

Your  
Health



# Ask Your Pharmacist

Your pharmacist is a health care professional who can play an important role in your health if you understand his role.

ExploreHealthCareCareers.org says pharmacists are, “medication experts and play a critical role in helping people get the best results from their medications,” and calls them one of the most accessible health care professionals, with most people in the U.S. living within 2 miles of a pharmacy.

## TRAINING

Pharmacists usually have a doctor of pharmacy degree, complete a one- or two-year on-the-job training period and must pass two licensing exams. They may choose to further specialize their career by becoming board certified in a particular area, such as ambulatory care, psychiatric care, infectious diseases or oncology.

## THE ROLE

A pharmacist’s basic role is to check prescriptions before dispensing medication to patients, to be sure a patient receives the correct drugs and dosage to ensure safety. Pharmacists keep patients’ allergies and other medications they are taking in mind, to be sure they won’t have an adverse reaction. They answer questions patients might have about drugs and any side



effects they might experience.

Most people are aware of those parts of a pharmacist’s job, but did you know your pharmacist also may offer consultation services for the management of complex diseases, such as diabetes, hypertension or arthritis, or give general

advice on diet, exercise, and managing stress? That’s according to an article in the Journal of Advanced Pharmaceutical Technology & Research, which examined a pharmacist’s role in the health care field. Pharmacists also may educate other health care professionals

such as physicians or nurses about pharmacology-related issues or medication management and contribute most in the campaign to stop the inappropriate use of antibiotics, habit-forming and aphrodisiac drugs, according to the article.

Pharmacists also listen to

patients’ symptoms and recommend over-the-counter medications to help. Before you message your doctor about an over-the-counter medication, first consider asking your pharmacist. They probably will be able to offer the advice you need.



# Can You Boost Immunity?

With the COVID-19 pandemic has come increased interest in boosting our immune systems.

Advertisements for products that claim to boost your immune system are everywhere. But is there any truth to the claims that you can, in fact, increase your body's immune functioning?

According to Harvard Medical School, boosting our immune system is not a straightforward task, because of the complexity of the system. In fact, it warns, "For now, there are no scientifically proven direct links between lifestyle and enhanced immune function."

## OVERALL HEALTH IS IMPORTANT

The best you can do, writes Harvard Medical School, is to keep your entire body healthy by making healthy lifestyle choices. That includes the following:

- Don't smoke.
- Eat a diet high in fruits and vegetables.
- Exercise regularly.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Drink alcohol only in moderation.
- Get adequate sleep.
- Take steps to avoid infection, such as washing your hands frequently and cooking meats thoroughly.
- Try to minimize stress.
- Keep current with all rec-



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ommended vaccines. Vaccines prime your immune system to fight off infections before they take hold in your body.

## IMMUNITY IS BIG BUSINESS

In 2019, Fortune Business Insights said immunity supplements were a \$16.32 bil-

lion industry. Supplements, probiotics and virtually all kinds of health products claim to have benefits for immunity.

Given the lack of research on the topic, however, you should look at these products with skepticism. The exception is among the elderly, who are prone to a condition

called micronutrient malnutrition, in which the body is deficient in essential vitamins and minerals, which can impact immunity. Harvard Medical School recommends older people speak with their doctor about this issue and whether they need dietary supplements.

Probiotics do have a role in

supporting the balance of bacteria in our guts, where research shows microbes help support our immune system. If those bacteria become imbalanced, probiotics can help restore balance. Too much of a good thing, however, can cause diarrhea and other health issues. Talk to your doctor before starting probiotics.

# COVID Hit Children's Waistlines

The COVID-19 pandemic led to weight gain among children, new research shows.

Anyone with children who participated in e-learning at home noticed the increased trips to the pantry and refrigerator during the daytime hours by children. And while there is some data about how much weight adults gained during the pandemic, now it appears that research has borne out parent's concerns about their children's eating habits and lack of exercise opportunities during the pandemic.

An August 2021 article in the *Journal of American Medicine* concluded that "Youths gained more weight during the COVID-19 pandemic than before the pandemic." The study looked at the health data of a racially and ethnically diverse group of Kaiser Permanente Southern California patients' health records. They looked at body mass index measurements from before, during and after the pandemic.

The authors wrote that the weight gain was most pronounced in younger children and, extrapolated out to the entire country, may signify an increase in childhood obesity in the U.S. "The greatest change in the distance from the median BMI for age occurred among 5- through 11-year-olds with an increased BMI of 1.57, compared with



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0.91 among 12- through 15-year-olds and 0.48 among 16- through 17-year-olds," wrote the study's authors.

They also found that the percentage of overweight or obese children increased 8.7% among 5- through 11-year-olds, 5.2% among 12- through 15-year-olds and 3.1% among 16- through 17-year-olds.

The authors concluded that long-term obesity trends should be monitored and

interventions may be needed to address health issues created by the trend.

Suzannah Stivison, a pediatric nurse practitioner in Kensington, Md., told NPR that when children lost the daily structure of their school and extracurricular activities, they began looking for a sense of control that many found in eating.

"One of the ways that we regained a routine and a

schedule within our families was most likely, for a lot of people, around meals," she said. "Eating became something we could control. And it was it's also something we use for comfort."

We know from previous research that children gain more weight during the summer months than when they are in school, possibly because they don't have access to organized sports and physical edu-

cation, according to NPR. The pandemic seems to have brought on similar effects.

The good news is that parents can have a positive impact on their children's weight by modeling good habits, such as exercising and keeping healthier foods at home, Stivison told NPR. They also should see an uptick in more healthy behaviors when they get back into school and into their routines.



# What Is Self Care?

We've all heard that we need to engage in self care to cope with the stresses of the COVID-19 pandemic. But what does that mean?

The pandemic has been stressful enough, but add in a national reckoning with race issues and a contentious election season and it's easy to see how it would be important for us to tend to our mental, emotional and spiritual needs. "Practicing self care has often meant buying products and experiences to facilitate comfort and happiness," writes WellandGood.com, "but with rates of loneliness and a number of other mental-health concerns surging, the pandemic has forced us to expand our understanding of what it means to effectively fill our own cup and heal with the help of both commodities and community."

That means that self-care no longer means just treating yourself to a bubble bath and a glass of wine, or buying a fancy new massage chair. Self-care during a pandemic also means finding ways to feel connected, even if opportunities to connect in person aren't available.

Here are some ways to stay connected and take care of yourself during the pandemic.

## **NURTURE FRIENDSHIPS**

Set up a weekly or monthly



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video call to connect with a core group of friends. Attend virtual religious services as often as possible. Reconnect with a friend you haven't talked to in a while. If you're interested in making new friends, visit Meetup.com to find others in your area with similar interests and participate in virtual events.

## **START A JOURNAL**

Journaling can help with mental health by helping you manage anxiety, reduce stress and cope with depression, according to the University of Rochester Medical Center. Journaling allows you to prior-

itize problems, fears and concerns; help track symptoms to help you recognize triggers and to better control them; and provide an opportunity for positive self-talk and identifying negative thoughts and behaviors.

Consider some of these topics from Premier Health to get you started.

- Name 10 things for which you are grateful.
- Make a list of short-term goals.
- Write down 10 words to describe yourself.
- Name internal and external resources you have to help you through the pandemic.

- Share something that has made you proud or happy in the past two weeks.

- Write about current challenges in your life.

- Make a list of everything you'd like to say "no" to.

## **STAY ACTIVE**

Taking a walk outdoors is a great way to get exercise and give your mental health a boost. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that adults get 150 minutes of moderate exercise each week. That's 30 minutes a day, five days a week.

You could also get some

exercise and declutter your living space by spending a day cleaning out your garage or basement.

## **PRIORITIZE SLEEP**

Getting enough sleep can seem like a luxury that's hard to come by with busy schedules of commuting, work and family responsibilities. Making sleep a priority can have big benefits for your physical and mental health. In fact, some parts of our body's immune response happen only during sleep, according to EverydayHealth.com. Make time for sleep and enjoy the many benefits.

# Indoor Air Quality

Given that many of us have spent more time indoors during the COVID-19 pandemic, the issue of indoor air quality came into focus.

## THE PROBLEM

Sources of pollution inside are home come from sources you might not expect. Did you know cooking with a gas range releases several pollutants into your home? If a home's ventilation system doesn't bring in enough fresh air and remove air contaminants, indoor air quality can quickly dip below levels the Environmental Protection Agency says is safe outdoors. High temperature and humidity levels also can increase concentrations of some pollutants, according to the EPA.

Some of the most common indoor air pollutants include gas-burning appliances; tobacco products; building materials such as asbestos, pressed-wood cabinetry and new flooring; chemicals used for household cleaning, personal care or hobbies; central heating, cooling and humidification systems; excess moisture; and outdoor sources such as pesticides, radon and outdoor air pollution. Old and improperly maintained appliances, or those that are un-vented or not working



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properly are of particular concern.

Polluted air from outdoor can enter your home through cracks and joints. Keeping your home well sealed will help with this issue. If your home's mechanical ventilation methods, such as outdoor-vented fans, aren't working properly, air quality can suffer as not enough polluted air is being replaced with fresh air.

## SOLUTIONS

The most effective way of controlling indoor air quality

is to eliminate sources of pollution or reduce their emissions, says the EPA. Addressing ventilation can also be effective but may be more costly due to increased energy consumption.

Here are some tips from the EPA for improving indoor air quality.

- Monitor your home's ventilation system to be sure everything is working properly, or have a professional inspect the systems.
- Inspect outdoor vents to be sure they are opening and

closing properly.

- Keep return air vents clean and be sure they aren't blocked by furniture or other items.
- Use your kitchen exhaust fan anytime you cook to help draw contaminants outdoors. If you don't have an exhaust fan in the kitchen, open a window or door.
- Open your fireplace flue when in use to help direct dangerous gases out of the home.
- Change furnace and air conditioner filters as recommended by the manufacturer.

- Use bathroom fans anytime you take a shower or bath.

- If you live in a humid area, use a dehumidifier to remove moisture from your home.

- Check your dryer vent for clogs, which can cause buildups of carbon monoxide and moisture in your home.

- Repair any water damage immediately to prevent mold growth.

- Quit smoking or smoke only outdoors with your home's doors and windows closed.



# Workplace Health Programs

If your workplace offers health programs to employees, it is wise to take advantage of them.

## BENEFITS

These programs can lead to change at both the individual and the organization levels, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. They can increase healthy behaviors, reduce risks for disease and improve current health among employees. For employers, these programs can benefit employee morale, reduce health care costs and increase productivity and retention.

Workplace health programs might include health education classes; discounted or free access to fitness facilities; health insurance coverage for preventive screenings; a healthy work environment through initiatives such as smoke-free campuses, availability of healthy foods and safe working areas, according to the CDC.

## TYPES OF PROGRAMS

Here are more examples of more workplace health programs and how you can benefit. You might not realize your employer offers such programs, so do your research and see what's available to you.

**Onsite fitness center.** RisePeople.com calls an on-site fitness center the “granddaddy of all corporate wellness pro-

gram examples.” Not only will you save time by not having to commute separately to a gym, but you might be more likely to squeeze in a workout when it's more convenient.

**Exercise programs.** You might get a discount for certain exercise programs, such as Jazzercise, or classes might even be offered on-site.

**Smoking cessation.** These programs might include lifestyle coaching and counseling on prescription smoking cessation medications.

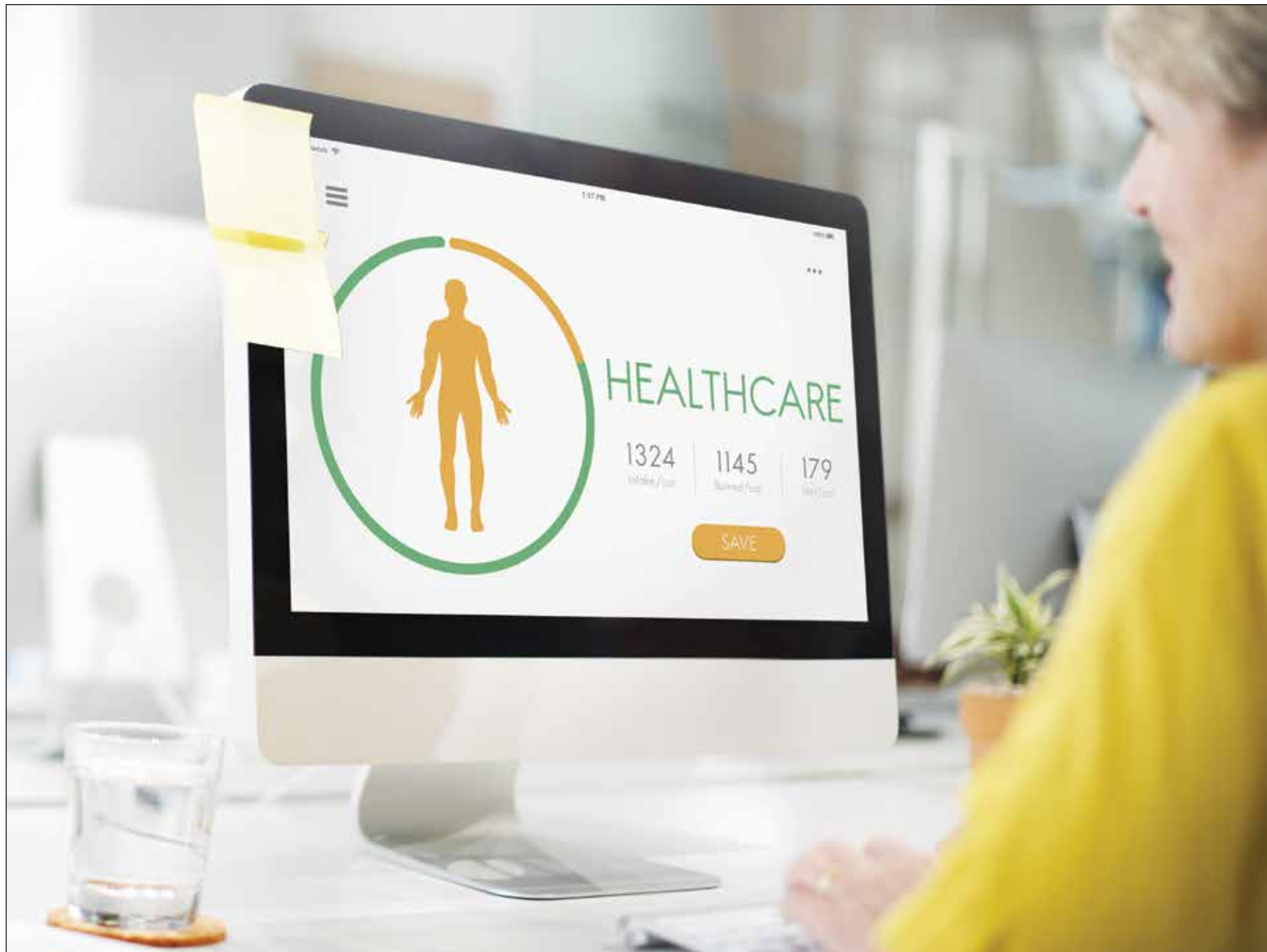
**Stress reduction.** Counseling and education about stress can help you get started on a path to eliminating stress at work and home.

**Weight loss or nutritional**

**counseling.** If you're looking to lose weight or address health issues through diet, these types of services can help you get started.

**Health screenings and health risk assessments.** These offerings can help you catch health conditions early or reduce your risk for developing new conditions.

**Rewards or incentives.** Some employers offer rewards or incentives in exchange for utilizing workplace health programs. They could include cash incentives, discounts on your health plan premiums or the ability to earn points that can be redeemed for health-related products or services.



# Silent Heart Attack

We tend to think of a heart attack as something that comes on suddenly with unmistakable symptoms.

While that is often the case, heart attacks also can arrive with milder symptoms that might be mistaken for other ailments, or simply chalked up to again. A heart attack can even occur without you ever knowing you've experienced one. This is called a silent heart attack and is more common among men.

## TYPICAL SYMPTOMS

The most common symptoms of a heart attack are sudden chest pain or discomfort; feeling weak, light-headed or faint; pain or discomfort in the jaw, neck, or back; pain or discomfort in one or both arms or shoulders; and shortness of breath, according to the CDC. If you or a loved one experiences these symptoms, call 911 immediately.

Women are more likely than men to experience symptoms such as shortness of breath, nausea and vomiting, and back or jaw pain, according to the American Heart Association.

## SILENT HEART ATTACK BASICS

Harvard Medical School points out that about half of heart attacks are mistaken for a less serious condition.



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Silent heart attacks account for 45% of heart attacks and strike men more than women. The symptoms lack the intensity of a classic heart attack and can be attributed to overwork, poor sleep or an age-related ache or pain. The symptoms “can feel so mild, and be so brief, they often get confused for regular discomfort or another less serious

problem, and thus men ignore them,” Dr. Jorge Plutzky, director of the vascular disease prevention program at Harvard-affiliated Brigham and Women’s Hospital, told Harvard Medical School.

The fact that the patient has suffered a heart attack might not be discovered until they receive medical treat-

ment later to address symptoms such as fatigue, shortness of breath or heartburn.

The following symptoms could indicate you are suffering a heart attack, even in the absence of severe chest pain, according to Harvard Medical School.

- Discomfort in the center of the chest that lasts several minutes, or goes away and

comes back. It can feel like an uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, or pain.

- Discomfort in other upper-body areas, such as one or both arms, the back, the neck, the jaw, or the stomach.

- Shortness of breath before or during chest discomfort.

- Breaking out in a cold sweat, or feeling nauseated or lightheaded.