

# HEALTHY LIVING

Wellness Newsletter from **AAOA**

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# Lowering Your Blood Pressure Without Medication



**1. Increase exercise.** Aerobic exercise can lower blood pressure and can also help with weight loss. It doesn't take a time-consuming workout in a gym to reap the benefits, either.

**2. Cut your salt intake.** One teaspoon (2,400 mg) is the maximum recommended daily amount. Reducing this to two thirds of a teaspoon (1,500 mg) can make a big difference.

**3. Eat a healthy diet.** Follow the DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) guidelines. This has been shown to lower systolic and diastolic blood pressure, even without other interventions.

The DASH diet is rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains and low-fat dairy products. It restricts intake of saturated fats, red meat and sugar.

The increased fiber, potassium, calcium and magnesium from these foods are all thought to play a role in reducing blood pressure.

**4. Lose weight.** For every two pounds of weight loss, you can lower your systolic pressure by one point and your diastolic pressure by 1.4 points.

**5. Limit alcohol.** This means no more than one drink a day for women, two drinks for men.

One drink is the equivalent of 12 ounces of beer, five ounces of wine or two ounces of hard liquor.

The key is to discover what works for you. Choose your strategies, take action and start enjoying the benefits. You can lower your blood pressure and help prevent other chronic diseases at the same time.

# STRESS

## How Stress Affects Your Health

### Here are some things to know:

**Digestion.** Stress hormones slow the release of stomach acid and interfere with how well the stomach can empty itself. This can cause stomachaches. These same hormones cause the colon to work faster and may lead to diarrhea.

**Heart, brain and blood vessels.** High levels of the stress hormone cortisol increase your heart rate and your blood pressure. Cortisol can also raise your cholesterol levels. These factors raise your risk for heart attacks and strokes.

**Immune system.** Normally, your immune system responds to infections by releasing chemicals that aid in the healing process. The stress response weakens your immune system, slowing wound healing and making you more likely to get colds and infections.

**Weight.** Cortisol makes you crave fats and carbohydrates, which can cause you to gain weight. Cortisol also makes you more likely to put on weight in your abdominal area. Weight gain in this area raises your risk for heart disease and diabetes.

**Mental health.** Being bombarded with stress hormones creates a constant state of tension and anxiety. Over time this can set you up for depression, headaches or other problems, especially if they run in the family. Also, because your body is in a heightened state of arousal, you may have trouble sleeping.



### Regaining your balance

If stress has taken over your life, it's time to regain some control. Your health depends on it. Here are some ideas:

**Make time for regular moderate exercise.** It's one of the best stress-busters, and it can improve your mood and help control your weight. Check with your doctor to see what activity level is right for you.

Spend some time doing things you enjoy. Go to a funny movie, take your kids fishing or have dinner with a dear friend.

**Learn some relaxation techniques,** such as deep breathing or meditation.

**Treat yourself well.** Make time for healthy meals and getting enough sleep. Avoid smoking, drinking too much and overeating.

*If you still cannot get a handle on your stress, talk to your doctor. He or she might recommend a counselor who could help you find other ways to reduce or manage the stress in your life.*

# Alzheimer's Risk Factors

## Well-established factors

**Increasing age.** Simply put, the older you are, the greater the risk.

**Family history and genetics.** Early onset Alzheimer's is thought to be caused by a defective gene passed down through the family. There may also be a genetic link between Down syndrome and Alzheimer's. The increased presence of the unusual protein called ApoE4 gene can be detected by laboratory tests.

## Possible factors

**Environmental factors.** Environmental factors probably influence any genetic predisposition. Various studies have linked Alzheimer's to specific environmental factors, such as zinc and food borne poisons.

**Head injury.** The Alzheimer's Association says that there appears to be a strong link between serious head injury and future risk of Alzheimer's. However, that link may only apply to people who already have a genetic susceptibility to Alzheimer's disease.

**Vascular disease.** Heart disease, stroke and high blood pressure all damage blood vessels that carry oxygen and nutrients to the brain and may contribute to the development of Alzheimer's. More and more studies are finding associations between cardiovascular diseases and Alzheimer's.

**Gender and education.** Female gender and low education level may play a role in the likelihood of developing Alzheimer's.

In the end, Alzheimer's may turn out to be a medical whodunit with many culprits all interacting and influencing each other, but not one of them causing the disease on its own. Whatever the cause or combination of causes, researchers have a way to go before solving the mystery.

# The Many Faces of Friendship

It's not always your oldest childhood pal who will provide long-term health benefits. The healing power of friendship comes in many forms.

Same-stage friends are those who are going through similar experiences as you. For example, you both may be managing chronic illness or parenting children who are the same age.

Workout friends can be lifesavers. And, the buddy system is a great way to boost your chances of sticking with an exercise routine.

Finally, having friends who are much younger or older than you may bring refreshing points of view and very special bonds.

## Healthy Chocolate Treat Creamy Chocolate Pudding



### Ingredients:

½ cup low fat ricotta cheese  
2T Honey  
2 T Cocoa powder  
½ tsp vanilla  
½ tsp ground cinnamon

### Directions:

Combine all the ingredients in a food processor and process until smooth. Scoop into small dessert dishes and serve.

### Nutrition Facts

Amount Per Serving

Calories 162

Fat 5g

Cholesterol 11mg

Sodium 100mg

Carbohydrate 21g

Fiber 2g

Protein 8g

## Say Yes to Yoga

Yoga is a system of exercises (called asanas) for gaining bodily or mental control and well-being.

The philosophy is that the breath, the mind and the body are so closely linked that whatever you do to one will affect the other. In addition to easing stress, yoga can improve strength, balance and flexibility.

Yoga is gentle form of exercise that is safe for most people when it's practiced correctly.

Consult a trained yoga teacher. Make sure you ask your doctor before you start any new activity.



# The Basics on Migraines

**With proper treatment, headaches don't have to be a way of life.**

Migraines are the most common type of vascular headache. Experts believe they occur because of blood flow changes in the brain. Migraines can last from a few hours to three or four days.

### Typical migraine symptoms include:

- Pounding or throbbing pain, usually on one side of the head
- Nausea or vomiting
- Sensitivity to light and/or sound

### There are two main types of migraines: classic and common.

- **Classic migraines** cause an aura - that is, neurological changes that occur about 10 to 30 minutes before the headache starts. The most common are visual changes, such as seeing zigzag lines or spots. Other symptoms may include such things as tingling of the hands or face.
- **Common migraines** don't have an aura. This can make them harder to diagnose and more likely to be mistaken for another type of headache.

Migraines can be triggered by any number of factors. These may include stress, lack of sleep, flashing lights, weather changes and some foods such as wine, chocolate and aged cheese. Many women have 'menstrual migraines' that they get around the time of their periods. Some get migraines from taking birth control pills or estrogen.

A doctor will diagnose migraines by asking about the symptoms and the pattern of headaches. Keeping a headache diary can help identify the activities or exposures that may trigger the headaches. Tests may be done to rule out other possible causes.

*Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs such as naproxen and ibuprofen may work for mild migraines. For more severe headaches, a doctor can prescribe stronger medicines that can stop or even prevent them.*

## SEPTEMBER WELLNESS TIP



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(AAOA Wellness Champion)

## Breathe Easier Indoors

As summer ends, the weeks get pretty crazy and there is a lot of activity in your house; especially with the start of school.

As a result, this may interrupt the usual housecleaning that you would normally do once a week.

Remember that keeping your home clean will help get rid of irritants such as dust, fumes and strong smells. This will allow you to reduce the risk of an allergic reaction, help control asthma, and overall help you breathe easier.

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