

Your
Health

Allergies

An allergy is when your immune system attacks something that doesn't bother some other people, such as pollen, mold, pet dander, food, insect stings or bites.

The American Academy of Allergy Asthma & Immunology says about 50 million Americans suffer from some allergy.

SYMPTOMS

Symptoms of allergies include a runny nose, sneezing, itching, redness, rashes, swelling and trouble breathing. Life threatening symptoms include anaphylaxis, a severe reaction characterized by a feeling of warmth, flushing, shortness of breath, throat tightness, vomiting or diarrhea, and a drop in blood pressure that can cause a loss of consciousness and shock.

DIAGNOSIS

Your doctor may send you to a specialist, an allergist or immunologist. Allergies are diagnosed through skin or blood tests combined with a

thorough medical history and physical exam. These tests can help you identify triggers to minimize your allergy symptoms.

TREATMENT

Other than avoiding as much as possible the things that make you sick, there are a variety of over-the-counter and prescription medications that can alleviate your allergy symptoms. Always talk to your doctor before starting any medication and be aware that many antihistamines and other medications can make you very drowsy. Make sure to read the labels thoroughly and ask a pharmacist if you're concerned about drug interactions.

IMMUNOTHERAPY

Some allergic conditions may respond well to immunotherapy, a gradual exposure to allergens to train your immune system not to attack certain stimulants. Immunotherapy shots usually are administered one or two times a week for a range of months. Sublingual tablets can also treat allergies for certain types of grass.



Warmer weather means more time outside in the sunshine. It also means you need to protect your skin from the sun's rays.



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Sunscreen 101

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says the sun can damage your skin in as little as 15 minutes. Keep reading for ways to protect yourself and your family.

STAY SAFE

If you can, stay out of the sun by seeking shade, wearing long-sleeved shirts and pants with UV protection, a hat to shade your face and sunglasses to protect your eyes. Pay attention to weather forecasts and look for a UV

index rating. But beware, cloudy days still mean sun exposure.

SUNSCREEN

Even on cloudy or cool days, the CDC recommends at least SPF 15 sunscreen when you go outside. SPF refers to the sun protection factor, the sunscreen's effectiveness in blocking UV rays. The higher the number, the more protection. Remember to reapply, though. Even high SPF numbers wear off. Reapply every two hours and after swimming, sweating or

towelng off, the CDC says.

SYMPTOMS OF SKIN CANCER

Exposure to UV rays can cause skin cancer. Symptoms of skin cancer are new skin growths, a sore that doesn't heal or a change in a mole. The CDC says to remember the ABCDEs of melanoma:

- A:** Asymmetrical. Does the mole have an irregular shape?
- B:** Border. Is it jagged?
- C:** Color. Is the color uneven.

D: Diameter. Is the spot larger than a pea?

E: Evolving. Has it changed in the past few weeks or months?

If you have any of these symptoms, talk to your doctor.

You can also have an increased risk of skin cancer, the CDC says, if you have certain characteristics. These include:

- A lighter natural skin color;
- Blue or green eyes;
- Blonde or red hair; or
- A family or personal history of skin cancer.

Catch Some ZZZs

Sleep is something we can take for granted, until we're plagued by not getting enough of it.

Keep reading to learn why sleep is important and how to improve your sleep health.

WHAT IS SLEEP?

Everyone has an internal body clock that tells you when you to sleep and wake up, usually a 24-hour cycle called the circadian rhythm. The circadian rhythm is tied to lots of things such as light, darkness, hormones and other factors. Our circadian rhythm changes with age; young children tend to sleep more in early evening and may have more REM sleep than other people.

Sleep is important because, during sleep, your body is working to support healthy mental and physical function. The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute says sleep deficiency can alter activity in some parts of the brain, triggering trouble making decisions, solving problems and controlling emotions. It's also been linked to depression, suicide and risk-taking behavior.

Sleep is also when your body repairs itself. Deficiency is linked to an increased risk of heart disease, kidney disease, high blood pressure, diabetes and stroke.

IMPROVING SLEEP

Allow yourself enough time to sleep. Instead of making sleep the first sacrifice to a busy schedule, protect your time to sleep for your good health. Next, establish and stick to a bedtime routine. Go to bed around the same time and try to wake up at the same time every day. Set quiet time before



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bed, and avoid heavy meals before bed, as well as nicotine, strenuous exercise, artificial light and caffeine. Keep your bedroom quiet, cool and dark. You may also choose to take a hot bath or practice relaxation techniques before bed.

WHEN TO TALK TO YOUR DOCTOR

If you're not getting enough sleep

and these simple techniques didn't help, it may be time to talk to your doctor. If you feel sleepy during the day, don't wake up refreshed, or are having trouble adjusting to a new schedule, it's time to seek help.

Before your visit, the NHLBI recommends thinking about the following:

How often do you have trouble sleeping? How long has this been going on?

When do you go to bed and get up? How long does it take you to fall asleep? How often do you wake up at night?

Do you snore loudly? Do you wake up gasping or feeling out of breath?

Do you feel refreshed when you wake up or tired during the day?

Do you doze off or have trouble staying awake during routine tasks, especially driving?

Get Moving Together

Physical activity is critical to staying healthy, and what's good for the grown-ups is good for the kids, too.

Find out how to get fit as a family.

GUIDELINES

The U.S. Department of Health & Hospitals recommends children 6-17 get an hour or more of moderate to vigorous physical activity per day. Adults should do at least 150 minutes to 300 minutes per week of moderate intensity exercise or 75 minutes to 150 minutes a week of vigorous intensity activity. Older adults should also aim for balance training and be as active as their abilities and conditions allow.

PLAY GAMES

One way to get fit as a family is to take up a new game or sport. Play basketball, golf or tennis. Look into disc golf, dodgeball or softball. You can join a community league, church league or set up a neighborhood tournament. Local parks may have facilities you can use for free or reduced cost, and look for used equipment at yard sales and secondhand stores.

TAKE A HIKE

Find some easy walking

trails nearby and get moving. Be aware of weather conditions that might make trails muddy or impassible, and make sure you take along plenty of water, sunscreen, bug spray, and anything else you need to be away from civilization for a few hours. Depending on the trails, you may also be able to bring the family dogs, too.

One thing to keep in mind: Footwear. Wear good quality socks and shoes made for going off the beaten path. If you don't have these, visit your local sporting goods store for a good fitting to prevent injuries.

AVOIDING INJURIES

Medline Plus gives you these tips to stay safe during exercise, especially if you're new at it.

Warm up with stretches and start off slowly. Don't push your body too hard or try an exercise that's too strenuous for your level of fitness.

Use proper equipment and form. If you're new to a gym or sport, consider asking a more experienced friend to help or hiring a trainer.

Use proper safety equipment. Depending on the activity, this could include the right footwear; helmets if needed; mouthguards; goggles; pads or other protective guards. If you're not sure about proper fit, visit a local sporting goods store.



Virtual Training

Gone are the days when going to an exercise class means waking up early and going to a gym. Now, with advances in technology and new smarthome devices, you can join a class from the comfort of your living room.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

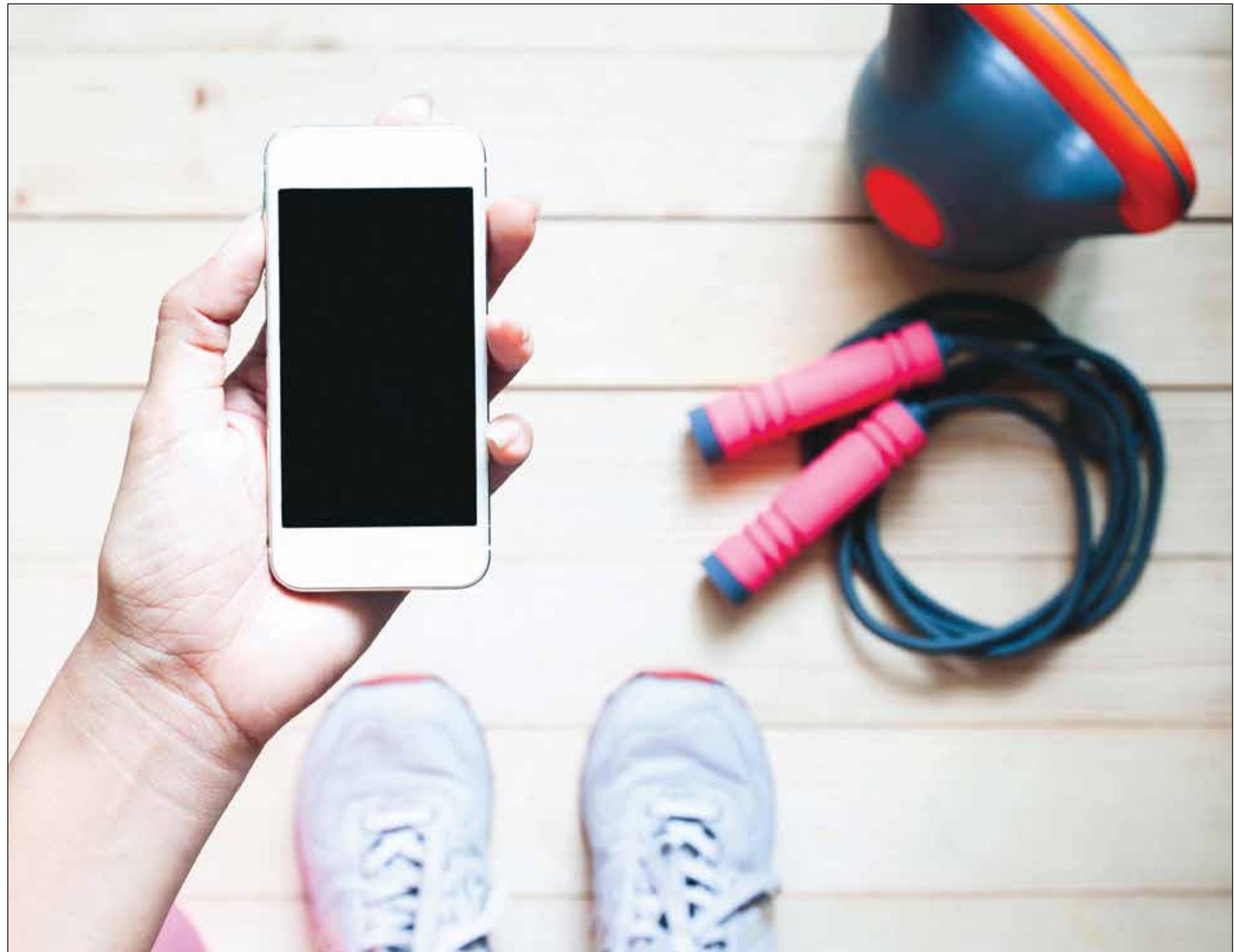
Talk to your doctor about the type of programs you want to use and make sure you're medically cleared to take part. This is especially true if you've recently had health issues, injuries or a chronic illness. Then, make sure you have the right set-up, equipment and space to do what you want.

CHOOSING AN APP

Typing "fitness" into your app store is going to be overwhelming. Food trackers, run trackers, maps, on-demand workout apps, short workout apps, yoga apps, apps with music, apps without music, apps that track your music. Overwhelming.

Think about the kinds of workouts you want to do, the time and space you have, and the kind of commitments you want to make. Then read these tips and get surfing.

Do you have a hectic



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schedule that's rarely routine? Look for an on-demand app. Make sure it offers the types of workouts you'd like to do (HIIT? Yoga? All of it?) and the level of instruction and length of workout you want to do not only now, but in the future. Many of these are sub-

scription based, so if you get all you can out of that app and need a new one, you'll need to remember to cancel the subscription in the app store, not just delete the app.

Don't have a lot of time or are you new to fitness? Look for apps that are targeted for

short workouts, usually modeled on circuit training. PCMagazine recommends 7-Minute Workout by Wahoo Fitness and The Johnson & Johnson Official 7 Minute Workout.

Want to do some good while working out? Charity

Miles is an app that donates money to the organization of your choice when you log miles running, walking or cycling. If you're motivated by charitable causes and don't mind a little corporate sponsorship, this free app might be for you.

Breathing Easy: Air Quality

If you live in a major metro area, you may have heard the weather forecaster talk about AQI.

That's the air quality index and reports how clean or polluted your air is and what health effects you might suffer from that air.

Learn more about AQI and how it can affect you.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

AQI is calculated based on five major air pollutants regulated by the Clean Air Act. They are ground-level ozone, particle pollution or particulate matter, carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide and nitrogen dioxide.

There are standards set for each level to protect public health. The index runs from zero (the best) to 500 (the worst).

0-50: Good, symbolized by the color green.

51-100: Moderate, symbolized by yellow.

101-150: Unhealthy for sensitive groups, orange.

151-200: Unhealthy, red.

201-300: Very unhealthy, purple. Values higher than 200 are infrequent.

301-500: Hazardous, maroon. Values above 300 are extremely rare.

OZONE AND PARTICULATES

Of particular concern, the EPA says, are ground-level ozone and particle pollution. Ground-level ozone forms when pollutants such as those emitted by cars, power plants, refineries and chemical plants react with the sunlight. It's more likely to be a problem in warmer months. Ozone can irritate the respira-

tory system, reduce lung function, aggravate asthma and other chronic lung diseases and cause permanent lung damage.

Particle pollution is a mixture of solid and liquid droplets from cars, power plants, wood burning, forest fires, industrial processes, or crushing and grinding operations. It's been associated with cardiac arrhythmia and heart

attacks, will aggravate lung disease and can increase susceptibility to respiratory infections.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR YOU?

Any level below red is fine for the general population. However, if you have respiratory issues or health issues that may affect your breathing, levels orange and yellow

may be a concern. At red, everyone, sensitive or not, can experience health effects that get more serious through the purple level. At maroon, there's an emergency. If the AQI level is at a level of concern for you, you may want to avoid prolonged exertion or heavy exertion. Put off your yard work and maybe go for a walk instead of a jog. Or stay inside altogether.



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Meditation 101

Today's fast-paced lifestyles mean we're no strangers to stress. But stress can affect our mental and physical health.

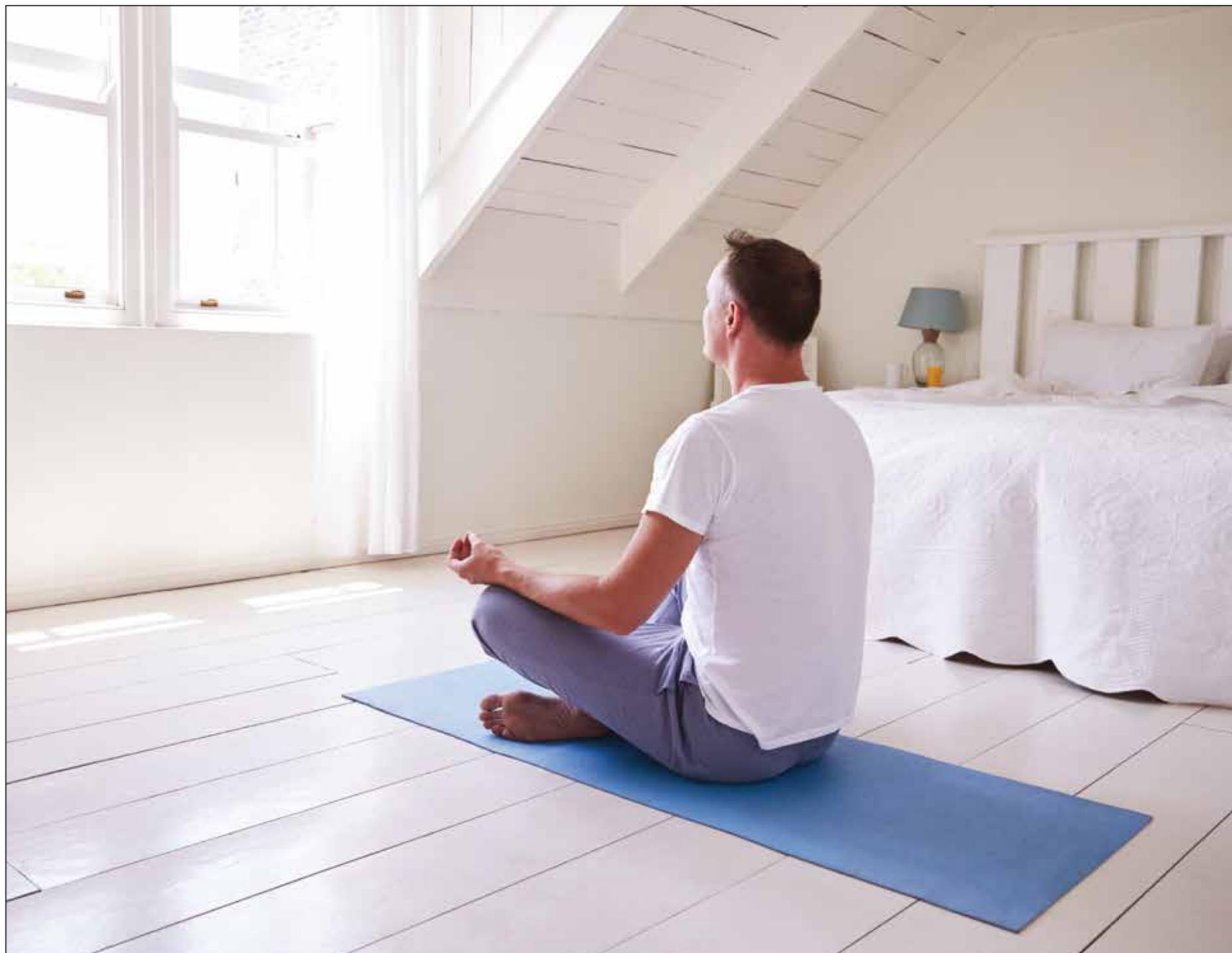
The National Institute of Mental Health says chronic stress can suppress your immune system, disrupt digestion and sleep, and contribute to serious problems such as heart disease and high blood pressure.

Meditation is focusing on your breathing or the repetition of a mantra to reach a heightened level of awareness. It also stops your body and the slow, even breathing can relax you into a more calm state.

HOW DO I MEDITATE?

Contrary to what you're picturing in your mind, you don't need a special room, special lightning or special garments. You can meditate anywhere at any time (maybe not while driving a car or operating heavy machinery). It's as easy as stopping what you're doing and mindfully breathing in and out and focusing on only that, blocking all other intrusive thoughts, until you're calm and relaxed.

There are a number of apps (one is Apple's Breathe app, which is native to the Apple Watch), videos and websites that can help you relax into a meditative state by helping you focus on the rhythm of your breath. If you're having



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trouble, try one of these apps, which may even feature soothing music to help your mind focus on something other than what's stressing you out.

OPEN AWARENESS MEDITATION

If you can't focus on a par-

ticular thing or if you find that stressful, try open awareness meditation. In that technique, you try to think of nothing, letting thoughts, emotions and sensations float by without being trapped by your mind. It's not something you can force; you have to ease

gently into it.

ADVANCED PLACEMENT

Meditation is a part of many religions around the world and has been practiced since antiquity. In Buddhism, for example, meditation is part of the path toward awak-

ening and nirvana.

If you're interested in learning more about meditation as part of a spiritual practice, check with your local houses of worship. Many will offer meditation or contemplative times with or without guidance.