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**inside** HEALTH — EXPERTS SAY TO BROADEN OUR DEFINITIONS | COVID-19 — BUSTING VACCINE MYTHS | ASTHMA — HOW TO LIVE A NORMAL LIFE WITH THE AFFLICTION | TUNA TRUTHS — WHAT CONSUMERS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THEIR FAVORITE CANNED FOOD | HEALTHY SOUPS — SAVORY SOUPS THAT WILL MAKE YOU FEEL BETTER | MEDICINE SAFETY — HOW TO KEEP PRESCRIPTION MEDICATIONS OUT OF YOUR CHILDREN'S EXPLORING HANDS | RX RESOLUTIONS — TURN 2022 INTO YOUR HEALTHIEST YEAR | PREGNANCY — WHAT ARE THE RISKS IN AMERICA? | MENOPAUSE — SKIN CARE FOR WOMEN IS JUST AS IMPORTANT | DENTAL HYGIENE — HOW CAREGIVERS CAN ENSURE DENTAL HEALTH FOR THEIR CHARGES



COURTESY PHOTO

(StatePoint)

Many Americans view health as a product of the medical care they receive. However, public health experts say that's just one piece of the puzzle.

"In reality, our health is shaped more by the zip code we live in than the doctor we see. In fact, where we live, our financial circumstances, our access to affordable, nutritious foods, and other non-medical factors overwhelmingly influence our physical and mental health," said Dr. Shantanu Agrawal, chief health officer at Anthem, Inc. These factors that Agrawal

refers to are known as "social drivers of health" (SDoH), and they determine up to 80% of our health outcomes, according to Robert Wood Johnson Foundation research.

As part of "What's Driving Our Health," Anthem's campaign to start a national conversation around whole health, the healthcare company recently conducted a study to learn more about Americans' perceptions of what health really means. Here are some of the study's top findings:

- While 46% of Americans are unaware of the concept of social drivers of health, once given the definition, 60% agree that their local com-

munity is facing at least some health issues related to them.

- Americans of color are disproportionately affected by the consequences of SDoH. While 58% of white respondents report that their local community is facing at least some health issues related to SDoH, 69% of Hispanic and Latino respondents report the same, as do 68% of Asian respondents and 68% of Black/African American respondents.

- Poor nutrition can contribute to a range of chronic health conditions, and 50% of those surveyed say it is hard to find affordable, healthy food in their local commu-

- Though 70% of Americans live near at least one hospital or medical center, one in five say that lack of transportation has kept them from medical appointments. What's more, nearly one-third struggle with access to health services and care.

- Internet access not only determines whether one is able to use important health services such as telemedicine, it deeply impacts educational outcomes and access to economic opportunities, including employment. Yet only 39% of Americans believe it significantly impacts their health.

- Some additional factors that can drive health out-

comes in the short and long term include access to green spaces, educational opportunities, economic stability and living in a safe community.

WHERE TO START

More than 80% of those surveyed believe that healthcare entities, local government, private citizens and employers share responsibility to address the many social drivers of health. While these issues are complex and no one entity can fully address all the social drivers alone, here is what you can do today:

1. Connect the dots. Visit [WhatsDrivingOurHealth.com](http://WhatsDrivingOurHealth.com) to read the full report and learn more about whole

health and its drivers.

2. Spread the word. Share what you've learned about the ways social drivers affect you and your community and follow the conversation on social media using #DrivingOurHealth.

3. Join the conversation. Understanding is the first step in making positive change. Engage with friends, family, and community members about the many ways to address health-related social needs in your community.

"The sooner we broaden our definition of health, the sooner we can address the many factors that affect people's ability to thrive," Agrawal said.



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COURTESY PHOTO

# COVID-19

## VACCINE MYTHS BUSTED

(StatePoint)

**C**COVID-19 vaccines are overwhelmingly safe and highly effective at reducing the risk of severe disease, hospitalizations and death. Unfortunately, misinformation and pervasive myths continue to sow doubt, leaving many unprotected.

Roughly 99% of deaths linked to COVID-19 in the latest wave — and the vast majority of cases involving severe symptoms that require hospitalization — were among the unvaccinated, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

“With high levels of community spread of COVID-19, we’re once again fighting a two-front war: against the virus and against rampant misinformation,” said American

Medical Association president Gerald E. Harmon, M.D.

Here are some of the top myths that physicians are hearing and what you need to know:

**Q:** Can COVID-19 vaccines impact fertility?

**A:** Risks to fertility or the ability to become pregnant after receiving a COVID-19 vaccine were disproven through clinical trials and real-world data points. While pregnant women weren’t specifically targeted for vaccine trials, several participants became pregnant without issue during the trial duration, and there’s been no demonstrated real-world impact on fertility.

Moreover, COVID-19 itself carries significant risks for pregnant women, including higher risks of preterm labor and stillbirth, and

higher risks of hypertension and pneumonia for pregnant women. There’s also no evidence showing that COVID-19 vaccines affect male fertility.

**Q:** Can vaccinated people “shed” spike proteins, affecting those close to them?

**A:** Vaccine shedding can only occur when a vaccine contains a weakened version of the virus. None of the COVID-19 vaccines authorized for use in the U.S. contain a live virus, so it’s not biologically possible for a vaccinated person to affect an unvaccinated person by proxy or by “shedding” spike proteins.

**Q:** I’ve already had COVID-19. Do I need the vaccine?

**A:** Yes, the data shows that unvaccinated individuals are more than twice as likely to be reinfected with COVID-19

than those who were fully vaccinated after initially contracting the virus. Getting the vaccine is the best way to protect yourself and those around you.

**Q:** Why do I need the vaccine if breakthrough infections are possible?

**A:** Some fully vaccinated people will still get sick because no vaccine is 100% effective. However, data show that vaccination may make COVID-19 symptoms less severe. The vaccines have also been shown to provide substantial protection against death and hospitalization in cases of breakthrough infection.

**Q:** I’m young and healthy. Do I really need the vaccine?

**A:** Many young, previously healthy people have gotten seriously ill or died from

COVID-19, and those numbers are increasing with new, more transmissible variants. There’s no way to predict how you’ll respond to infection.

Additionally, vaccines help prevent you from carrying the virus and transmitting it to others. Reducing the number of unvaccinated people will mitigate transmission of the virus.

**Q:** I have allergies. Should I be worried about a reaction to the vaccine?

**A:** There have been very rare (2.5 to 5 people per million) reports of severe (anaphylactic) allergic reactions to COVID-19 vaccines. Having severe allergic reactions to certain foods, bee stings or oral medications doesn’t mean you will have an allergic reaction to a COVID-19 vaccine. The vaccination sites

are prepared to evaluate and handle these situations on individual basis.

“The evidence around vaccinations is abundantly clear; they’re safe, effective and will help protect you and your loved ones from severe COVID and death,” Harmon said. “If you have questions about the vaccine, its safety, or effectiveness, please speak to your physician. We are here for you, eager to answer your questions, and get you protected from this virus.”

More fact-based vaccine information can be found by visiting [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov) or [getvaccineanswers.org](https://www.getvaccineanswers.org) online.

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# ASTHMA

LIVE A NORMAL, HEALTHY LIFE

(StatePoint)

**A**sthma is a lung disease that makes breathing difficult for more than 24 million Americans.

While there's no cure, there are steps you can take to help control it so you can lead a normal, healthy life.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) National Asthma Control Program developed the "six EXHALE strategies" that help contribute to better asthma control.

By putting all six activities into place, you and your loved ones can feel better, avoid the hospital or emergency room, and avoid missing school or work.

According to the American Lung Association, here's everything you need to know about the six EXHALE strategies:

**WHAT IS IT?**

What are the EXHALE strategies? The EXHALE strategies are for both children and adults and can be used one at a time or in combination with one another to help you gain better control of asthma. They are:

- Education on asthma self-management
- Extinguishing smoking

and secondhand smoke

- Home visits by asthma experts who can teach you asthma control skills as well as help you eliminate asthma triggers in your house

- Achievement of guidelines-based medical management. This means following your doctor's advice.

- Linkages and coordination of care across settings. Be sure all your healthcare providers are on the same page regarding your care.

- Environmental policies or best practices to reduce asthma triggers from indoor, outdoor and occupational sources. Are your home and workplace free of asthma triggers like smoke and pollutants?

**IMPLEMENTING STRATEGY**

How can I use the EXHALE strategies on a daily basis? Check out the CDC's guide for people living with asthma on how to use the EXHALE strategies at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov):

- Keep your asthma under control by learning the seven asthma self-management skills. Work with your healthcare provider to develop and maintain an asthma action plan that will remind you what to do when asthma symptoms get worse and how to properly use your

medicine.

- Tobacco smoke can trigger asthma symptoms for many. Limit your exposure to secondhand smoke and support smoke-free policies in your community that help people quit smoking.

- Work with a nurse or community health worker to help reduce or remove triggers in your home.

- Take your asthma medicines exactly as prescribed and check with your healthcare provider to make sure you're using the inhaler(s) correctly.

- Involve all of your healthcare providers in

your asthma care or your child's care so everyone is on the same page. Bring a copy of your or your child's asthma action plan to each doctor. Also, make sure other caregivers, your child's school or your workplace has a copy too, so they can help in an emergency.

- Make a few home updates to reduce asthma triggers. Remove mold and pests, make your home and vehicles smoke-free and talk with leaders in your community about putting policies in place that help people living with asthma.

**HELP FROM LUNG ASSOCIATION**

How can the American Lung Association help me? The Lung Association is implementing the EXHALE strategies in its Promoting Asthma Friendly Environments through Partnerships and Collaborations project. You can learn more about their work and programs by visiting [www.lung.org/AFE](http://www.lung.org/AFE).

Children and adults living with asthma can also participate in one of the Lung Association's asthma self-management programs, such as Open Airways for Schools, Kickin'

Asthma or Breathe Well, Live Well.

Additionally, the Lung Association has many programs and initiatives to help people follow the above tips.

Finally, you can get help quitting smoking or helping someone quit using Lung Association resources, such as Freedom From Smoking, Not on Tobacco (N-O-T) and the Lung Helpline. Learn more about creating an asthma-friendly home by visiting [www.lung.org](http://www.lung.org) online.

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- Non-healing wounds on your ankles or feet • Restless Leg

All are possible signs of peripheral vascular disease or superficial venous reflux disease—both are progressive conditions affecting circulation that will only worsen if not treated. They could also be a sign of a potentially more serious problem...underlying heart disease.

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# TUNA

## WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT YOUR SANDWICH

COURTESY PHOTO

(StatePoint)

**D**o you always look for the “dolphin-safe” and “sustainably caught” labels on your tuna? If so, you’re probably already thinking about how your meals impact marine life and the environment.

A new report shows that protecting human rights within the tuna industry is not only just as important as sustainability, but that the two issues are actually

interrelated.

According to Greenpeace USA’s latest report, “The High Cost of Cheap Tuna: U.S. Supermarkets, Sustainability and Human Rights at Sea,” American demand for tuna has risen steadily while fish stocks have declined due to overfishing and ocean warming driven by climate change. As commercial fishing escalates to meet demand, so have reports of forced labor and human rights violations aboard fishing vessels. The report

highlights how loopholes in human rights policies governing U.S. retailers’ supply chains have left many migrant fishers vulnerable to such exploitative labor practices as forced labor, debt bondage and physical abuse.

Advocates say that although major U.S. retailers don’t directly employ fishers, these companies can help put an end to this cycle by buying tuna only from ethical suppliers. Unfortunately, all 16 of the retailer chains sur-

veyed in the Greenpeace report received failing scores. The report, which for the first time assesses the human rights policies applied to retailers’ tuna supply chains, found that many companies have ignored this issue or have opted for only surface-level changes that have not delivered meaningful impacts.

Despite these results, there is some good news.

“The seafood industry has come under more scrutiny as consumers bet-

ter understand the links between environmental damage and human rights abuses,” said John Hovecar, oceans campaign director, Greenpeace USA. “Consumers are demanding that their retailers act sustainably and ethically. The report offers some encouragement that we are progressing in the right direction. However, it is clear that a large amount of work lies ahead to get these corporations to make the changes necessary to ensure they are

protecting human lives and the environment.”

To read the entire report and view the ranking, visit: <http://www.greenpeace.org/usa/tuna-scorecard>.

“Retailers and the consumers they serve can become voices for change,” says Hovecar. “We urge retailers to take ownership of human rights and sustainability issues at the same time, and we encourage consumers to demand that they do.”



# SOUP

## HEALTHY, HOMEMADE

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(StatePoint)

**W**hen sweater weather arrives, there’s nothing quite as comforting as a pot of something savory and delicious simmering on the stove.

As you turn to hearty soups this winter, having the right seasonal staples means you’ll be well on your way to having piping hot meals on the table, quickly and hassle-free.

Keep your pantry and fridge stocked with essential ingredients like onions, carrots and celery, along with a collection of earthy, zesty spices and versatile, all-purpose seasonings. You’ll also need a rich and all-natural stock handy, such as Kitchen Basics Unsalted Chicken Stock. Simmered all day with chicken, vegetables and McCormick herbs and spices, this deeply flavored stock can bring a burst of savory warmth to countless dishes. It’s low in sodium so it’s a good-for-you start to many delicious meals beyond soup, like rice, sauces, and more.

To help you embrace the colder weather, try a recipe for a hearty classic loaded with tender veggies, chicken, egg noodles and robust flavor that puts this stock — aka “liquid gold” — front and center. Yep, you guessed it, Savory Homemade Chicken Noodle Soup. Nostalgic and nourishing, all you need is 10 minutes of prep time and 20 minutes cooking on your stovetop.

## SAVORY HOMEMADE CHICKEN NOODLE SOUP

## Ingredients:

- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 cup chopped yellow onion
- 1 cup chopped carrots
- 1 cup chopped celery
- 2 tablespoons McCormick Garlic, Herb and Black Pepper and Sea Salt All Purpose Seasoning
- 1/2 teaspoon McCormick Ground Turmeric
- 1 pound boneless skinless chicken breast
- 2 cartons (32 ounces each) Kitchen Basics Unsalted Chicken Stock
- 2 cups uncooked medium egg noodles
- 1/2 cup frozen peas

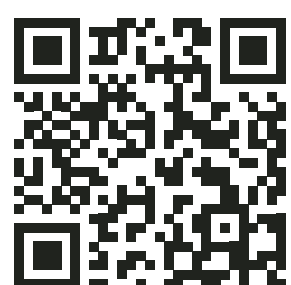
## INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat oil in large saucepan on medium heat until shimmering. Add onion, carrots and celery; cook and stir 3 minutes or until softened. Stir in seasoning and turmeric; cook 30 seconds until fragrant. Add chicken and stock. Bring to boil. Reduce heat; simmer, covered, 15 to 20 minutes until chicken is cooked through and tender.

2. Transfer chicken to medium bowl; shred using two forks. Set aside. Stir noodles into broth; cook 6 minutes or until tender. Return shredded chicken to saucepan. Gently stir in peas. Sprinkle with parsley to serve, if desired.

During the short, dark days of winter, healthy soups like this will feed your body and warm your soul.

For more great ways to warm up this season, visit [mccormick.com/kitchen-basics](http://mccormick.com/kitchen-basics).





COURTESY PHOTO

# MEDICINE SAFETY

## TIPS FOR PARENTS

(StatePoint)

A recent study found that approximately three in four emergency room visits for accidents related to over-the-counter cold and flu medicines among young children were made after a child got into the medicine on their own.

Are all of your medicines kept somewhere safe? With a potentially tough cold and flu season upon us, experts are urging parents and caregivers to remember to keep

medicines up and away and out of sight and reach of young children.

“During cold and flu season, seven in 10 people will reach for over-the-counter medicines to treat fevers, sinus headaches and other unwelcome symptoms. That’s a lot of additional medication in the home. Kids are curious, so parents and caregivers should take care to put medicines up and away, out of reach and sight of young children — after every dose,” said Mary Leonard, managing director, Consumer Health-

care Products Association Educational Foundation.

The Up and Away campaign is an initiative of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and its PROTECT Initiative, in partnership with the Consumer Healthcare Products Association Educational Foundation. The campaign aims to prevent accidental ingestion of medicine in young children by reminding families to follow these tips:

- Keep medicines, including those carried in purses, bags, pockets or pill organiz-

ers, in a safe location that is too high for curious, young children to reach or see.

- Never leave medicines or vitamins out on a counter, table or at a sick child’s bedside. To a young child, pills can look like candy and liquid medicines can look like sugary drinks.

- At home or away, keep medicines in child-resistant containers until right before you take them.

- If your medicine has a locking cap that turns, twist it until you can’t twist anymore or hear the “click.”

- Teach children what medicine is and why you or another caregiver must be the one to give it to them.

- Remind babysitters, houseguests and visitors to keep purses, bags, suitcases or coats that have medicines in them up and away and out of sight when they’re in your home.

Save the Poison Help number (800-222-1222) in your phone, so you have it when and if you need it. Make sure that babysitters, older children, grandparents and frequent family visitors have

this information too, in case there’s an emergency when they’re in charge. Call Poison Help right away if you think your child might have gotten into a medicine or vitamin, even if you are not completely sure. You can also visit [poison.org](http://poison.org). To learn more and for additional free resources, visit [upandaway.org](http://upandaway.org).

This cold and flu season and year-round, keep children safe by keeping medicine up and away and out of the sight and reach of young children.



COURTESY PHOTO

# RX RESOLUTIONS

## IMPROVE YOUR HEALTH IN 2022

(StatePoint)

While diet and exercise resolutions typically top New Year’s lists, experts say that focusing a few of your resolutions on forming good habits relating to your pharmacy routine can improve your overall health.

Susan Peppers, RPh, vice president, Express Scripts Pharmacy, suggests these resolutions to make the most of your pharmacy care.

### RESOLVE TO... ASK MORE QUESTIONS

Many of us are hesitant to speak up when we have ques-

tions about prescribed medications or therapies. Don’t be. Pharmacists have clinical expertise and can play an important role in your whole health.

### RESOLVE TO... NEVER MISS A DOSE

The best way to see improvement in both chronic and short-term conditions is to take medication as prescribed — the right dose at the right time in the right way. Try using a pill container or a dose reminder or taking your medication as part of your daily routine, such as brushing your teeth. Talk to your pharmacist about the

best time to take your medication.

You should also consider ongoing home delivery so you never run out of medication due to a missed pharmacy trip. Your prescriptions will be refilled at the right time, so your medicine will always be on hand.

### RESOLVE TO... TAKE YOUR MEDICATIONS SAFELY

Taking medication the wrong way or without knowledge of their effects can be dangerous. Read and understand the instructions printed on the prescription label, so you can be sure you’re taking your medicine exactly as

intended. For example, taking certain medications on an empty stomach if you’re supposed to take it with a meal can reduce their effectiveness.

You’ll also want to be sure you don’t mix your medication with certain other drugs or alcohol, or even engage in specific activities, like driving, if the label warns you against doing so.

### RESOLVE TO... CLEAN OUT YOUR MEDICINE CABINET

Many people find they’re more likely to take medications properly if they have a well-organized medicine cabinet. Go through and

properly dispose of expired medications or those you’re no longer taking.

### RESOLVE TO... CHECK-IN WITH YOUR DOCTOR

Your health can change, and your prescriptions should change along with it. Schedule time at least once annually to go over everything you’re being prescribed. It’s a good chance to talk to your doctor about what’s working, what’s not and what might need adjustments. In turn, keeping all medications at a single pharmacy when possible allows your pharmacist to have the most accurate information to help keep you

safe from drug interactions or medication issues. Be sure your physician knows which pharmacy you use.

### RESOLVE TO... UPDATE YOUR INSURANCE INFORMATION

The beginning of a new year is the perfect time to ensure you have updated insurance information accessible in case you need to reference it. Replace old cards with new ones as soon as you can to save time and reduce confusion when filling prescriptions.



# PREGNANCY

## RISKY BUSINESS IN AMERICA

COURTESY PHOTO

*(StatePoint)*

It surprises a lot of people to learn that the U.S. is the most dangerous place to give birth in the developed world.

Women in the U.S. are more likely to die from pregnancy-related complications than women in Libya and Kazakhstan, and the U.S. is the only industrialized nation to experience an increase in maternal mortality over the last two decades.

Pregnancy is especially dangerous for women of color. Black women in the U.S. lose their lives in childbirth at three to four times the rate of white women.

But there is good news. Experts say we can reduce deaths among moms and babies by improving health policies and changing the way care is delivered.

MomsRising, an online and on-the-ground organization working to improve the health and economic security

of moms and families, is urging federal and state lawmakers to invest in research into the reasons pregnancy and childbirth are so dangerous in the U.S.

The group is pressing to improve prenatal care, better train doctors and nurses, diversify the perinatal health care workforce, make it easier for working moms to breastfeed, improve mental health care for pregnant women and new moms, ensure that pregnant women

on Medicaid can keep their health insurance for a year after giving birth, and guarantee paid leave. Right now, one in four women go back to work just two weeks after giving birth because they can't afford to take any additional unpaid time off to recover from childbirth and care for their infant.

"The early weeks of a baby's life are critical for families. Insufficient paid leave for moms and dads is harmful for the health and

well-being of both babies and parents," said Tina Sherman, MomsRising's senior campaign director for maternal justice. "Families need that time to bond, moms need it to heal from birth and establish breastfeeding routines, and it's crucial for infant development."

Learn more at [www.momsrising.org](http://www.momsrising.org).

"Making pregnancy and childbirth safer is especially important as we recover from the pandemic, which has

caused tremendous strain for many of us," Sherman adds. "The U.S. is the richest country in the world, and it's past time we make pregnancy and childbearing as safe as possible for everyone. When we do, moms and kids will be healthier, communities stronger, and businesses and our economy more successful."



# MENOPAUSE

## EVOLVING SKIN CARE

COURTESY PHOTO

*(StatePoint)*

By 2025, there will be over 1 billion women experiencing menopause in the world, which will be 12% of the entire world population.

Most women hit menopause by their 50s. However, changes in the body start to appear earlier than you might think, often many years before a woman officially hits menopause.

This time in a woman's life can bring bothersome and debilitating symptoms which can significantly affect a woman's health and daily routines.

Women may notice physical changes in their skin as one of the first symptoms as

they age.

"When you're young, your body produces an abundance of collagen, the main skin-supporting protein that keeps your face supple and hydrated," said natural health physician and author, Dr. Fred Pescatore. "Studies show that women lose about 30% of their skin's collagen during the first five years of menopause due to hormonal shifts."

With collagen loss, skin becomes thinner and prone to wrinkles. It also loses the ability to protect itself, maintain hydration and produce strong collagen the way it once could. Many women see these changes reflected in increased bags under the eyes, sagging neck skin, and

increased hyperpigmentation in the face and hands.

There are several ways for women to minimize and manage skin health concerns that appear during this period.

#### MINIMIZE SUN EXPOSURE

Try to avoid direct sun exposure. Some women experience increased hyperpigmentation on their face and hands, often referred to as dark spots, leading up to and during menopause. This is caused by a combination of hormonal changes and sun exposure. "You can help minimize your skin's exposure to the sun by wearing sunscreen, hats and gloves when outdoors," said Dr. Pescatore.

#### TAKE SHORTER SHOWERS

Keep showers short and not too hot. "Spending too much time in water, especially hot water, strips natural oils from your skin, leaving it dry," Pescatore said.

In the time leading up to and during menopause, your skin is at increased risk for dryness, so try to take short, lukewarm showers to keep skin optimally hydrated.

#### ADD A PROVEN SUPPLEMENT

Look for ingredients that can stimulate collagen production and help improve the health of your skin from inside and out. Numerous clinical studies have shown that daily supplementation with the super-antioxidant Pycnogenol (Pic-noj-en-all) French

maritime pine bark extract can help minimize various skin concerns middle-aged women experience.

Pycnogenol binds with existing skin proteins, collagen and elastin, stimulates the genesis of new collagen and hyaluronic acid, and protects skin from various harmful enzymes, helping to rebuild elasticity for a smooth, younger look.

Additionally, Pycnogenol has been shown to reduce hyperpigmentation for a more even complexion.

A recent study, published in 2021, found that those who supplemented with 100mg of Pycnogenol for 12 weeks during dry winter months experienced a 13% improvement in both skin

elasticity and skin firmness.

"Pycnogenol is one of the most studied ingredients on the market, with decades of research showing the benefits of this natural extract for a variety of health applications," Pescatore said. "In fact, the extract has specifically been studied on menopausal women, so the skin benefits complement its additional women's health benefits nicely."

Available in more than 1,000 dietary supplements, topical creams, and health products worldwide, more information about Pycnogenol can be found by visiting [pycnogenol.com](http://pycnogenol.com).



# DENTAL HYGIENE

## TIPS FOR CAREGIVERS

COURTESY PHOTO

(StatePoint)

For the 44 million family caregivers nationwide, tangible support can help ease their burden. With that in mind, the American Dental Association (ADA) is offering essential oral health tips and information.

"Keeping your loved one's mouth healthy is important for their oral and overall health, comfort, safety, nutrition and self-esteem," said Dr. Jane Grover, MPH, director of the ADA's Council on Advocacy for Access and Prevention. "The combination of daily care and professional services equals the best chance for a healthy mouth.

It can also help prevent other health problems from arising or becoming worse."

While the exact assistance you provide your loved one will depend on their individual abilities and situation, there are some important things every caregiver should keep in mind. The following information from the ADA can help get you started:

1. Brush teeth twice a day for two minutes using fluoride toothpaste. Floss or use other between-the-teeth cleaners daily. Doing so will help prevent tooth decay (cavities), gum disease and bad breath.

2. If your loved one wears dentures, rinse them after each meal, brush them daily

with denture cleaner and take them out and store them in water before bedtime. Try to discourage them from sleeping with their dentures in their mouth overnight, as that habit over time can lead to serious tissue irritation on the roof of their mouth.

3. If your loved one is living with diabetes, pay special attention to their gums and mouth. Not only can gingivitis and dry mouth be signs of untreated diabetes, but research suggests that treating gum disease can actually help control blood sugar levels, decreasing the progression of the disease.

4. Dry mouth can affect older people for a variety of reasons, including being a sign

of diabetes and a side effect of certain medications. Dry mouth is not just uncomfortable. It can increase the risk of tooth decay. To combat it, try an alcohol-free mouth rinse and encourage hydration by having your loved one sip water, suck (not chew) on ice chips and use a humidifier while sleeping.

5. Limit snacking and sugary drinks. Encourage the consumption of healthy foods and drinks, such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains and water, which are good for the mouth and the entire body.

6. Make and keep dental appointments. Even people with dentures need to visit the dentist for an annual oral

exam.

7. Watch for symptoms that could signal larger issues. If your loved one shows any of the following signs, visit the dentist:

- Pain or swelling in the mouth, face and neck
- Sores, swelling or growths in the mouth
- A change in the fit of dentures
- Difficulty opening the mouth
- Red, swollen, tender or bleeding gums
- Gums that have pulled away from the teeth
- Bad breath that doesn't go away or becomes a daily concern
- Pus between the teeth and gums

■ Dark or discolored spots on teeth

■ Loose or broken teeth, partials or dentures

To access free oral health resources, including a caregiver's guide to dental health, visit [mouthhealthy.org](http://mouthhealthy.org).

"Tending to oral hygiene is an important part of caregiving. Managing both daily care and arranging for dental visits can help you keep your loved one healthy and happy," says Dr. Grover. "And of course, don't forget your own dental care. Being an effective caregiver starts with ensuring your own health and wellness."

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