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Become a Lifesaver

Blood donors are heroes. By donating blood you can save a life. That's because no chemical, drug or fluid can replace blood in a real emergency. Blood collections are rising, which is good news. The bad news is, the demand is increasing faster than collections, and the nation's blood banks are facing persistent supply problems, national blood-supply groups say.

Donations traditionally slump during the Christmas holiday season, as colleges, schools and businesses that normally host blood drives close and families take vacations. An outbreak of influenza and bad weather also can affect donations.

Maintaining an adequate amount of blood for surgeries, trauma victims and treatment of diseases can be problematic.

Every day about 38,000 units of red blood cells are given to Americans. Blood transfusions are used for trauma victims, patients needing surgery, and those getting treatment for leukemia, cancer or sickle cell anemia.

Why is blood use rising?

About 4.5 million people receive blood transfusions in the United States every year, and that number is expected to rise for several reasons:

- As the U.S. population grows older, the number of surgeries that require transfusions (heart, knee-replacement, and hip-replacement operations, for example) will likely rise as well.
- Procedures and surgeries that require numerous transfusions are becoming more common. A bone-marrow transplant patient needs three weeks of transfusions, and a person undergoing a liver-transplant operation requires 20 units of blood or more.

The basics of blood donation

Blood is separated into three components: red blood cells, which can be stored for 42 days; platelets, which last five days, and plasma, which can be frozen for as long as one year. You can give blood every eight weeks, plasma twice a week and platelets 24 times a year. Type O blood is the most commonly used because it can be safely transfused to people of all blood types.

Health Tip: Meeting Criteria for Blood Donation

They include your health history



Health eNews

- Your height and weight are basic criteria for being able to donate blood. But your health history and other factors also may prevent you from giving a pint.
- Here are general guidelines for who can donate blood, courtesy of the University of California San Francisco Medical Center:
 - You must be at least 17 years old and weigh at least 110 pounds.
 - You shouldn't have a blood pressure reading of higher than 180/100 at the time of donation. You can still donate if you take one or more blood pressure medications.
 - You shouldn't have a body piercing (excluding ear piercing) or a tattoo applied in the prior 12 months.
 - If you are diabetic, your symptoms must be well-controlled.

You shouldn't donate if you have used intravenous drugs, are taking antibiotics for an active respiratory infection, are sick with a cold or the flu, have recently traveled to certain countries that harbor blood-borne conditions, have had hepatitis, or are at a high risk for HIV/AIDS.

The Basics of Organ Donation

The ability to transplant organs is one of medicine's great achievements. It has saved thousands of lives since the first successful kidney transplant more than 50 years ago. Today, many types of transplants are possible.

Right now, about 97,000 Americans with serious health concerns are waiting for organ transplants. Unfortunately, the number of donors isn't enough to meet the need. This means that some people will die before an organ becomes available.

Organ donors are greatly needed. Have you ever thought about being one? Understanding the transplant and organ donation process can help you make this difficult, but life-saving, decision.

How is a person chosen for a transplant?

If a person needs a transplant, he or she is put on a computerized waiting list. This list is maintained by the United Network for Organ Sharing. The Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network is operated by this government-contracted organization. When a donor is found, the computer evaluates potential recipients on the master list. Factors such as blood type, medical urgency, size of the organ and time already spent on the waiting list are considered. And, each organ has its own specific criteria.

When an organ becomes available, the first person on this list is contacted. He or she is tested to see if the organ is a good match. If not, the body may reject the organ. Then, another recipient must be found. The next person on the list is called and so on, until a match is made.



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Who can be a donor?

When doctors evaluate a potential donor, the person's health is the main factor. People of any age or race can donate organs. All major religions support organ donation. So, faith often isn't an issue. And, there is no cost to you or your family for donating organs.

What organs can be donated?

You may think organ donation can happen only after death. But, you also can be a living donor. You can give tissue—such as bone marrow—or certain organs, including a kidney or part of your liver. After death, the heart, lungs and pancreas can be donated.

How do you become a donor?

People who donate organs are giving the gift of life. But, making the decision to donate isn't always easy, especially if you're a living donor. Although living donors are treated with the utmost care, you should consider the effects of surgery as well as recovery time.

If you decide to become an organ donor, it's important to make your wishes known. Unlike the transplant list, there is no national donor registry. Some states allow you to indicate your wish to be a donor on your driver's license. But, this often isn't enough. You also must be sure to share your decision with loved ones. Since laws concerning organ donation vary from state to state, you can find the specifics for your state at www.donatelife.net.

Reluctant To Donate Blood? Don't Be

Blood donations are used daily in your community hospital. Each day, patients need blood transfusions because of accidents, cancer, surgery, burns, childbirth and other situations. Yet, misunderstandings and fears often prevent people from donating much needed blood that could save someone's life. In fact, only 5 percent of Americans who are able to give blood actually do.

Blood cannot be manufactured. The only way for hospitals to keep their blood banks full is through volunteer donors. Donated blood has a limited shelf life, so new donations of all blood types are needed every day.

How much do you know about donating blood? It takes only about 10 minutes to draw the blood and not more than an hour of your time overall, including the paperwork. Consider the following information if you have been reluctant to be a blood donor:



Health eNews

- **Donating blood is safe.** New, sterile needles and bags are used to collect blood. They are disposed of after each use to eliminate the possibility of infection.
- **Your personal information is kept confidential.** If your blood tests positive for hepatitis or another disease, the results remain private and you are the only one notified.
- **Giving blood will not make you weak.** Most adults have 10 to 12 pints of blood in their bodies. You'll feel little or no effect after donating one pint.
- **It won't hurt!** You'll feel a pinch from the needle, but just for a few seconds.

You can safely donate blood every 56 days. Your body typically replaces the fluid lost within 24 hours.

You're never too old to donate blood as long as you are in good health. You must be at least 17 years old and weigh at least 110 pounds.

If you take medication, it doesn't mean you can't give blood. For instance, most people taking blood pressure medication and those with diabetes can donate blood without a problem.

Men's Health: With a Little Help From Friends

Want to live longer? Keep exercising and eating your vegetables, but make lunch plans with an old friend, too.

Numerous studies have shown that people with strong social networks live longer and recover more quickly from illness than those without these ties.

Men - who tend to have fewer close friends than women - stand to gain the most from developing relationships. Some researchers suggest that loneliness is a risk factor for heart disease, just like high blood pressure or elevated cholesterol. People without many friends are also more prone to depression.

Social isolation - a risk factor for men

Researchers at Harvard School of Public Health studied more than 28,000 men to see if social ties had an impact on their health. Half enjoyed a large social network of family, friends, and community connections; the other half did not. After 10 years:

- Deaths in the group with few social ties were 20 percent higher than in the highly social group.
- The more-isolated men were 53 percent more likely to die from a heart-related disease than the others.
- Of those who developed heart disease, the less-social men had an 82 percent higher risk of death than the other group.
- Men with the fewest social contacts had more than double the risk of dying from accidents and suicides than men in the



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other group.

- Married men had a lower risk of death from any cause and half the risk of death from accidents and suicides than the unmarried men.

In addition, an American Heart Association study looked at 3,267 men (average age 62). The study reported that those with few social ties had much higher levels of a blood marker for inflammation - known to be associated with heart disease - than men with bigger social circles. Known risk factors for heart disease were taken into account.

All the same, choose your friends wisely. Other studies show your risk of heart disease can go up if your relationships are stressful.

People need people

As many as 1 in 4 Americans say they have no one to confide in about personal problems. For them, making more friends could have clinical benefits similar to making lifestyle changes.

How do friends help us stay healthy? No one can say for sure, but theories include:

- Close friends and relatives encourage you to take care of yourself. They may get you to give up smoking, heavy drinking, or a poor diet.
- Having friends may boost self-esteem and ward off depression.
- Having social support may reduce stress and hormone levels tied to high blood pressure.
- You're more likely to be physically active if you have people to do things with.
- Some men see doctors only because a wife, partner, or friend convinces them to.
- A social circle is a valuable resource when you are sick. Friends can take you to the doctor or help out while you recover.

Generally, women are better at sharing their feelings and maintaining friendships than men. But anyone can increase their social network with a little effort. Joining a book club, bowling league, or poker group can widen your contacts; so can taking a class or doing volunteer work. Building good relationships can help keep you healthy in much the same way as a daily walk or a low-fat diet.

Nutrition for Men: A Game Plan for Weight Loss

Women may dominate the dieting world, but obesity is an issue for men, too. Read on for weight loss tips tailored for men.

Most men put more thought into how they fuel their car than how they fuel their body. It's no wonder that obesity is on the rise, and that the number of obese men in the U.S. has doubled over the past 25 years.



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Sedentary habits and overeating have contributed to this epidemic. But the question remains: how to motivate men in a dieting world that is dominated by women?

Ready for a tune-up?

For starters, forget the word "diet." Begin to *manage* your food intake - just like you manage your finances, your relationships and your job.

Next, think about your health and quality of life. Though your wedding tux may be out of reach, dropping a few pounds and exercising more will improve your fitness, strength and energy. Just check with your doctor before you increase your activity level.

Other benefits of losing weight may include:

- Decreased risk of diabetes, heart attack, some types of cancer, hypertension and sleep apnea.
- Better performance in sports.
- Longer lifespan (your spouse and kids will appreciate this).
- Enhanced sex life. Weight loss may even help with erectile dysfunction.

The game plan

Here's how to get the ball rolling:

Don't skip breakfast. A morning meal gets your metabolic fire started. Ditch your muffin or donut, and have some instant oatmeal with walnuts, eggs and low-fat cheese on an English muffin, peanut butter on whole-wheat toast or a bowl of whole-grain cereal with nuts and fruit.

Cut portions in half. Men like volume. But overeating is probably what got you here in the first place. So cut back on portions, especially when dining out. When cooking at home, add more veggies to your meal so you *feel* like you're eating more. For instance, add zucchini, mushrooms and onions to your pasta sauce. Use more sauce, and less pasta.

Don't overdo protein. Strength training, along with moderate protein and carbs, is the key to muscle building - not excess protein. Most men get more than enough protein in their diets. Forget protein powders, and stick with lean chicken, turkey, fish, eggs and beans. Even veggies and grains have protein.

Focus on good carbs. Carbs are essential for energy and building muscle. Stick with wholesome choices and go for fruits and veggies; whole-grain breads, cereals and pastas; brown rice; and baked and sweet potatoes. Limit cookies, donuts, cakes, large bagels and white flour rolls.

Pay attention to real hunger. Eat when you are hungry, and stop when you are full. This includes pushing away from the table when there is still food left. It's more manly to refuse extra food than to clean the plate.

Snack smart. Endless bowls of chips, ice cream and salted nuts are just some of the snacking downfalls of men. Instead of candy at the vending machine, go for a piece of fruit, a half a turkey sandwich or some low-fat cheese and whole-grain crackers. Keep healthy snacks stocked at the office.



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Exercise regularly. There is no better one-two punch for weight loss than regular exercise and good nutrition. Work in some type of aerobic exercise most days of the week. Strength train two to three times a week to build muscle. This will help increase your metabolism. Check with your doctor before you increase your activity level.

Travel light. Traveling for business adds an extra challenge. Try to skip heavy meals and keep to a meal schedule.

- For breakfast, go for scrambled eggs with toast, oatmeal with low-fat milk and fresh fruit. Limit refined carbs, such as bagels, pancakes and waffles.
- For lunch, opt for salads or sandwiches/wraps with grilled chicken, shrimp or salmon. Ask to skip or go light on the mayo.
- Watch dinner portions. Don't hesitate to leave leftovers on your plate. Opt for more fish and chicken versus beef, and avoid fried foods.

Limit alcohol. Spoiler alert: alcohol *has* calories. If you care to drink, limiting yourself to two drinks a day will cut the amount of calories you consume. It will also help you avoid gaining belly fat and will enhance your overall health.

Finally, don't rush it. A goal of one half to one pound a week is the most sensible for the long term. When it comes to permanent weight loss, slow and steady wins the race.

Suggested Checkups and Tests for Men

Screening tests can help men stay healthy. Find out which tests you need based on age, health and risks for other health problems.

This checklist is meant only as a general guideline. The tests and screenings you need depend on your individual risks, medical and genetic histories, and age. Talk with your doctor to know what you need to do to keep up your health. Your doctor can also tell you how often you should have these tests and screenings.

Many doctors follow the guidelines put forth by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF). The USPSTF is the nation's leading source of recommendations and guidelines for screening tests. Doctors also follow other recommendations, like those made by the American Cancer Society or other professional organizations.

Regular checkups. Regular checkups are a good way to keep track of your health. Your doctor can take your blood pressure, listen to your heart, weigh you and take other assessments. Sometimes, conditions that do not have noticeable symptoms, like high blood pressure, are found at a routine checkup. This is also a good time to get advice from your doctor about your diet, exercise and other steps to take. There is no consensus as to when or how often a man should go for a routine physical. Talk to your doctor about suggestions for what is right for you.



Health eNews

Testicular exams. The American Cancer Society (ACS) recommends a testicular exam as part of a routine cancer-related office visit. But checking yourself for testicular cancer (testicular self-exams) has not been shown to help men live longer. The ACS does not recommend testicular self-exams for all men. They do advise men who have cancer risk factors to consider a monthly testicular self-exam and to discuss this with their doctors. The USPSTF does not advise screening teens or adult men for testicular cancer if they do not have symptoms. Talk to your doctor about what is best for you.

Cholesterol testing. The National Cholesterol Education Program currently recommends a fasting lipoprotein profile for all adults age 20 and older every five years. This test measures total cholesterol, HDL, LDL and triglycerides. Depending on your risk factors for heart disease, your doctor may suggest more frequent testing.

Prostate cancer screening. Doctors disagree about whether routine prostate cancer screening should be done. The reason is that very small slow-growing prostate cancers may not cause a man any health problems, while treating those cancers with surgery or radiation could. Here are two different guidelines. Talk to your doctor about them and what is best for you.

The USPSTF does not advise for or against routine screening in men younger than age 75. The USPSTF concludes that there is currently not enough information to make a recommendation regarding screening. However, they do advise against screening men who are aged 75 and older.

The American Cancer Society recommends that doctors discuss the risks and benefits of prostate cancer screening with their patients. They also suggest prostate cancer screening for most men starting at age 50 and then yearly for men who do not have major medical problems and have a life expectancy of at least 10 years. Prostate screening includes both a PSA test and digital rectal exam (DRE). Yearly screening should start at age 45 for men who have a high risk for prostate cancer, including African Americans or men who have two or more first-degree relatives with prostate cancer. ACS also suggests that doctors talk about screening and offer screening to certain men who are at very high risk at age 40.

Colon cancer exams. The USPSTF recommends that everyone be screened for colon cancer starting at age 50 and continuing until age 75 with one of the following screening tests:

- Home fecal occult blood testing
- Flexible sigmoidoscopy
- Colonoscopy

The American Cancer Society guidelines also include several other tests that may be used to screen for colon cancer in some cases. These include:

- A double contrast barium enema
- CT colonography (virtual colonoscopy)
- Stool DNA test

If any of these tests are positive, your doctor may advise further testing with a colonoscopy.

If you have risk factors for colon cancer such as a family history, you may need earlier or more frequent screenings. Other risk factors include a personal history of inflammatory bowel disease, the presence of certain polyps, certain cancers or radiation



Health eNews

therapy.

Talk to your doctor to see which screening test is right for you.

Blood pressure. Experts do not agree on how often blood pressure should be checked. But it's probably a good idea to have your blood pressure checked at least once every two years. Talk to your doctor if your blood pressure is 120/80 or higher. If you have prehypertension or high blood pressure, your doctor may suggest more frequent screenings, periodic office visits and perhaps regular blood pressure monitoring at home as well.

Aortic aneurysm. The USPSTF recommends screening for aortic aneurysm if you have ever smoked. This is a one-time test done by ultrasound between the ages of 65 to 75.

HIV testing. The CDC recommends that men get tested for the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), the virus that causes AIDS, if:

- You are a man who has had sex with other men (after 1975). Get tested at least once a year.
- You inject illegal drugs. Get tested once a year.

Even if you think you have low risk for HIV infection, talk to your doctor about HIV screening.

Diabetes testing. The USPSTF recommends that adults with no symptoms but who have BP readings (either treated or untreated) of greater than 135/80 be tested for diabetes. The American Diabetes Association's recommended testing intervals vary slightly. They suggest testing for all people who are overweight or obese and who have any other risk factors for diabetes. Testing in people who do not have these risk factors should start at age 45.

Risk factors for type 2 diabetes include being overweight, being inactive and having a family history of diabetes. Also, if you have high blood pressure or high cholesterol, it is important to be tested for diabetes, because diabetes significantly raises your already higher risk of heart attack.

Obesity. You should be screened for obesity by measuring body mass index (BMI), waist circumference or both.

Dental checkups. Regular checkups with your dentist are important for dental health and even your overall health. Ask your dentist how often you should have checkups. Two visits per year for cleaning are typically advised.

Eye exam. The American Academy of Ophthalmology recommends that after an initial comprehensive eye exam, you have your eyes checked every one to four years after age 40. Of course, this depends on your age and whether you have any health problems that could affect your eyesight. People with diabetes, diagnosed eye disorders and other medical conditions may need more frequent testing.

Skin exams. Skin cancer is the most common type of cancer in the U.S. But most kinds of skin cancer can be cured if found and treated early. If you notice any new or changing moles or other marks on your skin or have a sore that does not heal, see your doctor right away.



Health eNews

Families That Eat Together Serve Up Good Dietary Habits

Kids make smarter food choices later on, study find

A new long-term study says that kids in families that have at least five meals together a week tend to practice good eating habits.

University of Minnesota researchers reported that adolescents who eat these so-called 'regular family meals' had more healthful diets, meaning they consumed more vegetables, calcium-rich food, dietary fiber and essential nutrients.

For the study, the eating habits of 677 youths were assessed through questionnaires they filled in during their pre- and early teen years and again five years later. The results were published in the March/April issue of the Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior.

'Findings from the current analysis, in conjunction with similar findings from a longitudinal analysis of older adolescents transitioning to young adulthood, strongly suggest that regular family meals have long-term nutritional benefits,' researcher and dietitian Teri L. Burgess-Champoux of the university's school of public health, said in a news release issued by the journal publisher. 'The importance of incorporating shared mealtime experiences on a consistent basis during this key developmental period should be emphasized to parents, health-care providers and educators.'

In the five years between filling out the questionnaires, the number of regular family meals the kids ate fell from 60 percent of their meals when they were age 12 or 13 to about 30 percent when they were 17 or 18. Good dietary habits were associated with kids having these regular family meals at times of measurement. Those who ate regular family meals at both points of their life had a better diet quality, on average, but they did not necessarily consume recommended levels of healthy dietary staples, such as fruit, vegetables or whole grains, during the entire five-year span.

More information

The Nemours Foundation has more about family meals: http://kidshealth.org/parent/nutrition_fit/nutrition/family_meals.html.

How to Increase Your Family's Physical Fitness

Exercise is essential to good health and fitness, and studies also have demonstrated that exercise contributes to overall happiness by improving our mood. In spite of the known benefits of exercise, physical inactivity has become a serious problem for adults and children alike in the United States.

Many adults and children today are victims of the age of automation. We are driven to and from work and school. Once we arrive



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at our destination, we spend the majority of the day sitting at a desk, engaged in activities that may work our mind but do little to keep our bodies fit. At the end of the work or school day, we arrive home only to spend more hours sitting in front of the television or computer. In addition to not getting enough exercise, we tend to consume high calorie, high fat, nutritionally lacking snacks during our periods of inactivity.

Current recommendations state that children and adults should strive for at least 30 minutes daily of moderate intensity exercise. This goal can be met through a wide range of family activities that not only will provide exercise but enjoyment as well. Parents need to become role models for their children at an early age. If your children see that you are physically active and having fun while you exercise, they are more likely to be active and stay active later in their lives.

Here are some simple ways to increase your family's level of physical activity:

- Plan a family hike through a scenic park. If you announce to your children that everyone in the family will be required to take a 2-mile walk on Saturday, chances are good that your idea will be met with resistance. However, if you turn the walk into a family outing and allow your children to participate in the planning, your children will be more likely to cooperate.
- Challenge your children to a basketball, volleyball, tennis or baseball game. Children like the idea of competing against adults. They are likely to have fun, and, at the same time, everyone physically benefits from this activity. This also promotes being active at any age.
- Join a community center that offers fitness and recreational programs. Check out your local YMCA or department of recreation. Many of these organizations offer community sports, and some also have swimming pools, skating rinks and fitness centers that the entire family can enjoy.
- If your child is involved in organized sports, offer to help out. Coaching is not the only way to get involved in your child's sports program. Offer to help at the concession stand or transport children to and from games. If you stay involved in your children's activities, chances are greater that they also will wish to remain involved.
- Emphasize fitness and fun, rather than competition and perfection. Not every child is going to be a great athlete. When children are made to feel inferior, they tend to withdraw from organized sporting activities.
- When picking indoor activities, select those that will offer some type of physical activity. Bowling, skating or touring a museum are better choices than seeing a movie.
- Allow your children to include their friends when you are planning your exercise activities. Establishing friendships and forming peer groups are of vital importance to your children. Your children will be more likely to want to participate in activities that include their friends.
- Discuss ways that everyone can be more active in daily life. Take the stairs instead of the elevator. Park farther away from mall entrances. Take a short walk after dinner. Don't drive somewhere that you can easily walk.
- Limit the amount of time that is spent watching television and playing video and computer games. Allow your child to select one or two favorite programs and do not leave the television turned on continuously. (Studies show that the average American child spends about 24 hours each week watching television.) Bargain with your children. For every hour of television they watch, get a commitment for equal time engaged in physical activity.
- Try not to take away physical activities as punishment for your child. Exercise promotes good health and is needed on a daily basis. If necessary, withhold other activities that will not interfere with your child's need for physical activity.
- Don't stifle informal play. While organized team sports have value, encourage your children to "play" often. Some of the best ways to promote fitness and creativity are through playing outside with friends. Openly support physical education and recess at your child's school. With so much emphasis on classroom learning, physical education time is constantly fighting the chopping block of school budgets.



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Kid Fit: Helping Kids Win at Fitness

Kids and fitness

Obesity is fast becoming a serious health problem facing children today. Consider these statistics:

- Obesity in children and adolescents has more than doubled in the past 30 years.
- More than one in four U.S. children are overweight, and 15 percent of them are very overweight or obese.

Researchers have already established that an adolescent who is now overweight runs a 70 percent risk of becoming an obese adult. It is a known fact that obesity in adulthood increases the chance that you will develop serious health problems such as high blood pressure, diabetes and heart disease. Physicians are encountering an increasing number of adolescents and young adults who have already developed these serious health problems.

Two Biggest Factors in Childhood Obesity

1. Decline in physical activity
2. Increased consumption of higher calorie, higher fat content foods such as fast foods and poor-choice snacks

