

Family and Community Health “Connections” in Runnels County

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HOW TO BUILD HEALTH HABITS THAT STICK

You know how important it is to eat right, exercise, and practice self-care. But making those healthy habits part of your daily routine can be a challenge. Creating a new habit takes time and persistence — but it's worth the effort. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 6 out of 10 adults have a chronic disease. And poor diet, lack of physical activity, and excessive alcohol use are some of the leading causes.¹ Making some lifestyle changes today can improve your overall health and long-term well-being. Whether you want to be more active or focus on your mental health, here are 6 ways to make healthy habits stick.

Stack habits

One of the easiest ways to commit to a new habit is to attach it to a current one. This is known as habit stacking. Your current habit may be eating breakfast every morning and the habit you want to add may be walking. In this example, completing breakfast triggers the beginning of your walk. After some time, following breakfast, you'll go for a walk without having to think about it or remind yourself. Harvard Business Review reports that repetition is key to making a new habit stick.² So, after you've completed this new series of habits a few times, it should come more easily.

The best part about habit stacking is that you can build on it. Once you form a new habit, you can stack on another, such as taking time to meditate after a morning walk. Habit stacking can help you add healthy activities slowly and form a full routine.

Start small

Every journey starts with a small step. If you've never jogged before, don't try to run 10 miles your first day. Setting smaller, more manageable goals will help set you up for success. In fact, researchers at Stanford University found that achieving small goals early on greatly increases motivation.³ Start by walking for a set time, for example. Then gradually increase the time you walk and your pace. This will help you reach your larger goal.

Be specific

It's important to be specific about your new healthy habit. Instead of saying, “I'll eat healthy,” say exactly what that looks like. For example, “I'll eat 2 servings of vegetables every day.” Or if you want to sleep better, look for specific reasons you're having trouble sleeping. Maybe it's because you find yourself scrolling through your devices, like a mobile phone, at night. If so, plan to set your phone away from your bed so you don't mindlessly reach for it. Having specific goals can make you more likely to achieve them.

Track your progress

It's motivating to see how far you've come — so track your progress. You can create a chart where you write down how many minutes you meditated. Or use a fitness tracker to note how many steps you've taken in a day. It might not feel like much in the moment. But when you see how it adds up over time, your confidence will grow.

Reward yourself

Changing your habits takes hard work and commitment. Don't forget to celebrate! Find fun ways to acknowledge your milestones and reward yourself, like treating yourself to a movie. Or find ways to add your celebration to your healthy habit. For example, invite friends to meet you for a hike.

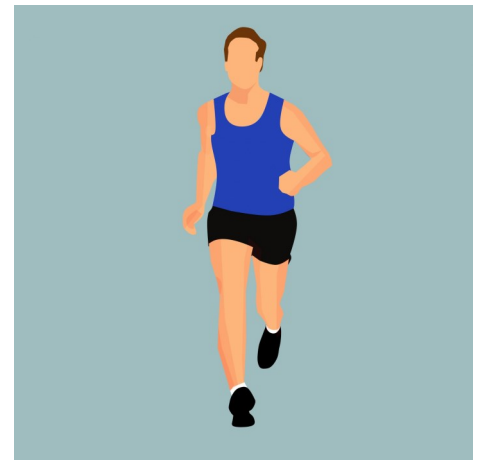
Find a bigger purpose

Sometimes, the more immediate benefits of healthy habits aren't enough to motivate us. That's why attaching your healthy habit to a bigger purpose can be helpful. Your purpose could be that you'd like to do more activities with your grandchildren or be able to enjoy an active retirement. Connecting the why to a healthy habit is a powerful way to stay motivated.

Learn more easy ways to incorporate better habits into your daily routine and live well.

Inside this issue:

How to Build Health Habits That Stick	1
Six Strategies for Beating the Winter	2
Benefits of Prepping Your Meals	2
7 Simple Exercises You Can Do At Home	3
Lemon-Thyme Sheet-Pan Chicken and Potatoes	4



Source: <https://thrive.kaiserpermanente.org>

Six Strategies for Beating the Winter Blues

By Laura Scholz

Feeling sluggish and sad during dark, dreary winter days? Seasonal affective disorder (SAD) could be to blame. According to Cherokee County counselor Rachel Fisher, symptoms of SAD mirror those of regular depression: social withdrawal, changes in appetite and weight, low energy, and difficulty sleeping. Why? Shorter days and a lack of sunlight cause a dramatic dip in serotonin, the body's natural mood stabilizer. And while you can't simulate a perfect 80 degree summer day in January, there are ways to beat those winter blues.

Opt outside

During daylight hours, take the dog for a walk, meet a friend in the park, or bundle up to drink your morning coffee outdoors to "boost mood and the body's vitamin D stores," says Fisher.

Try light therapy

For those days when you're stuck indoors, Georgia Tech psychology professor Dr. Paul Verhaeghen recommends the next best thing: a light box or lamp with 2,500 to 10,000 lux. Use it for up to one hour per day—preferably first thing in the morning—to simulate natural sunlight and increase energy.

Get social

Whether it's joining a book club, signing up for a class, or making dinner reservations at a new restaurant, having concrete plans on the calendar can make you feel less isolated and hold you accountable for getting out of the house, says Atlanta therapist Cameron McIntosh.

Work up a sweat

Even if done indoors, 20 minutes a day of moderate exercise like yoga or strength training is enough to increase endorphins, which can make you feel happier and more energetic for several hours, says Fisher.

Talk it out

Reach out to a friend to let them know you're struggling or consider making an appointment with a licensed therapist or counselor. "The right professional can help you develop coping mechanisms and get ahead of your symptoms before they become debilitating," says McIntosh.

Consider medication

If SAD symptoms persist for more than a few weeks and none of these strategies offer relief, Fisher recommends making an appointment with a general practitioner or a psychiatrist who can prescribe the appropriate medication and treatment plan.

Source: <https://www.atlantamagazine.com/health/six-strategies-for-beating-the-winter-blues/>

Benefits of Prepping Your Meals

While some people approach meal planning and prepping with a restrictive mindset, I look at it as an act of self-care. When I look at my calendar and see a busy week ahead of me, I know there will be limited time to shop, cook, and clean. Meal prepping is one way to simplify the process and make sure I have some filling and satisfying options ready to go when I need them.

Here are some other benefits of planning and prepping some meals in advance:

- Eliminate the need to wash more dishes than necessary (with these snack lunch ideas, you barely need silverware!)
- Use up the ingredients that are going to expire or spoil if you don't use them.
- Cover your bases with nutrition by making sure your meals offer a variety of food groups and nutrients. Most Americans don't eat the recommended servings of fruits & vegetables every day, so this is one easy way to #HaveAPlant
- Make mealtimes easier because some of the decision making is done ahead of time.
- Keep you home cooler since you don't need to rely on the stove or oven to cook.



Source: <https://fruitsandveggies.org>

7 Simple Exercises You Can Do at Home

It's no secret that exercise is good for you. But it's not always easy to know where to begin — or how to avoid injury-causing exercise mistakes. Whether your neck and back are sore from working from home or you're simply spending too much time on the couch, it's important to find an exercise routine that keeps your body safe.

One great way to stay active and help prevent pain and injury is with functional fitness — or simple exercises that use many muscle groups at once.

What makes functional fitness special

While exercises like weightlifting and cardio target specific health needs, functional fitness is meant to reduce your chance of injury while doing everyday things.

"Think in terms of your daily routine," says Kaiser Permanente Director of Employee Wellness and certified functional strength coach Andy Gallardo. "From crouching down in the garden to reaching high while shopping for groceries, you move in all sorts of ways every day. Functional fitness helps you stay strong and flexible as you go about your life." Simply put: It's about preparing your body for everyday life.

Like most exercise, functional fitness is good for your mental health too. Plus, Gallardo adds, it works well for all ages.

"Even though younger people tend to be more flexible and avoid injury easier, functional fitness can benefit everyone. And it's especially good for people in their 40s and older," he says.

7 simple functional fitness exercises

1. Squats for your legs, stomach, and lower back.

2. Lunges for your upper legs and glutes.

3. Planks for your core, back, and shoulders.

4. Push-ups for your chest, shoulders, triceps, and core.

5. Pull-ups for your biceps, triceps, forearms, wrists, shoulders, and core.

6. Shoulder presses for your core, shoulders, and back. Tip: To help prevent injury, try sand-filled weights instead of dumbbells.

7. Stackers for your whole body. Not familiar with stackers? Here's what to do:

- Stand with your feet a little more than shoulder's width apart and pretend to hold a basketball straight out in front of you.
- Bend at the waist to reach and tap the outside of your left heel.
- Then reach back up and across your body to the right, as if you're stacking a box on a shelf right above your shoulder.
- As you twist across your body, your left heel may come off the ground as you pivot your hips to the right.

Whichever exercises you do, remember that form is key. If you're working out at home, you can always search online for videos and step-by-step graphics that show how to do these exercises correctly. Make sure to go with a source you trust, and if something hurts, always stop and find help.

Tips for a successful fitness routine

To get the most from functional fitness, like with any exercise, you should make it part of your regular routine. "Move every day," says Gallardo — it's his number one tip. But also remember to:

• **Warm up and cool down** — Always start with a warmup to get your heart pumping blood to your muscles. Some jogging in place and light stretching are great ways to get your body ready for action," says Gallardo. "And after your workout, go for a walk and do more light stretching or yoga to help your body cool down."

• **Pay attention to posture** — To prevent injury, keep your back straight and avoid hunching your shoulders or straining your neck.

• **Mix it up** — Variety is key. Mix and match exercises each day to keep your workout fresh and give different muscles time to rest.

• **Know your limits** — Check with your doctor before you start your new training program so you can discuss your needs. Everyone is different, so take it slow and listen to your body as you create a workout that works well for you.

Source:
<https://thrive.kaiserpermanente.org/thrive-together/stay-active/7-simple-exercises-you-can-do-at-home>



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Lemon-Thyme Sheet-Pan Chicken and Potatoes

Ingredients

1/3 c. olive oil
1 1/2 tsp. roughly chopped fresh thyme
4 garlic cloves, chopped
Grated zest and juice of 1 lemon, plus 1 lemon cut into wedges
3 tsp. kosher salt
1 1/4 tsp. black pepper
10 skin-on, bone-in chicken thighs (4 to 4 1/2 pounds)
2 lb. red potatoes (6 medium), cut into 1-inch pieces
2 tbsp. finely chopped fresh parsley

Directions

1. Preheat the oven to 425°. Whisk the olive oil, thyme, garlic, lemon zest, lemon juice, salt and pepper in a large bowl.
2. Add the chicken, potatoes and lemon wedges to the bowl. Toss well.
3. Dump the mixture onto a rimmed baking sheet. Turn the chicken skin-side up and space the pieces evenly apart.
4. Roast on the middle oven rack, rotating the pan halfway through, until the chicken is golden brown and registers 165° on an instant-read thermometer, about 50 minutes. Remove to a platter and sprinkle with the parsley. Drizzle with any juices from the baking sheet and squeeze the roasted lemon wedges on the chicken.

Yields: 4-6 Servings

Prep Time: 15 minutes

Total Time: 1 hr 5 minutes

Source:

<https://www.thepioneerwoman.com/food-cooking/recipes/a35916631/lemon-thyme-sheet-pan-chicken-and-potatoes-recipe/>

