SUMMER 2021

THE HEALTH CONNECTION

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APWU HEALTH PLAN

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Schedule Your Child's Back-to-School Check-up

Children change a lot from year to year. A back-to-school well-child visit gives your pediatrician a chance to perform a complete evaluation of your child's physical development and mental wellbeing.

Well-child visits (also called annual physicals or yearly check-ups) also help kids build trust with health care providers. If a health issue arises, they can feel safe being open and honest about their health and wellbeing.

Proof of vaccinations may be required.
Depending on where you live and the school your child attends, you may be required to provide proof of immunizations and a well-child physical before the start of the new school year. Beat the rush and make an appointment before your pediatrician's schedule fills up.

What to expect during a well-child visit.
Annual physicals give pediatricians a chance to follow a child's progress and development over time. Your pediatrician can address any emotional or social concerns, and in some cases may catch a health issue before it develops into a more serious problem. Your pediatrician may also discuss diet, exercise, and safety issues, including wearing a bike helmet and using seat belts.

A well-child visit may include:

- Comprehensive physical exam
- Check to ensure immunizations are up-to-date
- Height and weight (BMI) screening
- Blood pressure and heart rate screening
- Cholesterol and blood sugar tests
- Scoliosis screening

Make the most of your teen's visit to the doctor.
Older children should be able to spend time alone with their pediatrician. Teenagers need to learn how to take more responsibility for their health care, and some may find it easier to talk about sensitive subjects—alcohol and substance use, tobacco and e-cigarettes, sexual activity, anxiety, and mental health—without parents around. Well-child visits also give parents a chance to ask pediatricians important questions about a child's health and wellbeing.

Source: American Academy of Pediatrics, "Back to School, Back to the Doctor" https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/school/Pages/Back-to-School-Back-to-the-Doctor.aspx

COVID-19 VACCINES AND FLU SHOTS SAVE LIVES

COVID-19 vaccines are widely available and free to everyone living in the United States. Ninety percent of people live within five miles of a COVID-19 vaccine location, and you may not need to schedule an appointment in advance.The best COVID-19 vaccine is the first one that is available to you. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) does not recommend one vaccine over another.

Currently, three COVID-19 vaccines are authorized in the U.S.:

Pfizer-BioNTech

- Available to people 12 years and older
- 2 shots given 21 days apart
- You are fully vaccinated 2 weeks after your second shot

Moderna

- Available to people 18 years and older
- 2 shots given 28 days apart
- You are fully vaccinated 2 weeks after your second shot

Johnson & Johnson's Janssen

- Available to people 18 years and older
- 1 shot
- You are fully vaccinated 2 weeks after your shot

For the most protection, be sure to receive all recommended doses of the vaccine.

Millions have safely received a COVID-19 vaccine
More than 348 million doses of COVID-19 vaccine have been given in the U.S. since the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) authorized the vaccines for emergency use. The FDA evaluated COVID-19 vaccines in clinical trials that included tens of thousands of participants.

COVID-19 vaccines are safe
The vaccines:

- Were developed using science that has been around for decades
- Are not experimental
- Have undergone and will continue to undergo the most intensive safety monitoring in U.S. history

COVID-19 vaccines are effective
The vaccines can keep you from getting and spreading COVID-19. And they can help keep you from getting seriously ill if you get COVID-19. Getting vaccinated also protects people around you who have a high risk for severe illness from the virus.

Breakthrough COVID-19 infections are rare
Some people who are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 still get sick because no vaccine is 100% effective. Occasional breakthrough infections are expected with any vaccine. Even with the highly contagious delta variant:

- 97% of people hospitalized for COVID-19 are unvaccinated
- 99.5% of people who die from COVID-19 are unvaccinated

Get your COVID-19 vaccine and flu shot at the same time
It's safe to get a COVID-19 vaccine and a flu shot at the same visit. The possible side effects of vaccines are generally the same when given alone or with other vaccines.

Health experts recommend that everyone age six months and older should get a flu shot before the upcoming fall flu season. Getting a flu vaccine is more important than ever this year to help reduce the strain on the health care system during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Flu vaccine options include:

- Standard dose shots for people age 6 months and older
- High-dose shots for people age 65+
- Shots made using an egg-based process for people age 65+
- Egg-free shots for people age 18+
- Nasal spray flu vaccines for healthy non-pregnant individuals, age 2 to 49

Egg-free vaccines are available for those with allergies to eggs.

Most side effects are mild
Some people may experience swelling, redness, or pain at injection site after receiving a flu shot or COVID-19 vaccine. Other common side effects include fever, headache, tiredness, muscle pain, chills, and nausea. Most side effects go away on their own within a few days.

Sources: CDC, "Seasonal Flu Shot" https://www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/flushot.htm

CDC, Different COVID-19 Vaccines https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/different-vaccines.html

PBS NewsHour, Breakthrough COVID infections show 'the unvaccinated are now putting the vaccinated at risk' https://www.pbs.org/newshour/health/breakthrough-covid-infections-show-the-unvaccinated-are-now-putting-the-vaccinated-at-risk

Is it safe to exercise during pregnancy?

Prenatal care is essential for a healthy pregnancy. During your early prenatal visits, talk to your obstetrician or health care provider about the types of exercises and physical activity that are right for you.

In general, it's safe to keep exercising—or start physical activity—as long as you're healthy and having a normal pregnancy.

What are the benefits of exercise when you're pregnant?
Regular exercise during your pregnancy can reduce back pain and improve your overall fitness. It can also promote healthy weight gain and strengthen your heart and blood vessels. Plus, exercise may lower your risk of developing gestational diabetes, a type of disease diagnosed for the first time during pregnancy.

How much should you exercise?
Pregnant women should try to get at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity each week. Activities include brisk walking, swimming, water workouts, stationary bicycling, modified yoga, and modified Pilates. Dancing to music, playing active video games, housework, and gardening count, too.

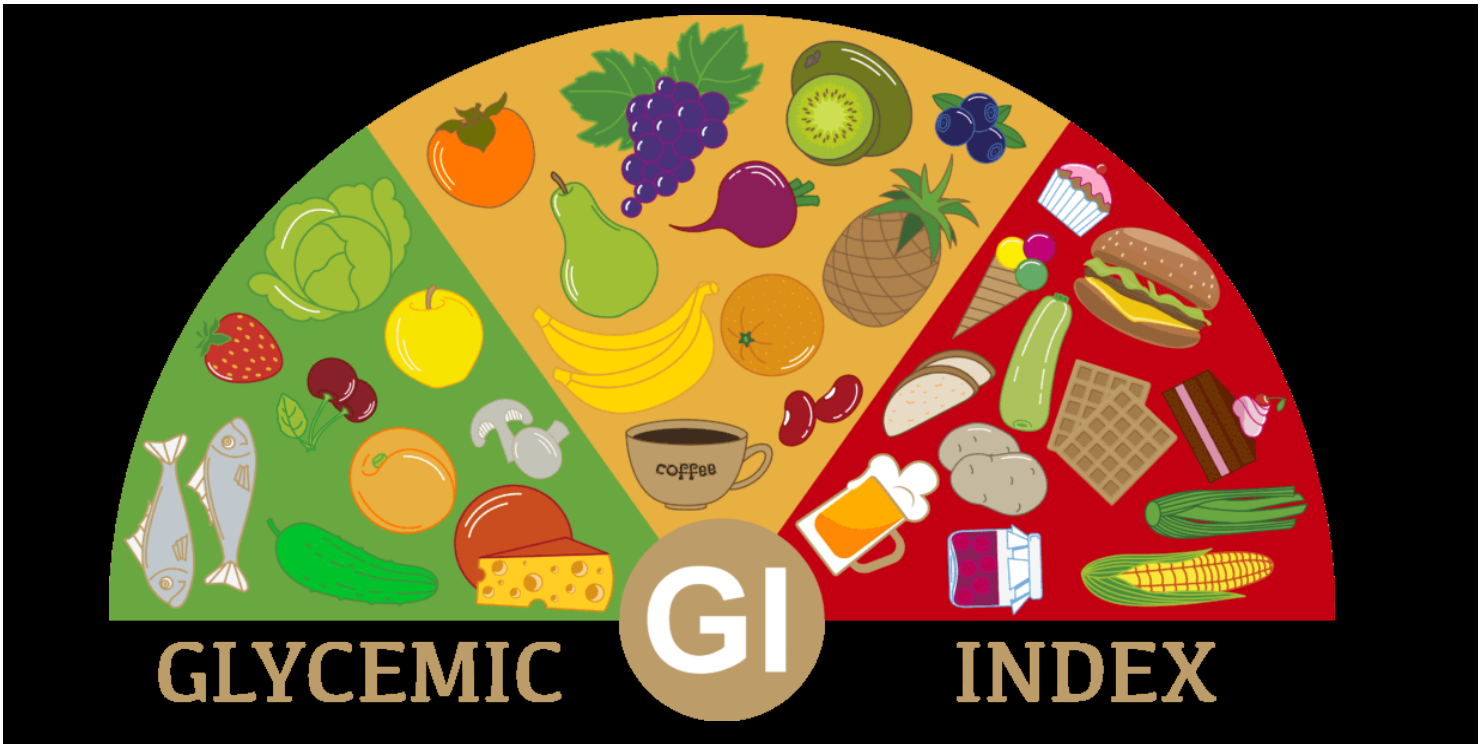
Aim for 30 minutes of exercise five days a week. If that sounds overwhelming, remember that three 10-minute bouts of activity during the day count the same as a 30-minute workout.

What steps should you take to stay safe?

- Start slowly. Ease into your exercise program and give your body time to adjust to the activity.
- Drink plenty of water before, during, and after you exercise.
- Wear a sports bra and loose-fitting clothes.
- Warm-up before you exercise, and cool down afterward.
- Exercise in a temperature-controlled space. Avoid exercising outside when it's very hot or humid.
- Avoid lying flat on your back to prevent your uterus from pressing on a large vein that returns blood to your heart.
- Stop exercising immediately if you experience chest pain or painful contractions of the uterus.

Source: The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, "Exercise During Pregnancy" https://www.acog.org/womens-health/faqs/exercise-during-pregnancy#:~:text=Frequently%20Asked%20Questions%20Expand%20All,birth%20weight%2C%20or%20early%20delivery.





Healthy foods to eat for diabetes

If you have diabetes, you need to pay attention to the carbohydrates (or carbs) you eat. That's because when you eat carbs, your blood sugar goes up. But not all carbs are created equal. There are three basic types of carbohydrates: sugars, starches, and fiber. Unhealthy carbs (like donuts and sugar-sweetened beverages) cause your blood sugar to spike, while healthy carbs (like whole fruits and beans) keep your blood sugar in balance. Eating healthier carbs can help you control your blood sugar and manage your diabetes.

What is the glycemic index?
The glycemic index (GI) is a tool that helps you choose foods that are less likely to cause large increases in your blood sugar levels. The system, which ranks food on a scale from zero to 100, gives you an easy way to make healthier food choices. Our bodies quickly digest and absorb foods with a high GI, causing a rapid rise in blood sugar. Foods with a low GI are digested and absorbed at a slower rate, which results in a slower rise in blood sugar levels. Eating lower GI foods can also help you maintain a healthy weight.

Understanding GI value.
Nutrition scientists assign GI values to food. In general, the number reflects how much a particular food raises your blood glucose (or sugar) levels.

Low GI: 0 to 55
Many fruits and vegetables, raw carrots, broccoli, beans and lentils, peppers, tomatoes, chickpeas, blueberries, strawberries, minimally processed grains, pasta, wild rice, nuts, all-bran breakfast cereals, skim milk, low-fat yogurt

Medium GI: 56 to 69
Sweet potatoes, sweet corn, bananas, pineapple, raisins, white rice, couscous, some oat breakfast cereals, multigrain bread, cheese pizza, low-fat ice cream

High GI: 70 to 100
White bread, most cookies, and crackers, bagels, cakes, donuts, croissants, rice cakes, many packaged breakfast cereals, french fries, soda, candy

Eat low-glycemic foods as part of a diabetes treatment plan.
Selecting foods based on the glycemic index can help you manage your diabetes and maintain a healthy weight. While foods that are part of a healthy diet have low GI values, you should also consider portion sizes and other nutritional factors, like calories, fat, fiber, and vitamins and minerals. If you have diabetes or another health condition, check with your doctor or health care provider before making changes to your diet.

Sources: Mayo Clinic, "Glycemic index diet: What's behind the claims" https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/nutrition-and-healthy-eating/in-depth/glycemic-index-diet/art-20048478

Harvard Health, "A good guide to good carbs: The glycemic index" https://www.health.harvard.edu/healthbeat/a-good-guide-to-good-carbs-the-glycemic-index

Healthy snacks for high blood pressure

Eating a diet high in sodium (salt) and being overweight are linked to high blood pressure. To keep your blood pressure under control, limit the amount of sodium you consume, and make healthy food choices. Eating smaller meals and snacks about every three hours or so can help you maintain more stable blood sugar levels and avoid extreme hunger so you don't overeat at lunch or dinner.

What to eat when you crave something salty.

Hummus: Make a batch of creamy hummus and spread it on whole-grain crackers or a whole wheat tortilla. Hummus also makes a savory dip for cut veggies: baby carrots, celery sticks, sliced bell peppers, cherry tomatoes, zucchini and cucumber circles, and broccoli, and cauliflower florets.

Whole-grain toast: Top a slice of toast with low-fat cheese, peanut butter, or almond butter.

Popcorn: As a whole grain that's naturally high in fiber and low in fat, air-popped popcorn is a gluten-free snack with staying power. Top it with a low-sodium popcorn seasoning.

Chickpeas: Try roasting chickpeas in the oven with olive oil, a pinch of salt, and a teaspoon of ground cumin. Roasted chickpeas have the crunchiness of chips but with a meaty texture and a nutty flavor.

Trail mix: For a portable, healthy snack, whip up a batch of trail mix with nuts (almonds, cashews, peanuts, and pistachios), seeds (pumpkin seeds and sunflower seeds), roasted soybeans, popcorn, and low-sodium seasonings. If you add dried fruit, be sure to look for fruit with no added sugar.

What to eat when you crave something sweet
Frozen grapes: A cup of frozen grapes is an easy, nutritious snack. It's a fun way to satisfy your sweet tooth with just a handful of calories. Or try a frozen banana drizzled with a tablespoon of chocolate syrup.

Yogurt: A single-serving container of light, low-fat yogurt (or Greek yogurt) is an easy snack when you're on the go. Add fresh fruit, ground flaxseed, or reduced-fat granola to yogurt to pack an additional nutritional punch. Or try freezing whipped yogurt for something new.

Angel food cake: Top a thin slice of angel food cake with raspberries, blueberries, or sliced strawberries and low-fat whipped cream.

Green smoothie: Satisfy your hunger while sneaking healthy greens into your diet. Use a cup of spinach (or another leafy green), a cup of water or milk, and one and a half cups of frozen fruit. Blend the greens and liquid first. Then add the fruit and blend again.

Fruit: Fresh fruit is always a healthy snack. For a creative spin, pair a piece of fruit with a few nuts, low-fat cheese, cottage cheese, or whole grain cereal and low-fat milk. Or try a cup of berries with a tablespoon of melted chocolate chips for dipping.

When shopping for snacks at the grocery store, read nutrition labels and avoid products that are high in sodium, fat, and added sugars.

Source: American Heart Association, Healthy Snacking https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/healthy-eating/add-color/healthy-snacking



Get ready for asthma peak week

September is asthma season
September can be a rough month if you have asthma. More people—including children—see their doctors because of asthma attacks in September, and asthma hospitalizations rise. Asthma peak week usually occurs during the third week of the month. It's always important to keep your asthma under control, but asthma sufferers need to take extra precautions at this time of the year.

Why asthma peaks in September.
September is filled with asthma and allergy triggers. In many places in the United States, a common pollen allergy called ragweed peaks in September, and fall leaves cause mold counts to rise. Plus, flu season begins as kids head back to school and are exposed to germs. With everything happening at once, it can be hard to keep asthma under control.

Stay healthy during the asthma peak season.
Take steps to prevent an asthma attack before it happens:

1. Follow your asthma action plan. This plan shows you the steps to take to keep your asthma from getting worse. And it guides you on when to call your health care provider or seek medical care.
2. Take all medicines as prescribed by your doctor.
3. Get vaccinated for COVID-19 if you haven't already done so. People with moderate to severe asthma are more likely to become very ill from COVID-19. Vaccines are available for anyone age 12 and up.
4. Get a flu shot. After you're vaccinated, it takes about two weeks for your body to build up enough antibodies to protect you against the seasonal flu.
5. Ask your doctor if you need the pneumococcal vaccine. The vaccine helps to prevent pneumonia.
6. Always remove your shoes before entering your home. And keep your windows and doors closed when the pollen count is high.
7. Wash your hands often. Don't touch your eyes or mouth.
8. Take care of yourself. Eat a healthy diet, drink plenty of water, and get the sleep you need. Ask your doctor about ways to manage stress.
9. Know your asthma triggers—and avoid them.

Practicing good asthma control can help you stay healthy throughout the year and during asthma peak week.

Source: Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (AAFA), "Brace Yourselves: The Biggest Week for Asthma Attacks Is Coming," https://community.aafa.org/blog/September-Asthma-Peak-brace-yourselves-the-biggest-week-for-asthma-attacks-is-coming

Are medications for high cholesterol right for you?

Doctors prescribe statins to lower cholesterol. While not everyone with high cholesterol needs to use a statin, these medications have been shown to reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke in some patients. To determine whether a statin may be right for you, your doctor may use an online tool to calculate your risks of having a heart attack or stroke in the next 10 to 30 years.

Making healthy lifestyle choices can help prevent heart disease.
Whether or not you take a statin, living a healthy lifestyle can help lower your cholesterol and reduce your risk of developing heart disease.

- Cut down on processed, packaged foods and eat a healthy diet rich in fresh fruits and vegetables, fish, lean proteins, and whole grains
- Limit your intake of saturated fat, trans fat, refined carbohydrates, salt, and alcohol
- Move more, sit less, and try to get at least 30 minutes of physical activity five days a week
- Get to and maintain a healthy weight
- Find ways to manage stress
- Quit smoking

Statins are a lifelong commitment.
Making significant changes to your lifestyle and losing a lot of weight can lower your cholesterol, but if you're on statin treatment, keep taking it as prescribed. If you want to try controlling your cholesterol without medication, talk to your doctor.

Source: Mayo Clinic, "Statins: Are these cholesterol-lowering drugs right for you?" https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/high-blood-cholesterol/in-depth/statins/art-20045772

COLORECTAL CANCER IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY

Cancer of the colon and rectum, located at the lower end of the digestive tract, are referred to as colorectal cancer. The disease usually starts as small growths called polyps. Regular screenings allow doctors to find and remove polyps before they become cancerous. Colorectal cancer has a wide range of risk factors that may raise your chances of getting the disease. Having a risk factor doesn't mean you will get colorectal cancer. And some people who get colorectal cancer may not have any known risk factors.

Risk factors you can control.
You can control some risk factors for colorectal cancer, like smoking or not getting enough exercise. Smoking tobacco is linked to a number of cancers, including lung cancer and colorectal cancer. If you're ready to give up smoking, ask your doctor to help you create a quit plan. APWU Health Plan also offers a tobacco cessation program at no cost to you. Being overweight or obese increases your risk of developing colorectal cancer, so it's important to achieve and maintain a healthy weight. If you want to lose weight, eat a healthy diet, move more, sit less, and get plenty of sleep.

Risk factors you can't control
You can't control other risk factors for colorectal cancer, like your age or racial and ethnic background. The risk of colorectal cancer goes up as you age. The disease is much more common after age 50, so it's important to start colorectal cancer screenings when you turn 50. As an APWU Health Plan member, you're covered for in-network colorectal cancer screenings beginning at age 50 and continuing until age 75. African Americans have the highest rates of colorectal cancer among all racial groups in the United States. According to the American Cancer Society, members of the Black community are about 20 percent more likely to get colorectal cancer and 40 percent more likely to die than most other groups. Access to cancer prevention, detection, and treatment often leads to higher rates of colorectal cancer among African Americans.

Sources: American Cancer Society, "Colorectal Cancer Risk Factors"
https://www.cancer.org/cancer/colon-rectal-cancer/causes-risks-prevention/risk-factors.html

https://www.cancer.org/latest-news/colorectal-cancer-rates-higher-in-african-americans-rising-in-younger-people.html

Is lower back pain a normal part of getting older?

As we age, many of us experience aches and pains in the spine. The condition is so common that 85 percent of people experience back or neck pain at some point in life. While most people start noticing back pain between the ages of 40 and 60, some begin to feel the effects of an aging spine when they're as young as 30.

What causes back pain?
Back pain has many different causes, from the discs in your spine to the cartilage lining the joints and the nerves in your spinal cord. The discs in your spine allow your back to bend. They also act as shock absorbers when you walk or run. When a disc ruptures, it's called a herniated disc, a common cause of back pain. Osteoarthritis, or "wear-and-tear" arthritis, also causes back pain. As you age, the cartilage lining the joints that connect the bones in your back diminishes. The added pressure on the joints can cause inflammation that leads to back pain. For some people, the spine narrows with age, a condition called spinal stenosis. The added pressure on the spinal cord and nerves may cause pain or numbness.

Can you prevent back pain?
Maintaining a healthy weight is one of the most important steps you can take to lower your risk of severe back pain. Extra weight puts pressure on your back and your entire musculoskeletal system (the bones, muscles, tendons, ligaments, and tissues in your body). If you need to lose weight, eat a healthy diet, and get regular physical activity, like walking, biking, gardening, or housework. Exercise can help you shed pounds and strengthen your back. And every step counts. (If you have five minutes, you have time to exercise.) But if physical activity causes more pain, ask your doctor to recommend exercises that are right for you.

When is it time to see your doctor for back pain?
If your back pain is so severe that it prevents you from taking part in daily activities—or if you have significant pain when you sleep, exercise, or work—see your doctor. Pain that shoots down your legs, numbness or tingling, or weakness may be signs of a more serious issue. Always see your doctor if you experience pain after a fall or injury.

Source: Penn Medicine, "Back and Neck Pain: Is It a Normal Part of Getting Older?" https://www.pennmedicine.org/updates/blogs/neuroscience-blog/2017/april/spine-pain-and-age

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TOGETHER.
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Emergency room follow-up care



To help protect your health and safety, APWU Health Plan members who receive treatment in the emergency department or hospital for mental health or substance abuse must have a follow-up appointment with a primary care doctor within 30 days.

Follow-up appointments give your doctor a chance to:

- Find out why you needed emergency care.
- Review the results of any tests that were performed.
- Evaluate any potential medication changes.
- Check your vital signs or repeat blood work.
- Ensure there aren't any complications.

Three ways to find a doctor.

1. Visit APWU Health Plan online at apwuhp.com and select Log In or Register to access your member portal.
2. Visit APWU Health Plan online at apwuhp.com and select Are my doctors in the network? to access the provider directory for your plan.
3. Contact APWU Health Plan:

1-800-222-2798
1-800-622-2511 (TDD)
8:30 a.m. – 6:30 p.m. ET
Monday – Friday