

COVID-19 Basics

Note: Check for daily updates at [coronavirus.gov](https://www.coronavirus.gov).

COVID-19 is a highly infectious disease. It is spread mainly person to person within about 6 feet of each other. Droplets released by coughing and sneezing are inhaled through the mouth and nose, and potentially the lungs.

People may not show symptoms until several days after they become infected. In that time, they can spread the virus to many people. To reduce infection risk, stay at least 6 feet away from other people.

Symptoms are cough, fever and shortness of breath. If you have these symptoms, and you've had contact with a person who has COVID-19 or you live in or have recently visited an area with COVID-19, contact your health care provider immediately. The CDC says symptoms may appear 2 to 14 days after exposure.

As of April 3, 2020, the CDC recommends that the general public wear cloth face coverings in situations (grocery stores, pharmacies, public transit) where it's difficult to keep a distance of at least 6 feet (called social distancing or physical distancing). Learn more at [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov). The coverings are *not* a substitute for handwashing.

Frequent handwashing is the most important step to protect yourself and others. **Use soap and water for at least 20 seconds.** Rub your hands to create a lather that covers your entire hands. When? After you cough or sneeze, before food preparation and eating, after using the bathroom and after touching high-contact surfaces, including door handles, elevator buttons and stair railings. No soap and water? Use alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.

The Mediterranean Table

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

The Mediterranean Diet features foods that are abundant in the countries along the Mediterranean Sea, including Greece, Italy and Morocco. But you can find these foods at your grocery store.

The Mediterranean table is rich in vegetables and fruits, which should fill half your plate at meals. Choose from every hue of the rainbow, including leafy greens, sweet peppers, oranges and berries, to reap the benefits of the different nutrients they contain.

Include other plant-based foods at meals too, such as beans, lentils, nuts, seeds, herbs, spices and whole grains. Make olive oil your preferred choice for salad dressing and light cooking.

May is International Mediterranean Diet Month.



While many of the foods in the Mediterranean Diet come from plants, you can include chicken, dairy and meat; just slightly reduce the quantity. Rather than eating meat daily, you can replace it with tofu, chickpeas or peanut butter more often. Eat fish twice a week.

When you eat more plant-based foods, you'll naturally reduce your intake of ultra-processed foods, such as baked goods, chips and fast food. This dietary transition helps reduce the risk of developing heart disease, type 2 diabetes and certain cancers, as well as helping maintain brain health as you age.

Take the Pressure Off



May is High Blood Pressure Education Month.

Normal healthy blood pressure is under 120 systolic (top number) and under 80 diastolic (bottom number). Elevated blood pressure is 120 to 129 systolic and less than 80 diastolic. People with **elevated blood pressure** are likely to develop **high blood pressure** unless they act to prevent it. Untreated, a 20-point higher systolic or a 10-point higher diastolic number can double your risk of death from a heart attack or stroke.

High blood pressure numbers:

Stage 1 HBP is 130 to 139 systolic or 80 to 89 diastolic.

Stage 2 HBP is 140 systolic or higher or 90 diastolic or higher.

If you reach either stage, your health care provider will likely recommend lifestyle changes, maybe medication (depending on cardiovascular risks or family history), and regular follow-ups until your BP is controlled.

You have a 90% chance of developing HBP. If you are diagnosed, work with your provider to:

- 1. Learn how to self-monitor your BP levels day to day.** Get a home monitor approved by your provider, and learn the best times for checking your BP, and when not to check it (e.g., within 30 minutes of smoking, drinking coffee or exercising). Have your medical clinic your home blood pressure monitor for accuracy.
- 2. Adopt a diet-and-lifestyle approach is the recommended first-line treatment** for people with stage 1 hypertension who are at low risk for developing heart disease. What works: a diet high in fruits and vegetables (search for **Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension** or **DASH** at www.nhlbi.nih.gov).



As Americans are living longer, protecting our bone health is more important than ever. By age 50, about half of us will have weak bones, according to the National Institutes of Health. We can improve this outcome through healthy diet and lifestyle — at every age.

Bone is made mostly of (1) **collagen**, a structural protein that acts as a building block for your bones, teeth, muscles, skin, joints and connective tissues; and (2) **calcium phosphate**, a mineral that adds strength, hardens the framework and provides flexibility. A low intake of dietary calcium and other nutrients during one's lifetime may contribute to low bone mass, bone loss, high fracture risk and osteoporosis (porous bones).

Osteoporosis affects more than 44 million Americans. It contributes to an estimated 2 million bone fractures per year.

Risk Factors for Osteoporosis:

Aging: In the U.S. 50% of women and 25% of men older than age 50 will suffer fractures of the hip, spine, wrist, arm and leg, often resulting from a fall.

Heredity factors: A family history of fractures; having a small, slender body build or fair skin; and Caucasian or Asian ethnicity may raise your risk.

Nutrition and lifestyle: Poor nutrition, a low-calcium diet, low body weight and a sedentary lifestyle are primary risk factors for osteoporosis; so are smoking and excessive alcohol use.

Medications and other illnesses: Osteoporosis is linked to the use of some medications, including steroids, and to other illnesses, including thyroid problems. This is called **secondary osteoporosis**.

Medical disorders: Several medical conditions can lead to osteoporosis, including juvenile rheumatoid arthritis, diabetes, hyperthyroidism, Cushing's syndrome, malabsorption syndrome, anorexia nervosa and kidney disease.

Children and adolescents can develop juvenile osteoporosis. While rare, it can be a serious health problem as it occurs during a child's prime bone-building years, from birth through young adulthood. It can be caused by a secondary medical disorder, but sometimes has no identifiable cause.

Note: Ask your health care provider if you need calcium and D supplements.

Extreme Weather and Mental Health

May is Mental Health Month.



By Eric Endlich, PhD

Those who experience extreme climate or weather events, such as severe heatwaves, hurricanes, tornadoes and fires can suffer significant fear, anxiety, trauma and a sense of loss. These reactions can be short-lived or may lead to long-term negative mental and physical effects.

Extreme heat can be particularly harmful to the very young, the elderly (especially those with medical conditions) and those with mental illness, increasing the risk of disease or death. During very hot weather, some prescription medications can impair the body's temperature regulation; discuss concerns with your health care provider.

Being prepared for a weather-related disaster can reduce stress and bring a sense of control. If extreme conditions are predicted:

- Get updates from reliable sources.
- Have an emergency plan in place and a bag packed with necessities.
- Know emergency plans in your workplace, school and neighborhood.
- Encourage your community to have disaster planning in place, including how to share resources and skills among neighbors.
- Talk openly with children about their fears, but remind them that people working are hard to keep them safe.

Learn more at [ready.gov](https://www.ready.gov).



The ABCs of Hepatitis



May is Hepatitis Awareness Month — a good time to learn about hepatitis prevention and testing — it could save your life.

Hepatitis is inflammation of the liver. It can result from infected food, drug injections, alcohol abuse and, sometimes, autoimmune diseases. But viruses (identified with letter designations) are the primary culprit.

Common types of hepatitis:

- **Hepatitis A** is highly contagious and spreads through infected food or close contact with an infected person. It can cause extended illness but rarely damage. A safe, effective vaccination prevents the virus.
- **Hepatitis B** infection can be chronic, causing liver damage and cancer. The CDC recommends hepatitis B vaccination for all infants, children 19 and younger, and adults with risk factors including sexual contacts and travel to countries where the disease is common.
- **Hepatitis C** causes lifelong infection leading to liver failure and potential cancer. Injecting drugs, contact with infected blood, and sex with someone infected are risk factors. There is no vaccine for hepatitis C. It can be treated and often cured when diagnosed early — but half of the 2.4 million Americans with this type don't know they're infected.

Search for **viral hepatitis** at [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov) and talk to your health care provider about hepatitis testing and any needed vaccinations. A simple blood test can detect infection.



The **Smart Moves Toolkit**, including this issue's printable download, **Medical Testing at Home**, is at personalbest.com/extras/20V5tools.

5.2020