

On Health

The Truth About What's Good for You

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Important Mask News

What to do to bolster protection right now

Wondering how protective your cloth face covering is against the coronavirus? In February, the first standards for such “barrier face coverings” (worn by the general public and workers outside of healthcare) were published. They were created through ASTM International, which develops voluntary performance standards for consumer products.

Face coverings that pass tests by independent third-party labs can note on labeling that they’re ASTM-certified, at Level 1 (they filter out at least 20 percent of particles smaller than a micron, roughly the size of respiratory droplets that generally carry the coronavirus) or at Level 2 (they filter out at least 50 percent). N95 respirators, by comparison, filter out at least 95 percent of 0.3-micron particles.

It’s unclear how fast we’ll see widespread sales of these face coverings. To improve the effectiveness

of what you’re currently using: **› Wear products with multiple layers and the densest possible weave.** They should also have a sturdy nose wire to help them fit your facial contours.

› Check for a snug seal around nose and mouth. “Ultimately, you want the air you inhale and exhale

to go through some sort of filtration device,” says James H. Dickerson, PhD, Consumer Reports’ chief scientific officer. “If your breath goes in and out the sides, you might

as well not be wearing a mask.”

› Tighten a loose fit. Tying or knotting ear loops, or fastening them with a claw-type hair clip behind the head, and tucking in side pleats significantly improved a surgical mask’s filtration rates in one study.

› Double up. A surgical mask underneath a cloth one with a high-weave density is more protective than either one alone.



› This Month’s Experts

We contact health authorities and medical researchers from across the country. Here are some of the experts we consulted this month:

Julie Adams, MD, professor of orthopedic surgery, University of Tennessee Health Science Center College of Medicine, Chattanooga.

Terri Harvath, PhD, director, Family Caregiving Institute, Betty Irene Moore School of Nursing, University of California, Davis.

Sunny Linnebur, PharmD, clinical pharmacy specialist, University of

Colorado Hospital Seniors Clinic, Aurora.

Asako Miyashita, RDN, dietitian, Japanese Medical Care, New York City.

Vijaya Rao, MD, assistant professor of medicine, UChicago Medicine.

Mona Rezapour, MD, gastroenterologist, UCLA Health, Los Angeles.

Brijen Shah, MD, associate professor, gastroenterology

and geriatrics, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, New York City.

Jacob Tulipan, MD, orthopedic hand surgeon, Rothman Orthopaedics at AtlantiCare, Egg Harbor Township, N.J.

Chad Worz, PharmD, geriatric pharmacist; chief executive of the American Society of Consultant Pharmacists.

Health Wire

Quick Tips for Living Well



Eat to Deter Parkinson's

A Mediterranean-style diet was associated with a later onset of Parkinson's disease in a recent study of 167 people with the disorder and 119 without it. The women who most closely followed a diet featuring leafy greens, poultry, and berries developed the condition 17.4 years later than others. For men, it was 8.4 years later. The researchers say compounds in the diet are linked to reduced disease progression.

Source: Movement Disorders, Jan. 6, 2021.

Skip This for Chronic Pain

Though antidepressants are often prescribed for chronic pain, they may be largely ineffective for it. An analysis of 33 studies found that serotonin and noradrenaline reuptake inhibitors and tricyclic anti-

pressants had only a small effect on back pain, sciatica, and osteoarthritis pain. If you have chronic pain, the researchers advise discussing the pros and cons of antidepressants for pain before use.

Source: The BMJ, Jan. 20, 2021.

Get a Vaccine Through a Patient Portal

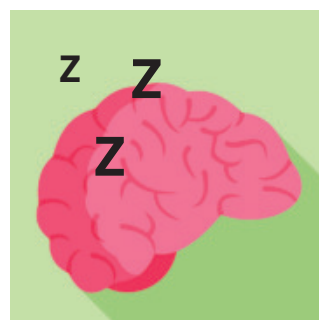
The 45 percent of older adults who don't use their primary care doctor's portal may be missing out on an easy way to sign up for the COVID-19 vaccine, according to a poll of more than 2,000 seniors. So ask your doctor whether your health system is using a patient portal for this purpose.

Source: University of Michigan National Poll on Healthy Aging, Jan. 15, 2021.

Brain Benefits of Napping

A regular afternoon nap was associated with better language use and memory in a recent study of 2,214 older adults. Participants reported whether or not they usually napped, and took thinking and memory tests. The researchers say that napping can have downsides if it replaces physical activity and socializing.

Source: General Psychiatry, Jan. 25, 2021.



Asthma-Safe Cleaning Tips

The percentage of people who reported household use of disinfectants five or more times a week while cleaning has almost doubled since the start of the pandemic, according to a survey of 795 adults with asthma. That frequent usage is linked to 37 to 69 percent greater odds for uncontrolled asthma. In the survey, disinfectant wipes and liquids were the biggest offenders, but all the disinfectants examined—including bleach—may worsen asthma. If you have asthma, consider a safer alternative, such as vinegar, water, and a drop of dish detergent. Follow label directions, open doors and windows, and turn on exhaust fans if you must use a disinfectant.

Source: Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology, Dec. 29, 2020.



An Easy Blood Pressure Fix

After doing a stretching routine regularly for eight weeks, older adults saw their blood pressure drop by as much as seven points, in a study of 40 people. Participants who took brisk walks daily saw smaller benefits. Both

groups did their routines for 30 minutes, five days a week. The researchers say walking and other exercises remain important for heart health, but stretching seems to have unique benefits for blood pressure.

Source: Journal of Physical Activity and Health, Dec. 2020.

Simple Steps for Managing Your Meds

Make sure you get the medications you really need, and steer clear of those you don't

If you use several medications—some research suggests that seniors take nine, on average—keeping up with them may be something of a challenge. And during the pandemic, it's especially important to have the right medications on hand, so you don't have to make a mad dash to the pharmacy, says Gina Ayers, PharmD, geriatrics clinical pharmacy specialist at the Cleveland Clinic.

In the COVID-19 era, when many older adults have pushed off doctor's visits, it's also key to ensure that you're taking only the medications that are beneficial, and not meds that have outlived their usefulness or pose a health risk, Ayers adds.

You may be surprised at how often those two things can happen: A study published in 2019 in the journal *BMC Geriatrics* found that when pharmacy students went to older adults' homes, they discovered that 40 percent had expired medications on hand, 15 percent had potentially inappropriate meds, and about a fifth had duplicate drugs. And a December 2019 University of Michigan national poll of older adults found that among those who use five or more prescription drugs, 32 percent also reported taking another five or more over-the-counter (OTC) meds or supplements, which can magnify the effects of prescription drugs or interact with them.

Here's how to make medication management easier.



GET YOUR REGIMEN REVIEWED

If you haven't done an annual medication review—aka a brown-bag review—since the pandemic hit, it's probably high time to do it. During this kind of review, a healthcare professional—a pharmacist, your primary care physician, or a nurse or physician assistant in your doctor's office—takes a look at all your current prescription drugs, OTC medications, and supplements, as well as their dosages.

This review may be covered by insurance, and while it usually involves taking all these items to your doctor or pharmacist, you can opt to do it virtually if you prefer.

"Physically looking through bottles with a healthcare provider, even if it's online, can often find duplications, excess supplies, expired drugs, and medication errors," says Sunny Linnebur, PharmD, a clinical pharmacy specialist at the

University of Colorado Hospital Seniors Clinic in Aurora and past president of the American Geriatrics Society.

CONSIDER MAIL-ORDER MEDS

It's pretty simple to do a drive-thru prescription pickup at the drugstore—and many pharmacies are offering this as well as deliveries. But the easiest way to make sure you get the prescription medications you use regularly in a timely manner is to use mail order, Linnebur says.

Set yourself up for a 90-day supply if your insurance will cover it. Automatic refills can help ensure that you don't run out. Otherwise, reorder several weeks before you need another 90-day supply, so you don't miss doses. If you run out, your physician can arrange for a "bridge" supply to cover you for 15 to 30 days until your mail-order prescription arrives, says Michael Hochman, MD, an internal medicine physician at Keck Medicine of USC in Los Angeles.

BE CAREFUL ABOUT RX WEBSITES

It's best to stick to mail-in services associated with local or national pharmacy chains or your medical insurance company. Be cautious with other internet sites, especially those from another country, no matter how tempting the low prices are. "Choosing to order prescriptions from outside the U.S. can increase the risks of receiving adulterated drugs or bypassing safety checks that U.S.-based pharmacies must include," Linnebur says.

In fact, when the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy reviewed more than 22,000 prescription drug sites, it found that almost 95 percent are not operating in compliance with U.S. laws. One example: failure to require a prescription for the purchase of prescription-only medicine. If cost is a concern, consider asking your pharmacist about discount coupons for your drug, or checking the Blink Health and GoodRx websites for coupons.

HAVE A LOCAL GO-TO PHARMACY

Even if you get all your regular medications by mail, it's important to have a dependable local pharmacy, where you can get prescriptions for acute illnesses such as infections, says Chad Worz, PharmD, a geriatric pharmacist and chief executive of the American Society of Consultant Pharmacists. Make sure your mail-order service and local drugstore (and doctors) have a current record of everything you take so that you don't accidentally double up on similar meds or take drugs that can interact with each other.

You can (and should) also use your local pharmacist if you have questions about prescription or OTC medications. For instance, certain OTC cough and cold drugs are not recommended for older adults because they contain phenylephrine or pseudoephedrine, which can drive up blood pressure, or the antihistamine diphenhydramine, which has been linked to side effects such as dizziness, sleepiness, and even cognitive impairment in seniors.

It doesn't matter whether you use a chain or an independent local pharmacy, Worz says, as long as the pharmacist takes time to answer your questions clearly. (Try to time your pharmacy trip for early morning or midafternoon—before 4 p.m.—when it's often less hectic.)

SPRING-CLEAN YOUR STUFF

Once a year (why not now?) go through your medicine cabinet and make sure none of your prescription or OTC medications are expired, Linnebur says.

While it's true that many medications may retain at least 70 percent of their original potency for a year or two after expiration, even after the container has been opened, it's safest to have the most up-to-date drugs with the most up-to-date instructions. "There may be new dosing instructions or warnings, or the potency may have been changed," she adds.



LEARN

For more on medication safety, go to [CR.org/medsafety](https://www.credentialed.com/medsafety).

Smart Storage Strategies

Many of us keep our medications in a bathroom medicine cabinet, but experts say that's not the most appropriate place. "Storing them in the bathroom can introduce moisture to the medications, which can speed up their breakdown," says Sunny Linnebur, PharmD. Consider keeping them in a hall closet or kitchen cabinet, where they're less likely to be exposed to moisture from a steamy shower.

For medications you use regularly, choose a spot in a room you frequent daily, such as a small storage bin on the kitchen countertop next to your coffee maker.

"The effectiveness of medications comes down to how consistent you are in taking them, so storing them in a place where you'll easily remember to take them is very important," says Chad Worz, PharmD, a geriatric pharmacist and chief executive of the American Society of Consultant Pharmacists.

Just be sure to keep all prescription and over-the-counter medications, as well as supplements and herbal remedies, well out of the reach of pets and any children who might visit. Take the same safety steps with anyone who has dementia.

When It's Time to Dispose of Pills

Some drugs can be risky in the wrong hands. So before you throw meds away, see whether your local pharmacy offers a medicine drop-off box or mail-back

program, or check for local locations at [disposemy meds.org](https://www.disposemy meds.org). If you can't find or get to a nearby program, you can put most medicines into your household trash.

Remove drugs from their containers and mix with an unappealing substance, such as cat litter or used coffee grounds. Place into a resealable plastic bag before disposal.

Certain drugs, like those with fentanyl (such as Abstral and Actiq) or hydrocodone (like Norco and Vicodin) should not be thrown in the trash. Flush these down the toilet.



Coping Strategies for Caregiving

Resources to help you during the pandemic and beyond

Being a family caregiver—often a spouse or adult child who steps forward to care for another adult who is frail or ill—can be trying even in ordinary times. But during the COVID-19 pandemic, caregivers have lost access to many essential resources, such as adult day care, in-home help, and informal assistance from friends or neighbors.

“They’re suffering,” says Terri Harvath, PhD, director of the Family Caregiving Institute at the Betty Irene Moore School of Nursing at the University of California, Davis. “We know that social isolation has deleterious effects both on older adults and their family caregivers.”

But even though some resources are unavailable, Harvath and other experts say that caregivers still have options for getting help, taking care of themselves, and reducing overall stress.

ORGANIZATIONAL AID

Every state has some sort of caregiver support program, says Bob Stephen, vice president of AARP’s caregiving and health program. Call 211 to find out what’s available in your community.

The Family Caregiver Alliance can help you set up a plan to care for loved ones, Stephen says. Go to caregiver.org to register, and someone will reach out to you.

Just getting started caregiving or have general questions? Call AARP’s caregiving support line (877-333-5885), which can provide referrals and information about resources in your area. If you’re caring for someone with dementia, the Alzheimer’s Association has a 24/7 support line (800-272-3900) staffed by master’s level consultants who can help you navigate difficult decisions and answer legal, financial, and treatment questions.



HELP FROM FRIENDS AND FAMILY

With no definitive end to the pandemic in sight, it may be time for some families to expand their bubbles to ensure that one person isn’t handling all the caregiving responsibilities for an older adult, says Beth Kallmyer, vice president for care and support at the Alzheimer’s Association. Even family members or neighbors who don’t enter your bubble can help, Harvath says. They can pay bills remotely, stop by the pharmacy, drop off groceries, even pick up and do a load of laundry. “When somebody says, ‘Is there something I can do to help you?’ have a list ready and waiting,” she says.

If Your Loved One Needs Medical Attention

For nonurgent care, ask the doctor if telemedicine is an option. It’s been very beneficial during the COVID-19 era, helping caregivers and the people they look after get the medical help they need, says Bob

Stephen of AARP.

If the person you care for needs to go to a hospital, be aware that some facilities consider caregivers visitors and may not allow you to stay in their room, says Terri Harvath of UC Davis. But some make exceptions for

caregivers, so ask.

And if assisted living or a nursing home may be needed, start looking as soon as possible, because the pandemic has made the process lengthier, says Beth Kallmyer of the Alzheimer’s Association.

SELF-CARE TIPS

Sometimes caregivers need a reminder that it’s important to look out for themselves while caring for another person.

“I encourage them to put their own oxygen mask on first before helping others,” Harvath says. She recommends starting with steps such as taking 5 minutes a day to do something indulgent, like having a cup of tea and putting your feet up. When you can, extend that period for as long as possible.

Mindfulness meditation and exercise like yoga can be beneficial and reduce stress as well, Stephen says. Watching a movie, with or

without the person you’re caring for, is an easy way to take a break, he adds. AARP and other groups do group screenings or offer programs through a virtual community center.

If other family members are caregivers and aren’t taking adequate care of themselves, mention the importance of self-care to them, Kallmyer says. “They often don’t want to ask for help; they feel it’s some sort of indictment on their relationship with the person or their abilities,” she says. Get them to reframe those thoughts so that they understand they’re doing their best, and that asking for help and taking breaks are necessary.

5 Asian Vegetables to Try Now

Tasty and nutritious, they add variety to your plate

If you're looking to mix up your produce repertoire, adding Asian vegetables gives you a healthy and delicious way to do it. Like broccoli, cauliflower, and kale, many of them belong to the cruciferous family, and have the same potential to lower cancer and heart disease risk.

They also may be easier to find than you think, even if you don't live near

an Asian supermarket. "Asian vegetables are getting into mainstream grocery stores in recent years," says Zhanglin Kong, RDN, founder of nutrition practice Joyful Family, in the Boston area, and adjunct faculty at Simmons University. They're also available at online retailers and farmer's markets. Here are five Asian vegetables to put on your shopping list.



VEGETABLE



Bok Choy

NUTRITION NOTES

For a mild-tasting vegetable, this green with crunchy stems and leafy ends packs a lot of benefits. Available in different sizes, all bok choy varieties are members of the cruciferous family. One cup cooked also provides about half of your daily need for vision-protecting vitamin A and antioxidant vitamin C.

HOW TO USE IT

"Asian families usually stir-fry bok choy with minced garlic and cooking oil," Kong says. You can also add the veggie to noodle soups. Slice and soak it in three changes of water to get rid of any grit that may be hiding between the leaves before any preparation.



Edamame

You may have tried these immature soybeans at sushi restaurants, where they are often served steamed and lightly salted. Just ½ cup has 9 grams of protein and 4 grams of fiber, and there is evidence that traditional soy foods like edamame and tofu may lower the risk of breast cancer, according to the American Cancer Society.

Boil shelled edamame (frozen or fresh) and mix with sesame oil, vinegar, and a little soy sauce for a simple salad, says Asako Miyashita, RDN, a dietitian based in New York with Japanese Medical Care. Or sauté the beans with garlic, sprinkle with Parmesan, and serve as a side dish.



Gai Lan

Though it may be called Chinese broccoli or Chinese kale, gai lan stands apart from both, with thick stems, flat leaves, and small florets, and a slightly bitter flavor. Like other crucifers, it contains glucosinolates, compounds that may protect against the cell damage that can cause age-related diseases. Plus, it supplies a hefty dose of the antioxidants beta carotene and lutein/zeaxanthin.

Like bok choy, gai lan works well sautéed or stir-fried. For the perfect texture, Kong suggests separating the stems from the leaves; sauté stems until they're 80 percent cooked, then add the leaves until soft. Flavor with reduced-sodium oyster sauce and garlic, or with ginger and lime juice, and toss with soba or whole-wheat noodles, adding peanuts if you like.



Mizuna

This leafy cruciferous vegetable, with its mild peppery flavor (similar to arugula but less spicy), can be eaten raw or cooked. Either way, it's packed with benefits. You get 15 percent of your daily need for calcium and 40 percent of vitamin A in 2 cups of the raw greens.

Use it in place of arugula in any salad or sauté it the way you would spinach. For a mizuna salad, Miyashita recommends chopping the greens into 2-inch pieces and mixing with ground sesame seeds, sesame or olive oil, lemon or vinegar, and salt and pepper to taste.



Kabocha

This pumpkin-shaped Japanese squash tastes a little like a sweet potato mixed with chestnut, and has a drier texture than butternut squash. "Kabocha has a nutty flavor with sweetness; it is great for dessert," Miyashita says. And while you can't go wrong with any squash, ounce for ounce kabocha has fewer calories and carbs and more potassium compared with its more common cousin, butternut.

You can pan-fry or roast it, then top with a drizzle of honey or maple syrup and a scoop of plain yogurt for breakfast or dessert. Or mash the baked squash and use it as a side dish where you might otherwise use sweet potatoes.

PHOTOS: FROM TOP: GETTY IMAGES (3); SHUTTERSTOCK; GETTY IMAGES (2)



The Best Ways to Curb Digestive Woes

Get relief from gas, heartburn, lactose intolerance, and more with simple lifestyle changes

While indigestion and other gastrointestinal (GI) troubles can occur at any stage of life, they tend to become more common as we age. That doesn't mean they're inevitable, though. "These aren't necessarily just a normal part of aging that you have to live with," says Brijen Shah, MD, an associate professor of gastroenterology and geriatrics at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai.

Adopting some lifestyle changes can make a big difference. We asked GI experts for their insights about what to do—and not do—to combat the digestive disorders older adults experience most often.

HEARTBURN

WHAT IT IS: Whether it's occasional heartburn or chronic (called gastroesophageal reflux disease, or GERD) the symptoms are the result of stomach acid flowing

back into your esophagus. "The lower esophageal sphincter [a muscular ring] is the door between your stomach and your esophagus," says Vijaya Rao, MD, an assistant professor of medicine at UChicago Medicine. "Acid reflux happens when that door opens too frequently."

WHAT MAKES IT WORSE: Carrying excess weight, especially around the middle, puts external pressure on the lower esophageal sphincter. In a 2021 study published by the journal *JAMA Internal Medicine*, people who had a body mass index under 25 (the cutoff point for being overweight) were 31 percent less likely to experience GERD than those who were overweight.

WHAT MAKES IT BETTER: In addition to maintaining a healthy weight, the JAMA study found that four other lifestyle factors lowered the risk of GERD: not smoking; limiting coffee, tea, and soda to no more than 2 cups per day; exercising 30 minutes or more per day; and eating a healthy diet, one that's rich in whole grains, fruits, and vegetables and low in red meat and added sugars.

"If everyone adhered to the five factors, it could prevent 40 percent of GERD cases in the U.S.," says Andrew T. Chan, MD, one of the study's authors.

Some people may need to avoid or at least minimize certain foods, including caffeine, fatty foods, alcohol, chocolate, peppermint, garlic, onions, citrus, tomatoes, and carbonated beverages. "But I tell my patients that I don't expect them to completely give up everything they love," says Mona Rezapour, MD, a gastroenterologist at UCLA Health. Keep a diary of the foods you eat and when symptoms occur. "In a couple of weeks, a pattern might emerge." Then you can focus on cutting down or eliminating the foods that seem to be triggers.

Rezapour also suggests waiting 2 to 3 hours after a meal to lie down, because lying down can relax the lower esophageal sphincter. "You want gravity to work for you to help push food down into your digestive system," she says. And when you do lie down, elevate your head with an extra pillow or by adding blocks under the head of your bed.

CONSTIPATION

WHAT IT IS: Straining to have bowel movements and/or going less frequently.

WHAT MAKES IT WORSE: With age, gut motility (the ability of your digestive system to move food through) can slow down. Not eating enough fiber, drinking enough water, or getting enough exercise can also cause or worsen constipation.

WHAT MAKES IT BETTER: “A high-fiber diet is important, but not all fiber is equal,” Rezapour says. Soluble fiber, found in foods like apples, citrus fruits, and oats, bulks up stool, so too much of it can exacerbate the problem. “Insoluble fiber [found in whole grains and vegetables] pulls water into the stool and helps ease constipation.” (Be sure to drink water when you increase fiber.) Staying active also promotes motility.

GAS/BLOATING

WHAT IT IS: A buildup of gas in the digestive system can leave you feeling overly full (bloating) and gassy. You may have stomach pains and feel the need to pass gas or burp to relieve pressure.

WHAT MAKES IT WORSE: Constipation can leave you feeling perpetually bloated. Gas can also be produced by swallowing too much air when you’re eating. Sucking on hard candies or chewing gum cause you

Extra pounds raise the risk of chronic reflux disease. One study found that people at a healthy weight were 31 percent less likely to experience GERD than those who were overweight.

take in more air. And certain foods (such as beans and cruciferous vegetables like cabbage and broccoli) can cause gas, as can suddenly increasing your fiber intake.

WHAT MAKES IT BETTER: You could cut out foods known to increase gas, but you shouldn’t. “Many are really healthy foods,” Rao says. “I also see that people who eliminate foods that are high in fiber because they cause gas end up with constipation.” A better solution is to increase your intake of high-fiber and gas-producing foods slowly to allow your digestive system time to adapt. Some experts also suggest a probiotic supplement. “An imbalance in your gut bacteria causes dysfunction in your GI system,” Rezapour says. “For some people, probiotics seem to help relieve gas, bloating, and pain.” But

the evidence isn’t conclusive, so talk to your doctor. As with all supplements, the Food and Drug Administration doesn’t verify that probiotics have what manufacturers say they do, so you can’t be sure you’re ingesting exactly what the label claims.

LACTOSE INTOLERANCE

WHAT IT IS: Lactose, the sugar in milk, is broken down by the enzyme lactase. Lactase production decreases with age, which can lead to diarrhea and other GI symptoms when you eat dairy products.

WHAT MAKES IT WORSE: Consuming milk or other foods that have lactose.

WHAT MAKES IT BETTER: You may not have to give up all dairy or rely on lactose-free milk or lactase supplements. (There’s not much evidence that the latter work all that well anyway.) Some dairy foods have little or no lactose, such as cheddar and Swiss cheeses. And the bacteria used to make yogurt “digest” the lactose in the milk. Also, research suggests that many lactose intolerant people can handle up to 15 grams of lactose—about what’s in a cup of milk—at a time, especially with a meal.



LEARN

Digestive upset can sometimes be caused by a virus. For more, go to [CR.org/norovirus](https://www.consumerreports.org/norovirus).

Eat Yogurt for a Healthy Belly

Yogurt with live active cultures is a natural source of healthy probiotics, which can help with digestion. Although plain yogurt is the healthiest choice, many people prefer flavored versions. So CR took a look at vanilla yogurts, rating 36 dairy and plant-milk products. These four stood out.

82

OVERALL SCORE



Icelandic Provisions 1.5% Milk Fat Traditional Skyr Yogurt Vanilla \$1.75

Came in at the top of our tests thanks to its low added sugars content (6 grams), real vanilla flavor, and whole-milk yogurt consistency.

81

OVERALL SCORE



Fage TruBlend Low Fat Greek Yogurt Vanilla, \$1.80

Has no added sugars but still tastes slightly sweet. Thick and creamy, with a mild vanilla flavor.

53

OVERALL SCORE



Good Plants Almond-milk Probiotic Yogurt Alternative Vanilla \$2

This was the highest-rated almond milk yogurt in our tests. It has 3 grams of added sugars. Our tasters said it was slightly chalky, with big almond flavor and a sweetness that lingers.

48

OVERALL SCORE



Oui by Yoplait Coconut Dairy Alternative Vanilla \$2

Tops for taste among the plant-milk yogurts we tested. But its added sugars (11 grams) and saturated fat (9 grams) brought the nutrition score down quite a bit.

How to Ease Hand Pain

The treatments that can really make a difference



We use our hands for activities from cooking to brushing our teeth to gardening to writing a shopping list. So when our hands, wrists, or fingers hurt, that pain can interfere with much of what we do.

This kind of discomfort can also be more likely to occur with age: The Arthritis Foundation estimates that about half of all women and a quarter of men will experience hand pain due to osteoarthritis (OA)—when the protective cartilage between bones wears down—by age 85. But there are ways to ease the ache.

3 REASONS YOUR HAND HURTS

Hand pain and stiffness are typical with OA. “The base of the thumb is one of the most common places in the entire body to develop osteoarthritis,” says Jacob Tulipan, MD, an orthopedic hand surgeon at Rothman Orthopaedics at AtlantiCare in Egg Harbor Township, N.J.

People with hand OA, especially at the base of the thumb, will often experience achy pain that worsens with tasks that require pinching, gripping, and grasping—for instance, turning a car key or tightening a jar lid, says Julie Adams, MD, professor of orthopedic surgery at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center College of Medicine in Chattanooga.

Another culprit could be trigger finger, when one of the cordlike tendons that let your fingers bend and straighten

becomes inflamed. This condition causes an often painful locking or catching sensation when bending and straightening the finger.

Numbness, pain, or tingling in the hand, wrist, or arm can also be caused by carpal tunnel syndrome—when one of the major nerves leading to the hand becomes pinched as it passes through the wrist. Older age and conditions like diabetes and rheumatoid arthritis can hike the risk of carpal tunnel, Tulipan says.

HANDLING IT AT HOME

Over-the-counter nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, including ibuprofen (Motrin) and naproxen (Aleve), may help relieve joint swelling and inflammation due to OA, according to the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons, but won't reverse joint damage.

A hot or cold compress may ease pain,

though finding out which works better could require some trial and error, Adams says. Heat might be useful for stiff joints prior to an activity because it helps increase blood flow to the area, and cold may reduce pain and swelling after use.

For thumb pain due to OA, you may want to modify frequently used items, such as pens and toothbrushes, “so you don't have to exert as much force when holding,” Adams says: For instance, “try wrapping tape around the pen so that when you grip it, it's bigger and doesn't hurt as much.”

A simple drugstore finger splint, worn occasionally at night, might help symptoms of trigger finger; a wrist splint may ease carpal tunnel symptoms. “Splinting helps keep the wrist straight at night,” Adams says. To help prevent and counter stiffness and pain, no matter the cause, Tulipan recommends doing these five exercises (10 repetitions of each, twice a day). Your doctor may recommend other exercises for specific conditions.

1. With wrists and fingers straight, make a “tabletop” with fingers. Bend at the knuckles. Hold briefly, then straighten.
2. Make a fist, then straighten fingers.
3. Make an “O” by touching your thumb to your fingertips, one at a time.
4. With one hand resting on a flat surface palm down, spread your fingers wide apart and bring them together again.
5. Start as you do with No. 4, then raise and lower each finger, one at a time.



LEARN

For more on how to handle arthritis pain, go to [CR.org/jointpain](https://www.cro.org/jointpain).

When to Dial the Doctor

If bothersome symptoms persist, it may be time to see an orthopedic hand surgeon, says Julie Adams, MD. These doctors are hand pain specialists, and though the title implies surgery, most cases do not require surgical treatment, she adds.

Treatments vary depending on the pain's cause and severity. Corticosteroid injections could reduce discomfort and inflammation caused by OA or trigger finger. “Some people find little relief, while others experience complete relief of

symptoms for a year or more,” says Jacob Tulipan, MD. Prescription topical anti-inflammatory medicines can sometimes help, too. Surgery may be an option when other treatments fail—or for carpal tunnel—to prevent permanent sensation loss.

Healthy Cooking for One or Two

Tips and kitchen equipment that make meal prep quicker

All too often, singles and couples turn to packaged foods and take-out because cooking doesn't seem worth the effort, and who wants to eat leftovers for days? But a diet of restaurant meals and processed food isn't so great for

your health or your weight. When you make your own meals, you can control what goes into them. Below we have tips for taking advantage of small appliances and streamlining meal prep to make cooking at home more manageable.

1 SCALE DOWN YOUR OVEN

In addition to heating up leftovers or a frozen dinner, toaster ovens can roast, bake, broil, and, of course, toast bread. And they get the job done faster than a regular oven because they tend to take less time to preheat. Plus, for those who find it difficult to bend to move things into and out of an oven, or struggle with the heft of a hot pan, the countertop height is very helpful. Some models, such as the Breville Smart Oven Air BOV900BSSUSC, do double or triple duty in the kitchen because they have features like air frying, convection, and slow cooking.

2 CONSIDER USING AN AIR FRYER

These can do more than make french fries and chicken nuggets. With just 1 or 2 tablespoons of olive oil, vegetables come out tender yet irresistibly crispy and caramelized. Try asparagus, carrots, brussels sprouts, cauliflower, corn on the cob, and "roasted" potatoes. You can also use it to cook one or two servings of fish or chicken. CR's tests found that the Ninja AF100 Air Fryer's electronic controls and programmed settings are among the easiest to see and use.

3 TRY GROCERY STORE TAKEOUT

Prepared supermarket foods, sold by weight, let you buy just the amount you need, so you aren't faced with oversized restaurant portions. To keep

your picks healthy, think simple: a piece of broiled salmon or tilapia, roasted veggies, and a whole-grain salad, for instance. Or buy just one part of the meal—the fish, say—and make the rest yourself

to ease food prep and cut back on cooking time. Ask about sodium counts, though, and if a dish is smothered in gravy, topped with lots of cheese, or slick with oil, it's not likely to be a healthy choice.



4 WAKE UP LEFTOVERS

Instead of having the exact same dish two days in a row, make extra of one or two sides when you're making dinner one night and use them in a whole new meal the next day. For instance, roast enough eggplant, onions, tomatoes, and zucchini to use in a pasta dinner and have about a cup left over. Serve those extra veggies with a chopped hard-boiled egg on slices of toasted whole-grain baguette the next day.

5 MAKE STAPLES IN BATCHES

Having beans and whole grains on hand to use in meals can be a big time-saver. A multi-cooker with a pressure cook function, such as the Zavor Lux LCD ZSELL02, allows for hands-off cooking (and no need to presoak the beans). Cooked beans and grains will keep four days in the fridge. And if you've made more than you can eat in that time, you can freeze them for up to four months. The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics recommends freezing single servings in a muffin tin, then transferring the discs to freezer bags. (You can pull out just what you need.)

6 BUY FOODS THAT LAST

Cabbage, carrots, onions, potatoes, winter squash, apples, and citrus fruit can last for weeks. Eggs will keep three to five weeks; hard cheeses (such as cheddar and Parmesan), for months.



PERRY SANTANACHOTE is a recipe developer and covers kitchen appliances for Consumer Reports.

On Your Mind

QUESTION OF THE MONTH

Do I need to wear a face mask when I'm outdoors with friends or family?

The risk of COVID-19 infection outdoors is just one-twentieth of the indoor risk, but it's wise to wear a mask outside if you'll be within 6 feet of people you don't live with, says Jeanne Ann Noble, MD, director of COVID-19 response at the UCSF Medical Center's Emergency Department. "The only time when not wearing a mask is probably okay is if you and the person you are with have both been fully vaccinated against COVID-19," she adds. Check advice from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, at [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover-guidance.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover-guidance.html).

Can using a computer or cell phone at night affect my sleep?

Yes. Evening exposure to the blue light from those devices can make falling asleep and getting up early more difficult, says Cathy Goldstein, MD, an associate professor of neurology at the University of Michigan Sleep Disorders Center. If you use devices at night and have sleep problems, Goldstein suggests staying electronics-free for at least an hour before bed. Two to 4

hours is better. "When you use devices in the evening," she says, "set them on night mode to reduce blue light."

I see so many unusual greens at the supermarket these days. What can I do with them?

You can simply wash, drain, and chop late spring and summer greens such as bok choy, chard, collards, dandelion, mizuna, and mustard. Then sauté them in olive oil

and garlic, with a squeeze of lemon juice, until they're barely wilted, says Sharon Palmer, RDN, a nutritionist in Ojai, Calif. Add herbs if you like, or mix with white beans and pasta for a meal. Chop tender greens like arugula, Little Gem, escarole, mache, pea tendrils, and oak leaf lettuce for use in a salad.

Can I get a skin check online and avoid an office visit?

Full-body skin checks shouldn't be done via telemedicine, but your dermatologist may want to check a concerning spot first through photos and/or over video. "There are some we may be able to determine are benign through teledermatology, but if there is any doubt, we will have the patient come in to evaluate it better," says Carrie Kovarik, MD, a professor of dermatology at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania. Let your doctor know right away if a spot is rapidly changing or a rash is quickly worsening, she adds. Keep in mind that skin-cancer smartphone apps can help you remember to do self-checks and can store photos to show your dermatologist. But don't rely on them to diagnose potential cancers, the American Academy of Dermatology says.

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