

Winter 2024

# Health NEWS



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# Flu and cold prevention starts now

Every year, **colds and the flu** make millions of people feel pretty lousy. Sore throats and body aches aren't the only concerns. These respiratory illnesses sometimes lead to serious health problems, like pneumonia and bronchitis. That's why it's so important to take steps to protect yourself and your loved ones.

Here's a refresher on cold and flu prevention tips:

Instead of...	Stay safe by...
Only washing your hands after going to the bathroom	Cleaning your hands frequently, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Before, during, and after preparing food</li><li>■ Before eating meals</li><li>■ After using the toilet</li><li>■ After touching pet food or waste</li><li>■ After taking out the trash</li></ul>
Washing your hands in a rush	Taking the full 20 seconds to wash your hands — scrub the backs of your hands, between your fingers, and under your fingernails
Waiting until you're home to clean your hands	Keeping a travel-sized hand sanitizer with you for when you don't have access to soap and water
Touching your face with dirty hands	Being aware of your face-touching habits; only touch your face with freshly washed hands
Skipping your annual flu vaccine	Making time to get the flu vaccine every year — it's best to get vaccinated by early fall, but vaccines are still beneficial in January or later

## What if I get sick?

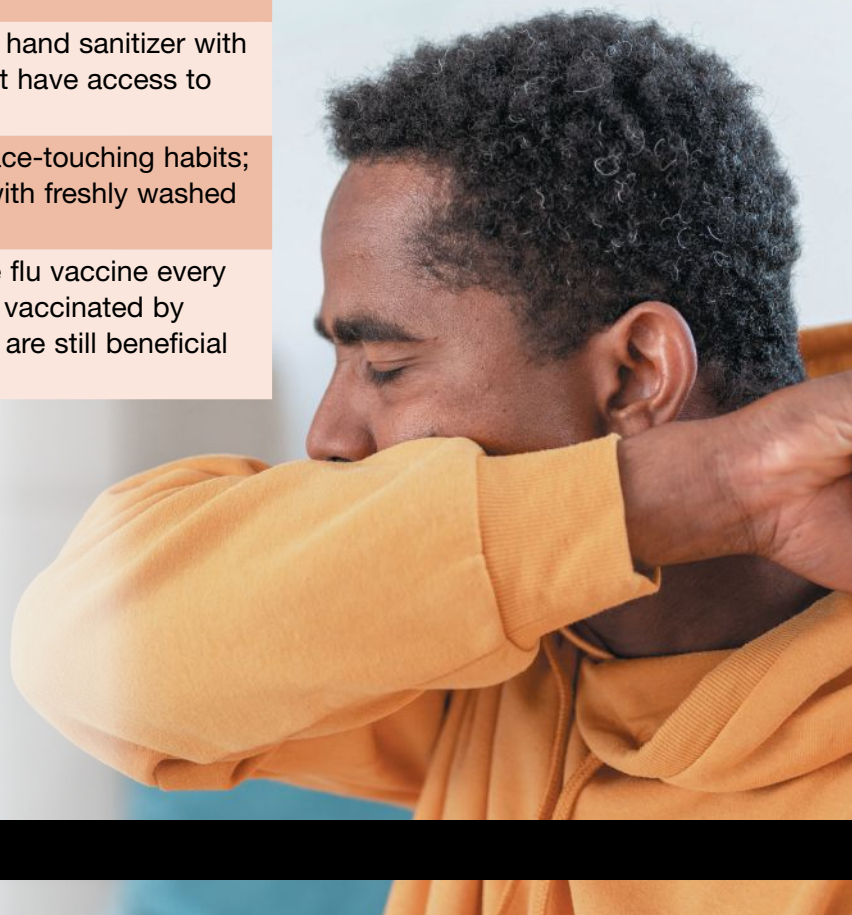
If you come down with the flu or a cold, follow this advice to avoid spreading it to others:

- Stay home. Ask someone to run errands for you.
- Before coughing or sneezing, cover your mouth and nose with a tissue. Wash your hands immediately after.
- Avoid hugging, touching, or having any close contact with other people.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces often; for example, light switches, doorknobs, and cellphones.

**It's not too late to get a flu shot**



To find a flu vaccination site near you, **click here**.



# 5 natural ways to boost mood

You don't always need to go to your favorite vacation spot to get warm, fuzzy feelings. Sometimes, happiness is just a few serotonin-boosting activities away.



## A feel-good chemical

Serotonin is a neurotransmitter that sends signals in your central nervous system. It helps control sleep and appetite, but it's mostly known for making positive, happy vibes. With some simple tweaks to your daily routine, you can actually increase serotonin levels. Try these tips:

### 1 Choose complex carbs.

Your brain uses an amino acid called tryptophan to produce serotonin. You've probably heard of it from Thanksgiving turkey. Tryptophan is also found in other meats, eggs, dairy, seeds, and legumes. Complex carbohydrates, such as vegetables, fruits, legumes, and whole grains, give tryptophan the best chance at reaching your brain and making serotonin.

### 2 Energize yourself.

Researchers theorize that physical activity triggers the brain to release serotonin and dopamine,

another feel-good hormone. The goal: Get at least 150 minutes of cardiovascular exercise each week. If that sounds too hard, it's OK to start small. Try 10 to 20 minutes per day. The most important thing is to get up, get out, and do something. Many NYC parks offer healthy events. To browse a calendar of events, [click here](#).

### 3 See the light.

A quick fix for low serotonin levels? Exposure to natural light or light therapy. Just 15 minutes a day can help you feel calmer and happier.

### 4 Show kindness.

Research indicates that being kind can boost serotonin. Look for ways to practice random acts of kindness. For example, hold the door for someone or wave hello to a neighbor. Interested in volunteering? To find local opportunities, [click here](#).

### 5 Slow it down.

There's a strong link between meditation and higher serotonin levels. Take a yoga class or practice mindfulness. Try to focus on the present (feelings, smells, and sounds) without making any judgment. To listen to a relaxing waterfall video, [click here](#). To look for free yoga classes at Shape Up NYC, [click here](#).

## Feeling down?

If your mood or energy levels feel low for more than two weeks, [reach out for support](#). Talk with your doctor about your symptoms. They may recommend medication, counseling, or both. If you have thoughts of harming yourself, call the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline at **988** right away. You can also use the Lifeline Chat and Text at [988lifeline.org/chat](https://988lifeline.org/chat).

# Resolutions that work

If you've ever made New Year's resolutions and failed to stick with them, you're in good company. As you start to think of goals for 2024, keep the following suggestions in mind. These ideas can help you start small and build on your achievements, step-by-step.

## Make them

The key to keeping resolutions is to make them realistic and attainable. These tips can help:

- **Assess your lifestyle.** Focus on areas you'd like to change. For example, if you want to improve your diet, keep a food diary for a week.
- **Focus on changes you can actually make.** Don't resolve to exercise every day, for example. Aim for three or four times a week.
- **Break major resolutions into small, specific steps.** For instance, if you want to improve your diet, begin by:
  - Adding an additional serving of fruits or vegetables to every meal

- Eating a healthy breakfast every day
- Drinking water or sparkling water, not regular, sugary soda
- Choosing 100% whole-grain bread and pasta

## Keep them

Once you've settled on a few attainable resolutions, these strategies can help:

- **Work on one resolution at a time.** Trying to stick to more than that at once could overwhelm you.
- **Let friends and family know your goals and ask for their support.** Even better, team up with someone with similar resolutions so that you can work together.

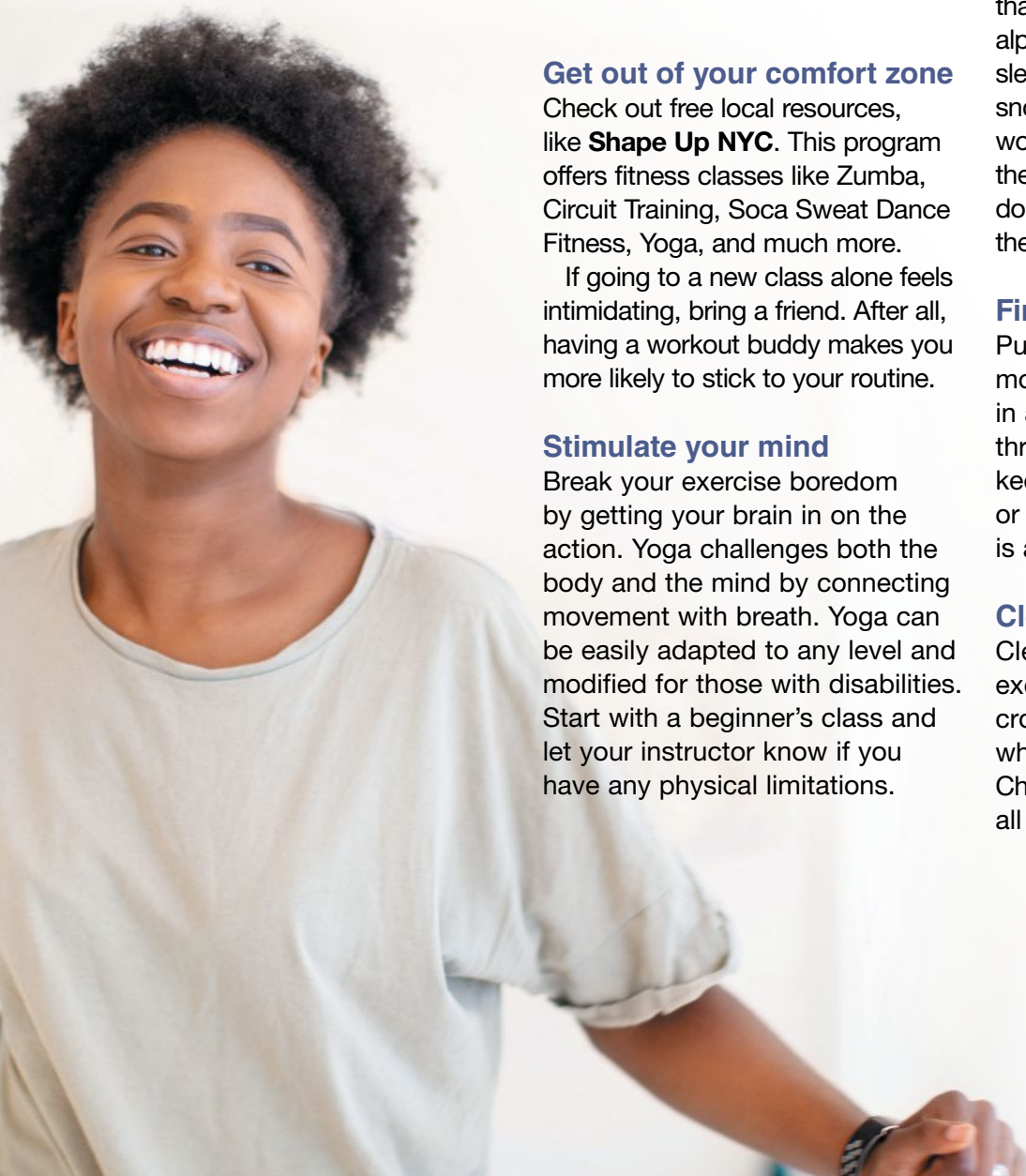
- **Consider joining a support group or working with a professional.** Look for a workout group or a group of people trying to quit smoking. Or you can seek help from a nutritionist, personal trainer, or therapist.
- **Mark your calendar to evaluate your progress.** Every few weeks or so, see how you're doing at meeting your goals. Tweak your plan based on how things are going. To learn more about creating a weight-loss plan and monitoring your progress, **click here**.
- **Cut yourself some slack.** Whether you're trying to lose weight, quit smoking, or exercise more, relapses are bound to occur. When they do, don't give up. Get back to your plan. For smoking cessation help, visit **smokefree.gov** or **nysmokefree.com**. You can also look for **local support groups** or contact the NY State Smokers' Quitline at **800.697.8487**.

We want you to stay healthy! Visit the MetroPlusHealth online Wellness Library at **healthlibrary.metroplus.org/Library/Wellness**.



# How to bring the spark back to your workout

You and your workout routine have been going steady for a while. But now, things are beginning to get boring. There's just no excitement anymore, and you're not motivated to make the effort. Before you break up with working out for good, try these tips to bring the spark back.



## Get out of your comfort zone

Check out free local resources, like **Shape Up NYC**. This program offers fitness classes like Zumba, Circuit Training, Soca Sweat Dance Fitness, Yoga, and much more.

If going to a new class alone feels intimidating, bring a friend. After all, having a workout buddy makes you more likely to stick to your routine.

## Stimulate your mind

Break your exercise boredom by getting your brain in on the action. Yoga challenges both the body and the mind by connecting movement with breath. Yoga can be easily adapted to any level and modified for those with disabilities. Start with a beginner's class and let your instructor know if you have any physical limitations.

## Spice up your steps

If your walking route has become stale, find a new one. Try a new park or different neighborhood. You can also go for a brisk winter walk as a family. Make a list of things to look for, such as a pinecone and a bird, or see if you can find something that starts with every letter of the alphabet. Another option is to go sledding. Walking up a hill in the snow is hard work. But it's totally worth it when you get to sail down the hill. Many of winter's fun activities don't feel like exercise—even though they are!

## Find your groove

Put on your favorite song and start moving! Dance to a few songs in a row or have mini sessions throughout the day — whatever keeps you grooving. Grab your kids or grandkids, spouse, or whoever is around to join in the fun.

## Clean up your act

Cleaning might not sound that exciting, but it is a great way to cross things off your to-do list while getting in your exercise. Chores like mopping and vacuuming all count as physical activity.

# 3 steps to add meatless meals to your routine

Shifting the focus to veggies and plant-based sources of protein may bring big benefits to your health. Why? Meat is a major source of cholesterol, saturated fat, and sodium.

Eating less of it can help slash your risk for high cholesterol and blood pressure, heart disease, type 2 diabetes, stroke, and even some cancers.

But you don't need to cut out meat completely or go meatless overnight. Here are three simple steps to start incorporating meatless meals into your weekly rotation:

## 1 Start with healthy meals you already know and love.

Then, swap out the meat for a plant-based source of protein. For example, try black beans seasoned with cumin, paprika, and chili powder instead of ground beef on taco night. Or use tofu instead of chicken in homemade stir-fries.

**2 Find new favorites.** Now that you've tried some meatless options, branch out and look for new, vegetarian recipes. Here are some ideas: **avocado tacos, minestrone soup, Mediterranean vegetable strata, black bean chili.**

**3 Avoid highly processed products.** Packaged "mock meat" products have much more sodium and fat than unprocessed plant-based proteins. Stick to nutrient-dense ingredients — like lentils, quinoa, whole grains, beans, and soy — over processed ones as much as possible.



# Vegan enchilada casserole

This meatless recipe makes a perfect meal for the entire family!



## INGREDIENTS

### Sauce

Canola or olive oil spray  
¼ cup diced yellow onion  
2 garlic cloves, minced  
2 tbsp. (about ½) diced jalapeño pepper  
2 cups vegetable broth (no salt added)  
6-oz. can tomato paste  
1 tsp. cumin powder  
1 tsp. smoked paprika  
½ tsp. Mexican seasoning (salt-free, dry blend)  
⅛ tsp. salt  
⅛ tsp. freshly ground pepper  
2 tbsp. apple cider vinegar  
1 tbsp. agave syrup or honey

### Filling

Canola or olive oil spray  
¼ cup diced yellow onion  
2 tbsp. (about ½) diced jalapeño pepper  
1 cup diced zucchini  
1 garlic clove, minced  
15-oz. can pinto beans, drained and rinsed

½ tsp. cumin powder  
⅛ tsp. Mexican seasoning (salt-free, dry blend)  
6 corn tortillas  
¾ cup vegan cheese

## DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.  
To make sauce: Preheat large pot on stove on high heat for two minutes. Turn heat off, spray with oil, turn heat back on, and sauté onion, garlic, and jalapeño pepper until onion is translucent, about three minutes.
2. Add broth, whisk in tomato paste, seasonings, vinegar, and agave syrup. Stir and bring to a boil, about five minutes. Turn off the heat and set the pot aside.
3. Heat a large pan over high heat for two minutes. Turn off, spray with oil, then turn heat on and add onion, jalapeño, zucchini, and garlic, and sauté for about four to five minutes, until onion is translucent and zucchini is cooked.

4. Stir in pinto beans, cumin, and seasoning blend. Sauté for two minutes. Turn heat off, then use a potato masher to mash together roughly.
5. Spray an 11-by-7 ½-inch baking pan. Pour about ½ cup of sauce into it. Lay three tortillas on bottom of pan. Spread filling on top of the three tortillas along with 1 cup of sauce. Lay three more tortillas. Pour remaining sauce on tortillas, then add ¾ cup vegan cheese. Bake for 30 minutes. Cut into eight pieces.

## PER SERVING

Makes eight. A serving is one piece. Each serving contains about 180 calories, 3.5 g fat (0 g saturated fat, 0 g trans fat), 0 mg cholesterol, 300 mg sodium, 32 g carbohydrates, 3 g fiber, 6 g sugars, and 7 g protein.

Looking for more healthy recipes? To get some ideas, [click here](#).

# Feeling frazzled? It could be ADHD

Do you have trouble remembering things, paying attention, or completing tasks? If these have been lifelong struggles, you may have attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Although most of us think of ADHD as a condition that only affects children, it can continue into adulthood. In fact, many people who have ADHD don't get diagnosed until later in life.

## Understanding inattention vs. hyperactivity/impulsivity

ADHD falls into three main categories: inattention, hyperactivity/impulsivity, and a combination of the two. So while some adults with ADHD mainly have symptoms from just one type, others can experience both kinds.

Signs of inattention include having trouble with:

- Paying attention to details or making mistakes at work
- Following instructions
- Organizing tasks and managing time
- Paying bills on time
- Losing things often, such as keys, wallet, or phone
- Being easily distracted
- Remembering daily tasks

Signs of hyperactivity/impulsivity can include:

- Extreme restlessness
- Fidgeting
- Excessive talking
- Interrupting others
- Answering before hearing the entire question



Having ADHD can leave you feeling unorganized or that you can never seem to get things done. This can lead to a range of problems, from relationship issues to difficulties at work. Talk with your doctor about your symptoms. In some cases, stress or other behavioral health issues may be the root cause.

## Find focus with ADHD treatments

Most adults with ADHD are greatly helped by some combination of medicine, therapy, and coaching. Your doctor can help decide which treatment might work best for you.

The most common medicines used to treat ADHD are stimulants, including methylphenidates (such as Ritalin) and amphetamines (such as Adderall). These medications don't cure ADHD, but they can help manage symptoms.

A therapist or counselor can also work with you to overcome the challenges that come with ADHD. In some cases, this may mean learning time management and organizational skills. They may recommend:

- Using day planners or a to-do list
- Setting timers to help keep you on task
- Breaking down big projects into smaller steps

The most important thing to remember is that it's never too late for a diagnosis. When you get help for ADHD, you can control your symptoms and improve your day-to-day life.