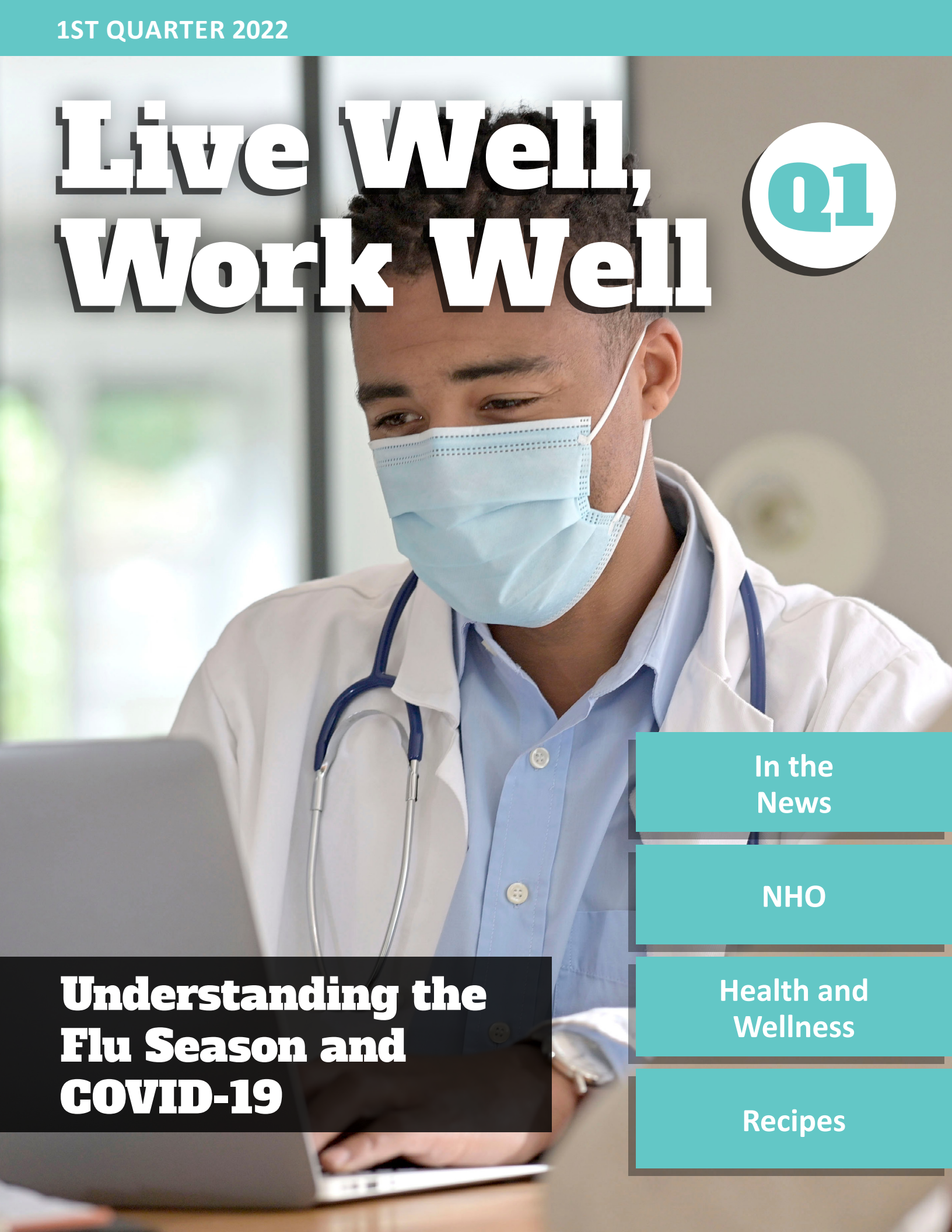


Live Well, Work Well



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Understanding the Flu Season and COVID-19



In the News

Catch up on the latest developments of the most significant health care news from the past three months.



Understanding the Flu Season and COVID-19

Influenza (flu) season usually begins in October and peaks between December and February, and this year's season is expected to be especially active amid the COVID-19 pandemic. As we're in the second flu season during the pandemic, it's even more crucial for you to take precautions to prevent both the flu and COVID-19 from spreading.

COVID-19 Versus the Flu

Since they are both respiratory illnesses, COVID-19 and the flu have some similar symptoms. However, different viruses cause these illnesses, so there are various symptoms to watch for:

- COVID-19—Coronavirus comes with a long list of symptoms that may be mistaken for other illnesses, but the most common telltale signs are fever, dry cough, shortness of breath and a loss of taste or smell. COVID-19 seems to spread easier than the flu and cause more severe illness. It may also take longer for you to start showing symptoms.
- Flu—If you feel fine one day and miserable the next, it may be the flu. Common symp-

toms include cough, fatigue, fever or chills, headaches, body aches, runny or stuffy nose, sore throat, vomiting and diarrhea.

It can be hard to tell the difference between COVID-19 and the flu based on [symptoms](#) alone. Because of that, diagnostic testing is the best way to determine what is making you sick.

It's possible to have the flu and other respiratory illnesses like COVID-19 at the same time, but health experts are still studying how common this is.

The Importance of Vaccination

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that anyone over 6 months of age get a flu shot every year. Keep in mind that if you're eligible for a COVID-19 vaccine, you can get a flu vaccine at the same time you get a COVID-19 shot, including a booster.

Remember that a flu vaccine doesn't protect against COVID-19 since different viruses cause them, so it's essential to get vaccinated against both. Vaccination can help prevent the spread of COVID-19 and another deadly flu season. If you are concerned about any symptoms, call your doctor, as the only way to confirm your illness is to get tested.



Drug Overdoses Hit Record High in the United States

The CDC recently released [data](#) showing a record-high number of overdoses in the past year. The agency estimates there were 100,306 drug overdoses in the United States between April 2020 and April 2021—nearly a third (28.5%) greater than the 12 months before this time frame.

The Data

Opioid deaths were especially pronounced during the 2020-2021 period, contributing to 75,673 reported overdose cases. That's nearly 20,000 more opioid deaths than the previous year. An influx of deaths notably stemmed from the following drugs:

- Fentanyl
- Methamphetamine
- Cocaine
- Prescription pain medication

Opioids continue to be the driving cause of drug overdose deaths, and there's been increased use of synthetic opioids in the United States. In the recent data, fentanyl accounted for 64% of overdose deaths, which is up 49% from the year before.

The Factors

Drug overdoses have been rising steadily for years due to various factors. During this latest reporting period, health experts have suggested that the COVID-19 pandemic played a role, but that doesn't mean opioid deaths will suddenly start declining after the pandemic. As the data shows, the drugs being abused aren't always illicit, and, in many cases, they are prescription medications.

Additionally, the rise in fentanyl use is another key contributor to the rising overdose death toll. Fentanyl is stronger and faster-acting than natural opiates, making it even more deadly. Synthetic drugs are easier to manufacture and more concentrated, making them more efficient for smuggling. According to the CDC, fentanyl is up to 100 times more potent than morphine and many times that of heroin. Consider a lethal dose of heroin is about 30 milligrams, and a 3-milligram dose of fentanyl is enough to kill an average-sized adult male.

As the country reopens and some pre-pandemic normalcy returns, access to treatment is critical to help save more Americans from drug overdoses. Visit the [CDC's website](#) for more information on recovery from opioid addiction.



Most Adults Shouldn't Take Daily Aspirin to Prevent Heart Attack

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) recently changed its [guidance](#) on aspirin use, stating that most adults do not need to take aspirin to prevent first heart attacks or strokes. This change to a long-standing recommendation is based on new evidence that the potential harms of aspirin cancel out the benefits.

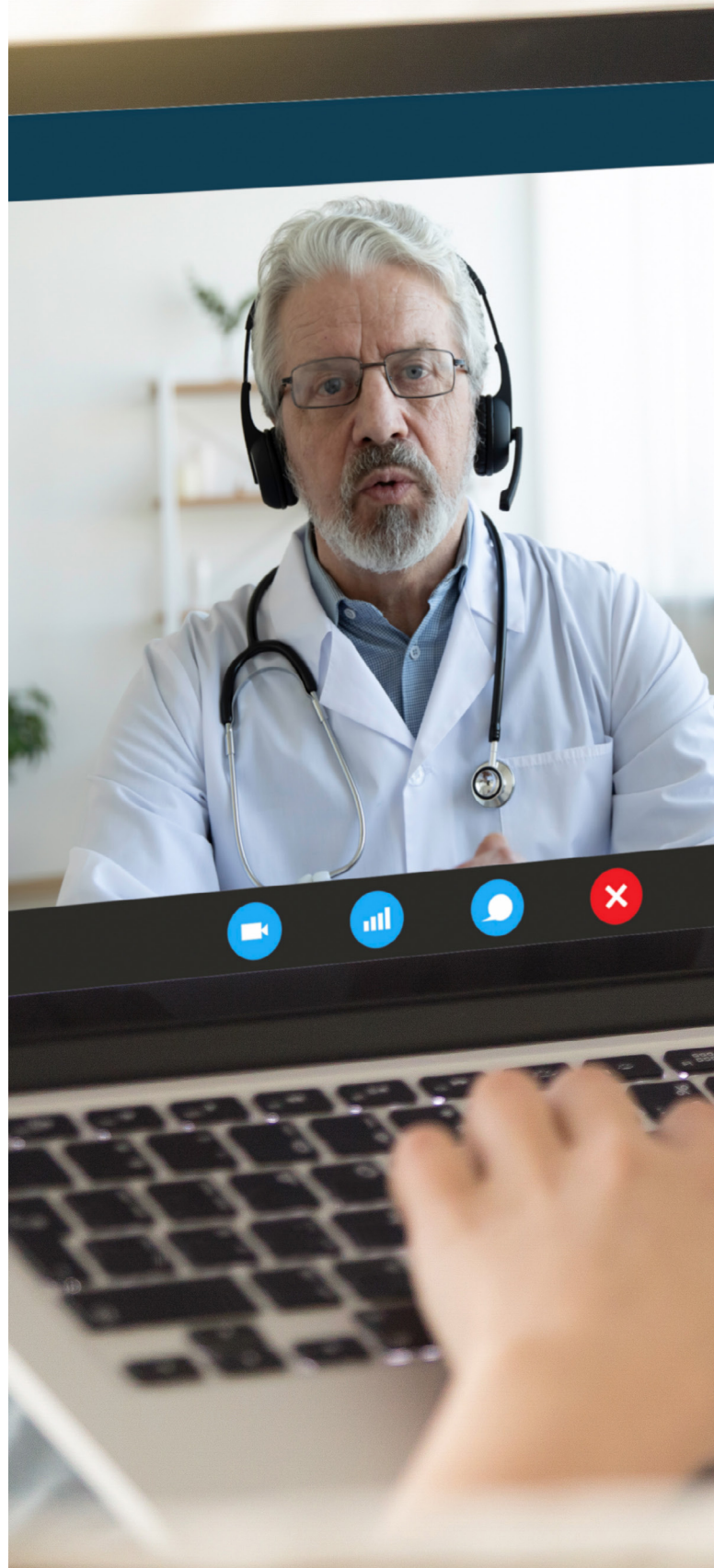
Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States. As such, taking a daily low-dose aspirin has long been recommended for heart health. However, major bleeding risks drove the change to this recommendation. The same process that lets aspirin prevent blood clots from forming can also increase a person's risk of bleeding because it prevents blood from clotting at the wound site. Notably, aspirin can cause life-threatening digestive tract bleeding or ulcers.

Here's an overview of the Task Force's new guidance:

- Adults ages 40 to 59 who are at a higher risk for cardiovascular disease but don't have a history of it should decide with their health care provider whether to start taking aspirin.
- Adults 60 years and older shouldn't start taking aspirin to prevent heart disease and stroke.
- Adults who are already taking aspirin for a previous heart attack or stroke should continue to do so unless told otherwise by their clinician.

According to the latest available Harvard data, roughly 29 million adults took an aspirin a day despite having no known heart disease. Of that figure, about 6.6 million of them were doing so independently—not based on a doctor's recommendation.

Your health care provider can recommend prevention strategies based on your health history and any other conditions. Lower-risk options like lifestyle changes and screening tests can help prevent heart disease in some people. Talk to your doctor if you have questions about taking aspirin.





NHO

Learn more about the three upcoming national health observances (NHOs) in this section.

January—National Birth Defects Prevention Month

About 1 out of every 33 babies in the United States is born with a birth defect. These can be minor or severe, ranging from structural (e.g., cleft lip or spina bifida) to functional and developmental (e.g., Down syndrome or cystic fibrosis).

January is National Birth Defects Prevention Month. While not all birth defects can be prevented, there are some ways to increase your chances of having a baby not affected by congenital conditions or disabilities. It comes down to being your healthiest self both before and during pregnancy. Keep in mind that whatever's best for you is best for the baby.

The CDC recommends you see your health care provider regularly and start prenatal care as soon as you think you may be pregnant.





February—American Heart Month

In the United States, 1 in 4 deaths result from heart disease, making it the leading cause of death in the country. Additionally, half of Americans are at risk for heart disease, and that statistic continues to rise.

February is American Heart Month, so it's important to understand that while heart disease can be deadly, it's also preventable in most people. Risk factors include high blood pressure, high cholesterol, smoking, obesity and physical inactivity. As such, diet and exercise are the best ways to reduce your risk of heart complications.

Talk to your doctor about your risk of heart disease or learn more at heart.org.



March—National Kidney Month

Thirty-three percent of U.S. adults are at risk for kidney disease, but most don't even know it. There are numerous physical signs of kidney disease, but most people attribute them to other conditions. It's even more critical to understand your kidney health during the pandemic, as kidney disease also puts you at an increased risk of developing life-threatening complications from COVID-19.

March is National Kidney Month, making it a great time to take charge of your health to lower your chances of developing kidney disease. Your kidneys filter your blood to remove waste and extra water to create urine. They also make vital hormones that produce red blood cells, promote bone health and regulate your blood pressure. Kidney tests are the best way to determine how well your kidneys work if you're at risk for disease.

Learn more about kidney disease at kidney.org or talk to your doctor.



Looking Ahead...

April

National Autism Awareness Month

May

Mental Health Awareness Month

June

Alzheimer's and Brain Awareness Month



Health and Wellness

Remain on top of the latest trends in health and wellness with the three articles in this section.

Reduce Your Alcohol Intake

Excessive alcohol use is responsible for 1 in 10 deaths among working-age adults every year, according to the CDC. Excessive alcohol consumption has immediate effects that increase the risk of injuries, motor vehicle crashes and alcohol poisoning. It can also cause serious long-term health problems like liver disease, high blood pressure, stroke, depression and cancer.

In addition to lowering your risk for those short- and long-term impacts, there are health benefits for drinking less. Reducing your alcohol consumption can improve your overall health. By eliminating or cutting back on alcohol, you may experience the following health benefits:

- Increased energy
- Better sleep quality
- Improved mental health
- Boosted immune system
- Healthier complexion

After weighing the risks and benefits of alcohol, you may be considering reducing your alcohol consumption. To get started, try the following strategies:

- **Track your intake.** Correctly measure your drinks and then track your alcohol intake so you're aware of how much you're drinking. It's important to drink slowly and have water after.
- **Set a limit.** Before you start drinking, set a healthy limit and stick to it. Drinking in moderation is outlined as up to one drink per day for women and no more than two drinks for men.
- **Opt for nonalcoholic alternatives.** If you're in a social setting and feeling left out, choose a non-alcoholic drink, such as a mocktail, sparkling or flavored water, soda or fresh juice.
- **Learn how to say "no."** When someone offers you a drink, get comfortable with politely declining it and meaning it.
- **Try a dry month.** "Dry January" has been gaining popularity in recent years to take a month-long break from alcohol. You may be surprised at how much better you feel and decide to continue to choose alcohol-free alternatives or cut back for good.

If you or a loved one are concerned about alcohol use, talk to a doctor or use the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) National Helpline by calling 800-662-HELP (4357).





Mind Your Mental Health This Winter

The winter months can be challenging for many people and can take a toll on your mental health. Shorter days and cooler temperatures may make you spend more time indoors or get less natural light exposure. As the pandemic continues, you may be finding this time of year even more depressing.

Health experts refer to this seasonal sadness as the “winter blues.” Some people may even develop a more severe type of depression called seasonal affective disorder (SAD), which is specifically related to the shortening of daylight hours.

However, winter is a great time to develop healthy self-care habits to boost your mental health for the months ahead. Try the following tactics:

- Get outside for some natural sunlight. Not only can nature help relax your mind, but the air can be refreshing.
- Keep up with your fitness routine, as exercise can improve your mood. It doesn’t necessarily need to be a formal workout either; just 15 minutes of movement each day can help.
- Create a winter bucket list so you have fun activities to look forward to during the season. This exercise can help you shift your thinking from negative to positive.
- Stay connected with family and friends—even if it’s virtual. It’s essential to surround yourself with people who support and inspire you and lend a listening ear.

If you’re struggling to get through the winter season or your daily functions are being affected by anxiety or panic, reach out to a mental health professional for help.



Tips for Cutting Back on Salt

Monitoring your daily sodium intake can have significant health benefits—from reducing your risk of a heart attack or stroke to lowering your blood pressure. The American Heart Association recommends no more than 2,300 milligrams of sodium per day, about one teaspoon of table salt.

However, more than 70% of the sodium we eat comes from processed, packaged and prepared foods. As a result, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration recently released [guidance](#) to help reduce salt in our food supply. The agency has asked food manufacturers and restaurants to cut the salt in their products over the next 2.5 years, hoping to reduce Americans’ overall sodium intake by 12%. This new recommendation aims to reduce heart disease across the country.

Since sodium is hiding in many foods we eat, step one is to avoid adding salt while cooking since you’re in control. But since most of the sodium we eat comes from packaged and restaurant foods, here are some ways to limit your salt intake:

- **Limit meals out.** Typical restaurant meals are high in sodium, so try eating out less often and order low-sodium food options that are steamed, baked, grilled, poached or roasted.
- **Check the label.** Steer clear of high-salt ingredients like sodium chloride, monosodium glutamate, sodium bicarbonate, disodium phosphate, sodium nitrate, sodium propionate and sodium sulfite.
- **Choose low-sodium varieties.** Many grocery store brands offer low-sodium or “no salt added” options for foods like deli meats, canned soups, spaghetti sauce, beans and vegetables.
- **Go easy on condiments.** Use half of your usual amount, or select a reduced-sodium version. Ketchup, barbecue sauce, mustard, hot sauce, soy sauce and salad dressings are loaded with sodium.

Cutting salt from your diet doesn’t have to be extremely limiting. Exercise and an overall healthy lifestyle, in addition to a low-sodium diet, can help keep your blood pressure within the healthy range. If you have concerns about your sodium intake, talk to your doctor.



Recipes

Try out these two healthy recipes from the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) MyPlate Kitchen website.



Oatmeal Bread

Makes 20 servings



Ingredients

- 1 cup rolled oats
- 1 tsp. salt
- ¼ cup boiling water
- 1 packet active dry yeast
- ¼ cup warm water (105 to 115 F)
- ¼ cup molasses
- 1 ½ Tbsp. vegetable oil
- 2 cups whole wheat flour
- 2 cups all-purpose flour

Nutritional information for 1 serving

Calories	135
Total fat	2 g
Saturated fat	0 g
Cholesterol	0 mg
Sodium	120 mg
Total carbohydrate	26 g
Dietary fiber	2 g
Total sugars	3 g
Added sugars included	3 g
Protein	4 g
Vitamin D	0 mcg
Calcium	18 mg
Iron	2 mg
Potassium	139 mg

Directions

1. Combine rolled oats and salt in a large mixing bowl. Stir in the boiling water and cool it to lukewarm (about 105 to 115 F).
2. In a small bowl, dissolve the yeast in ¼ cup warm water.
3. Add yeast water, molasses and oil to the cooled oatmeal mixture. Stir in the whole wheat flour and 1 cup of all-purpose flour. Add additional all-purpose flour to make dough stiff enough to knead.
4. Knead dough on a lightly floured surface until smooth and elastic for about 5 minutes.
5. Place dough in a lightly oiled bowl, turning to oil top. Cover with a clean towel and let rise in a warm place until double (about 1 hour).
6. Punch dough down and turn it onto a clean surface. Shape dough and place in greased 9x5-inch pan. Cover with a clean towel and let rise in a warm place until almost double (about 1 hour).
7. Preheat oven to 375 F. Bake for 50 minutes or until bread sounds hollow when tapped. Cover with aluminum foil during baking if bread is browning too quickly. Remove bread from pan and cool on wire rack.



Lentil Vegetable Soup

Makes 6 servings



Ingredients

- 1 cup dry lentils
- 5 cups water
- 2 Tbsp. vegetable oil
- 1 Tbsp. onion (finely chopped)
- 1 cup canned tomato sauce
- ½ tsp. garlic powder
- 1 tsp. salt
- ¼ tsp. black pepper
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 celery stalk (chopped)
- 2 Tbsp. vinegar

Directions

1. Sort lentils to remove any debris or shriveled lentils.
2. Place lentils in a deep pot with water. Bring to a boil and add all ingredients except the vinegar.
3. Reduce heat and cover.
4. Cook slowly for one hour, adding more water if necessary.
5. Add vinegar.
6. Remove garlic and bay leaf before serving.

Nutritional information for 1 serving

Calories	168
Total fat	5 g
Saturated fat	1 g
Cholesterol	1 mg
Sodium	571 mg
Total carbohydrate	22 g
Dietary fiber	8 g
Total sugars	4 g
Added sugars included	0 g
Protein	9 g
Vitamin D	0 mcg
Calcium	37 mg
Iron	3 mg
Potassium	480 mg