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# Diagnosis: Prediabetes

*It's a warning and an opportunity.*

The word “pre” may sound innocuous, but a prediabetes diagnosis is one to be taken very seriously. According to cardiologist Karol Watson, MD, UCLA Medical Center, the leading cause of death for people with diabetes is heart disease.

“The damage doesn’t just start once diabetes is diagnosed,” explains Dr. Watson. “The period called prediabetes is when the cardiovascular risk begins, and by the time someone is finally diagnosed with diabetes, they probably already have vascular disease. For this reason, it is imperative to monitor and treat conditions that can lead to diabetes. And prediabetes is one of the most important conditions to detect.”

### Prevention through Screening

According to the CDC, 86 million Americans have prediabetes and are at high risk of developing type 2 diabetes. Many of those who have prediabetes aren’t even aware of it. Some people with prediabetes (and type 2 diabetes) may be asymptomatic for many years. But that doesn’t mean it isn’t damaging your health.

“Studies suggest that lifestyle changes are able to prevent or delay the transition from prediabetes to type 2 diabetes,” explains geriatrician Jonathan Wanagat, MD, UCLA Medical Center and editor-in-chief of UCLA’s Healthy Years. “People with a body mass index at and over 25, and one or more additional risk factors, should be screened every three years.”

Risk factors include a sedentary lifestyle, unhealthy food choices, obesity, family history, and age.



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*Reducing your risk of diabetes also reduces risk of heart disease and other health problems.*

A simple blood test reveals if you have diabetes or prediabetes. You may be asked to have more than one type of test, and may also be asked to repeat a test to confirm a diagnosis.

The fasting plasma glucose test is the most commonly used. It measures how much sugar (glucose) is in the blood. As the name implies, you

must fast before this test. To get an accurate result, you cannot eat for at least eight hours before blood is drawn. The oral glucose tolerance test also requires a patient to fast for at least eight hours. The patient drinks a beverage containing glucose, and blood is drawn two hours after consuming the drink. The hemoglobin A1C test tracks average blood glucose over a two-to-three-month period. No fasting is required for this test.

### Insulin Resistance, a Disorder of Diabetes

Diabetes is a malfunction of how your body metabolizes sugar. Insulin, a hormone made in the pancreas, plays an important role in how food is metabolized. During digestion, the sugars and starches found in many foods are converted into glucose, which is a form of sugar. Glucose is transported through the bloodstream, where other cells of the body can use it for energy.

With type 2 diabetes, cells stop responding to insulin no matter how much the pancreas makes, and too much sugar remains in the bloodstream. The health problems associated with high blood sugar include the aforementioned heart disease, nerve damage in the feet, vision problems, and kidney disease.

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to change your address, renew  
your subscription, check your  
account status, or contact a  
customer service representative.**Study Finds Dementia Declined by 24 percent**

As the population ages, the expectation is that dementia will increase. Dementia can take many forms, from the most commonly known Alzheimer's disease, to the lesser known forms of vascular and Lewy body dementias. Regardless of type, the burden of dementia is formidable on all involved, from patients to caregivers to healthcare providers. Now, studies from high-income countries, including the United States, suggest that incidences of dementia may actually be on the decline. Kenneth M. Langa, MD, PhD, of the University of Michigan, and colleagues compared the prevalence of dementia in the United States between the years 2000 and 2012. Their study, an observational one, analyzed data from the Health and Retirement Study (HRS), a nationally representative, population-based longitudinal survey of individuals in the United States 65 years or older. Data were available on 21,000 adults. According to the study abstract, dementia prevalence among those 65 years or older decreased from 11.6 percent in 2000 to 8.8 percent in 2012. That represents a 24 percent decrease in dementia among the people surveyed. Also found was an increase in the average years of education, which may be associated with a decrease in dementia. But, researchers say more work needs to be done to figure out the full set of social, behavioral, and medical factors that directly influence the development of and reduced risk for Alzheimer's and other dementias. The study appeared in *JAMA Internal Medicine*, published online November 21, 2016.

**Digital Health Usage Is on the Rise but Less so Among Seniors**

Researchers at the high-tech healthcare company Rock Health conduct an annual consumer health survey, and in their 2016 report they found that nearly 50 percent of the consumers surveyed are using digital health tools. Those tools include telemedicine (such as email, live video chats, and telephone calls with physicians), wearables (such as fitness trackers), and novel technologies (such as digital applications for relaxation, rehabilitation, and pain management). It's no surprise to learn that those in the youngest age bracket surveyed (25-34) were the highest users of telemedicine. Baby Boomers (55+) were found to be the least likely to use telemedicine, but more than half were found to seek care through a live phone call. As far as internet searches, overall about 62 percent of Americans search for information about prescription drugs, and 56 percent look online for information about symptoms and take that information (and often a diagnosis) to their physicians. A little less than a quarter of Baby Boomers search online to find a physician. The researchers also found that seniors are less likely to trust technology companies to keep their health data secure, compared to those under age 55. But, findings show that the majority of Americans are interested in getting an electronic copy of their medical records. The survey is a 4,000-plus-person nationally-representative survey. The full report can be found at [rockhealth.com](http://rockhealth.com).

**Chinese Herb Regimen Studied for Blood Cell and Cancer Treatments**

In a five-year study led by pathologist Jianyu Rao, MD, UCLA Jonsson Comprehensive Cancer Center, researchers found that a Chinese herbal regimen called TSY-1 (Tianshengyuan-1) increased activity of an enzyme called telomerase. This enzyme is responsible for the production of telomeres, which help regulate cell division. According to the report, most cancers, and many other medical conditions, are associated with abnormal telomerase function. For many years, TSY-1 has been used in China to treat a type of pre-leukemia, and also aplastic anemia, a disorder where the body stops producing new blood cells; both conditions are associated with abnormal telomerase activity. In the study, researchers measured the ability of TSY-1 to affect telomerase activity in both cancer cells and normal blood cells. It did so by targeting a gene that regulates telomerase activity. The ability to increase or decrease telomerase activity has important implications for treating cancers in which not enough blood cells are produced. The research showed that TSY-1 increased telomerase activity in normal blood cells, but decreased it in cancer cells. According to the authors, the finding paves the way for future clinical studies to uncover how this treatment might be used for cancer and blood cell deficiencies. The study was published online in the journal *OncoTarget*. ■

# Tips for Living a Healthier, Happier, and Longer Life

*These free and easy ideas can make a positive difference.*

There is no shortage of products and procedures that promise youth and longevity. Some can be helpful, while others are little more than snake oil. What you do and don't do on a day-to-day basis can often be the defining factors of a life well lived. Dedicated actions, such as the ideas below, can ignite your passion and improve your health.

## Get Artful

"Whether it's singing, playing an instrument, painting, doodling, or dancing, many of us experience some art form as pleasurable, relaxing, or freeing," explains art therapist Erica Curtis, instructor for the UCLA Arts and Healing Social Emotional Arts certificate program. "Art provides us with moments when the mind is free from life's preoccupations."

Artistic endeavors provide an opportunity to be totally immersed in an activity. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, a leader in the field of positive psychology, wrote a seminal book called *Flow*, which describes what it's like to experience the state of flow and the benefits of being there. When in flow, it's as if time stands still. Focus is deep. Self-consciousness and self-criticism drop away. Actions feel effortless and joyful.

"Then there's the physical stress-reduction benefits such as tightening and relaxing your muscles, such as when kneading clay or taking deep breaths when singing," says Curtis. "That kind of engagement triggers our body's natural de-stressing response, thus promoting longevity and happiness."

Local community centers and adult education extensions of universities are good places to find art classes. Not sure what you would be good at? Explore what interests you



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*Be open to what sparks your interest. The journey will likely lead to unexpected joys.*

and see where it leads. While not everything will turn out to be a perfect fit, the journey can spark new and exciting passions.

## Rewarding Work

Many people think the pinnacle of life is reached when one can finally retire and stop working. Working at a job you love, however, provides structure, a continuing sense of accomplishment, and feelings of being valued. More than half of older Americans are likely to work past the traditional retirement age of 65 for a variety of reasons, according to a recent survey from the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research at the University of Chicago. And research from the American Psychological Association found that retirees who transition from full-time work into a temporary or a part-time job experience fewer major diseases, and are able to function better day-to-day compared to people who stop working altogether.

For some, volunteer work bridges the gap between formal employment and retirement. Like employment, volunteerism provides camaraderie

along with a sense of purpose. It also enables you to explore areas of interest that may not have been possible while working full time. For example, there are volunteer travel projects where participants can teach English, work with rescued elephants, or help rebuild homes after a disaster. Be sure to research all the details of these travel opportunities, as housing and conditions vary widely. A place to start is with [Projects-abroad.com](http://Projects-abroad.com), which features a variety of international volunteer projects geared toward older adults.

## Move Around

Physical activity, exercise, sports, no matter which you choose, the effect on longevity is undeniable. Gerofit is a senior fitness program run at the Greater Los Angeles VA. Steven Castle, MD, is a UCLA clinical professor and the clinical director of the program. He has seen how exercise can transform the human body and the human spirit. "It is so gratifying to see even frail people improve before your very eyes," says Dr. Castle. "This is the most rewarding thing I have done in my 30-plus years in the field of geriatrics."

Logging your activities is especially motivating. At the VA, they simply use paper-based checklists. It only takes a month of exercising two to three times a week for about an hour to experience major benefits. As for the myriad of chronic health complications that affect many seniors, Dr. Castle says that the conventional "wait until it gets better to exercise" is not the way to go.

"The chronic condition may or may not get better," he explains. "What we do know is that weight resistance training in particular seems to release substances from muscles that are very beneficial to blood vessel health. They promote good circulation to crucial organs, including the brain."

If you're new to exercise, consult with a healthcare professional, find a certified senior fitness instructor (search on [ideafit.com](http://ideafit.com)), or ask for a referral to a physical therapist. ■

# Thinking About a Cosmetic Procedure?

*These minimally invasive techniques offer rejuvenation without extensive surgery.*

There are many minimally invasive cosmetic treatments that promise to help aging faces look more refreshed. But can these less invasive procedures really make a difference for people in their late 50s and beyond? The short answer is yes.

“It’s crucial that the procedure fit the patient,” explains UCLA facial plastic surgeon Vishad Nabili, MD, “People see something on a commercial and automatically assume it’s for them. For example, Botox won’t help sun-damaged skin or a jowl.”

To figure out what can work for you, have a consultative conversation with a board-certified cosmetic surgeon who can steer you toward the right choices, and away from those that won’t meet your goals. According to Dr. Nabili, most practices offer a free consultation, or waive the typically low consultation fee if the patient chooses a procedure. Look for board-certified physicians who have expertise in aesthetic surgery.

Below are some of the more popular procedures. For some, a physician must oversee the practice, but others, such as physician assistants and nurses, may be the ones who actually administer the treatments.



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*Talk with an expert to better know if a treatment can meet your goals.*

## Neurotoxins to Smooth Wrinkles

Botulinum toxin type A, better known as Botox, has been around for more than 20 years. Since that time, several other neurotoxin products have been developed for the cosmetic industry. They all reduce facial wrinkles by temporarily weakening muscles. The injection process takes just a few minutes. But, it can take about ten days for the muscles to relax and skin to smoothen. Results can last up to four months.

## Platelet-rich Plasma

Newer to the cosmetic industry is platelet-rich plasma (PRP), which involves using a patient’s own blood to rejuvenate skin. PRP promotes the growth of collagen and increases blood flow, giving skin a more youthful appearance. The in-office procedure takes about 30 minutes. Blood is withdrawn, spun in a centrifuge, and injected into the face and neck areas needing rejuvenation.

“Once the data showed that it worked, we started using it here,” says

## WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

*Before choosing a provider ask:*

- **Are** you board-certified?
- **How** many procedures of this type have you done?
- **What** are the risks and complications?
- **How** long will the treatment last?

Dr. Nabili. “We combine PRP with micro-needling and are finding that the combination reduces fine lines helps reverse sun damage-related skin changes, and also improves skin texture.”

PRP has also been shown to help regrow hair.

## Micro-needling Improves Texture

This minimally invasive technique involves using a device with fine needles that actually puncture the skin (there is some bleeding). The microscopic damage promotes collagen and elastin growth, which improves texture and reduces the appearance of acne scars and fine wrinkles. Prior to starting the treatment, a topical anesthetic is used to minimize the pain, which is typically slight. Some redness akin to sunburn is common after the treatment. The skin may peel after a few days. Four to six treatments may be needed, depending on a patient’s skin condition.

## Soft Tissue Fillers

Dermal fillers, such as hyaluronic acid (Juvederm, Restylane), calcium hydroxylapatite (Radiesse), collagen, and even a patient’s own fat are used to smooth out wrinkles and add volume to plump up areas such as cheeks and lips. Results can last several months to two years.

Fillers can look fake when overdone, causing cheeks and lips to look unnaturally plump and tight. “The goal after any treatment is you don’t want people to know you had anything done,” explains Dr. Nabili. “We want people to say you look well-rested or refreshed.” ■

## DISSOLVABLE SUTURES

This procedure is akin to a very mild type of facelift but is minimally invasive. Unlike the above-mentioned options, this one lifts the skin to redefine the contours of the face. Instalift™ is an FDA-approved suture technique that builds on a procedure that was developed more than 10 years ago. A surgeon positions sutures on the outer sides of the face to lift from the lip area up through the cheekbones. The process takes about 45 minutes. Results are immediate. As sutures dissolve, collagen grows.

“It’s a conservative lift and meant for patients who have thinner faces, as heavier set faces may not have as successful of a lift with this approach,” explains Dr. Nabili.

For more information on minimally invasive techniques, see Dr. Nabili’s online video. Search on the title: To Fill or Not to Fill: Aesthetic Surgery of the Aging Midface.



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*Instalift™ is an FDA approved procedure used to contour the midface.*

# Common but Lesser Known Sleep Disorders

*Older adults are especially prone to these nocturnal disrupters.*

Most people are familiar with insomnia (the inability to fall or stay asleep), and sleep apnea (a disorder of obstructed breathing that interrupts sleep). These are just two of many sleep disorders that can rob you of needed rest. Quality sleep is essential for good health. We all need our Zs to repair tissue, build muscle, and to consolidate memories.

“Unfortunately, sleep can become lighter and less efficient with age,” explains geriatrician Cathy Alessi, MD, UCLA Medical Center. “There are also a number of sleep disorders that become more prevalent in older adults.”

While some older adults actually sleep quite well, many who have sleep problems don’t seek help. Some hold the belief that poor sleep is just a part of aging, but it isn’t.

## REM Sleep Behavior Disorder

Sleep is typically categorized into two key phases: rapid eye movement (REM), which is when dreaming occurs, and non-rapid eye movement (N-REM) sleep, which is considered the deepest phase of sleep when bodily repair and restoration occur. We cycle through these two phases several times during the night.

During REM, the brain has the same electrical activity as it does when it is awake. Eyes may twitch, but otherwise we are basically immobile. In people with REM sleep behavior disorder, RBD, muscles remain active. They act out their dreams. Some people get up, shout, and punch—which can cause injury to themselves or their bed partners.

RBD tends to affect more men than woman, with onset beginning after age 50. The disorder can be triggered by alcohol or by the withdrawal from some drugs, such as antipsychotics.



*A sleep disorder diagnosis can lead to appropriate treatment.*

SSRI antidepressants, such as Prozac, can also predispose a person to RBD.

Recent research suggests that RBD may be a harbinger of neurodegenerative diseases such as Parkinson’s and dementia. Because of this, it’s highly recommended that people with RBD be evaluated by a neurologist.

## Restless Legs Syndrome

Uncomfortable tingling, the urge to move, and creepy crawly sensations along the legs are all classic

### MELATONIN INDUCES SLEEP

As night begins to fall, melatonin, a naturally occurring neurohormone that ushers in sleep, is released by the pineal gland. Melatonin production tends to wane with age. In women, the decline coincides with menopause, when many women begin to experience sleep issues.

“Melatonin supplements may help some people and are generally well tolerated by most,” says Dr. Alessi.

“But keep in mind that any light can suppress your own body’s melatonin, and blue light in particular, does so even more. Turn off any devices that emit light, such as TVs, cell phones, tablets, and computers.”



symptoms of restless legs syndrome (RLS). These sensations occur just before falling asleep, which then interrupts sleep. Experts suspect that a disruption in dopamine, a brain chemical that helps regulate movement, may be a culprit in this syndrome. RLS often coexists with Parkinson’s, a disease in which there is a decline in dopamine.

About one in 10 adult Americans have RLS, and it affects slightly more women than men. It’s not known what causes RLS, but some other conditions may trigger it. These include varicose veins, kidney failure, anemia, and peripheral neuropathy (a condition when signals from the brain and spinal cord malfunction).

Lifestyle choices have also been implicated in RLS. Being overweight or inactive, drinking alcohol, and smoking all increase risk.

In 2014, the FDA cleared the first non-drug approach to treat RLS. The medical device (Relaxis) is a pad onto which patients place their legs. When activated, it produces a vibration that disrupts an RLS episode. The device is only available by prescription.

## Advanced Sleep Phase Disorder

People who have advanced sleep phase syndrome (ASPS) fall asleep too early and wake up too early. For example, they may go to bed at 6 p.m. and wake up at 2 a.m. The correct amount of sleep can be achieved, but in this case, the sleep and wake times can lead to social isolation. An inactive retirement may also be to blame, as can spending too much time indoors.

Treatments include bright light therapy, which is used to reset the biological clock. Another tactic is to gradually delay bedtime until a more conventional sleep time is achieved.

Some sleep disorders may require medications, while lifestyle changes and supplements may be solutions for others.

A sleep specialist can pinpoint your specific sleep issue and therefore recommend the most appropriate treatment. ■

# Pilates Machines Foster Flexibility and Strength

*This low-impact, joint-friendly method invigorates mind and body.*

**P**ilates was originally a one-on-one training system done on a mat and also on specialized machines developed by Joseph H. Pilates in the early 1900s. He originally called his system “Contrology,” because to do the exercises correctly requires full concentration and control.

It’s a total body workout, best known for how effectively it works core muscles. In the method, the core is called the “powerhouse,” because every movement is done with greater stability when it comes from a strong center.

“Without a strong core, loss of balance can occur,” explains physical therapist Ellen Wilson, director of Therapy Services, UCLA Department of Rehabilitation. “Almost all Pilates exercises incorporate core strengthening. Pilates movements

also carry over to functional movement, so improvement is seen in everyday activities.”

## Welcome to the Machines

Most people are introduced to Pilates in group mat classes. But to truly understand and gain the benefits of Pilates, private sessions on the machines provide an unprecedented opportunity. The primary spring-based machines are: the reformer, Wunda chair, and the trapeze table. Similar exercises are done on all machines, but the plane of movement (sitting, standing, lying down) provides a different challenge in each situation.

The concept of working with spring-based Pilates machines is similar to working with flexible bands



Image courtesy Balanced Body

*A Pilates instructor helps a client stabilize core muscles on the Wunda chair.*

“  
If your spine is inflexibly stiff  
at 30 you are old;  
if it is completely flexible  
at 60, you are young.

”

— Joseph H Pilates  
*Return to Life Through Contrology*, originally published in 1945

or tubing. You have to control the motion in all directions of movement. This builds muscles more efficiently (in addition to helping you with coordination, precision, and control).

The spring-based machines also support and challenge your movements, and make it easier for you to find and build your core muscles.

## Build Muscles and Flexibility

Pilates, like lifting weights, is a muscle-building regimen. But unlike weights, Pilates exercises also improve flexibility. That especially includes the muscles around the spinal column. The whole back and torso can be stretched, while also strengthening the smaller stabilizing muscles around the spine. This is why Pilates has been recommended for those who have back pain.

The best way to get started, especially if you have injuries, is by hiring a certified Pilates professional. ■



Image courtesy Balanced Body

*The reformer is commonly used in private and group classes.*



Image courtesy Balanced Body

*The trapeze table is especially helpful as a rehabilitation tool.*

**Prediabetes**—cont. from page 1

## Preventing Diabetes 1, 2, 3

It's not fully understood what causes insulin resistance. But there are three crucial lifestyle choices that can reduce the risk of developing insulin resistance and diabetes.

**1. Maintain a healthy weight.** Weight loss of just 10 to 15 pounds can make a significant difference. Many experts believe that excess fat around the waistline is a major cause of insulin resistance. Studies have shown that belly fat produces substances that trigger chronic inflammation, which can lead to insulin resistance as well as other health problems, including high blood pressure, high cholesterol and cardiovascular disease.

**2. Be physically active.** Anything that elevates your heart rate (also called cardiovascular or aerobic activity) is a good choice. Walking, swimming, and dancing are all types of activities that

can increase heart rate. If you haven't been very active lately, start with 10-15 minutes per day, several times a week. The American Heart Association recommends that all Americans exercise at least 30 minutes per day, most days of the week.

**3. Eat healthfully.** Food choices make such a difference in so many ways. When you eat well, you have the energy you need to exercise, and of course when you exercise, you feel better. Wise food choices and regular exercise will help you maintain a healthy weight. Stock your kitchen with healthy foods, and avoid bringing home the cookies, chips and other high-calorie products. Out of sight, out of mind.

### When to Screen

According to Dr. Wanagat, diabetes screening should be done as part of assessing your risk of heart disease, along with checks of cholesterol

## WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

*Prediabetes and type 2 diabetes may cause the following symptoms:*

- **Skin**, gum or bladder infections
- **Blurred** vision
- **Cuts** or bruises that heal slowly
- **Tingling** or numbness in feet or hands

*Because these symptoms can be indicators of other health problems, it can be easy to miss or dismiss them. That's why regular screenings are recommended.*

and blood pressure. If you already have prediabetes, alter your lifestyle choices now.

Every step you take can make a difference between getting full-blown diabetes, or not. And be sure to get screened annually. It's the only way to know for sure whether or not the disease is manifesting. ■

## PREVENTION

# Avoid Exercise Injuries

*Hire a high-quality Pilates instructor.*

**A** well-qualified, certified Pilates instructor will ensure you are doing the exercises correctly and safely. The instructor should have at least 300 hours of training, be fully certified in mat and on all the machines, and have at least a few years' teaching experience. Most Pilates certifications require knowledge of anatomy. But beware, some people can snag a Pilates certification in a weekend. The most respected certification programs require observation hours and/or apprentice hours in addition to personal practice, and mastery of the work.



© Brandon Bourdages | Dreamstime.com

*Top Pilates instructors are experts in body mechanics.*

discounted introductory sessions so you can determine if that instructor is a good fit for you. Sometimes an instructor may be well-qualified but your personalities may not be compatible. Many physical therapists also incorporate Pilates techniques into their treatment sessions for specific conditions.

"Pilates exercises are adaptable to all levels of fitness, and can be progressed as you improve," explains Wilson. "It's also low impact, which is better for seniors with arthritis or painful joints."

### Group Reformer Classes

These classes are increasingly popular and are money-savers, too. But you'll need a few private sessions before

jumping into these classes. Be leery of studios that allow you into a group reformer class without taking any privates. Generally, six or more one-on-one sessions are recommended. Private sessions help you better know your body and the equipment.

### Pilates Essential Principles

Top instructors incorporate these fundamental concepts into all sessions:

- **Concentration.** The mind and body connect to improve focus.
- **Control.** Movements are neither jerky nor momentum based.
- **Flow.** Exercises are fluid, not statically held, encouraging freedom of movement.
- **Precision.** No sloppy movement allowed; each movement is conscious and intentional.
- **Breath.** Full inhaled and exhaled help you to contact the core, energize the body, and focus the mind.
- **Balance.** This refers to physical balance and balanced muscular development needed for proper body mechanics. ■

### Ask About Experience

Inquire about their work with seniors and their experience with any injuries that apply to you. Many studios offer



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**Q** I've heard that exercise can be a natural antidepressant. Is that really true?

**A** Yes, it is true. One of the best health choices you can make is to exercise regularly. Not only is exercise a natural antidepressant, it also may protect you against getting depression or having a depressive episode. Physical activity releases endorphins, which are brain chemicals that help you feel good, and they promote nerve cell growth, too. Research has found that exercising for as little as 30 minutes per day can be an effective natural antidepressant. A number of studies have focused on aerobic exercise, but some have shown that resistance training can also work well. Consistency and intensity are also important.

A few years ago, researchers from Duke University compared exercise to antidepressant medication. Study participants included 156 older adults with major depressive disorder. One group did aerobic exercise three times per week, the second took sertraline (Zoloft), and the third group combined exercise and sertraline. After 16 weeks there was no difference in the level of depression among the groups, suggesting that both medication and exercise were equally effective. But after 10 months, those who exercised were 50 percent less likely to be depressed. If you can't exercise for an hour, try 10-minute bursts of exercise throughout the day. If you have trouble consistently exercising, working out with a friend can help you both stick to a program.

**Q** I've been trying to lose weight. What is the best weight-loss diet to try?

**A** Believe it or not, the good news is that there is no one single weight-loss diet. That's good news because it means that you can (and should) eat a wide variety of foods to achieve your goals. Two recent studies in the *Journal of Nutrition* found that people who ate a wide variety of healthy foods tended to have less body fat compared to those who ate a more monotonous diet.

For example, if you eat red meat several times a week, consider replacing some of those meat-based meals with plant-based proteins. Try lentils in soup, bean-based patties, or tofu (the baked versions are especially versatile). Use low-fat or no-fat dairy, instead of full-fat. While smoothies can be a tempting way to get more fruits and veggies into your diet, be aware that they can also pack a lot of calories. This is especially true for store-bought smoothies. Some can contain as many as 1,000 calories. The fiber in the fruits and veggies in smoothies are also pulverized and thus more quickly absorbed, compared to simply eating whole produce. This matters because slower digestion helps you feel fuller longer. Time also plays a role with respect to how you eat. Take time to chew and enjoy your food. Research has shown that those who eat fast consume more calories and feel less satisfied after their meals. Think also of losing weight as a long-term goal consisting of sustainable dietary changes, not just something you do to lose weight.

**Q** I have stomach pain that has come and gone for years. What might be causing this?

**A** There are many potential causes for your stomach pain. The most common cause of mild and occasional stomach pain is gastritis. The stomach normally produces acids to aid digestion. With gastritis, there is an overproduction of these acids, which irritates the stomach lining, resulting in pain. The irritation can be caused by certain foods, medications, stress, too much alcohol, or infection from the bacterium *H. pylori*, which is a common cause of gastritis. Given the duration of your symptoms, it's best to see a physician. It will be helpful for him or her to know if the stomach pain has gotten worse over time, if it has shifted from the original site of pain to elsewhere in the abdomen, how it feels (e.g. sharp, burning, cramping, dull), and the intensity of the stomach pain. Also, take note of when the pain occurs in relation to anything you've ingested, or after any emotional upset. These details will be helpful to your physician. ■

## IN COMING ISSUES

**NUTRITION —**  
Understanding  
nutritional  
labels.

**MIND &  
MEMORY —**  
Key questions  
to discern  
dementia.

**BONES &  
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