

Focus on Health

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mental health

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Commack, NY

Tips to protect your hearing over the long haul

Hearing is easily taken for granted. Many people do not experience hearing loss as children or young adults, which perhaps creates a false sense of security that hearing will always be there. But studies have found that billions of people's hearing is under threat, and that threat could present itself a lot earlier than they realize.

According to the World Health Organization, 1.1 billion people under the age of 35 are at risk of noise-induced hearing loss (NIHL). And many are already confronting issues with their hearing, as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that one in five teens in the United States already has measurable hearing loss.

The Hearing Health Foundation notes that once hearing is lost it cannot be recovered, which is why the organization is working diligently to change how people think about their hearing. Preventing hearing loss is part of the organization's mission, and it offers the following recommendations to individuals seeking to protect their long-term hearing.

Move away from noise if possible. The term "noise" is unique because it can



'1.1 billion people under the age of 35 are at risk of noise-induced hearing loss.'

— WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

be hard to measure and is often seen as relative. Moving away from particularly noisy situations can prevent hearing loss, but how is one to know if a situation qualifies as noisy? The HHF notes there are apps, including the NIOSH SLM app,

that measure noise levels and predict allowable exposure times. These features can indicate when a setting is too noisy and/or how long a person can be in a situation before his or her hearing may be adversely affected.

Lower the volume. It's simple, but effective. Lowering the volume on a car radio, television or personal device can protect long-term hearing. It's also beneficial to heed noise warnings on devices such as over-ear headphones. Such warnings may involve a beep and/or smartphone notification indicating that an attempt to raise the volume on headphones is exceeding the recommended maximum decibel levels.

Utilize noise-canceling devices. Noise-canceling capabilities on over-ear headphones are perhaps more helpful than users realize. By blocking out all external sounds, noise-canceling headphones reduce the likelihood that users will increase the volume when listening to music, watching a show or movie or talking on a phone. Keeping volume low is a great way to protect long-term hearing.

Schedule routine hearing exams. Hearing exams should be part of everyone's preventive health care routine. The HHF notes that regular hearing tests can help to uncover early hearing loss. When individuals learn they have hearing loss, they're more inclined to take steps to prevent further deterioration. ♦ (Metro)



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Don't let a tick make you sick Stony Brook Children's Hospital infectious diseases expert urges vigilance

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Tick Bite Data Tracker shows that emergency department visits for tick bites have increased in May.

Children have the highest incidence of Lyme disease in the United States. Specifically, the age group most at risk is children aged 5 to 9 years old. Children are particularly vulnerable to tick bites because they often play in areas where ticks are prevalent.

According to the CDC, early signs and symptoms for most tick-related illnesses include a rash, fever and chills, general ill feeling, headache, joint pain, muscle pain and stiff neck. If left untreated, Lyme disease can lead to serious long-term complications, including heart problems, neurological issues, and chronic arthritis.

The CDC estimates that nearly 500,000 people will contract Lyme disease this year, from just a single tick bite. A newly published study in the Journal of Medical Entomology provides critical insights into the emergence of babesiosis in the Mid-Atlantic region. Babesiosis can be more severe than Lyme disease, and can become a life-threatening disease for the elderly.

"Ticks can spread disease. Not all ticks can cause disease and not all bites will make you sick. The vast majority of tick bites do not result in any infection or other disease," said Dr. Andrew Handel, a pediatric infectious diseases expert at Stony Brook Children's Hospital and physician at the Stony Brook Regional Tick-Borne Disease Center in Hampton Bays, the first and only dedicated tick clinic in the Northeast.

"However, as tick bites and tickborne diseases become more common, it's important to learn how to prevent a tick bite, how to remove a tick and stay safe year-round. Increased tick activity as the weather warms also means increased risk of tickborne diseases such as Lyme disease, anaplasmosis, babesiosis, Powassan virus and Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever. Also, an odd phenomenon known as an 'alpha-gal allergy' may develop after a lone star tick bite, leading to an allergy to red meat," he said.



Dr. Andrew Handel
Stony Brook Medicine/
Jeanne Neville



Photo courtesy of CDC

Dr. Handel shares a multi-pronged strategy to stay tick-free:

- Wear light-colored, long-sleeve shirts and pants to make ticks more identifiable.
- Tuck your pants into your socks so the ticks don't have access to your skin.
- Use 20-30% DEET insect repellent.
- Perform routine tick checks when coming from the outdoors or nightly tick checks.
- Check unexpected and common places on your body for ticks. Ticks love to hide in the beltline, behind the ears, hairline, and in skin folds.
- If outdoors for an extensive time, consider treating clothes with permethrin, which kills ticks on contact.
- Put your clothes in the dryer for 10 minutes on high heat to kill any ticks.

Handel adds that anyone bitten by a tick should save the tick for identification.

"Do remove a tick if it is attached. The only safe method is to use a tweezer and firmly grasp the tick right at the base of the skin, where its head is embedded. Then pull directly away from the skin, without twisting. Once off, place the tick in a sealed bag. Then you can bring it to your clinician to examine and see if they can identify it and know what symptoms may develop into possible infections. We often hear of people using petroleum jelly or matches to kill the tick while it is attached to the skin. This is not effective and may cause much more harm to the skin," he said.

A tick typically needs to be attached for at least 36 hours before Lyme disease becomes a concern. In those cases, a medical provider may prescribe a single dose of doxycycline to prevent infection.

"If you are bitten by a tick, don't panic," Handel said. "The majority of tick bites do not lead to an infection and we have effective antibiotics for preventing or treating these infections." ♦

— CONTENT PROVIDED BY STONY BROOK CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL

Keeping spring and summer allergies in check

Spring and summer are typically welcomed with open arms. Warm weather, blooming flowers and trees full of leaves are a welcome sight for many, but seasonal allergy sufferers may find the transition from winter to spring a little more challenging.

The Center for Health Statistics found that just under 26 percent of adults and roughly 19 percent of children have a seasonal allergy. Treatments for seasonal allergies can be effective, and many people find over-the-counter medications are enough to alleviate their symptoms. But even people who take OTC medications daily may have days when seasonal allergies cause considerable discomfort. In such situations, allergy sufferers can consider these strategies.

Identify your triggers. The American College of Allergy, Asthma, & Immunology notes that pollen is the most common outside allergy trigger. Trees and grasses typically pollinate in spring and summer, which is why these seasons can be especially challenging for people with seasonal allergies. Dustmites and pets might trigger allergies indoors, but these can appear throughout the year. A visit to



an allergist can determine what exactly triggers seasonal allergies. For example, certain types of grasses and trees might be triggers for some but not others. Identifying triggers is an effective first step because it can compel people to avoid the

things that cause allergic reactions.

Stay indoors on dry, windy days. The Mayo Clinic advises seasonal allergy sufferers to stay indoors on dry, windy days, when pollen can be nearly impossible to avoid.

Take advantage of a good rain. The Mayo Clinic advises that the best time for seasonal allergy sufferers to be outside is after a good rain. Rain helps to clear pollen from the air, so post-rain conditions can be ideal for people with seasonal allergies.

Change your clothes and wash up upon coming inside. The ACAAI recommends changing clothes, washing them and taking a shower upon coming inside during allergy season. Washing clothes and taking a shower reduces the likelihood that you'll spread pollen around the interior of your home, where it can attach to furniture and trigger allergic reactions.

Monitor the pollen count. As noted, pollen is a seasonal allergy trigger, so allergy sufferers are urged to monitor the pollen count via a website such as Pollen.com, where visitors can type in their ZIP code and get an up-to-date allergy report. On days when the pollen count is high, stay indoors and keep windows closed so the pollen does not get inside.

The Mayo Clinic notes that pollen counts tend to be highest in morning, so it's best to avoid being outside during this time of day. ♦ (Metro)

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Spring Green Smoothie for Vitality & Focus

Recipe courtesy of Indu Kaur

Ingredients:

- 1 cup spinach (rich in vitamins and antioxidants)
- 1/2 cucumber (hydrating and cooling)
- 1 green apple (fiber and natural sweetness)
- 1/2 lemon (vitamin C boost)
- 1 tbsp chia seeds (omega-3s and energy)
- 1-inch piece of ginger (anti-inflammatory and energizing)
- 1 cup coconut water (electrolytes and hydration)
- Optional: 1 scoop collagen or plant-based protein powder

Instructions:

Wash all ingredients thoroughly. Add spinach, cucumber, green apple, lemon juice, chia seeds, ginger, and coconut water to a blender. Blend until smooth. Add more coconut water if you prefer a lighter consistency. Pour into a glass and enjoy immediately for a refreshing, nutrient-packed drink!

Why it's great for May: This smoothie supports hydration, mental clarity, and a gentle detox — ideal as the weather warms up and you want to feel light and energized.



How to prioritize mental health

Mental health is now discussed more openly than it once was. Mental illness or issues that affected mental health used to be stigmatized, and many people suffered in silence and might not have gotten the help they needed.

The National Institute of Mental Health reports more than one in five adults in the United States lives with a mental illness. Mental illnesses include many different conditions that may vary in degree of severity, from very mild to severe. The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health advises that, in any given year, one in five Canadians experiences a mental illness as well. Such statistics highlight just how common mental illnesses are.

The NIMH notes self-care plays a significant role in maintaining mental health and supporting recovery. People can safeguard their mental health in many ways, and doing so will improve their overall health as well.

Spend time in nature. Nature can have a calming effect on people. Going for a walk can help tame stress and break patterns of negative thinking. In Japan, the concept of forest bathing is said to improve mental health. Forest bathing involves spending time in a forest or another green area experiencing the different sounds, sights and smells that nature offers.

Set boundaries. B2B Reviews says 12 percent of U.S. workers were fully remote in August 2023. Estimates suggest that number may have increased to around 14 percent by 2025. Working from home can make it more challenging to set firm divisions on time spent working and for home life. Establishing boundaries means not being available 24/7 for calls or emails and not feeling guilty about taking time away from work.

Get regular exercise. Just 30 minutes of exercise each day can get feel-good endorphins flowing through the body to boost mood and bodily health.

Get more sleep. Adults generally need between seven and nine hours of sleep for optimal health and reaching deep sleep phases, says the Mental Health Foundation. Creating consistent sleep routines that include going to bed and waking at the same time each day; avoiding screens before bed; and avoiding caffeine or vigorous exercise late in the day can help improve sleep.

Try relaxing activities. Relaxing activities can include reading, listening to music, meditation, forest bathing, walking the dog, playing with the cat or low-stress crafts and hobbies. Make time each week for these calming pursuits.

Socialize with others. Socialization provides opportunities to see others and talk about anything you want to get off your chest. People feeling stress or anxiety might think they are alone. But having conversations with others can illustrate that these are common problems and there are solutions. Sometimes just talking about an issue can help you overcome it.

Use your vacation time. Too many people are not using enough of their deserved and accrued time off. A survey from the financial services company Sorbet found that 62 percent of Americans don't use all of their paid time off. A Pew Research Center survey found that nearly half of U.S. employees with paid time off take less time than their employers offer. Failure to take time off is a recipe for burnout. Mental health should be a priority.

Safeguarding mental health can involve various self-care techniques that anyone can employ. ♦ (Metro)

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Promote health with these eight daily habits

Health should be a priority, but too often life gets in the way and individuals take a reactive, rather than proactive, approach to their personal well-being. But living healthier need not be so difficult. In fact, research suggests that small, positive changes in how a person lives each day creates a healthier person over time.

A Hologic-Gallup survey on the state of women's health conducted in April 2024 found 63 percent of respondents said it was hard for them to make health a priority. They cited feeling overwhelmed, needing to care for others before themselves, emotional/mental health, and work as the top barriers to focusing on health. But it's important that both women and men recognize that small changes can add up to big results. These healthy habits can help individuals start living healthier lifestyles.

Stay hydrated. Hydration supports good digestion, increases energy and may improve brain performance, states Harvard Health. Drink a glass of water each day upon waking up and with every meal. Older adults often do not feel thirst like they did when they were younger, so it is especially important for seniors to stay hydrated.



Get some exercise. Regular physical activity is one of the most important things a person can do for his or her health. Exercise helps manage weight, reduces the risk of disease, strengthens bones and muscles, and improves brain health. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says adults should aim for at least 150 minutes (30 minutes a day for five days) of moderate-

intensity aerobic activity a week. A great place to begin is with a daily walk, which is a simple and effective habit that does not require a lot of time and no equipment except a good pair of athletic shoes.

Wear sunscreen every day. After washing your face each morning, apply a facial moisturizer with an SPF of at least 30, or blend equal parts of sunscreen and

regular moisturizer, suggests Harvard Health. Use it on the face, neck, ears, and any thinning hair spots on the scalp. Skin cancer is the most common type of the disease worldwide, and wearing sunscreen can help many people avoid it.

Spend time outdoors. It takes just a few minutes in the sun to raise vitamin D levels. Vitamin D is necessary for bone and heart health and helps to boost mood, says WebMD. Various studies indicate spending time in green spaces promotes calm and increases happiness.

Plan your meals. Meal planning is not just a way to manage food budgets. It's also a great method to being more mindful of food choices and avoiding impulse buys or meals that may not be as healthy as they can be. Adding more plant-based foods to a diet is a good start. Such foods can reduce the risk of chronic conditions like high cholesterol and hypertension.

Other practices that promote health include doing a **morning stretch**, **flossing**, and **taking an afternoon nap**. On the latter, research has shown that shorter and less frequent naps — lasting less than 30 minutes, no more than four times a week — were associated with the most benefit. ♦ (Metro)

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