

SMART Health

MAY 2021

Deciphering Medical Studies

Nearly every day we read or hear about the results of new medical studies. The amount of information is overwhelming and coverage varies among news outlets. Some research is groundbreaking, while other studies add to many years of scientific inquiry. A few, such as the Framingham Heart Study, encompass several generations of participants.

Medical research evaluates health and illness. Scientists explore the causes of disease or symptoms; test if treatments help with a condition; and learn how certain behaviors affect one's health.

The goal is to help health care providers find new and better ways to understand, detect, control and treat illness, and to help patients determine their own personal health risks, especially when they are diagnosed with or are at risk for a medical disorder.

When you read or hear about medical studies, consider these key factors:

- How many people participated and who were they (gender, occupation, health status)?
- Was it a randomized controlled clinical trial? (Participants are randomly assigned to a treatment group or a control group. COVID-19 vaccine trials are an example.)
- Where was the research done and who paid for it?
- For new treatments being tested, were there side effects?



A good way to explore a study is to read its abstract — a summary that can help you quickly learn the important aspects of the data. Abstracts generally include the study's purpose, size, methods used, participants, and a summary of results.

To access clinical abstracts online, start with PubMed (U.S. National Library of Medicine), which includes more than 18 million citations from a wide variety of science and medical journals, at pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov.



Note: Due to production lead time, this issue may not reflect the current COVID-19 situation in some or all regions of the U.S. For the most up-to-date pandemic information visit coronavirus.gov.

BEST bits



■ **One in five Americans will get skin cancer**, most often caused by overexposure to the sun's ultraviolet rays. Every year, nearly five million are treated for skin cancer; of these, 10,000 die. **May 28 is Don't Fry Day**, sponsored by the National Council on Skin Cancer Prevention — a good reminder to "Be Safe in the Sun." Learn more at cancer.org/healthy/be-safe-in-sun.html.



■ **HIV Vaccine Awareness Day is recognized globally on May 18.**

The aim is to encourage the need for AIDS vaccines and to educate people about how to prevent HIV infection. No vaccine is available to prevent the virus or treat those infected. Learn more about HIV services in your area at locator.hiv.gov. Good news: Early diagnosis, treatment and preventive measures are reducing infection; deaths related to HIV fell by nearly half between 2010 and 2017.

■ **Topical (diclofenac gel, liquid or skin patch) pain-relieving nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)** are now recommended for everyday aches and pains by the American College of Physicians and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Their advice is based on a review of more than 200 studies with 33,000 patients with short-term injury (e.g., back, neck or knee, lasting fewer than four weeks). **Benefit:** They may have fewer side effects than frequent use of oral NSAIDs, which are linked to stomach ulcers, high blood pressure, kidney damage and heart attack.

“I believe that ‘Food is a giver.’ It gives you nutrition, health, and at times can give you recognition, like it did in my case, and you got to treat it with that kind of respect.”

— Ranveer Brar



TIP of the MONTH

Mediterranean Diet



May is International Mediterranean Diet Month.

You can adopt this traditional eating style in Mediterranean countries by **including** more vegetables, fruit, whole grains, beans, fish, olive oil and fresh herbs in your diet, while **reducing** highly processed foods, sweets and red meat. This eating plan has been linked with a lower risk of high blood pressure, heart disease and some types of cancer, and is filled with a colorful variety of delicious dishes. No deprivation — just enjoyment.

eating smart

Rethink Kid Food



Check any restaurant children’s menu and the selection will look much the same: burgers, pizza and chicken fingers. While familiar and delicious, these foods offer little nutritional value. They provide more salt and fat than children require, and rarely contain enough fiber or vegetables.

Of course, it’s fine for children to eat these fun foods on occasion. Unfortunately, these foods have become the norm. Studies show that among average children in the U.S.: (1) ultra-processed foods comprise 65% of calories and (2) a third of a child’s daily food intake comes from products prepared outside their home (e.g., restaurants).

This is concerning because diets high in ultra-processed foods are linked with an increased risk of conditions, including heart disease, type 2 diabetes, some cancers and obesity.

How can parents and caregivers help children make better choices? Start by making it a priority, eating meals together and being a good role model. Kids are often interested in what’s on an adult’s plate, so let them try it. If they watch you eat vegetables regularly, they are likely to follow suit.

Involve kids with food in pleasant, fun and exciting ways: Go to a farmer’s market, visit a pick-your-own farm, grocery shop together, watch a cooking show and try new recipes. Children will learn about variety and be more likely to try new things. And, give your children some control: Offer meals family style on the table and let kids help themselves (instead of plating meals for them). You may be surprised to see which foods they choose.

Remember that *kid food* is merely a marketing term. Children can and should eat a variety of nutritious foods daily, including vegetables, fruit, fish, dairy, eggs, poultry, beans, nuts and whole grains. Don’t make any food off limits, but offer a variety of nutritious foods every day.



Mediterranean White Bean Salad

EASY recipe

2 cans (15-oz.) unsalted white beans, drained and rinsed	1 cup fresh chopped parsley
1 large tomato, diced	¼ cup fresh chopped mint
1 English cucumber diced	2 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
1 red pepper, seeded and diced	1 lemon, zest and juice
2 green onions, minced	2 tsp za’atar spice blend
	¼ tsp salt



In a large bowl, mix beans, tomato, cucumber, pepper, green onions, parsley and mint. In a small bowl, stir together oil, lemon zest, lemon juice, za’atar and salt. **Pour** dressing over salad and toss to coat. **Add** salt to taste. **Optional:** Serve topped with crumbled feta cheese and crispy pita chips.

Makes 6 servings. Per serving: 210 calories | 11g protein | 6g total fat | 1g saturated fat | 4g mono fat | 1g poly fat | 38g carbohydrate | 3g sugar | 11g fiber | 145mg sodium

Balancing Act: Work and Family

We've all heard it's important to have a **work-life balance**. But figuring out how to achieve it isn't always easy.

Tips for bringing your work and family into more harmony:

- **Commit to a healthy lifestyle.** A healthy diet, daily physical activity, adequate sleep and finding activities you can share with a partner, family or friends are essential to a balanced life, according to the Mayo Clinic.
- **Set limits for working from home.** Whether you telecommute or spend time occasionally working from home, set up a dedicated office space and make it clear to family and friends when you are at work. But also have a routine — such as shutting down your computer or going for a walk — which signals your workday has ended and you're ready for family time.
- **Develop a support system.** Enlist family members and trusted friends to help with childcare or pet care if you have to work late. Likewise, build relationships with coworkers who can cover for you (and vice versa) if a family matter arises.

Stewart Friedman, PhD, director of the University of Pennsylvania Wharton Work/Life Integration Project, says the goal is to “integrate these areas harmoniously instead of thinking only in terms of trade-offs (between work and family).”



“You will never win if you never begin.”

— Helen Rowland

Working from home?

Use these tips to avoid distractions. Temporarily turn off phone and email alerts when you need to concentrate. Although these notifications may be brief, a Florida State University study found they prompt mind-wandering. Taking regular breaks may seem like a distraction, but research shows you'll likely be more focused afterwards. Stop checking social media throughout your workday. Avoid the temptation by promising yourself you'll only visit social media once your work is finished.



Q: How do I talk effectively with my teenagers?

A: There's no one-size-fits-all technique, but here are some general guidelines:

- Focus on listening, not fixing (“That must have been really upsetting.”).
- Empower them to problem-solve (e.g., “What options do you see for yourself?”).
- Show curiosity — not criticism — about their decisions and judgments.
- Highlight their strengths. Point out what they've done well.
- Admit what you don't know. If you lacked social media in childhood, for example, accept that your child might be more of an expert.
- Be specific. Inquire about a history test rather than asking, “How was school today?”
- Choose your battles. Let the little things go.
- Try conversations in the car. Sometimes it's easier not being face to face.
- Play games and sports together; it can feel much less intimidating.

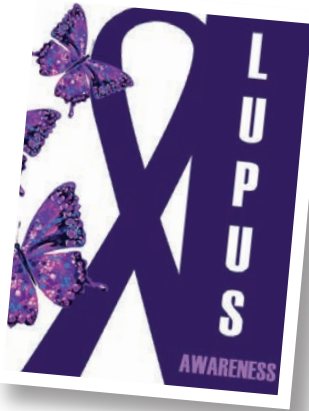
Finally, keep at it. Your efforts show that you care and support them.

— Eric Endlich, PhD



“Your body hears everything your mind says.”

— Naomi Judd



May is Lupus Awareness Month.

Lupus is a chronic, autoimmune disease (a condition in which your immune system mistakenly attacks your body). Symptoms may include a butterfly-shaped rash on the cheeks and nose, painful joints, and fatigue. It primarily affects women in their child-bearing years. The cause is unknown and there's no cure, but medication and reducing stress can help symptoms and reduce the risk of organ damage. Learn more from The Lupus Foundation of America at lupus.org.

body&mind

May is National High Blood Pressure Education Month.



Blood Pressure Ranges Explained

It's important to know your blood pressure numbers and what they mean. After all, high blood pressure raises the risk for stroke, heart attack, kidney disease and dementia.

Blood pressure measures blood pushing against the walls of your arteries as your heart pumps, sending blood throughout your body. The first number is the **systolic pressure**, indicating the pressure in your arteries when your heart beats. The second number, the **diastolic pressure**, measures pressure in your arteries when your heart rests between beats.

What constitutes a diagnosis of high blood pressure has changed. For many years, cardiologists considered high blood pressure as a reading of 140/90 or higher. But the American Heart Association's most recent high blood pressure guidelines, based on decades of research, divide blood pressure ranges into five categories:

Normal	Less than 120 and less than 80
Elevated	120 to 129 and less than 80
High Stage 1	130 to 139 or 80 to 89
High Stage 2	140 or higher or 90 or higher
Hypertensive Crisis	Higher than 180 and/or higher than 120

To learn more, visit Healthy and Unhealthy Blood Pressure Ranges at americanheart.org.



Signs of Hearing Loss

May is Better Hearing and Speech Month.



Hearing loss can impact people of all ages. While it's true hearing loss occurs gradually in many people as they reach their senior years, young adults and children can also have hearing problems.

Difficulty hearing has many causes, ranging from congenital hearing loss and ear infections to exposure to extremely loud noises. Ototoxic medications can sometimes damage hearing, too; they include certain antibiotics and cancer therapies, as well as extremely high doses of aspirin.

Signs of hearing loss include:

- Difficulty understanding words, especially if there is background noise.
- Having to turn the volume up to hear the TV or radio.
- Frequently needing others to speak up or speak more slowly.
- Avoiding some social situations and withdrawing from conversations because speech and other sounds seem muffled.



Don't ignore hearing problems. Over time, hearing loss can interfere with work, school and communications as well as impact speech. Also, some studies show it increases the risk for dementia. Contact your health care provider about any hearing concerns. If you have a sudden loss of hearing, especially if only in one ear, seek emergency treatment.

While most types of hearing loss cannot be reversed, there are steps you and a hearing specialist can take to improve hearing.

Learn more at asha.org.



National Women's Health Week is May 9 to 15.

Women's Health: Overview

Do you know the top health risks for women today? There are five primary concerns: high blood pressure, unhealthy blood cholesterol, type 2 diabetes, obesity and smoking. When these problems are chronic, they contribute to the four most common causes of death: heart disease, cancer, respiratory disease and stroke. Alzheimer's disease and unintentional injuries are also common causes of death in women.

If you have any of the five major health threats, you can improve your life by following your health care provider's treatment plan for lowering your risk. And include regular mammograms and other cancer screenings.

Take positive steps. While you can't control the added risk of family history for cardiovascular diseases and cancer, you can improve your odds against premature illness in six important ways.



1. Kick tobacco. Many people have succeeded in smoking cessation. Why not you?

2. Lose excess weight. Combine physical activity with healthful food choices.

3. Be active. Routine exercise (minimum 150 minutes per week of moderate-intensity activity, such as brisk walking) can help protect your cardiovascular health, lower cancer risk and reduce stress.



4. Eat well. Study the Mediterranean diet to lower cardiovascular risk (see "Tip of the Month," page 2).

5. Limit alcohol to one drink per day (equivalent to 1.5 oz. of liquor, 8 oz. of beer or 5 oz. of wine).

6. Control ongoing stress — a factor that may reduce your immunity to illness.



National Women's Health Week is designed to raise awareness about manageable steps women can take to improve their health. The focus: **Simply blend positive health steps into everyday life.** Rather than trying to overhaul your lifestyle, focus on one change at a time — start with eating more fruits and vegetables or adding exercise every other day. Learn more at womenshealth.gov/healthy-living-age.

EXPERT advice

— Elizabeth Smoots, MD

Q: When to go to the ER?

A: You need to go to the emergency room for health conditions that risk death or permanent disability. Call 911 for emergencies, such as choking, difficulty breathing, chest pain, head or spine injuries, electric shock or severe burns. Emergency room treatment is also warranted for passing out, severe or unusual headache, sudden slurred speech or weakness on one side, poisoning, overdose, severe allergic reactions, suicidal thoughts, seizures, deep wounds, heavy bleeding, broken bones or other emergency conditions.

Go to an urgent care clinic if your problem is not life-threatening and does not risk disability, but you cannot see your primary health care provider soon enough. Common illnesses and minor injuries can be treated at urgent care clinics.

See your health care provider whenever possible for non-emergency health conditions. You will generally get the best continuity of care from providers who know you and have access to your medical records.



“I've learned that you shouldn't go through life with a catcher's mitt on both hands; you need to be able to throw something back.”

— Maya Angelou



Food allergies are minor problems.

Right? Wrong. For 2% of adults and up to 8% of children in the U.S., food allergies cause symptoms ranging from hives and vomiting to life-threatening anaphylaxis. Food allergies are life altering, too — those affected must be constantly vigilant to avoid reactions. During **Food Allergy Awareness Month** learn more from Food Allergy Research and Education, an advocacy group for food allergy issues and research at foodallergy.org.

Top Dollar Dictionary: Federal Reserve

The Federal Reserve (Fed) is the U.S. central bank.

By establishing interest rates, the Fed impacts borrowing, saving, investing and inflation. The Fed sets the **federal funds rate**, which is the short-term interest rate banks charge each other to lend funds overnight. The federal funds rate is tied to the **prime rate**, which impacts credit card rates, home equity lines of credit rates and auto loan rates. When the Fed cuts rates, borrowing money becomes less expensive since lenders also lower rates on their credit products. Higher Fed interest rates typically slow consumer spending, home sales and borrowing.

Top Dollar Tip: Watch Out for Brushing

Brushing is an illegal scam in which people receive unsolicited items from a third-party seller (on an e-commerce site) who then posts false customer reviews to boost sales. Unsolicited packages can have anything from a Bluetooth speaker to a humidifier. The scammer uses your personal information to order the product. The seller can then pose as you and post a positive review of their product to boost their ratings on the e-commerce site where it was sold.

If you receive a package that you did not order, contact the e-tailer that hosts the seller. It means the scammer likely has your name, shipping address and possibly other information. Use a credit-monitoring service and change your password for the e-commerce site.

— Jamie Lynn Byram, PhD, AFC

safety solutions

May is Bike Safety Month.



Choose the Right Helmet

Bicycle helmets have come a long way in protecting your head against severe head injury, including the 2007 introduction of the Multi-directional Impact Protection System (MIPS), for helmets. The MIPS is a thin liner inside the helmet that allows the outer shell to slide a few millimeters across the skull on impact. This reduces the rotational force and energy transferred to the head, protecting further against concussions.

When choosing the correct helmet, here are some guidelines:

Check the labels. Make sure it is U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission certified, meaning that it was tested for safety, and meets the federal safety standard. You can also check for labels that state the helmet is ASTM, Snell or ANSI certified. **Note:** MIPS adds an extra level of protection.

Get the right fit. Helmets should be snug but not too tight. It should sit level on your head and no more than an inch above your eyebrows. Test the fit by pushing the helmet side to side and front to back and give it a twist. The helmet should only move a little. Adjust straps or knob to loosen or tighten.

Take proper care of your helmet. Store it away from direct sunlight and in a room that doesn't get too hot or cold. Clean your helmet by wiping it with a cloth. You can use warm water and a mild soap but never soak your helmet.

Replace your helmet. Helmets should be replaced after one impact — even if you don't see any damage. Also replace your helmet if it has any cracks, deterioration or any other damage. **Note:** The Consumer Product Safety Commission recommends replacing your helmet five to ten years after you buy it, based on amount of use and condition.



Gardening Gloves 101

It's a beautiful day — perfect gardening weather.

Grab your sunscreen, tools, a hat and gardening gloves for protection. Gardeners wear gardening gloves to keep their hands clean, but more importantly, to protect them against injury, insect bites, chemicals, infection and disease.

Wearing the correct gardening gloves can help minimize your risks against these hazards. Here's a quick rundown of some of the available types:

Gloves with forearm protection: These are great to protect your hands and forearms when weeding through thick brush and taller plants, especially when there are thorns and poisonous plants.

Gloves with grip capabilities: These gloves typically have a tighter fit and provide a better gripping capability when using tools. They can also protect you against wetness and different oils.

Water-resistant or waterproof gloves: These gloves help to protect your hands against moisture, which can cause chafing or chapped hands.

Bionic-style gloves: These gardening gloves are made for people who have extra-sensitive or arthritic hands.

Gloves come in many styles, sizes and materials. Fit, dexterity and durability should be top of mind when selecting the best and safest fit for you. **Tip:** Use gardening tools, such as a hand shovel or trowel, not your hands, to dig.



Digital Addiction

By Eric Endlich, PhD

Technology addiction is defined as the frequent and obsessive use of technology resulting in negative consequences for the user. While experts still debate whether excessive digital use constitutes a true addiction, unchecked use of electronic devices can definitely be detrimental.

Symptoms include:

- Impaired focus and increased distraction.
- Caring more about virtual relationships than actual ones.
- Compulsive gaming, shopping, gambling or stock trading.
- FOMO (fear of missing out) on the latest trending topics.
- Concealing internet use.
- Withdrawal symptoms (e.g., anxiety, restlessness) when offline.
- Deteriorating performance at school or work.
- Worsening communication and recognition of facial or nonverbal cues.
- Impulsivity or problems regulating emotions.
- Diminished time spent on other activities.
- Feeling isolated, lonely or stressed.
- Using the internet to escape from negative emotions (e.g., anxiety, depression).
- Phubbing (snubbing) others by using a smartphone during social occasions, such as meals.
- Decreased attention to basic needs, such as sleep, exercise or a healthy diet.

If these symptoms seem familiar to you, consider how your internet and smart device use is affecting you. Smartphones can be particularly tricky because of their easy accessibility; here are strategies to reduce the undesirable effects:

- **Try a digital detox:** Reduce or eliminate use of electronics for a specified period of time.
- **Delete social media apps** from your phone so you can only access them on your computer.
- **Leave your device** outside the bedroom at bedtime.
- **Curtail checking habits** by only using devices at designated, limited time slots.
- **Use cognitive behavioral therapy** to address resistant internet habits.
- **Designate digital-free times** and areas, such as the dinner table and while driving.
- **Set goals**, such as allowing yourself a certain amount of internet use once you have completed a chore.
- **Monitor your digital use** by keeping a log of time spent online for non-essential activities.
- **Use offline time** for enjoyable or productive activities. Rekindle an old interest, go outside or play with children or pets.
- **Recognize what triggers your online use.** If it's negative feelings, is there a better way to manage them, such as relaxation techniques or offline activities?



NO INTERNET

What About Kids?

Watch out for these red flags for digital addiction in children:

- Declining grades.
- Poor concentration and drowsiness during school.
- Extensive late-night device use.
- Diminished interest in friends or activities.
- Substantial bills for online activities.
- Withdrawal symptoms (pacing, irritability).

To seek more balance:

- Limit online access, especially at night.
- Create an online schedule jointly with older children.
- Identify the cause (e.g., depression, bullying, loneliness).
- Seek out free helplines.
- Avoid a battle of wills; problem-solve together.
- Introduce kids to positive online activities: art, blogging, virtual travel, pen pals, craft ideas, etc.
- Praise signs of progress.
- Seek professional help if your child persistently resists efforts to manage device usage.



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DR. ZORBA'S corner

As a nation, we're carrying more excess weight than ever.

In 1980 13% of Americans were overweight; that jumped to 19% in 2008 and is 42% today. Yet, according to the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, many overweight adults don't consider themselves to be overweight. Survey participants were asked if they considered themselves overweight, underweight or about the right weight. More than 40% of overweight adults and nearly 10% of obese adults didn't believe they had an issue with weight. If you wonder if you're carrying too many pounds, ask your health care provider what your ideal weight should be. And then act. Losing weight often means better health.

— Zorba Paster, MD

May Fill-in-the-Blank Puzzle

Find out how well you know the topics covered in this issue of the newsletter.

- 1 Diets high in _____ foods are linked with an increased risk of conditions including heart disease, type 2 diabetes, some cancers and obesity.
- 2 The _____ eating plan has been linked with a lower risk of high blood pressure, heart disease and some types of cancer.
- 3 When talking to teenagers, focus on _____, not fixing.
- 4 _____ blood pressure is 120 to 129 and less than 80.
- 5 Extremely high doses of _____ can damage hearing.
- 6 _____ is a chronic autoimmune disease.
- 7 Go to an _____ if your problem is not life-threatening and does not risk disability, but you cannot see your primary health care provider soon enough.
- 8 The top health risks for women are high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, type 2 diabetes, _____ and smoking.



You'll find the answers at personalbest.com/extras/May2021puzzle.pdf.

The Smart Moves Toolkit, including this issue's printable download, Q&A: How to stop worrying?, is at personalbest.com/extras/21V5tools.

Stay in Touch. Keep those questions and suggestions coming!

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