



Wellness Works

SUMMER 2024

Simple Strategies for Healthy Eating

Everyone wants to eat healthier, but making dietary improvements can seem daunting or unappealing. There are a lot of little (and delicious!) changes you can make in your daily food choices that can help you feel better. Below are simple tips for increasing nutrition without diminishing flavor or satisfaction. Incorporating even just a few of these suggestions into regular eating habits can make a difference in the long run.

- Start your day off with a healthy breakfast.
- Add a fruit or vegetable to every meal. Aim to eat a variety of colors or “the color of the rainbow” to add a variety of vitamins and minerals.
- Drink water with your meal instead of soda or juice.
- Eat smaller portions.
- Pack a healthy lunch and snack to take to work with you. Avoid vending machines. Try healthy snacks like unsalted nuts, fruits and vegetables, and whole grain crackers.
- Use less salt. Try adding flavor to your food using herbs and spices.
- Grill, bake or steam your food, rather than frying.
- Plan your meals for the week. A little food prep goes a long way!



- Switch to low-fat or non-fat milk.
- Have a side salad instead of fries and ask for the dressing on the side.
- Use less butter and cut back on added fats or oils in cooking.
- Make a grocery list for the week and do not shop when you are too hungry.
- Shop for lean meats such as skinless chicken breast, lean turkey, or fish.

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Did You Know?



You should use a shot of sunscreen every day.

On average, people are using only a quarter to half the amount of sunscreen that is recommended for proper coverage. You should be using one ounce of sunscreen to fully protect your face and body. This equates to the size of a standard shot glass.

To learn more about what to consider when selecting a sunscreen and how to properly apply it, visit www.cancer.org. Type in sunscreen in the search bar and learn all you need to know!

Welcome New Trustee

The Trust's Selection Committee has appointed **Erin Herbig, City Manager of Belfast**, to fill an open position on the MMEHT Board of Trustees.

Erin was selected to fill the remainder of the vacant term ending December 31, 2026, which was created by the resignation of Heather Hunter. Erin has served as City Manager of Belfast, her hometown, since March 2020. She has broad experience in both the private and public sectors, including state and local government, previously serving as a Maine State Senator and Majority Leader in the Maine House of Representatives. She has a tremendous respect for the important role the Health Trust has in providing quality benefits for employees across the state, as is pleased to have the opportunity to contribute to its future.

The Trustees are happy to welcome Erin to the MMEHT Board.



Health Trust Member Services

Do you know who you are speaking with when you call the Member Services phone number on the back of your medical ID card? The Member Service Representatives that you reach are all Maine Municipal Association employees working in the Health Trust Services Department.

The Health Trust contracts with different organizations to process your claims. For example, Anthem processes medical claims for the Trust, and Northeast Delta Dental processes dental claims. While we work closely with these companies to administer your benefits, we are pleased to be able to provide our own personalized customer service to Health Trust members.

Medical providers (doctors, hospitals, etc.) have their own separate phone number by which they can contact Anthem. Medical providers should not be calling the Health Trust member services phone number for customer service. This number is specifically designated for Health Trust members, so that we can personally handle your issues and concerns.

Health Trust Member Services Representatives are available to take your calls at 1-800-852-8300, Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. You may also reach them via email at HTMemberServices@memun.org.

Simple Strategies for Healthy Eating (continued)

- Plan a meatless dinner at least once a week. Try eating beans and rice instead of meat.
- Read food labels when you shop. Reading labels will help you choose foods that are low in saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, salt, and added sugars.
- Eat several whole-grain foods every day, such as oats, brown rice, whole-wheat bread, or pasta.
- Use fat-free or low-fat mayonnaise, sauces, dressings, and condiments.
- Turn off the TV, computer and phone while eating – you will be less likely to overeat!
- When eating out, share a meal with someone. Or take half home for lunch the next day.
- Eat sweet foods in small amounts. Share dessert or choose fruit instead.
- Eat slowly. Stop eating when you are full and do not go back for seconds if you are satisfied.

To learn more about any of these suggestions go to www.my-plate.gov. Here you will find a variety resources to help you make small changes that will have a significant impact on your health!

Vitamin N: The Essential Nutrient from Nature

In our quest for optimal health, we often focus on vitamins like A, B, C, and D, found in various foods and supplements. However, there's another vital "vitamin" that isn't found on grocery store shelves or in pill bottles — Vitamin N, also known as Nature.

Vitamin N represents our essential connection to the natural world. In today's fast-paced, technology-driven society, many of us spend the majority of our time indoors, surrounded by artificial lights and screens. This lifestyle shift has led to a growing disconnect from nature, with significant implications for our physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

Physical Benefits of Vitamin N - Spending time in nature offers numerous physical health benefits. First, it encourages physical activity. Whether it's hiking through a forest, swimming in a lake, or gardening in a backyard, outdoor activities get our bodies moving. This physical movement contributes to better cardiovascular health, improved strength and endurance, and helps maintain a healthy weight.

Exposure to natural sunlight also provides us with essential Vitamin D, crucial for bone health, immune function, and overall well-being. Vitamin D synthesis in the skin requires sunlight exposure, making outdoor time essential for preventing deficiencies and related health issues.

Mental and Emotional Well-being - Vitamin N is important for our mental health. Numerous studies have demonstrated that spending time in nature reduces stress, anxiety, and depression. Natural environments have a calming effect on the mind, helping to lower cortisol levels and promote relaxation. Even just a short walk in a park or sitting under a tree can significantly improve mood and enhance mental clarity.

Nature also stimulates creativity and cognitive function. The sights, sounds, and textures of natural landscapes engage our senses and encourage mindfulness, which can enhance concentration, memory, and problem-solving abilities.

Social and Community Benefits - Vitamin N fosters social connections and community engagement. Parks, trails, and other natural spaces serve as gathering places where people come together to exercise, relax, and socialize. These interactions promote a sense of belonging and strengthen community bonds, contributing to overall happiness and social well-being.

Environmental Awareness and Conservation - When people spend time in nature, they develop a deeper appreciation for the environment and a greater understanding of its importance.



This appreciation can inspire individuals to adopt more sustainable lifestyles, support conservation efforts, and advocate for the protection of natural habitats.

Vitamin N — our connection to nature — is a vital component of a healthy lifestyle. From physical fitness and mental well-being to social connections and environmental stewardship, spending time in nature offers a wealth of benefits that contribute to overall health and happiness. As we navigate the challenges of modern life, let's remember to nourish ourselves with this essential nutrient, embracing the healing power of nature for a more balanced and fulfilling life.

You can also make a conscious effort to bring aspects of nature indoors to further benefit from Vitamin N. Here are some ways to bring nature indoors:

Plants: Houseplants can brighten up a space and help improve air quality. Some plants that are good for indoor spaces include snake plants, which can remove toxins from the air and are easy to care for. Hanging plants can also look great and improve air quality.

Move the furniture: Position your favorite chairs or desk closer to the window so you can enjoy the natural light and see the beauty of nature right outside.

Decorations: Decorate with paintings or pictures that feature natural elements, or take photos of your favorite places in nature.

Scents: Use scented candles or sticks to bring the smell of nature indoors.

Sites: Be sure to keep the window shades and curtains open to allow you to see outdoors from every window. Add some bird feeders nearby to watch nature come to you!

Sounds: Listen to natural sounds or watch videos of nature.

How to Be an Effective Advocate for Aging Parents

As family caregivers, we play many roles: scheduler, money manager, house cleaner, health aide, nurse, nurturer and more. The most important role is advocate, as we ensure the best possible care for our loved ones. This includes understanding and respecting their goals and wishes for their care and quality of life, and ensuring their requests are carried out. We may also need to help them manage financial matters and ensure they receive appropriate, high-quality services and treatments when needed. We are their voices when they are unable to advocate for themselves. If the thought of being an advocate for others seems overwhelming, relax. You already have the skills to be effective - you just need to develop and apply them in new ways.

Strong observational skills

Caregivers are often too busy or exhausted to notice slight changes, but the slightest shift in our loved ones' abilities, health, moods, safety needs or desires may indicate a much larger medical or mental health issue. Catching those changes early can make all the difference in alleviating the problem. Equally crucial is keeping a close eye on the services they receive and adjusting any subpar care. Whenever possible, we must try to accompany loved ones to the hospital and visit them in their homes or wherever they reside, such as an assisted living or long-term care facility.

Document your observations. Keeping notes about your loved ones, including dates and details, can help you track changes. If in-person interactions are limited, enlist staff or neighbors who see them regularly to report back to you. Technology such as video calls via apps such as Zoom and FaceTime can tell you more about subtle changes in a loved one's physical appearance and abilities.

Ability to organize despite constant change

As an advocate, you'll need to manage your loved one's caregiving team, make task lists and organize the paperwork associated with health, legal and financial matters. Make sure you can easily access all legal documents (powers of attorney for finances and health care) when you need them. Create a folder of important health information such as medical history, current medication list, insurance information and a list of health care professionals.

Excellent communication skills

Caregiving can be a very emotional experience, and emotions can affect our communication styles and skills. Be respectful. Try to set your feelings aside when you are advocating for a loved one. Remember that to communicate effectively, listening is just as important as speaking.

Show up prepared and do your homework before meetings with lawyers, medical professionals, and other providers, and have questions ready. Be clear, concise and get to the point. Try to prioritize your top three questions. To ease communication with busy professionals, find out who in their office handles matters such as appointments and billing, and build relationships with them. Get to know how they prefer to communicate (phone, email, text, patient portal) and the best time of day to reach them. Always express appreciation.

Question everything

As a caregiver, it is your job to gather information. It never hurts to ask questions as many times as needed. Sometimes busy professionals will not offer critical information unless asked. It is okay to ask questions.

Tenacity

You are the advocate for your loved one. It is okay to speak up. Facing a fragmented, frustrating health care system, and trying to do more with less money can be discouraging. Being tenacious means being determined and not giving up easily.

Have a positive mindset. When caregiving knocks you down, get back up. Resilience is success!

www.aarp.org



Exercising Safely in the Heat

Exercising in hot weather puts extra stress on the body. If you do not take care when exercising in the heat, you can risk serious illness. Engaging in exercise, along with high air temperature and humidity, can increase your core body temperature. There are precautions you can take so you can be active and safe this summer!

Watch the temperature. Pay attention to weather forecasts and heat alerts during the time of your planned activity.

Get acclimated. If you are used to exercising indoors or in cooler weather, take it easy when you exercise in the heat. It can take one to two weeks to adapt to the heat. As your body starts to adapt, you can gradually increase the length and intensity of your workouts.

Know your fitness level. If you are less fit, be extra cautious when working out in the heat. Your body may have a lower tolerance to the heat. Reduce the intensity of the exercise and take breaks during the workout.

Drink plenty of fluids. Dehydration is a key factor in heat illness. Help your body sweat and cool down by staying adequately hydrated. Do not wait until you are thirsty to drink! If you are exercising intensely, consider a sports drink as well as water. Sports drinks can replace sodium, chloride, and potassium that you lose through excessive sweating.

Dress appropriately. Lightweight, loose-fitting clothing helps sweat evaporate and keeps you cooler. Avoid dark colors that can absorb heat.

Avoid midday sun. Exercise in the morning or evening when it is likely to be cooler. If possible, exercise in shady areas or try a pool workout.

Have a backup plan. If you are concerned about the heat or humidity, stay indoors. Work out at the gym or try an inside at-home workout.

Take the time to learn the signs and symptoms of heat related illnesses. A valuable resource is www.cdc.gov. In the search bar type in “heat related illnesses” to learn more.

Heat related illnesses are preventable. By taking some basic precautions, your exercise routine does not have to be sidelined when the weather is hot.



What Are Affirmations and How Are They Beneficial

Affirmations are powerful, positive messages you tell yourself to help you feel better and do better. Affirmations can be short statements or longer sentences, but they should be easy for you to remember. They typically use first person personal pronouns, like “I” and “me.” Another way to think about affirmations is that they help you show yourself the same compassion and support that you would show a friend.

Affirmations boost mental and physical health by harnessing the power of neuroplasticity, which is the brain’s ability to reorganize and form new neural connections. Over time, this repeated stimulation strengthens these pathways in your brain, making positive thinking more automatic. Just like consistent exercise strengthens our muscles, consistently using affirmations strengthens our brain’s ability to think more supportively of ourselves.

The best affirmations often come from within us and should feel authentic. It is important to tailor them to your personal goals, values, and desires. To create your own affirmations, use positive wording to focus on what you want to achieve or feel, rather than what you want to avoid such as instead of saying, “I am not stressed,” say, “I am calm and relaxed.”

Frame your affirmations as reality such as the words you put behind “I am” are some of the most powerful words you can say to yourself. For example, if you have a dream of running or walking a half marathon, you might try affirmations like, “I am a runner.” “I am capable.” “I finish what I start.” Crafting an affirmation that is both meaningful to you and evokes a strong, positive emotional response will be more helpful in achieving your goals.

Have fun and create some affirmations that will help you reach your personal, work, health and or spiritual goals.

Source: www.theseecret.tv/affirmations

Geocaching

There is more fun for everyone at Maine State Parks!

Summer months are a wonderful time to enjoy time outdoors with your family and friends. Relaxing in an Adirondack chair drinking a nice cold iced tea is nice, but sometimes we crave a little movement. Why not venture out on a scavenger hunt? You can discover eight geocaches as you explore Maine's spectacular State Parks and Historic Sites during the summer season. From historic forts to our deepest wilderness, the Maine State Parks GeoTour offers something for everyone! (Note that Caches are taken in during the off/winter season for refurbishing.)

HOW TO PLAY:

1. **Create your login** with geocaching.com from any of the park links listed below.
2. **Download** the GPS coordinates for each location to your GPS unit or mobile device.
3. Using the coordinates, **find** as many Maine State Parks geocaches (during the summer season during normal park hours of 9 a.m. to sunset) as you can! The hidden, water-tight containers will be clearly marked as official Maine State Parks Geocaches. **Hint: caches are only located at the following Maine State Parks:**
4. **Sign** the logbook inside each container.
 - Allagash Wilderness Waterway (207) 941-4014
 - Aroostook State Park (207) 768-8341
 - Cobscook Bay State Park (207) 726-4412
 - Colburn House State Historic Site (207) 624-6080
 - Colonial Pemaquid State Historic Site (207) 677-2423
 - Mount Blue State Park (207) 585-2261
 - Vaughan Woods Memorial State Park (207) 384-5160
 - Wolfe's Neck Woods State Park (207) 865-4465
5. **Stamp your Maine State Park Passport** with the unique stamp from that park's geocache. Passports are available for \$1. Ask a park ranger how to get one on your next park visit.

Call the parks with the numbers listed above or go to www.maine.gov for park and trail conditions.

Take the Vitamin N Challenge

Wellness Works is launching a 6-week Vitamin N Challenge on the WellSteps platform on August 6th and we would love to have you join us. As you may have just read on Page 3, Vitamin N (Nature) offers profound benefits to our physical, mental, and emotional well-being. From reducing stress to enhancing creativity, reducing cardiovascular risk to improving immunity - nature provides you with health benefits that you cannot get anywhere else.

The Vitamin N Challenge will encourage people to go outdoors and experience all that Maine has to offer. The Vitamin N Challenge has something for everyone, regardless of age - from scavenger hunts, to birdwatching challenges, to sharing photos of your favorite locations, and more. Plus, there is the opportunity for two lucky participants to win a \$100 LL Bean gift card just for participating and completing the 6 week challenge.

Ready to join the Vitamin N Challenge? If you are not already enrolled in WellSteps you should be! WellSteps is the on-line platform and app that Wellness Works uses to run a variety of campaigns and programs throughout the year. Signing up is free and you will have the ability to participate in any (or all) of the programs we run - with the chance to win some great prizes! Contact Amanda Nile (anile@memun.org) to sign up and get started today!





Nutrition Facts: 12 pieces, Total calories 52; Total fat: 2 g; Saturated fat: 1 g; Cholesterol: 5 mg; Sodium: 21 mg; Carbohydrates: 6 g; Fiber: 1 g; Protein: 2 g

Frozen Yogurt Bark

Simple and quick to make, this frozen yogurt bark is the perfect summer treat. Topped with fresh berries and crunchy granola, it is a perfect hot weather snack.

- 2 cups whole milk vanilla yogurt
- ½ cup diced strawberries
- ¼ cup blueberries
- ¼ cup granola

Instructions:

1. Line a rimmed baking quarter sheet with wax or parchment paper.
2. Pour the yogurt into the baking sheet and spread it evenly so that it fills the shape.
3. Top with strawberries, blueberries, and granola.
4. Place in the freezer until the yogurt is firm, about 3 hours.

How To Plan for Summer Fun Through Financial Planning

Summer is a time for getting out and making memories. However, that fun can put a significant dent in your savings. Here are some strategies to help keep you financially on track for summer spending. To get you started, first take stock of your current financial situation:

Check in on your savings and update your household budget so you know how much is already allocated to essential spending and what is left over each month that could go toward summer plans.

Think about upcoming income changes. If you have seasonal work or plan to change jobs soon, ensure your budget accounts for the potential loss or gain of income.

Prioritize your needs before you decide how much you can afford to spend on summer activities. Make sure your bills and all necessities are covered with allocated funds.

Do not lose sight of your goals. Review your long-term goals and check your emergency fund. Continue setting aside money for these items, even as you budget for summer.

Trim excess. As you review and update your budget, look for miscellaneous unnecessary spending. Do you have a

subscription or streaming service you do not use? Eliminate it to free up some funds.

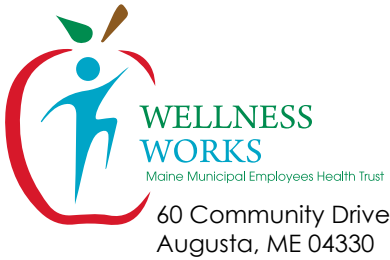
Once you know where you stand, you can start planning for financially savvy summer fun:

Set a budget for each summer activity to prevent overspending. Pick a number that includes any required transportation, lodging, food, tickets, and miscellaneous items (such as gas or souvenirs) then make your summer plans around this budget.

Find ways to save on transportation and accommodation. Traveling during off-peak times, using credit card points, or taking advantage of deals that give you a free hotel night if you stay a certain number of days are all practical options to research.

Look at local events. Summer fun does not only happen far away. You can significantly reduce costs by taking advantage of nearby activities. Hiking trails, beaches, museums, and festivals offer enjoyment without the cost of travel.

When warmer weather invites you to get away and explore, remember that summer fun does not have to be a budget buster.



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2024 Wellness Works Book Club

Do you want to learn more about how to build healthy habits, understand different perspectives and connect with other MMEHT participants who are interested in discussing wellness? Then the quarterly Zoom book club may be for you!

The next book we will be reading and discussing is ***The Blue Zones: Secrets for Living Longer*** by Dan Buettner. Twenty years after discovering the blue zones – the five places in the world where people live the longest – *New York Times* best-selling author Dan Buettner returns to these remarkable destinations to check in on the super agers. In this beautifully illustrated deep dive into the blue zones, Buettner offers new insight into the powers of purpose, faith, community, downtime, natural movement and plant-based eating that have provided as many as 10 additional years of healthy living into these regions.

The book club meeting will be held on **Wednesday, September 11 at noon or 7:00 p.m. and Tuesday, September 17 at noon**. You may choose which of the three times to attend. Please contact Anne Charles at acharles@memun.org if you have questions or want to join the book club this quarter (she will send you the link for the meeting).

- Participants will need to supply their own book – the use of public libraires is strongly encouraged. Purchasing a book or listening to audio is a great option too!
- Everyone who attends the book club meeting will receive a fun gift pack in the mail! Who doesn't love fun mail?