pepper, diced
 1 cup yellow corn, frozen or canned, drained</p> | <p>1 (14.5-oz) can fire-roasted, crushed tomatoes with juice, unsalted
 2 Tbsp tomato paste
 3 Tbsp Mexican seasoning blend, low sodium
 Salt to taste (optional)
 Garnish (as desired): tortilla chips, fresh avocado slices, sliced green onions or scallions, chopped fresh cilantro, chopped fresh tomatoes</p> |
|--|---|

PREPARATION

1. Place beans in a large pot, cover with water, and soak overnight.
2. The next day, discard the water, and add 4 cups fresh water and 4 cups vegetable broth to beans. Add dried sorghum, stir well, cover, and bring to a boil on high heat, and then reduce heat to medium-low and simmer for 45 minutes, stirring occasionally.
3. Add celery, onion, garlic, pepper, corn, tomatoes, tomato paste, and Mexican seasoning blend. Stir well to combine, cover, and simmer for an additional 45 minutes, stirring occasionally, until beans, sorghum, and vegetables are tender. May need to add additional water lost to evaporation. Should make a thick stew-like texture.
4. Serve in bowls and garnish as desired.

Note: You can find sorghum in some natural food stores or online, or you can substitute another whole grain, such as farro, wheat berries, or brown rice. Chili will have a thick consistency; if desired, add water until preferred consistency is reached.



Yield: 10 servings. Nutrition Information per 1½ cup serving:
 Calories: 272 Fat: 2 g Sodium: 245 mg Carbohydrates: 56 g
 Fiber: 9 g Protein: 13 g

SOURCE: Photo and adapted recipe printed with permission from Sharon Palmer the Plant-Powered Dietitian



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Q *Why is sleep such a struggle when we get older?*

A Getting a good night's sleep can become more difficult due to various physical, psychological, and lifestyle factors. One key reason is that the body's natural circadian rhythm—the internal clock that regulates sleep-wake cycles—tends to shift with age. This shift often leads to earlier bedtimes and wake times, along with more fragmented sleep during the night. As a result, many older adults find it harder to stay asleep. Physical health conditions such as arthritis, chronic pain, or respiratory issues also can contribute to sleep disturbances. In addition, changes in hormone levels, particularly the decrease in melatonin production (a hormone that helps regulate sleep), can make it harder to fall asleep and stay asleep. Psychological factors, such as increased stress, anxiety, or depression, can also affect sleep quality, particularly in people who may be dealing with life changes like retirement, loss of loved ones, or isolation. Sleep apnea, a condition mostly associated with men, becomes more prevalent in postmenopausal women. Sleep apnea is a sleep disorder in which a person's breathing repeatedly stops and starts during sleep. These pauses in breathing can last for a few seconds to minutes and may occur multiple times throughout the night. The most common type is obstructive sleep apnea, which happens when the muscles in the throat relax too much, blocking the airway. People with sleep apnea often experience loud snoring, choking, or gasping during sleep, and frequent awakenings. This leads to poor-quality sleep and excessive daytime fatigue. Compared with when they were younger, postmenopausal women are almost equally susceptible to sleep apnea as men. Untreated sleep apnea can increase the risk of serious health conditions, including high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and cognitive issues.

Lastly, lifestyle habits such as reduced physical activity or excessive napping during the day can interfere with the body's need for deep, restorative sleep. Most people struggle with sleep

occasionally. But if the issue persists for more than a few weeks consider seeing a specialist, especially if you experience any of the following symptoms: feel unusually tired during the day, have trouble staying awake at work, loud snoring or gasping, difficulty falling or staying asleep, frequent headaches or dry mouth in the morning. Good-quality sleep is essential to health, and there are treatments that can help you.

Q *How can I naturally boost my immune system to guard against colds and flu?*

A A few simple lifestyle adjustments can strengthen your defenses and improve your overall health. Eating a balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins provides essential vitamins and minerals like vitamin C, vitamin D, zinc, and antioxidants, which support immune function. Foods such as citrus fruits, spinach, and almonds are especially beneficial. Regular physical activity, such as walking or light aerobics, helps improve circulation, which allows immune cells to move freely throughout the body and fight infections more effectively. Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise most days of the week. Adequate sleep is essential for immune health. Aim for seven to nine hours of quality sleep per night to allow your body to repair and strengthen itself. Chronic stress can weaken the immune system. Practice stress-reducing activities like meditation, yoga, or deep breathing exercises to keep stress levels in check. Drinking plenty of water helps your body function properly, including your immune system. Staying hydrated supports the production of immune cells and keeps your body in balance. While it's best to get the flu shot before flu season peaks (typically between December and February), getting vaccinated in January or even later can still provide protection, especially since the flu can circulate well into the spring. The flu shot takes about two weeks to become fully effective, so even later in the season, it can help reduce your risk of getting the flu or make the illness milder if you do catch it. ■

IN COMING ISSUES

How heart disease differs in men and women.

Compounds in certain foods may slow cognitive decline.

Emotional and physical impacts on men's sexual health.

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