

May 2020

# Take the Pressure Off

May is High Blood Pressure Education Month.



## BEST bits?

### COVID-19 Basics

**Note:** Check for daily updates at [coronavirus.gov](https://www.coronavirus.gov).

**COVID-19 is a highly infectious disease.** It is spread mainly person to person within about 6 feet of each other. Droplets released by coughing and sneezing are inhaled through the mouth and nose, and potentially the lungs.

**People may not show symptoms until several days after they become infected.** In that time, they can spread the virus to many people. To reduce infection risk, stay at least 6 feet away from other people.

**Symptoms are cough, fever and shortness of breath.** If you have these symptoms, and you've had contact with a person who has COVID-19 or you live in or have recently visited an area with COVID-19, contact your health care provider immediately. The CDC says symptoms may appear 2 to 14 days after exposure.

**As of April 3, 2020, the CDC recommends that the general public wear cloth face coverings in situations (grocery stores, pharmacies, public transit) where it's difficult to keep a distance of at least 6 feet (called social distancing or physical distancing).** Learn more at [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov). The coverings are *not* a substitute for handwashing.

**Frequent handwashing** is the most important step to protect yourself and others. **Use soap and water for at least 20 seconds.** Rub your hands to create a lather that covers your entire hands. When? After you cough or sneeze, before food preparation and eating, after using the bathroom and after touching high-contact surfaces, including door handles, elevator buttons and stair railings. No soap and water? Use alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.

Normal healthy blood pressure is under 120 systolic and under 80 diastolic. Elevated blood pressure (EBP) is 120 to 129 systolic and less than 80 diastolic. People with EBP are likely to develop high blood pressure unless they act to prevent it.

Untreated, a 20-point higher systolic or a 10-point higher diastolic number can double your risk of death from a heart attack or stroke.

#### High blood pressure numbers:

**Stage 1 HBP** is 130 to 139 systolic or 80 to 89 diastolic.

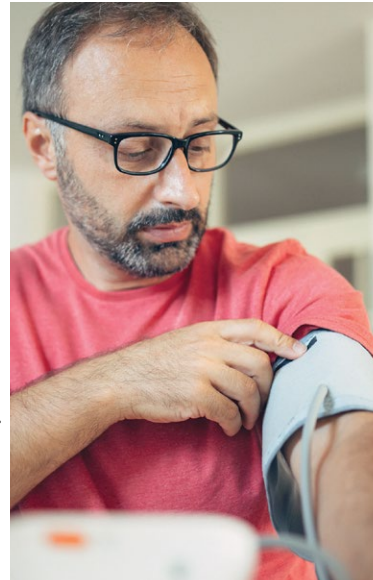
**Stage 2 HBP** is 140 systolic or higher or 90 diastolic or higher.

If you reach either stage, your health care provider will likely recommend lifestyle changes, maybe medication (depending on cardiovascular risks or family history), and regular follow-ups until your BP is controlled.

**You have a 90% chance of developing HBP.** This number has increased recently, partly because more Americans are overweight and living longer. Younger people are being impacted the most, as hypertension has tripled among adults under age 45.

#### If you are diagnosed with HBP, work with your provider to:

**1. Learn how you can self-monitor your BP levels day to day.** Get a home monitor approved by your provider, and learn the best times for checking your BP, and when not to check it (e.g., within 30 minutes of smoking, drinking coffee or exercising). Have your medical clinic check your home blood pressure monitor for accuracy. To learn more, search for **blood pressure at home** at [heart.org](https://www.heart.org).



**2. Learn to control your BP with positive daily choices.** Adopting a diet-and-lifestyle approach is the recommended first-line treatment for people with stage 1 hypertension who are at low risk for developing heart disease. What works: a diet high in fruits and vegetables (search for **Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension** or **DASH** at [www.nhlbi.nih.gov](https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov)).

Trust yourself. Create the kind of self that you will be happy to live with all your life. Make the most of yourself by fanning the tiny, inner sparks of possibility into flames of achievement. — *Golda Meir*



# Bone Health for Every Body



May is Osteoporosis Month.

As Americans are living longer, protecting our bone health is more important than ever.

By age 50, about half of us will have weak bones, according to the National Institutes of Health. We can improve this outcome through healthy diet and lifestyle — at every age.

Bone is made mostly of (1) **collagen**, a structural protein that acts as a building block for your bones, teeth, muscles, skin, joints and connective tissues; and (2) **calcium phosphate**, a mineral that adds strength, hardens the framework and provides flexibility. A low intake of dietary calcium and other nutrients during one's lifetime may contribute to low bone mass, bone loss, high fracture risk and osteoporosis (porous bones).

**Osteoporosis** affects more than 44 million Americans, and it contributes to an estimated 2 million bone fractures per year.

## Risk Factors for Osteoporosis:

**Aging:** In the U.S. 50% of women and 25% of men older than age 50 will suffer fractures of the hip, spine, wrist, arm and leg, often resulting from a fall.

**Heredity factors:** A family history of fractures; having a small, slender body build or fair skin; and Caucasian or Asian ethnicity may raise your risk.

**Nutrition and lifestyle:** Poor nutrition, a low-calcium diet, low body weight and a sedentary lifestyle are primary risk factors for osteoporosis; so are smoking and excessive alcohol use.

**Medications and other illnesses:** Osteoporosis is linked to the use of some medications, including steroids, and to other illnesses, including thyroid problems. This is called **secondary osteoporosis**.

**Medical disorders:** Several medical conditions can lead to osteoporosis, including juvenile rheumatoid arthritis, diabetes, hyperthyroidism, Cushing's syndrome, malabsorption syndrome, anorexia nervosa and kidney disease.

**Children and adolescents can develop juvenile osteoporosis.** While rare, it can be a serious health problem as it occurs during a child's prime bone-building years, from birth through young adulthood. It can be caused by a secondary medical disorder, but sometimes has no identifiable cause.

**Note:** Ask your health care provider if you need calcium and D supplements.

# Extreme Weather and Mental Health

May is Mental Health Month.

By Eric Endlich, PhD

Those who experience extreme climate or weather events, such as severe heatwaves, hurricanes, tornadoes and fires, can suffer significant fear, anxiety, trauma and a sense of loss. These reactions can be short-lived or may lead to long-term negative mental and physical effects.

Extreme heat can be particularly harmful to the very young, the elderly (especially those with medical conditions) and those with mental illness, increasing the risk of disease or death. During very hot weather, some prescription medications can impair the body's temperature regulation; discuss concerns with your health care provider.

## If extreme conditions are predicted:

Being prepared for a weather-related disaster can reduce stress and bring a sense of control.

- Get updates from reliable sources.
  - Encourage your community to have disaster planning in place, including how to share resources and skills among neighbors.
  - Talk openly with children about their fears, but remind them that people are working hard to keep them safe.
  - Have an emergency plan in place and a bag packed with necessities.
  - Know emergency plans in your workplace, school and neighborhood.
- Learn more at [ready.gov](https://www.ready.gov).



# The ABCs of Hepatitis



May is Hepatitis Awareness Month — a good time to learn about hepatitis prevention and testing. It could save your life.

**Hepatitis is inflammation of the liver.** It can result from infected food, drug injections, alcohol abuse and, sometimes, autoimmune diseases. But viruses (identified with letter designations) are the primary culprit.

## Common types of hepatitis:

- **Hepatitis A** is highly contagious and spreads through infected food or close contact with an infected person. It can cause extended illness but rarely damage. A safe, effective vaccination prevents the virus.
- **Hepatitis B** infection can be chronic, causing liver damage and cancer. The CDC recommends hepatitis B vaccination for all infants, children age 19 and younger, and adults with risk factors, including sexual contacts and travel to countries where the disease is common.
- **Hepatitis C** causes lifelong infection leading to liver failure and potential cancer. Injecting drugs, contact with infected blood, and sex with someone infected are risk factors. There is no vaccine for hepatitis C. It can be treated and often cured when diagnosed early.

Talk to your health care provider about hepatitis testing and any needed vaccinations. A simple blood test can detect infection.



**New research has linked measles to “immune amnesia,”**

a disease that causes children not vaccinated against measles to lose up to 70% of their antibodies to other pathogens after measles infection. This means it's more important than ever to keep you and your kids up to date on shots. There is lots of misinformation online about the side effects of vaccines, especially the measles vaccine. Measles kills. In 2018 the Democratic Republic of the Congo had 250,000 cases of measles with 5,000 deaths. This is just one example of how dangerous measles is. Make sure you and your kids get vaccinated.

— Zorba Paster, MD

# The Mediterranean Table

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

eating smart



May is International Mediterranean Diet Month.

**The Mediterranean Diet has been popularized by the foods that are abundant in the countries along the Mediterranean Sea, including Greece, Italy and Morocco. But you can replicate the same dietary pattern with foods from your local grocery store.**

**Your Mediterranean table should be brimming with vegetables and fruits,** which should fill half your plate at meals. Choose from every hue of the rainbow, including leafy greens, sweet peppers, oranges and berries, to reap the benefits of the different antioxidants and vitamins they contain.

Fresh or frozen vegetables and fruits are equally nutritious.

**Include other plant-based foods at meals, too,** such as beans, lentils, nuts, seeds, herbs, spices and whole grains. Make olive oil your preferred choice for salad dressing and light cooking.

**While many of the foods in the Mediterranean Diet come from plants,** you don't need to exclude animal foods, such as chicken, dairy and meat; just slightly reduce the quantity. Rather than eating meat daily, you can replace it with tofu, chickpeas or peanut butter more often. Fish is recommended twice a week.

**When you make room at your table for more plant-based foods,** such as vegetables and beans, you'll naturally reduce your intake of ultra-processed foods, such as baked goods, chips and fast food. This dietary transition helps reduce the risk of developing heart disease, type 2 diabetes and certain cancers, as well as helping maintain brain health as you age.

**The Mediterranean Diet** is also about balanced living. Include family and friends at the dining table for the joy and laughter of shared meals, and include physical activity daily as part of your healthy lifestyle.



**TIP of the MONTH**

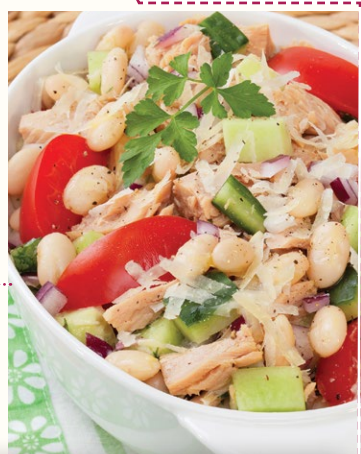
**Mediterranean Diet and Alcohol**

**You may know that red wine is part of the Mediterranean Diet, but it's not mandatory.** If you don't drink, you don't need to start. If you enjoy wine, have no more than 1 glass (4 ounces) a day for women, or 2 glasses (8 ounces) a day for men. Amounts above this may increase the risk of liver disease in both genders and breast cancer in women.

**Tuscan Tuna and Bean Salad**

**EASY recipe**

- 1 can (15 oz.) no-salt-added white kidney, navy or cannellini beans, drained
- 2 cans (5 oz. each) albacore or skipjack tuna, drained
- 1 cup cherry tomatoes, sliced in half
- 2 tsp capers
- 1 red onion, thinly sliced
- 3 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
- 3 tbsp fresh lemon juice
- 6 cups mixed greens
- ½ cup fresh chopped basil or flat leaf parsley
- Pinch each salt and pepper



**In** a large bowl, combine beans, tuna, tomatoes, capers and onion. **Drizzle** with oil and lemon juice, and toss to combine. **Scatter** mixed greens on a platter and add the tuna mixture on top. **Garnish** with herbs, salt and pepper, and serve.

**Makes 4 servings. Per serving:**  
290 calories | 21g protein | 12g total fat | 2g saturated fat | 8g mono fat | 2g poly fat | 26g carbohydrate | 2g sugar | 8g fiber | 356mg sodium

## Stay in Touch

Keep those questions and suggestions coming!

**Phone:** 800-871-9525

**Fax:** 205-437-3084

**Email:** [PBeditor@ebix.com](mailto:PBeditor@ebix.com)

**Website:** [www.personalbest.com](http://www.personalbest.com)

Executive Editor: Susan Cottman • Advisers: Patricia C. Buchsel, RN, MSN, FAAN; Jamie Lynn Byram, MBA, AFC, MS; Eric Endlich, PhD; Mary P. Hollins, MS, JD, CSHM; Kenneth Holtyn, MS; Reed Humphrey, PhD; Gary B. Kushner, SPHR, CBP; Diane McReynolds, Executive Editor Emeritus; Zorba Paster, MD; Charles Stuart Platkin, PhD; Cara Rosenbloom, RD; Elizabeth Smoots, MD, FAAFP; Margaret Spencer, MD • Editor: Aimie Miller • Designer: Heather Burke

The content herein is in no way intended to serve as a substitute for professional advice. Sources available on request. © 2020 Ebix Inc. All rights reserved. Unauthorized reproduction in any form of any part of this publication is a violation of federal copyright law and is strictly prohibited.

Personal Best® Two Perimeter Park South, Suite 160 East, Birmingham, AL 35243 • 800-871-9525 • fax 205-437-3084.

## EXPERT advice

National Peripheral Neuropathy Awareness Week is May 3 to 9.



### Q: What is peripheral neuropathy?

**A:** Neuropathy is a disease of the nerves.

The condition usually affects the peripheral nerves that stretch from the spinal cord to the skin, muscles and body organs. It leads to weakness, numbness and pain in the hands, feet or other areas of the body.

**Some primary concerns:** The most frequent cause is type 1 or 2 diabetes. Other common culprits include herniated spinal discs or pinched nerves from surrounding tissue, such as carpal tunnel syndrome. Neuropathy can also result from injuries, infections, toxins, alcohol abuse, vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency and metabolic or genetic disorders.

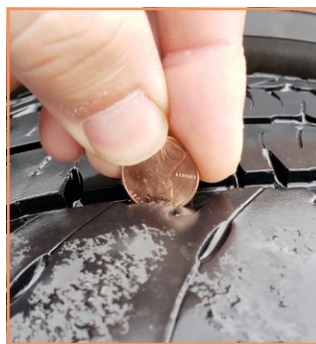
**Get medical care immediately** if you notice tingling, weakness or pain in your hands, feet or other areas of your body. Early treatment can help prevent permanent nerve damage. Medications, physical therapy, transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS) or, in some cases, surgery may be recommended — depending on the type of peripheral neuropathy. — Elizabeth Smoots, MD

## SAFETY corner

# Dos and Don'ts for a Tire Blowout



- ✓ **Don't panic.** Try to remain calm to keep control of the car.
- ✓ **Don't brake.** It's a natural reaction to want to brake, but keep your foot on the accelerator and steer in the direction you are headed. Your wheels need to continue rolling for you to maintain control.
- ✓ **Do correct your steering.** Only when you regain control of your vehicle can you ease off the accelerator and begin to move to the side of the road.
- ✓ **Do pull off the road and put on your hazard lights.** Call your road service or change the tire if you can safely.



### When to Retire a Tire?

Here's how to figure out when it's time to replace your tires. Check the treads — they are not safe and need to be replaced when the tread is worn down to  $\frac{1}{32}$  of an inch. Always check your tread at least once a month when you check the pressure. **Tip:** Check your tread by placing a penny in the tread with Lincoln's head upside down and facing you. If you can see the top of Lincoln's head, it's time to replace your tires.

## An optimistic outlook improves more than mood.

It helps protect health, too. Harvard researchers studied data on more than 230,000 people and found optimists, compared to pessimists, had a 35% lower risk of heart problems and a 14% lower risk of early death over about 14 years. Cultivating a positive outlook — with counseling, if needed — is a healthy decision for mind and body.

