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Healthy EndeavorsSM
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Wellness checklist: Staying on top of your health

If you're like many Americans, you probably resolved to make healthy lifestyle changes this year. Have you kept your promises? Whether or not you've slipped up, now is a great time to recommit to your health. This checklist can help you keep track of steps you need to take to stay healthy.

If you have diabetes:

- Have your cholesterol checked at least once a year.** Your LDL cholesterol should be less than 100.
- Have an annual dilated eye exam.** Your doctor will check for eye changes associated with diabetes.
- Have a hemoglobin A1c (Hb A1c) test at least twice a year.** This test monitors your average blood sugar level.

If you have heart disease:

- Have your cholesterol checked at least once a year.** Your LDL cholesterol should be less than 70.

If you've had a heart attack:

- Take your medicine as prescribed.** Don't stop taking it unless your doctor instructs you to lower the dose and stop.
- Go to follow-up appointments.** Even if your condition is stable, see your doctor once a year for a checkup.

If you're a woman:

- Get recommended mammograms.** Women ages 50 and older should have a mammogram every year. Women ages 40 to 49 should talk with their doctor about having mammograms every one to two years.

If you take antidepressants:

- Take your medicine as prescribed.** Don't stop taking it unless your doctor instructs you to lower the dose and stop.
- Get your refills on time.** Missing doses can make your medication less effective.
- Go to your follow-up appointments.** Tell your doctor about any side effects you may be experiencing. He or she may adjust the dose or suggest another medication.

Everyone:

- Get regular exercise.** Experts recommend at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity most days of the week.
- Maintain a healthy diet.** Eat smaller portions to cut calories. And make healthier food choices. For example, try substituting beans for meat in salads, stews and soups.
- Visit your doctor.** Even if you're healthy, it's important to see your doctor for regular checkups. Be sure to ask if you're due for any screenings or vaccinations, too.

10 ways to slash **STROKE RISK**

Strokes kill more than 150,000 Americans each year and leave many more disabled. They happen when the brain doesn't get enough blood, either because an artery burst or a clot blocked the blood flow.

Some risk factors, such as getting older and being male, can't be changed. But a new study in *The Lancet* found 10 that can — and together, they account for 90 percent of stroke risk. Here are the details:

- 1 High blood pressure.** Stroke risk is four to six times higher in those with hypertension. One in three adults has high blood pressure. Get yours checked regularly.
- 2 Diabetes.** High blood sugar damages blood vessels in the brain. People with diabetes have triple the stroke risk of those without the disease. Work with your doctor to manage your blood glucose.
- 3 Heart disease.** A misshapen heart or irregular heartbeat could contribute to stroke. To treat your condition, your doctor might recommend surgery or medication.
- 4 Abnormal cholesterol.** High levels of LDL or "bad" cholesterol and low levels of HDL or "good" cholesterol clog arteries. Have yours checked annually if you have diabetes or heart disease.
- 5 Waist-to-hip ratio.** Being heavy contributes to all four of the previous risk factors. To maintain a healthy weight, balance the number of calories you eat with your physical activity level.
- 6 Unhealthy diet.** Study participants who ate a Mediterranean diet — rich in fish, vegetables and fruits — had the lowest stroke risk. Load up on fruits, veggies, whole grains and lean proteins.
- 7 Not exercising.** Working out keeps your blood flowing and your heart strong. Aim for 30 minutes a day, five or more days a week.
- 8 Smoking.** All forms of tobacco can cause blockages in the artery leading to the brain. Nicotine also raises blood pressure and thickens the blood. Kick the habit and your stroke risk drops immediately.
- 9 Drinking alcohol.** Binge drinking thins blood, increasing bleeding risk. Limit alcohol to one drink per day for women or two for men.
- 10 Stress.** Constant psychological pressure may damage artery walls. To calm down, try positive self-talk. Don't think, "I can't do this." Tell yourself, "I'll do the best I can."

What if you have diabetes?

Diabetes boosts your risk for stroke, but lifestyle changes, such as eating healthier, can control diabetes and lower stroke risk at the same time. For help, call a nurse health coach. **1-888-392-3506.**



Kim Walsh, M.D., M.P.H.
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Ask the doctor:

Improving doctor-patient communication

Q: What information should I share with my doctor?

A: Good communication with your doctor is key. It's important to do your part and give your doctor the information he or she needs. At each appointment, share all you can about your current symptoms, your own and your family's health history, and any allergies you have. Bring a list of all your medications, including vitamins and supplements, to share with your doctor. Be sure to also write down the dosage of each medication and how often you are taking it. Or instead, you can bring your current medications in their original bottles. You may also want to share X-rays, test results, your immunization records and any other relevant records.

Q: How can I better understand my doctor?

A: You deserve to have a clear understanding of your health and your doctor's advice. These tips can help:

- Before each doctor's visit, write down a list of any symptoms or health concerns you want to discuss and questions you have for your doctor. Take this list with you and use it during your visit so you don't forget anything.
- Don't be embarrassed or afraid to say you don't understand something your doctor says.
- Take notes during your appointment or bring a family member to do so.
- Request brochures or other written sources of information about your condition or treatment. Ask your doctor to write down the treatment instructions he or she wants you to follow.
- Call between visits if you have questions, if you have side effects from your medications or if your symptoms change.

Staying healthy

Having strong communication with your doctor is an important step in managing your health. For more tips on staying healthy — and a checklist to keep you on track — see page 1.

Home, sweet (medical) home

If you're in great health, your medical care may require little more than a yearly checkup. But what if you have a chronic condition like diabetes or asthma? Your access to consistent, comprehensive care may seem a lot more important.

Some primary care practices are adopting a "medical home" approach that can help you coordinate your care. Medical home doesn't refer to anyone's house or even a physical building. Instead, it's a health care concept focused on the patient.

Professional members of a medical home work as a team to ensure each patient gets ongoing, complete care. The lead doctor usually coordinates the patient's health care needs, and team members may include doctors, nurses, pharmacists, physical therapists and others. Any specialist you see sends test results and treatment information to your primary care doctor, so your medical history resides in one place.

Let's say, for example, a woman is diagnosed with breast cancer. Instead of setting her loose to find specialists and make her own appointments, a medical home team can schedule the visit, prepare her for appointments and make sure she and her primary care doctor receive test results and treatment recommendations.

Ask your primary care doctor if his or her practice is part of a medical home.

HOUSE HUNTING?

BE ON ASTHMA ALERT

Looking for new digs is challenging enough. But when you have asthma, there are extra factors to consider. Allergy triggers in homes can make asthma flare up. Yet such triggers are surprisingly common. A study in the *Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology* of more than 800 homes in 75 sites across the U.S. found that half had at least six household triggers, such as cats, dogs, mice, cockroaches, dust mites or mold.

Whether you're buying or renting, it pays to keep an eye out for potential problems. This asthma checklist can help you find your home, sweet home.

Checklist: Is this house or apartment right for you?

A "yes" answer at right indicates a potential problem. If you're unsure how extensive the problem is, consider hiring a professional inspector. Specify that you're looking for allergy trouble spots. Establish up front who will pay for the inspection: you or the seller or landlord.

Home buyer or renter checklist

WHAT TO LOOK FOR	YES	NO	REASONS
FLOORING Are the floors carpeted?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Carpets may harbor dust mites or skin flakes from the previous resident's pets.
HEATING Is there a gas or oil furnace, woodstove, fireplace or unvented kerosene or gas space heater?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	These indoor fuel burners can produce nitrogen dioxide, a gas with an irritating odor.
PESTS Do you see signs of cockroaches? Are there cracks in walls or gaps around windows? Do you see mouse droppings?	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Look for live cockroaches, body parts and poison baits. These are places where cockroaches could enter. Mice, like pets, can trigger allergies and asthma.
KITCHEN AND BATHROOM Are there leaky faucets or pipes? Do you see signs of moisture under sinks? Are there no exhaust fans or ones that vent into the attic?	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Moisture promotes mold growth, cockroaches and dust mites. Look for standing water, water stains or visible mold. To reduce mold, exhaust fans should vent to the outside.
BASEMENT Is the basement damp or poorly ventilated?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Damp conditions encourage mold growth and dust mites.



Have a plan for your asthma

Do you have asthma? Look in your 2011 Health & Wellness calendar for a free asthma action plan that you can fill out with your doctor. Call 1-888-392-3506 to receive a free 2011 calendar.

One surprise move to control **diabetes**



You know kicking the habit would help you breathe easier. But here's a surprise — as a study in *Annals of Internal Medicine* confirms, ditching cigarettes can also help you prevent or manage your diabetes in the long term.

Because you have diabetes, you're already at higher risk for heart disease. But being a smoker doubles your chances of getting heart disease. Smoking is also dangerous for people with diabetes because it:

- Narrows your blood vessels, just like diabetes
- Increases your risk for eye problems and other diabetes complications
- Damages blood vessels in your legs, boosting chances of amputation

The good news? Quitting has many benefits. Stopping smoking protects your eyes, blood vessels, nerves, kidneys and other organs. It may also help improve your cholesterol, blood pressure and circulation. Giving up smoking benefits your family, too. It keeps

Get the help you need to quit smoking

We offer smoking-cessation counseling over the phone or at your workplace through the American Lung Association's Freedom From Smoking® course. Our program has shown proven success. And best of all, it's free! Quitting resources are available over the phone or through classes at your workplace. Call 1-888-392-3506.

them from being exposed to harmful secondhand smoke.

Once you've decided to quit, talk with your doctor about the best strategy. The Service Benefit plan members who complete the online Blue Health Assessment's Breathe module receive certain smoking-cessation prescription and nonprescription medications, such as nicotine patches, for free if prescribed by their physician.

How to dress your best if you have COPD

"One, two, buckle my shoe" isn't always so easy when you have COPD. Reaching, bending and moving your arms can make you feel breathless. Just getting showered and dressed in the morning can be a lot of work. Keep yourself looking sharp with these tips from the American Lung Association.

Fresh as a daisy

Use a shower stool and sit while you shower, shave and dry off. Some people find a handheld shower nozzle is helpful. Avoid excessively hot water to reduce steam and breathlessness. To dry off with less effort, slip into a soft terry cloth robe.

Dressing smart

Keep clothing and grooming tools within easy reach. When you go to bed, lay your clothes for the next day on a bedside chair or dresser. To avoid chest or stomach constriction and discomfort, women can wear a camisole instead of a bra, and men can trade a belt for suspenders. Lastly, ease into comfortable slip-on shoes.

These simple steps can help get your day off to a good start. Also, talk with your doctor about going to a pulmonary rehabilitation program where you can learn additional ways to increase your activity level.

Need help managing your COPD?

Our new COPD health coaching program can help. Call **1-888-392-3506** to speak with a nurse health coach. There is no additional cost for COPD educational materials and nurse health coaching.



HEART PATIENTS: Live longer by getting help for **DEPRESSION**

If you have heart disease, it's important to follow your treatment plan, take medications as prescribed and adopt a healthy lifestyle. But new research suggests you should pay attention to your mental health, too. Findings show that suffering from depression may shorten your life.

Depression has been shown to increase the risk of developing heart disease and suffering a heart attack. And both depression and heart disease are separately linked to a greater risk for death.

But what about people who have both conditions? A study recently published in the journal *Heart* examined how depression affected cardiac patients.

Heart disease plus depression may increase risk for death

Researchers analyzed the health data of nearly 6,000 men and women ages 35 to 74 and followed them for an average of 5.5 years. They found that people with both heart disease and depression were much more likely to die than people

who had just one of the conditions. And compared with those who didn't have either condition, people with both depression and heart disease had triple the risk for death from all causes and quadruple the risk of death from heart attack or stroke.

Depression is common among heart patients

Experts estimate that more than 20 percent of heart patients may suffer from some form of depression. If you think you could be depressed — with or without heart disease — talk with your doctor.

The good news is that depression is highly treatable. The two most common treatment methods are antidepressant medications and psychotherapy, or talk therapy. Medication addresses chemical imbalances in the brain. Therapy helps patients cope with feelings and symptoms while teaching them to change thought patterns that may play a role in the illness. If you need help locating a provider for your condition, call 1-800-222-4739.

Need help managing heart disease?

Call a nurse health coach today. It's free! **1-888-392-3506.**

Do you think you have depression?

Knowing the signs and symptoms of depression can greatly improve your or a loved one's health and prevent losing years to an undiagnosed illness. Check the symptoms below that apply to you and bring this list to your health care provider.

- I am often restless and irritable.
- I am having irregular sleep patterns — either too much or not enough.
- I don't enjoy hobbies, friends, family or leisure activities anymore.
- I am having trouble managing my diabetes, hypertension or other chronic illness.
- I have trouble concentrating or making simple decisions.
- I have nagging aches and pains that do not get better no matter what I do.
- I often experience digestive problems, headache or backache, chest pain, or dizziness.
- Others have commented on my mood or attitude lately.
- My weight has changed considerably.
- I have had several of the symptoms here for more than two weeks.
- I feel that my everyday life (work, family, friends) is suffering because of these problems.
- I have a family history of depression.
- I have thought about suicide.

Source: A Guide to Depression – Beyond Sadness. *University of Michigan Depression Center.*



Size matters: Portion control can help rein in weight

Keeping an eye on food portions is a great first step to maintaining a healthy weight.

For starters, don't confuse portion size with serving size. The serving size found on food labels is a guide to the calories, nutrients, fat, sugar and sodium a specific amount of food contains. A portion size is the amount of a food served in a meal or snack.

Often, portions are far bigger than a serving size. For example, bagels and muffins are sold in portion sizes that are at least two to three servings. Still, checking food labels for serving sizes can help guide you toward sensible portions.

Here are some other tips for downsizing:

- Measure the size of your glasses, bowls and cups to see how much you usually eat. Then compare that to a serving size to help you decide on a reasonable portion. Also helpful: Use smaller plates and bowls.
- Portion food on plates rather than placing serving dishes on the dinner table.
- If you buy snacks in bulk, divide large amounts into serving-size containers or bags. Eating your

Eat better

Want more information on how to choose healthier foods at your local farmers market or grocery store and how to determine portion sizes? Log on to bcbsnc.com/content/fep and watch our video, "Be a New You with Blue, Making Better Food Choices." Our registered nurse health coaches can also answer your food and nutrition questions over the phone. Call us at **1-888-392-3506**.

preportioned snack from a bowl or plate can help, too.

- Dining out? Order an appetizer as a main dish, split an entrée with a friend or ask for half to be boxed up to go.
- Avoid supersize syndrome at fast-food restaurants — choose a smaller sandwich and low-fat milk or water instead of a "value meal."

Find healthy foods at farmers markets

The weather is beautiful, so why not do your grocery shopping outside? Roam your local farmers market for foods like fresh fruits and vegetables, which can help prevent disease. Many markets also sell organic foods, which are grown without the use of most conventional pesticides. And because market foods are seasonal, they're often cheaper.

To get the most from your market, follow these tips:

- Go early, when the selection is best.
- Bring enough bags to keep raw and cooked foods separate, for safety's sake.
- Branch out! Try a new fruit or veggie that you haven't had before. Select colorful produce — it's often the healthiest. If you have little ones, let them choose.
- Buy fresh-cut produce, such as melon slices, only if they're in a cooler or on ice to lower the risk for food poisoning.
- Take foods home right away so they don't spoil.

Market locator For a list of farmers markets near you, visit localharvest.org.

In touch

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Healthy Endeavors members will continue to receive this magazine for two years.

Your plan for better health.SM

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Getting help from a health coach (a real nurse) is as easy as 1-2-3 — and free

Here's how simple it is to work with your own coach:

- 1 Call us at **1-888-392-3506**. Health coaching starts with an assessment that includes questions about your health.
- 2 You and your dedicated health coach — a registered nurse — choose goals for you to work on to improve your health.
- 3 Your health coach provides educational materials and support to help you reach your goals. We'd love to help you!

Blueberry crisp

Recipe by Cathy Chapman, Healthy EndeavorsSM team lead

This amount is for an 8-by-8-inch baking pan — use a glass one so you can see when the blueberries are bubbly.

Ingredients

- 4–5 cups of washed blueberries
- 1 ½ cups of uncooked oatmeal
- 1 stick of softened Smart Balance 50/50 butter blend or ½ cup of any 0 trans fat soft margarine
- ½ cup of firmly packed brown or raw sugar
- ½ tsp. of cinnamon or allspice

Directions

Heat oven to 375 degrees. Place berries in the baking pan. Combine remaining ingredients and spread evenly over the berries. Bake for approximately 20 minutes until topping is brown and the juice from the blueberries is bubbling.

Serve warm or cold. This recipe also works well using ripe peaches or a combination of peaches and blueberries.

