

# INSURING YOUR Health

February 2009

## THE SECRETS OF THIN PEOPLE

### Thin people weigh themselves.

For years diet experts discouraged stepping on the scale to keep weight in check. Yet one of the findings is that slim people do weigh themselves regularly. Not obsessively, not agonizing down to the ounce, but at least a couple of times a week. "At the first sign of weight gain, they go right back to their weight-loss plan," says registered dietitian Elizabeth Somer.

Anne Fletcher, also a registered dietitian, says of the weight maintainers she's interviewed over the years, "Most have found that it's easier to manage their weight if they don't allow themselves to go over their goal."

Holly Johnson, age 45, a co-owner of a Sarasota, Florida-based marketing and public-relations firm and the mother of an eight-year-old, confirms their findings. She always knows whether she's in her preferred range of 105 to 113, because she weighs herself about twice a week. "If the scale starts creeping up to the higher end or I feel that things are starting to get out of control," she says, "I cut back on starchy carbs and dessert."

*Source: WebMD Healthletter*

## GOLF

Golf is like a love affair. If you don't take it seriously, it's not fun. If you do take it seriously, it will break your heart.

*Source: Hope Health Letter*

## BEST STRESS BUFFER

It's usually the little hassles that cause stress, such as getting stuck in traffic or dealing with an irate coworker. They are likely to occur on a routine, if not daily, basis, and, indeed, become part 'n parcel of our lives.

That's why those who study ways to relieve stress generally say that just as stress is a daily occurrence, so should be the relief for it. In a University of Texas study, persons who were active each day were less bothered by

the stresses that come along. Exercise seems to help keep the individual stresses from piling up and become one big one.

Exercise, it seems, provides a "time out" for the mind to unconsciously process stress in an effective way.

*Source: Remedy*

## TOO MUCH FITNESS

You can try to do too much when it comes to fitness. Overworking the body can lead to soreness, injury, and even illness, not to mention discouragement. Two studies at Auburn University have found that "killing yourself" isn't the way to achieve fitness.

Students in spinning (group cycling) classes were asked to push themselves beyond the recommended maximum rpms and flywheel resistance. The result was that progress in fitness actually declined as students tried to do more than they were ready to do.

The American College of Sports Medicine says the symptoms of trying to do too much include: general fatigue and malaise, "heavy" limbs, changes in sleep patterns and appetite and even depression, anger, and anxiety. If you experience these symptoms, it's time to cut back on training and make sure you get adequate rest.

## LIQUID CALORIES

If you're trying to lose weight, look at your liquid calories. Beverages supply more than 20% of the calories in the average American's diet, a percentage that has risen over recent decades. Some liquid calories come from healthy beverages, such as nonfat or low-fat milk (a leading source of calcium and vitamins D and A) and fruit juices (vitamin C). But most come from soda or alcoholic beverages and are "empty"—that is, accompanied by few or no nutrients.

*Source: Prevention*

## THE CAT YEARS

I just realized that while children are dogs—loyal and affectionate—teenagers are cats. It's easy to be a dog owner. You feed it, train it, boss it around. It puts its head on your knee and gazes at you as if you were a Rembrandt painting. It bounds indoors with enthusiasm when you call it.

Then, around age thirteen, your adorable puppy turns into a big old cat. When you tell it to come inside, it looks amazed, as if wondering who died and made you emperor. Instead of dogging your footsteps, it disappears. You won't see it again until it gets hungry — then it pauses on its sprint through the kitchen long enough to turn its nose up at whatever you are serving. When you reach out to ruffle its head, in an affectionate gesture, it twists away from you, then gives you a blank stare, as if trying to remember where it has seen you before.

You, not realizing that the dog is now a cat, think something must be desperately wrong with it. It seems so antisocial, so distant, sort of depressed. It won't go on family outings. Since you're the one who raised it, taught it to fetch and stay and sit on command, you assume that you did something wrong. Flooded with guilt and fear, you redouble your efforts to make your pet behave.

Only now you are dealing with a cat, so everything that worked before now produces the opposite of the desired result. Call it, and it runs away. Tell it to sit, and it jumps up on the counter. The more you go toward it, wringing your hands, the more it moves away.

Instead of continuing to act like a dog owner, you can learn to behave like a cat owner. Put a dish of food near the door, and let it come to you. But remember that a cat needs your help and attention too. Sit still, and it will come, seeking that warm, comforting lap it has not entirely forgotten. Be there to open the door for it.

One day your grown-up child will walk into the kitchen, give you a big hug and kiss and say, "You've been on your feet all day. Let me do those dishes for you."

Then you'll realize that your cat is a dog again.

*Source: Adair Lara, San Francisco Chronicle*

## HELPING TEENAGER BECOME SAFE DRIVER

One of the most important things a parent can do is to help his or her teenager become a safe driver, says the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety.

## SMOKING AND INJURIES

A U.S. Army study shows that recruits who smoke a pack of cigarettes a day are twice as likely to sustain an injury during the eight weeks of basic combat training.

*Source: The Fitness Bulletin*

## EXAMINING YOUR ARTERIES

Is there any way to tell how much plaque you have before a heart attack occurs? If you're having angina or have several risk factors for heart disease, your doctor may order a series of tests to determine if you have coronary artery blockages. These include:

**Electrocardiograms.** In this test, known as an ECG or EKG, electrodes are attached to your chest to detect any irregular heart rhythm or damage from a heart attack and determine whether your heart is getting enough blood and oxygen.

**Imaging techniques.** These can determine if you have any artery blockages and if so, how severe they are. The most common ones are:

**Radioisotope scan.** A radioactive dye is injected into the bloodstream, and a special machine takes pictures of your heart and arteries as the dye passes through.

**Echocardiogram.** This test uses sound waves instead of dye or X-rays to trace a picture of your heart, revealing any damage to the muscle or abnormal blood flow.

**CT scan.** A more advanced form of X-ray, the CT machine takes detailed pictures of your heart from various angles, providing a cross-sectional view.

**MRI.** Using a magnetic field and radio waves, MRI records energy signals emitted by the atoms that make up the cells of the body. MRI can measure blood flow through arteries, providing information about blockages.

**Cardiac catheterization, or angiography.** In this procedure -- an invasive test -- a pencil-sized plastic tube is threaded through an artery in your groin. A catheter is then passed through the tube toward the heart and into a coronary artery. Iodine-based dye is then injected, and a special camera takes pictures to show any blockages.

**EBCT.** This sophisticated test measures calcification of the arteries, a possible indication of coronary heart disease (CHD).

Once your doctor determines you have plaques, the goal is to stabilize them and prevent a heart attack. But it's far better to prevent the plaques in the first place. Bringing down your cholesterol is a key strategy for both. For instance, having 60 percent of the surface area of a coronary artery covered in plaque is considered significant atherosclerosis. If your cholesterol is 150 you'll be 80 years old before you get that much plaque. But if your cholesterol is 300 you'll reach that level before you hit 40.

Of course, cholesterol isn't the only factor that plays a role in the development of heart disease. There are many

other factors involved -- inflammation, high blood pressure, even germs -- that can significantly affect your risk.

*Source: Reader's Digest*

### **BALANCING ACT**

Balance is being considered as the fourth component of fitness (being added to flexibility, strength and endurance). While balance is controlled by the inner ear, it's accomplished by the muscles. That's why balance is a learned activity, and being thus, it can be improved.

Balance is even more important as one ages as falls can be more hazardous to an older person.

The old saying about practice making perfect works with balance. Practice these poses and your balance will improve.

#### **Beginner**

With hips and shoulders squared hands over head, stand on one foot. Allow the off-the-floor foot to move about to aid in balancing. Try to hold that position for up to 30 seconds. Repeat standing on the other foot. When you can do it for 30 seconds, go to the intermediate pose.

#### **Intermediate**

Now stand with the sole of one foot resting on the thigh of the other. This is harder since you no longer have that foot to move about. One you can stand for 30 seconds on each foot, move to the advanced phase.

#### **Advanced**

Reach forward with your arms and upper body, one leg extended to the rear, parallel to the ground. Try to stand for 30 seconds on each foot.

*Source: Women's Sports & Fitness*

### **BASEBALL INJURIES**

Baseball is the No. 1 cause of sports-related eye injuries to children. The newsletter Archives of Ophthalmology (Vol 117, No. 3) recommends that children play with baseballs specifically designed for them. They are 15% to 20% softer than major-league baseballs, and they can reduce the potential for all impact injuries.

### **FEEL THE BURN**

Weight lifters often experience heartburn while lifting. It's likely from holding their breath while lifting.

Philip Schoenfeld, M.D., a gastroenterologist, says that when lifters hold their breath during reps, abdominal pressure increases and shoots extra stomach acid up into the esophagus.

To avoid this, always exhale during the lifting phase of an exercise.

*Source: Men's Health*

### **TALKING RAISES BLOOD PRESSURE**

Talking while you're having your blood pressure monitored can raise it as much as 15%, especially if you already have elevated blood pressure. Researchers have found that the average hypertensive's systolic blood pressure rises from 142 to 159 and the diastolic blood pressure rises from 97 to 111 if he is talking during the test.

*Source: Geriatrics*

### **FOOD LABELS: CAN YOU TELL FACT FROM FICTION?**

Your favorite juice is branded as a "fruit drink." This means that it:

- A. May contain little or no real fruit juice
- B. Was made from a mixed blend of fruit
- C. Contains 100% juice
- D. Is better for you than concentrate

**The answer is:** A, may contain little or no real fruit juice. If you see the word "drink" on a product, that's a telltale sign that it's not 100% juice, says Dr. Sears. Look carefully at the ingredient list to make sure you're getting pure fruit juice -- unhealthy drinks will contain 10% or less of pure juice. You should also avoid beverages with added sugars such as high-fructose corn syrup. Otherwise, you may be quenching your thirst with just sugar water.

*Source: Tufts University Health & Nutrition Letter*

### **DIFFERENT FOR WOMEN**

Moderate alcohol intake is defined as no more than two drinks a day for a man, and one for a woman. Why the difference?

■ Women end up with a higher blood level of alcohol and thus become more intoxicated than men from the same amount of alcohol. One reason: Women tend to be smaller and have proportionately more fatty tissue and less body water than men the same size (alcohol is diluted in body water).

■ Another reason: The stomach enzyme that breaks down alcohol before it reaches the bloodstream is less active in women. This allows more alcohol to enter the blood.

■ Thus, women are more likely to develop damage to the liver, heart muscle, and brain at lower levels of alcohol intake. Alcohol may also put women at increased risk for osteoporosis and breast cancer.

■ Though women are less likely than men to drive after drinking, they have a higher risk of having a fatal crash at a given blood alcohol concentration. Studies suggest that alcohol has a greater effect on driving skills in women.

■ Pregnant women who drink heavily risk having babies with fetal alcohol syndrome. No level of alcohol consumption during pregnancy is known to be safe.

*Source: Self*

### HOW TO LOSE 10 POUNDS

There any number of ways to lose 10 pounds. After all, it's only a matter of burning extra calories; 35,000 to be exact. Here are some of them:

#### To lose 10 pounds in ...

- 6 months** Swim for one hour, 2 times a week
- 4 months** Cycling for one hour, 3 times a week
- 3 months** Play basketball for one hour, 4 times a week
- 2 months** Run for one hour, 5 times a week
- 1 week** Walk for 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

*Source: Men's Health*

### A FLOSSED CAUSE

Dental floss plays an important part in keeping teeth and gums healthy, but most people don't use it—and some use it in interesting ways. From an issue of American Heritage:

- When commercial floss was first manufactured: 1882.
- Material it was first made of: silk.
- Material used starting in the 1940s: nylon (invented 1935).
- Newest material: Gore-Tex.
- Amount bought by Americans per year: more than 3 million miles.
- Amount bought per person: 18 yards (that's enough for only one flossing per week, assuming 12 inches for each use).
- Amount that should be bought per person: 122 yards minimum a year for daily flossing.
- Proportion who say they feel guilty about not flossing: almost half.
- Proportion who lie to their dentist about flossing: one-third.
- Criminal use: one prison inmate used floss to cut through a wire fence; another reportedly sawed through bars in his cell with floss; and one braided floss into a rope to help scale a wall and escape.
- Other non dental uses: shoelaces, kite string, cheesecake cutter, bead string, ukulele string, fishing line, picture hanger, replacement for chain inside toilet tank.

And by the way: Use it, but don't flush it down the

## INSURING YOUR HEALTH

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toilet. The nearly indestructible threads can gum up municipal sewer systems and pumping stations, according to the Toronto Star.

### WHEN 90% LEAN = 51% FAT

The people who sell you ground beef like putting percent-lean labels on their product. Ninety percent lean sounds like it's only 10% fat. But 10% fat content means that 51% of the calories come from fat.

Ground beef has been called the biggest source of saturated fat in the American diet. And interestingly, ground beef can be labeled "lean" if it's 22% fat by weight. Other foods must be 10% or less fat by weight to be called "lean."

Cooking only reduces fat content by 10% on average.

*Source: UC Berkeley Wellness Letter*

### POPCORN

You would have to eat two quarts of plain, unbuttered popcorn to get the calories in one ounce of potato chips (about 15 chips). Eat one cup of plain, unbuttered popcorn instead of a one-ounce bag of potato chips and you'll avoid 135 calories and 10 grams of fat.

### MICROWAVE YOUR SPONGES?

To kill germs in your kitchen sponges, microwave them at full power for two minutes. A study in the Journal of Environmental Health in December found that this reduces microbes by more than 99%. Sponges are a common source of microbes, including Salmonella, especially when they remain wet. Air-drying sponges does not significantly reduce germs, and though putting them in the dishwasher cleans them, it doesn't sufficiently decontaminate them. To guard against fire, make sure sponges contain no metal and are wet before you microwave them. Be careful when removing them, since they will be very hot.