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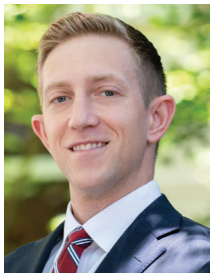

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5 ways to guard against orthopedic injuries this summer

Summer is the season of movement — longer days, warmer weather and a calendar packed with outdoor fun. Whether you're hiking, golfing, swimming, gardening or chasing the kids around the yard, it's the perfect time to stay active.

But with all that activity comes a spike in orthopedic injuries, especially those affecting the bones, joints, muscles and spine.

At Southeastern Orthopedics & Spine, our team of orthopedic surgeons and sports medicine specialists sees a noticeable uptick in injuries during the summer months — many of them preventable. Before you dive headfirst into your next summer adventure, check out these five tips to help you stay safe, strong and injury-free.

Warm Up Before You Work Out

Too often, people jump straight into physical activity without properly preparing their muscles and joints. Spending just 5-10 minutes warming up with light cardio and dynamic stretching helps increase circulation, boost flexibility and prepare your body for movement.

It's especially important if you're returning to activity after a sedentary winter or trying a new sport. A proper warm-up can reduce the risk of muscle strains, ligament sprains and joint injuries.

Be Mindful of Overuse

Summer can inspire people to go all-in, particularly with repetitive activities like running, cycling or tennis.

But doing too much too quickly is one of the fastest routes to overuse injuries like tendinitis, stress fractures and joint inflammation.The key? Progress gradually. If you're increasing your mileage or workout intensity, follow the 10 percent rule: Don't increase your activity more than 10 percent per week, and always listen to your body — pain is a warning sign, not a badge of honor.

Protect Your Spine While Gardening or Lifting

Back injuries don't just happen on the playing field. Yard work, gardening and DIY projects can take a toll on your spine if you're not careful.

We commonly see herniated discs, strained muscles and sciatica triggered by improper lifting or extended bending.

Here's how to guard your back: When lifting, bend at the knees — not the waist — and engage your core. Keep the object close to your body and avoid twisting.

If a task takes more than 30 minutes, take breaks and switch positions frequently.

Gear Up for Safety

From the right footwear to protective equipment, having the proper gear is essential for injury prevention.

Shoes should provide adequate support for the activity — running shoes aren't meant for court sports, and flip-flops definitely don't belong on a hike.

Helmets and pads can also make a big difference, especially for activities like biking, skateboarding or contact sports.

And don't forget hydration — dehydration can lead to muscle cramps, decreased coordination and even heat-related illnesses, which can increase the risk of falls and sprains.

Don't Brush Off a Small Injury

It's easy to dismiss a sore ankle or aching shoulder, but minor orthopedic injuries can evolve into bigger problems if left untreated. A nagging pain that doesn't improve after a few days of rest may need a professional evaluation.

Early diagnosis and treatment can often prevent a minor issue from becoming a major one.

At Southeastern Orthopedics & Spine, we specialize in diagnosing and treating a full range of orthopedic and spine conditions.

Whether you're trying to get back on the field or simply want to enjoy your summer without discomfort, we're here to help you move better and live healthier.

With five clinical locations — including South Asheville and Clyde — it's easier than ever to get the orthopedic care you need.

Call (828) 274-7367 or (833) 747-7367 to learn more and schedule your appointment.

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HEALTHCARE & WELLNESS

Of Western North Carolina

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How to take a pause from the daily grind

Stress affects just about everyone. Health woes, employment, politics, and negative news all can contribute to people feeling stressed.

So can engaging in a daily routine that elicits the "Groundhog Day" effect, or when each day seems like a carbon copy of the one before. Finding ways to take a break from a daily routine can help individuals become happier and healthier.

• **Focus on self-care:** People need to dedicate time for activities that help them unwind, such as meditation, yoga, reading, stretching, or taking a walk outside. Just a few minutes of self-care each day can help. Individuals can incorporate some deep-breathing exercises into a lunch hour or use time after dinner to stroll the neighborhood with the dog or family to decompress.

• **Make time for hobbies:** Individuals can treat hobbies and other interests just as they would personal or work obligations. Add time for hobbies to your daily calendar and assign them the same significance as work-related tasks.

• **Prioritize exercise:** Exercise can alleviate stress and release endorphins, which can improve mood and reduce anxiety. Exercise also can clear the brain by helping a person focus on movements instead of worries.

Make exercise a non-negotiable component of daily life. Taking the stairs, walking to work or school, parking further away from stores in parking lots, and doing little bursts of activity several times a day can ensure exercise becomes part of the routine.

• **Utilize personal and sick time:** Many people let their vacation and other personal days go to waste. Fears of falling behind and pressures to appear dedicated are driving these behaviors. The average American takes 14 days off from work a year while Europeans take 24 days. Using all personal time is definitely a way to take a break from the daily grind.

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- Standing for extended periods, forget it.
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- Sleeping is nearly impossible

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What to know about estate planning

Estate planning is an umbrella term that encompasses anything from asset allocation after death to end-of-life health care decisions to power of attorney should an individual become incapacitated. Key components of an estate plan typically include wills, trusts, power of attorney, and health care directives.

The following are some basic steps anyone can take to establish an estate plan.

• **Create a will:** A will is a legal document that specifies how your assets will be distributed after your death. Although a will can be set up without an attorney, relying on an attorney to create or update a will can ensure that it is legally sound and reflects your intentions. In the will you can name an executor who will carry out the plans of the will. Without a will, intestacy laws where you live will dictate the distribution of your assets.

• **Establish trusts:** Trusts are tools that can protect assets, minimize estate taxes and provide for beneficiaries. Trusts can be revocable or irrevocable. Special needs trusts also can be set up. Trusts can help avoid probate and reduce estate taxes. The National Bureau of Economic Research indicates trusts can reduce estate taxes by up to 40 percent. Trusts also can shield some of your assets so they cannot be counted as part of your responsibility for paying for skilled nursing home admittance.

• **Determine powers of attorney and health care proxies:** If someone becomes incapacitated, that person will need responsible people who can act on their behalf. A financial or legal power of attorney can help with paying bills, accessing accounts and managing finances and other needs. A health care proxy can be listed on an advanced health care directive, known as a living will. The proxy will communicate your wishes indicated on the directive and see that your wishes are honored.

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Common exercise injuries and how to avoid them

Exercise is great for your health, but without proper precautions, it can lead to injuries. Here's how to stay safe and active.

Shoulder injuries

Exercises and sports that involve repetitive motion can contribute to various shoulder injuries.

An impingement can occur when the top of the shoulder blade applies pressure to the soft tissue beneath as the arm is lifted. Shoulder impingements may be classified as rotator cuff tendinitis, shoulder bursitis or acromion deformity. Impingements are estimated to be responsible for around half of all instances of shoulder pain.

Shoulder impingement prevention strategies include warming up and cooling down prior to exercising. Such an approach can loosen muscles and prepare them for exercise. Make sure to wear the right workout attire and stop exercising the moment there's pain. If pain persists, visit a health care provider before exercising again.

Elbow injuries

Elbow injuries are also common among individuals who engage in activities that require repetitive use. Such injuries may include tennis elbow, which is caused by the development of small tears in the tendons of the elbow that can wear them down and result in painful inflammation, and golfer's elbow, which begins with pain in the inner part of the elbow but can spread to the forearm and wrist. Repetitive activities such as weightlifting can contribute to these conditions as well.

Orthopedic professionals emphasize the importance of stretching arm and hand muscles regularly to reduce the risk of elbow injuries. In addition, avoiding overuse, which can happen when physically active individuals do not incorporate off days into their workout regimens, can help to reduce risk for elbow injuries.

Knee injuries

A torn anterior cruciate ligament can occur when the knee is overextended or twisted, while runner's knee affects runners, hikers and cyclists and causes pain or tenderness under the kneecap or at the front of the knee. Torn ACLs might be most associated with physically active individuals who play sports like soccer and basketball, but improper form while lifting weights also can put stress on the knee, potentially leading to a tear in the ligament.

Hospice nurses provide care during some of life's toughest moments

Coping with terminal illness can be challenging, even for those people with immense support systems behind them. At some point in one's care plan, it may be recommended to transition from actively treating or trying to cure a condition to making the person more comfortable. This is when hospice steps in.

Generally speaking, hospice is reserved for people who expect to die from an illness within the next six months. Hospice care can take place in a health care setting or in a person's private home. Hospice nurses are vital parts of a hospice care team.

These are nurses who care for those who have opted for hospice at the ends of their lives and fulfill the hospice philosophy of comfort and quality based on each person's unique needs.

A hospice nurse discusses and explains the patient's prognosis, and performs assessments and reviews medical histories. The nurse will administer medication for pain and monitor conditions and additional needs. Hospice nurses work to support the family and advocate for care according to the patient's wishes.

They also can answer questions and address concerns, serving as sounding boards in difficult situations. Hospice nurses also provide emotional support and can facilitate spiritual support. Nurses also may be present at the time of death if asked. Hospice nurses also may help coordinate counseling for surviving family members who are experiencing grief.

Hospice nurses may be classified as intake admissions, case managers, visit nurses, and triage nurses. One or more hospice nurses will be involved with patient care over the course of treatment.

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Total hip replacement recovery

Everything you need to know

Curious what recovery really looks like after a hip replacement?

Total hip replacement surgery has become less invasive thanks to new surgical techniques and modern implants. As a result, recovery is now faster and more comfortable than it used to be.

Most patients go home the same day or after one night in the hospital. However, some patients — especially those with limited mobility or without support at home — may need to go to a rehabilitation facility.

Resuming activities

Walking usually begins the same day after surgery, once the effects of anesthesia have worn off. Early movement helps speed up recovery and lowers the risk of blood clots.

Most patients can even begin climbing stairs that day. Though most will be able to put full weight on their leg, many surgeons recommend using crutches or a walker for a few days or weeks — depending on a patient's strength, balance and mobility before surgery — to prevent falls.

Most people can resume full participation in all their physical activities, including sports, within six to 12 weeks.

Here's a typical timeline for returning to work:

- **Sedentary/desk jobs:** two to four weeks
- **Active jobs with lots of walking:** six to eight weeks
- **Jobs with heavy labor:** up to three months

Rehab and exercises

Pre-habilitation programs — where patients do physical therapy before surgery with a certified physical therapist — can increase strength and balance before surgery, making recovery faster.

After-surgery exercises often include:

- **Gait retraining** (helping patients learn to walk properly)
- **Balance and proprioception exercises** (training the body to sense where the joints are to avoid falls)
- **Strengthening the hip flexors and abductors**, which improve overall hip function

Long-term studies show that 95% of hip replacements last 15 to 20 years. These studies were based on older implants, so today's newer, more durable designs may last even longer.

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Sunscreen on your feet?

Doctor urges sunscreen use and exams to prevent skin cancer on feet

Dr. Robert Todd DelBene

By Smoky Mountain Foot Clinic

When at the pool or lake we all lather up with sunscreen to protect our skin from the harmful rays of the sun. But do we remember to apply sunscreen to our feet?

Many don't realize skin cancer can occur on the feet from unprotected sun exposure, and overlook applying sunscreen to the area. But, Robert DelBene, DPM, with Smoky Mountain Foot Clinic warns skin cancer of the foot is prevalent and can even be fatal if not caught early.

While all types of skin cancer, including squamous cell and basal cell carcinoma, can be found on the foot, the most common is the most serious form, melanoma. Symptoms can be as subtle as an abnormal-looking mole or freckle found anywhere on the foot and often go unnoticed without routine foot exams.

According to foot and ankle surgeon Dr. DelBene, early diagnosis is key to effective treatment for the condition. But because people aren't looking for the early warning signs or taking the same precautions they do for other areas of the body, often skin cancer in this region is not diagnosed until later stages.

"I advise my patients to regularly inspect their feet, including the soles, in between their toes and even under their toenails, for any changing moles or spots and to have any suspicious areas promptly examined by a foot and ankle specialist," Dr. DelBene explains.

For more information on skin cancer of the foot call 828-452-4343 to request an appointment at Smoky Mountain Foot Clinic or visit smokymountainfootclinic.com to learn more. The practice has four locations in WNC, including Asheville and Waynesville.

When partaking in normal outdoor activities during spring and summer, your feet can be exposed to the sun even when other parts of your body aren't, making them susceptible to painful burns and long-term skin damage.

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Therapy dogs bring comfort and joy to Haywood Regional Medical Center

Haywood Regional Medical Center has two new therapy dogs: Maverick, a four-year-old Newfoundland therapy dog, and Huck, a 115-pound golden doodle

Huck and Maverick are known for their gentle demeanor and love for people.

Studies have shown that therapy dogs can help lower blood pressure, reduce cortisol levels (a stress hormone), and increase the release of endorphins, which promote feelings of happiness and well-being. Additionally, therapy dogs provide emotional support and enhance social interaction, especially for patients who may be experiencing long hospital stays or undergoing difficult treatments.

Huck visits the hospital weekly alongside his owner, Kristin Neel, Director of Behavioral Health Services at HRMC. Neel's unique dual role as a behavioral health leader and therapy dog handler helps integrate Huck's visits into the hospital's broader mission of compassionate care.

"Huck has an incredible ability to connect with people, ease anxiety, and simply brighten the day for those who need it most. It's been a joy to watch the comfort he brings to our patients and staff alike," said Neel.

Maverick, owned by Connie Sovie, has extensive experience as a therapy dog, particularly working with children as a reading dog. He has spent countless hours allowing children to read aloud while resting on his back, offering a calming and supportive presence.

Huck

Maverick

Haywood Regional Medical Center awarded for progress in sustainability goals

Haywood Regional Medical Center received the national Energy to Care award for sustainability practices — including energy efficiency and reducing energy consumption.

Awarded facilities must demonstrate a 10% reduction in energy use intensity over the previous year, or 15% over two years, to qualify. HRMC also met the following criteria across the last three years:

- Tracking energy and water consumption and greenhouse gas emissions.
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- Maintaining a weather-normalized SOURCE EUI equal to or lower than baseline for three or more years.

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8 games to try at the next backyard bash

Games can enhance any outdoor function. Whether at the beach or in one's backyard, activities can keep guests entertained in between the food and other refreshments. And the good news is that most games designed for these types of functions are appropriate for players across a wide range of ages.

The following games can add to the excitement of any outdoor gathering.

1. Ladder toss: Also known as ladder golf, this game requires players to toss string-attached balls onto a ladder-shaped target. Points are awarded depending on which rung the ball lands on.

2. Kubb: Pronounced "KOOB," this Swedish lawn game believed to have originated during the era of the Vikings and is best described as a blend

of bowling and horseshoes. Two teams compete to knock over their opponents' wooden blocks by throwing batons.

3. Cornhole: Many people have played cornhole, which involves tossing bean bags at the cornhole board, The objective is to get the bag into the hole or on the board to score points. The game can be played as singles or doubles. The first team to reach 21 points wins.

4. Spikeball®: Also called Roundnet, this two-on-two sport is played by hitting a ball off a net with the goal of preventing the opposing team from returning the ball within three touches.

5. Ring toss: This is another game that tests hand-eye coordination. Players take turns tossing the rings onto the target pegs. Each peg is worth a different number of points. The first player to reach the agreed-upon amount of points wins.

6. Connect four in a row: Giant versions of familiar tabletop games also are available for yard use. With this game, players need to get four chips in a row, either up and down or diagonal.

7. Kan Jam®: Similar to cornhole or horseshoes, Kan Jam® features two teams of two that alternate between throwing a frisbee and trying to deflect it. The goal is to get the frisbee into the can.

8. Rollers: Goals are placed 25 feet apart and then players roll wooden discs to try to get closest to the goal. Each side of the disc has a different number to determine the point value.

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Hearing aids effective in combating loneliness among seniors

Hearing aids appear to be an effective method of countering an epidemic of loneliness among U.S. seniors, a new study says.

Two-thirds of seniors 70 and older suffer from some degree of hearing loss. Hearing plays a vital role in communication and social connection, and people who are hard of hearing might struggle to maintain relationships.

Seniors given hearing aids retained more friends than others who weren't provided the devices, and in turn reported a decrease in loneliness. More than a quarter of seniors say they have little to no contact with others, and a third report feeling lonely, researchers said in background notes.

Senior woman puts on the hearing aid. Deafness, senior health care concept

The study

For the clinical trial, researchers tracked nearly 1,000 men and women with hearing loss in Maryland, North Carolina, Minnesota and Mississippi.

Half of the participants ages 70 through 84 were provided hearing aids, as well as counseling sessions and personalized instruction from an audiologist. When necessary, they also were provided tools like adaptors that connect hearing aids to televisions.

The other half were given advice on healthy aging such as exercise tips and strategies for communicating with health care providers, but no hearing aids or hearing assistance, the study says.

Researchers measured the participants' social isolation by tracking how regularly they spent time with others and assessing the size and variety of their social networks.

Before the study, participants in both groups reported feeling equally lonely, researchers said.

Three years later, loneliness scores had improved slightly among those who'd received hearing aids, but slightly worsened among those who hadn't, results show.

"Our findings add to evidence that helping aging patients hear better can also enrich their social lives and boost their mental and physical well-being," lead researcher Nicholas Reed, an audiologist with the NYU Grossman School of Medicine's Optimal Aging Institute, said.

Researchers plan to continue following the participants for another three years, and to repeat the clinical trial in a more diverse group of patients.

Deep breathing tricks the brain into unwinding the stress response

When you face a perceived threat, the brain sets off an alarm system in the body, prompting a surge of hormones, such as adrenaline and cortisol.

But when stressors are always present and you always feel under attack, that fight-or-flight reaction stays turned on. The long-term activation of the stress response system and too much exposure to cortisol and other stress hormones can disrupt almost all the body's processes.

A silver lining of stress

Stress is a normal part of life that is not always as bad as it may seem.

A 2013 study by researchers at the University of California-Berkeley found that acute stress caused stems in the brains of rats to proliferate into new nerve cells that ultimately improved the animals' mental performance. That led researchers to conclude that intermittent stressful events can improve alertness, which in turn can help individuals perform better.

The potentially positive effect of stress only applies when stress is acute. Acute stress is commonly experienced a few times each day in the face of an immediate threat. Prolonged stress, a.k.a. chronic stress, is dangerous, as it can contribute to conditions like high blood pressure that increase individuals' risk for cardiovascular disease and stroke.

Breathing exercises can help to alleviate stress by tricking the brain into thinking a person is in a different emotional state than he or she is actually in. When a person is confronting a stressful situation, breathing speeds up and becomes irregular and shallow. Breathing exercises help people slow down their breathing, thus tricking the brain into thinking a person is in a calm state where no threat is perceived.

Deep breathing

Short, shallow breaths into the chest are common but can contribute to feelings of anxiety and fatigue. Deep breathing techniques are designed to teach people how to take bigger breaths.

A deep breathing exercise can begin after a person finds a comfortable position and then breathes in through the nose and lets the belly fill with air. Then breathe out through the nose before placing one hand on the belly and the other on the chest. Feel the belly rise as you breathe in and then feel it lower as you breathe out. Take three additional full, deep breaths.

Focus can help make a deep breathing exercise more effective. Close the eyes before taking a handful of big, deep breaths. When breathing in, imagine the air is filled with a sense of peace and calm. When breathing out, imagine stress is leaving with that exhaled air. A word or phrase can be utilized when breathing in and out to reinforce these feelings.

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Research explores why some remember their dreams, and some don't

A research team studying what makes us remember our dreams found seasonal variations, with participants reporting higher dream recall during spring compared to winter.

Meanwhile, young people and those who experience longer periods of light sleep are most likely to remember their dreams, according to the study. But older people are more likely to experience "white dreams" — a sensation of having dreamt without recalling any details, say scientists.

The ability to recall dreams seems to be based both on individual characteristics and external factors. Some people wake up vividly recalling their dreams from the night before and can even tell precise stories experienced during the night, while others struggle to remember even a single detail.

The new study, published in the journal Communications Psychology, explored the factors that influence "dream recall" — the ability to remember dreams upon awakening — and uncovers which individual traits and sleep patterns shape the phenomenon.

It was conducted from 2020 to 2024 and involved more than 200 participants, aged 18 to 70. They recorded their dreams daily for 15 days while their sleep and cognitive data were tracked using wearable devices and psychometric tests. Each study participant was given a voice recorder to report, every day right after waking up, about the experiences they had during sleep.

The participants had to report whether they remembered having dreamed or not, if they had the impression of having dreamed but did not remember anything about the experience, and to describe the content of the dream if they were able to remember it.

For the duration of the study, participants also wore an actigraph, a sleep-monitoring wristwatch that detects sleep duration, efficiency, and disturbances.

At the beginning and end of the dream recording period, the participants were subjected to psychological tests and questionnaires.

The study revealed that people with a positive attitude toward dreams and a tendency for mind-wandering were "significantly" more likely to recall their dreams.

Sleep patterns also seemed to play a "critical" role with participants who experienced longer periods of light sleep having a greater likelihood of waking with a memory of their dreams.

"Our findings suggest that dream

recall is not just a matter of chance but a reflection of how personal attitudes, cognitive traits and sleep dynamics interact," said study lead author Professor Giulio Bernardi, of the IMT School. "These insights not only deepen our understanding of the mechanisms behind dreaming but also have implications for exploring dreams' role in mental health and in the study of human consciousness."

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Food recalls are more prevalent than you think

Potato salad with foreign plastic. Mixed greens with listeria exposure. Ice cream with metal fragments. Cookies with undeclared nut allergens. Dried pasta with mold contamination. These are just a few examples of recent food recalls issued by the U.S. federal government.

Food recalls increased by 15% from 2020 to 2024, peaking in 2023 with 547 recalls. Only a small percentage of food recalls make headlines — generally those with a public health concern like ecoli or peanut contamination on a product that's supposedly peanut free. But there's a host that never made the headlines.

With around 10 food recalls a week on average, how can you keep up of the ones you should be aware of? At recalls.gov, you can scroll a running list of recall notices and search by topic.

How food recalls works

Both the the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture share regulation and oversight to identify and issue recalls that get those products off of store shelves and out of consumers' homes.

What you should do after learning about a food recall depends on the severity and reason for the recall. Some recalls, like those for undeclared allergens, may not pose a risk to you if you don't have an allergy, while others— such as bacterial contamination or lead exposure — require immediate action.

Food recalls are categorized by the level of severity.

- **Class I:** Most hazardous products, which have higher risks of causing serious adverse health consequences or death.
- **Class II:** Moderate risks.
- **Class III:** Minimal risks.

Common causes of food recalls

- **Allergen contamination:** 38%

Occurs when products are exposed to allergens like wheat, dairy, and nuts, often due to cross-contamination during manufacturing. Even trace amounts can trigger severe allergic reactions in sensitive individuals, making prevention and accurate labeling crucial.

- **Bacterial contamination:** 21.8%

Includes pathogens like salmonella, E. coli, and listeria. These bacteria can cause serious illness, particularly in vulnerable populations such as young children, the elderly and those with weakened immune systems. Infections can lead to severe gastrointestinal distress, long-term health complications, and even death.

- **Foreign object contamination:** 11.4%

Includes materials such as rocks, insects, plastic, or metal. These contaminants can cause physical harm, such as choking, dental damage, or internal injuries if ingested.

- **Lead contamination:** 2%

The least common but highly concerning due to their severe health risks. Recent high-profile lead recalls include contaminated applesauce pouches, which garnered extensive media coverage due to the potential harm to vulnerable populations.

Tips to overcome seasonal allergies

Treatments for seasonal allergies can be effective, and many people find over-the-counter medications are enough to alleviate their symptoms. But even people who take over-the-counter medications daily may have days when seasonal allergies cause considerable discomfort. In such situations, allergy sufferers can consider these strategies.

• **Identify your triggers:** Pollen is the most common outside allergy trigger. Trees and grasses typically pollinate in spring and summer and can trigger seasonal allergies, whereas, dustmites and pets might trigger allergies indoors throughout the year.

A visit to an allergist can determine what exactly triggers seasonal allergies. For example, certain types of grasses and trees might be triggers for some but not others. Identifying triggers is an effective first step because it can compel people to avoid the things that cause allergic reactions.

• **Stay indoors on dry, windy days:** Seasonal allergy sufferers should stay indoors on dry, windy days, when pollen can be nearly impossible to avoid.

• **Take advantage of a good rain:** The best time for seasonal allergy sufferers to be outside is after a good rain. Rain helps to clear pollen from the air, so post-rain conditions can be ideal for people with seasonal allergies.

• **Change your clothes and wash up upon coming inside:** Change your clothes, wash them and take a shower upon coming inside during allergy season. Washing clothes and taking a shower reduces the likelihood that you'll spread pollen around the interior of your home, where it can attach to furniture and trigger allergic reactions.

• **Monitor the pollen count:** As noted, pollen is a seasonal allergy trigger, so allergy sufferers are urged to monitor the pollen count via a website such as Pollen.com, where visitors can type in their ZIP code and get an up-to-date allergy report. On days when the pollen count is high, stay indoors and keep windows closed so the pollen does not get inside. Pollen counts tend to be highest in morning, so it's best to avoid being outside during this time of day.

We diagnosis and treat allergies, and other allergic diseases. We offer an unmatched array of clinical services to quickly identify the root cause of your symptoms and put you on the path to relief. Your experience with allergies is as unique as you are.

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Safety tips for outdoor enthusiasts

From hiking to kayaking to surfing, there's no shortage of ways to spend a day in the great outdoors.

However, it's important that safety is prioritized when spending time in the great outdoors. The following safety tips merit consideration for any nature enthusiast, including novices and seasoned outdoorsmen.

• **Let others know your plans:** Nature is unpredictable, and conditions can change in the blink of an eye. Share your itinerary with loved ones back home before entering the great outdoors. That's particularly vital if you intend to visit remote spots to hike, fish or engage in another activity. Provide your precise location, the hours you plan to be outside and your intended return time so people know when to alert authorities if you haven't returned in time.

• **Get to know your destination:** Research your destination to assess the conditions and identify any challenges and amenities prior to their arrival. For example, are there restrooms at the trail head?

• **Leave wildlife alone:** Encounters with wildlife are not uncommon in the outdoors. While wildlife can be awe-inspiring, outdoor enthusiasts should never confront wildlife or infringe upon animals' space. Keep a safe distance between yourself and wildlife. That's vital year-round, but particularly important in spring, when wildlife give birth to young, and parents may prove especially protective of their babies during this time of year.

• **Protect your body:** Apply sunscreen prior to going outdoors, and liberally reapply sunscreen if you're sweating a lot or spending several hours outside. Apply sunscreen even on cloudy days.

• **Stay hydrated:** It's important to bring along more water than you think you need. Dehydration can set in quickly and make it hard to keep moving. Consider iodine tablets to a water purifier so you can refill water from a stream and treat it for drinking.

Open-air workouts

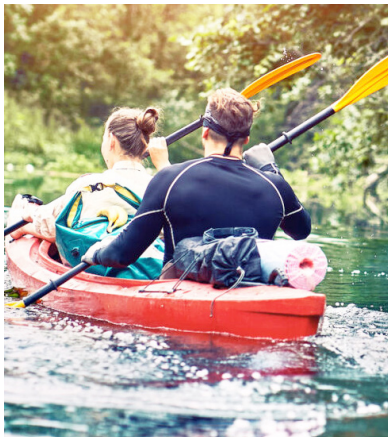
Utilizing outdoor activities to get in shape can improve people's chances of exercising regularly. Here are a few ideas to kick-start a new routine.

Kayaking and paddleboarding: Kayaking and paddleboarding offer cardiovascular benefits by getting the heart pumping, and also build good upper body and core strength. These water activities offer a great way to exercise that doesn't often seem like exercise at all.

Hiking: Walking for pleasure gained popularity in Europe during the 18th century. Going on long, vigorous walks on trails or footpaths is an excellent cardiovascular exercise and can strengthen the lower body.

Park circuit: When walking for exercise, stop periodically along the way to do sit ups, lunges, and push-ups.

Climbing and scrambling: Climbing hills and mountains is a challenging way to get in shape and improve physical fitness. Climbing involves working muscles all over the body. It also requires balance and flexibility.



Sports: Volleyball, baseball, tennis, pickleball, and other organized sporting activities can offer aerobic and strength-training benefits. Team sports can offer companionship and good-natured competition that often develops in such settings can keep participants engaged and having fun.

Treat a nature lover to a special gift

Enjoying time in the great outdoors has been linked to everything from improved mood to reduced risk of disease. Just a little bit of time in fresh air and sunlight can improve well-being by a significant margin, which is perhaps why nature has inspired so many devotees.

If there is a nature lover in your family, use that interest as inspiration when holiday shopping this year. Here are some nature-related gift ideas.

• **Binoculars:** Bird watchers or other animal observers understand that wild animals can become skittish around people. It's best to view them from afar, and a good set of binoculars makes it easier to do so.

• **Mounted camera:** The GoPro camera revolutionized the way amateur filmmakers could document their adventures. There are now many version that enable people to capture photos and videos both on land and underwater with a head-mounting strap to be unencumbered by the camera.

• **Waterproof hiking boots/shoes:** Taking the road less traveled often means going on foot. Trailblazing is made easier with durable, waterproof footwear that can go from the trail to the mountainside more readily.

• **Motion-capture trail camera:** Another way to watch wildlife is to do so from a motion-capture trail camera that can be set up by a nesting area or along a path frequented by local wildlife.

• **First aid kit:** It's always important to keep safety in mind when enjoying nature. A well-stocked first aid kit is a great way to give the gift of good health and safety.

How to navigate medication and exercise

Seniors can benefit from routine exercise, but they may need to navigate working out differently than their younger counterparts. That's because prescription drug use is much higher among older adults compared to younger demographics.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 89% of adults age 65 and older take prescription medication. That's notable because prescription medication can produce side effects that must be taken into consideration when designing and performing an exercise regimen.

Seniors taking prescription medication who want to exercise can consider the following strategies to ensure their workouts are safe.

• **Open a dialogue with your physician:** Physicians will be familiar with the potential side effects of medications they prescribe and what seniors can expect while taking a given medicine. Physicians can discuss patients' intended workout schedules and may recommend taking medications at certain times of day so workout routines go as smoothly as possible.

• **Consider low-exertion exercise:** Opioids slow breathing and heart rate. Breathing less means the body takes in less oxygen, and that in turn means less oxygen is available for muscles.

This can adversely affect endurance, and seniors taking opioids may find they tire quickly or cannot exercise with the intensity they're accustomed to. In such instances, seniors can consider low-exertion exercises such as walking so they can still get the benefits of physical activity while taking the medications their doctors prescribe.

• **Work out with a friend:** The buddy system has long been touted as a great way to maintain exercise motivation, but working out with a friend also is beneficial for seniors taking medication who don't necessarily need a companion to keep them on track.

Exercising with a workout buddy can ensure someone is there to point out any side effects that individuals may not feel themselves or may feel but write off as harmless consequences of breaking a sweat. A workout buddy can report when a pal looks flushed or seems off in some other way. Of course, working out with a friend also ensures someone is there to call for help in the case of an emergency.

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From Awareness to Action: Improving mental health services in our community

May is National Mental Health Awareness Month. One in five Americans has a mental illness, and depression and anxiety have increased dramatically since the pandemic, according to the National Council for Mental Wellbeing.

Unlike physical conditions, symptoms of mental health and substance use problems can be difficult to detect. Friends and family members may find it hard to know when and how to step in. As a result, those in need of mental health services often do not receive care until it is too late.

Why this matters

- Nearly 20% of high school students in North Carolina experience major depression.
- Nearly 10% report attempting suicide, according to N.C. Child's latest 2025 Child Health Report Card.

Mental health support is more important than ever — and organizations like the Y are here to help. Their staff are trained in Youth Mental Health First Aid, so they can recognize the signs that teens may need help from a mental health professional.

Youth Mental Health First Aid is a skills-based course that gives adults the tools to identify, understand, and respond to someone who might be struggling with a mental health or substance use challenge — and connect them with appropriate support and resources when necessary.

We all have mental health. Mental health is how we think, feel and act. The best way to normalize and have a positive impact on mental health is to talk about it. Mental illnesses impact thoughts, emotions, and relationships but are real, treatable conditions.

Mental health is as important as physical health, yet many struggle to find support. If you or someone you know is struggling or in crisis, help is available.

Visit Ymcawnc.org/mental-health for a variety of local resources.

Asparagus and peas: two spring veggies that should be on your plate

Here's two spring veggies that are not only rich in vitamins and fiber but also in flavor — something that's harder to find in out-of-season picks.

Asparagus: A versatile staple

Asparagus is a powerhouse of nutrients that support whole-body wellness. It's a natural source of vitamin A for eye health, potassium for heart health and antioxidants like vitamins A and E that help fight free radicals, or oxygen particles produced by cells as waste. Its high fiber content supports digestion and can help lower cholesterol, while folic acid makes it a key food for prenatal health.

Asparagus is quick to prep and even quicker to enjoy. One go-to method is to trim the ends, toss in olive oil, sprinkle with salt and pepper and cook at 400 degrees Fahrenheit for 5 minutes.

Roasting or grilling also works well, bringing out its natural sweetness. Asparagus pairs easily with eggs, salmon or pasta, and makes a standout side dish or salad topping.

Peas: Sweet and simple

Peas might be small, but they pack a lot of value into each bite. Peas are among the top plant-based sources of protein, essential for maintaining and repairing muscles, bones, skin and cartilage.

They're also rich in dietary fiber, which plays a key role in digestion, heart health and blood sugar regulation. When combined, this protein-and-fiber duo helps create a lasting feeling of fullness.

Peas also supply key nutrients like folate and vitamin C, which help support everything from immune health to cellular repair. They're rich in antioxidants like lutein and zeaxanthin, which may protect against age-related eye issues while reducing inflammation. With a low glycemic index, they won't spike blood sugar.

Peas cook quickly, making them ideal for fast, flavorful meals. Toss them into pasta dishes, blend them into soups for a smooth, naturally sweet base or serve them sauteed with garlic and herbs for a quick side.

Fresh peas are best when just barely cooked, as they'll keep their pop and bright green color. They also freeze well, which means you can enjoy that spring flavor long after the season ends.

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Summertime is the perfect opportunity to take back the health of you and your family

By Dr. Michael Hogan
Blue Mountain Chiropractic Center

As parents of five kids we know the hustle, bustle and busyness that summer can bring. But if you don't make time for your health, the body might just put you out and make you take time out of your summer fun. This is the time to fix your alignment and posture.

That little nagging neck pain or tweak to your lower back can become a huge problem after spending a day in the garden or exerting yourself running around the lake.

Even if it is a small annoying pain, your body is trying to signal you to do something about it! Let us enlighten you as to why trips to the chiropractor can enhance your summer fun. Having neck and back pain can actually impact your brain, causing brain fog and memory issues.

Let me explain why...

The spinal cord is a continuous extension of your brain. Protected by the bony spinal column, it's basically a direct line of communication from your brain to body and body back to the brain.

Dr. Michael Hogan of Blue Mountain Chiropractic Center of Waynesville helps patients feel their best, focusing on spinal alignment as a key to whole body wellness.

Chiropractic adjustments are focused on improving the function of spinal joints. When the spine is moved toward alignment, inflammation levels drop and tissues can heal and return to a more normal state.

When long standing spinal misalignments or acute injuries impact this area it not only causes discomfort in muscles and joints, but the added impact is on what the brain is feeling and sensing. These messages of tension and pain continuously signal the brain can cause reoccurring tension in the nervous system.

The nervous system is constantly watching and balancing all the other systems in the body. Re-occurring tension on the nervous system leads to increases in the body's stress response. Excessive stress responses in your body makes everything feel more stressful.

We may not be able to eliminate the stresses of life, but we can greatly reduce the stress on our body. Through alignment, stress on the body gets less — and frees up more energy for you to be your best.

Alignment balances all the muscles in the body from your head to your feet. Misalignment causes sensory overload, pain and discomfort. This impacts sleep, movement, and energy. Sleep improvement, in fact, is one of the number one responses to spinal alignment.

Remember, alignment is an interaction with your nervous system. Activities to improve alignment are all things that improve your health. Posture yourself everyday to make a commitment to healthy nutrition, movement, and PMA (positive mental attitude).

Dr. Tara Hogan performs an adjustment at Blue Mountain Chiropractic Center. "It's the best thing in the world to watch my patients walk this healing journey," Hogan said.

And if you body is giving a warning sign of discomfort, visit the chiropractor as your first line of defense in optimizing your nervous system. We help people from bronchitis, to vertigo, to pain, to sciatica, to digestive issues. Remember your nervous system is the master control system, and when in balance you will feel your best.

When you have constant nagging pain this will deplete your energy. It can cause you to feel Exhausted. Live with good energy through alignment!

Blue Mountain Chiropractic Center offers x-ray specific and data driven spinal adjustments and detailed, personalized nutrition consultations. Services include family care (pregnancy, pediatric, infant and breastfeeding concerns); sports injuries and recovery; and pain and ailments. Insurance and Medicare coverage accepted. Visit Blue Mountain Chiropractic Center in Waynesville or contact 828-246-9555 to schedule a consultation.

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★★★★★

My husband, myself and both my children see Dr. Mike and Dr. Tara, they both do amazing work. We appreciate them and highly recommend them from your Chiropractor needs! Autumn P.

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