

Keeping your health and wellbeing in the know

MyHealthTALK

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Courtesy of Asset Health



GIVING THANKS IS GOOD FOR YOUR HEALTH

The first Thanksgiving was celebrated when the Pilgrims gave thanks for their survival and a good harvest. This distinctly American holiday reminds us to be thankful and appreciative for the blessings we have. November is a good time to consider how being grateful improves our mental health and how we can cultivate more gratitude.

Expressing gratitude is one of the simplest ways to feel better. Research affirms that being thankful is good for your mental and emotional health. This is true whether you are feeling grateful or expressing it to others.

In positive psychology research, gratitude is strongly and consistently associated with greater happiness. Gratitude generates positive emotions, and helps people relish good experiences, improve their health, deal with adversity, and build stronger relationships.

Two psychologists who have researched the effects of gratitude are Dr. Robert A. Emmons of the University of California, Davis, and Dr. Michael E. McCullough of the University of Miami. In one study, three groups of people were asked to write about their experiences. The first group focused on what they were grateful for throughout the week. The second group focused on what had irritated them, and the third group wrote about their experiences with no particular emphasis on positive or negative events.

After 10 weeks, group members writing about what they were grateful for were more optimistic and felt better about their lives. They also exercised more and had fewer trips to the doctor's office.

So how does one go about cultivating an attitude of gratitude? You can write down a few thoughts each week, expressing your gratitude about various experiences, people, places and blessings in your life. Another way is to begin focusing on what you appreciate in your life (instead of what may be making you unhappy). By being grateful for what you already have, you minimize the tendency to reach outside of yourself for things that are often perceived as necessary for one to be happy—such as material or physical possessions.

Although it may feel contrived at first, cultivating an attitude of gratitude grows stronger with practice. Once you begin, you will notice that being thankful improves your moods, relationships and overall health. So why not get a head start on Thanksgiving and begin expressing gratitude today?

THE GREAT AMERICAN SMOKEOUT

SMOKERS ARE 'VAPING' E-CIGARETTES

With the high cost to one's health, more than 2.5 million smokers in the U.S. have turned to e-cigarettes and the number is growing. E-cigarettes, or e-cigs, are designed to reproduce the psychological effect of holding and smoking a cigarette. The battery-powered e-cigs vaporize nicotine, do not create second-hand smoke and leave little scent in the air or clothing.

"This is a product that eliminates second-hand and third-hand smoke," said Ray Story, CEO of the Tobacco Vapor Electronic Cigarette Association. Third-hand smoke refers to toxic particles that linger on smokers' clothes, furniture and other surfaces long after second-hand smoke has cleared.

Proponents of e-cigs say that they are a far healthier option than traditional cigarettes, citing the lack of tar, tobacco and other harmful substances. "We already know e-cigarettes are much safer than the conventional cigarette," Story said, "because you're not burning it, and you don't have the five or six thousand ingredients in cigarettes, which are mostly dangerous chemicals."

Still, health and safety concerns remain. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration considers e-cigs an unapproved new drug, due to a lack of scientific evidence that they are safe or effective. People using refillable versions and handling liquid nicotine need to be aware that liquid nicotine can be dangerous, especially if it comes in contact with skin or if it is ingested.

Nearly one in five deaths in the United States, an estimated 443,000 deaths annually, are caused by cigarettes, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Cigarette smokers are 2–4 times more likely to develop coronary heart disease and 2–4 times more likely to have a stroke. Smoking increases risks of lung cancer in men by 23 times, lung cancer in women by 13 times, and dying from chronic obstructive lung disease by 12 to 13 times.

While the jury is still out on health and safety benefits, it can be argued that if e-cigarettes allow people to quit smoking, then they may be a move in the right direction. Tobacco smokers who quit significantly reduce serious health risks while taking charge of their health and wellbeing.

PSORIASIS LINKED TO DIABETES

If you're one of 8 million Americans with psoriasis, your risk for developing diabetes may be significantly higher. Recent research combining data from 27 studies concludes there is a strong connection between the scaly skin rash and the blood sugar disorder, which predisposes patients to heart disease.

"Our investigation found a clear association between psoriasis and diabetes," said April Armstrong, assistant professor of dermatology at University of California-Davis. Armstrong and her colleagues found that patients with mild psoriasis have a 53 percent increased risk of diabetes, while those with severe psoriasis have a 97 percent increased risk.

Psoriasis is a chronic, inflammatory skin disease characterized by reddish patches covered with silvery-white scabs of dead skin. The patches are flaky and sometimes itchy, occurring on the elbows, knees and other parts of the body. Psoriasis is believed to be an autoimmune disease, which causes the body to regard its own skin as foreign.

Diabetes is a metabolic disorder in which high levels of sugar circulate in the blood because the pancreas does not produce enough insulin or cells are insulin-resistant. Diabetes is a serious condition, which can lead to many complications including heart disease, high blood pressure, poor circulation, high cholesterol levels, heart attack and stroke. If blood glucose levels persistently remain high, diabetics may have health problems involving eyes, kidneys, nerves and/or blood vessels. Nearly 26 million children and adults in the U.S. have diabetes, and an estimated 79 million have prediabetes.

"Patients with psoriasis and their physicians need to be aware of the increased risk of developing diabetes so that patients can be screened regularly and benefit from early treatment," said Armstrong. She said additional research is needed to understand how the two diseases are connected. According to Armstrong, altered immune pathways may make psoriasis patients more susceptible to developing diabetes. Additionally, patients with psoriasis are often heavier, more depressed and less physically active than those without the condition, which could contribute to their underlying diabetes risk.

Dr. Jashin Wu, who has studied the link between psoriasis and other diseases at Kaiser Permanente Los Angeles Medical Center, said patients with psoriasis should have their blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar checked regularly. More than three percent of adults in the U.S. have psoriasis, according to the National Institutes of Health.

Armstrong and other researchers compiled data from 27 observational studies of patients with psoriasis, in what is known as a meta-analysis. The study included more than 3 million people who were followed for 13 years. The findings have been published online in the *Archives of Dermatology*.

Pumpkin Soup

Ingredients:

6 cups chicken stock
1 ½ teaspoons salt
3 ½ cups cubed fresh pumpkin
1 tsp. fresh parsley
1 cup chopped onion
½ tsp. chopped fresh thyme
1 clove garlic, minced
½ cup 2% milk
1/8 tsp. pepper
Dash of nutmeg, to taste

Directions:

1. Cut pumpkin into half-inch cubes. To soften pumpkin (optional), cut pumpkin in half and heat at 375 °F for 10 minutes.
2. Heat stock, salt, pumpkin, onion, thyme, garlic, and peppercorns. Bring to a boil, reduce heat to low, and simmer for 30 minutes uncovered.
3. Puree the soup in small batches (1 cup at a time) using a food processor or blender.
4. Return to pan and bring to a boil again. Reduce heat to low and simmer for another 30 minutes, uncovered. Stir in milk. Pour into soup bowls and garnish with fresh parsley.

Serve with French bread.

