

Spring 2023

# Health NEWS



Take care of your health and **earn a reward!** If you see this symbol, go to [metroplusrewards.org](https://metroplusrewards.org) to learn how you can earn member rewards.

## Give your favorite meals a **healthy makeover**

PAGE 4

## What you need to know about **colorectal cancer**

PAGE 3

## How to get creative with your cardio

PAGE 8



VISIT US AT [METROPLUS.ORG](https://metroplus.org)

Do you speak a language other than English? MetroPlusHealth has Member Services staff who speak your language. If you need help making an appointment, call the Member Services Department at **877.475.3795 (TTY: 711)**.



# 5 tips to save money and eat healthier

If you feel like your money is stretched too thin to make healthy choices, you're not alone. In a study of roughly 2,000 Americans, 59% of respondents felt that living a healthy lifestyle was too expensive.

But adopting healthy behaviors doesn't have to come with a price, especially when food is concerned. There are some things you can change, from how you eat your meals to where you shop, to improve the health of you and your family.

**1 Set up a budget.** A budget helps you see where you spend your money — and where you can save. It's as simple as listing and adding up all your expenses for a month and then subtracting that amount from how much you make. If your expenses are higher than your income, you need to cut your spending. To start saving, take a look at your expenses and see where you can spend less.

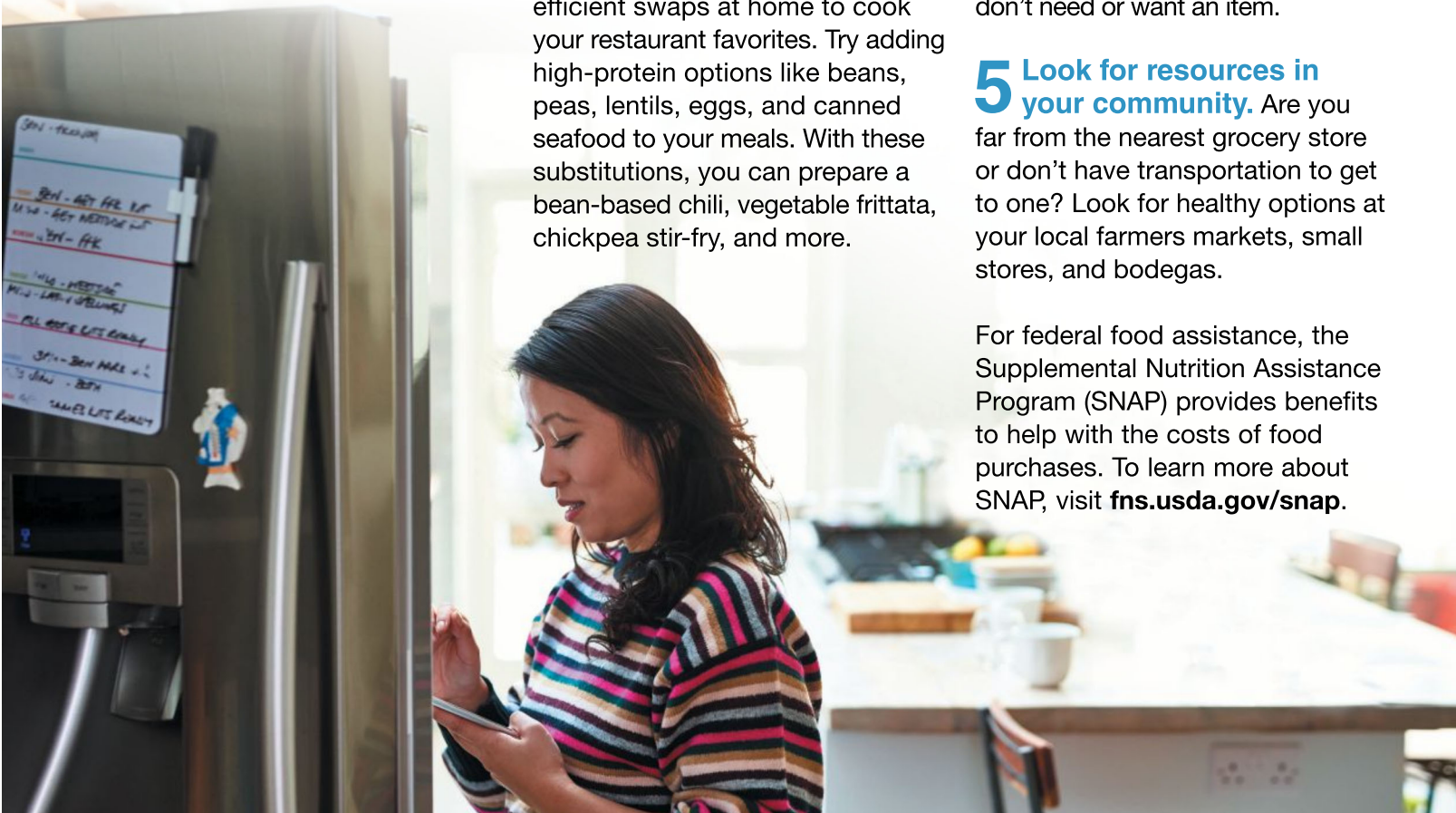
**2 Eat in more.** Americans spend more money at restaurants than at grocery stores. Not only is eating out hard on your waistline, but it's also costly for your wallet. You can make cost-efficient swaps at home to cook your restaurant favorites. Try adding high-protein options like beans, peas, lentils, eggs, and canned seafood to your meals. With these substitutions, you can prepare a bean-based chili, vegetable frittata, chickpea stir-fry, and more.

**3 Trim your grocery bill.** Meal planning saves you time, money, and stress. Plan your recipes for the week in advance so that the items on your list reflect only what you need. Make sure you bring your shopping list to the store. Want to stretch your budget even further? Choose store brands, which can reduce your grocery bill by 20 to 30%. If fresh produce is limited, look for canned or frozen alternatives.

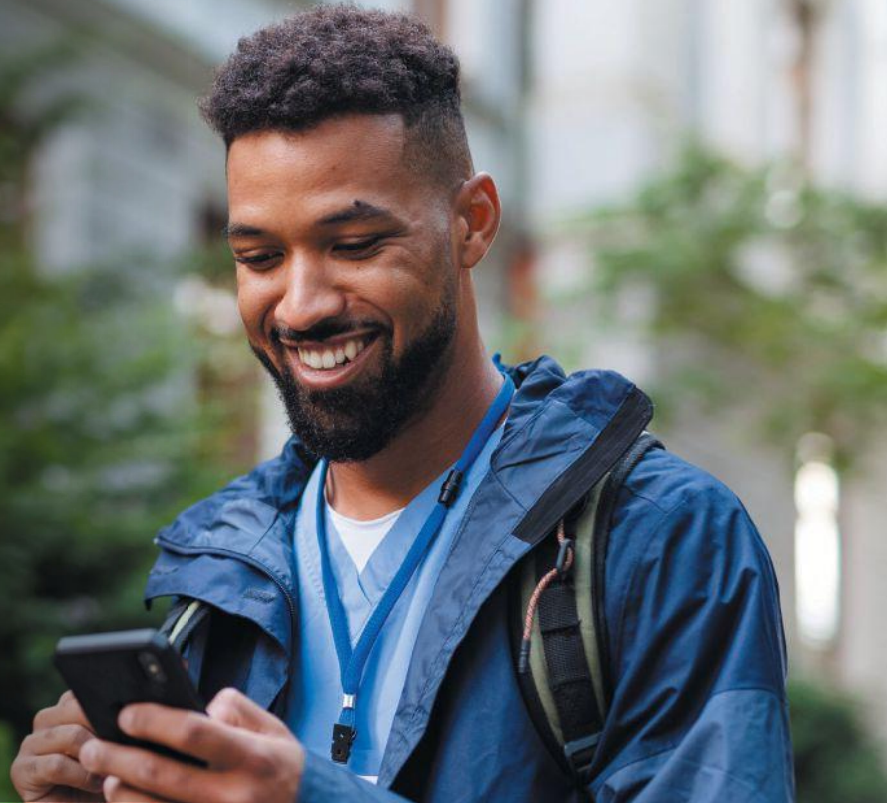
**4 Think before you buy.** The next time you find a sale that seems too good to pass up, ask yourself: Do I really need this? Am I buying this only because it's on sale? Remember, it isn't really a deal if you don't need or want an item.

**5 Look for resources in your community.** Are you far from the nearest grocery store or don't have transportation to get to one? Look for healthy options at your local farmers markets, small stores, and bodegas.

For federal food assistance, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides benefits to help with the costs of food purchases. To learn more about SNAP, visit [fns.usda.gov/snap](https://fns.usda.gov/snap).



# What you need to know about colorectal cancer



Although the disease is still more common in people older than 50, rates have been falling for this population. This is due to increased screening which can prevent some cases by finding precancerous growths — as one reason for this decline. But among those younger than 50, colorectal cancer rates have risen since the early '90s.

## Get your flu shot and COVID-19 shots and boosters



Are you up-to-date with vaccinations? Also, ask your provider when you should get the pneumonia and shingles vaccines. Get the latest information on COVID-19 boosters and vaccination.

Experts say that eating habits and obesity play a role. If you're a young adult, choosing a healthy diet and managing your weight may help. If you're in the 50-plus group, the same tactics complement regular screening. Either way, it pays to take action.

### Optimize your diet

Eating lots of red meat has been linked to an increased risk for colorectal cancer. Meanwhile, diets rich in vegetables, fruits, and whole grains might decrease the risk.

Besides consuming more fruits and veggies and less red meat, you can make other changes to help lower your risk for colorectal cancer:

- Limit your intake of processed meats.
  - Avoid drinking alcohol in excess.
  - Balance the calories you get from food with the ones you burn through regular exercise.
- An inactive lifestyle and obesity are risk factors for colorectal cancer.

### Schedule a screening test

Screening helps detect cancer early, when it's easier to treat. Some tests also help find precancerous growths, called polyps, so they can be removed before they turn into cancer. Experts recommend beginning screenings for colorectal cancer at age 45.

There are a few types of screenings. The guaiac-based fecal occult blood test, fecal immunochemical test, and stool DNA test examine a stool sample for signs of cancer. These tests can usually be done at home.

Flexible sigmoidoscopy and colonoscopy are used to examine the colon to look for growths and signs of cancer. CT colonography also examines the colon and rectum. But it uses X-rays and a CT scan to create 3-D images, rather than inserting a scope. If the scan finds polyps or abnormalities, a colonoscopy is needed to remove them.

Talk with your provider to help choose the best screening method for you.



# Give your favorite meals a healthy makeover

When you think of healthy eating, you may think you'll need to cut out many of your favorite foods. But you can still have your favorite dishes with a few healthy tweaks. Try these tips to transform them into nutritious and delicious meals.

## Spice it up

Ditch the saltshaker and reach for sodium-free sources of flavor instead. Use half the normal amount of salt (or none at all) when cooking your favorite dishes. Add flavor with spices, herbs,

garlic, and onion. Squeeze lemon or lime juice on your dish for some extra zest.

## Trim the fat

Trade in high-fat meats for leaner ones. Use lean or extra lean ground beef in tacos and burgers. For instance, choose skinless chicken breasts in place of fried and fatty varieties.

## Slim down on dairy

When making mac and cheese, casserole dishes, and other meals with cheese, opt for low-fat choices:

- Swap 2% milk for 1% or skim
- Use nonfat Greek yogurt instead of sour cream
- Choose light or nonfat creams and cheeses

## Fill up on fiber

Swap calorie-dense ingredients for those that are low in calories and high in fiber, like vegetables and fruits. That way, you can eat the same portion size with fewer calories and more nutrients.

For example:

- Use less cheese when making homemade pizza and top it with broccoli, mushrooms, peppers, or other favorite veggies.
- Swap some of the meat and cheese on a sandwich for lettuce and tomato.
- Fill lasagna with spinach and zucchini.

By making these small swaps, you can eat healthy meals without sacrificing flavor.

# Get help for tummy troubles

Maybe it happens after a big meal or leading up to a stressful event. It could even wake you up in the middle of the night with a burning sensation. You know the feeling: an upset stomach.

Help is here. By making simple changes throughout the day, you can often relieve mild stomach symptoms. Try these tips:

**1 Look to your plate...and how you fill it.** Bloating can be caused by dairy, beans, and lentils, while cruciferous vegetables, such as cabbage, broccoli, and brussels sprouts, can cause gut irritation. Spicy or fatty foods may be to blame for indigestion.

Also look at *how* you eat. Do you tend to go for larger meals? Are you a fast chewer? Consider adjusting your habits. Downsize your meals and time them closer together. Avoid eating near bedtime, and try to chew and swallow more slowly.

**2 Break out the home remedies.** A heating pad can ease stomach pain. Herbal products with peppermint, chamomile, coriander, fennel, or turmeric are also soothing for the belly. To alleviate nausea and vomiting, opt for ginger or ginger ale.

Practice meditation and deep breathing to help stress-related discomfort. For kids with anxious tummies, talk with them about their concerns and offer coping strategies.



**3 Head to the medicine cabinet.** Over-the-counter treatments, such as antacids and anti-gas medications, can help relieve digestive issues. Just be sure to skip products that might irritate the stomach, like pain and anti-inflammatory medicines. Check in with your pediatrician before giving stomach medicine to kids.

**4 Reach out to your provider.** They can help figure out if digestive conditions, such as inflammatory bowel disease or

ulcers, are behind your upset stomach. The earlier many of these disorders are found, the easier they are to treat.

But don't wait if your pain begins to affect your daily life, or if you notice blood in your bowel movements or vomit, severe or worsening pain in your abdomen, severe vomiting or diarrhea, or unexpected weight loss. In those cases, it's best to call your provider or pediatrician right away and seek medical care.

# 5 healthy things to do when you're pregnant

Take care of yourself and your growing baby with these good-for-you habits.

Your health never comes into sharper focus than it does when you're pregnant. Because your decisions directly affect your baby, it's worth adopting positive habits to give you both the best chance at good health. Here are five healthy behaviors to practice when you're expecting:

## 1. Keep the water flowing.

You'll need to drink more water when you're pregnant to support your body and your growing baby. Plus, good hydration will help you avoid hemorrhoids, constipation, urinary tract infections, bladder infections, excessive swelling, and premature labor.

Everyone needs a different amount of water based on their size, activity level, and the weather. How do you know what's right for you? Try the urine test. When you pee, it should be clear or pale yellow.

**2. Stay active.** Exercise is healthy for most people who are pregnant. Aim for at least two and a half hours of moderate-intensity activity a week. (Think cycling, swimming, dancing, and low-impact aerobics.) This can help prevent back pain, reduce your anxiety, improve your sleep, and prepare you for delivery.

**3. Quit your vices.** If you smoke, now is the time to quit. Smoking during pregnancy ups your chances of having a baby with a low birth weight, which puts them at greater risk for health problems.

You should also stop drinking. There is no safe amount of alcohol while pregnant. Those who drink risk having a baby with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, which can cause abnormal facial features, learning disabilities, and behavioral issues.

## 4. Pay attention to your plate.

When you're pregnant, nutrition matters more than ever. Eat a healthy variety of vegetables, fruits, and whole grains, along with protein foods and low-fat dairy products. To find out how much you should eat from each food group based on your age, height, weight, trimester, and physical activity level, visit [myplate.gov](https://myplate.gov).

**5. Take a prenatal vitamin.** When you're pregnant, certain nutrients are especially important. You'll find them in a prenatal vitamin. For example, folic acid helps prevent some birth defects, while iron and iodine are key to staying healthy.



# Have diabetes? Work with your provider to protect your heart

A surprising number of people who have type 2 diabetes aren't paying enough attention to their heart health. In fact, the American Heart Association says that less than 20% of people who have type 2 diabetes are taking steps to control their heart disease risk — even though they're twice as likely to have heart disease or a stroke.



## Get help making lifestyle changes

Eating a well-balanced diet and getting enough exercise can also help you manage type 2 diabetes — and boost heart health. Your provider may refer you to a dietitian. The dietitian can also suggest activities to help you get the recommended 150 minutes of moderate exercise each week. Walking or cycling are usually good options.

If you smoke, talk with your provider about quitting. Smoking causes your blood vessels to narrow. This increases your chances of complications such as heart disease. There are many resources to help you stop smoking. Visit [smokefree.gov](https://www.smokefree.gov) or [nysmokefree.com](https://www.nysmokefree.com) or call the NY State Smokers' Quitline at **800.697.8487**. Giving up smoking can be hard, so don't feel bad if you have a slipup. Learn some tips from former smokers.

Your provider can help you keep your heart in good shape. Here's how to partner with them to improve your cardiovascular health.

## Watch your numbers

Blood sugar, cholesterol, and blood pressure levels all matter for your diabetes and heart health. A1C tests track your average blood sugar levels. Most people with type 2 diabetes have an A1C goal of less than 7%, but your provider will give you your specific target goal.

Cholesterol levels should be tested every four to six years, but you may need more frequent screenings. If you're older than age 40 and have high cholesterol, your provider may give you medications to keep your numbers in check.

Your provider can also help you avoid high blood pressure. It's best to keep your blood pressure below 140/90 mm Hg.



# How to get creative with your Cardio

Aim for at least 2.5 hours per week of moderate-intensity physical activity (like walking briskly) or 1.25 hours of vigorous-intensity activity (like jogging) or a mix of both. Think creatively and you can fit different types of cardio into your day. Try these tips:



## 1. Get those steps.

Going to the grocery store? Park at the farthest end of the parking lot and add a couple of minutes of walking to your day.

## 2. Grab some drumsticks.

Try a cardio drumming class. This type of class lets you drum to music. This fun workout will get your heart rate up and can be modified for any fitness level.



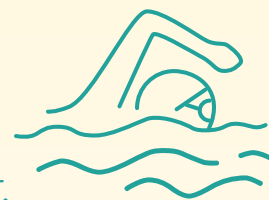
## 3. Dance it off.

About 15 million people every week take Zumba, a high-energy dance class. No time for class? Cue up your favorite music and take a 5-minute dance break.



## 6. Get wet.

Swimming is a fun way to move your body. Water exercise classes are a great option if you have joint or mobility issues.



## 5. Walk and talk.

Grab a coffee to go, meet up with a friend and get a walk in. You'll catch up while you sneak in a workout.



## 4. Get up from that couch.

Do you, like many people, spend most of your day sitting? Instead of lounging in front of the TV all night, walk in place or do a set of slow, controlled squats while catching up on your favorite shows.

