Health
and Wellness

Prevention | Getting Medical Attention

Handling Health Problems | Dealing With Stress

Prevention

Many people take their good health for granted. Then something happens. A bone might break. Illness strikes. Visits to the doctor become more frequent. Developing healthy habits is vital to protecting your health. Regular exercise, good **hygiene**, proper nutrition, and accident prevention can go a long way toward keeping you feeling good.

Making Good Health a Habit

Hector hated missing school, but he was sick. Thankfully, he wouldn't have to be out too long. His doctor said it was just a mild case of the flu.

Last weekend, Hector had gone to his friend Scott's house. That must have been when he caught the illness. Scott had invited a few friends over to watch movies. One girl had the sniffles and a cough. She left early and was out of school the next day.
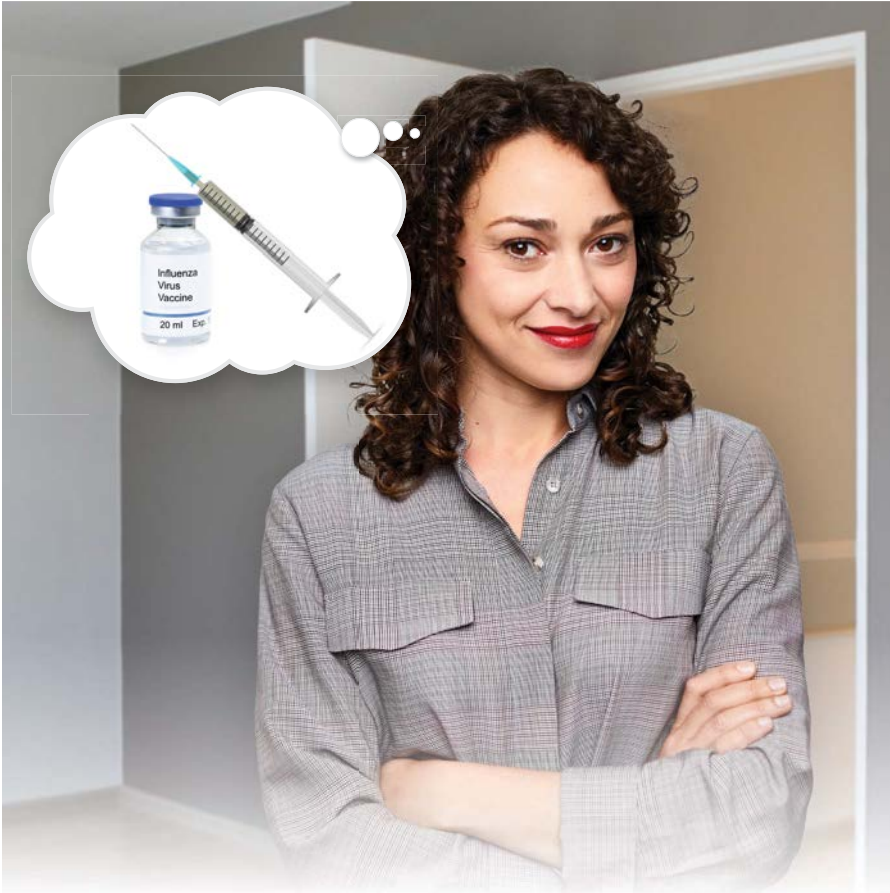
Hector usually did everything he could to avoid getting sick. Living in a house with five other people made that a challenge. His mother reminded everyone to wash their hands to prevent the spread of germs. She teased Hector about "not having time to get sick."

Normally, Hector got a flu shot every year. But this year he did not. He had been too busy with his job, school, and working out. The shot hadn't been a priority. Now Hector wished he'd made time for it.

Chapter 1

Physical Fitness

Think about the challenges your body faces each day. Do you run to the bus stop? Is your backpack heavy and hard to carry? After school, do you play a sport?

Your body's ability to meet these daily demands is called physical fitness. Regular exercise is one of the keys to physical fitness. It is part of a healthy lifestyle and helps you look and feel your best.

Aerobic Exercise

Getting regular exercise can help you live a longer and healthier life. **Aerobic exercise** strengthens your heart. During aerobic exercise, you breathe in more oxygen, and your body uses it in an effective way. This type of exercise makes your heart beat faster. More blood is pumped to your muscles, which gives them more oxygen. Swimming, biking, walking, and running are examples of aerobic exercise.

How much aerobic exercise is enough? The Mayo Clinic says to do at least 30 minutes of aerobic activity a day.

Walking as Aerobic Exercise

- **Leisure walking:** Stroll at a slow to moderate pace.

- **Race walking or power walking:** This form of walking comes close to running, but unlike running, at least one foot remains on the ground at all times. To do it, pick up your pace and pump your arms.

- **Hill walking:** After walking on flat ground at a moderate pace for five to ten minutes, walk up a hill at a steady pace. Then walk down the hill and back up again.

- **Interval training:** Start with a warm-up by walking at a slow pace for five to ten minutes. Next, walk as quickly as you can for 20 seconds. Then walk at a normal pace for 40 to 60 seconds. Continue to switch back and forth between a fast pace and a normal speed.

Balance

Balance isn't often something we think about when it comes to health. However, improving balance is an important part of staying healthy. Good balance makes you feel steadier on your feet and helps prevent falls. Posture is an important part of balance. This is the way your body is positioned when sitting or standing. When the body is positioned well, you are less likely to fall or injure yourself. To maintain good balance and posture, strong muscles are key.

Strength Training

Having big muscles doesn't necessarily mean that a person is healthy. But being strong is an important aspect of good health. It gives you the ability to lift objects without injury.

Strengthening your muscles doesn't just make you stronger. It also stimulates bone growth, lowers blood sugar, helps with weight control, improves balance and posture, and reduces stress and pain in the lower back.

Lifting weights is one way to improve strength. If you don't have dumbbells or can't get to the gym, don't worry. Bodyweight exercises like squats, push-ups, and lunges are effective ways to build muscle without equipment.

Play It Safe

Exercise is a must for good health, but be sure to work out safely.

Warm up first to loosen your muscles before you put them to work. Stretch before and after exercising to reduce the chance of injury.

After your activity, make sure to give your muscles time to cool down and relax.

Guidelines for Stretching

- Don't stretch your muscles when they're cold. Walk at a slow pace for five or ten minutes before doing your warm-up stretches.

- After exercising, stretch again.

- Stretch all of your major muscle groups, not just your legs.

- Be sure to stretch both sides of your body.

- Don't bounce when you stretch. Instead, hold the stretch for approximately 30 seconds. Repeat each stretch three or four times.

- Avoid stretching to the point that it hurts. You should feel tension, not pain.

- Add movement to your stretching. For instance, reach up or out with your arms while stretching your legs. Think of the movements used in yoga and martial arts.

Benefits of Exercise

Many people who exercise regularly say they love it. Why? Scientists have found that the body releases special chemicals during exercise. These are called **endorphins**. They create a sense of well-being. Endorphins also reduce feelings of stress.

Exercise has other benefits too. These include:

- helping you maintain a healthy weight

- improving mental function

- reducing your risk of heart disease

- helping the body manage blood sugar levels

- improving sleep

- reducing the risk for certain cancers

How to Incorporate Exercise Into Your Life

Finding time to squeeze in a workout can be hard. These tips will help you weave exercise into your daily life.

- Take the stairs instead of the elevator.

- Go for a walk on your lunch break.

- Work out when you wake up. Before getting dressed for the day, do a few push-ups or crunches.

- Wear a pedometer to see how many steps you can get in during the day. A good target for healthy adults is 10,000 steps.

- Dance or do other movements while doing housework.