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Buddy up, get fit!

Having a workout buddy or team can significantly boost your fitness journey. It's more than just shared sweat; it's about mutual motivation and support.

PARTNER POWER

- **Increased motivation:** A workout partner holds you accountable. Knowing someone is counting on you makes it harder to skip a session. And maintaining a consistent workout schedule helps achieve your fitness goals.
- **Enhanced enjoyment:** Exercise becomes more enjoyable when shared. Social interaction during workouts can make time fly.
- **Safety and support:** Having someone spot you during weightlifting or offer encouragement during tough cardio sessions can prevent injuries and boost confidence.
- **Healthy competition:** Friendly competition can push you to achieve more than you would alone, leading to better results.
- **Shared learning:** You can learn new exercises and techniques from each other, broadening your fitness knowledge and routine.

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Building healthy bonds

Relationships are fundamental to our well-being. Yet, navigating them effectively can be complex. Building positive connections hinges on mutual respect, trust, and open communication. Recognizing unhealthy patterns and establishing clear boundaries are vital steps in fostering truly healthy interactions that support your emotional health.



IDENTIFYING TOXIC TRENDS

Be aware of behaviors that erode your self-esteem, such as consistent belittling or demeaning remarks about your appearance, abilities, or personality. Attempts to isolate you from friends and family or dictate your choices are also significant red flags. A lack of respect is evident when someone consistently ignores your “no” or disregards your personal space, whether physical, emotional, or mental. And gaslighting is where someone manipulates you into questioning your own reality by distorting the truth, or blaming you for their abusive behavior. These patterns erode your confidence and judgment.

CREATING HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

Clearly articulate your limits, letting others know what is and isn’t acceptable behavior. Consistency is key. Enforce your boundaries even when it feels difficult. Prioritize your self-respect, understanding that your needs and feelings are valid. Also, learn to say “no” without guilt. It’s perfectly acceptable to decline requests that compromise your well-being.



STRATEGIES FOR HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS (HALT)

A simple yet powerful framework for managing your emotional state in relationships is **HALT**:

- **Hungry:** Address hunger to prevent irritability.
- **Angry:** Manage anger constructively by taking a breather.
- **Lonely:** Seek social connection to combat isolation.
- **Tired:** Prioritize sleep to improve emotional regulation and patience.

WHEN TO SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP

- If you experience persistent feelings of anxiety, fear, or depression related to a relationship, this may indicate a consistent negative impact on your mental health.
- If you experience any physical or emotional abuse (violence, threats, manipulation, gaslighting, or constant criticism). These are signs to seek help, as it creates an unsafe environment.
- If you are consistently unable to set or maintain healthy boundaries, external support from a therapist or counselor can provide valuable tools and guidance for resolution and individual well-being.



Age well, vaccinate well

As we gracefully age, our immune systems can naturally become a bit less robust. This means we are more susceptible to certain infections. Talk to your doctor or healthcare provider about which vaccines are recommended for you based on your age, health conditions, and lifestyle.



RECOMMENDED IMMUNIZATIONS FOR OLDER ADULTS

- **Influenza (flu) vaccine:** The flu can be much more serious for older adults, potentially leading to complications like pneumonia. An annual flu shot is your best defense.
- **Pneumococcal vaccine:** Pneumococcal disease can cause serious infections in the lungs (pneumonia), blood (bacteremia), and brain (meningitis). Two types of pneumococcal vaccines are recommended for most adults 65 years or older: PCV15 or PCV20.
- **Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) vaccine:** RSV infection can cause serious respiratory illness, especially in older adults. Vaccination is recommended for everyone ages 75 and older, and for those ages 60-74 at increased risk for severe RSV disease.
- **Shingles vaccine:** Shingles is a painful rash caused by the reactivation of the varicella-zoster virus – the same virus that causes chickenpox. Even if you had chickenpox as a child, you can still get shingles. The shingles vaccine, Shingrix, is highly effective in preventing shingles and its complications, like long-lasting nerve pain. Two doses are typically recommended.
- **COVID-19 vaccine:** Vaccination against COVID-19 remains crucial for older adults, who are at higher risk of severe illness, hospitalization, and death from the virus. Staying up to date with recommended doses, including boosters when eligible, offers significant protection.
- **Tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis (Tdap) vaccine:** This vaccine protects against three serious bacterial diseases. Any adult who didn't get the Tdap vaccination as an adolescent should get one dose, then get a Tdap booster shot every 10 years.
- **Hepatitis B vaccine:** Hepatitis B is a serious liver infection. Vaccination is recommended for adults 19-59 years of age if they have not yet received the vaccine. Adults 60 years and older are recommended to get vaccinated if they are at increased exposure to hepatitis B. Your doctor can help you determine if you are at risk for Hepatitis B.

The ultra-processed puzzle

Let's dive into the world of ultra-processed foods (UPFs). These foods undergo multiple processing steps and often bear little resemblance to their original ingredients. They are typically designed to be highly palatable, convenient, and have a long shelf life. Making informed choices about the foods we eat is crucial for our long-term health.



CHARACTERISTICS

- Ultra-processed foods are essentially industrial formulations made mostly from substances derived from foods (like oils, fats, sugars, starch, and protein isolates) and often contain additives like artificial flavors, colors, emulsifiers, and preservatives.
- They typically contain many ingredients that consumers wouldn't usually use in home cooking.
- Their primary aim is often to be hyper-palatable – engineered to be extremely appealing to our taste buds, often overriding the body's natural satiety cues.
- They are frequently heavily marketed and readily available, contributing to their significant presence in modern diets.
- While derived from food components, the extensive processing often strips away beneficial nutrients like fiber and vitamins.



COMMON EXAMPLES

- Sodas, fruit juices with added sugars, and sweetened beverages, which are often packed with artificial sweeteners and flavorings
- Chips, crackers, cookies, candy, and granola bars loaded with added sugars, unhealthy fats, and artificial ingredients
- Hot dogs, sausages, deli meats, and bacon that often contain high levels of sodium, saturated fats, and preservatives
- Instant Meals and Ready-to-Eat Products. Frozen dinners, instant noodles, and pre-made sauces frequently contain numerous additives to enhance flavor and extend shelf life.
- Cakes, pastries, and commercially-produced bread that often contain emulsifiers, artificial flavors, and large amounts of added sugars and unhealthy fats



NEGATIVE HEALTH OUTCOMES

- These foods are often energy-dense, low in fiber and nutrients, and can disrupt satiety signals, leading to overeating.
- The high sugar and refined carbohydrate content can negatively impact blood sugar control and insulin sensitivity.
- Unhealthy fats, high sodium content, and inflammatory ingredients can contribute to heart problems.
- The lack of fiber and abundance of artificial ingredients in UPFs can negatively affect the balance of beneficial bacteria in the gut, potentially leading to inflammation and other health issues.
- Some studies suggest a link between high consumption of UPFs and certain types of cancer.



From shy to shine!

Social anxiety disorder (SAD) is fear of social situations where you might be judged, embarrassed, or humiliated. It goes beyond occasional nervousness. People with social anxiety often worry for days or weeks before an event and spend considerable time analyzing their performance afterward, fearing they said or did something wrong.



IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES

- Understand your triggers.** Start by identifying the specific situations that make you feel most anxious. Is it public speaking, small talk, eating in front of others, or attending parties? Recognizing your triggers is the first step towards managing them.
- Practice gradual exposure.** Avoidance reinforces anxiety. Instead, try gradually exposing yourself to feared social situations, starting with less anxiety-provoking ones. For example, if you're anxious about talking to strangers, start by making brief eye contact and offering a simple "hello" to a cashier. Gradually work your way up to more challenging interactions.
- Focus on others.** When you're feeling anxious in a social situation, try shifting your focus outward by actively listening to the other person, asking them questions, and showing genuine interest. This can help take the pressure off of yourself and make the interaction feel less threatening.
- Challenge negative thoughts.** Social anxiety is often fueled by negative and unrealistic thoughts about social situations ("Everyone will think I'm boring"). Practice identifying these thoughts and challenging their validity. Ask yourself if there's evidence to support these thoughts or if there are alternative, more positive ways to view the situation.
- Learn relaxation techniques.** Techniques like deep breathing exercises, progressive muscle relaxation, and mindfulness can help calm your nervous system in anxious moments. Practicing these regularly can make them more accessible when you most need them.
- Seek professional support.** If social anxiety is significantly impacting your life, consider seeking help from a mental health professional. Therapy, particularly Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and social skills training, can provide you with effective tools and strategies to manage your anxiety. Medication may also be helpful in some cases.



Side-by-side learning

Your involvement in your child's education, from early learning to higher education, is a dynamic and vital force. Being an active participant means offering support and fostering a home that champions learning, ultimately becoming their essential learning partner.



INVOLVEMENT BENEFITS

- **Higher academic achievement:** When parents are engaged, children tend to take their studies more seriously and strive for excellence.
- **Better attendance:** Children whose parents actively participate in their education are more likely to attend school regularly and have fewer unexcused absences or tardiness. This consistent presence in the learning environment allows them to fully benefit from instruction and maintain continuity in their studies.
- **Improved behavior:** Active parental involvement can contribute to a more positive attitude towards school and a greater understanding of classroom expectations. This often leads to fewer disciplinary issues, improved social skills, and a more respectful demeanor towards teachers and peers.
- **Increased motivation:** When children see that their parents value their education and are invested in their learning journey, it can significantly boost their intrinsic motivation to learn, explore new ideas, and persevere through academic challenges.



ACTIONABLE STEPS

- **Preschool-elementary:** Show genuine interest in their school day. Ask specific questions like, "Tell me about the story you read." Attend school events, volunteer in the classroom if possible, and encourage playful learning at home with books, games, etc.
- **Middle school:** Help them develop organizational skills, time management, and study habits. Stay informed about their assignments and projects through school portals and attend parent-teacher conferences to discuss their progress and any challenges.
- **High school:** Encourage their interests and help them explore potential career paths or college options. Be a sounding board for their academic anxieties. Support them in taking responsibility for their learning.
- **College years:** Offer emotional encouragement and help them navigate the challenges of higher education. Discuss their academic goals and listen to their experiences. Help them develop financial literacy and connect them with resources.



Power snooze

A WELL-TIMED NAP CAN PROVIDE A MENTAL RESET, HELPING TO IMPROVE FOCUS, MOOD, AND EVEN MEMORY. AIM FOR A “POWER NAP” OF AROUND 20-30 MINUTES TO REAP THE MOST REWARDS WITHOUT DISRUPTING YOUR NIGHTTIME SLEEP.



DAYTIME SHUT-EYE PERKS

- A short nap can combat afternoon slumps and increase your alertness and concentration, making you more productive and mentally sharp. Think of it as a mini-reboot for your brain, clearing away mental clutter.
- Napping can have a positive impact on your emotional state. It can help regulate mood, decrease feelings of frustration, and promote relaxation, acting as a mini-stress reliever during a busy day.
- Napping can help consolidate memories, making it easier to retain information you've learned. This can be particularly beneficial for students, or anyone engaged in continuous learning.
- By giving your brain a break, a nap can sometimes lead to new insights and creative thinking. That period of rest allows your mind to process information in the background, potentially sparking innovative ideas.

Home check habits

Think of your home like a car – regular check-ups prevent bigger problems down the road. A little routine maintenance can save you time, money, and stress.



SEASONAL CHECKS (EVERY 3-4 MONTHS):

- **Inspect gutters and downspouts.** Clear out leaves, debris, and any blockages to ensure proper water drainage away from your foundation. This helps prevent water damage to your roof, walls, and basement.
- **Test smoke and carbon monoxide detectors.** Ensure they are functioning correctly by pressing the test button. Replace batteries at least once a year, or according to manufacturer recommendations, to guarantee they'll alert you in case of an emergency.

ANNUAL CHECKS:

- **Inspect HVAC system.** Schedule a professional check-up for your heating and cooling systems. This helps identify potential issues before they become costly repairs.
- **Check plumbing fixtures.** Look for leaks and water damage around faucets, toilets, and under sinks. Address problems promptly to prevent water waste and potential mold growth.