

Dr. Marlene's NATURAL HEALTH CONNECTIONS



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Brain Health: What You Need To Know

Who doesn't want better memory, focus, and alertness, today and for years to come? As luck would have it, there are practical, proven steps that will help you get and stay on top of your game, now and well into the future.



Do you ever feel as though you're just not as sharp as you'd like to be, or used to be? Maybe you sometimes experience a bit of brain fog, or you forget where you left your keys and chalk it up to a "senior moment."

Things in our bodies do change as we get older: various internal processes slow down and are more susceptible to external challenges. Staying up late and being sleep-deprived doesn't take the same toll on a young adult as it does on an older one. But it's easy to overestimate how much we should attribute to "getting older."

In addition, some of my patients worry that minor lapses in memory may be a sign that they're headed for disabling mental deterioration down the road. Most of the time, this isn't the case.

The fact is, how we function mentally has a great deal to do with how we eat and what we do — or don't do — in our daily lives. Before

I describe steps you can take to stay as sharp as possible, I want to give you a snapshot of what is known about the risks for the worst-case scenario among older Americans.

We are living longer. In 1920, only 1 in 20 Americans were age 65 or older. More recently, when the last census was completed in 2020, 1 in 6 Americans had reached that age bracket.

The longer our lifespans, the higher the risk for mental deterioration. Although there isn't some secret law that says this is inevitable, it's a trend that is observable in our culture.

To get a sense of risk at different stages of life, researchers from New York University and Johns Hopkins University analyzed health records of 15,000 people who did not have dementia at age 55. After examining a lot of health data on people who had and had not developed dementia later in life, they published their findings earlier this year.¹



They estimated that the average risk for developing dementia was 4 percent by age 75, 20 percent by age 85, and higher after that. About one-third of the people studied had at least one copy of the APOE4 gene, which indicates genetic risk for Alzheimer's disease. And some people had two copies of the gene, which indicates the highest risk.

How many older Americans actually have dementia? About 3 percent after age 70, 22 percent after age 85, and 33 percent after age 90.²

Dr. Marlene's
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There are two ways of looking at these statistics: glass half empty or half full. From a half-full perspective, two of three people over age 90 don't have dementia. And doing the things that are known to reduce risk, which I'm about to cover, increases the odds that you'll be in the healthy majority.

Here's another trend: There is some evidence that the incidence of dementia among Americans age 65-plus may have been decreasing in this century.³ While this may sound promising, such a hopeful trend isn't likely to last.

Here's why: More and more Americans are developing prediabetes and type 2 diabetes, the most common controllable health condition that significantly increases risk for Alzheimer's disease and other types of dementia. And if you're wondering what "other types of dementia" means, let me explain.

What Is Dementia?

Dementia is an umbrella term that describes a loss of mental faculties — regardless of the cause — that is severe enough to interfere with daily life. Symptoms may include decrease in memory, judgement, ability to reason, and ability to communicate with others.

Alzheimer's disease is one cause of dementia. Some others can include brain injury, damage to blood vessels that reduces the flow of blood and nutrients to the brain, chronic inflammation, and damage to brain cells from toxins.

Each of the points I'm about to cover plays a role in protecting the brain and overall health. And they can sharpen your thinking in both the short and long term.

The Essential Diet

We often hear about superfoods for the brain, such as berries or leafy greens. While these are nutritious foods, they won't produce the best results by themselves.

Let's say someone eats a diet of mostly packaged or take-out food that is high in carbs, contains unhealthy fats, and has hardly any vegetables other than potatoes. Just adding some berries every day won't hurt, but it is not going to turn that diet into a brain-healthy one.

The Shocking Effect of Diabetes

Studies show that with diabetes, risk for dementia is multiplied 1.5 to 2.5 times.⁴

A high-carb diet — typical today — initially leads to elevated insulin, which is inflammatory to the whole body, including the brain. Elevated insulin also promotes fat storage, especially the most harmful, inflammatory fat in the belly area, which further perpetuates inflammation.

After insulin has been elevated for some time, blood sugar also rises. Elevated blood sugar increases risk for type 2 diabetes and starts to damage blood vessels, predisposing them to atherosclerosis.

Underlying this is a critical malfunction: insulin resistance. When things work as they should, insulin enables blood sugar to be absorbed by cells and used to produce energy. It unlocks the doors to the cells, so to speak, allowing blood sugar to enter.

With a high-carb diet, the cells have been flooded with so much insulin for so long that the doors

don't unlock as they should. They resist. As a result, the brain can't get enough fuel, and it can't function properly.

Sagging mental energy or brain fog can be symptoms. And they are usually accompanied by cravings for high-carb snacks — to get over an afternoon slump, for example. Such snacks perpetuate the malfunction. And this is how the road to type 2 diabetes is paved.

The solution is to learn to limit carbs in a way that you can enjoy and will adopt as a new way of eating. My patients and many of my readers have proven that my approach to low-carb eating is practical and sustainable.

A Balance of Fats

There are a couple of myths that lead to too much unhealthy fat in most American diets. One is that saturated fat is bad and should be avoided. We need some saturated fat because it provides structure and stability to the wall of

every cell in the human body. Just like your house won't provide shelter without stable walls, cells can't function properly without them.

Much saturated fat in our food supply has been replaced by refined seed oils, such as soybean, corn, and safflower oils, which are inflammatory. An overabundance of these not only makes cell walls too fluid but also leads to harmful chronic inflammation and greater risk for dementia.

A recent study led by Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine, in Cleveland, looked at different types of fat and dementia in 183 countries. And it found that levels of omega-6 fat had increased in recent years and were driving higher rates of dementia in the United States and many other countries.⁵

On the flip side, omega-3 fats, found in fish and some plant foods, are anti-inflammatory and help to

preserve good mental function. For six years, one study tracked dementia incidence and use of omega-3 supplements in more than 1,100 people between the ages of 55 and 90. Compared to those who never took omega-3 supplements, those who had taken them for ten or more years had 64 percent lower risk for dementia.⁶

Omega-3 supplements are usually made with fish oil. For vegans, products made from algae are available.

We need a balance of omega-6 and omega-3 fats. As it is, we get much more omega-6 fat than we need and not enough omega-3 fat. To correct the imbalance, avoid foods made with the inflammatory omega-6 oils I mentioned above and don't use them at home (see *Good Fats* on page 3).

Do eat fatty fish, such as salmon, mackerel, herring, or sardines, two or three times per week. If you

Good Fats

Instead of using vegetable oil, such as corn, soybean, canola, or safflower oil, for cooking or salad dressings, use one or more of these:

- Olive oil works well for sautéing (frying with a small amount of oil at a medium heat).
- For cooking at a high heat, use butter or coconut oil. If you don't like the taste of coconut, use a refined coconut oil, which is tasteless.
- For salad dressings, use extra virgin olive oil, lemon juice or a vinegar you like, and seasonings you enjoy.



About Dr. Marlene

Dr. Marlene Merritt's passion for natural medicine is fueled by her drive to help others and by her own experience of overcoming a debilitating heart condition, diagnosed at the age of 20. A competitive cyclist at the time, she suddenly began experiencing severe chest pains. Forced to quit the sport, she suffered from fatigue and chest pain for another 15 years, despite doing everything that conventional, Western medical doctors told her to do.

And then, the tide turned. A physician trained in naturopathic healing recommended a whole-food vitamin E supplement. A week after starting the supplement regimen, her energy began to return, and the pain began to disappear.

Dr. Marlene is a Doctor of Oriental Medicine, has a Master's degree and is board-certified in Nutrition, and is board-certified in Functional Medicine. She is certified in the Bredesen MEND Protocol™, a groundbreaking method of addressing Alzheimer's disease, and is a Proficiency Diplomate in the Shoemaker CIRS protocol for treatment of mold-related illness. She is the author of *Smart Blood Sugar* and *The Blood Pressure Solution*, and co-author of *The Perfect Sleep Solution*. After 31 years in private clinical practice, she now focuses on writing and educating health professionals and consumers to reach more people and positively impact their health.



don't regularly do this, take 1,000 mg daily of a fish oil supplement.

Sleep and Food Timing

Sleep is essential for healthy mental function. While you're asleep, the brain carries on routine detoxification and repair. If your sleep is interrupted or you're digesting food when you go to sleep, the repair and detoxification cycle is impaired. Studies show that inadequate sleep among older adults increases risk for dementia. Taking sleep medications also increases risk.⁷

As a rule, I recommend not eating anything for at least three hours before bedtime. But there is an exception.

When blood sugar has been erratic for some time, it can lead to a starving brain during the night. And then, that brain wakes you up. If this is happening, have a small low-carb snack that contains fat, such as a scoop of peanut butter, before bed. This should alleviate the waking up.

This is only a temporary measure. You should be eating

a low-carb diet that keeps blood sugar stable around the clock. If you do that for a while, you will be able to go without food for a few hours before bed and then sleep more soundly during the night.

Essential Exercise

Exercise is non-negotiable. It's essential for healthy brain function and needs to be done the right way.

The brain's most powerful repair hormone is BDNF (short for brain-derived neurotrophic factor). It protects and stimulates growth of healthy cells in the brain, nervous system, and other tissues, including the pancreas. It even helps to protect against insulin resistance and diabetes.⁸

Levels of BDNF decrease with age, and lower levels are linked to memory decline and neurodegenerative diseases.⁹ The good news is that BDNF is stimulated by exercise. In fact, exercise is the most effective way to raise BDNF levels.

A leisurely walk won't have much impact. You boost your BDNF level when you exert some force, when you push yourself up

while doing a push-up, or when you walk really fast or run. Interval walking, where you alternate normal walking with fast walking — as fast as you can, increasing your heart rate — is very effective at boosting BDNF. Any other activity where you exert intense effort in spurts will work equally well.

Mental games or puzzles can also boost BDNF, but they need to be really challenging. They work best when there's limited time to accomplish something. A crossword, another type of puzzle, or a game of chess, for example, is most effective when there's a time limit to complete a step or make a chess move.

Other Things To Know

Although there is much we can do to stay healthy and mentally sharp, various processes in our bodies slow down as we live longer. And it's important to recognize this and be realistic.

My 85-year-old mother was coming to see me. The flight takes over five hours, and she didn't want to spend a whole day traveling, so she decided to take a red eye. Although she's in good shape, she's not as resilient as she once was, so I persuaded her to take a daytime flight. She may have "lost" a good chunk of a day on an airplane, but she was undoubtedly better able to enjoy her visit once she landed.

These are some other things to know:

Toxins: Mercury has been known to be a brain toxin for many years. The Mad Hatter in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was a fictional character, but he was based on real people. In the 19th century, mercury was used in making felt

Cocktails and Other Alcoholic Drinks

There has been conflicting information about whether alcohol is beneficial. There is one fact that has consensus: If you don't drink, don't start. But if you do, quantity makes a difference.

Anyone who drinks in excess typically has nutritional deficiencies and is damaging their liver. But for most people, excessive sugar is the most likely substance to cause liver damage.

In looking at all the related research and working with patients, I haven't seen

cognitive problems with one to one-and-one-half drinks per day. These are standard sizes of one drink: 12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine, or 1.5 ounces (a shot) of liquor or distilled spirits such as brandy, gin, whiskey, vodka, tequila, or rum.

That said, if you're having a cocktail with some type of mix, it probably contains sugar and can contribute to unhealthy insulin and blood sugar. Be sure to count the carbs.

hats, and people who worked in the industry often suffered from memory loss, slurred speech, tremors, and other neurological damage from mercury poisoning.

Today, some fish are a significant source of mercury. You don't have to worry about the fatty fish that are usually recommended for their healthy fats, such as salmon, herring, and mackerel. These are not unsafe to eat. They are small fish that don't have long lifespans, so they don't accumulate much mercury. But other fish do.

Albacore tuna and swordfish are large fish that can live ten or more years, and they are significant sources of mercury. If you eat them, do so only occasionally. If you like tuna, choose skipjack (chunk light canned tuna), which is a smaller fish that is significantly lower in mercury.

For a list of many fish, mercury levels, and how often it's safe to eat different ones, visit <https://www.nrdc.org/sites/default/files/walletcard.pdf>.

Hearing loss: Hearing aids can easily correct the problem, but many people ignore it. As a result, the brain is deprived of perception and the cells that are normally involved in hearing die off, leading to permanent hearing loss and higher risk for dementia.

Social connections: Being in touch with friends and family, spending time in nature, volunteering, and being involved in cultural activities or hobbies that matter to you all contribute to good mental (and physical) function. I'll be covering the subject in more detail in next month's newsletter but wanted to mention it here.

Supplements: Although they can never replace a healthy diet, multivitamins can provide some nutritional insurance. I also recommend 1 gram daily of fish oil. Ginkgo biloba can enhance circulation, if needed. And turmeric can help to lower inflammation.

A Final Word

I've covered the most important things to do to stay mentally sharp in this article. But there are situations where additional changes need to be made, such as treating infections that cause inflammation or removing toxic mold from a home. I cover this and other related information in earlier issues, listed in *Related to This Topic*. They are there for you to read at any time.

Implementing change can be hard, I know. But doing it one step at a time can lead to a new and improved way of living.

- 1 Doctrow, B. "Risk and future burden of dementia in the United States." NIH Research Matters. February 18, 2025.
- 2 Freedman V.A., et al. 2023. National Health and Aging Trends Study Trends Chart Book: Key Trends, Measures and Detailed Tables.
- 3 Hudomiet, P., et al. "Trends in inequalities in the prevalence of dementia in the United States." Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A. 2022 Nov 16;119(46):e2212205119.
- 4 Ninomiya, T. "Diabetes mellitus and dementia." Curr Diab Rep. 2014;14(5):487.
- 5 Ciesielski, T.H., et al. "Country-level incidence of Alzheimer disease and related dementias is associated with increased omega-6-PUFA consumption." Commun Med (Lond). 2025 Jul 31;5(1):326.
- 6 Wei, B.-Z., et al. "The Relationship of Omega-3 Fatty Acids with Dementia and Cognitive Decline: Evidence from Prospective Cohort Studies of Supplementation, Dietary Intake, and Blood Markers." Am J Clin Nutr. 2023 Apr 5;117(6):1096-1109.
- 7 Wong, R., et al. "Sleep Disturbances and Dementia Risk in Older Adults: Findings From 10 Years of National U.S. Prospective Data." Am J Prev Med. 2023 Jun;64(6):781-787.
- 8 Bethina, S., et al. "Brain-derived neurotrophic factor and its clinical implications." Arch Med Sci. 2015 Dec 11;11(6):1164-1178.
- 9 Erickson, K.I., et al. "Brain-Derived Neurotrophic Factor Is Associated with Age-Related Decline in Hippocampal Volume." J Neurosci. 2010 Apr 14;30(15):5368-5375.

Related to This Topic

These are some earlier issues of this newsletter that address related topics:



Related Topic	Volume	Issue	Title
A Healthy Diet	7	1	My Low-Carb Diet — Fine-Tuned
Healthy Fats	4	11	Healthy Fats: Deadly Myths and Life-Saving Facts
Healthy Meat	3	2	The Diabetic's Guide to Eating Meat
Healthy Carbs	3	6	The Diabetic's Guide to Eating Carbs
Exercise	8	10	Exercise Myths and Facts
Insulin	8	9	Insulin: The Secret Door to Good Health
What's Normal?	2	12	The Guide to Lifelong Brain Health
Brain Inflammation	1	5	Is Your Brain on Fire?
Blood Sugar	1	1	The Link Between Diabetes and Alzheimer's Disease
Sleep	2	2	The 10-Minute Sleep Solution

Access these online by logging in to www.NaturalHealthConnections.com.

Technology for Managing Blood Sugar

Diabetics who use insulin must check blood-sugar levels often, and many others can also benefit by tracking their levels. But the traditional test — pricking a fingertip and testing blood with a strip — is not an easy way to do it.

Continuous glucose monitors (CGMs) are a newer, FDA-approved tool that makes the process much simpler, less invasive, and more effective. Fingertip tests give only a snapshot of blood sugar at a given moment, whereas CGMs provide a bigger picture of ongoing blood-sugar levels.

CGMs have been available for some years, but until a few months ago they always required a prescription. Some of my patients have had difficulty getting a CGM prescribed because their doctor was not familiar with the device and didn't feel it was necessary.

High prices have also been a huge barrier. Although Medicare and other insurance plans have been covering some of the costs, they do so only for diabetics — not other people who would benefit by managing blood sugar to prevent diabetes and improve health.

But recently, CGMs have become much more accessible and affordable. And for people who aren't using insulin, CGMs are available without a prescription.

How CGMs Work

A CGM measures blood glucose with a sensor, worn under a small patch on the upper arm. Each sensor, which is worn continuously, needs to be replaced

after 7 to 15 days, depending upon the CGM model. While wearing a sensor, you can shower, exercise, sleep, and go about the rest of your day as usual. With some CGMs, you can also swim.

The sensor continually monitors blood sugar and transmits readings to a smartphone, smartwatch, or other digital device. Depending on the CGM brand and model, blood sugar may be checked every minute, every few minutes, or every 15 minutes. While wearing a CGM sensor, you can simply look at your smartphone or other monitoring device any time to check your blood sugar.

Why Use a CGM

For people with or without diabetes, a CGM is an educational tool that gives you a peek into the inner workings of your body.



Learning how foods, stresses, exercise, and sleep habits affect your blood sugar is invaluable information. From there, you can adjust these factors to your body's needs to improve your blood sugar and overall health.

As your health improves, your reaction to these same factors will change. Then, you can adjust your lifestyle again, probably in smaller ways. Athletes and fitness buffs who are not diabetic or prediabetic use CGMs to help them fine-tune their diet and exercise regimen.¹

Types of CGMs

Prescription CGMs: These are for diabetics who use insulin; they should be covered by Medicare or other insurance.

Until recently, without insurance, initial costs for a prescription CGM ranged from about \$250 to \$1,000 or more for a starter kit with a receiver and sensors for the first two months or so. After that, sensor prices have varied from around \$45 to \$60 each. But more recent prescription models can cost less: around \$150 to \$200 (FreeStyle Libre) and around \$50 per sensor. Health Savings Accounts and some Flexible Spending Accounts can be used for CGM costs.

Over-the-counter CGMs: Earlier this year, the FDA approved these two

CGMs, which work with a smartphone or smartwatch:

Stelo (www.stelo.com): For diabetics who do not use insulin, for people with prediabetes, and for those who want to track blood sugar to improve their health. Price is \$99 per month for two sensors or \$89 per month with a subscription. The app works with Apple and Android smartphones and smartwatches.

Lingo (www.hellolingo.com): For healthy people who do not have prediabetes or diabetes but want to track blood sugar to improve their health. One sensor, for two weeks' wear, costs \$49. As we go to press, the app is available only for iPhone.

¹ Klonoff, D.C., et al. "Use of Continuous Glucose Monitors by People Without Diabetes: An Idea Whose Time Has Come?" *J Diabetes Sci Technol*. 2023 Nov;17(6):1686-1697.

5 Important Reasons to Get Green **SUPER FOODS** Into Your Diet



Reason #1

You don't eat enough fruits and vegetables.

Eat your broccoli! Can you hear your mother say it? Sure, but do you really want to?

Getting the fresh vegetables you need every day for good health isn't easy, or fun.

Fruits are friendlier, but unless you're eating berries, you're getting too much sugar. Apples, bananas, oranges, grapes and melons are especially high in sugar. And too much sugar impacts your weight, your blood glucose, and your lipid profile.

And yet vegetables and berries are essential to good health. And that's why, today, many people are choosing Primal Labs' **Super Greens** nutrient drink.

This delicious raspberry-flavored powder mixes easily in water, or can be added to a smoothie. It's loaded with nutritious phytonutrients, alkalizing chlorophyll and free-radical-fighting antioxidants.

In less than one minute you get all the green nutrients you need for the day!

Reason #2

You want a healthier body chemistry

Did you know your body's natural pH is 7.4? That's slightly alkaline, which is exactly what your body needs for good health.

But your body's natural pH can come under assault from the typical Western diet, which leans acidic, with a pH between 5 and 6.9.

For example, red meats, deli turkey, sodas, grains and processed foods are all acidic foods. Alcoholic beverages are acidic, too. And even some cheeses are acidic.

It's not hard to choose foods that are almost all acidic, and that can push your natural pH levels down.

Super Greens nutritional drink comes to the rescue with its concentrated formula of alkalizing superfoods that provide essential phytonutrients, polyphenols, chlorophyll, live enzymes and several bioavailable vitamins and minerals.

All the nutrients in **Super Greens** support good health while maintaining the proper pH.

Reason #3

You want health-promoting Phytonutrients

Fruits and vegetables contain over 25,000 different phytonutrients, and up to 8,000 of them are antioxidants that fight the free radicals that contribute to aging.

More benefits on the next page! →



For Heart Health, Bone Health, Digestive Health and Brain Health - Get **Super Greens!**



Until recently, only a relatively small number of phytonutrients have been studied, but that's changing. And already many of these amazing nutrients are known to...

- Lift your energy
- Boost your immune system
- Fight cellular oxidation (aging)
- Improve your digestion
- Support eye and artery health

Plus...

- Promote brain health
- Nourish your skin, hair, and nails
- And fight food cravings!

Just a quick glance at these important benefits tells you that getting your phytonutrients is essential to good health. And now they're easy to get with Primal Labs' **Super Greens** nutrient drink.

Reason #4

You want a nutritious "greens drink" that tastes great

Maybe you've tried a greens drink before and found it to be "awful." I know what you mean. Some of them taste like blenderized grass clippings. And many of them are sickeningly over sweetened.

Super Greens is different. It contains a healthy berry blend that tastes like a refreshing raspberry drink. Make a smoothie with a couple of ice cubes and a scoop of your favorite yogurt, and it'll taste like dessert (incidentally, while most dairy is acidic, yogurt is alkaline).

Best of all, because it tastes so good, you'll love making **Super Greens** a regular part of your diet. And you may even want to have it more than once a day. Can you do that?

You sure can, there's no harm, only good.

Use **Super Greens** daily and you won't miss out on the important nutrients you'd get from fresh fruits and vegetables. For many folks, **Super Greens** is a convenient and delicious alternative.

Reason #5

You need to watch your weight

One of the biggest problems many of us have is nagging hunger pangs. That's when we reach for a candy bar. Or a bag of chips. Or a sugar-laden drink.

But that's too much sugar, and too many empty calories.

Here's the solution – mix up a glass of delicious **Super Greens!** It's refreshing. It's filling. It's loaded with green superfoods. And best of all, because it's lightly sweetened with stevia, it has ZERO sugar and only 20 calories per serving.

So, use **Super Greens** to support your heart health, bone health, digestive health and brain health. Use it to keep inflammatory responses normal. And also to support a healthy body chemistry that resists aging.

Considering that it's not always practical to get all the fruits and vegetables you need – **Super Greens** offers a convenient and great-tasting alternative.

Try it and see for yourself how much better you feel. Through this ad, you can get 15% OFF your order. And Primal Labs has an unbeatable 100% money-back guarantee. You must be happy or your money back. Period. So, give it a try on my recommendation. I know you'll be glad you did!



Order **Super Greens** at 15% Off
Today Through This Special Link:
www.PrimalSpecials.com/Greens

Health Benefits of Trees

A new study at the University of Louisville, in Kentucky, shows that trees do more than provide shade and enhance the look and feel of an area. They deliver a significant health benefit.

The university's Green Heart Louisville Project found that increasing the number of trees and shrubs in a neighborhood significantly lowers residents' levels of inflammation — a major risk factor for heart disease, diabetes, and other chronic illnesses.¹



Study Details

In 2018, researchers chose a four-square-mile area of south Louisville, where they measured air pollution and tree coverage, and tested health markers of 745 residents between the ages of 25 and 75. Blood, urine, hair, and nail samples were used to document health data.

Then, the research team partnered with other organizations and contractors to plant mature evergreen trees and shrubs in some, but not other, neighborhoods within the study area. By 2022, more than 8,400 trees and shrubs had been planted in designated areas. During the next two years, study participants' health markers were retested.

Here's what the study found: Compared to people whose neighborhoods did not receive new trees and shrubs, those in the greened neighborhoods had 13–20 percent lower levels of a key marker of chronic inflammation: high-sensitivity C-reactive protein (hs-CRP).

The reduction is significant. It's associated with a 10–15 percent lower risk of having a heart attack, getting cancer, or dying from any disease. And other research shows that nature reduces anxiety and enhances mood and overall well-being.

What To Do

This Louisville project enabled a *lot* of trees to be planted. As individuals, we don't have the power to suddenly transform our own neighborhoods. But, where possible, we can support community efforts to make our neighborhoods greener. And we can do our best to seek out and spend more time in nature.

If you aren't familiar with parks and hiking trails in your vicinity, it's never too late to learn about them and explore. Spend time in parks and green areas near your home, and for more outdoor adventures, check out the National Park Service website at www.nps.gov.

¹ Sears, C.G., et al. "The Effects of Neighborhood Greening on Inflammation in The Green Heart Project." ISEE 2024: 36th Annual Conference of the International Society of Environmental Epidemiology. 25 August 2024. ² Kaur, E., et al. "Arm Size Coverage of Popular Over-the-Counter Blood Pressure Devices and Implications in US Adults." Hypertension. 2024 Sep 5. doi: 10.1161/HYPERTENSIONAHA.124.23473. Online ahead of print. ³ Lo, C.-H., et al. "Association of Ultra-processed Food and Unprocessed or Minimally Processed Food Consumption With Bowel Habits Among U.S. Adults. Clin Gastroenterol Hepatol. 2024 May 15:S1542-3565(24)00448-8.

Blood Pressure Cuff Size

Most of today's blood pressure monitors are automated; you push a button and they inflate. Typically, they all come with the same-sized cuff. But a recent study has found that these cuffs don't fit more than 17 million American adults.² And if the cuff is the wrong size, your readings won't be accurate.

The study, by researchers at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in Baltimore, tested ten monitors that are popular on Amazon. Each of these came with only one cuff size, for arms that measure between 8.6 and 16.5 inches. Some manufacturers sell smaller or larger cuffs for an extra cost.

Readings will be falsely high with a cuff that's too small, and falsely low with one that's too big. Be sure to use a cuff that fits.

Foods and Constipation

You've probably heard that ultraprocessed foods are unhealthy. They contain industrial ingredients that you wouldn't find in nature or in a home kitchen, such as emulsifiers, gums, and various hard-to-pronounce chemical substances. These increase risk for high blood pressure, obesity, heart disease, diabetes, cancer, and more.

But that's not all. The latest study on the subject found that consuming ultraprocessed food more than doubles the odds of constipation, because it disrupts normal digestion.³

Olive Oil Tips

Extra virgin olive oil, best known as part of the Mediterranean diet, is a healthy fat that contains anti-inflammatory compounds and anti-



oxidants. As well as adding flavor to food, it helps to protect against heart disease, joint problems, brain deterioration, and cancer. And there are different ways to benefit.

Combined with vinegar or lemon juice, and perhaps herbs, it makes a healthy and tasty salad dressing. Drizzling it on cooked vegetables and adding some seasoning can turn bland dishes into delicious ones. But there's more.

Cooking With Extra Virgin Olive Oil

In discussions of cooking, we often hear about the smoke point of different oils, which is the temperature at which an oil begins to burn and smoke. This gives food an unpleasant, bitter flavor.

Olive oil is often dismissed as an oil to cook with because it has a lower smoke point than some other oils. For example, avocado, peanut, and refined coconut oil can

be used with high heat, for frying, stir frying, or broiling. However, extra virgin olive oil works well in medium or low heat — when sautéing or baking.

What's the difference between frying and sautéing? When frying, food is at least partially submerged in fat. Fried chicken is an example; it cooks in the fat. Olive oil is not a good fat in this case, because the temperature required to cook the food is too high.

Olive oil works well for sautéing, which requires lower temperatures. Sautéing uses less oil — just enough to coat the bottom of the pan to prevent sticking — and it gives the food a nice flavor. (Butter is another sautéing option, for a different flavor.)

Preserving Nutrients

Cooking will destroy some nutrients in olive oil. But there are ways to reduce the loss.

When Spanish researchers tested nutritional content of extra virgin olive oil before and after cooking in different ways, they found the higher the temperature, the more nutrients are degraded. How long a food cooks has a lesser effect.¹

In other words, you will preserve more nutrients in extra virgin olive oil if you sauté or bake at a lower temperature, even though you will probably need to let the food cook longer. The Spanish study concluded that the oil is still a healthy fat when used in cooking this way.

How you store olive oil also helps to preserve nutrients. There's no need to keep it in the fridge if you're going to use it within a month or so. Olive oil starts to become somewhat solid when chilled because it contains some saturated fat, and you will need to let it warm up to room temperature each time you take it out of the fridge. But this is unnecessary for everyday use.

Keep olive oil in a cool place — not by or above the stove. And it's best to choose a product in a dark bottle or keep it in a cupboard, away from light. Rancid olive oil has a strong, unpleasant taste and smell, which people have compared to chemicals, plastic, crayons, old walnuts, or putty. Don't eat rancid olive oil

If you're cooking with vegetable or corn oil — both of which are inflammatory — extra virgin olive oil is a better option for anything that doesn't require high heat. And the olive oil is much more versatile.

Gum Disease and Diabetes Complications

Gum disease increases risk for diabetes and diabetes complications, such as diabetic neuropathy and vision problems. At the same time, type 2 diabetes increases the risk for gum disease: gum inflammation that, left untreated, is the most common cause of tooth loss. The link is so strong that a group of Danish researchers recently suggested that where one condition is present, the

other should also be checked for and addressed.²

Whether you have type 2 diabetes or not, if you have sore or bleeding gums, or haven't seen a dentist in years, make it a point to get your mouth examined. For keeping your teeth healthy, I describe a very effective protocol in an earlier issue of this newsletter: Volume 3, Issue 10, *The 5 Simple Steps to Healthy Teeth and Gums*.

¹ Lozano-Castell n, J., et al. "Domestic Sautéing with EVOO: Change in the Phenolic Profile." *Antioxidants (Basel)*. 2020 Jan 16;9(1):77. ² Bitencourt, F.V., et al. "Periodontitis and Diabetes Complications: A Danish Population-Based Study." *J Dent Res*. 2024 Aug;103(9):870-877.

Q&A

Q: I have been taking a blood-pressure medication and recently started to also take some supplements to lower blood pressure. Since starting the supplements, my blood pressure has gradually been dropping, but I also got dizzy, so I stopped taking the supplements. What should I do? — Amy J.

A: Although I can't give you a medical diagnosis, your blood pressure may be improving as a result of the supplements, and your drug dosage may need to be adjusted by your doctor.

I am not telling you to stop the medication. Rather, I recommend that you bring your blood pressure readings and notes about dizziness to your prescribing doctor. If you have experienced any other improvement or made any changes in diet or exercise, your doctor should know that, too.

With your current information in hand, your doctor can determine the best option. Keep in mind that the average patient who takes a blood pressure medication doesn't make any changes in their life, and their overall health does not improve. You are a happy exception, and your doctor should be happy to help you.

Q: You recommend eating every three hours, but I can't do that when I'm at work. Is there an alternative to eating every three hours? — Monty B.

A: Yes, there are things you can do. But first, I want to review why I recommend eating that often. With the typical American diet that is too high in carbs, blood sugar rises sharply after eating and then crashes within the next few hours. The blood-sugar crash can lead to low energy, brain fog, or irritability, along with cravings, especially for high-carb and sugary foods or drinks.

More carbs or sugar make the cycle repeat. Over time, this leads to various health maladies that afflict many people, such as prediabetes, diabetes, weight gain, and chronic inflammation.

The trick to breaking this cycle is to eat in a way that leads to more stable blood sugar. This requires eating low-carb meals with enough fat to keep you satiated and eating often enough.

Eating every three hours works well for most people. However, I've occasionally had patients who needed to eat every 90 minutes for 6 weeks before their blood sugar became stabilized enough for them to eat less often.

Gradually, they extended the time between meals and snacks. Now, they just eat three meals a day without experiencing low energy, moodiness, or brain fog because they no longer have drops in blood sugar that were causing those symptoms. Many people who follow my approach don't need to eat between meals once their blood sugar has stabilized, but it's an essential step to reach that point.

If you eat fewer carbs and more fat at each meal, then your blood sugar becomes steadier for longer

periods of time. For example, you can add butter or cheese to cooked vegetables — use full-fat cheese. If you drink protein shakes, add some peanut butter. If you eat oatmeal in the morning, add some MCT oil or powder to it. MCT powder can be added to any food. (See page 6 in this issue for more information about MCT oil.)

You can also add fat to beverages. If you drink coffee, for example, avoid low-fat or nonfat milk as well as sugary syrups that add flavors. Instead, use full-fat milk, half-and-half, or a touch of heavy whipping cream, or try adding MCT oil or powder, coconut oil, or coconut cream. If you want sweetness, try stevia, which is available in plain and flavored liquid versions.

In other words, low-carb meals with some fat can help to tide you over to your next meal. In addition, if you get enough sleep and some regular, moderate exercise, you should be able to maintain stable energy while eating less often.

Do you have a question for Dr. Marlene?

Send your health-related questions to drmarlene@naturalhealthconnections.com. Please include your first name and the initial of your last name. Although she cannot answer each question directly, Dr. Marlene will select a few in each newsletter and will address other questions and concerns in articles in future issues. Answers are intended for educational purposes only and should not be viewed as medical advice. If you need help with your subscription or have questions about Primal Health supplements, email support@primalhealthlp.com or call 877-300-7849.