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Hospitals are not just for emergencies

Hospitals play an important role in keeping people healthy. While hospitals remain the place to go when experiencing a medical emergency, these vital facilities offer much more than emergency care. The scope of services available in many hospitals is vast and can benefit people confronting medical emergencies as well as individuals hoping to live as healthy as possible. The following rundown of offerings can shed light on how beneficial it can be to look to hospitals as part of a health care regimen.

Vaccination: Many people get vaccinated during wellness checkups or at local pharmacies. But some patients are forced to wait months before they can book an appointment with their primary care physicians, while others may not

live close to pharmacies. In such instances, people can visit their local hospitals to determine if they provide vaccinations. Many hospitals do, and that can help circumvent months-long waiting lists at primary care offices and issues related to pharmacies.

Notary services: Advance directives and power-of-attorney arrangements are important components of estate planning. When setting such directives, it's customary if not mandatory to have such wishes notarized so there is no legal gray area upon a person's death. Many hospitals include notary services as part of their concierge care (some might include notary services under packages with different names). These are vital guest assistance services and can be particularly useful if patients encounter

a medical emergency and are unsure if they have formalized their intentions regarding their estate.

Financial assistance: Health care costs can be substantial, particularly for people who experience a medical emergency and find themselves facing hefty bills related to their care. Hospitals typically have trained financial assistance professionals on staff who can help patients and their families navigate the potential assistance available to them. Options can include direct assistance in finding government support, charity care, billing support, and more. Financial assistance staff may help patients and their families determine out-of-pocket costs, which is often a significant concern for people confronting a medical emergency.

Wellness services: Hospitals also offer services to people who are not confronting medical emergencies. Some facilities provide wellness services that emphasize preventive care like nutrition advice, dietary counseling and weight management support.

Such offerings also may include lifestyle education that can showcase strategies people can look to each day to get healthy and stay healthy.

Language interpretation: Patients whose native tongue differs from that spoken at the hospital may be hesitant or intimidated when discussing their health and care with hospital officials. But many hospitals provide language interpretation and translation services that can ease those concerns and ensure there is no disconnect between patients and their health care providers. These services also can be utilized by people seeking advice on preventive care and healthy lifestyle choices.

Peer support services: Many hospitals also offer peer support services to patients as well as family members. These services may include routine support groups for survivors, caregivers, and others affected by a personal or family medical issue.

Hospitals are more than just places to go when feeling unwell. The range of services available at many hospitals goes well beyond patient care.

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Long-term benefits of getting braces

Braces are commonly worn by school-aged children. Estimates vary, but numerous sources suggest no fewer than 50 percent and as much as 70 percent of children get braces or seek treatment from an orthodontist prior to adulthood.

Braces are known to straighten teeth and make people more confident in their appearance, but the benefits of braces go beyond cosmetic enhancements. When considering whether or not to get braces, people should know that getting them can provide a host of long-term benefits.

Gum disease prevention: Gum disease is caused when bacteria accumulates along the gum line. When that occurs, people are vulnerable to infection and inflammation. Crooked or improperly spaced teeth can make certain areas inaccessible during routine brushing, and that can make the mouth vulnerable to the buildup of plaque and bacteria. When that occurs, the gums can be affected by inflammation and infection that ultimately can cause gum disease. Braces help to straighten teeth and ensure proper spacing between them, which can help to prevent gum disease.

Reduced risk for cavities: The buildup of bacteria on misaligned and poorly



spaced teeth also can increase the risk for cavities. While it can be harder to clean teeth while wearing braces, the Cleveland Clinic notes that once the braces are

off, the straighter teeth and more accessible spaces in the mouth help to prevent cavities.

Prevent the erosion of bone: The

Atlanta Center for Advanced Periodontics notes that misaligned teeth can cause dental bone loss. That's because misaligned teeth prevent normal chewing, which results in a loss of stimulation to the bone. When that happens, the bone that holds teeth in place can break down. Braces help to ensure proper alignment of teeth, and over time that can help to prevent dental bone loss.

Braces and reduced risk for TMJ disorders: The Mayo Clinic notes that the temporomandibular joint (TMJ) connects the jawbone to the skull. Disorders affecting the TMJ can cause pain in the jaw joint and in the muscles that control movement of the jaw. While the Mayo Clinic notes it can be difficult to pinpoint the exact cause of a TMJ disorder, a misaligned bite can stress the jaw. That stress can potentially contribute to a TMJ disorder. Braces can help to address a misaligned bite, and over time that can reduce risk for a TMJ disorder.

Braces are often associated with producing immediate and positive results. But there are various long-term benefits to braces that merit consideration as well.

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Seeing clearly: Kids and contact lens care

Upon visiting the eye doctor, many youngsters learn that their vision is not quite as perfect as they would have hoped. In the not-so-distant past, eyeglasses were the standard for children experiencing diminished vision. However, as pediatric eye care has evolved, contact lenses have become an increasingly popular and safe option for children and teenagers.

According to the American Optometric Association, approximately 15 percent of children under the age of 17 in the United States currently wear contact

lenses. Beyond simple vision correction, contacts can help young athletes concerned about wearing glasses during competition. Contacts also offer relief from potentially heavy eyeglass frames, as well as a boost in self-confidence. Kids can benefit from wearing contacts, and most can manage these medical devices safely with some instruction.

Clearer vision and more

For active children, switching from traditional glasses to contacts eliminates the risk of lost or broken frames during

sports or recess. There's also a significant psychological impact to wearing contacts over glasses. According to research published in Optometry and Vision Science, children and teens who switch from glasses to soft contact lenses report a marked improvement in their self-perception, social acceptance, and comfort during activities.

Beyond vision correction and a confidence boost, contact lenses now serve as a preventive health tool. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration-approved daily disposable lenses like MiSight are specifically designed for children ages 8 to 12 to slow the progression of myopia. This helps to safeguard their long-term eye health.

Safe care and health

Contacts are medical devices that require proper care. The FDA emphasizes that the safe use of contacts requires wearers to emphasize lens hygiene. If parents feel kids can manage lens hygiene, then they are old enough to wear lenses. Indeed, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advise that children can successfully wear contacts as long as the lenses are properly maintained.

A study published in Pediatrics highlighted that proper usage of contacts is essential, revealing that around 13,500

children visit emergency rooms each year due to complications related to contact lenses. These often stem from improper cleaning, wearing lenses while sleeping, or using tap water instead of a sterile solution for storage and cleaning.

When applicable, daily lenses may be safest and most convenient for younger wearers, as they are single-use. That means putting in fresh contacts each day and not having to worry about storing and cleaning them.

Determining if a child is ready

To evaluate if a child is mature enough for contact lenses, parents and eye-care professionals should consider these patterns.

- Do they complete daily chores and maintain hygiene without needing constant reminders?
- Do they wash their hands with soap and water before touching their face or eating?
- Do they keep track of eyeglasses or other important items?
- Do they feel comfortable inserting and removing the contact lenses on their own?

Parents who feel their child may be ready for contacts can consult with an eye care professional about the best options.



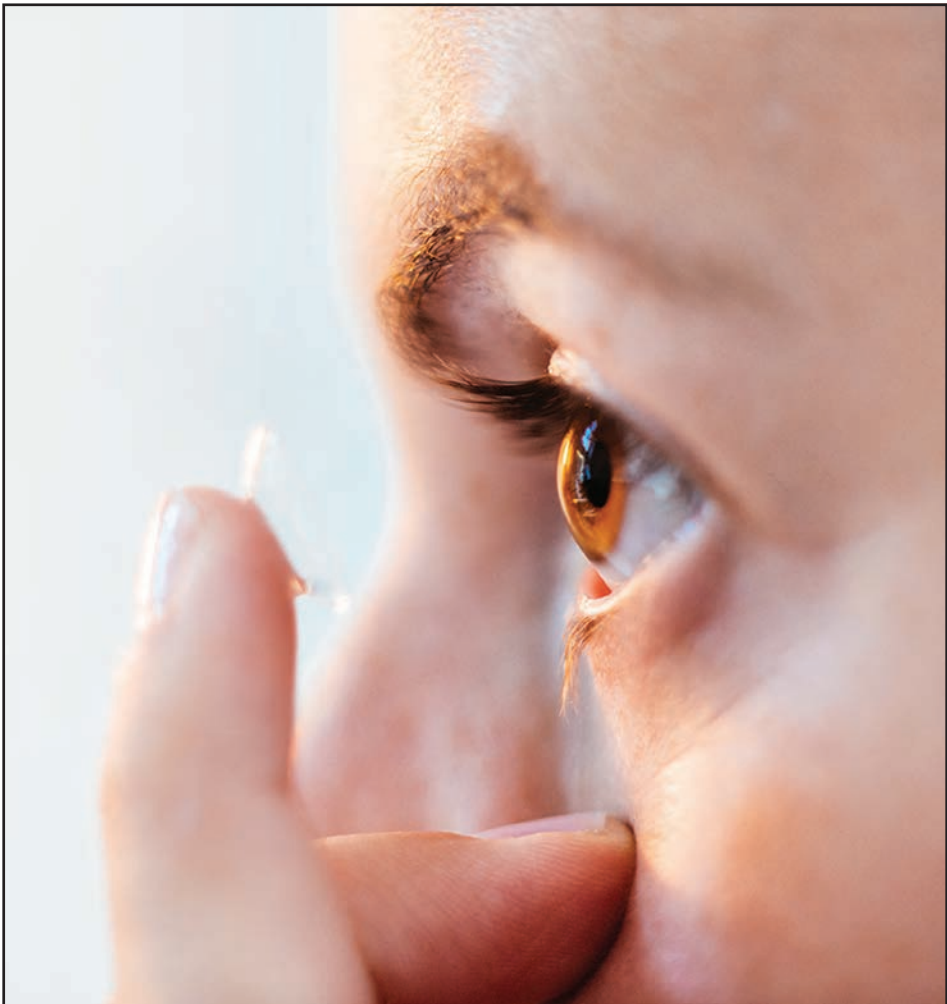
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Take a bite out of dental hygiene

Maintaining a healthy smile goes beyond a five-second brushing while running out the door for work or school. It involves being mindful of the often simple oral hygiene steps a person can take to avoid common oral health issues.

According to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, nearly 47 percent of American adults age 30 or older suffer from some form of periodontal disease. More than 20 percent live with untreated tooth decay, according to the National Interprofessional Initiative on Oral Health. Despite these statistics, common oral health complaints are largely preventable. Incorporating the following daily habits can significantly reduce a person's risk of decay and facilitate lifelong dental health.

Increase brushing time. The Academy of General Dentistry reports that the average person brushes for only 45 to 70 seconds per day. But the American Dental Association recommends brushing for two full minutes, twice daily. Setting a timer will help adults and children meet this goal.

Use a fluoride toothpaste. Fluoride strengthens enamel and can reduce caries incidence by up to 31 percent, says the ADA. Ingestion of fluoride can be reduced by spitting out excess and teaching children the proper way to brush.

Recognize that angle matters. Angling toothbrush bristles to 45 degrees toward the gum line can sweep away plaque trapped at the perimeter. People should use short, gentle, circular strokes to clean teeth, rather than harsh back-and-forth scrubbing, which can erode enamel and lead to gum recession, says the American Diabetes Association.

Use floss and water flossers. A standard toothbrush can reach only so much of the tooth's surface. The tight spaces between the teeth will remain untouched without interdental cleaning. Traditional string floss, interdental brushes, and water flossers will flush out food particles and bacteria.

Invest in a tongue scraper. The tongue is a magnet for oral bacteria, which can contribute to bad breath and plaque buildup. People can use a tongue scraper to clean the tongue each morning.

Use mouthwash. Finishing the dental routine with an alcohol-free antibacterial mouthwash will help neutralize any lingering bacteria without drying out delicate oral tissues. Some mouthwashes also are fortified with fluoride for extra tooth protection.

Get twice-annual cleanings. Visiting the dentist every six months treats the teeth and mouth to a thorough cleaning and inspections that can uncover issues before they escalate.

Dedicating roughly five minutes per day to proper brushing and oral care can protect the teeth, gums, and overall health.

Physical therapy helps people avoid surgery

Individuals who are dealing with injuries or chronic pain may seek relief in various ways. Surgery may seem like an inevitable outcome, but advances in medicine have led to more conservative solutions. Physical therapy is a powerful, non-invasive first-line treatment that is increasingly being recommended by health care professionals as a means to address a wide range of conditions.

According to the Cleveland Clinic, physical therapy is a health care specialty that helps restore movement, manage pain and improve physical function. Physical therapists undergo many years of schooling, during which they learn to employ targeted exercises, hands-on care, and patient education to help people heal after surgery, recover from injuries, or manage chronic health conditions.

By targeting structural mechanics, restoring tissue mobility, and addressing underlying movement dysfunctions, physical therapy frequently can resolve complex medical conditions without the risks, costs, and down time associated with surgery. Here are some of the conditions PT can address.

Herniated or bulging discs: Targeted exercises, such as mechanical traction and spinal extension maneuvers, can help



centralize disc material away from compressed nerves, says the Jacksonville Orthopaedic Institute.

Spinal stenosis: Strengthening of core and pelvic stability muscles can reduce loading on the spinal canal. Manual therapy will help restore joint mechanics

to alleviate pain and other symptoms.

Degenerative disc disease: Physical therapists can help strengthen deep postural stabilizer muscles to create internal support. This can help relieve mechanical stress on intervertebral discs that have worn out.

Soft tissue injuries: Overuse injuries and tendon degradation can lead to pain that mimics conditions that require surgical repair. These may include achilles tendinopathy, plantar fasciitis, and carpal tunnel syndrome. PT may be an initial treatment option for these conditions.

Pelvic floor dysfunction: The National Center for Biotechnology Information says pelvic floor dysfunction involves the abnormal activity or function of the pelvic floor musculature. Pelvic floor dysfunction can affect bladder and bowel function and cause pain in the abdomen, including during intercourse. Physical therapy uses biofeedback, internal and external manual techniques, and targeted neuromuscular retraining to strengthen the pelvic basket.

Joint osteoarthritis: The Cleveland Clinic says osteoarthritis is the most common form of arthritis. It happens when the cartilage that cushions the ends of bones in a joint wears down over time. PT can address osteoarthritis in knees, hips, shoulders, and other joints.

Physical therapy can be a powerful tool when patients consistently and actively participate in the treatment. For many, a tailored physical therapy plan provides a path to complete recovery.



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Find your next fitness obsession outdoors

(BPT) — If the same old gym routine has gotten old, or you've let your membership lapse, consider a fresh new way to stay active: Go outside.

Exercising outdoors can boost your physical and mental health, thanks to exposure to vitamin D via sunlight and reduced stress from spending time in nature. Another advantage is the wide variety of activities you can do to match your fitness level. You'll enjoy fresh air and sunshine, the beauty of nature, and getting to know your neighborhood and neighbors a little better.

Late summer and autumn are perfect for being outdoors, so here are some ideas to get you started.

The beauty of walking

Nothing beats walking for simplicity

and effectiveness when it comes to supporting your well-being. Beyond a good, supportive pair of shoes, you don't need special equipment, and you can just walk out your door and around your neighborhood.

If you haven't been exercising lately, start slowly and don't walk faster or longer than is comfortable. Gradually increasing your pace and distance can boost your heart rate and improve your stamina. Maintain good posture while walking, with your head up and shoulders back.

Keep walking interesting by changing up your route or inviting friends. Explore local parks or walking paths for even more variety.

Want more challenge? Beyond picking up speed and extending your route, tackle some hills or stairs, pump your

arms as you walk or wear a weighted vest.

Stay safe: Bring a water bottle for longer walks, dress comfortably and use sunscreen to protect your skin. Avoid listening to loud music or noise-blocking headphones that can keep you from hearing potential hazards. Keep a fully charged phone with you, and tell someone where you're going for extended treks.

Take it up a notch: When you're ready for more, consider hiking or running, depending on your fitness level and preferences.

Hiking is all about exploring the natural environment, traversing trails through forests and other terrain including state or national parks. Hiking requires proper gear and safety measures like sturdier footwear, bringing plenty of water and snacks, and being prepared for everything from encounters with insects and wildlife to inclement weather.

Stay safe: Research the park or terrain you're visiting ahead of time, so you know what to bring. Follow park rules and stay on trails, make sure your phone is fully charged before leaving, and tell someone where you're going — and/or hike with a buddy.

Considering running? It's a good idea to see your doctor to ensure you can handle this strenuous activity. Proper footwear is vital for protecting your feet and joints, as is staying on flat, even surfaces. Gentle stretching before and after running can help prevent injury.

Stay safe: Start slowly, stay hydrated and pay attention to your body's signals. Walk as needed, and use rest days so your body can recover.

Be a team player

Miss playing sports you enjoyed as a kid? Always wanted to play one?

Being on a team is a fantastic way to get outside, stay active and socialize. Good places to find a softball, baseball or soccer team include parks and rec centers and community education programs. They often have classes and leagues for beginners and/or older adults.

You could try a popular outdoor game to play with a friend or two, like the current pickleball craze — or tennis, basketball, golf or ultimate Frisbee.

Stay safe: Wear protective gear and sunscreen to protect your skin and scalp. Comfortable shoes, protective eyewear and weather-appropriate clothing is also recommended. Warm up and stretch before games to help avoid injury. Stay hydrated and cool down slowly to recover from exertion.

"Life is like a bicycle ..."

"... To stay balanced, you must keep moving," or so the saying goes. Cycling is an effective, low-impact way to stay fit and enjoy being outside. If you don't own a bicycle, many cities offer low-cost bike rentals. Some bike shops have rentals or sell refurbished bicycles.

Explore biking trails in your area, and consider joining a local club or bike with a friend.

Stay safe: Get your bike checked out and tuned up if it hasn't been ridden for a while. Protect yourself by wearing a bike helmet, and refamiliarize yourself with rules of the road before heading out.

These are just a few ways to exercise in the great outdoors. Feeling adventurous? Explore other options like swimming, paddleboarding, kayaking and more. There's a whole world of fun activities out there waiting for you.



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Three sleep myths that could be keeping you awake

Americans have never been more focused on optimizing their health. They wear devices that measure nearly every aspect of their day — from workouts and steps to heart rate and recovery — and increasingly turn to GLP-1 medications as part of the weight management journey.

Alongside these changes, experts are encouraging people to prioritize another key pillar of health: quality sleep, which plays an important role in overall well-being and can support healthy lifestyle habits.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), more than 30% of U.S. adults regularly get less than the recommended seven to nine hours of sleep each night.

Dr. Stephanie Stahl, Medical Director at Indiana University Health, notes that many people still treat sleep as something they'll fit in if there's time. Stahl is the Sleep Medicine Fellowship Program Director and Associate Professor at Indiana University School of Medicine as well as Natrol® Sleep Science Advisory Board member. "Many people think of sleep as the first thing they can sacrifice when life gets busy. But sleep isn't a luxury. It's one of the most powerful tools we have to support our health, mental well-being and daily performance."



That can be difficult in today's always-on world. Packed schedules, constant notifications and late-night scrolling can all work against the body's natural sleep-wake cycle. In fact, 38% of adults say using their phone or tablet before bed to read the news or "doomscroll" makes their sleep somewhat or significantly worse.

What sleep myths could be keeping you awake?

"One of the biggest misconceptions I hear is that sleep starts when your head hits the pillow," said Stahl. "The truth is that your body has been preparing for sleep all day. Your light exposure, activity, meals, stress and evening routine all influence how prepared your brain and body are for sleep."

She describes this as your sleep ecosystem — the daily habits, routines and environmental cues that work together to influence your body's natural sleep-wake cycle. One of the most important players in that ecosystem is melatonin, a hormone your body naturally produces in response to darkness. Rather than forcing sleep, melatonin helps signal to your brain that it's time to wind down.

Stahl is helping to debunk three common sleep myths:

Myth: Better sleep starts at bedtime.

Stahl: "Great sleep starts the moment you wake up. Morning sunlight helps regulate your body's internal clock and supports natural melatonin production later that evening."

Myth: I'll catch up on sleep this weekend.

Stahl: "Consistency matters more than catch-up sleep. Keeping a regular sleep and wake schedule (yes, even on weekends) helps reinforce your body's natural rhythm."

Myth: The eight hours you're asleep are all that matter.

Stahl: "The hour before bed matters, too. A consistent wind-down routine, like dimming the lights and avoiding screen time, helps prepare your brain and body for quality sleep."

What small habits lead to better sleep?

The good news is that improving sleep

doesn't require overhauling your lifestyle. Stahl recommends focusing on a few consistent habits: Get outside for natural light early in the day, stay physically active, avoid caffeine in the afternoon and evening, maintain a regular sleep schedule and create a cool, dark, quiet sleep environment.

If travel, changing schedules or other temporary disruptions affect that rhythm, melatonin supplements can help support your body's natural sleep-wake cycle.

When healthy habits need extra support that is safe

Healthy sleep habits are the foundation of better sleep, but even the best routines can't account for everything. Travel, shift work, changing schedules, stress and age-related changes can all temporarily disrupt your body's natural rhythm.

It's one reason more than 27% of U.S. adults report using melatonin supplements, making it one of the country's most commonly used sleep supplements. Melatonin is a well-studied naturally occurring hormone that plays a key role in regulating the sleep-wake cycle. When used as directed, it is widely recognized as a safe, effective and non-habit-forming option for temporary sleep support. Backed by 30 years of scientific research and widespread use, melatonin is the No. 1 doctor recommended ingredient for sleep, recognized by experts as a safe, reliable way to help people fall asleep faster and stay asleep longer.

"Healthy sleep starts with healthy habits," says Stahl. "Melatonin is a hormone your body naturally produces to help signal when it's time to sleep. If travel, changing schedules or other temporary disruptions affect that rhythm, melatonin supplements can help support your body's natural sleep-wake cycle. The key is to think of it as one part of a broader sleep strategy, not a replacement for healthy habits."

Because sleep challenges vary from person to person, some people may also benefit from ingredients such as magnesium glycinate, valerian root, GABA or L-theanine depending on their individual needs. Guided by leading sleep experts, including Stahl, Natrol develops science-backed sleep solutions designed to complement healthy sleep habits and support different sleep needs.

The benefits of prioritizing sleep extend well beyond feeling rested — 88% of adults who are satisfied with their sleep, report they are flourishing, compared with just 47% of those who aren't. Better sleep isn't just another wellness goal. It's one of the strongest investments you can make in your overall health and well-being.

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