

Healthy workplace

Your monthly Anthem wellness newsletter



Back Pain

At some point in our lives, most of us will suffer from back pain. It can be caused by something as small as sleeping in a strange position, or it can be from something more serious like an accident or injury. With 63% of Americans now overweight or obese, back pain is on the rise due to the strain of that excess weight on the body. Back pain is one of the most common reasons people visit a doctor or miss work.

How to avoid problems

Fortunately, there are things you can do to help with back pain:

- Exercise on a regular basis to increase muscle strength and balance. Add total body strength training; a strong core can help prevent injury
- Use good posture and stay at a healthy body weight
- Eat a healthy diet with plenty of calcium and vitamin D to strengthen your spine. This also helps prevent osteoporosis (a thinning of bone tissue and loss of bone density over time)
- Be careful when lifting heavy objects. Be sure to support your back by keeping it straight when you have to lift heavy objects and always lift with your leg muscles
- Don't smoke. Smoking restricts blood flow to the discs that cushion your vertebrae, lowers calcium absorption and prevents new bone growth
- Moderation! Don't be a weekend warrior with sports or overdo it with chores around the house
- Try to lower the stress in your life

When is back pain serious?

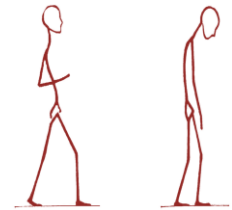
Most back pain goes away on its own with the right exercise and preventive steps, but some back pain may be a sign of other health problems. Be sure to talk to your doctor if:

- Pain goes down your leg below your knee
- Your leg, foot, groin or rectal area feels numb

- You have fever, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, weakness or sweating
- You lose control over going to the bathroom
- Your pain was caused by an injury
- Your pain is so intense you can't move around

Posture

Posture isn't just about how you look. How you position yourself can help or hurt your health over your lifetime.



Years of slouching wears away at your spine to make it more fragile and prone to injury. Holding your body and moving in unhealthy ways often leads to neck, shoulder, and back pain. In any 3-month period, about 1 in 4 adults in the U.S. has at least 1 day of back pain. Poor posture can also decrease your flexibility, how well your joints move, and your balance. It can impact your ability to do things for yourself and increase your risk for falls. Slumped posture can even make it more difficult to digest the food you eat and breathe comfortably.

There are several things you can do to improve and maintain your posture

- Be mindful of your posture during everyday activity like watching TV, washing the dishes, or walking
- Take frequent breaks for stretching and moving your body in different ways
- Stay active
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Make sure work surfaces are at a comfortable height for you, whether you're working in an office, doing a hobby, preparing dinner, or eating a meal
- Wear comfortable, low heeled shoes

Source: "Getting It Straight: Improve Your Posture for Better Health" NIH News In Health, August 201

Prescriptions for Creating a Healthy Brain

By Daniel G. Amen, MD

Knowing how to care for your brain and the brains in your family or organization is the first and most important step to success, in any thing you do. Your brain is the most complex, mind-blowing organ in the universe. A piece of brain tissue the size of a grain of sand contains 100,000 neurons and 1 billion synapses, all “talking” to one another. If you don’t take care of your brain, you lose on average 85,000 brain cells a day. That is what causes aging. With appropriate forethought, however, you can reverse that trend and dramatically slow the aging process and increase your mental agility. Here are prescriptions to optimize it for a better life in all you do.



Love Your Brain

Loving your brain is the first step toward creating a brain healthy life. Avoid things that hurt your brain, such as brain injuries, drug and alcohol abuse, chronic stress, smoking, and obesity. And engage in regular brain healthy habits, such as great nutrition, sleep, exercise, new learning, and taking some simple supplements like fish oil.

Increase the Brain’s Reserve

Have you ever wondered why certain stresses or injuries affect some people and not others? Brain reserve is the cushion of healthy brain tissue we have to deal with the unexpected stresses that come our way. The more reserve we have, the more resilient we are in times of trouble. The less reserve, the more vulnerable we are. The exciting news is that it is never too late to work on increasing your brain’s reserve. The rest of these prescriptions will be geared toward increasing your brain’s reserve.

Protect Your Brain

Your brain is soft and your skull is hard. Brain injuries can ruin your life so wear your seat belt, drive in safe vehicles, don’t hit soccer balls with your head, and stay off the roof. One of the most common brain injuries in men over 40 is falling off the roof.

Stop Poisoning Your Brain

Do not put toxic substances in your body. If you poison your brain you poison your mind! Limit alcohol, illegal drugs, including marijuana, quit smoking, limit your caffeine

intake, and stop using cleaning products without good ventilation.

Protect Your Memory

It is critical to take early memory problems seriously and not just dismiss them as normal aging. According to a study from UCLA 95% of people with Alzheimer’s disease are not diagnosed until they are in the moderate to severe stages of the disorder, when not much can be done.

One of the MOST important things you can do to keep your memory strong is exercise because cognitive abilities are best in people who are physically active. There are also a number of supplements that have good supporting research for memory including fish oil, ginkgo biloba, sage and a Chinese moss extract called huperazine.

Good Sleep Is Essential to the Health of Your Brain

Unfortunately, 60 million Americans have trouble sleeping, which affects their moods, memory and ability to concentrate. It is estimated that sleep deprived people cause more accidents than drunk drivers. Because of our sleep problems doctors are prescribing sleep medications that can affect your moods and memory at alarming rates. Look to eliminate anything that may interfere with sleep, such as caffeine, alcohol or surfing social media before bed time. Develop a night time ritual such as:



- Meditating
- Take a hot bath with essential oils
- Journal
- Turn down all technology
- Try supplements such as melatonin and powered magnesium
- Engage in light stretching
- Dim the lights
- Read

Learn Brain Healthy Ways to Deal with Pain

Pain is one of the most frightening symptoms that we can have. Chronic pain affects everything in a negative way, such as sleep, mood, memory and concentration. Scans at the Amen Clinic have shown that the use of chronic pain medications, such as Vicodin or Oxycontin, may be harmful to brain function. Long term use of these medications makes the brain look like people who drink too much. Research shows that there are a number of alternative and natural treatments for pain such as fish oil, acupuncture, music therapy and hypnosis. Removing artificial sweeteners from your diet may also help. Of course, you should talk to your doctor.

You Need a Brain Healthy Diet

Incorporate lean protein, such as turkey or chicken, low glycemic, high fiber carbohydrates (carbohydrates high in fiber that do not raise your blood sugar) such as whole grains and green leafy vegetables, and healthy fats that contain omega three fatty acids, found in foods such as tuna, salmon, avocados and walnuts. Since the brain is 85% water, make sure to drink plenty of water to keep your self-hydrated. Anything that dehydrates you is bad for the brain, such as alcohol, caffeine, excess salt or not drinking enough fluids.

Physical Exercise

Physical activity is critical for brain health because it boosts blood flow to the brain, plus it increases chemicals that are important for learning, memory and stimulating the growth of new brain cells. Thirty minutes 3 or 4 times a week is all you need. If you don't know what to do, walk fast, like you're late.

Mental Exercise

Once you exercise and boost blood flow to your brain, you then need mental exercise. In one study of lab rats, exercise was found to generate new cells in the learning and memory centers of the brain. These new cells lasted for about four weeks. If they were not stimulated by new learning they died off. If you stimulate new brain cells by using them, by learning something new, they connect to other cells and become part of the fabric of your brain. Crossword puzzles, learning to dance, physical exercise, learning a musical instrument and exploring a new country or a new language are great mental exercises.



Notice What You Love about Your Life, a Lot More Than What You Don't.

Dr. Amen and psychologist Noelle Nelson performed a study on the power of appreciation. When looking at a woman's brain scan when she was focused on what she loved about her life, and then again while she focused on what she hated about her life, they noted a significant difference. The loving scan looked healthy, while the hateful scan showed decreased activity in several important areas of her brain, involving emotions and memory. Other studies too have found that focusing on negative thoughts changes the brain in a negative way. Creativity, learning, and imagination all go down with negative emotion. Although, while focusing on positive, happy, hopeful thoughts helps both the brain and you work better.

3 Quick Steps to Stop Negative Thinking



We live in a world where we are constantly bombarded with fear and bad news that triggers our automatic negative thinking—**ANTs!** In fact, our brains are wired to focus on the negative in order to avoid things that might hurt us. Fear definitely serves a purpose, but what happens when all we seem to focus on are negative thoughts? Take a look at these compelling facts:

- Every thought you have releases chemicals in the brain.
- Hopeful thoughts release chemicals that help you feel happy and calm
- Negative thoughts release chemicals that make you feel stressed and sad.
- If what you bring your attention to determines how you feel and act, focusing too much on negative thoughts can lead to destructive behaviors—behaviors that can ruin your important relationships and ruin your mind.

You can learn how to kill your automatic negative thoughts (ANTs) and focus on the positive in three easy steps

1. **Write it down.** When those automatic negative thoughts start tumbling around in your mind, write them down to clearly identify them.
2. **Investigate.** Ask yourself, are these thoughts even true? Uninvestigated thoughts can lead us to act in harmful ways.
3. **Talk back.** If you discover that these negative thoughts are false, talk back to them! Tell these thoughts you know they aren't true!

Practice these steps each time you feel automatic thoughts entering your brain.

Source: Dr. Daniel Amen: <http://danielamenmd.com/3-quick-steps-to-stop-negative-thinking-now/>

Breast Cancer Awareness Month



Breast cancer can't be prevented, but there are ways to protect your overall health and assess your personal breast cancer risk.

Know your risk: Talk to your doctor and talk to your family to find out if anyone in your family had breast cancer.

Get screened: Talk to your doctor about how often you should have a mammogram and clinical breast exam. Perform regular breast self-exams.

Know what is normal for you: Learn how your breasts normally look and feel and report any changes to your doctor.

Make healthy lifestyle choices:

- Maintain a healthy diet and weight
- Exercise regularly
- Get enough sleep
- Learn to manage stress
- Limit alcohol

Chicken and Spinach Soup with Fresh Pesto



Serving size: about 1½ cups

Ingredients

- 2 teaspoons plus 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- ½ cup carrot or diced red bell pepper
- 1 large boneless, skinless chicken breast (about 8 ounces), cut into quarters
- 1 large clove garlic, minced
- 5 cups reduced-sodium chicken broth
- 1½ teaspoons dried marjoram
- 6 ounces baby spinach, coarsely chopped
- 1 15-ounce can cannellini beans or great northern beans, rinsed
- ¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese
- ⅓ cup lightly packed fresh basil leaves
- Freshly ground pepper to taste
- ¾ cup plain or herbed multigrain croutons for garnish (optional)



Preparation

1. Heat 2 teaspoons oil in a large saucepan or Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Add carrot (or bell pepper) and chicken; cook, turning the chicken and stirring frequently, until the chicken begins to brown, 3 to 4 minutes. Add garlic and cook, stirring, for 1 minute more. Stir in broth and marjoram; bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce the heat and simmer, stirring occasionally, until the chicken is cooked through, about 5 minutes.
2. With a slotted spoon, transfer the chicken pieces to a clean cutting board to cool. Add spinach and beans to the pot and bring to a gentle boil. Cook for 5 minutes to blend the flavors.
3. Combine the remaining 1 tablespoon oil, Parmesan and basil in a food processor (a mini processor works well). Process until a coarse paste forms, adding a little water and scraping down the sides as necessary.
4. Cut the chicken into bite-size pieces. Stir the chicken and pesto into the pot. Season with pepper. Heat until hot. Garnish with croutons, if desired.

Nutrition Facts

Per serving: 226 calories; 9 g fat(2 g sat); 6 g fiber; 18 g carbohydrates; 19 g protein; 77 mcg folate; 28 mg cholesterol; 2 g sugars; 0 g added sugars; 3,866 IU vitamin A; 29 mg vitamin C;

Recipe from <http://www.eatingwell.com>

October Fruit & Veggies

Apples

Beets

Blackberries

Broccoli

Brussels Sprouts

Cabbage

Cauliflower

Chicory

Cranberries

Dates

Figs

Grapes

Leeks

Lettuce

Okra

Oranges

Parsnips

Pears (late season)

Peppers

Pumpkins

Quince

Shallots

Star fruit

Sweet Potatoes

Turnips

Watercress

Winter squash

