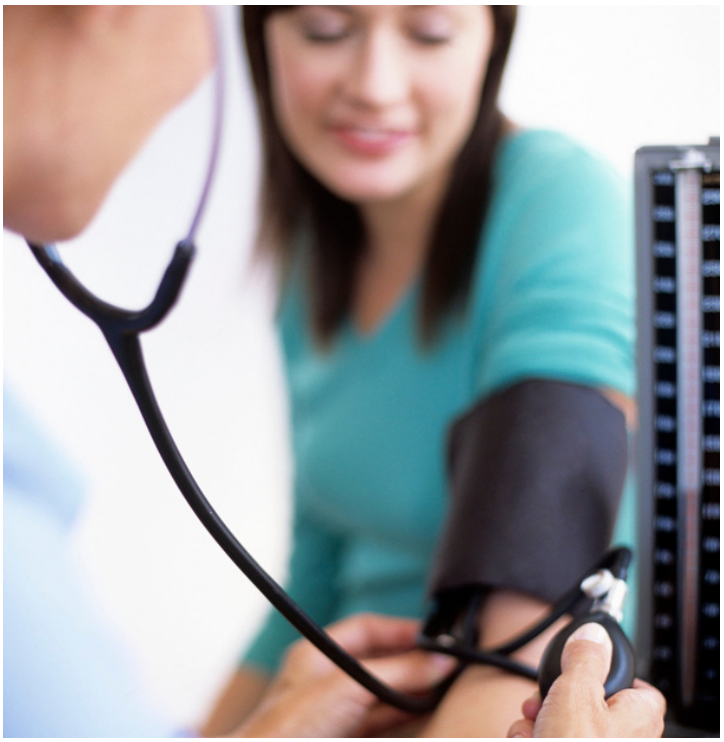
High Blood Pressure: The Silent Killer

One of the most important things you can do to protect your heart (and your brain) is to prevent or manage high blood pressure—and most of the factors influencing blood pressure are under your control.

Under Pressure. The first number, the systolic blood pressure, is the pressure on the artery walls when the heart contracts and pushes blood out into the arteries. The second number, the diastolic pressure, is a measure of the pressure on the artery walls when the heart is at rest between beats.

The artery walls need to stretch when the heart pushes blood into them. Blood pressure gets higher if the artery walls lose elasticity and cannot stretch adequately, or if the volume of blood increases (due to water retention because of too much dietary sodium, for example). Over time, the increased pressure on the blood vessel walls can create an environment that allows atherosclerotic plaque to build up. This plaque makes the walls stiffer and narrower, which results in even higher blood pressure.



The Silent Threat. High blood pressure—also known as hypertension—generally has no symptoms, but it is extremely damaging to your health. Atherosclerotic plaque is the leading cause of chest pain (angina), heart attack, and stroke. In the presence of less flexible and narrower blood vessels, the heart needs to work harder, which contributes to heart failure. High blood pressure also effects the brain. Hypertension increases stroke risk and, as brain cells receive less and less oxygen and nutrients through plaque-narrowed vessels, risk for cognitive decline increases.

Lifestyle changes and medications are a powerful combination for lowering blood pressure. In some cases, lifestyle changes allow people to cut the dose of medication that is needed to control their blood pressure. Everyone can benefit from blood-pressure-friendly lifestyle choices.

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The Food Fix. Dietary intake has a definite impact on blood pressure. The most important blood-pressure related nutrients are sodium and potassium. High sodium intake increases blood pressure, and adequate dietary intake of foods that supply potassium can help lower blood pressure or keep it in a normal range.

There is a lot of evidence behind the DASH and Mediterranean-style dietary patterns for controlling blood pressure. These research-backed patterns are both higher in vegetables, fruits, whole grains, seafood, legumes, and nuts than the typical American diet. These naturally low-sodium foods are excellent sources potassium (and other nutrients that support general health). You can learn more about these dietary patterns, or customize a pattern that best suits your preferences and lifestyle by following a few simple rules:

- **Limit Sodium:** We need some sodium in our diets, but excess can definitely have a negative impact on our health. Unfortunately, most Americans consume more than the recommended 2,300 milligrams (mg) a day. Research shows even modest reductions in salt intake can result in reduced blood pressure over time.
Added salt (sodium chloride) is the primary source of sodium in our diets. Only around 11 percent of the sodium in our diets comes from table salt. The bulk comes from processed foods and restaurant meals. Cutting out highly processed foods naturally lowers added sodium.

- **Eat Plants:** Eating plenty of naturally low-sodium fruits, vegetables, legumes, and unsalted nuts and seeds ensures you get minerals that help support healthy blood pressure, including potassium. These minimally processed plant foods also provide fiber, which is another dietary component research shows may help lower blood pressure.

Interpreting Blood Pressure Readings

Category	SYSTOLIC mmHg (upper number)		DIASTOLIC mmHg (lower number)
Normal	Less than 120	and	Less than 80
Elevated	120 – 129	and	Less than 80
High Blood Pressure (Stage 1)	130 – 139	or	80 – 89
High Blood Pressure (Stage 2)	140 or higher	or	90 or higher
Hypertensive Crisis (see a doctor)	Higher than 180	and/ or	Higher than 120

Source: American Heart Association

Other Lifestyle Choices. In addition to making heart-healthy dietary choices, losing weight, moving more, limiting alcohol, avoiding tobacco, getting adequate sleep, and limiting or managing stress all help prevent and treat high blood pressure.

Find out what your blood pressure is. If it is high, work with your healthcare professional to bring it down. In addition to lifestyle changes, medication may be necessary. Making the lifestyle changes discussed here can lower your blood pressure, so your medication dose may need to be reduced. Monitor your blood pressure regularly at home so you can see how you're doing. Be sure to share any significant lifestyle or blood pressure changes with your healthcare provider.

Set a goal that moves you toward better blood-pressure control. Your heart (and your brain) will thank you.

New Findings on Cognitive Health

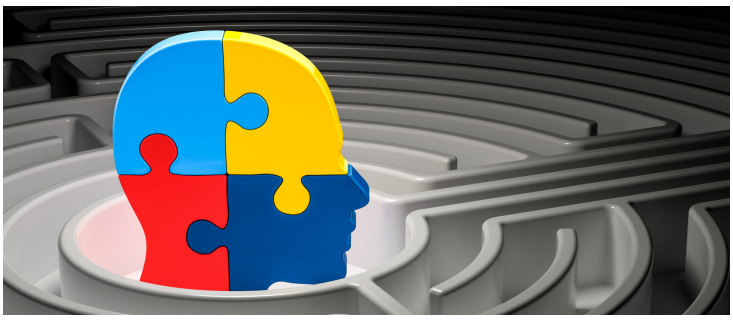
There is a growing understanding of the role lifestyle choices play in preventing and slowing the progression of cognitive decline. While we await new treatments for Alzheimer's disease and other age-related dementias, emerging research can offer some advice for keeping our brains healthy and sharp.

1. Eat Minimally Processed Plants. "We know that a Mediterranean-style dietary pattern (which is high in minimally processed plant foods) may help delay age-associated cognitive dysfunction and probably prevent or delay the onset of Alzheimer's disease," says Richard Dupee, MD, chief of geriatrics service at Tufts Medical Center. Researchers are working on getting more detail on what roles different nutrients play in this relationship.

The new study: Researchers studied the association between dietary patterns rich in magnesium-containing foods and markers of brain health in just over 6,000 participants aged 40 to 73 years at baseline. On average, consuming more magnesium-rich foods was associated with larger brain volumes, especially in women.

What it means: While this study does not prove cause and effect, it suggests that increasing your intake of magnesium-rich foods may be good for brain health and, by extension, cognitive health. Magnesium-rich foods like leafy green vegetables, legumes, nuts, seeds, and whole grains are also packed with other beneficial nutrients. Whether it is the magnesium itself, or (more likely) a combination of factors, that is responsible for the observed association with brain health, choosing these foods in place of less healthy options is always a good idea.

What to do: Increase your intake of whole and minimally processed plant foods: Have a salad with leafy greens daily; choose whole grains and whole grain foods over refined; snack on a handful of nuts once a day, or sprinkle them on salads, whole grain low-sugar cereals, or grain dishes; and look for simple bean-based main courses or add beans to soups, stews, salads, and dips.



2. Avoid Ultra-Processed Foods. Ultra-processed foods generally bear little resemblance to whole foods, either in appearance or nutrient makeup. They are manufactured composites of extracted parts of foods, often mixed with artificial ingredients. More and more research is tying dietary intake high in ultra-processed foods to health problems.

The new study: Researchers looked at the dietary intake of over 10,700 individuals (average age, 51-and-a-half years) living in Brazil. Higher consumption of ultra-processed foods (including breads, crackers, cookies, candy, cereal bars, sodas, mayonnaise, sausages, ham, pizza, instant noodles and soups, deli meats, chips and other baked and fried snacks, and juices) was associated with a higher rate of cognitive decline in six to 10 years of follow-up.

What it means: Eating highly processed offerings may increase your risk for cognitive decline.

What to do: Focus on eating mostly whole and minimally processed foods. This means filling your plate with plenty of fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts/seeds, whole grains, seafood, lean meats, dairy, and healthy plant oils. Watch out, in particular, for foods with refined flour, added sugars, and lots of sodium. Foods loaded with processed protein isolates may also be problematic.

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3. Listen Up. As we get older, our hearing gets worse (more so for men than women, for whatever reason. There is no question poor hearing increases risk for loss of cognition.

The new study: A study analyzed information from over 430,000 individuals aged 40 to 69 years. At baseline, participants were asked to report any hearing loss and use of hearing aids. Hospital records and death data were used to ascertain dementia diagnoses during the follow-up period. Compared to participants without hearing loss, hearing loss without use of hearing aids was associated with a higher risk of developing dementia. This association was not found in people with hearing loss who wore hearing aids.

What it means: Even if you have hearing loss, correcting the problem may help preserve brain function.

What to do: If you suspect you have any hearing loss or a family member or close friend mentions they have noticed a problem, it is important to be tested. If it is determined a hearing aid will help, get one. "There is significant resistance to getting hearing aids," says Dupee, "perhaps because of appearance, or perhaps due to cost. If you can correct a hearing problem, do, not just for the sake of your hearing, but for your brain health as well."

4. Get Moving. Along with a healthy dietary pattern, regular physical activity is known to be important to preserving brain health. These are the same measures that protect cardiovascular health. We know being active helps keep veins and arteries clear, which decreases risk for vascular dementia and strokes. Researchers are trying to understand other ways physical activity may help the brain.

The new study: It is suspected that physical activity causes long-term changes in the hippocampus, the part of the brain that controls the autonomic nervous system and is thought to be the center of emotion and memory. Working in a lab, researchers exposed hippocampal cells to chemicals released by contracting muscles. Neuronal activity increased and the number of cells increased rapidly.

What it means: In addition to aerobic activity , resistance training may cause beneficial changes in the brain.

What to do: Get moving! Any kind of physical activity, in any amount, started at any age is beneficial to heart and brain health. The current recommendation is to aim for 150 minutes a week of moderate activity, like gardening or brisk walking, or 75 minutes of more vigorous activity every week. Engaging in resistance training at least two days a week is also recommended.

5. Tame Stress. We do see that stress increases difficulty multitasking and adapting—especially in the aging brain. We also know that life stress, like the death of a spouse, is associated with higher risk for cognitive decline.

The new study: A study assessed the level of perceived stress of nearly 25,000 participants aged 45 and older at baseline and at one follow-up visit. Cognitive function was assessed at the start of the study and annually throughout the study period. Higher levels of perceived stress were associated with about 40 percent higher risk of poor cognitive function.

What it means: If you feel you are under a lot of stress, you may be at higher risk for cognitive decline.

What to do: It may not always be easy, but stress can be managed. Think about what life changes (a new job, more vacation or personal time) you might be willing and able to make that could reduce the stress in your life. If you are a caregiver, look for resources that can give you some time off. Physical activity is a great way to relieve stress (and boost health!). Research also supports meditation as a way to relieve stress—even if it's just setting aside a few minutes each day to close your eyes and breathe deeply. Laughter is another great choice, so find time to laugh with friends, go to a comedy show, or watch a funny movie. Get social, regular interaction with family and friends can help reduce stress.

Working Up a Sweat

Staying active is essential to our health. But trying to walk, run, bike, or play in the heat is at best unpleasant and at worst dangerous. Without taking the proper measures to keep cool, you risk developing dehydration, heat exhaustion, or life-threatening heatstroke. Let's explore some ways to keep active—and cool and hydrated—on summer days.

Your Body in the Heat.

When your body temperature rises, two important things happen: you begin to sweat, and blood flow to the vessels just under the skin increases. As sweat evaporates, it helps cool the body. In dry heat, sweat evaporates quickly, but if you live in areas where it is humid, be aware that the already moist air has less room to accept water molecules from your skin. The higher the humidity, the slower the sweat will evaporate and greater your chance of overheating. Overheating (hyperthermia) can lead to heat exhaustion or heat stroke. Increased blood flow to the skin allows heat to dissipate through your pores. People with cardiovascular disease (like atherosclerosis or heart failure) may not be able to shift their blood flow effectively. This makes them more likely to overheat—and the existing cardiac problems make them more susceptible to serious consequences of hyperthermia. Carrying excess body fat can also increase risk for overheating.

Beating the Heat.

If you live in a part of the country where the temperature varies dramatically in different seasons, keep in mind that it can take one or two weeks for your body to adapt to the heat. If you typically participate in outdoor activities (including walking), spend less time outside and reduce the intensity of your activity until your body adjusts.

Take advantage of cooler temperatures in the morning and evening hours and shady areas. Going to an air-conditioned gym, taking exercise classes at a community center, walking in an indoor mall, trekking the stairs in an office or apartment building, and working out in a pool are great ways to stay active while keeping cool.

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Be sure to dress appropriately.

Sweat evaporates more easily from lightweight, loose-fitting clothing. Light colors absorb less heat than dark colors, and synthetic fabrics (like polyester or nylon) help draw water away from your body, aiding in evaporation (as opposed to cotton, which holds water and gets saturated.)

The best way to avoid heat-related illnesses is to hydrate. Make sure you drink plenty of fluids and include extra servings of fruits and vegetables on hot days so you are fully hydrated before you go out into the heat. Bring plenty of water with you when you exercise, and make sure you drink it. If you sweat a lot, sports drinks can be helpful for replacing lost sodium and other electrolytes. Stay away from sugar-sweetened beverages and alcohol, as these can actually promote fluid loss.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, oIder age, youth (age 0-4), obesity, fever, heart disease, mental illness, poor circulation, sunburn, and prescription drug and alcohol use can limit the ability to regulate temperature. Talk to your health-care provider if you think you may be at increased risk for heat-related illnesses or if you are planning to become more active than you have been in the past.

Heat Exhaustion

The warning signs of heat exhaustion include the following:

- Heavy sweating
- Cool, clammy skin
- Muscle cramps,
- Fatigue, weakness
- Dizziness
- Headache
- Nausea or vomiting
- Fainting
- Weak, rapid pulse
- Irritability

Heat Stroke

Heat stroke can be fatal if not treated promptly. Warning signs vary but may include:

- Very high body temperature (103°F or higher)
- Red, hot, dry skin
- Rapid, strong pulse
- Headache
- Dizziness
- Nausea
- Confusion
- Unconsciousness

Try these tips to be physically active safely on hot days:

- Hydrate. Drink plenty of (unsweetened, alcohol-free) fluids, before, during, and after being active.
- Bottle it. Find a water bottle that is convenient for you to carry, fill it with water and take it with you.
- Move inside. Go to an air-conditioned gym; take classes at a community center; walk in an indoor mall; walk stairs in an office or apartment building; or work out in a pool.
- Dress for success. Wear lightweight, loose, light-colored, synthetic clothing, and avoid cotton.
- Avoid peak sun and heat times. Go out early or late in the day and look for shady areas.
- Start slow. Give your body time to adjust to hot weather and talk to your healthcare provider before starting any new activities.

Create a Powerful Pantry

Healthy cooking doesn't have to start with fresh ingredients. Having nutritious staples and cooking essentials on hand makes it easy to prepare an endless variety of quick, delicious, healthy meals. Here are some of our favorites, and some ideas for putting them to good use:

Whole Grains 	Stock familiar favorites, like oats, brown rice, and whole wheat pasta, as well as a couple different varieties, like farro, sorghum, or quinoa. Studies show dietary patterns containing whole grains (rather than refined grains) are associated with lower risk of many chronic diseases. Whole grains are simple to prepare and work for any meal, from hot breakfast cereal, to cold grain-and-bean salad with vinaigrette, to a hot pilaf side dish with mushrooms, onions, or any ingredients you like. Whole grain breads, cereals, and crackers make a quick sandwich, breakfast, and easy, out-of-the-box snack. Storing a few homemade whole-grain meals in the freezer can save the day when time is tight or energy is low.
Canned Tomatoes 	Whole, diced, or pureed, canned tomatoes are a common ingredient in many recipes. Grab no- or reduced-sodium varieties and see how easy it is to make a topping for whole grain or bean pasta or whip up a homemade salsa or a pot of chili or soup. Canned corn is also a popular pantry staple, although frozen may be more convenient and environmentally friendly.

Root Vegetables 	Keep root vegetables like onions, garlic, beets, turnips, and sweet potatoes on hand. They last for months and are very versatile. Try them baked, roasted, steamed, or added to soups and stews.
Cooking Essentials and Seasonings 	Plant oils, like soybean, corn, olive, and canola, are the first step to making foods we love, like stir fries and sautéed and roasted veggies. Keep a few favorite spices beyond salt and pepper for flavoring. Dried oregano and basil, and garlic, chili, and curry powders are popular choices, and many home cooks like to use pre-mixed spice blends (just avoid those where the primary ingredient is salt). On the savory side, you'll want to have a few vinegars (like apple cider and balsamic) on hand to use as a base for a vinaigrette or splash into soups and stews. Soy sauce and Worcestershire sauce add flavor to whole grains, stews, soups, and stir-fries.
Legumes 	Dried or canned beans, peas, and lentils are nutritious, versatile, protein-packed options to keep on hand. They provide a healthy dose of fiber and important minerals like iron, magnesium and potassium. The many varieties of (low- or reduced-sodium) canned legumes make plant-based meals a snap. Toss them into soups, stews, and salads, puree them into creamy bean dips, mash them into burrito or quesadilla fillings, or form them into veggie burgers with whole grains and chopped vegetables . Dried beans, peas, and lentils keep indefinitely in a cool, dry place. They are perfect for comforting, slow cooked one-pot meals like soups, stews, chilis, and curries. Dishes made with legumes freeze well—so you can cook once, portion, and freeze for future meals. Nuts, seeds, and nut butters. Even tiny seeds like sunflower and pumpkin are tasty, filling, and nutrient rich. Nuts and seeds make great grab-and-go snacks, yogurt and salad toppers, and additions to granola and other whole grain cereals. The healthy unsaturated fats in nuts and seeds boost the calorie content, but a little goes a long way—just a handful can help satisfy hunger. Nut butters make a great dip for carrots, celery, and apples. Or spread them on banana slices, whole grain crackers, or bread, stir them into oatmeal, or whirl them into smoothies with fresh or frozen fruit.

Reader Beware

1

ANIMALS ARE NOT PEOPLE

In the 1970s, researchers found that very high intakes of the calorie-free sweetener saccharin caused bladder cancer in rats. At the time, lots of people had already been using saccharin (which was discovered in the late 1800s) for a long time. Beginning in 1977, foods sweetened with saccharin had to have a cancer warning label. But in 2000, scientists discovered humans metabolize saccharin differently than rats, making the supposed cancer connection incorrect. The warning labels were removed.

WHAT WE LEARNED

The results of animal studies should not be automatically generalized to humans. Animal research is important for addressing questions that cannot be studied in humans. Findings from animal studies may help researchers narrow down their search for answers or suggest a direction for human research, but animals are not humans.

WHAT TO DO

When you read about a new nutrition breakthrough, see if the article mentions whether animal models or humans were studied.

Although headlines sometimes give the impression that one ground-breaking nutrition study will change food-based guidance, this is rarely, if ever, the case. Take a look at these examples of when studies were overhyped or misinterpreted—and why—so you'll know how to make the best decisions for you and your family.

2

THE "FRENCH PARADOX"

An ecologic study (comparing different nations or populations) published in 1993 found people in Finland had a much higher risk of dying from coronary heart disease than people in France, even though both countries had very similar dietary cholesterol and saturated fat intakes. This became known as the "French Paradox." Researchers then set out on a quest to determine what was different about the French. Since drinking red wine is a big part of French culture, many researchers focused on that. This single study was a driving factor behind the idea that red wine—and, by extension, the phytochemical resveratrol it contains—is good for heart health. This idea is still unproven, and human studies so far have been disappointing.

While this ecologic study opened up an interesting avenue for further study, it probably pointed people in the wrong direction. There were many other differences between Finland and France, including in other dietary habits and level of physical activity. Cohort studies are a better type of observational study, comparing people within a population and allowing careful adjustment for differences between people. One example is the coffee study mentioned in last month's issue. Coffee was found to be associated with higher risk for cancer—until it was shown that many of the coffee drinkers in the cohort study were smokers, and it was the smoking that was causing the cancer.

WHAT WE LEARNED

There are different types of observational studies: ecologic, case-control, and cohort. Ecologic studies, like the one that suggested the "French Paradox," are the weakest type of evidence. Retrospective case-control studies also have key limitations. While observational studies cannot necessarily prove cause and effect, carefully adjusted cohort studies provide the strongest evidence that two things may be independently associated with each other.

WHAT TO DO

Be aware that many nutrition studies are observational, and not all observational studies are created equal. Large, prospective cohort studies can provide the best evidence but, unless also supported by other types of research, may not be a sufficient reason to change dietary guidelines—or your behavior.

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3 THE ANTIOXIDANT EXPLOSION

Antioxidants (like vitamin E, vitamin C, beta-carotene, and lycopene) have been all the rage since the 1990s. Foods that contain them (like berries, cocoa, green tea, pomegranate juice, legumes, and many fortified processed foods), as well as supplements, love to tout their benefits on labels and in advertisements. Should you believe them? Yes, and no.

Antioxidants play an important role in the body, minimizing a normal but potentially dangerous condition called oxidative stress. In what sounds like something out of a thriller, unstable molecules called "free radicals" roam the body, stealing electrons from unsuspecting stable molecules. This can lead to cell damage that is involved in the development of atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries), which increases risk of heart attack and stroke. Oxidative stress can also turn cells cancerous and accelerate the onset of dementia, among other things. Antioxidants counteract these free radicals.

Often, when a news article or website touts the antioxidant effects of a vitamin, mineral, or plant compound (phytochemical), those effects were observed when that isolated antioxidant was exposed to human cells or tissue in vitro (in test tubes or petri dishes). The same effect may or may not take place in the complex setting of the human body. In fact, although results have been mixed, research on antioxidant supplements involving humans has been disappointing. "One potential reason for the disappointing results is that our bodies have multiple antioxidant systems frequently working in concert," says Alice H. Lichtenstein, DSc, Stanley N. Gershoff professor of nutrition science and policy at Tufts' Friedman School and director of the Cardiovascular Nutrition Laboratory at the Jean Mayer USDA Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging at Tufts University. "In addition, as long as we are meeting our requirements for a nutrient with antioxidant properties through the foods we eat, there is no reason to expect more is better. In fact, some studies have identified negative effects of high dose antioxidant supplements."

WHAT WE LEARNED

We now know antioxidants have many functions in the body. Depending on the circumstances, compounds that act as antioxidants some of the time can act as dangerous free radicals at other times. "Dietary patterns containing foods rich in antioxidant compounds have consistently been linked to better health," says Lichtenstein, "but we can't say for sure these benefits are due to the antioxidants alone."

WHAT TO DO

Antioxidants occur naturally in whole foods, especially fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts, seeds, and whole grains. The antioxidant capacity of a food does not make it necessarily healthier than another food. (For example, blueberries were found to have very high antioxidant levels, but other berries and fruits are equally good choices for overall health.) Eating a variety of plant foods is your best bet for health, rather than a whole lot of one specific food. A healthy dietary pattern is the best way to achieve an adequate intake of antioxidant nutrients —as well as fiber, vitamins, minerals, and everything else your body needs. "There are many benefits beyond antioxidants of habitually consuming a healthy dietary pattern rich in fruits and vegetables, whole grains, fish, legumes, nuts, seeds, and healthy plant oils that is low in added sugars and salt," Lichtenstein says.

4 THE EGG FLIP

From 1961 until 2015, most major dietary recommendations in the U.S. included advice to limit intake of cholesterol from foods to 300 milligrams (mg) per day. We knew that high levels of LDL ("bad") cholesterol in the blood increased risk for cardiovascular disease, so limiting or avoiding foods that contained cholesterol seemed logical. Foods like eggs and shrimp, which are high in cholesterol but low in saturated fat, were "off the menu" for many people.

Further assessment of the data showed that, at the levels at which we currently consume dietary cholesterol in the U.S. (about 300 mg a day), dietary cholesterol does not play a large role in controlling LDL ("bad") cholesterol levels. The major dietary determinant of LDL cholesterol levels is a higher ratio of dietary saturated fat to unsaturated fat. There was a relationship between high intake of eggs (about five eggs per day) and LDL cholesterol levels, but intake of reasonable quantities of foods high in cholesterol but low in saturated fat (like eggs and shrimp) is no longer considered a concern.

WHAT WE LEARNED

Recommendations evolve as new data emerges. You can generally rely on dietary guidelines like the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and recommendations put out by public health non-profits (like the American Heart Association and American Diabetes Association), and international bodies (like the World Health Organization). Groups of experts analyze all the existing research to provide strong, evidence-based information geared to be helpful to the majority of individuals.

WHAT TO DO

One study does not change recommendations. New data is merged with existing data, and guidance is re-assessed and potentially revised. Don't be taken in by articles or advertisements claiming some new study is groundbreaking. Keep an eye on publications like this one to inform you of any true changes to nutrition advice.

5 Healthy Eating Tips for the Holidays

Here's your recipe for staying on track no matter what's cooking.
'Tis the season for family, festivity, and food—lots of food. Temptations are everywhere, and parties and travel disrupt daily routines. What's more, it all goes on for weeks.
How do you stick to your diabetes meal plan when everyone around you seems to be splurging? Here are 5 tips that can help:

1. Holiday-Proof Your Plan

You may not be able to control what food you're served, and you're going to see other people eating tempting treats. Meet the challenges armed with a plan:

- Eat close to your usual times to keep your blood sugar steady. If your meal is served later than normal, eat a small snack at your usual mealtime and eat a little less when dinner is served.
- Invited to a party? Offer to bring a healthy dish along.
- If you have a sweet treat, cut back on other carbs (like potatoes and bread) during the meal.
- Don't skip meals to save up for a feast. It will be harder to manage your blood sugar, and you'll be really hungry and more likely to overeat.
- If you slip up, get right back to healthy eating with your next meal.

2. Outsmart the Buffet

When you face a spread of delicious holiday food, make healthy choices easier:

A) Have a small plate of the foods you like best and then move away from the buffet table.
B) Start with vegetables to take the edge off your appetite.
C) Eat slowly. It takes at least 20 minutes for your brain to realize you're full.
D) Avoid or limit alcohol. If you do have an alcoholic drink, have it with food. Alcohol can lower blood sugar and interact with diabetes medicines.

Also plan to stay on top of your blood sugar. Check it more often during the holidays, and if you take medicine, ask your doctor if the amount needs to be adjusted.

3. Fit in Favorites

No food is on the naughty list. Choose the dishes you really love and can't get any other time of year, like Aunt Edna's pumpkin pie. Slow down and savor a small serving, and make sure to count it in your meal plan.

4. Keep Moving

You've got a lot on your plate this time of year, and physical activity can get crowded out. But being active is your secret holiday weapon; it can help make up for eating more than usual and reduce stress during this most stressful time of year. Get moving with friends and family, such as taking a walk after a holiday meal.

5. Get Your Zzz's

Going out more and staying out later often means cutting back on sleep. Sleep loss can make it harder to manage your blood sugar, and when you're sleep deprived you'll tend to eat more and prefer high-fat, high-sugar food. Aim for 7 to 8 hours per night to guard against mindless eating.

Most of all, remember what the season is about—celebrating and connecting with the people you care about. When you focus more on the fun, it's easier to focus less on the food.