



March is Nutrition Month.

The gluten-free diet has become popular in recent years. Some people choose it for medical reasons. Gluten is a protein found in wheat, rye and barley as well as foods containing these grains, such as breads, pancakes and cookies. Gluten needs to be avoided by people with:

- >> **Celiac disease:** This autoimmune disease requires a gluten-free diet for life. Gluten damages the intestinal tract and causes malabsorption, which can lead to anemia, osteoporosis and neurological issues.
- >> **Wheat allergy:** Since gluten is a protein in wheat, people who have a wheat allergy need to avoid it.
- >> **Non-celiac gluten sensitivity (NCGS):** This is the condition that is diagnosed when symptoms are triggered by eating gluten, but medical tests rule out celiac disease or wheat allergy.

If you don't have 1 of the conditions listed above, there is no health reason for you to avoid gluten. Keep in mind:

- >> Not eating gluten-containing whole grains can result in nutrient deficiencies if you don't replace what's missing.



- >> Many gluten-free foods are made with refined starches, which offer little nutritional value and may add unwanted calories.
- >> If you can't have wheat, rye and barley, try nutritious whole grains such as brown rice, quinoa and millet.

PROS and CONS of Weekend Warriors

For health protection, official guidelines recommend we get 150 minutes of moderate-intensity (or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity) physical activity each week. But what does this mean for weekend warriors who squeeze their exercise into 1 or 2 days a week?

Scientists recently reported in *JAMA Internal Medicine* about middle-aged men and women who reported their exercise habits for a month and were studied for mortality rates 15 years later. Those who exercised in at least 3 sessions had only slightly lower death rates than the weekend warriors. **Note:** This study showed an association, not a direct cause, between death rates and exercise habits.

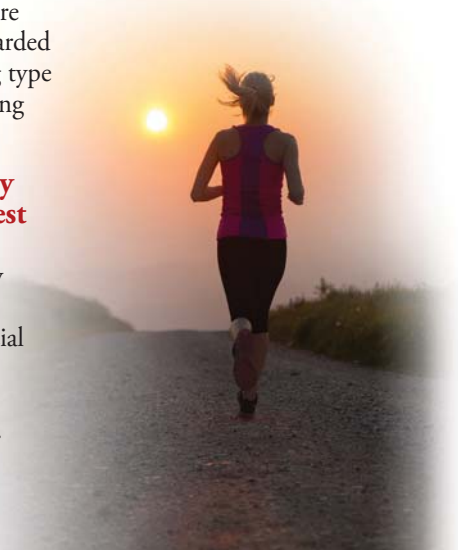
So should you cram all your exercise into 1 or 2 days?

Consider the pros and cons:

PROS: If you have limited time or you prefer concentrated exercise bouts, such as distance running, you still benefit. In fact, the benefits may be comparable whether you break your activity into 5 30-minute or 2 to 3 high-intensity sessions.

CONS: Sports-related injuries are more common among weekend warriors. You may lose some of your cardiovascular endurance, which usually drops after a 4- or 5-day break, between workouts. More frequent exercise is regarded as better for preventing type 2 diabetes and improving other health factors.

Future research may help confirm the best way to get weekly exercise. A large body of research shows that exercise is most beneficial when done at least 3 days a week, per government guidelines.



“The best preparation for **tomorrow** is doing your best **today.**”

— H. Jackson Brown Jr.

Tap Into Protein Power

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

Protein is an essential nutrient found in many foods. Protein breaks down into **amino acids** that the body uses to make muscles, tendons, organs, enzymes, hormones and other molecules that serve important functions. Without protein, our bodies couldn't function.

We can get protein from animal and plant sources.

Animal sources include meat (beef, lamb, pork, etc.), poultry, eggs and dairy products such as milk, cheese and yogurt. Plant protein comes from beans, lentils, nuts, seeds and, to a lesser extent, vegetables and whole grains.



We need 20 amino acids – 9 of them must come from our diet because the body can't make them.

Animal and plant-based proteins, such as soy and quinoa, contain all 9. Most beans, nuts, seeds and whole grains lack 1 or more essential amino acids, but not the same ones. By eating a variety of these foods, you'll get what your body needs, even if you choose not to eat animal products.

How much protein you need depends on your age, gender, activity level and current health. Guidelines suggest a range of 10% to 35% of daily calories. On average, we consume about 16% of total daily calories from protein.



Vaping CAUTIONS

Are e-cigarettes safe or not? Studies show a minority of smokers have successfully quit smoking using e-cigarettes when nothing else worked. This tool has the potential to help reduce smoking, which is the leading cause of preventable disease and death in the U.S.

But the products don't meet FDA safety standards. Here is an update:

➔ **E-cigarettes** deliver nicotine but not the tobacco, or tar, which is carcinogenic.

➔ **E-cigarettes** have a battery-powered cartridge that heats a nicotine-containing liquid into aerosol form that is inhaled (called **vaping**). The heating creates other harmful chemicals (e.g., formaldehyde and acetaldehyde), which the user also inhales.

➔ **FDA-funded studies are testing these products**, specifically the effect of nicotine vapor on human bronchial cells that may increase the risk of lung disease.

➔ **One finding:** E-cigarettes appear to cause cells to become more cancer-like and change their growth rate significantly, more than nonsmoking and similarly to smoking regular tobacco.

More time is needed to determine the impact of vaping. However, users should be aware that they are inhaling nicotine, which is hazardous and very addictive.

Another caution: E-cigarettes are a product of the tobacco industry that aggressively markets them to youth. Teach your children to protect their lungs.

Stretching Works Wonders

Stretching helps you maintain flexibility – vital whether putting on your shoes or preparing for vigorous exercise or sports. Flexibility declines as we age, resulting in short, tight muscles and increased risk of injuries and balance issues that contribute to falls.

Stretching and other flexibility exercises, including yoga and tai chi, can provide several benefits such as:

- Improved range of motion.
- Enhanced muscular and joint function.
- Reduced pain, stiffness and stress.
- Increased blood flow and circulation.

If you want to start stretching, talk with your health care provider first if you have joint or back problems, feel pain when you stretch or are recovering from an injury.



Here are some basic guidelines:

- 1 **Stretch after** a 5- to 10-minute warm-up or **after** your main exercise is completed.
- 2 **Focus on muscles susceptible to stiffness:** hamstrings, hip flexors, calves and chest. The American College of Sports Medicine recommends stretching at least 2 days per week.
- 3 **Stretch slowly and smoothly** without bouncing to reduce muscle tightness. You should feel tension but not pain; if you feel pain, you've pushed too far.
- 4 **If you've suffered a strain or an injury in the past**, discuss this with your provider, who may advise that you initially work with a physical therapist.

By stretching safely and regularly, you can stay active for life.



Smart Moves toolkit is at www.personalbest.com/extras/18V3tools.

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