What should I know about my family’s health history?

by Kathleen Connelly, BA, ACE Certified Personal Trainer and Health Coach

Asking loved ones about their health might seem intrusive at times although it is important to know your family’s history of diseases and health conditions when managing your own health. Based on your family’s health, your health care providers might recommend certain screenings and decide at what age those screenings need to start for you. The CDC recommends collecting information on major medical conditions, causes of death, age of disease diagnosis, and ethnic background. If you’re able, collect health history information about parents, grandparents, siblings, children, aunts/uncles, and nieces/nephews. To record, track updates and have a simple way to share information with your doctor, visit My Family Health Portrait, Public Health Genomics Knowledge Base at cdc.gov.

Does exercise reduce my risk for dementia?

by Carla Ficorilli, MS, Health Coach

The number of people with dementia is expected to rise from 47 million to 135 million by 2050. The good news, according to the World Health Organization, is that physical activity has been shown to lower the risk factors for Alzheimer’s and cognitive decline.

Exercise affects the brain at three different levels: 1) the micro level: blood flow, neurotransmitters, neurons, synapses; 2) the macro-level: individual brain regions like the frontal or temporal lobes and the amount of gray and white matter; and 3) the behavioral level: changes in mood and cognition, such as attention, memory and others forms of mental functioning.

While the science continues to evolve, a multi-modal program works best, i.e., getting 1) aerobic exercise (exercise that increases your heart rate) 150-300 minutes/week, 2) muscular strength training twice a week, and 3) neuromotor exercises which involves motor, coordination, and mind-body exercises such as yoga and tai chi.
Have you experienced stabbing heel pain that’s often worse in the morning? It could be plantar fasciitis, a common cause of foot pain. Plantar fasciitis is an inflammation of the band of tissue that runs along the bottom of your foot and connects your heel bone to your toes. If you think you may have plantar fasciitis, you will be happy to learn that some simple changes can have you back on your feet.

**Rest, ice and anti-inflammatory medications**
Medicines such as ibuprofen, can reduce inflammation and speed healing.

**Stretch your arches**
Practice the stretches shown left several times a day and try wearing a splint overnight. The splint is a cushiony boot that provides gentle stretching for your calf and the arch of your foot through the night.

**Invest in new shoes and orthotics**
Replace worn out shoes. Choose cushiony tennis shoes with good arch support. Avoid walking barefoot. Your doctor may prescribe custom-fitted arch supports (orthotics) to redistribute the pressure on the bottom of your feet.

**Change up your workout**
Choose low-impact activities. If you usually run or walk for exercise, try replacing some workouts with cycling, swimming or rowing.

Expect your recovery to take several months. If your pain does not improve, you may need medical treatment for this condition. However, most people can recover with smart self-care. To feel better faster, start today!
What is an Instant Pot®? It is basically a modernized electric pressure cooker plus slow cooker, rice cooker, steamer, and sauté all in one package. The first Instant Pot sold on Amazon in 2010, and it exploded in popularity in 2016, with no signs of slowing down. Instant Pot is actually a branded name of this multi-cooker, and several other brands now have their own version with very similar features and functions. Certain models offer additional functionality where you can produce perfectly-boiled eggs, make a cheesecake, create yogurt, cook sous vide style, pressure-can food, and steam clean your whole house (just kidding on that last function).

Why an Instant Pot? Time, my friends! Well, that’s not the only reason, but boy is it one of its most appealing qualities. Did you forget to thaw the meat? No worries, the Instant Pot has your back. Did you forget to soak the Kamut overnight? Fear not, after a quick soak, the Instant Pot will have this ancient Egyptian wheat variety cooked to perfection just in time. I’m still blown away that I can put a frozen-solid whole chicken in the Instant Pot, pressure cook it on high, and in less than an hour, fall-off-the-bone chicken meat is ready for deboning. There are times when the Instant Pot won’t be the fastest method, but sometimes it just produces a clearly more desirable end product. For example, many folks will claim its superiority in preparing soft- and hard-boiled eggs.

What can you prepare in an Instant Pot? Oh so many recipes! Soups. Stews. Meat (from frozen or fresh) that is cooked perfectly tender and juicy. Any intact whole grain, not just rice, of course in far less time than the traditional stove-top cooking method. Legumes. Stock. And so much more.

If you already have an Instant Pot, perhaps you’re under-utilizing this fantastic appliance and it’s time to tag or Pin more recipes and max out the potential sitting in your pantry. Or, maybe the Instant Pot will be on your wish list this year? Many delicious, time-slashed recipes are awaiting your discovery!

NUTRITION
Cooking with an Instant Pot
by Vanessa Mitchell, RDN

INSTANT POT BROCCOLI AND POTATO SOUP

3 cups chicken stock, low-sodium
7 cups diced sweet potato & red/gold potato
1 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
1 sm-med onion, diced
4 cloves garlic, chopped
1.5 tsp dried, rubbed sage
¼ tsp celery seed
½ tsp each salt, pepper
2.5 cups 1% or 2% milk
½ cup half and half
>1 lb frozen broccoli florets
½ cup plain Greek yogurt
1.5 cups shredded cheddar, divided
Scallions, chopped

DIRECTIONS:
1. Chop/dice onion and garlic. Dice potatoes and sweet potatoes.
2. Using medium Sauté mode of Instant Pot, sauté onion and garlic in olive oil for a couple minutes until tender and translucent.
3. Turn off sauté mode, add diced potato, diced sweet potato, chicken broth, sage, celery seed, salt and pepper to the sautéed onion and garlic.
4. Close and lock the lid, ensure the pressure valve is set to the sealing position. Set to pressure cook on high for 5 minutes.
5. Microwave broccoli florets according to instructions.
6. Allow natural steam release for about 12 minutes, then manually release remaining steam.
7. Toss ¾ cup of cheddar in 1 tbsp flour.
8. Remove lid, turn on low sauté mode and add steamed broccoli, milk, half and half and ¾ cup cheddar that was coated in flour. Heat through.
9. Turn off heat. Serve soup in bowls and top with freshly cracked pepper, yogurt, scallions and remaining shredded cheese.

Nutritional Information —
Serves 8. Serving size: 1.5 cups topped with 1 tbsp yogurt & 1.5 tbsp cheese
Calories: 292 Carbohydrate: 32g
Protein: 14g Fat: 12g
Fiber: 6g Sodium: 496mg

Recipe courtesy of Vanessa Mitchell, RN
STRESS AND MINDFULNESS
How to Create a Gratitude Journal
by Cara Harris, BS, Wellness Program Coordinator

Gratitude is defined by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary as the state of being grateful; thankfulness. In this season of thanksgiving, it is important to practice gratitude. Doing so may increase feelings of happiness and decrease symptoms of depression. Other benefits of practicing gratitude include increased joy, better sleep, decreased anger or aggression, a reduction in stress, and many more. Keeping a gratitude journal allows you to be intentional about your appreciation for the things in your life, no matter how big or small.

So how does one create a gratitude journal? Begin by buying a blank notebook or searching for “gratitude journal”. “Gratitude journals” might be a good option because they give writing prompts. Start small and block out a few minutes of the day (or a few times a week) to sit down and write in the journal. If you struggle starting out, look around you. Perhaps you are grateful for the roof over your head? Do you have food to eat? Is the sun shining or the stars shimmering? All these things warrant thankfulness, and maybe they will spark some additional considerations.

Be specific. As you are jotting down your thoughts, it helps to state why you are thankful for something. For example, one could say, “I am thankful for my bed because it allows for restful sleep each night.”

Create a routine. Could you allow 5 minutes each morning to journal, or 5 minutes before bed? Do you have time during lunch to journal? Habit forming can be difficult, but also rewarding once there is a routine.

There are so many things in our lives to be thankful for, even in tough times. Practicing gratitude not only allows us to put our thoughts on paper, but it boosts mood and joy in our lives. No matter how big or small, start somewhere. You might be surprised with how much good there is.

For more information on the benefits of gratitude, please visit: health.harvard.edu/healthbeat/giving-thanks-can-make-you-happier