State of MARYLAND

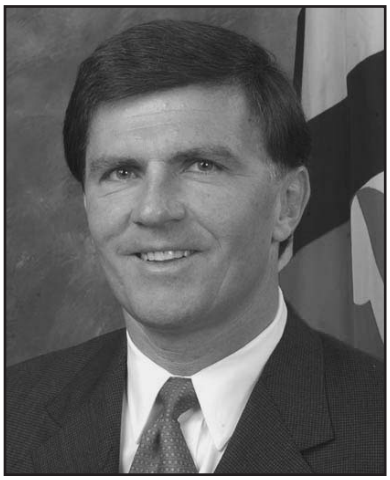
Health and Benefits News

Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr., Governor • Michael S. Steele, Lieutenant Governor

"An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

FALL 2003

GOVERNOR'S MESSAGE



Mother Nature packed a real wallop with the arrival of Isabel. Hopefully, we will enjoy milder weather for the rest of the fall. Traditionally, fall is the time to prepare for the winter months. While we don't know what is in store for us weather wise, we know that the flu bug will make an appearance.

The influenza virus infects an estimated 120 million people in the United States, Europe, and Japan every year. Influenza continues to be a major cause of sickness and mortality, causing 20,000 to 40,000 deaths each year in the U.S. alone, especially among those over 65 and people with chronic diseases such as asthma and diabetes. Influenza is also a major cause of illness and absenteeism among working adults.

What can you do to protect yourself? A flu immunization is a wise and cost-effective solution. Check your local health departments for flu clinics. You can also log on to the FLU SHOT LOCATOR at www.lungusa.org. The American Lung Association sponsors this site. Check out more information about flu immunizations on page 8 of this newsletter.

Have a great autumn. Stay well and get your flu immunization.

Sincerely,
Governor Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr.

CLUB MARYLAND NEWS has been renamed ***Health and Benefits News***. You will find the same helpful health information along with articles about how to become involved in your health care decisions and tips to manage a chronic illness. The CLUB MARYLAND staff has been assigned to the Employee Benefits Division. Although CLUB MARYLAND services and self-help information kits are no longer available, the wellness web pages can be accessed through the Department of Budget and Management's website. Go to **www.dbm.maryland.gov**. Click on Employee Services to locate the website. *Health and Benefits News* will be published quarterly online.

WHAT'S INSIDE...

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- ...And much more!

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YOUR HEALTH-CARE DECISIONS...

Be involved!

Many people don't participate in their treatment decisions.

Some prefer it that way, but many simply don't have enough information about their condition and treatment options to make informed care choices.

Here's how to become an active participant in your health care.

- **Don't be shy** or embarrassed about anything. Rest assured that doctors have "seen it all" and have "heard it all." They're not there to judge.
- **Remember, your doctor** is not a mind reader. You must tell him or her everything you know, think, and feel about your problem.
- **Ask questions** and more questions. If you can't understand your doctor's explanations, ask him or her to repeat everything in simpler language. Ask if there are any printed materials you can take home with you.

  Make another list of questions when you get home that may not have been answered, and then call your doctor's office for answers.
- **Share your thoughts** with your doctor. If you don't think what he or she is recommending makes sense, say so — and say why.

  If you're worried, say so — and ask for more information and support.

  If you don't think a treatment is necessary, say so — and ask for more information.
- **Don't hesitate** to talk about costs. This will make your doctor aware that you don't want unnecessary tests and procedures.

  Ask about non-medical alternatives, such as lifestyle changes. Ask if you can take a "wait and see" approach.

Source: Hope Heart Institute, Seattle

exercise

TO RELAX, TONE, & STRETCH

YOGA

Yoga can help counteract our modern, stress-filled, tightly scheduled lives.

Though the Americanized version of yoga focuses more on the physical than the spiritual, it still benefits both mind and body.

- **Yoga has a calming effect.** The exercises, combined with the deep breathing, slow down your heart rate and metabolism, and lower blood pressure.
- **Yoga tones your muscles.**
- **Yoga stretches and strengthens** your muscles. By including yoga in your workout, you build strength by stretching and holding a posture, not by lifting weights.
- **Young or old, yoga is good** for just about any body.

  As with any exercise program, if you are just getting started or have had back troubles or other medical problems, check with your doctor first.

Source: The Yoga Site (www.yogasite.com)

YOGA WON'TS

- **Yoga won't build** muscles.
- **Yoga won't demand special equipment** of you — or clothes (just loose and comfortable).
- **Yoga won't tire you out.** Instead, you will feel more calm *and* energized after a workout.

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WHAT THE EXPERTS RECOMMEND…

Immunization schedule

	DTaP	IPV	MMR	Hep B	Hib	Td	Var	PCV
Birth to 2 months				✔ [2]				
2 months	✔	✔ [1]			✔ [4]			✔
1 to 4 months				✔				
4 months	✔	✔ [1]			✔ [4]			✔
6 months	✔				✔ [4]			✔
6 to 18 months		✔ [1]		✔				
12 to 15 months			✔		✔ [4]			✔
12 to 18 months							✔	
15 to 18 months	✔							
4 to 6 years	✔	✔ [1]						
4 to 6 years (or anytime up to 18 years)			✔					
2 to 18 years				✔ [3]			✔ [6]	
11 to 18 years						✔ [5]		

✔ [1] Shots recommended (inactivated virus).
✔ [2] Babies born to hepatitis-positive mothers, or mothers whose hepatitis status is not known, should receive this first hepatitis B shot *immediately* after birth.
✔ [3] 3-dose series for those not previously vaccinated.
✔ [4] Schedule depends on which vaccine is used.
✔ [5] This shot should be given every 10 years after the first DTaP vaccination series.
✔ [6] Needed only if vaccine was not given at 12 to 18 months. Two doses are needed for children 13 years and older who have not had chickenpox or the chickenpox vaccine.

Note: **Hepatitis A vaccine** is recommended only for children in selected areas of the country, and for certain high-risk groups. Talk to your doctor or department of public health. **Influenza vaccine** is recommended annually for high-risk children six months or older (i.e., children who have asthma, cardiac disease, sickle cell disease, HIV, diabetes).

DTaP = Diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis (whooping cough)
IPV = Inactivated poliovirus vaccine
MMR = Measles, mumps, and rubella (Germ measles)
Hep B = Hepatitis B
Hib = Haemophilus influenzae type b
Td = Tetanus and diphtheria
Var = Varicella (chickenpox)
PCV = Pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (pneumonia, meningitis, ear infections)

Note: Talk with your doctor about the immu tion schedule that's right for your child.

Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

A MESSAGE FROM THE FIRST LADY

With Halloween just around the corner, families across Maryland are busy carving pumpkins, stocking up on candy, and picking out costumes. However, it is important to remember that while this fall tradition is meant to be celebrated in the spirit of fun and imagination, Halloween can present dangerous circumstances for trick-or-treaters. Following are some important safety tips to share with your favorite little ghosts and goblins:

- **Decorate** costumes and candy sacks with reflective tape.
- **Remind** children to look both ways before crossing the street.
- **Make** costumes short enough to avoid tripping.
- **Make sure** masks fit securely and do not restrict vision.
- **Accompany** young children on trick-or-treating rounds.
- **Instruct** children to travel together and only in familiar areas.
- **Always inspect** treats to ensure they have not been tampered with.

I hope you find these tips useful as you celebrate Halloween with your family this year. Remember the importance of playing it safe, and above all, have fun!

Sincerely,

Kendel S. Ehrlich, First Lady

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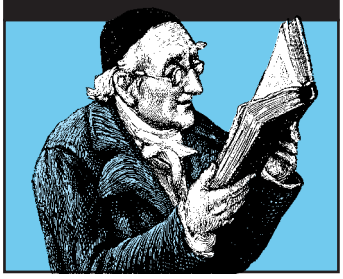
Research news

FROM LEADING PUBLICATIONS AND AUTHORITIES...



arthritis

In some of the better research done to date, the supplement glucosamine sulfate has once again been shown to be effective in not only soothing the pain of osteoarthritis, but also in slowing its progression.

The glucosamine dose used in this study was 1,500 mg daily. No significant side effects were noted.

"This is a landmark study providing evidence that glucosamine has an important role in the management of osteoarthritis," says John Klippel, Arthritis Foundation medical director.

Source: Lancet, Vol. 357, Pg. 247

overindulgence

Eating a lot of sugar or a high-fat, high-calorie meal can cause inflammation in the body for up to four hours after eating.

What does this mean?

It means that heart disease could be in your future — in part because inflammation has been linked with heart disease.

To add insult to injury, eating a heavy or high-fat meal can significantly increase the risk of heart attack.

But in one small study, preceding the indulgence with an extra dose of antioxidant vitamins C and E blocked this inflammatory process.

Source: 2002 meeting of the American Diabetes Association

new heart test?

Painless inflammation in the body is now thought to be a major trigger of heart attack and stroke — worse even than high cholesterol.

But should you be tested for inflammation?

It depends.

The American Heart Association (AHA) does not recommend screening for everyone at this point in time.

They do say, however, that people with risk factors for heart disease in the next 10 years may be candidates for testing.

The test measures a marker for inflammation in the blood called C-reactive protein, or CRP. Heart disease risk rises dramatically when CRP levels are 3 or higher.

Inflammation can be brought down with the same strategies that improve cholesterol numbers — eating a healthy diet (i.e., avoiding refined carbohydrates like sugar and white bread), exercising, losing weight, quitting smoking, and taking statin drugs.

Source: Circulation, Vol. 107, Pg. 499

high blood pressure drugs

Lowering blood pressure with a diuretic works at least as good as — and maybe better than — therapy with the newer and more expensive calcium-channel blocker or ACE inhibitor drugs, say researchers.

Source: Journal of the American Medical Association, Vol. 288, Pg. 2981

water & heart attack

Drinking at least five glasses of water a day could cut your risk of having a heart attack.

Why? Keeping your body well-hydrated helps keep blood thinned, which could lower your risk of developing heart-attack-triggering blood clots.

On the other hand, beverages like juice, soda, and coffee seem to increase blood's thickness because water is drawn out of the blood to help process them, researchers say.

While the blood-thinning benefits of water start at five glasses a day, eight glasses may be even better.

Health experts have long recommended that we drink at least eight glasses of water every day, though this is the first time researchers have found an association between water-drinking habits and heart attacks.

Source: American Journal of Epidemiology, Vol. 155, Pg. 827

The information in this publication is meant to complement the advice of your health-care providers, *not* to replace it.

Before making any major changes in your medications, diet, or exercise, talk to your doctor.

Articles written by outside contributors have not been reviewed by the Hope Health Medical Advisory Board.

diabetes & exercise

While everyone should incorporate exercise and other physical activity into their daily lives, it's especially important for people with diabetes, who can be at high risk for heart and blood vessel damage.

The standard recommendation is for 30 minutes to an hour of moderate-to-brisk exercise most days of the week.

EXERCISE CAN:

- **Help control** blood sugar. High levels can damage blood vessels and nerves.
- **Help control** blood pressure by keeping blood vessels soft and pliable.
- **Improve** heart function.
- **Reduce** levels of inflammation throughout the body. Inflammation damages blood vessels.

Source: Journal of the American Medical Association, Vol. 288, Pg. 1622

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...you can use!

rheumatoid arthritis

A diet high in fruits, vegetables, legumes, and olive oil — known as the Mediterranean diet — may help ease the symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis.

In this study, people eating a Mediterranean diet saw more symptom improvement than those eating a typical Western diet. They had less pain and inflammation and fewer swollen joints.

Researchers believe the Mediterranean diet can help people regardless of their previous dietary habits.

This diet — which also includes more fish and less red meat — can lower the risk of heart disease, cancer, and memory loss as well, say researchers.

Source: Annals of the Rheumatic Diseases, Vol. 62, Pg. 208

sugar

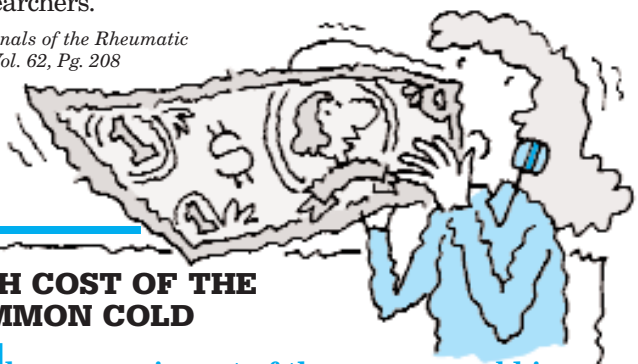
People should get no more than 10% of their daily calories from added sugar.

That's what the World Health Organization and the Food and Agriculture Organization — two United Nations agencies — are saying in a recent report.

The U.S. government's dietary guidelines, however, aren't as strict. They say that up to 25% of our total daily calories can come from sugar.

Restricting sugar intake — at whatever level — is born out of health experts' concern for our global epidemic of obesity-related health problems like diabetes and heart disease.

Source: World Health Organization (WHO) and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)



HIGH COST OF THE COMMON COLD

The economic cost of the common cold is estimated to be nearly $40 billion a year.

How that compares with other illnesses:

Asthma	$14.3 billion
Osteoporosis	$17.7 billion
Colds	$39.5 billion
High blood pressure	$40.4 billion
Stroke	$45.4 billion
Cancer	$116.9 billion

Editor's note: We could reduce this cost substantially if people just realized they don't need to go to the doctor for an antibiotic prescription when they have a cold. Antibiotics have no effect on cold viruses.

Source: Archives of Internal Medicine, Vol. 163, Pg. 487

colon cancer & aspirin

Proof continues to mount that a daily aspirin can help prevent colon and rectal cancers.

In one recent study, the growth of colon polyps (which sometimes turn into cancer) was substantially reduced when people took an 81 mg aspirin every day.

In another study, a daily 325 mg aspirin helped to prevent the recurrence of colon polyps in people who'd already had cancer.

Researchers are still puzzled about which dose is the best to use.

In any case, talk to your doctor about whether you are a good candidate for aspirin therapy. Aspirin (and other nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs like ibuprofen) can cause stomach problems like ulcers and bleeding.

Source: New England Journal of Medicine, Vol. 348, Pg. 891

vitamin C and colds

Ultramarathon runners who took daily vitamin C supplements of 600 mg were significantly less likely to come down with a head cold within two weeks of their races than those who did not take vitamin C.

But you're not an ultramarathon runner, you say? Vitamin C can still help.

A sedentary group of people who took daily vitamin C supplements reported less severe head cold symptoms than a sedentary group who took a placebo pill.

Note: If you are prone to kidney stones, gout, or bladder problems, check with your doctor before taking vitamin C supplements.

Sources: American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, Vol. 57, No. 2; The Vitamin Book, by Harold Silverman, Pharm.D

Battling "bugs"

Taking an antibiotic when it's not necessary can be harmful. It increases the risk of getting an infection later that antibiotics can't kill.

This kind of bacterial resistance could mean more visits to the doctor, a lengthier illness, and possibly the need to take more toxic drugs.

For still others it could mean death. Each year, about 90,000 people with hospital-acquired infections die — in many cases because antibiotics couldn't kill the bacteria.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- **Don't ask for an antibiotic** when your doctor says it isn't necessary. Never take an antibiotic for a viral infection such as a cold, a cough, or the flu.
- **Take medicine exactly as prescribed.** If it's an antibiotic, take it until it's gone — even if you're feeling better.
- **Don't take leftover antibiotics** or antibiotics prescribed for someone else.

These antibiotics may not be appropriate for your current symptoms. Taking the wrong medicine could delay getting correct treatment and allow bacteria to multiply.

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; U.S. Food and Drug Administration

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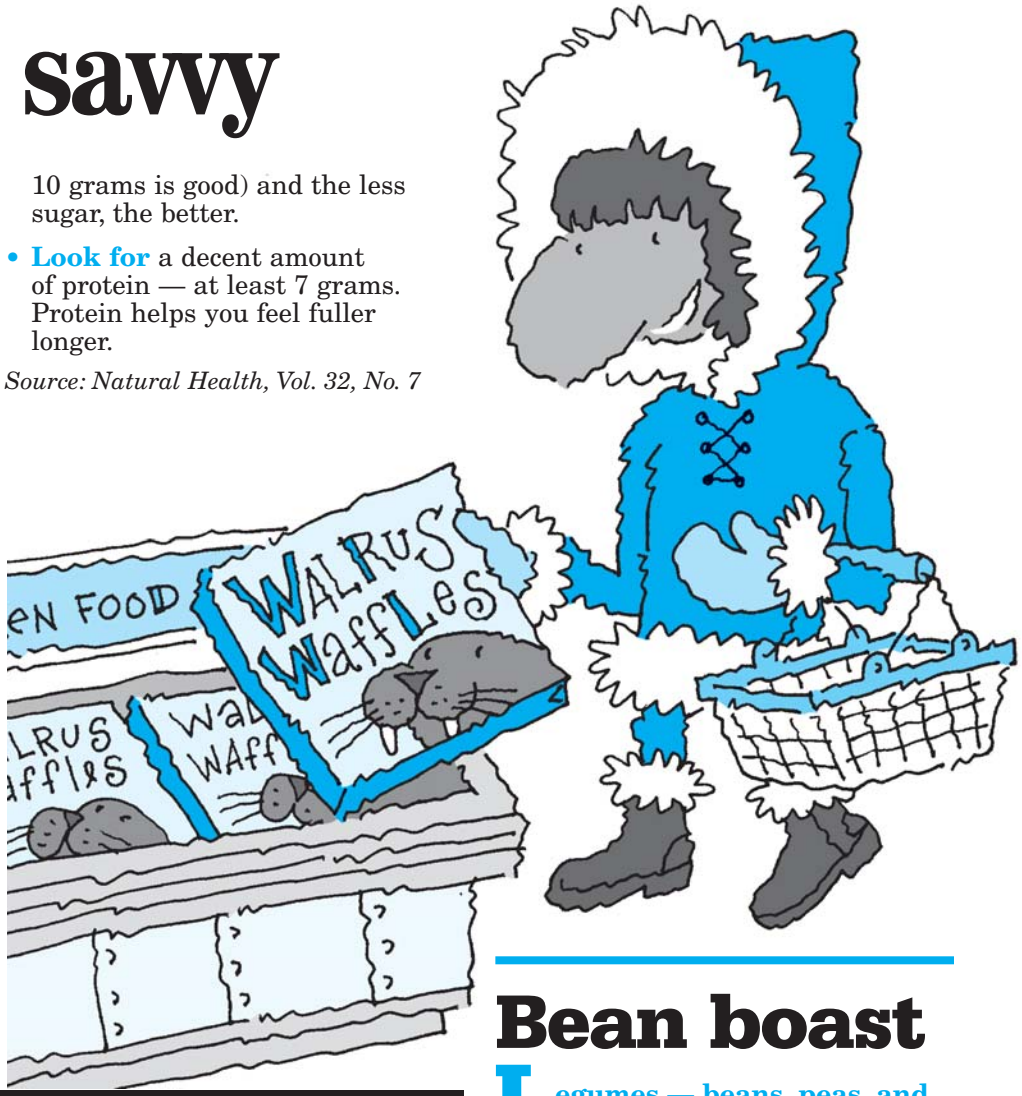
TV dinner savvy

For once-in-a-while breaks from cooking, TV dinners are just fine — as long as you choose wisely.

- **Pick meals** that are between 300 and 400 calories.
- **Choose entrees** that include some fruits or vegetables. If you choose a pasta meal, complement it with a fresh salad.
- **Stay with meals** that have *less than* 15 grams of fat — with no more than a third of that saturated.

  If the word "hydrogenated oils" appears on the ingredient list, consider passing it up. This means it contains trans fatty acids — one of the least heart-healthy of all fats.
- **Choose meals** that have no more than 800 mg of sodium. Around 500 mg is about as low as you'll find in a tasty frozen meal.
- **Check fiber and sugar** contents. The more fiber (8 to 10 grams is good) and the less sugar, the better.
- **Look for** a decent amount of protein — at least 7 grams. Protein helps you feel fuller longer.

Source: Natural Health, Vol. 32, No. 7



EATING-WELL RECIPE

Chicken & black bean enchiladas

- nonstick cooking spray
- ¾ cup black beans, rinsed and drained
- 2 tsp. chili powder (or to taste)
- 1 tsp. ground cumin
- 1 jalapeño, minced (optional)
- 1 cup prepared salsa
- 4 8-inch whole-wheat flour tortillas
- 1 cup cooked shredded chicken breast
- 2 oz. shredded Mexican cheese blend or reduced-fat Monterey Jack cheese
- ½ cup chopped scallions

Preheat oven to 400°F. Coat shallow baking pan with cooking spray and set aside. In a large bowl, combine beans, chili powder, cumin, jalapeño, and ½ cup of salsa. Mash with fork until blended.

Spoon mixture onto center of each tortilla. Place chicken over bean mixture. Roll up tortillas, fold in ends, and place side by side in bottom of prepared pan. Top with remaining salsa, cheese, and scallions. Cover with foil and bake 20 minutes. Uncover and bake 10 more minutes.

SERVES 4. Per serving: 375 calories, 8 g fat, 46 g carbohydrate, 27 g protein, 10 g fiber, and 741 mg sodium.

Source: Adapted from American Institute for Cancer Research

Bean boast

Legumes — beans, peas, and lentils — are a healthful addition to any meal. For starters, they're rich in fiber, protein, folate, and a whole array of antioxidants.

HOW TO EAT MORE BEANS

- **Mix beans,** peas, or lentils with cooked rice. Add sautéed onions and red pepper for a tasty and colorful pilaf. Top with a few toasted nuts.
- **Toss cooked lentils,** beans, or frozen peas into salads for added texture.
- **Serve fat-free refried beans** as a dip for vegetables or as a spread on whole-grain crackers.
- **Use any mashed legume** as an extender for meatballs or meatloaf.

Source: Environmental Nutrition, Vol. 25, No. 11

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8 keys to living with illness

1. **Be an active participant** in your health care. Help shape your treatment.

   Equip yourself with the knowledge and power to make choices. Learn about your illness. Learn the symptoms, complications, and treatment options for your condition.

   Don't compete with your doctors for medical expertise, but remember that you are the best expert on you.

2. **Work effectively with your doctors** and develop collaborative partnerships. This can be the key to how well your medical team takes care of you.

3. **If you're in the hospital, expect the unexpected.** But also understand and exercise your right to know why you are having a test performed.

   There are times when medical procedures cost you some of your dignity, but you have a right to be treated politely and with respect.

4. **Treat your body with kindness.** You can avoid some complications by eating healthy foods and exercising as much as you are able to.

   Know when you need to say "no" to certain activities.

5. **Understand that there's a powerful link** between your body and mind. Stress can interfere with good health and healing. Learn some simple relaxation techniques.

6. **Draw on your spirituality.** Your mind-body link is really a mind-body-spirit connection and is a key to living successfully with illness.

   Religion is the structure many people use to connect with their spirituality, but it's not the only way. You can also experience spirituality through nature, art, and music.

7. **Try to focus your mind on thoughts** that reduce unhealthy stress. Negative thought patterns can make stress worse.

   For example, "I am out of control and have no influence over my life" creates more stress, while "I can make good choices and influence events around me" creates a sense of control, helping to reduce stress.

8. **Accept that taking care of yourself is not selfish.** Self-care is a healthy behavior that begins with doing what energizes you and brings you comfort.

Source: Adapted from Living Better: Every Patient's Guide to Living with Illness, by Carol Langenfeld, MSEd, LPC, NCC, and Douglas Langenfeld, MBA, CPA.

One by one

"**Thirty years ago my older brother, who was 10 years old at the time,** was trying to get a report on birds written that he'd had three months to write.

It was due the next day. We were out at our family cabin... and he was at the kitchen table close to tears, surrounded by binder, paper, and pencils, and unopened books on birds — immobilized by the task ahead.

Then my father sat down beside him, put his arm around my brother's shoulder, and said, "Bird by bird, buddy. Just take it bird by bird."

— Anne Lammott, author of Bird by Bird

this 'n' that

CANCER CASES COULD DROP BY...

- **20% if people would eat** at least five servings of vegetables and fruits each day.
- **30% if people would avoid tobacco.**
- **30% to 40% if people would eat** mostly a plant-based diet, get regular exercise, and maintain a healthy weight.

Source: American Institute for Cancer Research

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Flu Q&A

Q: Who should get a flu shot?

A: Anyone who wants to avoid the flu; especially children six to 23 months of age, along with their caregivers; healthy people 50 years of age and older; adults and children with chronic heart and lung disease; anyone living in a nursing home or other care facility; people with chronic conditions such as diabetes, anemia, cancer, immune suppression, HIV, or kidney disease; health-care workers or caregivers.

Q: When's the best time to get a shot?

A: October or November. But it's still not too late in December. It takes about two weeks for your body to build up the necessary immunity after a shot.

Q: Why are flu shots given every year?

A: Immunity only lasts six months to a year. Plus, there can be different flu strains circulating each year. The people who make the vaccines decide each year which strain or strains need to be included in the vaccine.

Q: Isn't there a nasal spray flu vaccine available now?

A: Yes. This vaccine was recently approved by the FDA and should be available for the first time this flu season.

But the vaccine isn't appropriate for many people. It's not safe for children under five, pregnant women, or people who have compromised immune systems. And it's not effective for most adults 50 and older. It's also more expensive than the flu shot.

Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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HOPE HEALTH

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