

Wellness Advocate

SIMPLE TIPS FOR HEALTHY EYES

Your eyes are an important part of your health. There's a lot you can do to keep them healthy and make sure you are seeing your best. Follow these simple steps for maintaining healthy eyes for life!

HAVE A COMPREHENSIVE DILATED EYE EXAM. You might think your vision is fine or that your eyes are healthy, but visiting your eye care professional for a comprehensive dilated eye exam is the only way to really be sure. When it comes to common vision problems, some people don't realize they could see better with glasses or contact lenses. In addition, many common eye diseases such as glaucoma, diabetic eye disease and age-related macular degeneration often have no warning signs.

KNOW YOUR FAMILY'S EYE HEALTH HISTORY. Talk to your family members about their eye health history. It's important to know if anyone has been diagnosed with a disease or condition since many are hereditary. This will help to determine if you are at higher risk for developing an eye disease or condition.

EAT RIGHT TO PROTECT YOUR SIGHT. You've heard carrots are good for your eyes. But eating a diet rich in fruits and vegetables, particularly dark leafy greens such as spinach, kale, or collard greens is important for keeping your eyes healthy, too. Research has also shown there are eye health benefits from eating fish high in omega-3 fatty acids, such as salmon, tuna and halibut.

MAINTAIN A HEALTHY WEIGHT. Being overweight or obese increases your risk of developing diabetes and other systemic conditions, which can lead to vision loss, such as diabetic eye disease or glaucoma. If you are having trouble maintaining a healthy weight, talk to your doctor. The HealthSmart wellness team is here for you as well. Our registered dietitians can help you with delicious, effective meal plans.

WEAR PROTECTIVE EYE WEAR. Wear protective eye wear when playing sports or doing activities around the home. Protective eye wear includes safety glasses and goggles, safety shields, and eye guards specially designed to provide the correct protection for a certain activity. Most protective eye wear lenses are made of polycarbonate, which is 10 times stronger than other plastics. Many eye care providers sell protective eye wear, as do some sporting goods stores.

QUIT SMOKING OR NEVER START. Smoking is as bad for your eyes as it is for the rest of your body. Research has linked smoking to an increased risk of developing age-related macular degeneration, cataract, and optic nerve damage, all of which can lead to blindness.

BE COOL AND WEAR YOUR SHADES. Sunglasses are a great fashion accessory, but their most important job is to protect your eyes from the sun's ultraviolet rays. When purchasing sunglasses, look for ones that block out 99 to 100 percent of both UV-A and UV-B radiation.

GIVE YOUR EYES A REST. If you spend a lot of time at the computer or focusing on any one thing, you sometimes forget to blink and your eyes can get fatigued. Try the 20-20-20 rule: Every 20 minutes, look away about 20 feet in front of you for 20 seconds. This can help reduce eyestrain.

CLEAN YOUR HANDS AND YOUR CONTACT LENSES PROPERLY. To avoid the risk of infection, always wash your hands thoroughly before putting in or taking out your contact lenses. Make sure to disinfect contact lenses as instructed and replace them as appropriate.

PRACTICE WORKPLACE EYE SAFETY. When protective eye wear is required as a part of your job, make a habit of wearing the appropriate type at all times and encourage your coworkers to do the same.



QUICK TAKES

JANUARY IS NATIONAL BLOOD DONOR MONTH

Since 1970, National Blood Donor Month has been observed in January to not only honor blood and platelet donors, but also to help increase donations during the winter. Maintaining a sufficient blood supply for patients is difficult at this time of year because extreme winter weather and seasonal illnesses often impact donor turnout.

The American Red Cross encourages donors to give blood regularly, beginning in January. Donors with all blood types are needed, especially those with types AB, O, B negative and A negative.

To make an appointment, download the free Red Cross Blood Donor App, visit redcrossblood.org or call 800-733-2767.

Taste - Bud Rehab

LOVING FOOD THAT LOVES US BACK



Taste buds are adaptable. The job of our taste buds is not to make us happy or unhappy, although they can do both. The job of taste buds is all about survival; they are guards at the main gate to our inner world. Their job is to distinguish friend from foe.

In our native nutritional habitat (way back before fast food, grocery stores and all the temptations modern man has), "sweet" was a relatively rare and reassuringly safe encounter. Our taste buds welcomed it. As few foods in nature are naturally salty, and we need salt to survive, our taste buds welcomed it, too. Fat is the most concentrated source of calories, and in our native habitat, fat was relatively scarce, so—you guessed it—our taste buds welcomed it. That's why high-fat, salty foods can be so irresistible.

Just as eating junk food can make you come to prefer it, so can eating ever more nutritious food. By learning how to trade up choices in every food category, you get an immediate benefit by cutting out gram after gram of sugar, milligram after milligram of sodium, and adding fiber, antioxidants and other valuable nutrients. You are likely to cut calories and lose weight, too, because one of the many virtues of more nutritious foods is that they fill us up on fewer calories.

As you trade up your choices and cut out superfluous sugar, salt, trans-fat and food chemicals, you also put your taste buds through rehab. They become more sensitive to sugar and salt. They may come to not enjoy the approach of unhealthy oils and unnatural chemicals. You are then standing on the threshold to the promised land of dietary health.

Food is a source of great pleasure, and should be exactly that. But vitality is at least as great a source of pleasure, and should be exactly that. We should not need to mortgage either to pay for the other. By consistently making better foods in all categories, you will start preferring them. Your taste buds then encourage you to make further improvements, because that's what rehabilitating them does. That's the promise of taste bud rehab: loving food that loves us back.

Recipe: Acorn Squash Stuffed with Swiss Chard & White Beans

Ingredients

2 medium acorn squash, halved and seeded	2 tablespoons water
1 teaspoon plus 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, divided	1 tablespoon tomato paste
1/2 teaspoon salt, divided	8 cups chopped Swiss chard leaves (about 1 large bunch chard)
1/2 teaspoon freshly ground pepper, divided	1 15-ounce can white beans, rinsed
1/2 cup chopped onion	1/4 cup chopped kalamata olives
2 cloves garlic, minced	1/3 cup coarse dry whole-wheat bread crumbs
	1/3 cup grated Parmesan cheese

Directions

1. Cut a small slice off the bottom of each squash half so it rests flat. Brush the insides with 1 teaspoon oil; sprinkle with 1/4 teaspoon each salt and pepper. Place in a 9-by-13-inch (or similar-size) microwave-safe dish. Cover with plastic wrap and microwave on High until the squash is fork-tender, about 12 minutes.
2. Meanwhile, heat 1 tablespoon oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add onion; cook, stirring, until starting to brown, 2 to 3 minutes. Add garlic; cook, stirring, for 1 minute. Stir in water, tomato paste and the remaining 1/4 teaspoon each salt and pepper. Stir in chard, cover and cook until tender, 3 to 5 minutes. Stir in white beans and olives; cook until heated through, 1 to 2 minutes more. Remove from the heat.
3. Position rack in center of oven; preheat broiler.
4. Combine bread crumbs, Parmesan and the remaining 1 tablespoon oil in a bowl. Fill each squash half with about 1 cup of the chard mixture. Place in a baking pan or on a baking sheet. Sprinkle with the bread crumb mixture. Broil in the center of the oven until the bread crumbs are browned, 1 to 2 minutes.

Makes 4 servings: 342 calories per serving | 13 g fat | 6 mg cholesterol | 49 g carbohydrates | 11 g protein | 12 g fiber | 665 mg sodium | 151 mg potassium