Completely Well

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New Avenues
Midwest Behavioral Health Network
Know Your Numbers: A1C and Glucose

A portion of what you eat, and drink is broken down into glucose for the body to use as energy in its cells. When glucose enters the bloodstream, a signal is sent to the pancreas to make and send out insulin. The insulin is what allows the glucose to move from the bloodstream into cells to be used for energy. **Glucose and A1c tests provide a measure of the glucose that is left unused in your blood.**

Diabetes is the body’s inability to take the glucose (sugar) out of the bloodstream and use it for energy for essential body functions in the brain, muscles, and internal organs. Regular screenings for Diabetes are particularly important for individuals with risk factors for Diabetes such as obesity, family history of the disease, or a sedentary lifestyle.

**A1C Blood Test (glycohemoglobin, HbA1C, Hemoglobin A1C test)**

- Measures average blood glucose for the past 2-3 months (no fasting required).
- A normal A1C level is below 5.7%. Prediabetes is between 5.7% and 6.4%. Diabetes is diagnosed at 6.5% and higher.

The A1C test can be used to test for prediabetes or type 2 diabetes. The results of the A1C test may also help to monitor how well a person can manage diabetes through lifestyle changes, daily blood sugar checks, and medication.

**Fasting Plasma Glucose Test**

- Tests your fasting blood glucose levels. (Fasting means that you cannot eat or drink anything except water for at least 8 hours.)
- A fasting blood sugar level of 99 mg/dL or lower is normal, 100 to 125 mg/dL indicates you have prediabetes, and 126 mg/dL or higher indicates you have diabetes.

These tests allow individuals and healthcare providers to track the development of prediabetes and diabetes. They can also help to track how well blood sugar levels are being controlled with treatment plans and help suggest adjustments to those plans accordingly.

Uncontrolled prediabetes or diabetes can have systemic effects on various organs and systems in the body. Diabetes increases the risk of cardiovascular disease, nerve damage, kidney damage, and eye damage as well as other chronic health issues. Monitoring glucose levels is not only about managing diabetes but also about supporting overall health. Regular testing helps ensure that an individual is maintaining good health and reduces the risks of diabetes and diabetes complications.
How to Improve Your Balance

Improving balance takes a combination of physical strength, coordination, and awareness of body position. Here are some key factors and exercises that can help improve balance:

• A strong core provides a stable base for balance. Exercises that target the abdominal muscles, back muscles, and pelvic floor include planks, bridges, and bird dogs.

• Strengthening the muscles in your legs and hips can enhance stability and balance. Exercises like squats, lunges, and leg presses can help improve leg strength.

• Practice being aware of your body position awareness. Practice exercises that challenge your balance position awareness, such as single leg standing or yoga poses. Yoga and tai chi are both disciplines that emphasize balance, strength, flexibility, and mindfulness. These practices incorporate various poses and movements that can improve overall balance and body awareness.

• Flexibility plays a role in balance by allowing for a greater range of motion. Incorporate stretching exercises, such as hamstring stretches, calf stretches, and hip stretches, into your routine to improve flexibility.

If you have specific balance concerns or are at a higher risk of falling, it may be beneficial to consult with a physical therapist or balance specialist. They can assess your balance, provide tailored exercises, and guide you through proper techniques to improve your balance effectively.

Consistency and patience are key when it comes to improving balance. Start gradually, listen to your body, and gradually increase the difficulty and intensity of balance exercises as you progress.

Standing on one leg is a simple yet effective exercise for improving balance. This is an exercise that can be done just about anywhere. Try to remember to practice while doing the dishes or when taking a brief break at work. Start by standing near a support (such as a chair or wall) and simply lift one foot off the ground. Gradually progress to balancing without assistance. Aim for 30 seconds to one minute on each leg.
Wellness Briefs

National Mental Health Awareness

This year, the National Alliance on Mental Illness is celebrating Mental Health Awareness Month with the theme “More than Enough.” A reminder that “showing up, just as you are, for yourself and the people around you is more than enough.”

National Bike Month

May is National Bike Month, and a good time for a reminder about the importance of wearing a properly fitted bike helmet. Bicycle helmets save lives. One study found that wearing a bicycle helmet during a crash reduced head injury by 48%, serious head injury by 60%, and traumatic brain injury by 53%. Keep in mind that you can be seriously injured from a simple fall on a casual bike ride.

Your helmet should fit correctly:

• Make sure that you try on the helmet. Sizes and fits vary by manufacturer.
• The helmet should be snug, but not too tight. Check to see if it can be adjusted to customize fit.
• The helmet should sit level on the head. The front of the helmet should sit about 1-2 finger widths about the user’s eyebrows, and the padding at the back of the helmet shouldn’t touch the top of the neck.
• While wearing the helmet you should be able to see forward, and side-to-side.
• Side straps should make a “v” at the bottom of, and slightly in front of the user’s ears, and the chin strap sit snugly (allow 1-2 fingers between chin and strap) in the center of the chin.

Don’t forget that you are modeling safe behavior to children by wearing a helmet every time that you ride a bike. Be safe and have fun!
High Density vs. Low Density Calories: The easy way to monitor food intake

Guest contributor: Erin Long, B.S., NSCA-CPT, PN1

One of the most common questions I receive is, “How much should I eat to lose weight?” It’s a great question because, after all, we need to burn more calories than we consume to shed those extra pounds. However, it’s a balancing act. If we cut calories too much, our body’s hormones can send hunger signals to our brain, prompting it to start storing body fat. This can lead to unintended consequences.

The good news is that in order to lose weight you don’t have to weigh and measure your food or count calories. Instead, one of the best ways to control calories is to focus on foods that offer higher density with fewer calories. It’s simple! Make friends with fruits and vegetables.

Food density refers to the amount of nutrients, such as vitamins, minerals, fiber, and other beneficial compounds, present in a given volume or weight of food. On the other hand, calorie density refers to the number of calories present in a specific amount of food. High density foods contain a significant amount of nutrients compared to the volume or weight, while low-calorie density means that a food has fewer calories for a given volume or weight.

Example Comparisons:

A Big Mac contains 550 calories and weighs just under half a pound. A large apple weighs about the same but contains only 150 calories.

What’s going to keep you feeling more satisfied – 1 cup of grapes or 4 Ritz crackers? Both contain about 70 calories, but the grapes weigh 150 grams, while the crackers weigh a mere 13 grams. Can you see why it’s so easy to consume a whole sleeve of Ritz crackers?

The simplest way to use the power of calorie density in your favor is to include high density/low calories foods in your daily meals. This means that fruits and/or vegetables should be a part of every meal. This approach ensures you fill up on nutrient-dense, lower-calorie foods, helping you stay full for longer and reducing those nagging between-meal hunger pangs.
May is Healthy Vision Month, and if you haven’t made an appointment for an annual eye exam already, then do it today! Most children and adults should get an eye exam every one to two years. If you have a higher risk of eye disease or vision problems (age, injury, stroke, genetics, chronic disease such as diabetes), then you may need to have your eyes checked more often. You will also need more frequent eye exams if you wear glasses or contact lenses.

Eye exams are a painless way of checking your vision to see if you need contacts or glasses, and also tests to check your overall eye health and monitor for eye disease.

Who should you see? Optometrists and Ophthalmologists are doctors who specialize in eye care. Ophthalmologists can also perform surgery on the eyes. Opticians are not doctors but can help you to select eyeglasses.

Your provider is looking for:
- The need for corrective lenses (glasses or contacts)
- Changes if your vision over time caused by cataracts, glaucoma, macular degeneration or detached retina.
- Problems with the muscles that support your eyes. Crossed eyes or lazy eye.
- Tumors or cancer in the eye.
- Problems or changes in the eyes can also signal a variety of conditions such as autoimmune disorders, diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol or arterial disease.

After the eye exam, the eye care professional will discuss their findings with you, provide any necessary prescriptions for glasses or contact lenses, and offer guidance on maintaining good eye health.

Expect your eye care provider to:
- Shine a light on your pupil to check dilation. The pupil is the small opening at the center of the colored part of your eye. It should react to light by becoming smaller or larger.
- Have you follow movement with your eyes to check how your eyes move, how they focus and how they move together.
- Have you read letters on an eye chart. They will test one eye at a time and both eyes together and will have you view the letters through a device that allows your provider to determine if you need glasses.
- Your range of vision (peripheral vision) is checked by holding an object up and moving it from one side of your face to the other while you focus straight ahead.
- You may be checked for color blindness by looking at images that include colored dots. Among those dots are numbers or shapes in different colors. If you are color blind, you may not be able to see the numbers.
- Measure your eye’s cornea using a computer to find any curves (astigmatism) that may affect your eyesight, or to fit you for contacts.
- Have you look through the eyepieces of a machine (phoropter) as they flip through lenses and ask which help you to see better.
- Examine your eyes using a microscope that is mounted to a table. You will rest your chin and forehead on the equipment and the provider will look at the interior of your eyes under magnification.
- Dilate your eyes using eyedrops. Dilating makes your pupils larger so that your provider can examine the inside parts of your eye more thoroughly. Your eyes will dilate over 15 to 20 minutes and will be very sensitive to light for a while afterwards.
- Test for glaucoma. This test uses a machine to blow a puff of air on your eye or you may receive numbing eye drops and the provider uses a tool to check the pressure of your eye.
Chicken Lavash Wraps

Veggies and lean meat in an easy wrap. If you want to cut back on bread, then try wrapping this sandwich in Collard Greens. They have a mild flavor, and are sturdy enough to wrap without breaking. Plus they add even more healthy nutrients to the dish.

Note: Lavash is a thin, Middle Eastern flat bread similar to a tortilla or flat wrap-style sandwich bread. If you cannot find Lavash you can use a tortilla or sandwich wrap instead. Look for choices that are whole wheat or whole grain. There are many possibilities, and finding one that you like may be a matter of taste.

**Ingredients:**
1 cucumber (about 4 ounces)  
1 cup packaged cabbage-and-carrot coleslaw  
Half of a small red onion, sliced  
1 tablespoon seasoned rice wine vinegar  
1 teaspoon chopped pickled ginger, plus  
1 teaspoon ginger juice  
1 teaspoon sesame oil  
1 piece lavash-style bread (about 10 1/2- x 9-inch piece)  
6 ounces sliced deli smoked chicken

**Preparation:**
Peel cucumber and remove the seeds. Cut the cucumber into ribbons using a vegetable peeler. Toss cucumber in a bowl with coleslaw mix, onion slices, vinegar, chopped pickled ginger, ginger juice, and sesame oil to coat. Let stand 10 minutes, stirring occasionally, for flavors to combine. Cut lavash into 4 equal pieces, and line each with one-fourth of sliced chicken; top with one-fourth of salad mixture. Bring sides of lavash together, and spear with wooden picks. Serve.

Nutrition Info: Serves 4, per serving: 123 calories, 4g fat, 8g carbs, 2g fiber, 16g protein

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Want to know more?

Connect with New Avenues for more information on wellness programs and how they can help you reduce healthcare costs and improve employee well-being.

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