

Health Awareness

A County Health Pool Publication



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February is Wise Health Consumer Month



With February designated as *Wise Health Care Consumer Month*, it's a good time to think about how to improve your health and get the most from your health care system.

Making good health care decisions can pay off in fewer visits to the doctor and a better quality of life for you and your family. Here are some ideas to help you improve your health and your health care.

Adopt a healthy lifestyle—There are many simple things you can do every day to improve your general health, including:

- Eat a healthy well-balanced diet with plenty of fruits and vegetables
- Exercise regularly
- Drink plenty of water
- Wear sunscreen
- Get 8-10 hours of sleep each night
- Drink alcohol only in moderation
- Abstain from tobacco products
- Drive safely and always wear your seatbelt
- Walk instead of driving, if possible

Take an active role in your health care—For optimal health, you should be an active partner in your health care team and you should become an advocate for your health care.

Know your health plan—One of the first steps you can take to improve your health care is getting to know your health plan. Learn what is covered and what is excluded.

Understand the differences between deductibles, co-pays, co-insurance, out-of-pocket maximums, and plan maximums. Familiarize yourself with the pre-certification process and your provider network. Refer to your plan document and plan summary for more information.

Communicate with your health care provider—Your doctor can serve you better when you communicate effectively with him or her. Your doctor can make a better diagnosis and you can work together to decide on the appropriate treatment. If your physician prescribes a medicine for you, ask what it is, what it does, and what are the possible side effects.

Asking questions is a great way to advocate for your health. Your doctor should give you clear and thorough answers to your questions.

Educate yourself—Another way to advocate for your health is to educate yourself about health issues that are

important to you. Take advantage of resources such as health care agencies and providers. However, use caution when searching the Internet for health information. Websites sponsored by the government or universities are the most reliable.

Find out what routine medical tests are recommended for people your age and sex and get them as needed.

Review your medical bill—After you visit a health care provider, carefully review both the itemized medical bill from your health care provider and the Explanation of Benefits (EOB) from your health plan. Did you see the provider or have services performed on the date being billed? Did the health plan cover the appropriate expenses? If not, alert your health plan.



Exercise your way to a healthy heart



The Conditioned Heart

The normal unconditioned heart beats at a rate of approximately 70 beats per minute at rest, or about 100,000 beats per day. The well-conditioned heart can actually beat as few as 40 times a minute at rest, or approximately 58,000 beats a day.

In short, a well-conditioned heart conserves energy. It can supply oxygen-rich blood to the rest of the body with half the effort of an unconditioned heart.

Aerobics for Heart Health

Since the heart is a muscle, it can become bigger and stronger through exercises that progressively increase the body's demand for oxygen. This type of exercise is called "aerobic," which means "with oxygen." Aerobic exercise involves steady, continuous motion of the large muscles, which places a large and continuous demand on the heart.

Aerobic activities—such as walking, running, swimming, or aerobic dance—should be intensive enough to raise and sustain your heartbeat to a target heart rate or THR (60-85 percent of its maximum capacity), for 20 to 30 minutes (see chart). For optimum benefits, exercise aerobically within your THR for at least 20 minutes at least three times a week.

The End Result

A well-conditioned heart, like any muscle, is stronger and more

efficient than average. By exercising within your target heart range for 20 to 30 minutes three to four times a week, you can condition your heart, enjoy the benefits of a fit and healthy lifestyle and reduce your risk of life-threatening diseases.

Source: Parlay International



Target Heart Rate Guidelines

Age	Beats per Minute
25	117-146
30	114-142
35	111-138
40	108-135
45	105-131
50	102-127
55	99-123
60	96-120
65	93-116
70	90-113
75	87-109
80	84-105
85	81-101

Reduce your salt intake for better heart health



Sodium chloride, better known as table salt, is a mineral that is essential for good health, but most

of us consume far more of it than we need.

Our bodies need only about 2,000 milligrams of salt a day, the equivalent of one teaspoon of salt, but most of us ingest two to six times that amount!

Most foods are naturally low in salt, especially complex carbohydrates, such as fruits, grains and vegetables,

but the canned, frozen and packaged foods we have grown used to tend to be high in salt.

Why cut back on sodium?

Most physicians agree that a diet high in sodium contributes to high blood pressure, which, in turn, is a known risk factor for heart disease, America's number one cause of death.

Many heart patients are advised to go on low-salt diets, and most of us could improve our general health as well by cutting back on salt, whether we have heart disease or not. Too much salt in the diet may be a

factor in causing high blood pressure in those who don't have it yet, and a high-salt diet has been shown to contribute to an increase of kidney stones.

Alternatives to salt

Try various salt substitutes, such as herbs, lemon or lime juice, salsa, chili peppers or commercial salt substitutes.

You may even discover the subtle but distinctive flavors of foods without any salt at all, flavors you may have missed because they had been hidden by salt.

Source: Parlay International