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iCare Community™ Magazine
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FROM THE EDITOR

By ANGEL CHAVEZ

To Be or Not to Be

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED? Just like King Solomon about life and everything else?

“The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. “Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher; “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.”

What profit has a man from all his labor in which he toils under the sun? One generation passes away, and another generation comes, But the earth abides forever. The sun also rises, and the sun goes down and hastens to the place where it arose. The wind goes toward the south and turns around to the north; The wind whirls about continually and comes again on its circuit.

All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full; To the place from which the rivers come, there they return again. All things are full of labor; Man cannot express it.

The eye is not satisfied with seeing, Nor the ear filled with hearing. *Ecclesiastes 1:8*

IF YOU EVER FIND YOURSELF LIKE A PREACHER PREACHING NEGATIVELY TO YOURSELF, GIVE YOURSELF AWAY TO THE ONE LIVING IN YOU, AND LET HIM BE, THEN YOU WILL BE ALSO.

YOU WILL FIND YOURSELF AS ONE THAT IS NEVER ALONE, NEVER PURPOSELESS, NEVER INADEQUATE TO FULFILL YOUR CALL, NEVER WITHOUT GRACE, NEVER POWERLESS, NEVER WITHOUT IDEAS, NEVER WITH EMPTINESS, NEVER, NEVER, NEVER... WITHOUT ANYTHING YOU MAY NEED. BECAUSE GREATER IS HE THAT IS IN YOU THAN HE THAT IS IN THE WORLD. YOU ARE AN OVERCOMER AND MORE THAN A CONQUEROR



IN HIM. YOU ARE FULL OF LOVE, JOY, PEACE LONG SUFFERING, KINDNESS, GOODNESS, FAITHFULNESS, GENTLENESS, AND SELF CONTROLLED, IN JESUS YES, WE ARE!

HIS PURPOSE IS BEING FULFILLED IN YOUR LIFE, THEREFORE, DELIGHT YOURSELF IN HIM AND HE WILL CHANGE ANY OF YOUR SELFISH DESIRES FOR HIS DESIRES.

I DO RECOMMEND YOU TO BE WHAT HE HAS CREATED YOU TO BE, INSTEAD OF WONDERING WHAT TO BE OR NOT TO BE.

WRAP YOURSELF IN HIS LOVE, THEN WALK, RUN, SWIM, OR FLY IN HIS LOVE. GET LOST IN HIM AND YOU WILL FIND YOURSELF, WITHOUT THE WONDERING, BECAUSE AS HE IS SO ARE WE IN THIS WORLD.

IF YOU ARE NOT SURE YOU ARE HIS, THEN YOU CAN START BY DOING THIS PRAYER: OUT LOUD IS MORE EFFECTIVE AND THEN TELL IT TO SOMEBODY, THAT YOU BELONG TO JESUS!

WE NEED THIS KIND OF BOLDNESS ONCE AGAIN IN THIS COUNTRY, OTHERWISE, WE ARE CAUSING THE ENEMY TO RISE IN OUR OWN FACES.

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Helping Kids Navigate the World of Artificial Intelligence

Source: commonsensemedia.org

From chatbots to image generators, it seems like everyone is playing with artificial intelligence tools these days. Although new programs keep popping up, AI is already a big part of our lives.

An artificial intelligence is any computer program that can do tasks that typically require human expertise or skill. AI can be used to power the voice assistants on our phones, the posts we scroll through on social media, the ads we see online, and so much more.

It's natural for children to be curious about the latest popular AI programs. As these tools become more widespread, it's important to talk with kids about responsible and appropriate tech use. These tips can help your family explore and learn about AI together.

Talk about the benefits and risks of using artificial intelligence. Many AI tools can help kids be creative and learn new skills. New programs are being created that can support children's individual learning needs. Depending on the app, AI can also be useful for everyday tasks, from making a list of chores to finding ideas for fun family activities. Chat with your child about AI tech that excites them. Get them thinking about how the programs could help them learn and grow.

There can also be risks when using AI tools that are not created with kids in mind. For example, many chatbots are designed to respond like humans, which

can make it feel like a social interaction. Talk about how using AI programs makes your kids feel. Help your kids be mindful that they're interacting with programs, not people with feelings and emotions.

Plus, AI systems work by using large amounts of data, so they tend to collect lots of user information. This can put a child's privacy at risk, so make sure your kids know the rules of safe online behavior. This includes not sharing private info, and getting people's permission before posting anything by or about them.

Try out AI tools together

It's a good idea for kids to try out and use AI programs with adult support. That way, you can make sure they're using tools that won't expose them to anything inappropriate. Testing them together can also allow kids to think about how the tools could be useful, or even harmful. Did they discover a new song generator? Get it to write silly lyrics for everyone to enjoy. Is your child's class using a new coding program? Figure out how to build a website together!

Explore together how artificial intelligence systems work, too. Look for kid-friendly guides that allow your children to reflect on how AI is used around them. Ask them to think about the ways they already interact with artificial intelligence.

Talk about biases in tech

Artificial intelligence tools are designed by humans. They also use data originally created by humans, and data that reflects existing biases in society. A lot of AI programs are even known to give biased or incorrect information. The tech is not perfect, and can make a lot of mistakes. This is especially true when it comes to race and gender.

Encourage your kids to be critical of the information they get from new technology. Teach them to question the writing, images, and posts that AI tools create. For example, ask: How did AI come up with the answer? What information did it use to find the answer? Have your kids go and find the answer themselves from other trustworthy sources. Help them build their critical thinking and problem-solving skills by chatting about what else the AI's answers could include. Could the responses be suggesting things that could harm marginalized groups? Are the answers making assumptions about race, gender, and other forms of identity?

Have conversations about plagiarism and cheating

Apps that kids can use to cheat with have been around for a while. Many popular AI tools like ChatGPT generate text and images, which kids might want to use for schoolwork. These programs don't always give sources for their information, so they could be inaccurate or used without permission.

Explain to your kids that using AI for work they did not create themselves could be considered plagiarism or cheating. Instead, steer them toward educational tools that help them build on what they learn in school. Age-appropriate AI tools can complement their learning, but not replace it. It can be a part of the process, just like looking up information online for essays, or watching YouTube videos to learn something new.

Ask your child's teachers and school for support

Your child's school might already be teaching with artificial intelligence programs. Ask their teachers about tools that can support their learning at home. It could be anything from websites that help kids with learning disabilities, to apps that teach a new language.

Lastly, check if your school district offers classes on AI or emerging tech. Your kids can learn important skills that will set them up for success in their education and careers in the future. ♦



From the Sheriff

by NOEL E. STEPHEN
Okeechobee County
okeesherriff.org

What is the S.A.F.E. Program?

Simply put, it is a way for Okeechobee County Emergency Services to identify persons with special needs, either those with intellectual or social interaction disabilities such as certain people on the autism spectrum, mild - profound mental deficiency or physical disabilities, deaf, mute, visually impaired, or loss of limbs that would cause their need for assistance.

You give emergency services information about the person and the caregiver and their home location, and we also request vehicles they travel in. Why, some have asked, what do you use the information for?

- Who to contact if the caregiver is injured or incapacitated
- Gives the emergency services a clear indication identifying someone in the home or vehicle may need extra assistance
- Allows us to know if someone will react differently or need more help than "normal" during an emergency

Each family or caregiver receives a 5-inch S.A.F.E. Sticker for each vehicle and home. This is a redundancy measure for computer systems our first responders use, all of which (city, & county L.E. along with Fire rescue) are familiar with and have been trained on the SAFE Program.

How to get it?

Go our facebook or website at okeesherriff.org, scan the QR code and bring it to the Okeechobee City Police Dept, Okeechobee County Sheriff's Office or the Okeechobee County Fire Rescue H.Q. (Located at Emergency Management.

Once the paper is reviewed to ensure you have everything, we will issue the stickers, and the information goes within a database that ONLY Okeechobee Emergency Services can access.

What started in Santa Rosa County Sheriff's Office FL, as a local program is gaining traction throughout Florida. We hope to see it make it national.

This program will only work if you join.

Everything but your time is free to the public. Please sign your loved one up today; it may save them tomorrow.

Hey, fellow Sheriffs, Police Chiefs, and Fire Chiefs here in Florida and throughout the county, Okeechobee Sheriff Noel E. Stephen challenges you to help make this a fixture for awareness. ♦

Jack Nash

Community Liaison & Public Information Officer

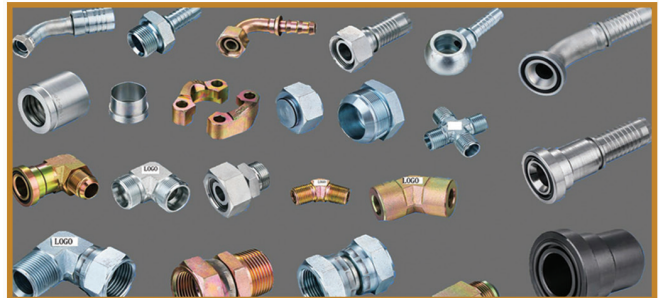


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From the Mayor

by DOWLING WATFORD
City of Okeechobee
cityofokeechobee.com

WELCOME TO THE CITY OF OKEECHOBEE!



If you're looking for a friendly, rural, small town community with a forward-thinking attitude, you'll feel right at home here in Okeechobee!

While we have a number of exciting business and industrial success stories, it's hard to beat early morning fishing on Lake Okeechobee. Whether it's landing a trophy fish or just the relaxing view of a variety of Florida's wildlife in their natural habitat waking up to a cool sunrise breeze, you'll fall in love with Okeechobee. In contrast, there's the excitement of a number of nationally sanctioned professional bass fishing tournaments.

Okeechobee is known as the "Speckled Perch Capital of the World" so it is only fitting that we hold an annual event in honor of this title. The Speckled Perch Festival, sponsored by the Okeechobee Main Street, is our largest festival of the year and is held in March. Each year this downtown event attracts thousands of out of town visitors and locals alike. It's kicked off by a parade that wraps around Flagler Park. Hundreds of craft and food vendors are scattered about, the most popular being the Seminole booths with their colorful jackets and crafts for sale as well as their delicious pumpkin bread. There's also the Okeechobee Cattlemen's Rodeo and the Okeechobee County Fair going on at the Agri-Center.

We have a vibrant business district, but as our Okeechobee Main Street logo states we have 'old values and new visions'. On the 4th Saturday in July we have the Day of the Cowboy event, which includes a cattle drive through our town. Yes, we do things like that in Okeechobee!

Our location makes Okeechobee the Gateway to South Florida with convenient access to both coasts and all of Central Florida. (Locate Okeechobee) Commercial and industrial concerns have found that Okeechobee is the place you want to be and along with the Chamber of Commerce of Okeechobee County we've taken an aggressive attitude toward seeking new businesses in our two local Industrial Parks.

We could go on about all the amenities we have to offer, but we want to invite you to visit our town and discover it for yourself. We think you'll find that our community prides itself most on the hospitality of its residents. ♦



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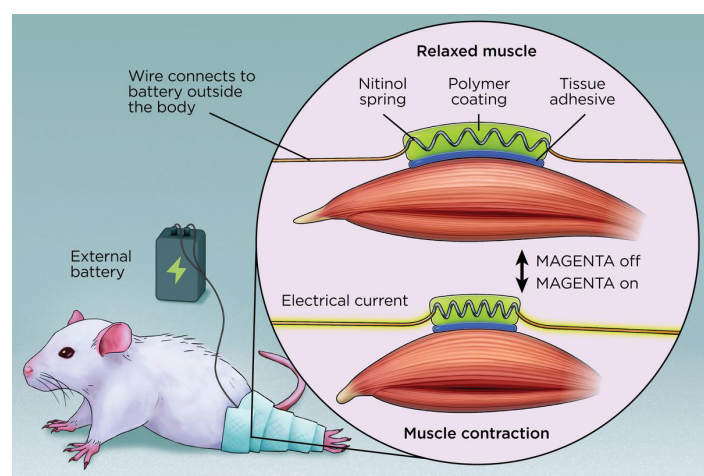


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New implantable device for fighting muscle atrophy

Scientists developed a new biomedical device that adheres to muscle tissue and delivers contractions, promoting tissue regeneration.

Source: sciworthy.com



When a person does not routinely move their muscles, the muscles begin to thin and waste away, a condition known as muscle atrophy. Although muscle atrophy can be treated through exercise, it is not feasible for many patients, including those on bed rest. Scientists have been exploring ways to directly stimulate muscle tissue to promote tissue regeneration and reduce muscle atrophy.

Previously, scientists have demonstrated that stretching pieces of engineered tissue in the lab increased cell production and cell growth. Although devices are routinely used to externally stretch human tissues, such as those used in orthodontics, scientists have yet to build a device to stimulate tissues inside the body. Scientists face two main challenges for developing an internal device. The first challenge is designing a system that can mechanically generate forces along the tissue surface. The second challenge is successfully adhering the device to the muscle tissue in a way that will effectively stretch or compress the muscle.

Recently, scientists from Harvard University built a device that addressed these two challenges. To generate forces along the tissue surface, they designed a spring made out of nickel and titanium, called nitinol. When these two metals are mixed together, they form a material with unique mechanical properties called a shape memory alloy.

The spring is originally formed in a tight coil. When it is stretched at room temperature, the spring changes shape, or deforms, and holds this new shape. When the spring is heated, in this case by electric current, the spring “remembers” its tight

coil shape and contracts back to it. When the electric current is turned off, the temperature in the spring drops and it can again be deformed into a stretched shape. Shape memory alloys have been safely used in other medical devices and proven to be biocompatible.

To adhere the spring device to muscle tissue, the scientists first embedded the spring inside a stretchy rubber called an elastomer. Then they added a sticky yet strong gelatin-like material to the elastomer called a hydrogel. Previous researchers have shown that tough hydrogels can adhere strongly to human tissues. The scientists named this new device MAGENTA, which stands for mechanically active gel-elastomer-nitinol tissue adhesive.

The scientists then performed several experiments to test the effectiveness of MAGENTA. First they attached MAGENTA to a piece of engineered tissue in the lab and applied an electric current through the wire. As the wire contracted, the surrounding elastomer also contracted, which then caused the underlying tissue to squeeze together. When the current was turned off, the spring and tissue relaxed back, confirming MAGENTA operated as the scientists expected. They performed a similar successful experiment on muscle tissue removed from the hind leg of a mouse.

Next, the scientists set out to test MAGENTA in living tissue. They implanted the device on the large muscle in the hind leg of live mice. When electric current was applied through the wire, the scientists observed the skin covering the device contract. They also confirmed the muscle was moving with the device using high-resolution ultrasound imaging. The scientists observed only mild inflammation in the mice’s stimulated muscles and no severe adverse effects, confirming biocompatibility.

The scientists then designed an experiment to learn if MAGENTA could treat muscle atrophy. They immobilized the hind leg of mice to induce muscle atrophy and implanted MAGENTA into half the mice to stimulate the immobilized leg muscle. After two weeks, the scientists measured higher levels of protein synthesis in the leg muscles of the mice treated with stimulation. The muscles in the mice treated with MAGENTA were bigger and heavier than in the mice that were not treated. The scientists also measured the force that the muscles could expel and found the treated mice generated forces much higher than the untreated mice. These forces were actually similar to those generated in muscles of healthy, active mice.

One drawback to MAGENTA application is the need to have wires attaching the device to an electric source outside the body. The scientists observed the nitinol spring could heat and contract by shining a laser on the device. They then implanted a wireless MAGENTA onto the muscle of a mouse leg. They shone a laser onto the mouse leg and confirmed the device stimulated the muscle. This demonstrated that the laser could remotely activate MAGENTA through a layer of skin.

Although the focus of this study was to develop a biomedical device to treat muscle atrophy, the scientists think MAGENTA could be used on other types of human tissue such as skin and heart. However, wireless application via laser heating is currently limited by how deep in the body it can be implanted. The scientists suggest future work to increase light sensitivity could address these limitations and open up possibilities for other applications. ♦

How to Evaluate Technology Solutions for Your Business

When evaluating technology solutions for your business, it's important to consider the long-term implications of any decisions you make. Here are a few tips to help you make the best choice for your organization.

1. Identify Your Needs: Before you start looking for the right technology, it's important to understand what your business needs. Make a list of tasks and processes that you want to improve or automate. This will give you a better idea of what type of technology you should be looking for.

2. Research Your Options: Once you have a better understanding of what your organization needs, it's time to start researching the different options available. Look into different vendors and products to see how they compare. Consider factors such as cost, functionality, customer service, and scalability.

3. Evaluate Performance: Performance is key when it comes to selecting the right technology. Make sure to test out any potential solutions to ensure they're up to the task. Ask vendors for trial periods and pay close attention to how the technology works in real-world scenarios.

4. Consider Support: Technology can be complicated, and it's important to make sure you have access to the support you need. Look into the vendor's customer service policies and read reviews from other customers. It's also important to look at the vendor's track record for updates and bug fixes.

5. Calculate the ROI: Finally, it's essential to consider the return on investment for any technology solution you select. Make sure the cost of the solution is off set by the increase in efficiency and productivity.

By following these tips, you can make an informed decision when it comes to finding the right technology solution for your business.



By Angel Moncada
President of
YESHUA GROUP



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EXPIRED

Expires On, Sell By and Best Before Dates... What Does It All Mean?

In case you're contemplating some spring cleaning, you may want to take on the task of organizing your pantry and refrigerator. There's a good chance you're buying food you probably already have in your kitchen (especially if it's unorganized) — just hidden in the back or under other products. On the other side, you may have “expiration police” in your household. Those who refuse to consume anything expired and are quick to toss anything “old” in the garbage. They're always the ones searching for an expiration date on every package.

It turns out, they may be the ones committing a crime — the crime of throwing out perfectly good food and, therefore, wasting money. Many of those tiny little expiration dates refer to the quality of the item, not its safety for consumption.

It seems most of us are confused about expiration dates. Every year, it's estimated that the average American family of four loses \$1,500 to uneaten food — oftentimes because of the expiration date on the package. (Can you imagine having an extra \$1,500 every year?)

Even the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) notes that food remains safe to consume after the expiration date, as long as it's been handled properly and shows no signs of spoilage.

However it's important to note cans that are dented, rusted, leaking or bulging should definitely not be consumed, because the contents could be tainted with bacteria such as botulism.

Did you know the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does not require food manufacturers to list expiration dates on products? The only exceptions are infant formula and baby food. Otherwise, in most states, it's completely at the discretion of the manufacturer. What does the date mean?

Best If Used By or Best Before

Established by the manufacturer, the term refers to the food or beverage's quality. Until the date listed, the food is at its peak quality. After the date, the food or beverage is still safe to consume. However, the flavor and quality may not be as good. Of course, the longer you wait, the quality will diminish accordingly.



Use By

The term is a little more definitive, meaning the food should be consumed by the date stamped on the package. Past the date, you should be cautious and just toss it for safety.

The term is mostly used for perishable foods, including vegetables, fruits, meats, poultry, fish and dairy.

Consuming these foods past the expiration date can make you sick. The life of these foods can usually be extended by a few months, if you freeze them by the date on the package.

Sell By

The term is intended for retailers, as a marker for when the product needs to be removed from the shelf. Most of these items are safe to eat or drink afterward — sometimes for weeks.

However, this is the term that causes the most confusion (and waste) for consumers because most read it as an “expiration date”, believing the food is no longer good past the date.

Storage recommendation

You should store commercially canned foods and other shelf stable products in a cool, dry place.

Never put them above the stove, under the sink, in a damp garage or basement or any place exposed to high or low temperature extremes.

If you do so, according to the USDA they are safe indefinitely. However, over time, most canned foods will change in taste and texture and may eventually lose nutritional value.

Get organized

One of the best ways to save money on your groceries is to organize your kitchen. Food is less likely to be trashed, when older items are used first.

If you keep your pantry and refrigerator organized, you can easily use what needs to be eaten next before it “goes bad.”

This is a trick bargain hunters have known for years — just treat your pantry as your own little grocery store.

When you restock a household staple, simply move older product to the front and put the newer items in the back.

That way, when you pull a can, bag or box for a meal, you know they're in chronological order by expiration date.

The biggest mistake is just stocking new items on top of old ones. That's how you end up with a can of beans from 2009.

Save money

Expiration dates can be a gold mine for bargain hunters. Many retailers drastically reduced the price on perishable and non-perishable products about to expire. You just have to know where to look for them.

Find the clearance spots at your favorite grocer, as they usually keep them in the same areas. (You can also check the shelves for clearance tags.) Then, every time you shop, check each area for the latest bargains.

You can usually find lots of deals in the meat and dairy departments. If an item is about to expire that same day or in the next few days, most grocers would rather sell it than throw it away.

As a result, you'll find deep discounts — often 50% off or more. (If you're lucky, you can sometimes find items at 75% to 90% off.)



The key is to know your family will consume it immediately, especially with dairy products. Although, a big family with lots of kids can easily go through a gallon of milk within in just a day or two! A good discount can also help dictate your dinner plans. If you find a great deal on ground beef or chicken, you can easily make hamburgers, tacos or fajitas that same night.

Discounted meat also offers a little more flexibility because you can easily freeze it to extend its usability. If you find big savings, you might consider stocking up your freezer.

And don't be shy. If you find a product on the shelf about to expire, ask the store or department manager if they'd be willing to reduce the price. You'd be surprised at their response. My tip is to be extra polite. Being rude or demanding won't get you too far.

You're actually helping them keep their shelves "fresh" and from potentially losing money on an expired product. Make the meat and dairy department managers your friend! This trick also works well in the floral department.

Being a good bargain hunter takes a little confidence and work, but it's worth it. You may not always get a "yes", but it never hurts to ask — especially when it comes to saving money. ♦



Not all foods are equal when it comes to nutrition and anti-aging properties. There are many lists of superfoods, and many strong opinions about which is best, but you will always find the following mentioned!

Blueberries

These are the most super of the superfoods. They are little exploding bombs of nutrients, packed with bioflavonoids, a type of antioxidant that is said to strengthen artery walls and maintain the structure of the skin. They contain anti-cancer and anti-aging properties, and can help to lower cholesterol. Sprinkle them on porridge or cereal for a power breakfast.



Broccoli

A powerhouse source of iron, broccoli is the king of vegetables. Absolutely packed with bioflavonoids, it is top of the list of anti-cancer vegetables, and has been shown to protect against breast and prostate cancer. Use it steamed or in stir-fries.

Tomatoes

A source of lycopene, which can help to fight prostate cancer in particular, as it mops up the free radicals that cause damage to body tissue. The body absorbs lycopene more efficiently if the tomatoes are cooked, so use freely in soups and sauces. Tinned tomatoes are an excellent source of lycopene, as they have already been cooked.

Oily Fish

Oily fish, such as salmon, mackerel, tuna and sardines are top sources of Omega-3 fatty acids. These are absolutely the "in" nutrients of the moment, said to help lower the risk of blood clots, and the build up of fatty deposits on arteries. However, it is the suggestion that Omega-3 improves brainpower that has been causing a stir, and experiments have shown a marked improvement in the



continued page 19

beginning your EXERCISE ROUTINE



Adoption and Adherence

Why do you stay interested, excited, and motivated in your exercise routine? Many people experience lapses or drop out of work out programs due to a lack of mental readiness, inappropriate exercise prescription, difficulty in changing habits, and injury. When the training program is overly restrictive, too challenging for beginners, or does not promote self-responsibility, it is easy to quit. Exercise psychology studies the mood changes associated with exercise, both desirable and undesirable, in order to describe, explain, predict, and intervene.

Common exercise goals consist of muscle toning, body sculpting, weight loss, and cardiovascular fitness. Less common reasons for engaging in an exercise program are mood enhancement, stress reduction, social interaction, and experiencing flow. Flow happens when you have achieved the state of peak performance in physical, technical, and mental training, so you have a total immersion in the activity.

Common mistakes made in training include overtraining, under training, performing non-specific exercises, failure to schedule a long-term training plan, and failure to taper before a performance. Tapering includes a short-term reduction in training load prior to competition to allow the muscles to re-

synthesize glycogen and heal from training-induced damage or delay onset muscle soreness (DOMS).

Let's review, what is exercise? Exercise is a large muscle activity involving repetitive body movements that are planned, structured, and purposeful and intended to enhance physical fitness, well-being, and health.

There are six known exercise psychology strategies for enhancing exercise adherence. Behavior Modification Approaches consist of prompts, verbal, physical, or symbolic cues used to initiate behaviors, and contracts including the expectations, goals, responsibilities, behaviors, contingencies, and consequences. Reinforcement Approaches include charting your attendance and participation and providing rewards and feedback for attendance, participation. Cognitive-Behavioral Approaches comprise of goal setting, which can be flexible, set by the individual, and time-based. Decision Making Approaches involve you, the exerciser, in the decisions prior to beginning your exercise programs to create a decision balance sheet. Social Support Approaches incorporate your family and friends, buddy systems, and increased group identity into your exercise program for further support and encouragement. The sixth method for

continued next page

enhancing adherence is Intrinsic Approaches which focus on increasing the fun and enjoyment of working out through focusing on the experience and the process, typically through engagement in purposeful and meaningful activities.

Everyone can improve one's consistency and reduce negative thoughts associated with sports, exercise, and staying physically active through adopting the idea, "Let's focus on what you can do." When embracing excellence in mental state, focus on dreams to stay excited; on successes and how they are influenced by free will, change, and lifelong learning; stay positive through being your own best friend, biggest fan and greatest coach; and create your own reality through keeping things in perspective.

Another important consideration is "don't forget to have fun!" To create the perfect exercise program for you, start by using your critical thinking skills to make two lists. The first list will answer the question "Why don't I exercise?" and the second list will focus on "Why do I like to exercise?" After reviewing the lists, act on your opportunities.

The first step in developing a realistic fitness plan is to first have a fitness assessment. Exercise and diet are essential parts of achieving health-related fitness. Health-related fitness consists of five components: strength, muscle endurance, cardiorespiratory or cardiovascular endurance, flexibility, and body composition. Strength is your muscle's maximum ability, while muscle endurance is how long your muscles can perform a task. Cardiorespiratory or cardiovascular endurance is the body's ability to supply oxygen to working muscles, especially during aerobic exercises such as walking, biking, swimming, and dancing that work most of the body. Flexibility helps redistribute blood after bouts of exercise and stretch and loosen muscles and joints. Body composition is body fat percentage.

I also recommend goal setting strategies and positive self-talk, like "Today I will... Yes, I can..." Eating healthy food and following a balanced diet is critical to achieving fitness. You should ensure you consume the right nutrients, including a balance of carbohydrates, protein, fat, water, minerals, and vitamins, through making good food choices and having a food plan. ♦

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UNNAMED PAIN:

Coping with ambiguous grief

The death of a loved one can be among the most distressing experiences people face. It's a clear loss with expected and validated feelings of grief and sadness. Many times, however, people can feel significant loss when there isn't a death. It can be more difficult to recognize and validate these emotions.

Ambiguous grief is a person's profound sense of loss and sadness that is not associated with a death of a loved one. It can be a loss of emotional connection when a person's physical presence remains, or when that emotional connection remains but a physical connection is lost. Often, there isn't a sense of closure.

Ambiguous grief can feel lonely, stressful and confusing. Your feelings need to be validated and the significance of the experience recognized. However, there's often no formal recognition from others that a loss has occurred — or if others do acknowledge it, they show no recognition that it is of any major significance. You may have intense sorrow, numbness, bitterness, persistent longing, pain, rumination, guilt and anger.

Types of ambiguous grief

Grief is complicated and complex. Ambiguous grief is no exception.

Many scenarios could generate feelings of ambiguous grief, which usually fall into one of these general categories:

Goodbye without leaving

This happens when the person you are grieving is physically alive but not emotionally or relationally part of your life. Examples include divorce, estrangement, incarceration, relocating to a new country or a chronic illness like dementia.

The relationship you had with the person is over or substantially changed. This can result from your decisions or be a situation entirely outside of your control.

A couple in conflict is a common situation where someone might experience ambiguous grief. A partner may say, "I want the person he or she used to be." A similar sentiment is shared by a caregiver for someone with memory loss, who yearns for the relationship before their loved one's dementia progressed. In these cases, the wanted person is no longer available, leading to significant loss and grief.

Leaving without a goodbye

You may grieve a person who is physically gone under circumstances where you are unsure if they are dead or alive. For example, the person may have an addiction that leads to abandonment or a missing person scenario. These situations are difficult because you aren't able to say your farewells. There may not be a traditional funeral or another mourning period, which can lead to a lack of closure. This grief also is experienced by children when a parent leaves the family due to a divorce.

Situational goodbye

Sometimes, feelings of ambiguous grief aren't due to a relationship change but occur because of other losses. These situations could affect you personally or occur elsewhere but cause significant grief in your life. This could include the COVID-19 pandemic, a change in future plans, natural disasters, political unrest or a loss of financial or personal security.

Ambiguous grief coping tips

People follow different paths through the grieving experience. There's no right or wrong way to grieve. There are no specific phases. It's rarely a linear path and instead has ups and downs and moves forward and back.

Remember these coping tips as you navigate your ambiguous grief journey:

Identify your grief.

It's important to validate your ambiguous grief. One way to do this is to write down everything in your life that has changed or will change due to your loss. Nothing is too small to include. Don't minimize your list, as that can short-circuit your grief. A list for a parental estrangement may include wedding dress shopping together, sending Mother's Day cards or holiday gifts, having inside jokes and more. The list for an incarcerated loved one may include lost holidays and milestones, vacations, daily conversations and physical intimacy. The list for a loved one suffering from dementia may include planned trips, sharing holidays, living in the same place and shared memories. When you are done with your list, share it with a trusted friend, family member or mental health counselor.

Recognize multiple emotions.

During the grieving process, many people experience multiple emotions simultaneously. You can feel relieved to have your divorce finalized but saddened over the loss of the future you

continued next page

envisioned. A loved one's dementia diagnosis can make you distressed, even as you welcome the opportunity to spend more quality time together and continue to visit often.



Don't compare.

It's impossible to compare grief because people aren't simple or the same. There are many variables or contributing factors that are more or less important to each person. It's not helpful to minimize your grief because your situation doesn't include death.

Remember that grieving can compound as well. For example, a person could be moving a child to college, caring for an ill family member and coming to terms with an estranged loved

one. Separately, these situations may be manageable, but when they happen simultaneously, the person could struggle with deep feelings of ambiguous grief.


Consider ceremonies.

When there is a physical death, it's common for the community to gather to pay tribute to the lost person and lend support to those grieving. Traditions vary, but there is usually a memorial service, sharing of meals and retelling of happy memories. While full closure may not be possible with ambiguous grief, ceremonial activities can provide therapeutic benefits. You could write a letter to the person, plant a tree, donate money or time, host a remembrance ceremony or do other meaningful activities. A mental health counselor can help you find a creative way to process your loss through such ceremonies.

Seek support.

People aren't meant to carry their grief alone. Most need others to help them work through their feelings and move forward. Family members, friends, social support groups and your faith community are good resources to help you work through your grief. You may be able to find a support group focused on a particular type of ambiguous grief, such as divorce, estrangement, addiction or missing persons. Professional counseling can help you explore your emotions and develop healthy coping skills.

Feelings of loss and sadness due to ambiguous grief are valid. Talk with a professional mental health counselor if you have intense grief, anxiety or trouble performing daily tasks. There's nothing wrong with your reactions or emotions, but a counselor can help you live more freely. ♦



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Phylicia Cortes



My professional experience ranges from Varsity Cheerleading Coach of Okeechobee High School, Certified Surgical Technologist for the Plastic Surgery of The Palm Beaches, to an small business owner Glow Beauty Bar here in Okeechobee.

I am also involved in The Healthy Start of Okeechobee as a Board Member, currently the Treasurer of the local coalition.

What is your philosophy on business and life?

I wholeheartedly believe what my Broker Lori Mixon preaches: "The relationship is more important than the sale."

Connect with Phylicia at: 863.532.030 or email her at: phylicia@mixongroup.com

Realtor with Mixon Real Estate Group and Owner of Glow Beauty Bar Salon

Hi Phylicia, please give us a brief introduction.

My name is Phylicia Cortes. It's so nice to meet you! I have spent most of my life residing in Okeechobee County. My Father named Phil, and my mother named Lee, decided to combine their first names together when they named me Phylly.

I am blessed with one older sister Tuesday Burk and a twin brother Richard Bueter. All three siblings are graduated from Okeechobee High School.

After graduation I moved to West Palm Beach for about 10 years, then I moved to Huston Texas in 2011 and lived there for almost 10 years. That is where my little girl Rowan was born.

I moved back to Okeechobee to raise my 9-year-old daughter so she too can experience all the same traditions and advantages of growing up in my hometown.

What do you love about what you do?

I am a people person. I love the opportunity of meeting new people and developing a lifelong connection. My life's passion is to help people, and being a Realtor allows me to fulfill this personal desire in a daily basis.

What are your future plans?

I am daily striving to build my real estate business by providing local knowledge along with superior customer service.

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Unlocking Inner Peace:

The Powerful Benefits of Meditation

In today's fast-paced world, where stress and anxiety seem to be ever-present, finding ways to calm the mind and relax the body has become more crucial than ever. One practice that has gained widespread popularity for its numerous mental, emotional, and physical benefits is meditation. Meditation is a simple yet powerful technique that involves training the mind to focus and cultivate a state of deep relaxation and awareness. With regular practice, meditation can unlock inner peace and transform your life in many ways. In this blog post, we will explore some of the incredible benefits of meditation and how it can enhance your overall well-being.

- **Reduced Stress and Anxiety:** In a world filled with constant demands and pressures, stress and anxiety have become prevalent. Meditation has been proven to be an effective tool for reducing stress and anxiety by activating the relaxation response in the body. By quieting the mind and releasing tension from the body, meditation helps to lower the levels of stress hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline, resulting in a sense of calm and tranquility.
- **Improved Mental Clarity and Focus:** Our minds are constantly bombarded with thoughts, distractions, and information overload, which can leave us feeling scattered and overwhelmed. Regular meditation practice helps to sharpen the mind, increase mental clarity, and enhance focus. By training the mind to stay present and observe thoughts without judgment, meditation cultivates a

heightened sense of awareness and concentration that can be applied to various aspects of life, such as work, studies, and relationships.

- **Enhanced Emotional Well-being:** Emotions play a significant role in our overall well-being, and meditation can help us develop a healthier relationship with our emotions. Through meditation, we learn to observe our thoughts and emotions without reacting to them, allowing us to respond to situations in a more thoughtful and balanced way. Meditation also promotes positive emotions such as compassion, gratitude, and loving-kindness, which can boost emotional resilience and foster a positive outlook on life.
 - **Improved Physical Health:** The mind and body are intricately connected, and the benefits of meditation extend beyond mental and emotional well-being. Numerous studies have shown that meditation can have positive effects on physical health, including reducing blood pressure, boosting the immune system, improving sleep quality, and reducing inflammation. Meditation has also been found to alleviate symptoms of various health conditions such as chronic pain, irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), and cardiovascular diseases.
- Enhanced Self-awareness and Personal Growth: Meditation is a powerful tool for self-reflection and self-awareness. Through regular practice, we learn to observe our thoughts, emotions, and patterns of behavior with a non-judgmental attitude, allowing us to gain insight into ourselves and our actions. This increased

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anti-aging foods cont.

concentration of school children who have been given Omega-3 supplements. Parents are now being advised to make sure their children have adequate Omega-3 in their diets.

Garlic

For centuries garlic has been renowned for its healing properties. It is also a powerful antioxidant, and is considered one of the best natural remedies for colds and 'flu. Garlic has also been shown to help reduce high cholesterol levels. For best results, eat garlic raw, if you dare! Failing that, use freely in cooking..

Brazil Nuts

Brazil nuts are considered high in fat, but this is unsaturated fat, considered to be the "good" fat. They are an excellent source of the antioxidant selenium, which neutralizes free radicals in the body. Just two or three brazil nuts a day will provide you with adequate levels of selenium.

Avocado

Another superfood considered to be high in fat, but again, we are talking about the beneficial monounsaturated fat. Nutritionally, avocados are almost a complete meal in themselves, containing high levels of many vitamins, especially vitamins E and C.

Olive Oil

Favorite anti-aging ingredient of the Mediterranean diet which has proved to be so beneficial in improving blood vessel function,

and maintaining a healthy heart. It is rich in monounsaturated fats which help lower cholesterol levels. Recently it has been found that extra virgin olive oil contains an anti-inflammatory compound, which may help people with arthritis. Use freely as a salad dressing and in cooking.

Honey

Honey, like garlic, has been a superfood before the term had even been invented! Has powerful antibacterial and healing properties. Manuka honey, a specialist honey from bees that feed on the flowers of the manuka tree has been found to be effective as a topical dressing in the treatment of wounds and infections. It has been used to cure difficult wounds like leg ulcers when conventional treatment has failed.

Bananas

A meal in a skin! Exceptionally high in minerals, bananas provide potassium, and good carbohydrates. They are the chosen snack for athletes and anyone engaging in vigorous physical activity as they help to maintain energy levels.

Try to include at least some of these anti-ageing superfoods in your diet, and you and your health will certainly benefit. ♦

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U.S. CONSTITUTION

by DR. BRENDA MACMENAMIN, DCE
Professor, Christian Leadership University

May We the People Choose LIFE!

If Americans had not forgotten who we are in Christ and the authority He enabled “We the People” to “Hold”, we would have screamed “Treason” and impeached the rogue justices in the Dred Scott and the Roe v. Wade Supreme Court opinions. Just as the 14th Amendment recognized the personhood of our black sisters and brothers, we must we recognize the personhood of the pre-born.

One of the best ways for Floridians to do this is through the Human Life Protection Amendment. The ballot summary language is:

“An amendment recognizing the God-given right to life of the preborn individual. Defines “preborn individual” as a preborn human person at any stage of development. Affirms that life-saving procedures to save the life of the mother shall not be construed as a violation when accompanied by reasonable steps to save the life of the preborn individual. To be added to the Declaration of Rights under Article I of the Florida Constitution.”

The Word of God is quite clear that God requires us to protect innocent human life: “Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves; ensure justice for those being crushed.” *Proverbs 31:8 New Living Translation*

“Today I have given you the choice between life and death, between blessings and curses. Now I call on heaven and earth to witness the choice you make. Oh, that you would choose life, so that you and your descendants might live!” *Deuteronomy 30:19 New Living Translation*

The Human Life Protection Amendment is a grassroots citizens initiative to amend the Florida Constitution to recognize the right to life of the preborn, the most victimized and vulnerable people group in our state. In order to accomplish this, we need to secure 891,589 signed and validated petitions from registered voters across the state of Florida by February 1, 2024.

We need your help! Please print and sign the petition today. Would you like to help beyond that? Sign up to volunteer on one of our county teams or make a donation to support our efforts. ♦

For more info, to sign the petition and to volunteer, go to: HumanLifeFL.com.

For His Glory! Dr. Brenda MacMenamin, DCE TeachingHisStory.com High School American History and American GOV & Ec online. Foundation for American Christian Education, Master Teacher, Teaching every subject delightfully from the Word of God!

inner peace cont.

self-awareness can help us identify areas for personal growth and development, and make positive changes in our lives. Meditation also encourages self-compassion and self-acceptance, fostering a positive relationship with ourselves and promoting a healthy sense of self-esteem.

- **Better Relationships:** Our relationships with others play a significant role in our overall well-being, and meditation can enhance our interactions with others. By promoting mindfulness and compassion, meditation helps us develop better communication skills, empathy, and understanding towards others. It also fosters a sense of connection and intimacy with our loved ones, leading to healthier and more fulfilling relationships.

- **Increased Resilience and Coping Skills:** Life is full of challenges, and building resilience to cope with them is essential. Meditation helps us develop mental and emotional resilience by training us to stay present, observe our thoughts and emotions without judgment, and respond to situations in a more thoughtful and balanced way. This increased resilience enables us to navigate through difficult times with grace and equanimity, and bounce back from setbacks with greater strength and clarity.

Meditation is a powerful practice that offers a wide range of benefits for our overall well-being. From reducing stress and anxiety to improving mental clarity, emotional well-being, physical health, and relationships, meditation has a transformative impact on our lives. It is a tool that can be easily incorporated into our daily routine, and with regular practice, it can unlock inner peace and help us lead a more mindful, balanced, and fulfilling life.

Getting Started

Getting started with meditation is simple. You can begin with just a few minutes of daily practice and gradually increase the duration as you become more comfortable. There are various meditation techniques to choose from, such as mindfulness meditation, loving-kindness meditation, body scan meditation, and many more. You can experiment with different techniques to find the one that resonates with you the most.

To start meditating, find a quiet and comfortable space, sit in a relaxed posture, close your eyes, and bring your attention to your breath or a chosen focal point. As thoughts arise, simply observe them without judgment and gently bring your focus back to your breath or focal point. Over time, with consistent practice, you will notice the benefits of meditation manifesting in your daily life.

Incorporating meditation into your routine can be a game-changer. It can help you manage stress, improve your mental and emotional well-being, boost your physical health, and enhance your relationships. It can also foster personal growth, self-awareness, and resilience, empowering you to navigate life's challenges with grace and equanimity.

So, why wait? Start unlocking the incredible benefits of meditation today and experience the profound positive impact it can have on your mind, body, and soul. Take a few moments each day to quiet your mind, connect with your inner self, and cultivate a state of deep relaxation and awareness. Your well-being deserves it, and you deserve the peace and clarity that meditation can bring. Begin your meditation journey and unlock the power of inner peace in your life! ♦



Summertime Care, Are You Staying Hydrated?

by PAULINE FORSHEE, RDN LDN
Joy Rising Nutrition
www.joyrisingnutrition.com

As summertime approaches, I am often asked how much water is enough water? My answer is, "It depends." Living in sunny Port Saint Lucie, we want to ensure we are staying well hydrated. If we are out in the sun less than one-hour plain water is our best source. Avoid pricey enhanced waters that contain minimal amounts of vitamins and minerals but contribute added sugars to our diets.

When we are in the sun for more than one-hour and sweating or performing a strenuous activity for greater than one-hour, in addition to water we should also replace our electrolytes. This is when a sports drink would be appropriate.

So, how do we know when enough is enough? A general rule of thumb for adults is 8 - 12 cups of water each day. This is the equivalent of 2-4 liters of water. This number will vary slightly from person to person. Additionally, as we age, we often lose the sense of thirst. I recommend to our seniors setting a reminder to drink 4 oz of fluid every thirty minutes this will help prevent dehydration.

What about our kiddos? An easy way to ensure our children remain well hydrated is 1 8-ounce glass of water per year of life. For example, if you have a four year they would need, on average, 32 ounces (1 liter) of water daily. For children eight



years and older they would require a minimum of 64 ounces (2 liters) each day.

Finally, additional sources of thirst-quenching hydration include 100% fruit or vegetable juices, milks, melons, popsicles, Jell-O, and brothy soups. Pour yourself a refreshing glass of hydration today and step outside to enjoy our beautiful Port Saint Lucie surroundings! ♦



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I am unashamedly a Christian that uses sound evidence based research along with the Bible to inspire, motivate, and empower change. I am a registered dietitian nutritionist and hold a degree in Early Education and a Bachelor of Science in the field of Dietetics and Nutrition. I have taught internationally and have been the keynote speaker at conferences, seminars, and retreats. As a former missionary, pastor's wife, and church leader, I know first hand the pressures of self-induced perfectionism. I joyfully call myself a "recovering perfectionist." God isn't finished with me yet and He isn't finished creating a joyful life for you either!



W. Pauline Forshee, RDN, LDN

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But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. - Isaiah 40:31

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Over 55 and the Elderly

We understand times get tough. There is a neighborhood organization that helps seniors get access to the financial and educational resources that they need.

Many people think retirement age is the time to relax and live the good life. This is the case for some, but not all. Seniors are living longer and traditional models of work and retirement have not kept pace with inflation. Those who have worked their entire lives have found themselves facing 2008 financial crisis where many lost half of their retirement, or more. Some were never really able to recover before COVID-19 hit in spring of 2020 when a second financial hit occurred to many seniors IRA accounts.

In addition to the financial struggle mobility is a very real issue for our seniors. Everyday objects, homes and communities not originally designed with longevity in mind often become obstacles to movement, safety, independence and socializing. Remaining safe and mobile are top priorities for older adults.

The health care journey can be particularly complex and fragmented for older adults, two-thirds of whom have at least two chronic conditions. This adds a second layer of financial hardship for seniors who pay excessive costs in medication and treatments. ♦



What you may not know...

Over the past century in the United States alone, the proportion of persons aged 65 years or older increased more than threefold, from 4.1% to 12.9%. According to a 2018 U.S. Census Bureau report, in 2035 “there will be 78.0 million people 65 years and older compared to 76.4 million under the age of 18.” This is estimated to account for 20% of the population. Is the medical community prepared for this? Are these people even going to be able to afford medical care with the ever increasing costs?

According to a Statement from the National Senior Citizens Law Center, poverty among older adults disproportionately impacts women, especially women of color, with twice as many older women as men living in poverty in 2012. Poverty rates were even higher for black (21.2%), Hispanic (21.8%) and Native American (27.1%) women 65 and older. Over 25 million American senior citizens are living at or below 250% of the federal poverty level (\$29,425 per year for a single person). The elderly struggle with rising housing and health care bills, inadequate nutrition, lack of access to transportation, diminished savings, and job loss.

It's no secret that we have a medical epidemic in this country, especially for seniors. Approximately 80% of senior citizens have at least one chronic disease, and 77% have at least two. Having four chronic diseases such as heart disease, cancer, stroke, and diabetes—statistically cause almost two-thirds of all deaths each year. According to an article on CNBC—“A 65-year-old couple in good health will need \$387,644 to pay for health-care costs for the remainder of their lives, according to HealthView Services, a provider of health-care cost projection software.”

Now More Than Ever, Your Help Is Needed!

Donate now to help the working poor/ over 55 get access to financial assistance and educational resources. Your donations go towards helping senior citizens get access to medical care, aid in their mobility, provide food and necessary items they might not be able to afford, and strengthen your community! Neighbors Helping Neighbors.

Visit www.theindigofoundation-us.org and make a donation today!

WANT TO LIVE TO 100?

It's all in the Genes

New research suggests that your life choices might not be the crucial factor in determining whether you make it to 95 or beyond; it finds that many extremely old people appear to have been as bad as everyone else at indulging in poor health habits during their younger years.

Of course, don't take this as an excuse to blow off the gym and enjoy a steak dinner with fries and a cigarette. Your lifestyle matters. But genes seem to provide an extra boost to those who end up living the longest, said Dr. Jill P. Crandall, a professor of clinical medicine at Albert Einstein College of Medicine and co-author of a new study on longevity.

"The genetic component that allows people to survive into extreme old age is probably a very powerful one," she said, even counteracting the effects of unhealthy lifestyle choices.

The study focuses on the genes of extremely old people, who are a hot topic in anti-aging research. "When there is going to be a breakthrough that allows us to slow biological aging, it's probably going to come from the genetics of these people," said S. Jay Olshansky, a professor of epidemiology at the University of Illinois at Chicago who studies aging.

The study authors interviewed people living independently at ages 95 to 109, and asked them to recall things such as their weight, height, alcohol consumption, smoking and their physical activity at age 70; they were also asked whether they ate a low-calorie, low-fat or low-salt diet at that age. All the subjects were Ashkenazi Jews, who share a similar genetic heritage.

The researchers then compared the responses to those from a group of 3,164 people who took part in a survey in the 1970s. At the time, they were at about the same ages as the elderly subjects who appear in the new study.

In essence, the researchers wanted to know whether today's elderly people acted any differently back around age 70 than people in general. Were they healthier? Did they smoke less and exercise more?

The answer: Not really. "We found that our centenarians by and large did not adhere to any specific healthful diet more than the other population did," Crandall said. It was the same for smoking and exercise. Only 43 percent of men aged 95 and older, for example, reported engaging in regular exercise of moderate intensity, compared with 57 percent of men in the comparison group.

However, there was one interesting difference. Researchers found that although men and women aged 95 and older were just as likely to be overweight as their counterparts in the general population, the centenarians were significantly less likely to become obese.

It's not clear if the extremely old people in the study continued to indulge in bad habits such as smoking. When the elders were asked why they thought they had been able to live so long, most (apparently correctly) did not single out lifestyle factors. One-third reported a history of family longevity, while 20 percent believed that physical activity also played a role in their long life. Others attributed a positive attitude (19 percent), a busy or active life (12 percent), less smoking and drinking (15 percent), good luck (8 percent), and religion or spirituality (6 percent) to their centenarian status.

Although lifestyle factors did not appear to greatly influence the centenarians' longevity, the researchers stressed that people not blessed with longevity genes should definitely watch their weight, avoiding smoking and exercise regularly -- all things associated with a longer life span.

Olshansky said the findings underscore the importance of genetics to life span. "The only way anyone has any chance at all of living an exceptionally long life is if they won the genetic lottery at birth," he said.

But, he said, your choices about health can do one thing: lead you to the grave earlier than otherwise. "The only control we have over our duration of life is to shorten it. We exercise that control all the time." ♦

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8 Benefits of Tai Chi for Fitness

Tai Chi is a Chinese martial art often practiced for its health benefits. The practice involves slow, graceful movements coordinated with deep breathing and mental focus. While Tai Chi is often seen as a form of meditation or relaxation, it can also be a great exercise that can improve your fitness in several ways. In this article, we'll explore the eight benefits of Tai Chi for fitness.

Improved Balance and Stability

Tai Chi involves a lot of movement that requires you to shift your weight from one foot to the other. This can help improve your balance and stability, which is especially important for older adults who are at risk of falls.

Increased Flexibility

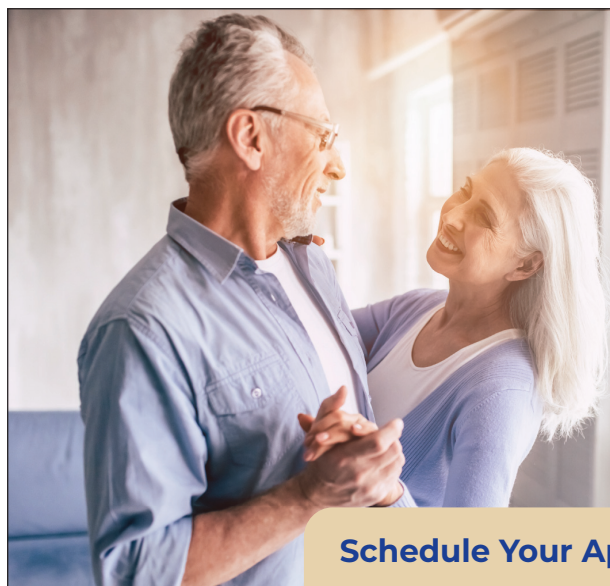
Tai Chi involves a lot of stretching and reaching movements, which can help improve your flexibility. This is important for maintaining mobility as you age and for preventing injury during exercise or other activities.

Strengthened Muscles

While Tai Chi is a low-impact exercise, it still requires using your muscles. The slow, controlled movements can help strengthen your muscles, especially in your legs and core.



continued next page



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Improved Cardiovascular

Health While Tai Chi may not be as intense as other forms of cardio exercise, it can still provide cardiovascular benefits. The deep breathing and slow movements can help improve circulation, lower blood pressure, and reduce stress.

Reduced Stress and Anxiety

Tai Chi is often practiced as a form of meditation or relaxation, which can help reduce stress and anxiety. The slow, controlled movements can also help promote mindfulness and improve mental focus.

Improved Posture

Tai Chi requires you to maintain good posture throughout the practice, which can help improve your posture over time. In addition, this can help reduce pain and discomfort in your back, neck, and shoulders.

Increased Energy and Stamina

While Tai Chi may not leave you sweating and out of breath like other forms of exercise, it can still help increase your energy and stamina. The deep breathing and slow movements can help boost your energy levels and improve your endurance.

Low Impact Exercise

Tai Chi is a low-impact exercise, which means it is gentle on your joints and muscles. This makes it a great option for people with arthritis or other joint conditions and for older adults who may be more prone to injury.

Overall, Tai Chi is a great form of exercise that can provide a wide range of benefits for your fitness and overall health. Whether you want to improve your balance, flexibility, strength, and cardiovascular health or simply reduce stress, Tai Chi can be a great addition to your fitness routine. ♦



For classes on Tai Chi please visit the following websites to find one in your area:

- www.pslbg.org/tai-chi-at-the-gardens
- www.ladytaichi.com
- www.masterchenwellness.com
- www.internalartsinstitute.com
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Prepare Your Home for the Summer Months

Source: *kiplinger.com*



Summer is around the corner, and it's shaping up to be a scorcher.

According to the Farmers' Almanac's summer 2023 forecast, most regions in the United States can expect warmer-than-average temperatures. Thunderstorms are also on tap for the Southeast and south Central regions of the country, and heavy rainfall is expected in the Central states.

Kiplinger talked to home experts on how to prepare your home for this summer's weather conditions.

1. Tune up your HVAC system

An inefficient HVAC system can drive up your summer cooling costs. Mallory Micetich, home expert at Angi, tells Kiplinger she recommends hiring a professional HVAC technician to service your system before summer begins to ensure it will run smoothly during the hot-weather months. According to Angi data, a tune-up costs an average of \$150 — less than half of the cost of the average HVAC repair bill.

2. Change HVAC air filters

"A clean HVAC filter can reduce allergens in your home and help your HVAC system run easier," Micetich says. For best results, she suggests changing your HVAC filter at least once every three months.

3. Rotate ceiling fans counterclockwise

When used properly, a ceiling fan can help keep a room cool. In the summer, you should set your ceiling fans to rotate counterclockwise. "This will help circulate cool air and push it down into your room, creating a cooling effect throughout," Kate McKenna, a senior editor at home improvement website The Spruce, tells Kiplinger.

4. Plug air leaks

A poorly insulated house can jack up your utility bill, but you can combat it with a combination of air sealing and proper insulation. Check your home's attic, windows, and exterior doors for gaps, and seal them before the summer months to help keep conditioned air inside your home.

Bonus: Adding insulation also means you'll save money in the winter by keeping warm air inside your house. Indeed, homeowners can save an average of 15% on heating and cooling costs by air sealing their homes and adding insulation in their attic, floors over crawl spaces, and basements, the EPA estimates.

5. Program your lawn sprinkler system

Your lawn may need some extra hydration to sustain long, hot summer days. "A professional can help make sure your sprinklers are functioning with proper rotation and power and you're not over-watering your lawn, as many homeowners are guilty of doing," says David Steckel, home expert at home services website Thumbtack.

For best results, Micetich suggests running your sprinklers in the evening or early morning to avoid the hottest part of the day.

6. Aerate your lawn

Aeration entails making small holes in your yard to allow for better water penetration, helping the soil breathe and soak up nutrients. You can do the task yourself by renting a core aerator from a local home improvement store, or hire a professional aeration service. Depending on the size of your lawn, aeration typically costs between \$75 and \$203, according to HomeAdvisor data.

7. Deep clean your outdoor grill

Cookouts are synonymous with summer, so make sure your grill is ready for barbecuing. If you have a gas grill, first scrub the grates with a grill brush and then soak them in a mixture of 2 cups of vinegar and 1 cup of baking soda. Dust off any cobwebs from your grill, which can cause a flare-up if they ignite, and clean the outside of the lid and bowl with soap and water.

Cleaning methods can vary based on the type of grill you own. Home Depot provides step-by-step cleaning guides for gas, charcoal, and pellet grills.

8. Clear out gutters

Heavy rainfall can spell disaster if your gutters are clogged. Clearing out dirt and debris can help prevent water backups. "This is a project that really should be left to the professionals, as it can be dangerous for the inexperienced and can also cause damage to your home if done incorrectly," Steckel says.

A professional gutter cleaning costs between \$119 and \$228 on average, HomeAdvisor reports. (Gutter cleaning for two- and three-story homes tends to cost more than single-story homes.)

9. Keep indoor humidity in check

Generally, your home's indoor humidity level should stay around 40% to 50% in the summer months. Humidity levels of 60% or higher can lead to mold and dust mites, according to the EPA. If necessary, purchase a dehumidifier to draw excess moisture from the air.

10. Consider getting flood insurance

Floods can happen anywhere. In fact, more than 25% of flood insurance claims are filed by people who live outside high-risk flood areas, according to FEMA. However, flooding isn't covered by most standard home insurance policies.

You can purchase flood insurance coverage through the National Flood Insurance Program. Nationally, the average annual flood insurance premium is \$700, FEMA reports; rates for homes in areas with low-to-moderate risk of floods typically cost \$400 to \$500 per year. That's a worthwhile investment when you consider that the average NFIP insurance claim is over \$32,000. ♦



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Using The Slow Season To Your Advantage



Almost every single business has a slow season, no matter what service or product you offer to your customers. For some businesses, the slow season comes because of changing weather, like in the case of a surf shop. For others, specifically those in the wholesale or home improvement business, the slowest part of the year comes in the summer when other people tend to take vacations from their jobs or focus on leisure activities.

Whatever your slow season is, the answer isn't just to go through the motions and wait until business picks up again. Use this guide to help you learn how planning for the slow season can boost your revenue and help you spend your time in a worthwhile fashion, even if you aren't earning as much as you do during the busiest part of the year.

FOCUS ON 'FREE' MARKETING

There's no such thing as free marketing when you're running a business, because even going out on the street and telling potential customers about your business takes time and money whether you're doing it yourself or paying someone. However, there are types of marketing that cost very little when compared with traditional print media or advertising.

For most companies, cost-effective marketing is all about using social media wisely. Developing a social media strategy is essential when it comes to planning for the slow season. Dedicating a little more time to communicating with your customers and boosting your visibility on social media sites like Facebook is an ideal way to spend some of your downtime.

To really connect with your customers and raise awareness of your company, consider implementing things like giveaways or contests for people who follow you or like a certain page or product. When customers or potential customers follow you in the down season that means they will also be following you when it's time to buy. This concept of gaining followers in the slow season that will carry over to the busy season is particularly important for companies who sell seasonal items or activities.

PREPARE YOUR STAFF

One of the best things you can do to make sure your business is functioning at its highest level when you are busy is to work on building your staff's skills during the slow season. For companies in the retail market that could mean teaching your sales associates the basics of making sales or even sending them to classes to learn more about your industry or business.

Preparing your staff could also mean giving each employee time to study your product line or visit the factory where products are made. Downtime for you also means downtime for your employees so make sure they're using that time wisely so they can help your company improve when they really are busy.

OFFER DISCOUNTS

Planning for the slow season, at least in the case of many retail businesses, means offering discounts to your customers when they normally wouldn't be thinking about your product or service. If you own a surf shop, try having a mid-winter sale. People may not be surfing, but they may take advantage of great prices and get a jump on the gear they'll need when the weather starts to warm up.

IMPROVE YOUR OFFICE OR STORE

If you own the office where your company works or the retail space where you sell a product to customers, basic improvements can make it hard to do business. Paving the parking lot or even putting up a fresh coat of paint can make it hard to close a sale.

That's why you should be planning for the slow season by making the necessary repairs when you don't have a lot of business. Your space will look its best when you're overrun with customers and you'll be using your downtime wisely.

WOO YOUR POTENTIAL BEST CUSTOMERS

If you own the office where your company works or the retail space where you sell a product to customers, basic improvements can make it hard to do business. Paving the parking lot or even putting up a fresh coat of paint can make it hard to close a sale.

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USE VACATION TIME

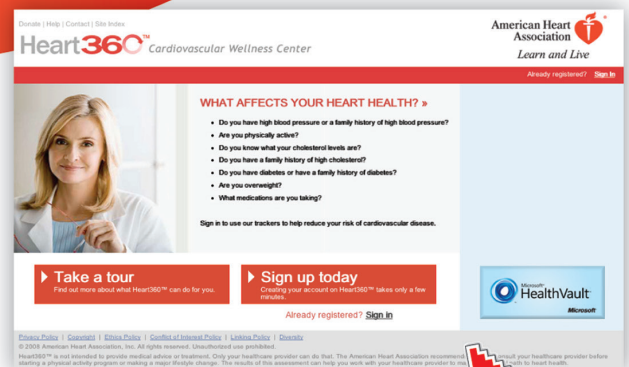
Planning for the slow season is very important if you want to keep your business growing all year round but even the most proactive business owners need some time away from work to unwind. If you're smart, planning for the slow season also means making sure that you take your vacation time when you'll be needed at work the least. ♦

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from the Editor cont.

BE BOLD AND DO THIS PRAYER! Lord, I do believe that Jesus of Nazareth took my place in the Cross. Lord, I am sorry for all my sins against you and against my own life, please forgive me. I believe Jesus was raised on the third day for my justification. Jesus, I receive you as my Lord and Savior. Your Holy blood cleanses me right now and God gives me a new heart and eternal life. Now my name is written in the Book of Life, guaranteed by the following written law:

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Romans 10:9-10 ♦

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