Prime Yourself for a Healthy Fall

The days are getting shorter, darker, and, depending on where you live, the air is getting chillier and drier—all conditions that can affect your health in a number of ways. Check out these easy tips to help you stay healthy this fall.

Get your flu shot. It's the best way to protect yourself—and family members—from the seasonal flu. And don't forget to check into whether your employer offers free or reduced-rate flu shots.

Talk to your doctor about taking a vitamin D supplement. Sunlight is a good source of vitamin D that helps improve bone, muscle, and the immune system. If you live in a region with waning sunlight, your doctor may suggest vitamin D supplementation. Be sure to stock up on vitamin D-rich foods, such as salmon, tuna, mackerel, cheese, egg yolks and vitamin D-fortified foods.

Curb digital distractions and make real-time connections

Continually checking your email, texting, surfing the web or playing online games can be as destructive as other types of addictions like substance abuse or gambling, including affecting your real-life relationships. Compulsively viewing your screen in the presence of others or substituting social media interactions for real-life interactions can make you miss out on meaningful conversations and the deep closeness with others that supports positive mental health. Here's what you should know:

Watch for warning signs of unhealthy use: Feeling moody or restless if you can't go online; hearing complaints from family and friends about your time spent online; frequently choosing to spend time online over going out with other people; and hiding or becoming defensive about your online activities.

Taking a digital detox can be healthy for everyone. Some tips include:
- Make screen time off limits when you're with friends or family
- Turn off your cell phone at work; leave it behind when attending outings or activities
- Make meals technology-free as a chance to reconnect with others at the table
- Keep the phone out of sight when meeting with someone
- Don't answer calls when someone else is talking
- Postpone responding immediately to every text
- Unplug completely for a set amount of time daily
- Forgo digital distractions entirely one day a week and only make real-life connections. For example, pick up the phone and invite a colleague for coffee and to chat
- Reserve texting mainly to say thank you or for confirming a meeting—not to “talk” back and forth. Give the person a quick call instead.

If your online technology use is causing distress in your life, talk to your healthcare professional about help to control your use.

Start getting a dose of morning sunlight. Exposure to sunlight helps your body release serotonin, the hormone associated with boosting mood, regulating appetite and more. As the days shorten, ask your doctor about whether sitting in front of a “light box” for a few minutes each day could benefit you.

Sign up for an indoor exercise class. To stave off winter inertia (and winter weight gain!), why not sign up now for a fun activity, or one you've been meaning to try? Think Pilates, yoga, kickboxing, spin class—or try one after the other!

Scout out community outdoor free activities. Many local parks hold fall trail hikes, for example, or charity walks and races—and often these events include sharing hot mulled cider, a delicious fall favorite. You might even make new friends to meet up with all through the winter ahead!
Brighten your meals

It is common knowledge that eating fruits and vegetables is good for your health. But did you know that you can get greater nutritional benefit by eating a variety of colors? The differences in color of fruits and vegetables are caused by nutrients that influence their pigmentation. Use these tips to help you strive to brighten your meals by incorporating a rainbow of fruits and vegetables.

• **Strive to eat as many colors as you can each day.** Common colors of fruits and vegetables include blue, purple, red, orange, yellow, white and green.

• **Drink a smoothie.** Try making a smoothie by blending three different colors—for example, a smoothie with spinach, pineapple and blueberries gets you green, yellow, and blue!

• **Double up.** Cook two vegetables at once for additional flavor and variety. Opt for broccoli and cauliflower; peas and carrots; peppers and onions; zucchini and eggplant; or spinach and tomatoes.

• **Make a loaded veggie soup.** Soups are a great way to incorporate a variety of vegetables.

• **Try rainbow chard.** A vegetable that is already multicolor? Yes, please! You can find it in yellow, orange, red, purple, green and white.

• **Assemble a bright snack.** Wash, cut and bag cherry tomatoes, yellow bell peppers, carrots and celery as a vibrant pick-me-up.

• **Stock your fruit bowl.** Keep many colors of fruit on hand like bananas, apples, pears, peaches and plums—they’re great for a quick snack and a bright, edible decoration!

Have fun and get creative!

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**September is Fruits and Veggies More Matters Month**

Find out about how many fruits and vegetables YOU need, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.