A walk in the woods, a weekend camping trip or even a short hike in a nearby state park—they’re all terrific ways to incorporate some physical activity into our daily lives. But if you’re going to enjoy the great outdoors this summer, watch out for poison ivy.

If you do have an unfortunate brush with this unpopular plant (or poison oak or poison sumac), the American Academy of Dermatology (AAD) suggests following these steps:

> Rinse the affected area thoroughly with lukewarm water to remove some of the urushiol—the oil from the plant that irritates skin.
> Wash the clothes you were wearing since the oil can stick to them, too.
> Wash anything else that might have touched the plant—gardening tools, golf clubs, your shoes, etc. If your dog came into contact with the plant, hose him down also.

As the rash develops, you may see some swelling and red itchy bumps or streaks, perhaps even some blisters. The rash will probably last one to three weeks. And yes, it will itch.

But if you’re tempted to apply an antihistamine cream, hold off. The AAD cautions that it can make the rash—and the itching—worse. Instead, try soothing calamine lotion or cold compresses, or take a short lukewarm bath with oatmeal or baking soda added to the bathwater. Cool showers might bring some temporary relief to your skin, too.

Don’t worry: You can’t “catch” poison ivy by touching someone who has the rash, even if you touch the blisters on their skin. The only way to get a rash is by touching something that has the urushiol on it. So if you still have oil on your skin, you can spread it to other parts of your body.

**When to Seek Help**

Most of the time, you can manage a case of poison ivy at home on your own. The rash will itch as it heals, and the skin may become a little crusty as the blisters begin to dry up. If large parts of your body are covered by the rash, or you develop a rash on your face or genitals, you may want to give your health care provider a call.

But certain symptoms require additional treatment. For example, if you experience trouble breathing or swallowing, head straight to the emergency room. Don’t ignore eyelids that begin to swell shut, either. Seek medical attention right away.
Recently additional recommendations for treating high blood pressure and cholesterol were issued. These differ between organizations, so talk to your health care provider about how these may apply to you. Here is a snapshot of what’s new.

High blood pressure (HBP) is still defined as blood pressure (BP) of 140/90 or greater. The new recommendation by the Joint National Committee (JNC 8) is to begin lowering HBP with specific medications at 140/90 or greater in adults under the age of 60 and adults of any age with diabetes or chronic kidney disease (CKD). For those older than 60 who don’t have diabetes or CKD, treatment should begin at BP 150/90.

The American Heart Association and the American College of Cardiology differ and say treatment should start at a BP of 140/90, and BP should be kept at less than 130/80 for people who have heart disease, diabetes or CKD. A BP less than 120/80 is best for most people. In addition, the American Diabetes Association re-affirms that BP treatment goal for patients with diabetes should be less than 140/80.

New cholesterol guidelines have three basic recommendations: 1) Identify those most likely to benefit, 2) give the right dose of statin drug, and 3) lower LDL cholesterol a certain percent from the baseline level. The guidelines provide a tool to identify the right dose of statin to the right person to get the desired improvement. There is no specific LDL-C level to reach, but levels are used to determine if treatment is followed and effective, so levels and ranges of LDL-C will still be used.

If you have questions, talk with your health care provider.

How to minimize pain and discomfort when injecting insulin

After you choose an area in which to inject your insulin, you can take steps to minimize any pain associated with the injection.

The American Association of Diabetes Educators suggests a few possible strategies:

- Use a smaller, shorter needle.
- Use room-temperature insulin.
- Try to relax the muscles at the injection site before inserting the needle.
- Penetrate the skin quickly.
- Try to distract yourself from thinking too much about the possibility of pain.
- Don’t change the direction of the needle during insertion or withdrawal.

You also might try using an injection device that puts pressure all around the injection site. And after you withdraw the needle, put firm pressure on the skin for five to eight seconds. (Don’t rub.)

Tried everything but still quake at the sight of a needle, even a short one? Talk to your diabetes educator or counselor about this for advice.
Keep Your Feet Healthy During Sandal Weather

When the weather heats up, a cool pair of sandals sounds great. But summer heat can cause dryness, cracking and sores that can be problematic for people with diabetes.

So as tempting as it may be, you may need to avoid going barefoot this summer. You don’t want to risk a puncture wound to your foot or burning the soles of your feet on hot sand or sun-baked pavement.

Other ways to keep your feet healthy in the summertime:

- Opt for comfortable shoes with smooth linings that won’t rub blisters on your feet.
- If you do wear sandals, choose a pair you can wear with socks.
- Don’t forget to slather the tops of your feet with sunscreen with an SPF (sun protection factor) of 15 or higher.
- Put on support stockings if your feet and ankles begin to swell.
- Apply moisturizer to your feet, but not between the toes. The moisture could lead to fungal infection.

Summer is not the time to take a vacation from foot care. Monitor your feet on a daily basis, looking for any blisters or scrapes that might get infected. Treat wounds immediately, and call your health care provider if a cut or injury is slow to heal.

How Stress Affects Your Blood Sugar

Do you know what happens inside your body when you get stressed? Your body prepares to take action by gearing up its instinctive “fight or flight” response. It ramps up production of certain hormones that make more fuel (fat and glucose) available to your cells to produce energy.

If you have diabetes, the response doesn’t work as well. According to the American Diabetes Association, glucose piles up in the blood because the body isn’t always able to use insulin to let glucose into your cells. That’s why chronic stress can lead to long-term high blood sugar levels.

If stress gets you flustered, these tips might help keep stress levels—and blood glucose levels—down.

Brainstorm solutions. Friends or family members may offer a fresh set of eyes.

Keep your chin up. Think positive and try to put the situation in perspective.

Breathe deeply. A few slow deep breaths can help you regain focus.

Meditate. A study in Diabetes Care found that a mindfulness-based stress-reduction program provided people with diabetes a number of health benefits, including reduced blood pressure.

Take a short walk. Exercise relaxes your body.

Think of something that makes you happy. When you feel your stress level start to go up, concentrate on this pleasant image or memory.

Blueberry-Beef Burgers

Preparation Time: 20 minutes
Serving Size: 4 servings

Ingredients:
2 slices whole-wheat country bread
½ cup fresh or frozen and thawed blueberries
1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
2 cloves garlic
¼ teaspoon salt
Freshly ground pepper
12 oz. 90 percent lean ground beef

Instructions:
1. Place bread in a food processor and pulse into fine crumbs. Transfer to a large bowl. (No need to wash the work bowl.)
2. Add blueberries, vinegar, mustard, Worcestershire, garlic, salt and pepper to the food processor; process until puréed. Scrape into the bowl with the bread crumbs. Add ground beef and mix well with a potato masher. Divide the mixture into four equal portions; form into ½-inch-thick patties, about 4 inches in diameter.
3. Meanwhile, preheat broiler or heat an indoor or outdoor grill to medium-high. If using the broiler, coat a broiler pan with cooking spray. If using a grill, oil the grill rack by rubbing it with an oil-soaked paper towel. Cook patties until browned and no longer pink in the center, 4 to 5 minutes per side. An instant-read thermometer inserted in the center should register 160°F. Serve immediately, with or without rolls and toppings.

Nutrition Facts:
Per Serving: 200 calories; 9 g carbohydrates; 19 g protein; 9 g fat (4 g saturated, 4 g monounsaturated); 55 mg cholesterol; 343 mg sodium; 343 mg potassium

Exchange: .5 starch, 2.5 lean protein, 1 fat

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Keep Bugs at Bay This Summer

**Mosquito bites itch** like crazy, can leave marks on your skin and are just all around unpleasant. Beyond that, they can infect you with West Nile Virus. Fortunately, you can avoid the bite of the pesky mosquito by planning ahead.

**Avoid peak hours.** Stay inside as much as possible during the hours between dusk and dawn, which are prime time for mosquitoes that transmit West Nile Virus.

**Spray.** Before you go outside, apply insect repellent on all exposed skin and clothing. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend choosing a product containing one of these ingredients: DEET, picaridin, IR3535, or the plant-based oil of lemon eucalyptus, which all have been evaluated for efficacy and safety.

**Cover up.** Wear long sleeves, long pants and socks when you go outside.

**Avoid standing water.** Mosquitos love bird baths, buckets, pet water dishes and other outdoor sources of standing water, so empty them on a regular basis.