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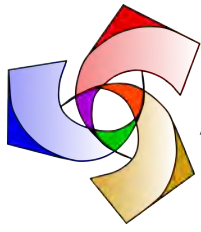
Healthcare Toolkit

Staying Healthy

Information about nutrition, exercise, recreation, and preventive care.

Contents

- Nutrition
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- Recreation
- Preventive Care



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Healthcare Toolkit

Staying Healthy: Nutrition

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Staying Healthy: Nutrition

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Last Updated September 29, 2015

1 What is this topic about?

A healthy diet can help improve or keep up good health. A healthy diet may also lower the risk for some chronic health problems such as heart disease, diabetes, and cancer. A healthy diet means eating the right amounts of the right nutrients, and drinking the right amount of water. Nutrients can come from many different foods. Everyone's bodies are a little different, and there are many ways to have a healthy diet. This section gives some links to basic information about healthy diet and nutrition.

2 What kind of diet is healthy for me?

There is no single diet that is best for all people. Some people like to stick to a particular diet, like a vegan, low carbohydrate, paleo, anti-inflammatory, or Mediterranean diet. It's okay if you do not want to follow a particular diet. Following some general healthy eating guidelines is all you need to do.

General Guidelines

Vegetables - Try to make about half your plate be vegetables at every meal.

Variety - Eat a variety of types of food, especially vegetables

and fruits. Different foods have different amounts of nutrients that you need. If you only eat a couple types of foods you may be missing several important nutrients.

Whole Grains - If you eat something with grains (breads, pasta, rice, etc.) choose "whole grain" options when possible (whole grain bread, whole grain pasta, brown rice, etc.)

Beverages - It is easy to get extra calories from things you drink. This can cause weight gain. Drinks like soda, coffee based drinks, milk shakes, juice, and alcohol all have lots of added sugars and fat. Healthier options are to drink water, black coffee, or unsweetened tea.

Juice - Many of us were told that juice is healthy because it is from fruit. Unfortunately this is not true. Juice can have more sugar than a candy bar! Sugar is often added to fruit juice. Also, by drinking the juice, you are only getting the sugary fluid from the fruit. This means you are missing many important nutrients, like fiber, from the rest of the fruit. If you do drink fruit juice, try to find labels that say, "100% fruit."

Snacks - If you know you are going to need a snack before your next meal, try to keep a healthy snack easily available. This helps you stay away from chips or candy as snacks. Here are some quick healthy snack ideas:

- Nuts (unsalted, not candied) - Nuts are good sources of healthy fats, protein, and minerals. Eat up to a handful a day.
- Fruit - a piece of whole fruit is a good way to have something sweet and healthy. Whole fruits have lots of fiber, vitamins, and minerals. If you are hungrier, try putting some type of nut butter on your fruit, like peanut or almond butter.
- Hard boiled eggs - these can last a week in the refrigerator. You can take them to school or work. When you're ready to eat, you can peel the shell off. Eggs are good sources of protein, B-vitamins, phosphorus, and selenium. [Here's how to cook them.](#)

Sweets - Sweet foods, breads, and pastas are mostly made of carbohydrates. Carbohydrates are important for your body to get

quick energy. This also means that carbohydrates are digested faster and you will feel hungry again sooner. Eating meals mostly with carbohydrates can also spike your blood sugar. To avoid this, try to include healthy fats and proteins any time you eat something with a lot of carbohydrates. This makes sure you get your short-term and long-term energy sources at each meal.

Planning Ahead - In general, eating meals you make at home are healthier than meals you buy at restaurants or fast food places. This is because you can control the ingredients that are in the foods you make yourself. Often we eat out or get fast food when we haven't prepared something already at home or are busy and stressed. One way to avoid this is to plan ahead. Pick a day to make your meals for the rest of the week and freeze them. That way you only have to cook once! This way you know that you have a quick meal ready that you made. This also helps save you money from eating out. Examples: make large batches of stew, curry, burritos, and stir-fry. These things are easy to store in the fridge or freezer and eat later in the week.

Read Labels - Read the labels of the foods you eat. Just reading the nutrition labels and ingredients lists helps you know what you are eating and can help you make better food choices.

Specific Healthy Diets *Mediterranean Diet* This is one of the best researched diets for reducing the risk of chronic disease and maintaining health. The basic concepts are:

- Base your meals on fruits, vegetables, whole grains, olive oil, beans, nuts, legumes, and seeds.
- Use seafood, poultry, and other lean meats as your main sources of meat.
- Limit the amount of red meats and sugars.

Ornish Diet (Ornish Spectrum) -The Ornish diet was developed by Dean Ornish, MD based on different nutrition research. Foods are categorized into 5 groups. Foods in Group 1 are considered the healthiest. Foods in Group 5 are considered the least healthy. These

categories help you decide how much of healthy or unhealthy foods you want to eat. Learn more at ornishspectrum.com.

Links to other guidelines and general information about nutrition and healthy diets:

[Recipes for Healthy Living](#) created by the American Diabetes Association has tools and tips for people with and without diabetes including: Information on how to make a healthy meal, recipes with nutrition content, healthy and budget-friendly meals, customizable food plans with grocery lists. The American Heart Association has [diet and lifestyle recommendations](#) to reduce the risk of heart disease including: how many calories to eat, blood pressure and cholesterol advice, and information on individual food groups, fish, and sugar. The Harvard School of Public Health [Nutrition Source](#) has information on healthy foods, beverages, and exercises, as well as a "healthy eating plate" to visualize food group portions. [LiveStrong.com](#) has a lot of different tools and articles to help with diet, nutrition, and exercise, including:

- Detailed information about nutrition [Livestrong](#)
- A page where you can browse [recipes](#) for healthy food based on your own food preferences (includes detailed nutritional information)
- A [food tracker](#) where you can keep track of what you eat

Online and phone apps to track what you eat: [MyFitnessPal](#), [My Food Diary](#), [My Net Diary](#).

3 Where can I find specific details on individual foods or nutrients?

[NutritionData.com](#) has tools and information to understand and analyze nutrition, including

- Information about what nutrients are in which foods

- A daily nutritional needs calculator based on your sex, age, weight, and activity level
- Detailed information about special health diets such as diabetic or heart diets

The [Linus Pauling Micronutrient Information Center](#) has detailed, technical information on many nutrients found in food, as well as symptoms from not getting enough—or getting too much—of a nutrient. It also has summaries about research on nutrition in specific medical conditions. *NOTE: This site has a lot of information, but is not written in a way that is easy to understand. The information is very technical and uses a lot of jargon.*

4 How much water do I really need to drink?

It is hard to know how much water people need to drink. Many people have heard that you should drink 8 glasses of water a day. Some people may need more or less though depending on how big they are. Also, the food you eat gives you some water, so how much extra you need to drink depends on what you are eating. The Institute of Medicine estimates that adult men need to drink an average of 3.7 liters (125 oz) daily and adult women need to drink about 2.7 liters (91 oz) of water daily. A different way to figure out how much water you might need is to take your body weight in pounds, divide it half, and that's the number of ounces you should drink (for example, a 150 lb person would drink 75 oz of water a day: $150/2=75$). Exercise, hot weather, or illness: There are a number of things that can cause you to need more fluids. One is exercising. Another is being in hot weather conditions. Illnesses can also make you lose fluids if you have diarrhea, vomiting, or a high fever with sweats. In those situations, you need to drink more fluids and replace your electrolytes (the salts that are naturally in your body). Some examples of drinks with electrolytes are Gatorade or Poweraid. One way to know if you are drinking enough water is to check your urine. It should be a clear or

pale/light yellow. If it is darker you may need to drink more water. Certain medications and medical conditions can also make your urine look darker.

5 What should I do if I want to lose weight?

A goal of losing 1 pound a week is recommended for most people who wish to lose weight. Losing more weight is not sustainable for most people because it requires more drastic lifestyle changes that you might not be ready for. In general, to lose weight, you need to either eat less or exercise more. For many people this means:

- eating 500 less calories per day, or
- exercising enough to use up an extra 500 calories per day.

You can talk to your doctor more about safe ways for you to lose weight.

6 How do I eat healthy on a budget?

A lot of people think they can't afford healthy food. It is possible to eat healthy on a budget. Finding simple meals with a protein source and some vegetables can be an easy, quick, and cheap meal.

Quick tips to save money:

- Use coupons and check for sales. Buy in bulk when possible.
- Protein - Meat is an expensive protein source. Decreasing your meat intake and using cheaper protein can help save you money. Eggs, beans, tofu are good sources of protein that tend to cost less.

- Produce - Buy what you know you'll eat. If you are buying fresh fruits and vegetables only get enough for what you know you will eat in the next couple of days. If you buy a lot of fresh fruits and vegetables they may go bad before you get a chance to eat them. This means wasted money. Buying only a few fresh items at once may mean more trips to the store, but it can also save you money.
- Frozen produce - If you do not think you will eat fresh produce before it goes bad, frozen vegetables and fruit are a good option. They are just as good nutritionally and will keep longer in the freezer. Many frozen vegetables are also pre-cut, which can save you time and steps while cooking.
- Many packaged snacks and prepared dinners are actually more expensive than making your own meal. If possible, learn how to make basic meals and make larger batches that can last for several meals. Cooking your fresh vegetables can often make them last longer.

These resources give some ideas for how to eat healthy even when money is tight. Not all of these ideas may be useful to you. You can ignore any that aren't.

The United States Department of Agriculture has a section of its web site that includes [articles on shopping on a budget](#). [Foodstamped.com](#) offers some recipes and tips on how to eat healthy on a food stamp budget.

Zenhabits.net has an article called [50 Tips for Grocery Shopping](#) that has a lot of tips for saving money at the grocery store, as well as for having a more calm experience at the grocery store.

7 Tips for Using the Grocery Store

The grocery store can be an extremely stressful experience for some people. Some tips that may be helpful are:

- Plan the shopping before you go, both by making a list and by making a plan of how you will navigate through the store.
- Get very familiar with just one neighborhood grocery store. A smaller one may be easier to get to know well. (But pick a store that is large enough to have the things you need.)
- Bring a friend with you.
- Develop a routine around grocery shopping: for example, visit the same aisles in the same order, use the same checkout - anything that can help reduce the need to process all the bustle of the store.
- Learn where the aisles are that you never use and then just ignore them (for example, there is no need to pay attention to the meat counter if you're a vegetarian).
- Stick to the perimeter of the store. Most grocery stores put the healthier items on the perimeter, like the produce and meat counter, or the frozen aisles. Most of the packaged and snack items are in the center of the store.
- Go grocery shopping during less crowded days and times, for example at 1:00 PM on a Tuesday, or, if you're a night person and have a 24-hour grocery, at 2:00 AM. The *busiest* times at the grocery store are usually:
 - Friday, Saturday, and Sunday mid-morning to late afternoon
 - Weekdays 4:00 PM to 6:00 PM
 - Around major holidays or events like Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve, and Super Bowl Sunday
- Some grocery stores may have online shopping or a delivery service.
- Protect your senses—it's OK to use things like sunglasses, hats, headphones, or ear plugs in the grocery store.
- If your grocery store has them, the self checkouts can be a good way to avoid having to interact with sales people.

- Remember that you can always leave the store at any time if it gets overwhelming.

Shopping Tours Some grocery stores like New Seasons and Whole Foods, and some dieticians offer "tours" of grocery stores to help you select healthy foods or find foods to follow a particular diet (like if you need help finding gluten-free foods if you were diagnosed with Celiac disease or gluten-sensitivity). They can also help you find lower cost items to help save you money. Contact your local stores to see if they offer this service, or contact local dieticians, nutritionists, college health programs, and local health departments and ask.

About.com has a nice article on [how to shop](#) for groceries and how to navigate a grocery store.

Food Issues for Independent Autistic Adults is a website created by Patricia E. Clark that includes tips to [help with shopping](#).

8 Cooking is hard for me, what are some ideas to make it easier?

There are a lot of cooking resources on the Internet. These three are particularly clear with a lot of steps and photographs, and no confusing phrases like "until it looks good to you." [Step-by-Step Cook](#) offers in-depth, detailed, start-to-finish instructions on a wide variety of recipes. This site assumes that the users have no prior cooking experience, and includes photos of what each step should look like. [Cooking for Engineers](#) breaks recipes down very concretely with tables showing which steps are done in order and which are done at the same time. It also has information on cooking gadgets. [Cooking With Autism](#) has some step-by-step sample recipes, and offers a book for purchase. If following recipes or cooking a lot of different things just isn't going to happen for you, here are some ideas:

- Learn how to cook one kind of thing and then do variations on it. For example, learn how to use a rice cooker to make rice and steamed veg-

etables. Then you can just change the kind of vegetables you steam in it.

- Find healthy frozen dinners or other prepared foods that can be heated in a microwave.
- Learn what kinds of raw foods or pre-cooked foods will give you a healthy diet and then just make plates of them. For example, raw vegetables, canned beans, canned fish, fruits, bread, nuts, and cheese are all things that can be eaten without needing to touch a stove or put ingredients together.
- Make one day a week be "cooking day" and make all of your meals for the week on that day. Reheat them in the microwave or oven, or eat them cold the other six days.
- Trade with someone for cooking. If there's something you're good at but someone else finds hard, maybe you can trade with them. For example if you like programming computers, maybe you could build a web site for someone and keep it updated, and in return they could cook for you a few days a week.
- Keep some "emergency food" stocked so you don't go hungry on days when preparing food isn't manageable. For example, nuts and dried fruits are nutritious, high in calories, and can last a long time.

Food Issues for Independent Autistic Adults is a website created by Patricia E. Clark that includes tips to [help with cooking](#).

9 How do I cook safely?

The U.S. Fire Administration has tips on cooking and [fire safety](#).

Keepingitkleen.com has a lot of information about sanitation and [food safety](#). If you have trouble with forgetting that things are cooking, some kitchen devices run on automatic timers and will shut off by themselves. Examples are microwaves, some toaster ovens, some rice cookers or steamers. If you have trouble with cutting things up, you can get food pre-cut up in a few different ways.

- Some supermarkets carry pre-cut produce, usually in a cooler by the un-cut produce.
- Some supermarket workers at meat or fish counters or in delis will cut up your meat, fish, bread, or deli items for you if you ask them to, including removing skin and bones.
- Frozen or canned produce often comes pre-cut.
- Special cooking tools can sometimes help with cutting. Some tools help by making cutting safer and easier (like a bagel slicer). Other tools help by doing the cutting for you (like a food processor).

10 Someone else makes my food, how can I make sure it's healthy?

If you have a good relationship with the person who makes your food and you feel comfortable communicating with him or her, discuss your wish to eat a healthier diet. You can then brainstorm realistic ways that you can eat healthier foods. If you don't feel comfortable talking with your caregiver about wanting healthier food, you might ask for help from someone you trust. If you receive disability services, you can bring up your desire to eat healthier food at your person-centered care conference. You may want to talk to someone you trust first and invite him or her to the meeting so that he or she can help advocate for you.

11 I don't like or can't eat most food, what should I do?

Some people on the spectrum have trouble eating a variety of foods. Sometimes it is because of sensory reasons, for example trouble tolerating certain tastes, smells, temperatures, or textures. Other times it may be due to the desire for sameness and not liking changes in routines.

Although it is good to eat a variety of foods, the number of different types of foods is less important than making sure you have a balanced diet with all the nutrients you need. You can find detailed information about the nutritional value of different foods at [NutritionData.com](https://www.nutritiondata.com).

Some tips for getting the nutrients you need, even if you have a restricted diet, include:

- Look for foods you can tolerate that have each of the important nutrients.
- Talk to your healthcare provider about what vitamins or supplements you should take daily.
- Try a different form of the food - for example, some people who can't tolerate the texture of a vegetable may be able to drink it as a juice or smoothie.
- Prepare the food in a different way. Some people may not like raw broccoli, but they may like steamed or boiled broccoli.
- Change the temperature of a food and see if it works better for you that way.
- "Hide" foods - for example, you can put vegetables in a blender and then mix them into pasta or pizza sauce.
- Try something new on a day when you think you can handle it. Even if you don't like it at first, make sure to try it at least three different days before you reject it—you might find you like it after you have had it a few times.

- Try new foods when you're really hungry.
- Try adding spices you like to food.

Food Issues for Independent Autistic Adults is a website created by Patricia E. Clark that discusses some of the dietary issues adults on the autistic spectrum face including tips on coping with [food phobias](#).

12 Special Diets for People with Health Conditions

People with some types of health problems need special diets. For example, you may need to eat a special diet if you have diabetes, kidney disease, heart disease, or Celiac disease, or if you take medications such as Coumadin. Your healthcare provider can give you information about what types of foods you should or should not eat to help take care of your health problems. In some cases, your healthcare provider can give you a referral to a nutritionist so that you can get more detailed counseling. Ask your provider if your health insurance would pay for a visit with a nutritionist.

13 Eating Disorders

Eating disorders are very common, both in general and among people on the autism spectrum. The National Eating Disorders Association is a good place to start for information about [eating disorders](#).

14 Links

General Nutrition

- The US government's fitness site has information and recommendations about [healthy eating](#).
- [Livestrong](#) is a health resource website. The nutrition section of this website has a comprehensive list of suggestions, advice, activities, and tools.
- [Mayoclinic.com](#) maintains useful and up-to-date information and tools to help people stay healthy. Their nutrition section has articles, tools, recipes, shopping tips, and other resources related to healthy eating.
- Some general information about what's in food can be found at [nutrition.com](#).
- [Food Issues for Independent Autistic Adults](#) by Patricia E. Clark addresses a variety of topics.
- [The American Heart Association](#) has nutrition and diet information that focuses on heart health.
- MedlinePlus has a section on [nutrition](#).

Food Safety

- [Fire safety](#)
- [Food safety](#)

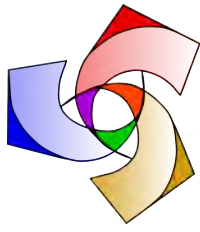
Shopping

- [How to grocery shop](#)
- [Meal planning and budgeting](#)
- [Shopping on a food stamp budget](#)
- [50 tips for Grocery Shopping](#)

Cooking

- [Step-by-Step Cook](#)
- [Cooking for Engineers](#)
- [Cooking with Autism](#)

See the National Eating Disorders Association for information on [eating disorders](#).



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Healthcare Toolkit

Staying Healthy: Exercise

Contents

- What is this topic about?
- What counts as exercise?
- How often should I exercise?
- How do I pick exercise that's right for me?
- I don't like or can't do most exercise, what should I do?
- Someone else controls my daily schedule, how do I get exercise included?
- What changes in my body can I expect if I start exercising more?
- Do I need to change anything about my diet if I start exercising?
- How can I make sure I'm safe when I'm exercising?
- How do I know if I've hurt myself exercising and what might I do about it?
- Links

Staying Healthy: Exercise

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1 What is this topic about?

Different sources will tell you different things on how to exercise properly. With so many different activities to choose from, figuring out what to do can be difficult. The most important thing about exercise is just to do it, do it in moderation, and do it regularly.

2 What counts as exercise?

Exercise is anything that makes your heart beat faster, your skin sweat, and your joints and muscles get used. Cardiovascular exercise, like walking, biking, running, and swimming makes your heart beat fast and hard. Resistance exercise like weight lifting, yoga, or pilates puts weight on your muscles, bones, and joints. It's good to get both cardio-vascular and resistance exercise, but it's more important to get any kind of exercise.

Exercise doesn't have to be complicated, or involve special equipment. A 30-minute brisk walk three to four times a week is exercise. If walking doesn't seem to be making your heart pump very fast, try running, or try putting heavy things in a backpack and going for a walk with the extra weight.

Exercise doesn't have to be a "sport." Martial arts or dancing—even dancing by yourself alone in your room as long as it gets your heart beating faster—is exercise. So is walking up and down the stairs in your house over and over. So is bouncing on a trampoline or jumping rope in the yard.

Exercise can be done alone or with other people. Some people like to take classes with others to motivate them to exercise. Others don't want to be watched at all. The important thing is to find an exercise you like to do, and do it regularly.

3 How often should I exercise?

If it's important to exercise regularly, what does "regularly" mean? Different resources have different answers to that question. How much you should exercise will also be different depending on whether you have any exercise goals, for example, if you are trying to lose weight or trying to train for a sports competition. In general, it's good to exercise three to five times per week. You should also take at least one day or two days a week off from heavy exercise.

Livestrong.com has an article on how much exercise to get if you're trying to [lose weight](#). San Diego University has tips on how to know if you are [getting too much](#) exercise. Zenhabits has tips for how to make exercise a [daily habit](#). The US government has recommendations for exercise in the [be active](#) section of fitness.gov

4 How do I pick exercises that are right for me?

Here are some things to think about when picking an exercise:

- Are you physically able to do it well enough so that you can get started? For example, if you haven't exercised in a long time, you might want to

start with walking before you try out running. Pick something that you can succeed at.

- Is it easy to get set up for it and/or get to it? Can you just do it without having to make a lot of difficult arrangements? For example, find something you can do in your home or near where you live or work. Or if you're someone who has trouble with fine motor skills, don't pick something that requires buckling and lacing on a lot of complicated safety equipment—or, pick something with equipment that will do fine motor work for you, like using weight machines instead of free weights.
- Is it in your budget? Some exercises like skiing might require a lot of expensive equipment, while others like walking around the neighborhood with a heavy backpack are free.
- Do you like doing it? This is really important! If you like music and dancing, do that. If you enjoy feeling deep pressure in your muscles and joints, weight training might be perfect. If you love slow-paced things, try yoga; for fast-paced nervous energy burn, try sprinting around the track at the local high school when no one else is using it.

5 I don't like or can't do most exercises, what should I do?

If you really don't like any kind of exercise, at least not well enough to be able to do it regularly, or can't do most regular types of exercises, here are some tips for how to get exercise by doing every day things in creative exercise-focused ways. HappyLists has a list of [20 creative ways](#) to get some quick exercise. Fitwatch.com has a list of 9 ways you can slip exercise into your [daily routine](#).

6 Someone else controls my daily schedule, how do I get exercise included?

If you have a good relationship with the person who makes your schedule and you feel comfortable communicating with him or her, discuss your wish to add a new exercise routine. You can then brainstorm realistic ways that you can fit it into your weekly schedule.

If you don't feel comfortable talking with your caregiver about adding exercise to your schedule, you might ask for help from someone you trust. If you receive disability services, you can bring up your desire to exercise at your person-centered care conference. You may want to talk to someone you trust first and invite him or her to the meeting so that he or she can help advocate for you.

7 What changes in my body can I expect if I start exercising more?

Some people experience a lot of changes in their bodies when they start exercising, while others do not. Changes some people might experience are:

- Weight loss or weight gain
- A change in distribution of muscle and fat
- Differently-shaped muscles or more muscles
- Increased appetite or hunger, particularly after workouts
- More energy
- Normal muscle aches

8 Do I need to change anything about my diet if I start exercising?

Exercising causes sweat, which means you need more fluids to replace the ones you sweat out. If you have trouble remembering to drink fluids, you might want to make a rule that you have to drink at least eight ounces of water before you start exercising and again after you finish exercising. Some people may find exercise increases their appetite and they need a bit more food. However moderate amounts of exercise should not require a big change in diet. If you are doing special physical training—for example, if you want to run marathons—you may need to make changes in your diet. That information is outside the scope of this introductory article.

9 How can I make sure I'm safe when I'm exercising?

There are two big kinds of safety with exercise. One is keeping yourself from getting injured from the exercise. The other is being safe from others while exercising, particularly in public places like parks and gyms. Harvard Medical School has 10 Tips for [Exercising Safely](#). These tips were not written for people on the autism spectrum, so some might make bad assumptions like that "listen to your body" is helpful advice. The University of Chicago has some tips for [keeping safe](#) while walking in the community.

MedlinePlus has a section on [sports safety](#).

10 How do I know if I've hurt myself exercising and what might I do about it?

It is normal to feel some muscle aches after exercising, especially if you haven't been exercising regularly, if you are trying a new exercise, or if you

are pushing yourself to do more than you are used to doing. You can learn more about [managing sore muscles](#) and joint pain from exercise at WebMD.

Sometimes, though, pain can be a sign of an injury. It may be hard for some people on the spectrum to tell the difference between normal soreness and pain from an injury, especially if they have difficulty with body awareness. One way to know that you may have injured yourself is if the pain is keeping you from doing something that you ordinarily can do. For example, it might be normal to have achy legs after running, but you should not have to limp when you walk. Or it may be normal to for your arms to be sore after rowing, but if you could lift them over your head before exercising, you should still be able to lift them over your head afterwards. If you think you may have injured yourself, contact your healthcare provider and ask if you need to come in for an appointment.

MedlinePlus also has a section on [sports injuries](#).

11 Links

[DareBee](#) has a large number of exercise routines that can be done for free on your own time. There are short and long routines. There are routines that have RPG-type stories with them to make them more interesting. All of the exercises have instructions drawn in black and white illustrations. General Fitness

- The US government's [fitness site](#) has information and recommendations about exercise.
- A nice [checklist and guide](#) to exercise, both for people just starting out and for people who want to increase their current exercise practice, can be found in this PDF from [health.gov](#).

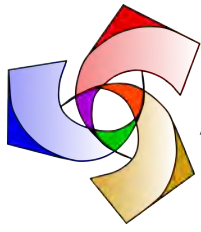
- [Livestrong.com](#) is a health resource website. The fitness section of this website has a comprehensive list of suggestions, advice, activities, and tools for those who are already active or are wishing to get active.
- [Mayoclinic.com](#) maintains useful and up-to-date information database and tools to help people stay healthy. Their fitness section has articles on a wide range of topics from basic exercise, to exercise for specific conditions.
- [The American Heart Association](#) has fitness recommendations for different ages, and other resources on their website.

Developing Routines

- 20 ways to get [quick exercise](#)
- 9 ways to slip exercise into your [daily routine](#)
- Tips for making exercise a [daily habit](#)

Exercise Safety

- MedlinePlus on [sports safety](#) and [sports injuries](#).
- Tips for how to know if you're [exercising too much](#) from San Diego University
- [10 Tips](#) for Exercising Safely from Harvard Medical School
- Tips for [keeping safe while walking](#) from University of Chicago.



AASPIRE

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Staying Healthy: Recreation

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- What is this topic about?
- What is recreation and why is it important?
- How do I pick recreational activities that are right for me?
- I can't afford the kind of recreation I like, what should I do?
- I need assistance with the kind of recreation I like, what should I do?
- Someone else controls my daily schedule, how can I get recreation included?

Staying Healthy: Recreation

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1 What is this topic about?

Recreation, leisure and play are important for everyone, including adults on the spectrum. Recreation can increase independence, offer a chance to be around peers, or just help people burn off stress. This section describes suggestions for recreational activities.

2 What is recreation and why is it important?

Recreation is something you do that refreshes you. It is something enjoyable that improves your health. It might help you to burn off stress, or just make you happy. Recreation is important for physical and mental health.

Different people find different things recreational. What is recreational may also depend on your mood. Some examples of healthy recreational activities are:

Arts recreation

- drawing, painting, sculpting, taking photographs, making visual art
- singing, composing, playing a musical instrument

- writing stories, poems, non-fiction, plays
- acting in plays, doing comic routines, making movies
- sewing, knitting, building furniture, crafting
- going to live theatre, live music shows, movies

Science recreation

- making machines out of circuit boards, building robots, building radios
- playing with microscopes, chemistry, examining geology, ecosystems, star-gazing
- doing math problems
- programming computers
- going to a science museum, zoo, lecture, aquarium

Sensory recreation

- touching things that are soft/hard/rough/smooth—whatever you like to touch best
- listening to music, sounds that are entertaining or relaxing
- watching spinning things, shiny things, colored lights, things that are entertaining and relaxing to look at
- rocking, swinging, dancing, going on slides, moving in ways that are entertaining

Quiet recreation

- reading a book
- spending quiet time outside in nature just sitting

- watching a movie
- snuggling quietly with a friend
- doing puzzles

Exciting recreation

- white water rafting, hiking, bungee jumping, skiing, water skiing
- going to a party, a club, or a dance
- traveling, visiting new places
- working with animals
- exploring national parks and public lands (see [Recreation.gov](https://www.recreation.gov) for some more information)
- playing exciting computer games

Recreation and interests

- Find an online or in-person group that shares your special interest and see about getting involved with it. [Meetup.com](https://www.meetup.com) is a resource for in-person groups; [google groups](https://www.google.com/groups) and [yahoo groups](https://www.yahoo.com/groups) both offer big lists of online communities dedicated to specific interests.
- Allow yourself to spend time studying, building, doing whatever it is that you love most

Recreation and Self-Advocacy Self-advocacy groups may have recreational activities. Some places to contact to get hooked up with local self-advocacy groups: your state's [Council](#) on Developmental Disabilities, the Autistic Self Advocacy Network ([ASAN](#)), Self Advocates Becoming Empowered ([SABE](#)).

Anything that refreshes you can be recreation. It's OK if the things you like to do for recreation are unusual or related to your special interests. It's OK if the things that you like to do for recreation are the same things you liked to do as a child.

3 How do I pick recreational activities that are right for me?

Here are some things to think about when picking a recreational activity:

- Do you enjoy doing it?
- Does it make you feel refreshed and centered?
- Does it make you feel good about yourself?
- Is it safe for you?
- Do you have time in your schedule to do it?
- Is it in your budget? Some recreational activities can get very expensive, while others are free. Some more expensive activities might have low cost options. See the section on "I can't afford the kind of recreation I like, what might I do?" for some ideas.
- Is it available where you live? It might be harder to do nature activities in the middle of the city, or to go to a museum or a live symphony if you live in the wilderness. (Although there are books, films, and the Internet...)

4 I can't afford the kind of recreation I like, what should I do?

Some kinds of recreation can cost money. Some can cost a lot of money. Here are some ideas for how to get access to less expensive or free recreation that often costs.

- Theatre companies will often let people come see their dress rehearsals for a reduced rate or for free. Some theatre companies will have special reduced rate nights.
- Some recreational facilities, like museums, zoos, and aquariums have reduced rates for people with disabilities. Some have reduced rate days or times (although they can be crowded on those days).

- City, state, and national parks will often have recreational activities for free, or on a sliding scale.
- Sometimes rates for recreational activities are lower if a group attends. If you know other people who would also enjoy the activity, maybe you could pool your money and get a group rate.
- Some places have "second run" movie theaters where you can see a movie that's been out for a while for a low price.
- Some expensive recreational activities can be done in less expensive ways. For example, if you like to travel but don't have the money to go very far or to exotic locations, try exploring new places in your own city.
- Ask at your local library. Some libraries offer reduced rate tickets for attractions like museums to library card holders.

5 I need assistance with the kind of recreation I like, what should I do?

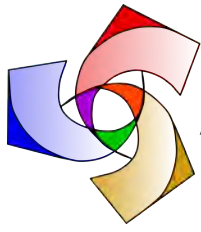
If you have a friend or family member who you enjoy spending time with, ask them to help you out. If you get developmental disabilities services, ask your case manager or personal agent if you can get any recreation assistance through your services. If you don't have those things, try contacting the chapter of [Autism Society of America](#) in your state. Sometimes they organize recreation or know of resources that can help.

6 Someone else controls my daily schedule, how can I get recreation included?

If you have a good relationship with the person who makes your schedule and you feel comfortable communicating with him or her, discuss your wish to add

recreation. You can then brainstorm realistic ways that you can fit it into your weekly schedule.

If you don't feel comfortable talking with your caregiver about adding recreation to your schedule, you might ask for help from someone you trust. If you receive disability services, you can bring up your desire to have more recreation at your person-centered care conference. You may want to talk to someone you trust first and invite him or her to the meeting so that he or she can help advocate for you.



AASPIRE

Healthcare Toolkit

Staying Healthy: Preventive Care

Contents

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- How do I know when I need preventive care?
- How might I schedule preventive care?
- I have a hard time tolerating some types of preventative care, what might I do?
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- What are some other ways I can minimize risks to my health?
- Links

Staying Healthy: Preventative Care

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www.aaspire.org

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1 What is this topic about?

Preventive care includes things that can help prevent a major health problem, or can help catch a health problem when it is still minor or easier to treat. Preventive care includes:

- Checking blood pressure, cholesterol levels, and weight
- Screening for cancers, such as cervical, breast, colon, prostate, and skin cancer
- Screening for other diseases like diabetes, osteoporosis, thyroid disease, HIV and other sexually transmitted infections
- Screening for mental health conditions such as depression or anxiety
- Screening for substance abuse such as alcohol, tobacco and drug abuse
- Asking about life situations that can affect health, such as domestic violence
- Getting vaccines to prevent conditions such as tetanus, the flu, or cervical cancer
- Getting eye exams, dental exams, and dental cleanings
- Getting advice about exercise, diet, or other things you can do to stay healthy

2 How do I know when I need preventive care?

What kinds of preventive care you need, and when you need them, will depend on your age and sex. The Mayo Clinic has a [tool](#) that gives a personalized list of recommended screenings based on your age and sex. The Centers for Disease Control have a number of [quizzes and schedules](#) for helping to figure out what vaccines are recommended based on your age and sex. Your healthcare provider can also help you figure out what kinds of preventive care you need and when.

You might ask, *"Am I due for any preventive care?"*

Whether or not it's a good idea to get certain kinds of preventive care isn't always an easy decision. If you're not sure what kinds of preventive care you need, or not sure if a certain kind of preventive care is right for you, discuss it with your healthcare provider.

3 How might I schedule preventive care?

Your primary care provider can talk to you about ways to keep yourself healthy and can help you decide what types of preventive care you need. Some types of preventive care (such as getting a tetanus shot) can happen during a normal office visit. Other types may need a special appointment (such as getting a Pap smear). Yet other types have to be done outside of the office and may need a referral from your provider (for example mammograms to screen for breast cancer or colonoscopies to screen for colon cancer).

See the section on "Making an Appointment" for detailed information on how to make an appointment with your primary care provider. When making an appointment, tell the office staff that you are interested in a preventive care visit. If you think you may need a Pap smear, also mention that to the office staff because many offices schedule longer visits for Pap smears.

Once you are at your visit, your provider can help you decide what preventive care you need and can give you referrals for tests that have to happen outside of the office. You can use the [After the Visit Worksheet](#) to help make sure you know how to follow up on these referrals. Your primary care provider can order vaccines for you and give them to you in the office. You can also get some vaccines, such as the flu vaccine, by going to local pharmacies or health fairs.

You will need to go to a dentist for preventive dental care (like getting your teeth cleaned) and to an optometrist for preventive eye care (like checking to see if you need glasses).

4 I have a hard time tolerating some types of preventive care, what might I do?

Many of the tips for being examined by your healthcare provider also apply to preventive care situations.

5 I have a really hard time with blood draws, what might I do?

If you have a very hard time with blood draws, here are some things that might be helpful.

- Ask your provider to only order blood tests when absolutely necessary and group them together to avoid having to get stuck more than once.
- Use a numbing spray or cream on your skin so that you can't feel the needle as much.
- Ask the person drawing blood to be very patient and use a calm voice.
- Ask to lie down or lean on something.

- Get a very detailed explanation of what will happen, including how many tubes of blood will be filled.
- Ask your healthcare provider if it would be a good idea to use an anti-anxiety medication before the blood draw.
- Ask the person drawing the blood to give you a lot of advance warning so you can prepare yourself emotionally.
- Have the person drawing the blood warn you before they stick the needle.
- Ask the person drawing the blood not to tell you when they will stick the needle.
- Bring something, or have someone do something, to distract you.

6 What are some other ways I can minimize risks to my health?

Some other things that can be done to help prevent major health problems are:

- Eat a healthy diet
- Exercise five or more times a week
- Do things you like and that make you happy every day
- Get enough rest and relaxation
- If you drink alcohol, don't have more than one alcoholic drink per day
- Don't do drugs
- Don't smoke cigarettes (here's some [information on quitting](#) if you do)
- Use seatbelts and helmets
- Use sunscreen or other protection from the sun

- If possible, avoid people who make you feel bad about yourself
- Find out how to get help if someone is scaring or hurting you. More information is available at [The Hotline](#).

7 Links

- [Mayo Clinic screening tool](#)
- [CDC schedules](#)
- Help for abuse at [The Hotline](#)