



EMPOWERED WELL-BEING

Balancing Health, Happiness, and Community

MARCH 2026



Healthy eating can help prevent disease, but it can't replace medical care.

Is Food Medicine?

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

A nutritious diet and an active lifestyle can help reduce the risk of several diseases. In fact, about 90% of diabetes, 80% of heart disease and 40% of cancers can be prevented through healthy behaviors such as eating well. That's probably why the phrase **food is medicine** has gained popularity in recent years. But is it accurate?

What is medicine?

To decide if food is medicine, let's start by defining medicine, since it has two meanings:

- 1 The practice of preventing, diagnosing and treating disease.
- 2 A compound used for preventing or treating disease, such as a drug.

A diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins and healthy fats can play a role in preventing and managing some diseases. In this sense, "food is medicine" fits the first definition.

But calling food *medicine* has its limits.

Food supports health, but it doesn't replace medical treatment, per the second definition. Doctors may prescribe medications that provide treatment far beyond what can be done by food alone. Food is one tool that can help prevent and manage some medical conditions, but food alone cannot cure diseases that require medication.

Medical nutrition therapy can be a part of medicine. This is personalized nutrition registered dietitians provide. It is an evidence-based complementary therapy to help people manage conditions, such as:

- Type 2 diabetes.
- Heart disease.
- Some types of cancer.
- Osteoporosis.

In medical settings, dietitians use evidence-based nutrition interventions to help improve outcomes and enhance quality of life. But dietitians work in tandem with health care providers and pharmacists who also use medicine as part of treatment plans.

Maybe a better phrase is "food is part of medicine." It plays a role in both preventing and treating disease, but it works best as part of your health plan, not a replacement for conventional medical treatment.

City Events

Mindful Eating Guided Meditation

Monday, March 2
9:00 am - 10:00 am

[Register here](#)

Exercise 2.0: Beyond the Basics

Wednesday, March 11
10:00 am - 11:00 am

[Join here](#)

How Physical Pain Can Impact Your Mental Health

Thursday, March 12
11:00 am - 12:00 pm

[Register here](#)

Celebrate You: Body Positivity for Every Body

Thursday, March 16
12:00 pm - 1:00 pm

[Register here](#)

The Joy of Movement

Tuesday, March 17
12:00 pm - 1:00 pm

[Register here](#)

Healthy Weight

Wednesday, March 18
9:00 am - 10:00 am

[Register here](#)

Psychology & Exercise

Monday, March 23
11:00 am - 12:00 pm

[Register here](#)

Relaxation Micro Moments

Tuesday, March 24
11:30 am - 12:30 pm

[Register here](#)

Ergo Fit: What to Aim for

Wednesday, March 25
12:00 pm - 1:00 pm

[Register here](#)

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Teens and Sleep: What Parents Need to Know

If you have a teen at home, you know the struggle — convincing them to go to bed on time, then coaxing them to get up the next morning. So, why do teens stay up so late and how much sleep do they need? You might be surprised, but underneath the midnight energy and sleepy mornings lies real science.

Teenagers need eight to ten hours of sleep, according to the National Sleep Foundation. The natural body or circadian clock changes during the teen years. This means teens often don't feel sleepy until late at night and have a harder time feeling alert early in the morning, which conflicts with school and work schedules.

Help your teens develop healthy sleep habits by:

Making screen time off limits the hour before bedtime. Light from the screen may suppress the production of melatonin, the body's sleep-inducing hormone. Social media also can induce anxiety, which can prevent sleepiness.

Reducing chaos. If a teen's day is packed with sports, activities, work and homework, it may be time to think about trimming down the schedule.

Scheduling a checkup with a health care provider to educate them on the importance of sleep and

to screen them for teen sleep disorders, including sleep apnea and insomnia.

Using black out screens that eliminate light, making it easier for teens to fall asleep.

Asking them to share their goals and think about healthy sleep habits to help them achieve those goals. If it's playing a sport or taking an exam, ask them if they felt better after a good night's sleep — let them draw their own conclusions.

National Kidney Month

Kidney stones are hard objects formed inside kidneys. They're usually extremely small and can pass through the urinary tract with little or no discomfort. However, a pea-sized or larger stone causes pain as it moves in the kidneys or passes into one of the ureters (the tubes connecting kidneys and bladder) and making urination difficult and sometimes excruciating. Kidney stones can also stick together, blocking urine and causing severe pain, requiring an urgent medical procedure to break up or remove the blockage. Types of stones: calcium, uric acid, struvite, and cystine (rare genetic condition).



During **Kidney Month**, learn more at [kidney.org](https://www.kidney.org).

Massage to Ease Stress

Many people like massages. It relaxes you, improves circulation and often relieves pain that can come with tight muscles. But massage has more than the physical benefits of easing sore muscles; it can also relieve stress and anxiety.

In a randomized pilot study, researchers enrolled adults age 60 and older to receive 50-minute, twice weekly massage therapy or guided relaxation sessions. The study showed that massage participants had significantly better outcomes on anxiety, depression, vitality and perceived stress compared to the guided relaxation control group.



Of course, not all massages are the same. Different massage techniques target specific needs. For example, a Swedish massage is known for relaxation and reducing stress, using light, flowing strokes. One of the biggest perks of massage is its ability to naturally lift your mood by boosting endorphins. In addition, it can improve sleep quality.

Here's what a good, one-hour massage can do for you:

- ➔ Increase neurotransmitters, such as endorphins, serotonin and dopamine, that carry signals between nerves and your body and reduce depression.
- ➔ Lower your heart rate and blood pressure.
- ➔ Improve circulation and relax tense muscles.
- ➔ Lower cortisol, alleviating symptoms of anxiety and stress and boosting your body's immune system.
- ➔ Fulfill the need for human contact and comfort.
- ➔ Allow you to focus on your mind-body connection instead of what's stressing you.
- ➔ Provide much needed rest and relaxation, reducing the fatigue that often comes with stress.
- ➔ Improve your sleep.

Caution: If you have a chronic health condition, check with your health care provider before getting a massage.

Climbing stairs may boost heart health and lifespan.

That's the conclusion of University of East Anglia research involving more than 480,000 people between the ages of 34 and 84, according to the European Society of Cardiology. Frequent stair climbing was associated with a 24% reduced risk of dying from any cause and a 39% reduced risk of dying from heart disease and stroke. Of course, not everyone can climb stairs. However, most people can incorporate some stair climbing into daily life and even short bursts of climbing stairs can have significant health benefits, according to the study. **Note:** Association does not prove cause. Just because two factors happen together doesn't automatically mean one causes the other. This study provides data for further research.

Whole, low-fat and skim milk — which should you drink?

Whole, low-fat and skim milk all provide the same amount of beneficial nutrients, including protein, calcium and vitamin D. The main difference is the fat and calorie content. Choosing the right type depends on your health goals and preferences.

Here's how they compare per cup:

Whole milk:

150 calories, 8g fat

Low-fat 2% milk:

122 calories, 5g fat

Low-fat 1% milk:

102 calories, 2.5g fat

Skim milk:

83 calories, 0g fat

Whole milk is thicker and richer, while lower-fat options are lighter and thinner. If you're watching calories or saturated fat intake, low-fat or skim milk are better options.

eating smart

Healthful Breakfast Cereals

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

Breakfast cereal is a convenient option, but not all of them are equally nutritious. With so many choices, it's important to know what to look for when selecting this morning staple. Here are five tips.

- 1 Look for whole grains:** Many cereals are made with refined corn, rice or wheat, which offers little fiber. Instead, choose cereal with a whole grain or bran as the first ingredient, such as oats, whole wheat or brown rice. Whole grains provide fiber, which supports digestive health and helps keep you full longer.
- 2 Aim for fiber:** Check the Nutrition Facts label and choose cereal with at least three grams of fiber per 30-gram serving. Fiber comes from whole grains but can also come from the bran, nuts, seeds or dried fruit that's added to some cereals.
- 3 Opt for lower sugar:** Breakfast cereal can range from zero grams of sugar to more than 15 grams (four teaspoons) per serving. Try to keep added sugars under six grams (about 1½ teaspoons) per serving. Natural sweetness from fruit can make up the difference if you prefer something a little sweeter.
- 4 Choose protein:** It's important to get enough protein at breakfast, since it helps control hunger and balance blood sugar. Some cereals are made with added whey or soy protein. If your cereal is low in protein (fewer than three grams), pair it with milk or Greek yogurt to create a more satisfying meal.
- 5 Be sodium cautious:** Do sweet cereals contain salt? Surprisingly, yes. Sodium is used as a preservative. Aim for cereals with less than 200 milligrams of sodium per serving.

Many cereals are beneficially enriched with a long list of vitamins and minerals, which add essential nutrients to your day. They can also be a good base for a balanced breakfast. Combine your favorite high-fiber, low-sugar cereal with fruit and milk (or a fortified, protein-rich, plant-based alternative) to create a complete meal.



easy recipe

Crunchy Granola

2 cups old-fashioned oats	3 tbsp olive oil
½ cup sliced almonds	¼ cup real maple syrup
½ cup unsalted sunflower seeds	1 tsp vanilla extract
1 tsp ground cinnamon	<i>Optional:</i> ¼ cup raisins

Preheat oven to 350°F. **Line** baking sheet with parchment. **In** a large mixing bowl, stir together oats, almonds, sunflower seeds, cinnamon, oil, maple syrup and vanilla. **Stir** to combine. **Spread** granola evenly over baking sheet. **Bake** 20-25 minutes, stirring once halfway through. **Remove** from oven and let cool. **Stir** in raisins, if using. **Store** in an airtight container for up to 1 month.

Makes 8 servings. Per serving:

173 calories | 4g protein | 9g total fat | 1g saturated fat | 5g mono fat | 2g poly fat | 20g carbohydrate | 6g sugar (0g added sugar) | 3g fiber | 4mg sodium



News & Notes

• **Reconfirm Healthcare Eligibility for Your Dependents:** If you have dependents enrolled in a City healthcare plan before January 1, 2024, you will receive a reverification notice from Alight Solutions during the week of March 9, 2026. The process, called Dependent Eligibility Reverification, helps ensure that your covered dependents continue to meet eligibility requirements under the City's healthcare plans and may require you to submit eligibility documentation. Submit all required documents by May 4, 2026. [See News and Announcement](#) for more information.

• **File 2025 FSA Claims by March 31, 2025:** Did you participate in a Health Care or Daycare Flexible Spending Account (FSA) in 2025? Be sure to submit all eligible claims and required documentation by March 31, 2026 for reimbursement. Claims can be filed at <http://www.naviabenefits.com> or through the My Navia app. Submitting early gives you time to resolve any issues, such as providing receipts for denied claims or re-submitting unclear or incomplete documentation. Any unused 2025 funds over the carryover limit of \$680 will be forfeited—don't leave money behind.

• **Nutrition Counseling and Your Benefits:** Interested in meeting with a licensed nutritionist or registered dietitian? Coverage is available for children and adults with obesity, adults who are overweight with other health concerns, and people with conditions like diabetes, digestive issues, high blood pressure, kidney disease, seizure disorders, and other long-term health conditions. To find a covered provider, call the phone number on the back of your medical card.

Registered dietitian visits are also available through WeightWatchers (WW). Aetna members may pay a copay, while Kaiser members may pay out-of-pocket. [Sign up](#) today or access visits through the WW app if you're already a member.

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Deferred Compensation

Overview of Plan Investments and Fees

March 18, 2026 12-1pm – [Click to Join](#)

Plan Overview and Enrollment

March 26, 2026, 12-1pm – [Click to Join](#)

Buckle Up

Every year, thousands of lives are lost because a seat belt wasn't buckled. In 2023 alone, nearly half of the 23,959 passenger vehicle occupants killed weren't wearing a seat belt. A single click could mean the difference between life or death. Don't take the chance — always wear your seat belt.



Here are some facts and tips on buckling up:

- 1 **Always use your seat belt.** It's your best protection in a crash and your top defense against impaired, distracted and aggressive drivers. Staying buckled keeps you inside the vehicle; being ejected is almost always fatal.
- 2 **Air bags are designed to work with seat belts,** not instead of them. In fact, without wearing a seat belt, the air bag's force could seriously injure or kill you.
- 3 **You need to buckle up correctly** for seat belts to work. Here's how:
 - Use the shoulder belt across your chest, not your neck.
 - Use the lap belt across your hips, not your stomach.
 - Never tuck the belt behind your back or under your arm.
- 4 **Check that seat belts fit correctly before buying a vehicle.** If not, ask for extenders or adjusters. **Note:** Modern seat belts can be installed in older vehicles.

expert advice

Q: What is progressive muscle relaxation?

A: Progressive muscle relaxation is a simple yet effective technique for easing stress and tension. PMR trains you to recognize the contrast between muscle tightness and relaxation, allowing you to calm your body as needed.



The practice involves deliberately tensing and then releasing different muscle groups in sequence, typically starting with one end of your body (head or toes) and gradually moving to the other end. For example, you might clench your fists for five to ten seconds, notice the tension, and then release for ten to 20 seconds before moving on to the next set of muscles.

Studies suggest that PMR can be beneficial for:

- Anxiety.
- Sleep.
- Headaches.
- Backaches.
- Stomach upset.
- High blood pressure.

Plan to practice regularly — daily if possible — for at least 15 to 20 minutes. If you don't see the benefits you're seeking, consider trying other calming practices such as guided imagery, meditation, massage, yoga or tai chi. — Eric Endlich, PhD