

health matters

Eating Triggers

How to control your cravings

Every day you decide what to eat, but you might not understand why you eat.

For instance, do you eat only when you are truly hungry or do you sometimes eat because you are bored or sad?

The answer to that question can be important—especially if you are trying to lose or maintain weight.

One way to find out is to keep a food journal for a few days. Try writing down what, when and where you eat and how you are

feeling at the time. This will help you see if there is a pattern in what is causing you to overeat or to choose unhealthy foods.

The next step: Finding ways to avoid the triggers. Here are suggestions for three common things that make you want to eat.

You eat for comfort

You use food to relieve stress, loneliness and other emotions.

Instead of reaching for food:

- Get physical—head to the gym, take a walk or work in your garden.
- Breathe deeply for 5 minutes.

[more on page 4](#) ▶



Spring Allergies

For many people, the start of the spring season comes with the start of allergy symptoms. Although there is no cure for spring allergies, there are things you can do to control your symptoms.

What causes spring allergies?

- Pollen is the most common cause of spring allergies. It is released into the air by trees, grasses and weeds.
- Allergy symptoms are higher on windy days.
- Rainy days cause drops in

[more on page 5](#) ▶



In this issue:

2 Laughter is contagious:
Spread it around

3 Cholesterol and your heart:
Learn your levels

4 Beans: A healthy source
of fiber and folate

5 Stroke: Know the signs
and symptoms

Have a Healthy Laugh

You make time for work. You make time to shop for food and serve family meals.

Do you set aside time to laugh?

If the idea makes you smile, that is great. Health experts say cheerful emotions offer all sorts of benefits.

Good medicine

Studies show laughter reduces stress. It relaxes muscles and can even act as pain relief.

And there may be a reason it is called a hearty laugh. A deep laugh is good for your heart. Experts say it:

- Improves blood flow
- Makes blood vessels work better
- Lowers blood pressure

A magnetic smile

Laughter can spread to other people as well. Not in a bad way, like the flu. But in such a good way that it attracts other people toward you.

That is why a smile pulls other people toward it. Having a good attitude can lead to good friends.

Think about what makes you happy. Set aside time for it, and maybe ask others to join in. You might invite friends over for a monthly game night. Or sign up for an art class at your community college.

So have a hearty laugh. It is good for you. ■

Sources: Mental Health America; Society for Vascular Surgery



Questions about your mental health benefits? Call San Mateo County's Behavioral Health and Recovery Services at 800-686-0101.

Why You Need a Pap Test

A Pap test can save a woman's life.

It can find early signs of cancer in the cervix, the lower part of the womb. When it is caught early, the chance of curing this cancer is very high.

Even better, a Pap test can help prevent cancer. It can find cells that could turn into cancer, making it possible to treat the cells early.

Women ages 18 and older need to get a Pap test every 1 to 3 years.

Ask your doctor how often you should be tested.

Be prepared

Be aware of things that can affect your test result. To make sure the result of your next Pap test is accurate:

- Have the test when you do not have your period.
- Try to be tested 10 to 20 days after the first day of your last period.

Also, for 2 days before your Pap test:

- Do not have sex.
- Do not use tampons.
- Do not use any kind of vaginal douche, cream or medicine.

Call your doctor to schedule an appointment today. ■

Source: Office on Women's Health

If you do not have a primary care doctor and need help finding a doctor to do your Pap test, call Health Education at 650-616-2165.

Cholesterol Counts—Know Your Levels

Do you know if your cholesterol is normal?

If you are not sure, it could mean you are overdue for a routine blood test. A blood test for cholesterol can identify your risk for heart problems or a stroke.

Cholesterol is a fatty substance that helps our bodies function properly. The liver makes the cholesterol we need, but we can get more from what we eat.

There are two types of cholesterol.

Low-density lipoprotein (LDL), or bad cholesterol. If you have too much bad cholesterol in your body, it can clog your arteries. It causes your blood vessels to become smaller and reduces blood flow to your heart and brain. This increases your risk for heart disease, a heart attack or a stroke.

High-density lipoprotein (HDL), or good cholesterol. HDL helps remove bad cholesterol from your blood vessels. It is good to have a high level of HDL (good cholesterol).

Keeping LDL and HDL levels in a healthy range helps reduce

your risk for heart disease. But you cannot know if you have healthy levels if you do not get regular cholesterol tests. Most adults should get a cholesterol test at least once every 5 years, according to the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute.

Talk to your doctor

Your doctor can explain what your cholesterol numbers mean and help you set your cholesterol goals. If you need to improve your numbers, ask your doctor about what you can do. Here are

some examples of things you can do every day:

- Choose a diet that is low in saturated fats, trans fat and cholesterol, and high in fiber, fruits and veggies.
- Get at least 60 minutes of exercise each week.
- Lose weight, if needed.

Some people may also need medicines to help lower their cholesterol. But exercise and a healthy diet remain important in keeping cholesterol levels low, even with prescription medicines.

Take the first step. Ask your doctor about having your cholesterol checked, and learn your numbers. ■



HEALTH MATTERS is published as a community service for the friends and patrons of HEALTH PLAN OF SAN MATEO, 701 Gateway Blvd., Suite 400, South San Francisco, CA 94080, telephone 800-750-4776, website www.hpsm.org.

Information in HEALTH MATTERS comes from a wide range of medical experts. If you have any concerns or questions about specific content that may affect your health, please contact your health care provider. Models may be used in photos and illustrations.

Chief Executive Officer
Medical Director
Health Educator

Maya Altman
Fiona Donald, M.D.
Daisy Liu



Eating Triggers

► continued from cover

- Sip a cup of hot tea.
- Write down what is bothering you.

Snacking while watching TV

Do you like to snack on food while watching TV?

- Eat only in the kitchen or dining room and not in front of the TV.
- Do not keep unhealthy foods in the house.
- Ride a stationary bike, do crafts, brush the dog or lift hand weights while you watch TV.

Seeing food makes you want to eat

At a restaurant:

- Ask the waiter or waitress to remove the bread or chips before the meal.
- Request a take-home box when you order. Put half your meal in it before you eat.

At home:

- While cooking, chew sugar-free gum or sip a calorie-free beverage, like water with a slice of lemon.
- Place controlled portions of food on each person's plate, in the kitchen, instead of passing food around the table.

At work:

- Sit far away from doughnuts or other goodies at a meeting.
- Keep healthy snacks in your drawer. They can help you avoid the high-calorie snacks in the vending machine. ■

Sources: American Heart Association; American Psychological Association; National Institutes of Health

5 Beans to Know, Love and Eat

| Black | Cannellini | Garbanzo (chickpeas) | Red kidney | Pinto |
|--|--|--|---|--|
| Popular in Latin, Caribbean, Southwestern dishes | Great added to pasta, soups, Italian foods | Popular in Middle Eastern, Indian dishes | Often used in soups, chili, Cajun dishes, mixed into rice | Popular as refried beans and in Mexican dishes |

Why does it help to eat more beans? Because they are rich in:

- Fiber, which helps control appetite and diabetes and may protect against colon cancer
- Folate, which prevents birth defects and may reduce risk of pancreatic cancer
- Iron, which helps carry oxygen to organs and cells

- Magnesium, which is important for a healthy heart and bones.
- Low-fat protein (½ cup of cooked beans counts the same as 2 ounces of meat)
 - How to prepare beans:
 - **Canned beans:** Drain and rinse to remove 40 percent of sodium, or buy lower-salt varieties.
 - **Dried beans:** They need to be

soaked before cooking.

Quick method: Boil for 2 minutes, turn off heat, cover. Soak for at least 1 hour.

No-hurry method: Let soak overnight, 8 to 12 hours.

Drain and cook for 1 to 2 hours on the stove, 6 to 8 hours in a slow cooker or 15 to 30 minutes in a pressure cooker.

Add beans to:

- Soups
- Green and tuna salads
- Scrambled eggs
- Rice, quinoa or couscous
- Salsa, burritos or enchiladas
- Garlic and herbs, mashed together, for a dip or spread ■

Sources: Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics; American Institute for Cancer Research; Produce for Better Health Foundation

Spring Allergies

► continued from cover

pollen counts because the rain washes away the allergens.

What are the symptoms of allergies?

- Runny nose
- Watery eyes
- Sneezing
- Coughing
- Itchy eyes and nose

What can I do to feel better?

- Try to stay indoors when the pollen count is very high (pollen counts are usually highest in the mornings).
- Keep your house and car windows shut on days with high levels of pollen. An air purifier may also help.
- Clean the air filters in your home often. Also, clean bookshelves, vents and other places where pollen can collect.

- Vacuum twice a week. Wear a mask to avoid breathing in the dust or pollen trapped in your carpet.

What medicines can I take?

There are many over-the-counter and prescription drugs to treat spring allergies, including:

- Antihistamines, which reduce sneezing, sniffing and itching
- Decongestants, which clear mucus out to reduce the stuffiness and swelling in your nose
- Antihistamine/decongestant combinations
- Nasal sprays
- Eye drops to help itchy, watery eyes
- Nasal saline rinses, which may decrease nasal irritation and dryness

Talk to your doctor or pharmacist to make sure you choose the right medication.

When to seek medical attention?

Call your doctor if your allergy symptoms get worse after you take nonprescription medicines or if there is no improvement after 2 to 4 weeks of treatment. ■



Stroke

5 Sudden Signs

How can you tell if someone is having a stroke? If any of the following symptoms start suddenly, you need to call 911 right away.

- Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg
- Sudden confusion or trouble speaking or understanding

- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Sudden trouble walking or loss of balance or coordination
- Sudden severe headache with no known cause

Minutes matter

Check the time when symptoms began. Emergency medical staff who treat a patient who has had a stroke will need to

know when symptoms began to occur. Treating the patient with a drug within 3 hours of the first symptom can help the patient recover from a stroke. ■

Sources: American Heart Association; National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute

Spot the signs to save a life. Get more facts about stroke at www.hpsm.org. Under “Health Information,” click “Health Conditions.”

Raising a Reader

Reading is a gateway to the world. Good readers tend to do better in school and find learning easier throughout their whole lives.

Parents can help by teaching kids to love books. Try these steps:

- Set aside a time each day to read to your child, even if it is just for a few minutes. Remember: Just talking about the pictures together counts as reading too.
- For babies, start with soft books they can hold.

- Fill a basket or line a shelf with books in your child's room. That shows kids they can enjoy books on their own.
- Use funny voices and noises when you read. Stop now and then to talk about your own family or pets.
- Read favorites again. Kids love hearing stories over and over.
- Do not test kids on letters or words. Instead, make it a game to see what they know.
- Let kids pick their own books at the library.

Most kids do not read well



until they start school. But you can lay the foundation by making books fun. That gives kids a big head start on reading. ■

Source: American Academy of Pediatrics

Happy Smiles: How to Keep Kids' Teeth Healthy

To help your child have healthy teeth, start with the three basics:

1. Brush teeth twice a day.
2. Floss once a day between any teeth that touch each other.
3. See a dentist every 6 months.

Other important tooth-care tips for every age are:

Birth to first tooth

- Wipe baby's gums with a clean, moist cloth.
- If your baby takes a bottle to bed, give only water. Milk, juice or sugary drinks can lead to tooth decay.
- Call your child's doctor if baby has a fever or diarrhea when teething.

First tooth to 2 years old

- Clean teeth with a soft cloth or baby toothbrush. Use only water—no toothpaste yet.
- Floss wherever two teeth meet.
- Take baby to the dentist as soon as the first tooth arrives.
- Ask if baby needs extra fluoride.

2 to 5 years old

- Brush all your child's teeth twice a day—floss once.
- Choose a soft kids' toothbrush.
- Use no more than a pea-sized dab of toothpaste.
- Teach your child to spit out, not swallow, the toothpaste.
- Supervise—even after your child can use the toothbrush alone.

- Ask the dentist to explain to your child why tooth care is important.

5 years and older

- Watch as kids brush and floss. Be sure they are thorough and use only a little bit of toothpaste.
- Ask the dentist about protecting teeth from decay with a thin coat of plastic called a sealant.

How do I find a dentist?

Call one of the numbers below:

Medi-Cal members: Call Denti-Cal at **800-322-6384**.

Healthy Kids members: Call Delta Dental at **866-527-9564**. ■

Sources: American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry; American Dental Association