

TOP HEALTH[®]

The Health Promotion and Wellness Newsletter

UNIVERSITY OF
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GERMS IN THE GYM



Do you practice good hygiene at the gym? Most health clubs clean regularly but don't wipe down equipment after each use. To protect yourself from "bad bugs" — including the drug-resistant methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) bacteria — *simply follow these tips:*

- Shower immediately after exercising. Wear shower shoes.
 - Keep wounds well covered.
 - Protect feet with shoes or sandals.
 - Wash and dry gym clothes at a high temperature after wearing.
- Don't share towels, mats, clothes or personal hygiene items.
 - Wipe equipment handles or dumbbells with sanitizing wipes.

While MRSA in the community is less deadly than that found in hospitals, it can still give you nasty boils or a painful rash. See your doctor right away if you experience these symptoms.

LONGEVITY CORNER

Sweet Hearts. A recent article from the British Medical Journal brings happy news: A chocolate a day keeps the heart attack away. Reviewing more than 4,500 research studies involving more than 100,000 people, the authors found that high levels of chocolate consumption could reduce the risk of heart disease by 37 percent and stroke by 29 percent. All forms of chocolate appeared to be beneficial. However, since chocolate often contains a hefty amount of sugar and fat, consider cutting something else so you can have your heart-healthy chocolate fix. Now you can eat chocolate *and* feel good about it. — **Zorba Paster, M.D.**



Got New Year's weight goals? If you've wondered about the glycemic index, read the article on the other side.

Kid-Approved Meals

Kids can be tough customers when it comes to healthy meals. Battling and bribing aren't good long-term solutions. So how can you convince them to eat more nutritious foods?

Set a good example. Eat wholesome foods, watch portion size, stop eating when you're full and model a sense of adventure about trying new dishes.

Get them involved. Even small children can help pick out produce at the store, lend a hand in the vegetable garden, decide what to make for dinner and assist in making a meal.

Add appeal. Presentation can make a big difference. Use colorful plates, arrange vegetables into a smiley face on the plate, make sandwich kebobs or serve a frozen banana on a popsicle stick.

Make it more fun. Try creative names for dishes, especially those prepared by children (Peter's Perfectly Puffed Potatoes, anyone?), or use themes such as Italian night. Use low-fat dips to jazz up vegetables, or encourage your child to create a new recipe, such as her own version of trail mix.

Eat together. Whether it's takeout or a homemade dish, what matters is sharing the meal. Keep it relaxed and enjoyable. If family meals occur only once or twice a week, mark it on your calendar as a special event. Turn off the TV and avoid taking calls. And if teenagers are reluctant, let them invite a friend over.



Weight Loss and the Glycemic Index



Several popular weight-loss programs are based on the glycemic index (GI), which rates foods on how much they raise your blood sugar. Foods such as white bread that raise your blood sugar more are high-glycemic. The premise is that if you eat mostly low-glycemic foods, your blood sugar will fluctuate less and you'll lose more weight.

THE PROS

Low-glycemic, slow-absorbing foods stay in the digestive tract longer. This may help control appetite and prevent insulin resistance (a condition that increases the risk of diabetes). Many generally healthy foods — whole grains, produce, legumes and dairy products — are also low-glycemic.

THE CONS

The GI can steer you toward certain foods, but it doesn't answer important questions such as how many carbohydrates to consume, how to limit calories or fat, or how to eat a balanced diet. Furthermore, the index does not judge the quality of carbohydrates — for example, potato chips or ice cream may rank as lower-glycemic than a baked potato, even though the latter is probably a healthier food choice. In addition, research supporting the GI diet for weight loss remains mixed.

THE BOTTOM LINE

A GI-based diet plan is fairly easy to use and could be helpful for people who want to stabilize their blood sugar, change their overall eating habits or avoid counting calories. But a balanced eating plan may accomplish the same goals. People with diabetes or other health issues should check with their doctors before starting any new diet. A registered dietitian can help too.

NEXT MONTH: Resetting Your Body Clock

Here's to Your Heart Health

Do Cholesterol-Lowering Supplements Work?

High cholesterol is often managed by prescription drugs such as statins. But what about supplements — can they control the condition?

Research involving several supplements has shown promise in lowering cholesterol. For reducing both total cholesterol and LDL (“bad”) cholesterol, candidates include artichoke extract, barley, beta sitosterol and sitostanol (found in certain margarines), blond psyllium (found in certain fiber supplements), garlic extract and oat bran. Fish oil and ground flaxseed may reduce triglycerides, and green tea extract may reduce LDL levels. The most common side effect concerns are relatively mild (typically gas and diarrhea), but use caution if you're also taking blood-thinning

medications, especially in the case of fish oil, flaxseed, garlic and green tea extract.

While some studies have supported the use of red yeast rice to lower cholesterol, the FDA has banned companies from promoting this product to lower cholesterol. Since some varieties have been found to contain high levels of cholesterol-lowering drugs, the FDA considers these products to be new and unapproved drugs and therefore illegal.

FYI: Keep your doc in the loop if you're taking any supplements. If you have high cholesterol, supplements combined with lifestyle changes might help. If not, your health care provider may suggest options such as prescription medications.



Craving Smooth Foods?

Smooth foods tend to pack a punch when it comes to saturated fat and calories. It's no secret that cutting out mayonnaise, butter and sauces can help you build a better sandwich. Still, you don't have to give up the flavor and smooth “mouthfeel” of fats if you try some of these suggestions.

MASHED AVOCADO

Add freshly squeezed lemon or lime juice with a dash of salt and pepper. Avocado features healthier fats, but be aware that it is also high in calories.

VEGGIE SPREAD

Mix roast onions, peppers, eggplant and mushrooms, then puree into a paste with a bit of olive oil and season to taste.

OLIVE OIL WITH FLAVORED VINEGARS

Drizzle on your sandwich right before eating.

SPICE IT UP

For more zip, try flavored seasonings such as lemon pepper or smoked salt.



Smart moves for your personal wellness program are at www.personalbest.com/extras/feb12tools.