

AUGUST 2006

# HealthLine

INTERNATIONAL UNION OF OPERATING ENGINEERS LOCAL 4  
HEALTH & WELFARE PLAN



## Dear Health & Welfare Participants,

The Board of Trustees is pleased to bring you a new look for your *HealthLine* newsletter, a bimonthly health, wellness and benefits publication we will provide to all insured participants.

The Trustees of the Fund understand that preventing illness is the best way to control health care costs. More importantly, Operators who stay healthy have better work opportunities and a better quality of life. It is our goal to provide you and your family with practical information on topics such as good nutrition, staying active, reducing health care costs and preventing illness.

We also will use this newsletter to communicate Health & Welfare benefit information updates to you, sometimes via an insert or on the front and back pages of this newsletter.

Enjoy *HealthLine*! We hope you and your family find it useful in developing and maintaining a healthful, happy lifestyle and that you receive the information you need to understand your Health & Welfare benefits. Please share it with someone else whose health you care about.

Sincerely,  
**Your Board of Trustees**

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## HARVARD HEALTH TIP

Smoking, an unhealthy diet and excess weight all rev up inflammation. **Stopping smoking, eating smarter, losing weight and exercising calm inflammation** — just one way in which each of these reduces the risk for heart attack and stroke.

Source: Harvard Health Publications • [www.health.harvard.edu](http://www.health.harvard.edu)

A close-up photograph of a woman with long, straight blonde hair. She is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. A single green apple is balanced on top of her head. She is wearing a dark necklace with a large, ornate pendant. The background is plain white.

# PUT UP A FOOD FIGHT Against Disease

**YOU CAN'T CHANGE YOUR FAMILY MEDICAL HISTORY,** which may put you at increased risk for chronic disease. But you can fight back against such conditions by altering your lifestyle, particularly your diet.

Nutrition is a critical component in promoting good health. If certain diseases run in your family, you'll want to make your diet as preventive as possible.

Here's food for thought on dietary changes that can help you prevent several serious conditions.

## **CURB BREAST CANCER**

The National Cancer Institute estimates one in eight women in the United States will develop breast cancer during her lifetime.

To reduce your risk:

- **Limit alcohol.** Having more than one drink a day for women has been associated with an increased risk for breast cancer.

- **Watch your weight.** Maintaining a healthful weight is one of the most important things you can do to reduce your breast cancer risk.

## **COMBAT COLON CANCER**

Colon cancer is the third most common cancer in the United States. To reduce your risk:

- **Drink your milk.** An analysis of 10 studies of more than 534,000 people found those who drank more than 8 oz of milk a day had a 15 percent reduction in colon cancer risk, compared with those who drank less than two glasses of milk a week.
- **Load up on fruits,** vegetables and whole grains, such as whole-wheat rice and barley.
- **Be a meat minimalist.** Diets high in red meat have been associated with an increased risk for colon cancer. To eat less meat, consider the fruits, vegetables and whole grains as the entrée at meals and meat as the side dish.
- **Downsize drinking.** Alcohol also has been associated with an increased risk for colon cancer, so if you drink, do so in moderation.

## **BEAT HEART DISEASE**

Heart disease is the number one killer of American adults. To reduce your risk:

- **Go fish.** Consume at least two fish meals a week. Not only is fish a good source of lean protein, but fatty fish — such as mackerel,

salmon and lake trout — are high in omega-3 fatty acids, a “good” fat that may reduce the risk for heart attack.

- **Fill up on fiber.** The American Heart Association recommends consuming 25 to 30 gm of fiber a day.
- **Keep your diet low in fat.** Of the fat you do consume, avoid those that are solid at room temperature, such as butter, margarine and lard. They're high in artery-clogging saturated or trans fat. Instead, use unsaturated fat, such as canola and olive oil, whenever possible.

## **DERAIL DIABETES**

At least 41 million Americans ages 40 to 74 have pre-diabetes, according to the American Diabetes Association.

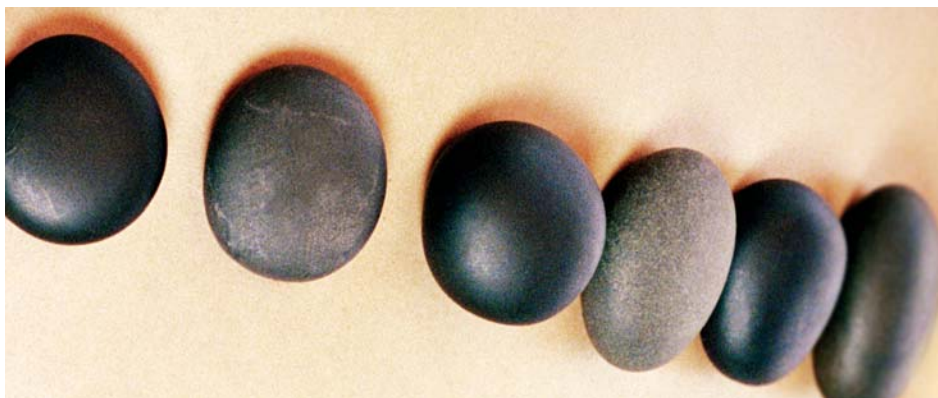
To prevent or delay the onset of diabetes if you're pre-diabetic or if type 2 diabetes runs in your family:

- **Maintain a healthy weight** by cutting calories and exercising. Having a normal weight is the most important thing you can do to prevent type 2 diabetes.

In the short term, a healthful diet will give you more energy and decrease your stress. In the long term, it will help reduce your risk of developing most of the deadliest chronic conditions that plague Americans.

**To learn more:** U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, [www.ahrq.gov/clinic/uspstfix.htm](http://www.ahrq.gov/clinic/uspstfix.htm)

## Talk With Your Doctor About Alternative Care



**MANY PEOPLE WITH ARTHRITIS,** cancer and other illnesses use alternative or complementary therapies, such as herbs or vitamins and minerals, without telling their doctors.

For example, of 232 people with arthritis, two-thirds had used complementary medicine but only half had told their doctors, according to a study published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*.

People often don't tell their doctors for fear they'll disapprove and tell them to stop using the alternative remedy.

However, keeping mum puts their health in danger because their doctors don't have a full picture of all the factors that could potentially interact or affect treatment decisions.

The following suggestions can help you work with your doctor if you choose to use alternative therapies.

- **Keep your doctor informed** of any alternative therapies you're using or considering, including massage, acupuncture, chiropractic care, herbal and essential oils, vitamins and minerals and special diets.
- **Don't assume** your doctor will respond negatively. Today, many doctors acknowledge the effectiveness of certain alternative approaches. Many also work with complementary therapists and

can recommend a massage therapist or acupuncturist.

- **Ask your doctor** if he or she sees anything in your medical history or current health profile that could make a particular alternative therapy risky.
- **Tell your doctor** if you plan to use an alternative medicine treatment even though he or she advises against doing so. It's important your decision be noted in your records.
- **Offer information** if your doctor doesn't know about a therapy you're using. If your doctor doesn't have time to stay current on every kind of alternative treatment, it's your responsibility to research the risks and benefits of a particular remedy. You also can ask your alternative practitioner to send your doctor information on his or her alternative treatment plan.

Finally, ask for a prescription or referral if your doctor approves or doesn't object to an alternative treatment. Some therapies, such as massage or chiropractic, are covered by some health insurance carriers if your doctor prescribes them.

**To learn more:** Office of Alternative Medicine of the National Institutes of Health, [www.nccam.nih.gov](http://www.nccam.nih.gov)

### WATCH OUT FOR THESE HERB AND DRUG INTERACTIONS

Herbal supplements aren't necessarily harmless since they can contain active ingredients that may interact with prescription or over-the-counter drugs. Here are some of the known interactions.

#### FEVERFEW, GARLIC, GINGER, GINKGO

Avoid mixing with:

- Aspirin
- Ticlopidine (Ticlid)
- Clopidogrel (Plavix)
- Dipyridamole (Persantine)
- Warfarin (Coumadin)

#### ST. JOHN'S WORT

Avoid mixing with:

- Antidepressants
- Birth control pills
- Indinavir sulfate (Crixivan)
- Digoxin (Lanoxicaps, Lanoxin)
- Theophylline (Slo-bid, Theo-Dur)
- Cyclosporin (Neoral, Sandimmune, SangCya)

#### GINSENG

Avoid mixing with:

- Warfarin (Coumadin)
- Phenelzine sulfate (Nardil)
- Digoxin (Lanoxicaps, Lanoxin)

#### KAVA

Avoid mixing with:

- Sedatives
- Sleeping pills
- Antipsychotics
- Alcohol
- Drugs used to treat anxiety or Parkinson's disease

#### ECHINACEA

Avoid mixing with:

- Anabolic steroids
- Amiodarone (Cordarone, Pacerone)
- Methotrexate
- Ketoconazole (Nizoral)

## ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

Almost one-third of American medical schools — **among them Harvard, Yale, John's Hopkins and Georgetown Universities** — offer coursework in alternative methods.

# WHAT YOU MUST KNOW ABOUT Alcoholism and Alcohol Abuse

## MORE THAN HALF OF THE ADULTS

in the United States say one or more of their close relatives have a drinking problem.

Learning about alcoholism and alcohol abuse can help you recognize these problems in yourself or someone you know, so help can be found.

## ALCOHOLISM

An alcoholic can't control his or her drinking, is preoccupied with alcohol and continues to drink even when the consequences are adverse. Denial of alcohol's negative effects is common in alcoholics.

Heavy drinking can increase the risk for certain cancers, liver damage, immune system problems, brain damage and harm to unborn babies during pregnancy.

In addition, drinking increases the risk for death from car accidents.

Alcoholism, also known as "alcohol dependence," is a disease that includes:

- **Craving:** a strong need or compulsion to drink
- **Loss of control:** the inability to limit one's drinking on any given occasion
- **Physical dependence:** withdrawal symptoms, such as nausea, sweating, shaking and anxiety, when alcohol use is stopped after a period of heavy drinking
- **Tolerance:** the need to drink greater amounts of alcohol to "get high"

Although some people are able to recover from alcoholism without help, the majority of alcoholics need help.

## ALCOHOL ABUSE

Alcohol abuse differs from alcoholism in that it doesn't include a strong craving for alcohol, loss of control over drinking or physical dependence.

Alcohol abuse is a pattern of drinking that results in one or more of the following situations within a 12-month period:

- **Failure to fulfill major responsibilities** at work, school or home
- **Drinking in physically dangerous situations**, such as while driving a car
- **Having recurring alcohol-related legal problems**, such as being arrested for driving under the influence of alcohol
- **Continued drinking** despite having relationship problems caused or worsened by the drinking

Although alcohol abuse is different from alcoholism, alcoholics also experience many effects of alcohol abuse.

## SEEK HELP

The sooner a person gets help for an alcohol problem, the more likely he or she is to recover.

**To learn more:** National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, [www.niaaa.nih.gov/faqs](http://www.niaaa.nih.gov/faqs)

## COST OF ALCOHOL

Twenty-five to 40 percent of all patients in U.S. hospitals are being treated for complications of alcohol-related problems. In comparison to moderate and non-drinkers, **individuals with a history of heavy drinking have higher health care costs.**

## SIGNS OF DRUG ABUSE

There are many signs that a person may have a drug problem or addiction.

If someone you love has any of the following signs, seek information and guidance from a substance abuse professional.

### SIGNS INCLUDE:

- Increase or decrease in appetite
- Smell of substance on breath, body or clothes
- Extreme hyperactivity; excessive talkativeness
- Change in attitude/personality
- Change in friends
- Change in activities; loss of interest in things that were important before
- Difficulty in paying attention
- Drop in school or work performance; skips or is late to school or work
- Lack of motivation
- Defensiveness, temper tantrums, resentful behavior
- Unexplained moodiness, irritability or nervousness
- Violent temper
- Paranoia, suspiciousness
- Excessive need for privacy
- Car accidents
- Chronic dishonesty; trouble with police
- Unexplained need for money
- Possession of drug paraphernalia

**To learn more:** Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, <http://findtreatment.samhsa.gov>



# Are You Active Enough?

**BEING ACTIVE** is one of the most important lifestyle choices you can make to stay healthy and reduce the risk for disease.

Physical activity doesn't only mean running a marathon. Gardening, using the stairs, walking the dog, swimming and cycling can be part of an active life. A little physical activity is good, but more is better if you want to achieve all the health benefits.

Answering the following questions and adding up your score can help you determine if you are physically active enough or need to spend more time on the move.

1. Do you look for ways to get more exercise while going about your daily routine? (For example, using stairs instead of an elevator and walking instead of driving short distances.)  
 Often – 10  
 Sometimes – 6  
 Never – 0
2. How much time do you spend exercising aerobically in a typical week? (For example, walking briskly, taking an aerobics class, playing racquetball or working out on a treadmill, exercise bike or other machine.)  
 90 minutes or more – 10  
 60 to 89 minutes – 8  
 1 to 59 minutes – 6  
 Zero minutes – 0
3. How many times do you strength train each week?  
 Two or three – 6  
 One – 4  
 None – 0
4. Do you regularly perform stretching and flexibility exercises?  
 Yes, every week – 4  
 Yes, once or twice a month – 2  
 No – 0

5. Do you spend time doing weight or resistance training?  
 Yes, every week – 6  
 Yes, once or twice a month – 2  
 No – 0
6. Do you warm up and cool down when you exercise?  
 Always – 4  
 Sometimes – 2  
 Never – 0

**Your Total Points** \_\_\_\_\_

## 30 to 40 points

**Well done.** You are probably meeting or exceeding the recommended amount of daily exercise.

## 20 to 29 points

**Good job.** You're headed in the right direction. With a little more exercise, you'll be doing even more to improve your health.

## 10 to 19 points

**You've made a good start.** Finding ways to be more physically active each day – walking with friends or family or signing up for an exercise class – can help you improve your score.

## 9 points and below

**Oh-oh.** You are not getting enough physical activity – in fact your lack of exercise is most likely impacting your health negatively. Make it a point to start a regular, gentle exercise program – perhaps walking once a day for 10 minutes. Add five minutes a day to your walk each week until you're up to 30 minutes.



## BENEFITS OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Physical activity can bring many health benefits. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, regular physical activity can improve health and reduce the risk for premature death in the following ways:

- Reduces the risk of developing coronary heart disease and the risk of dying of it
- Lowers the risk of developing type 2 diabetes
- Reduces the risk of developing colon cancer
- Reduces the risk for stroke
- Lowers the risk of developing high blood pressure
- Helps achieve and maintain a healthy body weight
- Reduces depression and anxiety
- Promotes psychological well-being and reduces stress
- Helps build and maintain healthy bones, muscles and joints

## EXERCISE FOR LIFE

Sedentary lifestyles are to blame for 23 percent of deaths from major chronic diseases, including heart disease, diabetes, colon cancer and high blood pressure. **On average, people who are physically active outlive those who are inactive.**



# How to Read OTC Medication Labels

**READING AND UNDERSTANDING THE INFORMATION LABELS** on over-the-counter (OTC) medications can help you take them safely and effectively.

To use the products to their maximum benefit, you must read the labels carefully and understand what you're taking and why. To avoid medication mishaps, pay special heed if you're taking more than one medicine, have a known allergy or are responsible for giving medication to a child or an elderly person.

A Drug Facts label now is required on almost all OTC drugs. It contains important information about ingredients, doses and warnings in an easy-to-read, standardized format.

Here's an overview of the most important usage and warning information you'll find on the new label, in the order it appears.

## LABEL LINGO

- **Active Ingredient:** First up on the Drug Facts label is the active ingredient – the therapeutic substance that makes the product work, as well as the purpose of the product. Is the product an anti-histamine? An antacid? A cough suppressant? Here's where you'll find out.
- **Uses:** Under this heading, you'll find the symptoms the product relieves. When choosing a medication, target this list. To keep potential side effects to a minimum, take products only for symptoms you have.
- **Warnings:** This section is extremely important because it tells you when not to use an OTC product, such as if you're also taking insulin or tranquilizers. It also tells you when you should contact a doctor before using, such as if you have other health conditions or you're pregnant or breast-feeding, and when to stop taking the product, such as if any new symptoms appear or if pain becomes worse. This section also lists any side effects you may experience

when using the product, such as drowsiness or excitability.

- **Inactive Ingredients:** This section lists substances in the product that don't enhance its effectiveness but can make it easier to take, such as flavorings. Inactive ingredients aren't always inconsequential, however.
- **Directions:** This area designates how to take the medicine, how much to take, how often and how long. It's typically age-specific, with different guidelines for children vs. adults.

For the greatest benefit with the least possible risk, follow label directions exactly. Don't take more than the recommended dose or for longer than recommended without consulting your doctor.

- **Other Information:** Under this section, you'll find specifics about how to store the product properly and required information about certain ingredients, such as the amount of calcium or sodium the product contains.

The label also tells you the product's expiration date, the lot or batch code to help the manufacturer identify the product in case of recall, the name and address of the manufacturer, how much of the product is in each package and what to do if an overdose occurs.

## ASK YOUR PHARMACIST

Pharmacists know OTC and prescription drugs, and they're often more accessible than doctors. So get their opinions when you're stumped. When you're selecting medication for yourself or your family, pharmacists can provide you with valuable insights about which medication is right.

**To learn more:** Consumer Healthcare Products Association, [www.chpa-info.org](http://www.chpa-info.org), click on "For Consumers," then "Drug Facts Label."

## TOOLS FOR CHANGE

### Jest for the Health of It

Can a hearty laugh be good for your heart? Here's the punch line: Studies show humor aids your physical and mental health.

It's no joke. Humor is good for your health. We've all heard the saying "Laughter is the best medicine," and now, research backs it up. A good guffaw pumps up your heart, increases your circulation, works your muscles and strengthens your immune system.

Laughter and a sense of humor also may help cut your risk for heart disease. In a 2005 study, researchers gauged the effect of emotions on cardiovascular health when they showed both funny and scary movies to 20 healthy men and women. They found that laughter causes the inner lining of the blood vessels (endothelium) to open wider, increasing blood flow. At the very least, laughter offsets the impact of mental stress, which is harmful to the endothelium.

Over the years, researchers also have learned that a good belly laugh:

- Lowers blood pressure
- Works muscles
- Improves breathing
- Reduces stress
- Increases energy
- Makes you feel good

Seek out humor and build it into your day with bouts of laughter. Just like regular exercise, ample sleep and a nourishing diet, your good health can profit from it.

# MANAGING STRESS With Exercise

**STRESS CAN MAKE YOU FEEL DRAINED**, anxious, even depressed. And while there are several ways to manage runaway stress, none is as enjoyable and effective as a regular exercise routine.

## HOW IT WORKS

Exercise causes the brain to release endorphins, opiumlike substances that ease pain and produce a sense of comfort and euphoria. It also encourages the nerve cells in the brain to secrete other neurotransmitters, such as serotonin, dopamine and norepinephrine, which improve mood.

Deficiencies of these substances have been linked to symptoms of depression,

anxiety, impulsiveness, aggression and increased appetite. According to a study published in the *Archives of Internal Medicine*, when depressed people exercise, they increase their levels of these natural antidepressants.

According to the National Institutes of Health, exercise also improves people's ability to relax and sleep, promotes self-esteem and enhances energy, concentration and memory.

Exercise also provides an outlet for negative emotions, such as frustration, anger and irritability, thereby promoting a more positive mood and outlook.

Finally, exercise helps you take time for yourself.

## STRESS-REDUCTION MOVES

Almost any exercise can provide stress relief, but the following guidelines can help you find those likely to be more effective.

- **Choose an exercise you enjoy.** The kinds of activities you choose depend on your physical ability as well as your preferences.

It's important to choose activities that are accessible and feasible for you to do regularly. You also need to determine if you want to play competitive sports, such as basketball or tennis, or if you'd rather do noncompetitive activities, such as walking, bicycling or taking an aerobics class.

- **Exercise every day if you can.** The U.S. Surgeon General's *Report on Physical Activity and Health* recommends 30 minutes of activity on most, if not all, days of the week.
- **Consider mind/body activities.** In yoga and tai chi, your mind relaxes progressively as your body increases its muscular work.

Controlling stress ultimately comes down to making time to exercise. Physical activity provides an enjoyable and effective way to cope with life's troubles as it promotes lasting strength and empowerment.

**To learn more:** American Council on Exercise, [www.acefitness.org](http://www.acefitness.org)



[www.local4funds.org](http://www.local4funds.org)

The IUOE Local 4 Health & Welfare Plan is striving to assist you and your family in getting the maximum value from your health benefits and living a healthful lifestyle.

Through our various initiatives, we hope to better serve our members. From newsletters like this, to health fairs, to our website, the Health & Welfare Plan offers resources that can positively impact your life.

If you have not already done so, please take the time to visit our website, [www.local4funds.org](http://www.local4funds.org), for the latest information regarding your benefits. You will find an online Summary Plan Document (SPD), a "Frequently Asked Questions" page, recent *HealthLines* and other publications regarding your health, pension and annuity benefits, as well as helpful links.

At the click of your mouse you can access the SPD content and COBRA rates, link up to the Blue Cross Blue Shield website to locate PPO providers or review Blue Cross Blue Shield medical policy. You also can get the latest information on prescription trends through the Caremark website and learn new information from Davis Vision. For example, Davis Vision has recently announced there are 23 new locations in their network now that they have partnered with Cambridge Eye Doctors.

If you would like to drop us a note with your feedback or have a benefit inquiry, please send us an e-mail at [office@local4funds.org](mailto:office@local4funds.org). (Please do not include any Social Security information or confidential health care information in your emails.)

We hope you  
enjoy the website!

## QUESTIONS & Answers



### MY KIDS WANT ME TO BUY THEM A TRAMPOLINE. IS IT SAFE?

Safety experts are glad you asked. Their advice: Stay away from trampolines. Hospital emergency rooms treat nearly 75,000 trampoline-related injuries in children and teens every year. Most occur on home trampolines. The most common injuries are bone and skull fractures, concussions, head and neck trauma, internal injuries and jagged skin wounds.

What makes a trampoline unsafe? A child can easily be thrown onto the hard frame or springs along the trampoline's edge – or fall off. Children also can get hurt if they land wrong or collide with another person. The American Academy of Pediatrics has issued this warning: "Trampolines should never be used in the home environment, in routine physical education classes or in outdoor playgrounds."

### CAN EXERCISE HELP PREVENT BREAST CANCER?

Regular exercise can help prevent many diseases, including cancer. And a new study indicates that exercise may even help cancer survivors.

A study presented at the American Association for Cancer Research showed that regular exercise can help improve a woman's chance of surviving breast cancer. These results were part of the Nurses' Health Study. There were 2,167 nurses diagnosed with breast cancer after the study began, and they were followed over a period of 16 years. Those who got the most exercise were more likely to survive than women who did not exercise. Even a small amount of exercise helped improved survival rates.



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