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Healthy LIVING



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Posture and Whole-Body Health

BY GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

You may have groaned when your mom kept telling you to sit up straight, but her advice was about more than you looking good.

Proper posture goes far beyond how someone looks when standing or sitting. The way the body is aligned throughout the day influences breathing, muscle balance, circulation and energy levels. Over time, poor posture can contribute to chronic pain, fatigue and reduced physical function, while supportive alignment can help the body move and work more efficiently.

In modern life, posture challenges are common. Long hours at desks, frequent phone use and limited movement can gradually pull the body out of alignment. These small daily habits can add up, affecting multiple systems at once.

Posture and Breathing

Breathing and posture are closely linked. When the shoulders round forward and the head juts ahead of the spine, the chest compresses



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and the diaphragm has less room to move. This often leads to shallow breathing, which can limit oxygen intake and place extra strain on neck and shoulder muscles.

Efficient posture allows the rib cage to expand fully and supports deeper, more relaxed breathing. This improved airflow can help

reduce muscle tension and support focus and endurance. Over time, better breathing mechanics may contribute to reduced stress levels and improved overall comfort.

Pain and Muscle Imbalance

Poor posture places uneven demands on muscles and

joints. Some muscles become overworked and tight, while others weaken from underuse. This imbalance can lead to neck pain, back pain, headaches and joint discomfort.

For example, slouching while sitting increases pressure on the spine and can strain the lower back. Forward head posture places additional load on the neck, increasing tension and wear on surrounding tissues. These patterns often develop gradually, making them easy to overlook until pain becomes persistent.

Improving posture helps distribute forces more evenly across the body, reducing unnecessary strain

and supporting healthier movement patterns.

Fatigue and Energy Levels

Posture affects how much energy the body uses throughout the day. When muscles must constantly compensate for poor alignment, they fatigue more quickly. This can lead to a sense of physical exhaustion, even without strenuous activity.

Supportive posture allows muscles to work more efficiently, conserving energy and reducing overall fatigue. Better alignment can improve circulation, helping oxygen and nutrients reach tissues more effectively and supporting sustained energy levels.

Supporting Healthier Posture

Improving posture does not require perfection. Small, consistent adjustments can make a meaningful difference.

Regular movement breaks, ergonomic workstations and awareness of sitting and standing habits all help support alignment.

Strengthening core and upper back muscles while gently stretching tight areas can further reinforce good posture. Activities that emphasize body awareness, such as yoga, Pilates and targeted physical therapy exercises, may be helpful.

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Getting kids back into free play

BY METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

One of the endearing components of the Netflix series “Stranger Things,” which reached its conclusion at the close of 2025, is how the show harkened viewers back to the unencumbered days of being a kid in the 1980s — that is, until those kids had to fight for their survival against otherworldly foes. Demogorgons and mind flayers aside, the Hawkins kids would hop on their bikes and traverse their town, or engage their imaginations during game play in a wood-paneled basement. Baby Boomers, Generation Xers and even Millennials can likely recall youthful days when they had plenty of free time on their hands to pursue various adventures.

Fast forward to 2026, and today’s children lead much more structured lives. With the rise of “helicopter parenting” and “tiger parenting,” children find themselves continuously engaged with academics, structured sports teams, music lessons, and choreographed play dates, largely initiated by the adults



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in their lives. “Free play,” defined as child-initiated, unstructured activity, has largely been phased out.

The American Academy of Pediatrics and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention suggest that free play is not simply a break from learning, but the “primary vehicle through which children develop the brain architecture necessary for adult success.” Free play should be encouraged and not lambasted.

Here’s a look at how free play is imperative for healthy kids.

- **Improves executive functioning:** Research published in The Journal of Pediatrics says children who have more time for unstructured play have better self-regulation and executive function. These elements can predict academic success better than IQ, say health experts.

- **Greater brain development:**

Researchers at Baylor College of Medicine have found that children who don’t play much develop brains 20 to 30 percent smaller than is normal for their age.

- **Stress reduction:** In their clinical report, “The Power of Play,” the AAP suggests that when play and safe, stable, nurturing relationships are missing in a child’s life, stress hormones can elevate to harmful levels. Play is so essential to kids that the AAP suggests pediatricians recommend more of it at each child well visit.

- **Promotes conflict resolution:** Children who engage in free play learn on their own how to keep the game going through compromise, rather than relying on a parent or referee.

Free play is an important component of a child’s well-being, and one that is not stressed nearly as much as it should be for good health and future success. Kids can enjoy self-directed play that is nature-based and unplugged from digital distractions.

Lifestyle choices that could affect colorectal cancer outcomes

BY METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

The World Health Organization reports that colorectal cancer is the third most common cancer worldwide, accounting for roughly 10 percent of all cancer cases each year. Colorectal cancer also is the second leading cause of cancer-related deaths across the globe. But colorectal cancer may not be as formidable a foe as those statistics suggest.

The American Institute for Cancer Research notes that lifestyle factors are among the main risk factors for colorectal cancer. Such factors are within individuals’ control, and when individuals embrace healthy lifestyle choices, they might be able to improve outcomes in relation to a colorectal cancer diagnosis.

Physical activity

Routine physical activity has been linked to a wide range of healthy outcomes, including a reduced risk for chronic diseases and improved

mental health. The AICR notes that people who are more physically active have better health outcomes after a colorectal cancer diagnosis than people who live a sedentary lifestyle. While there’s no guarantee such outcomes will improve by incorporating physical activity into a daily routine, the benefits of regular exercise are so profound that it can benefit anyone living a sedentary lifestyle to get up and move more frequently.

Diet

The AICR notes that people who eat more whole grains have better health outcomes after a colorectal cancer diagnosis. AICR research also indicates eating three servings of whole grains each day lowers a person’s risk of colorectal cancer by 17 percent. The Mayo Clinic notes that whole grains include quinoa, brown rice, oatmeal, whole wheat flour, and popcorn. The AICR cautions that people who have been treated for colorectal cancer

have reported difficulty consuming whole grains after treatment, including surgery. In such instances, a gradual reintroduction of whole grains under the supervision of a health professional can help people get back on track and reduce the need to consume refined grains.

Sugary drinks

Sugary drinks have been associated with a number of negative health outcomes, including overweight and obesity, each of which are risk factors for type 2 diabetes. The AICR also indicates people who consume less sugary drinks have better health outcomes after being diagnosed with colorectal cancer. The AICR recommends people consider reducing their consumption of sugary drinks.

Colorectal cancer is a common and often deadly form of the disease. But the right lifestyle choices may make a colorectal cancer diagnosis easier to overcome.



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Reducing consumption of sugary drinks like soda may improve health outcomes after a colorectal cancer diagnosis.

Smart Pain Management

BY GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

Pain is one of the most common reasons people seek medical care, yet long-term reliance on medication is not always the best or only solution.

While medications play an important role in pain management, especially after injury or surgery, many people benefit from additional approaches that address pain at its source and support overall function. A comprehensive, evidence-based strategy can help reduce discomfort while improving quality of life.

Non-medication approaches often focus on restoring movement, calming the nervous system and strengthening the body's natural ability to heal.

The Role of Physical Therapy and Movement

Physical therapy is a cornerstone of nonpharmacological pain management. Rather than masking symptoms, it aims to improve strength, flexibility, balance and mobility. Targeted exercises help correct movement patterns, reduce strain on joints and support injured tissues as they heal.

Regular movement, even at low intensity, can help manage chronic pain. Gentle activities such as



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walking, swimming or stretching increase blood flow, deliver nutrients to tissues and reduce stiffness. Over time, consistent movement can lower pain sensitivity and improve daily function.

Avoiding activity due to fear of pain may actually worsen symptoms. Guided, gradual movement helps rebuild confidence and supports long-term recovery.

Mindfulness and the Nervous System

Pain is not just a physical experience; it is shaped by the nervous

system and emotional health. Chronic stress can amplify pain signals, making discomfort feel more intense and persistent. Mindfulness-based practices help interrupt this cycle.

Techniques such as deep breathing, meditation and body awareness exercises encourage relaxation and reduce stress-related muscle tension. These approaches can change how the brain processes pain, helping people feel more in control and less overwhelmed by symptoms.

Mindfulness does not eliminate pain, but it can reduce its effect and

improve coping skills, especially when used alongside physical therapies.

Additional Evidence-Based Approaches

Other non-medication strategies may also play a role, depending on the type of pain involved. Occupational therapy can help modify daily activities to reduce strain. Heat and cold therapy may ease muscle tension or inflammation. Cognitive behavioral strategies can help address fear, anxiety and unhelpful thought patterns that often accompany chronic pain.

Some people benefit from complementary approaches such as massage therapy or acupuncture when used as part of a coordinated care plan. These methods are most effective when guided by health professionals and tailored to individual needs.

Effective pain management is rarely one-size-fits-all. A primary care provider or pain specialist can help develop a balanced plan that integrates movement, therapy and lifestyle strategies. The goal is not to ignore pain but to address it thoughtfully, reducing reliance on medication while supporting long-term function and well-being.

Chronic Inflammation

BY GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

Inflammation is part of the body's natural defense system. When you cut a finger or catch a virus, inflammation helps heal damaged tissue and fight infection.

Problems arise, however, when inflammation lingers long after the immediate threat has passed. This long-term response, known as chronic inflammation, can quietly undermine health over time.

Unlike acute inflammation, which is visible and temporary, chronic inflammation often works beneath the surface. It may not cause obvious symptoms at first, yet it has been linked to a wide range of health conditions, including heart disease, arthritis, diabetes,

autoimmune disorders and certain cancers. Understanding how it develops and how to manage it can play an important role in long-term wellness.

What is Chronic Inflammation?

Chronic inflammation occurs when the immune system remains activated for weeks, months or even years. Instead of protecting the body, this ongoing response can damage healthy cells, tissues and organs. Contributing factors vary but commonly include prolonged stress, poor sleep, lack of physical activity, smoking, environmental toxins and diets high in ultra-processed foods.

In some cases, chronic



DMITRIY VASILENKO

inflammation stems from unresolved infections or autoimmune conditions, where the immune system mistakenly attacks healthy tissue. Excess body fat, particularly around the abdomen, is associated with higher inflammatory activity

because fat cells release inflammatory compounds into the bloodstream.

Because symptoms may be subtle, people often do not realize inflammation is an issue until it contributes to another condition or worsens existing health

concerns.

How it Affects the Body

Over time, chronic inflammation can interfere with normal bodily functions. Blood vessels may become less flexible, raising the risk of cardiovascular disease. Joints and connective tissue may deteriorate, contributing to stiffness and pain. Inflammation can also affect insulin regulation, increasing the risk of metabolic disorders.

The brain is not immune to its effects. Research suggests persistent inflammation may influence mood, memory and cognitive health, potentially playing a role in depression and neurodegenerative conditions. Digestive health

SEE INFLAMMATION, Page A7

Gut Health and Food Sensitivities

BY GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

Digestive discomfort is common, but not all reactions to food are the same.

Terms such as intolerance, sensitivity and allergy are often used interchangeably, yet they describe different processes in the body and call for different responses. Understanding these distinctions can help people better manage symptoms, protect their health and know when to seek medical guidance.

Digestive issues can range from mild bloating to serious, life-threatening reactions. Identifying the type of response involved is a key step toward effective care and informed food choices.

Food Intolerance: A Digestive Issue

Food intolerance occurs when the body has difficulty



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digesting certain foods. This is not an immune response but rather a problem with processing specific components, often due to missing or insufficient digestive enzymes. Lactose intolerance is one of the most common examples, caused by the body's inability to break down lactose, a sugar found in dairy products.

Symptoms of intolerance typically include

bloating, gas, abdominal pain or diarrhea and may appear hours after eating. The severity often depends on the amount consumed. Many people with intolerances can still eat small quantities of the triggering food or tolerate modified versions, such as lactose-free dairy products.

Managing intolerance usually involves dietary adjustments rather than complete elimina-

tion. Keeping a food and symptom journal can help identify patterns and guide choices.

Food Sensitivity: A Broader Response

Food sensitivities fall into a less clearly defined category. They may involve digestive symptoms but can also trigger headaches, fatigue, joint pain, skin issues or brain fog. Unlike

allergies, sensitivities do not cause an immediate immune reaction, and symptoms may be delayed, making them harder to pinpoint.

Some sensitivities are thought to involve the immune system at a low level or be linked to gut health and inflammation. Commonly reported triggers include gluten, certain food additives and fermentable carbohydrates.

Because testing for sensitivities is limited and sometimes unreliable, identification often relies on elimination diets conducted under professional guidance. Gradually removing and reintroducing suspected foods can help clarify which items may be contributing to symptoms.

Food Allergy: An Immune Emergency

Food allergies are **SEE GUT HEALTH, Page A7**

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The Science of Recovery, Rest Days

BY GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

In a culture that often celebrates constant productivity, rest can be misunderstood as inactivity or lost time.

In reality, recovery is a vital part of physical and mental health. Whether the body is adapting to exercise, healing from illness or managing everyday stress, rest allows essential repair processes to take place. Without it, progress can stall and health can suffer.

Recovery is not only for athletes. Everyone benefits from balancing effort with restoration, and rest days play a key role in sustaining energy, resilience and overall well-being.

What Happens During Recovery

Physical activity places controlled stress on the body. Muscles develop tiny tears, energy stores are depleted and the nervous system works harder to coordinate movement. Recovery is when the body repairs this damage, rebuilding tissue stronger than before and replenishing fuel.

Hormones released during rest support muscle repair, immune function and inflammation control. Adequate recovery helps regulate heart rate, blood pressure and metabolic processes. When rest is skipped or insufficient, these systems may remain under strain,



XAVIER LORENZO

increasing the risk of injury, illness and fatigue.

Sleep is one of the most powerful recovery tools. During deep sleep, the body releases growth hormones, repairs tissue and consolidates memory. Chronic sleep deprivation disrupts these processes, affecting both physical performance and mental clarity.

Rest and Mental Health

Recovery is just as important for the brain as it is for the body. Continuous stress, whether physical or emotional, keeps the nervous system in a heightened state of alert.

Over time, this can contribute to irritability, anxiety, difficulty concentrating and emotional exhaustion.

Rest days help calm the nervous system and reduce stress hormones. Mental recovery supports mood regulation, decision-making and creativity. Even short periods of intentional rest, such as quiet breaks, time outdoors or gentle movement, can help reset attention and reduce mental overload.

Ignoring mental fatigue often leads to burnout, which can affect motivation, sleep and overall health. Building recovery into routines helps protect long-term emotional

well-being.

What Effective Recovery Looks Like

Recovery does not necessarily mean complete inactivity. Active recovery, such as walking, stretching or light movement, can promote circulation and reduce stiffness without placing additional strain on the body. Gentle activities help muscles relax while maintaining mobility.

Other recovery strategies include hydration, balanced nutrition and stress management. Proper fueling supports tissue repair, while relaxation practices such as breathing exercises or mindfulness can enhance both physical and mental recovery.

Listening to the body is essential. Persistent soreness, declining performance or ongoing fatigue may signal the need for more rest or a change in routine.

Making Rest a Part of Health

Recovery is not a reward for hard work; it is a requirement for sustainable health. Scheduling rest days, prioritizing sleep and allowing time to recharge can improve performance, prevent injury and support mental resilience. When rest is treated as an essential part of health, the body and mind are better equipped to meet daily demands.

The Role of Hormones

BY GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

Hormones act as the body's internal messengers, coordinating essential functions that affect how people feel, think and function each day.

From regulating energy levels and metabolism to influencing mood and sleep, hormones help keep the body in balance. When levels shift, whether due to age, stress or health conditions, the effects can be felt across multiple systems.

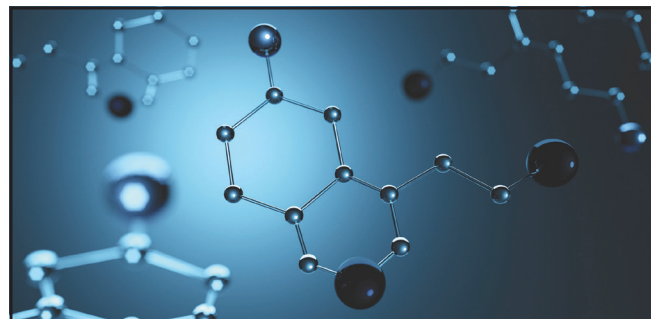
Hormonal changes are a natural part of life, but understanding how they influence health at different stages can help people recognize symptoms early

and take steps to support overall well-being.

How Hormones Influence Daily Function

Hormones are produced by glands in the endocrine system and travel through the bloodstream to signal organs and tissues. Even small fluctuations can have noticeable effects.

For example, changes in thyroid hormones can affect energy, body temperature and weight regulation. Cortisol, often called the stress hormone, plays a role in blood sugar balance, immune response and how the body reacts to pressure. Sex hormones such as



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estrogen, progesterone and testosterone influence far more than reproductive health. They affect bone density, muscle mass, cardiovascular health and brain function. Melatonin helps regulate sleep-wake cycles, while insulin manages how

the body uses and stores energy from food.

When these systems are working together smoothly, the body adapts well to daily demands. Disruptions can contribute to fatigue, mood changes, sleep difficulties and metabolic concerns.

Hormonal Changes Across Life Stages

Hormone levels naturally shift throughout life. During adolescence, rising hormone levels drive growth, development and emotional changes. In adulthood, hormones continue to fluctuate in response to stress, lifestyle factors and health conditions.

Midlife often brings more noticeable changes. Perimenopause and menopause involve declining estrogen and progesterone levels, which can affect sleep, mood, metabolism and temperature regulation.

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Did you know?

BY METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Soyfoods can be an important component of a healthy diet. Soy is a nutrient-dense, plant-based protein that is high in fiber, potassium and iron. Because soy is low in saturated fat, it is considered a smarter protein source than animal-based products. For those looking for healthier alternatives to meat or dairy, soy can be a good thing. However, soy has been studied in the past in relation to cancer causation, notably breast cancer due to soy isoflavones that can act as estrogen in the body. Increased estrogen has been linked to certain

types of breast cancer. But the American Cancer Society says a large body of evidence supports the safety of soy as part of a healthy diet. In fact, studies have found consuming soyfoods is associated with a decreased risk or no change in risk for cancer. Past studies featured mice and rats, which break down isoflavones differently than humans. Also, the doses that elevated breast cancer risk in the rodents were much higher than in studies conducted in people. Human studies have found the estrogen effects of soy seem to have no effect at all and may even reduce breast cancer risk.



GUT HEALTH

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immune system reactions that occur when the body mistakenly identifies a food protein as harmful. Even small amounts can trigger symptoms, which often appear quickly. Reactions may include hives, swelling, difficulty breathing, vomiting or a sudden drop in blood pressure.

Common food allergens include peanuts, tree nuts, shellfish, eggs, milk, soy and wheat. Allergies can be unpredictable, and severe reactions, known as anaphylaxis, require immediate medical attention. Unlike intolerances and sensitivities, food allergies require strict avoidance and clear labeling awareness. Diagnosis should always be made by a medical professional using appropriate testing and

clinical evaluation.

Knowing What To Do

Persistent digestive symptoms should not be ignored. A primary care provider or gastroenterology specialist can help rule out underlying conditions and determine whether symptoms point to intolerance, sensitivity or allergy. Registered dietitians can play a key role in creating safe, balanced eating plans.

HORMONES

FROM PAGE A6

Testosterone levels may gradually decline with age, influencing energy, muscle strength and motivation.

Later in life, hormonal changes can interact with other age-related shifts, affecting bone health, body composition and cognitive function. These transitions vary widely, and symptoms can differ from person to person.

Supporting Hormonal Health

While hormonal changes

cannot be stopped, healthy habits can support balance and reduce their impact. Regular physical activity helps regulate insulin, cortisol and sex hormones while supporting metabolism and mood. Strength training, in particular, plays a role in maintaining muscle and bone health as hormone levels change.

Sleep is critical for hormonal regulation. Inadequate or disrupted sleep can interfere with cortisol, insulin and appetite-related hormones, contributing to fatigue and weight changes. Stress management also matters, as chronic stress can keep

cortisol elevated and disrupt other hormonal systems.

Nutrition supports hormone production and balance by providing essential building blocks such as healthy fats, protein and micronutrients. Consistent meals and balanced blood sugar can further support energy and mood stability.

Persistent symptoms such as unexplained fatigue, sleep disruption, mood changes or shifts in weight may warrant a conversation with a health care provider. Evaluating hormonal health in context with lifestyle and medical history can help guide appropriate care.

INFLAMMATION

FROM PAGE A4

may also suffer, as inflammation can disrupt the balance of gut bacteria and impair nutrient absorption.

Because inflammation affects multiple systems, addressing it often requires a whole-body approach rather than a single solution.

Everyday Ways to Reduce Inflammation

Reducing chronic inflammation starts with daily habits. Nutrition plays a key role. Diets rich in fruits, vegetables, whole

grains, lean proteins and healthy fats help provide antioxidants and nutrients that support the body's natural repair processes. Limiting added sugars, refined carbohydrates and highly processed foods can further reduce inflammatory triggers.

Regular physical activity is another powerful tool. Moderate, consistent movement helps regulate immune responses, improve circulation and lower inflammatory markers. Adequate sleep is equally important, as the body uses rest to reset immune function and repair tissue.

Managing stress is often overlooked but critical. Chronic stress keeps the body in a heightened inflammatory state. Practices such as mindfulness, deep breathing, time outdoors and maintaining social connections can help lower stress-related inflammation.

Finally, avoiding tobacco, moderating alcohol use and following recommended medical care all contribute to keeping inflammation in check. While chronic inflammation may be silent, proactive lifestyle choices can help quiet its effect and support overall health.





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