

# Healthy Byte

Wishing You the Best.

## Laughter: A Strong Antidote

Finally, there is an inexpensive, drug-free, and fun way to keep your heart healthy. Laughter can be strong medicine say researchers at Stanford University. Even the physical act is good for you. It increases blood flow and contracts abdominal muscles.

The most significant evidence of laughter's power comes from a study of heart attack patients. Half watched comedy shows for 30 minutes every day, the other half didn't. After a year, the laughers had one-fifth the number of repeat heart attacks that the control group had.

Doctors at the University of California, Irvine, say watching a humorous video decreases levels of two key stress hormones that can cause irregular heart rhythms. Heart disease patients are often given beta-blocking drugs that specifically block these hormones. The doctors say laughter does the same thing and is a lot more fun.

In other studies, laughter has been shown to help children and adults handle painful medical procedures.

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## Parents Fail to See Obese Children

Parents fail to see overweight problems in their children, a British study finds. Researchers surveyed parents of 277 children in Britain and found only a quarter recognized when their offspring were overweight.

When children were obese, 33 % of mothers and 57% of fathers thought their sons and daughters were "about right," according to a study in the British Medical Journal. In addition, parents were less likely to recognize overweight boys than girls in the study.

The study authors say the findings also reveal some parents showed a lack of concern toward their children's weight problems.

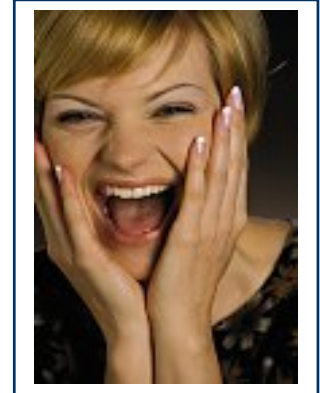
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## How to Pick Up Luggage Painlessly

Packing lightly to avoid making travel a literal pain in the neck is something worth thinking about. The heavier and larger the luggage, the more susceptible a traveler is to injuring the back, shoulder and neck, says James Weinstein, chair of the Council of Academic Affairs.

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission reports more than 51,800 luggage-related injuries were treated last year. The experts advise travelers to bend at the knees, lift luggage with leg muscles - not the back and waist - and avoid twisting and rotating the spine.

### Additional Tips:

- Purchase sturdy, light luggage w/ wheels and handle.
- Avoid luggage that is too heavy or bulky while empty.
- Do not rush when lifting or carrying a suitcase.
- Do not carry heavy pieces for long periods.
- Use backpacks with two padded and adjustable shoulder straps.
- Do not carry duffel or shoulder bag on one shoulder.
- Carry all rolling luggage up flights of stairs.

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### Vitamin D Low in Females with Osteoporosis

More than 10 million people in the United States are estimated to have osteoporosis and 80 percent are women. Vitamin D, an essential component of osteoporosis therapy, helps to ensure the body absorbs and retains calcium and phosphorus, both critical for building bone.

The National Osteoporosis Foundation advises getting recommended daily amounts of vitamin D and calcium as one of the five steps involved in bone health and osteoporosis prevention.

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### Tips for Choosing Childcare

In selecting before- and after-school child care, parents should evaluate the program and the people. "Cost and quality vary greatly with these programs, so it helps to know what to look for," says Susan Walker, assistant professor of family studies at the University of Maryland.

She suggests considering:

- Features such as recreational activities and academic enrichment based on solid principles of youth development.
- Daily schedules.
- Staff's education and training in youth development and education.
- The setting, including space for play, quiet areas for reading, homework or being alone.
- Playground equipment.
- Safety, health and food, including quality of snacks and meals.
- Equipment safety and cleanliness.
- Supervision, attitude, engagement of other children in the program.
- Involvement of other families.
- Personal needs, such as hours of operation, transportation and cost.
- Program operation, including check-in, check-out.
- Objectives and other procedures and policies.

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### 16% of Adults Have Back Pain

About one in six adults suffer from chronic back pain, the Illinois-based North American Spine Society said.

The non-profit medical group dedicated to spine care surveyed 1,014 adults who had back pain about the condition of their backs over the last 30 days.



Sixty-four percent of women and 50% of men experienced back pain. Nearly 1/3 reported difficulty lying in bed, 22% said it was uncomfortable to drive, and 18% said back pain had decreased sexual activity.

More than a quarter of respondents said back pain made it too difficult to engage in vigorous physical exercise and 32 percent were unable to lift heavy objects. More than a quarter blamed aging for a bad back.

"With 76 million aging baby boomers living in the United States, back pain will continue to be a major health concern," said Dr. Thomas Errico, the society's president.

Sixteen percent said their back pain resulted from a workplace injury and 14% said they were hurt from a sports or exercise-related incident. Only 9 % blamed back pain on an automobile accident.

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### Inaccurate Home Blood Pressure Monitoring

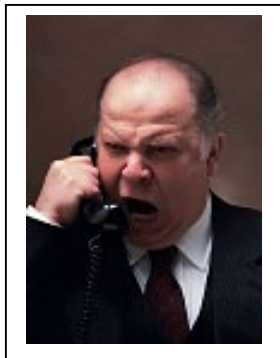
A new study suggests many people may be making common errors when taking their blood pressure. While up to 1/3 of people with hypertension have a blood pressure monitor at home, measurements may be inaccurate.

In a study of 80 patients who bought digital blood pressure monitors 90% of them didn't know they should rest for at least two minutes before taking a reading; 1/2 knew to place the cuff just above the elbow, and 70 % didn't know that how they sit could alter the reading. A patient's back should be supported with legs uncrossed and the arm resting at heart level. Otherwise readings may be too high or too low.

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## How to Talk to Your Boss

A Texas researcher says talking to the boss is a science that needs to include assessing his or her style, experience and personality.



You should evaluate how your boss handles stress and processes information, advises Michael Staley, director of biomedical engineering and asset management for Harris County Hospital District in Houston and author of the report published in Biomedical Instrumentation and Technology.

If "no" is not an acceptable answer, find ways to back up your position with valid reasoning. If you speak of a plan that is not working, have alternative options ready. Maintain your credibility and integrity. Do the research before making the statement, which may be used as a basis for a company decision, says Staley, who had 12 bosses in 13 years.

His other tips:

- Watch your delivery, gearing it to your boss's style, personality and experience;
- Put company interests above your own;
- Understand your role and how it fits into the company's strategic plan;
- Stick to the facts, avoid half-truths or partial information;
- Know what your boss wants, needs and expects;
- Be clear and concise;
- Know when to elaborate, be patient and persistent;
- Be prepared, try to anticipate problems and remember, timing is everything.

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## Men Least Likely to Wear Seatbelts

Men between 19 and 29 are least likely to wear a seat belt in a car and are three times as likely not to as are women of the same age, a study says.

A new data analysis from Health and Human Services' Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality shows that 88 percent of people between 16 and 64 years of age were reported to always or nearly always use seat belts.

However, a little more than 5 percent of people ages 16 to 64 never or seldom use their seat belt, and another 7 percent use their seat belts only sometimes.

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## Meditation Helps Middle Schoolers

A Georgia study funded by the National Institutes of Health found 20 minutes of daily meditation lowered blood pressure and heart rates in middle schoolers.

The Medical College of Georgia team, in a study published in the latest edition of the journal Psychosomatic Medicine, discovered students who used a simple concentration-based breathing meditation technique had lower resting and "active" blood pressure readings.

The amount of reduction in blood pressure, if maintained over time, "would translate into an approximate 12.5 percent lower predicted risk of stroke or coronary mortality in adulthood," study author Frank A. Treiber says. Treiber and colleagues say the incidence of high blood pressure "has risen dramatically in recent years among youth," including a nearly sevenfold increase in high blood pressure among some minority youth.

The study included 73 Augusta middle school students randomly assigned to either meditation or a regular health education class. All students in the study had normal blood pressure and all wore monitors during the study to gauge their blood pressure and heart rate throughout the day. Students in the meditation group participated in two 10-minute meditation sessions each day, once in class and once after school, for three months.

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Remember these top keys to a healthy back: posture, mechanics, and exercise. The season for fun is now. Use it to get your back in shape for summer.

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## Preventing Back Pain

Though sudden back pain can occur after a twist or a sneeze, most back injuries are caused by years of mistreatment before that final painful injury.

Stresses such as poor posture, faulty body mechanics, obesity, emotional tension, and lack of fitness over the long term are the cause. With these modern problems, it's not surprising that back pain is the number one pain complaint today.



Whether you want to treat it or prevent it, these steps

- **Posture:** Stand with your ears, shoulders, and hips forming a straight line. See a chiropractor if they don't.
- **Body mechanics:** Keep the correct alignment of ears, shoulders, and hips while performing everyday activities. Keep lifted objects close to your body, and you reduce your risk of injury.
- **Exercise:** Make it central to maintaining a healthy back. Your program should include aerobic, flexibility, and strengthening exercise.

Aerobic exercise includes walking, biking, and swimming. Do it 10 to 15 minutes three or four days a week to start, building to 30 minutes.

Poor flexibility can be a key contributor to low-back and neck pain. If your hips don't move freely, your spine will move more than it should, leading to back programs. If you have a limited range of motion in an area, you need to stretch that area.

Well-balanced muscle strength is essential in maintaining good posture and a healthy back. Strong back, hip, and abdominal muscles support the spine. Toned trunk muscles help to prevent back injuries.

## Battling Dry, Winter Skin

Cold air and dry heat often produce a common winter nuisance: dry skin. The skin loses moisture and may crack and peel, or become irritated and inflamed. Bathing too frequently, especially with harsh soaps, also contributes to dry skin. Eczema may also cause dry skin.

Dry skin is most common on your lower legs, arms, abdomen, and thighs. The symptoms most often associated with dry skin include:

- Scaling
- Itching
- Cracks in the skin

To relieve chronic dry skin, it may help to change your bathing habits:

- Keep baths or showers short.
- Use warm (not hot) water.
- Use as little soap as possible. Try mild cleansers like Aveeno or Cetaphil or mild soaps like Neutrogena or Dove.
- Dry your skin thoroughly but gently -- pat, don't rub.
- Take baths or showers less often.

It also helps to increase skin and body moisture:

- Use bath oils and moisturizers at least daily. Thick, greasy moisturizers work best. Avoid products with alcohol. Apply just after a bath or shower, when your skin is still damp.
- Use a humidifier if the air is dry.
- Drink plenty of water throughout the day to stay hydrated on the inside.
- Apply cool compresses to itchy areas, and try over-the-counter cortisone creams or lotions if your skin is inflamed. If this is not enough, talk to your doctor about possible prescription lotions.

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