

# HealthWords <sup>for</sup> Women<sup>®</sup>

WINTER 2005 • VOLUME 14, ISSUE 4 • P.M. EDITION

www.mercycenterville.org

## Mighty munchies

In a snack rut? Eating the same snacks each day can be just as unsatisfying as eating the same meals. Avoid boredom by choosing from a variety of treats, such as:

- ✓ a brown-rice cake with almond butter and jam
- ✓ baked tortilla chips with black-bean dip
- ✓ a baked apple topped with low-fat yogurt
- ✓ a deviled egg made with low-fat mayonnaise
- ✓ low-fat tuna salad on a rice cake or half a toasted mini-bagel
- ✓ raw cashews and tomato juice
- ✓ frozen low-fat yogurt sprinkled with fresh berries
- ✓ a heated corn tortilla sprinkled with low-fat cheddar or Monterey Jack cheese
- ✓ a mini-pizza made from half a toasted English muffin, tomato sauce, mozzarella and oregano
- ✓ a fat-free or sugar-free chocolate pudding cup with low-fat whipped topping
- ✓ warmed whole-grain French bread with store-bought bruschetta
- ✓ an oven-baked pretzel with gourmet mustard
- ✓ whole-wheat fig bars with a cup of low-fat cocoa
- ✓ Brie or Camembert cheese with pear or apple slices
- ✓ a fruit-and-yogurt smoothie

## Smart snacking

Satisfy your hunger with healthy choices

It's 4 p.m. and you have an urge to nibble. Go ahead! You have permission to snack. Gone are the days of getting by on three squares. Many nutrition experts recommend that adults eat three meals and up to three snacks a day, depending on their activity level.

Why snack? Eating small portions of good-for-you foods can help you reduce or maintain your weight and get the nutrients your body needs. Plus, spreading your calories over the day limits blood sugar swings, which helps control hunger and benefits people with diabetes or insulin resistance.



Bridging the between-meal gap with smart food choices allows you to:

- avoid overeating at your next meal—a light bite mid-morning helps you forgo chips and cookies at lunch
- avoid or lessen cravings—a healthy nosh at 3 p.m. can beat that 4 p.m. desire for sweets
- keep your energy up—well-timed snacks prevent fatigue that results from blood sugar dips
- keep your mind alert—steady blood sugar levels help you stay focused
- save money—a satisfying, well-timed snack helps you avoid

unplanned visits to the vending machine, convenience store or fast-food restaurant

### Facts about snacks

But snacking can be a two-edged sword. Snacks can put you over your daily calorie limit, causing weight gain. You can also wind up filling your body with poor food choices. A donut, for example, may  
*(continued on page 2)*

*For more information, contact*

*Susan Schrader at*

**641-437-1975 or**

**sshneider@mercydesmoines.org.**

**4 Protect yourself from cervical cancer**

**7 The weather and your health**

## Smart snacking (continued from page 1)

give you a short-lived energy pick-up but ultimately leave you feeling drained.

You can snack smartly by:

- **Planning ahead.** Prepare healthy snacks and keep them where you need them—at home, at work, in your car or in your gym bag.

- **Eating mindfully.** Take a break from what you're doing to enjoy your snack. Avoid dipping into the chips while you're watching TV, surfing the Internet or doing chores when you may not be paying full attention to the amount of food you're eating.

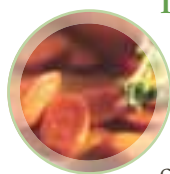
Read on to learn about common snack mistakes and how to avoid them.

### **Mistake: Eating what you crave.**

Grabbing a chocolate bar or a handful of cookies may net you a few hundred calories, extra fat and sugar and crank up your desire for more sweets.

### **Better way: Fill your nutrient needs.**

Use snacks to get the vegetables, fruits, dairy or whole grains that protect your body from disease and help it run efficiently.



**Try:** Raw carrots or red-pepper strips dipped in hummus, string cheese with pizza sauce or fruit with a slice of cheddar.

## A bad mix: Sugary snacks and your teeth

Sugary snacks feed bacteria in the mouth that can cause tooth decay. Brush your teeth with toothpaste after eating snacks, especially after you've enjoyed a chewy treat. Better yet, try to avoid high-sugar snacks altogether and go for a more healthful treat like a banana dipped in sugar-free cocoa mix to satisfy a sweet tooth.

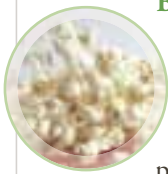
**Mistake: Thinking calories don't count.** Smaller or sedentary people can't eat the same number of calories that larger or more active people can.

**Better way: Snack within your daily calorie budget.** Big meals plus big snacks can lead to a big waistline. Downsize meals a bit so you can enjoy your snacks.

**Try:** An apple and a spoonful of peanut butter or a small granola bar. If you're struggling to lose weight or maintain it, consult with a dietitian or nutritionist to learn how many calories you need a day or consider joining a weight-loss group that will help you determine the number of servings you should eat each day.

### **Mistake: Snacking on protein to avoid gaining weight.**

Snacking on a bunless cheeseburger in addition to consuming your normal fare will load your body with calories and saturated fat.

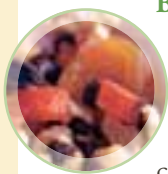


### **Better way: Go for a healthier blend of nutrients your body needs.**

**Try:** A few cups of air-popped popcorn with some vegetable juice or tomato juice spiked with Worcestershire sauce, Tabasco sauce and lemon juice—you'll get a serving of whole grains plus vitamin C and lycopene, a cancer-fighting antioxidant.

### **Mistake: Thinking natural or organic snacks always make good snack choices.**

Snacks labeled natural or organic, such as granola bars, chips or bakery goods, may still be loaded with sodium, sugars and empty calories plus few, if any, nutrients.



### **Better way: Check nutrition labels to see what you're getting.**

**Try:** A handful of nuts with a few dried apricots or nachos made from baked tortilla chips, salsa, canned

black beans and a sprinkle of shredded low-fat cheese.

**Mistake: Never letting yourself indulge.** Sometimes raw carrots out of a sandwich bag just don't satisfy.



### **Better way: Plan ahead to have an occasional indulgence.**

Keeping calories in mind, budget in a small treat. Think about what you crave the most—saltiness, sweetness, crunch—and take the time to savor it.

**Try:** A cup of low-fat chocolate ice cream, a single-serving bag of baked potato chips with low-fat dip or a thin slice of veggie-topped pizza.

### **Mistake: Not eating after dinner.**

If late-night TV or a good book usually keeps you up past midnight, you may be asking for trouble if your last meal was at 6 p.m.

**Better way:** Allot some of your daily calories for a planned treat around 9 p.m.—otherwise, you may surrender to the chocolate-chip ice cream by 11.

**Try:** A *small* bowl of cereal and milk, low-fat yogurt and berries or two whole-grain crackers with low-fat cheese.



### **Find what works for you**

Beware of store-bought cookie or cracker snack packs, which often contain hydrogenated oils or high-fructose corn syrup. Make your own snack packs using more healthful food choices like low-salt pretzels, crunchy whole-grain cereal and a few chocolate chips. Tack on your refrigerator a list of snack options, working with food choices that suit *you*. For example, frozen grapes may leave you feeling deprived, while a mug of low-sodium soup dusted with Parmesan cheese may satisfy you. Once you tune into your own taste buds, you may find losing or maintaining your weight is easier than ever. ●

# Back pain: Don't take it lying down

**A**ching back? Join the club. Four out of five adults say they've been brought down by back pain at some point during their lives. In fact, low-back pain, the most common form, is one of the top five reasons Americans see their doctors.

Low-back pain can have many causes, including poor posture, excess weight, mental stress that leads to muscle tension, muscle strain, a torn ligament or a slipped disk. Your back is especially susceptible to injury because it bears more weight than any other part of your body. What's more, doctors can't always determine the reason for backache or injury since a combination of several factors is often the cause.

An active lifestyle, which includes exercising to strengthen your back, is your best bet when it comes to preventing low-back problems. If you already suffer from chronic back pain, exercise can help prevent discomfort or recurring injuries by helping you build a stronger, more supple back, improve your posture and get rid of excess weight.

## When lower back pain strikes

Since even getting up each morning can be agonizing when you're suffering from back pain, you may be tempted to stay in bed until the pain subsides. A day or two of rest, nonprescription pain relievers and cold and warm compresses can help ease spasms, pain and inflammation. But prolonged bed rest can delay relief. Usually, light activity will help speed recovery. However, if your back pain lasts longer than 72 hours, see your doctor. He or she can prescribe medications such as

nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs and muscle relaxants. If pain persists, he or she may give you a cortisone injection for relief. Massage therapy and acupuncture have also been shown to help relieve chronic low-back pain for some people.

## Stand tall

Regular exercise is crucial for maintaining good posture and back health and for strengthening an already-achy back. Chronic lower back pain sufferers should ask their health-care providers to help them develop a safe exercise program. Your workouts should include:

- aerobic exercises like swimming and walking to stretch and strengthen your lower back muscles
- strength training and flexibility exercises for making your back more durable
- exercises that target and strengthen your abdominal muscles, since weak abs can place extra stress on your lower back

In addition, eat a healthful diet to help you shed any extra pounds that may be adding strain to your back. Also, don't smoke—smokers tend to have lower levels of oxygen in their spinal tissue, which slows recovery from back problems.

To avoid injuring your back, follow these simple everyday precautions:

- Lift objects with your legs, not with your lower back. Don't twist while lifting. As you lift, hold the object you're lifting close to your body.
- Try to perform any heavy lifting late in the day instead of first thing in the morning when your



## Signs you need to see your doctor

How do you know whether you have a backache that will respond to self-care or that needs medical attention? Call your doctor if:

- pain is intense, travels down your leg or prevents you from moving
- your leg, foot, groin or rectal area feels numb
- you have fever, nausea or vomiting, stomachache, weakness or sweating
- an injury caused your pain
- your pain hasn't lessened after two to three weeks
- you've had past episodes of back pain

back is not as flexible.

- Sit with your lower back properly supported. If you must sit for long periods of time, try to get up and walk around frequently.

- Improve your posture. Don't slouch—keep your head and neck aligned over your shoulders and hips and your stomach pulled in. ●

**C**ancer of the cervix can strike women at almost any time, but it usually appears between ages 35 and 55. More than 20 percent of cervical cancer cases are diagnosed in women older than 65.

The cancer develops when cells on the cervix—the necklike opening that connects the uterus to the vagina—undergo abnormal changes and begin to grow out of control. Fortunately, cervical cancer is a slow-growing disease. More than 90 percent of the time, precancerous changes are detected during a Pap test and can be successfully treated to stop cancer before it has fully developed. That’s why it’s critical to follow screening guidelines for the disease.

### Preventing precancers

About 95 percent of cervical cancer cases occur as a result of exposure to a sexually transmitted disease called the human papillomavirus (HPV). Although HPV often goes away on its own without treatment, it can lead to precancerous changes. Since the virus doesn’t always cause warts or other signs, women can have HPV without knowing it.

In recent studies, vaccines to immunize women against HPV have been shown to be effective and may be on the market as early as next year, pending U.S. Food and Drug Administration approval. However, women should continue to limit exposure to HPV by delaying inter-

### Suspicious symptoms

While many women with cervical cancer experience no signs of the disease, some women do report symptoms. Schedule an appointment with your doctor if you notice any of these conditions:

- unusual discharge
- spotting or bleeding between periods
- bleeding and pain during intercourse
- bleeding following intercourse



# Cervical cancer

Protect yourself with a Pap test

course when they’re young and limiting their number of partners.

Women who smoke are twice as likely as nonsmoking women to get cervical cancer. Other risk factors for the disease include:

- chlamydia infection
- human immunodeficiency virus
- a diet low in fruits and vegetables
- excess weight
- long-term use of oral contraceptives (five years or more)
- seven or more full-term pregnancies
- low socioeconomic status
- a family history of cervical cancer
- being the daughter of a mother who took the hormonal drug diethylstilbestrol (DES) while she was pregnant with her

### Detecting and treating precancers and cancer

Women with early cervical cancer or precancers usually don’t experience symptoms, so doctors rely on the Pap test to screen for suspicious cell changes. A Pap test is performed during a routine pelvic exam. Your

doctor scrapes or brushes a sample of cells from your cervix and sends them to a lab. If the results show an ambiguous or minor abnormality, your doctor will probably instruct you to repeat the test in several months. In most cases, the repeat test will show a normal result.

In some cases, depending on the abnormality found, a doctor may order tests such as a biopsy or endocervical curettage in which cells are scraped from the endocervical canal to find out whether precancerous cells or cancer is present. Women older than age 30 may also be given an HPV DNA test to determine if they have the virus.

*Preinvasive cervical cancer* occurs when precancers are confined to the cervical lining’s first layer. Abnormal tissue can be removed in the doctor’s office or hospital. Doctors can destroy precancerous cells by freezing them with liquid nitrogen (cryosurgery) or burning them off with a laser.

When *invasive cervical cancer* is confined to the cervix, doctors treat



## Cervical cancer rates vary across the country

Cervical cancer rates are highest in areas where low-income, poorly educated women are less likely to have easy access to health-care services, according to a recent report from the National Cancer Institute. Women most at risk for dying from the disease are African-American women in the south, women living along the Mexican border, white women in Appalachia, American Indians in the Northern Plains, Vietnamese-American women and Alaska natives.

- Women in all age groups who have risk factors for cervical cancer, such as HIV infection or a weakened immune system, should continue to be tested yearly.
- Women over age 30 have another alternative—to get tested every three years (but not more frequently) with the Pap test *plus* the HPV DNA test.
- Women ages 70 and up who have had three or more normal Pap tests in a row and no abnormal Pap test results in the last 10 years may choose to stop screening. Women in this age group who have risk factors should continue to be screened as long as they are in good health.
- Women who have had a total hysterectomy (removal of the uterus and cervix) may stop getting tested unless the surgery was performed to treat cervical cancer or precancer.

Thanks to earlier detection and treatment, death rates due to cervical cancer dropped 74 percent between 1955 and 1992. Still, an estimated 3,700 American women will die from the disease this year. Getting a regular Pap smear is the best way to avoid becoming a statistic. ●

it using hysterectomy or radiation therapy. When it spreads to other parts of the body, doctors order diagnostic tests such as magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) or computed tomography (CT) scans to determine how large the cancer is and how far it's spread. Surgery (including hysterectomy), radiation, chemotherapy or any combination of these may be used.

### Screening guidelines

The American Cancer Society recommends women follow these guidelines:

- All women should begin cervical cancer testing about three years after they begin having intercourse, but no later than when they are 21 years old. Testing should be done every year with a regular Pap test or every two years using the newer liquid-based Pap test.
- Beginning at age 30, women who have had three normal Pap test results in a row may be tested every two to three years with either the regular or newer liquid-based Pap test.

## The Pap test: What to expect

During a pelvic exam, your doctor takes a small sample of cells from your cervix. The procedure, performed in a doctor's office, clinic or hospital, takes seconds and is only mildly uncomfortable.

According to the National Cancer Institute, a woman should have the Pap test performed when she isn't menstruating—between 10 and 20 days after the first day of her last menstrual period.

To obtain more accurate test results:

- Don't douche or have intercourse for 48 hours before the test.
- Don't use tampons, foams, jellies or other vaginal creams or vaginal medications for 48 hours before the test.

Your doctor puts the cell sample either onto a glass microscope slide or into a preservative solution and sends it to a lab. The liquid-based Pap test, although more expensive, prevents cells from drying out and allows for more accurate detection of cancers and precancers. Technologists inspect samples or use computerized instruments to spot abnormal cells.

Roughly 55 million Pap tests are performed in the United States each year. About 6 percent of these (3.5 million) are abnormal and require a medical follow-up. ●

## HealthWords for Women

Your complimentary  
issue is presented by  
Mercy Medical Center—  
Centerville.

**T**he bad news first: You tend to become less flexible as you age. Joints stiffen so you can't move as easily as you used to. The good news: You can maintain (and even regain) your flexibility with exercises to improve your range of motion. And that can make you feel years younger at any age!

### How's your ROM?

Range of motion (ROM) is the normal amount your joints can move in certain directions. Unless you've been performing yoga the past 30 years, you could probably manage a much better front split when you were 7 years old than you

can today. That's because your hips' ROM has decreased over the years.

But other things affect your ROM, too, such as arthritis, surgery, injury or physical inactivity.

When you perform a ROM exercise, you work at increasing the normal amount your joints can move. Why is that important? Because improving the flexibility in your joints helps you:

- slow down the progression of arthritis
- reduce stiffness that makes it harder for you to perform daily activities
- keep joints flexible and pain-free
- improve your circulation by

increasing blood flow to your muscles

- enhance your coordination and balance, making you less likely to fall
- relieve stress by relaxing tight muscles
- improve and maintain good posture
- reduce your chance of injury during physical activity

### Improve your flexibility

Do these gentle exercises once a day to improve the ROM in your ankles, hips and shoulders. You may find that walking, climbing stairs, exercising and simply reaching overhead become a lot more comfortable.

If you have arthritis or any other chronic medical condition, get your doctor's OK before performing new exercises. Warm up by walking while pumping your arms for five minutes. Perform each movement below up to 10 times, slowly and without bouncing. Stop if you feel pain.

#### Ankles

Sit on a sturdy chair with your feet flat on the floor. Slowly lift your toes as high as possible while keeping your heels on the floor. Then return your toes to the floor and lift your heels up as high as possible. Repeat.

#### Hips

Lie on your back with your legs straight and about six inches apart, toes pointing upwards. Slide one leg out to the side as far as you can comfortably go, then return, keeping your toes pointed to the ceiling. Repeat with the other leg.

#### Shoulders

Lie on your back, arms alongside your torso. Raise one arm over your head, keeping your elbow straight and your arm close to your ear. Return your arm slowly to your side. Repeat with your other arm. ●

# How young are your joints?

Range-of-motion exercises can keep them limber





# The weather and your health

## What's the connection?

“Close that window. You’ll catch a cold!” Most of us grew up hearing advice like this. But can you really catch a cold from cold weather? Can achy joints predict a storm?

Some people have pretty fixed ideas about how weather affects them, although scientists haven’t always reached the same conclusions. Some notions don’t stand up. Others make sense.

Here are three common beliefs about the weather and your health and the truth behind them.

• **You’re more likely to catch a cold when you’re out in the cold.** The common cold has nothing to do with cold weather. Viral infections cause colds, so you’d have to make contact with a sick person to

catch a cold. However, viruses that cause colds tend to be more active during the winter, so it may seem as if you catch more colds when it’s cold out.

• **If you have arthritis, you’ll do better in a warm climate.**

Some people swear they ache less and move more easily in hot climates. Others say humidity triggers their joint pain. Recent studies show that a drop in barometric pressure causes the most discomfort for people with arthritis—which could explain why you feel discomfort in your joints when a big storm’s coming. Changes in pressure also seem to trigger headaches and migraines in some, along with more serious maladies.

• **You’re more likely to have a heart attack when the outdoor temperature is cold.**

People often blame the cold or snow for winter heart attacks. But scientists have found that many heart attacks occur soon after dramatic drops in air pressure that accompany storms. A greater variation in atmospheric pressure during the winter than in other seasons may be why the winter months are hardest on the heart. ●

## Strange but true

Some people are allergic to cold weather, suffering from cold-induced hives, a condition called urticaria. Frosty temperatures trigger a release of chemicals called histamines in the skin of these cold-sensitive people, triggering redness, itching, hives and swelling.

# health wise

*Do you know what's best for your body? Take this quiz to test your knowledge of health, nutrition and fitness.*

- 1) Problems with your walking style, or gait, can lead to:**
  - a. back and kneecap pain
  - b. a sore Achilles tendon
  - c. leg cramps
  - d. all of the above
- 2) If you experience persistent shivering while outside in cold weather, you should:**
  - a. ignore it—it’s normal
  - b. return indoors
  - c. look for changes in skin color
  - d. rub skin to reduce shivering
- 3) Which statement is *not* true about trans fats:**
  - a. Trans fats are found naturally in animal foods.
  - b. Trans fats are found in many snack foods and fried foods.
  - c. Trans fats increase LDL (bad) cholesterol, increasing heart disease risk.
  - d. Trans fats is another name for saturated fats.
- 4) Having low blood levels of HDL (good) cholesterol, high blood levels of triglycerides and type 2 diabetes increase a woman’s chance of suffering from:**
  - a. stroke
  - b. heart disease
  - c. chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder
  - d. leukemia
- 5) If you experience an intense, steady ache in your upper middle or upper right abdomen, along with nausea, you may be having a:**
  - a. panic attack
  - b. bladder infection
  - c. gallbladder attack
  - d. liver disorder

# Try this healthy whole-grain snack

**S**tore-bought pita crisps can't compare to these flavor-packed wedges. Store these healthy, low-cost crisps for up to a week in an airtight container or longer in a plastic freezer bag. Enjoy them alone or with your favorite dip at snack time or serve them with a mealtime soup or salad.

## PITA CRISPS

*Serves 18; 2 wedges per serving*

- 3 6-inch whole-wheat pita breads
- ¼ cup very finely snipped fresh parsley
- 2 green onions, finely chopped
- 1 tsp. olive oil
- ¾ tsp. dried basil, crumbled
- ½ tsp. dried rosemary, crushed
- 1 medium clove garlic, minced, or ½ tsp. bottled minced garlic
- olive oil spray
- 2 tbsp. grated Parmesan cheese

Preheat oven to 350°. Separate each pita bread into two round single layers. In a small bowl, combine parsley, green onions, olive oil, basil, rosemary and garlic. Stir well. Spread mixture evenly over pita breads. Lightly spray tops with olive oil spray, then sprinkle with Parmesan cheese. Cut each pita bread half into six wedges. Bake on an ungreased baking sheet for 12 minutes, or until crisp. Serve warm.

*Per serving: 27 calories; 1 g protein;*

*5 g carbohydrates; 1 mg cholesterol; 1 g total fat (0 g saturated, 0 g polyunsaturated, 0 g monounsaturated); 1 g fiber; 42 mg sodium.*

---

*Reprinted with permission from The New American Heart Association Cookbook, Sixth Edition, Copyright © 2001. Published by Clarkson Potter/Publishers, a division of Random House, Inc. Available from booksellers everywhere.*

## HealthWords for Women

is provided as a community service from  
**MERCY MEDICAL CENTER—CENTERVILLE**  
**1 St. Joseph's Drive, Centerville, IA**  
**641-437-4111**

Clint J. Christianson,  
President & CEO

Ann E. Young,  
Vice President,  
Community & Staff Relations

Mercy Medical Center—Centerville  
1 St. Joseph's Drive  
Centerville, IA 52544

**NON PROFIT**

U.S. POSTAGE

**PAID**

Lebanon Junction, KY  
PERMIT NO. 115