

# HOLIDAY HEALTH CHALLENGE 2021

## WEEK 5



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Hello, everybody!

Is it possible we are entering Week 5 – the week before Christmas – already?!

This can be an incredibly stressful, busy week for people, so we are focusing on things that will help in that department. Our focuses this week will be:

**Water intake**...virtually all of us can benefit from consuming more water. The handouts will explain why water intake is important, and tips in how to increase it.

**Stretching**...why we should stretch, the benefits and a link to a 15 minute stretch video.

**Sleep hygiene**...we all know the importance of good sleep. Some suggestions on how to achieve that follow.

**Your bonus challenge this week:** go to bed a half hour earlier 3-4 nights this week! This is the perfect week to give yourself the gift of sleep before all the festivities.

I would like to wish the warmest and sincerest Merry Christmas to all of you. Take this time to truly enjoy your family and friends, and all the special things the season brings. May you feel peace and joy.

Yours in wellness

Michelle

## **WATER, WATER...**

**We always hear that we are supposed to drink more water, but do you know exactly why? Below are some very good reasons to up that intake.**

### **1. It lubricates the joints**

Cartilage, found in joints and the disks of the spine, contains around 80 percent water. Long-term dehydration can reduce the joints' shock-absorbing ability, leading to joint pain.

### **2. It forms saliva and mucus**

Saliva helps us digest our food and keeps the mouth, nose, and eyes moist. This prevents friction and damage. Drinking water also keeps the mouth clean. Consumed instead of sweetened beverages, it can also reduce tooth decay.

### **3. It delivers oxygen throughout the body**

Blood is more than 90 percent water, and blood carries oxygen to different parts of the body.

### **4. It boosts skin health and beauty**

With dehydration, the skin can become more vulnerable to skin disorders and premature wrinkling.

### **5. It cushions the brain, spinal cord, and other sensitive tissues**

Dehydration can affect brain structure and function. It is also involved in the production of hormones and neurotransmitters. Prolonged dehydration can lead to problems with thinking and reasoning.

### **6. It regulates body temperature**

Water that is stored in the middle layers of the skin comes to the skin's surface as sweat when the body heats up. As it evaporates, it cools the body.

### **7. The digestive system depends on it**

The bowel needs water to work properly. Dehydration can lead to digestive problems, constipation, and an overly acidic stomach. This increases the risk of heartburn and stomach ulcers.

### **8. It flushes body waste**

Water is needed in the processes of sweating and removal of urine and feces.

### **9. It helps maintain blood pressure**

A lack of water can cause blood to become thicker, increasing blood pressure.

### **10. The airways need it**

When dehydrated, airways are restricted by the body in an effort to minimize water loss. This can make asthma and allergies worse.

### **11. It makes minerals and nutrients accessible**

These dissolve in water, which makes it possible for them to reach different parts of the body.

### **12. It prevents kidney damage**

The kidneys regulate fluid in the body. Insufficient water can lead to kidney stones and other problems.

### **13. Weight loss**

Water may also help with weight loss, if it is consumed instead of sweetened juices and sodas. "Preloading" with water before meals can help prevent overeating by creating a sense of fullness.

## TIPS FOR BOOSTING WATER INTAKE

How much is enough? There is no one, generic amount that fits every body. For most, simply drinking to quench your thirst will ensure you meet your fluid needs. Despite this, many of us just do not drink enough water, so below are some tips to help.

### 1. Set a daily goal

Setting a daily water intake goal can help you drink more water

For example, one water-consumption goal might be to drink 32 ounces of water per day.

It can also help to record your progress, which can keep you motivated to achieve your goal — and make it a habit.

### 2. Keep a reusable water bottle with you

Keeping a water bottle with you throughout the day can help you drink more water. You can easily drink water in any setting, whether you're running errands, traveling, or at home, work, or school, and keeping a water bottle handy can also serve as a visual reminder to drink more water.

*(Plus, it's better for the environment than relying on single-use plastic water bottles!)*

### 3. Set reminders

You can also set reminders to drink more water using an app or the alarm on your smartphone or smartwatch.

For example, try setting a reminder to take a few sips of water every 30 minutes, or set a reminder to finish drinking your current glass of water and refill it every hour. It might sound silly to do, but these reminders can help you increase your water intake, especially if you struggle with being forgetful or too busy to drink.

### 4. Drink one glass of water before each meal

Another simple way to increase your water intake is to make a habit of drinking one glass of water before each meal.

Not only will your intake increase, sometimes your body may mistake feelings of thirst for hunger. Drinking a glass of water before eating can help you discern whether you are feeling true hunger.

### 5. Flavor your water

If you dislike the flavor of water, or just need a bit of flavor to help you drink more, you have many choices.

Using an inexpensive fruit-infuser water bottle is one healthy option. Popular fruit combinations to use in an infuser bottle are cucumber-lime, lemon, and strawberry-kiwi. Although, you can use any combination of fruits that suits your taste. You can also purchase water enhancers in powder or liquid form to add to your water, **but be aware that many of these products contain sugar, artificial sweeteners, or other additives that may harm your health.**

### 6. Drink one glass of water per hour at work

Fill up your cup as soon as you get to work, and at the top of every hour, simply drink the remaining water and refill.

This method will keep your water intake consistent throughout your workday.

### 7. Sip throughout the day

Sipping on water consistently throughout the day is another easy way to help you meet your fluid goals.

Reaching for a sip of water consistently during your day will keep your mouth from getting dry and may even help keep your breath fresh. Keep a glass of water or a reusable bottle nearby and within your line of sight for a constant visual reminder to take a sip.

### 8. Eat more foods high in water

Getting more water doesn't always mean drinking it. Try eating foods that have a high water content. Fruits and vegetables that are particularly high in water include: lettuce, celery, zucchini, cabbage, watermelon and cantaloupe. In addition to their high fluid content, these fruits and vegetables are packed with vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants that promote your overall health.

### 9. Drink one glass of water when you wake up

An easy way to boost your water intake is to simply drink one glass when you wake up. A glass of cold water in the morning may help wake you up and boost your alertness.

## **Why stretching is important**

Stretching keeps the muscles flexible, strong, and healthy, and we need that flexibility to maintain a range of motion in the joints. Without it, the muscles shorten and become tight. Then, when you call on the muscles for activity, they are weak and unable to extend all the way. That puts you at risk for joint pain, strains, and muscle damage.

For example, sitting in a chair all day results in tight hamstrings in the back of the thigh. That can make it harder to extend your leg or straighten your knee all the way, which inhibits walking. Likewise, when tight muscles are suddenly called on for a strenuous activity that stretches them, such as playing tennis, they may become damaged from suddenly being stretched. Injured muscles may not be strong enough to support the joints, which can lead to joint injury.

Regular stretching keeps muscles long, lean, and flexible, and this means that exertion won't put too much force on the muscle itself. Healthy muscles also help a person with balance problems avoid falls.

## **Where to start**

With a body full of muscles, the idea of daily stretching may seem overwhelming. But you don't have to stretch every muscle you have. The areas critical for mobility are in your lower extremities - calves, hamstrings, hip flexors and quadriceps. Stretching your shoulders, neck, and lower back is also beneficial. Aim for stretching daily or at least three or four times per week.

## **The cumulative effect of stretching**

Stretching once today won't magically give you perfect flexibility. You'll need to do it over time and remain committed to the process. It took a long time to get tight muscles, so you're not going to undo that in a couple days. It's a practice you should weave into your life as often as possible.

## **Proper execution**

Hold a stretch for 30 seconds. That is the magic number for those muscles to relax. It might seem like a long time, but studies show that it is the most beneficial amount of time to stretch – prior to that, your muscles don't fully release. Use a timer – don't count in your head – because you will inevitably cut it short. And if you must count in your head, count at least to 45!

Don't bounce. Years ago, ballistic stretching was thought to be the best way to increase flexibility. Now, experts suggest that you avoid bouncing unless these types of stretches have been recommended to you by a doctor or physical therapist.

Don't stretch beyond the point of comfort. While it's normal to feel some tension when stretching a muscle, you should never feel pain. If you do, there may be an injury or damage in the tissue, so back off the stretch until you don't feel any discomfort.

Don't hold your breath while stretching. You might not even realize you are doing it! A good thing to do is actively take 3-4 breaths in while holding the stretch and stretch a little bit deeper as you let that breath out.

Don't overdo it. Like other forms of exercise, stretching puts stress on your body. If you're stretching the same muscle groups multiple times a day, you risk over-stretching and causing damage.

## **WHY STRETCH?**

### **1. Increases your flexibility**

Regular stretching can help increase your flexibility, which is crucial for your overall health. Not only can improved flexibility help you to perform everyday activities with relative ease, but it can also help delay the reduced mobility that can come with aging.

### **2. Increases your range of motion**

Being able to move a joint through its full range of motion gives you more freedom of movement. Stretching on a regular basis can help increase your range of motion.

### **3. Improves your posture**

Muscle imbalances are common and can lead to poor posture. One study found that a combination of strengthening and stretching specific muscle groups can reduce musculoskeletal pain and encourage proper alignment. That, in turn, may help improve your posture.

### **4. Helps to heal and prevent back pain**

Tight muscles can lead to a decrease in your range of motion. When this happens, you increase the likelihood of straining the muscles in your back. Keep those muscles loose and flexible to help prevent injuries.

### **5. Great for stress relief**

When you're experiencing stress, there's a good chance your muscles are tense. That's because your muscles tend to tighten up in response to physical and emotional stress. Focus on areas of your body where you tend to hold your stress, such as your neck, shoulders, and upper back.

### **6. Can calm your mind**

Participating in a regular stretching program not only helps increase your flexibility, but it can also calm your mind. While you stretch, focus on mindfulness and meditation exercises, which give your mind a mental break.

### **7. Helps decrease tension headaches**

Tension and stress headaches can interfere with your daily life. In addition to a proper diet, adequate hydration, and plenty of rest, stretching your shoulders and neck can help relieve some of the tension in muscles that contribute to tension headaches.

**VIDEO OF STRETCHING LINK** [https://youtu.be/g\\_tea8ZNk5A](https://youtu.be/g_tea8ZNk5A)

## Sleep Hygiene

Healthy sleep habits can make a big difference in your quality of life! Having healthy sleep habits is often referred to as having good sleep hygiene. Try to keep the following sleep practices daily:

**1. Stick to a sleep schedule of the same bedtime and wake up time, even on the weekends.** This helps to regulate your body's clock and could help you fall asleep and stay asleep for the night.

**2. Practice a relaxing bedtime ritual.** A relaxing, routine activity right before bedtime conducted away from bright lights helps separate your sleep time from activities that can cause excitement, stress or anxiety which can make it more difficult to fall asleep, get sound and deep sleep or remain asleep.

**3. If you have trouble sleeping, avoid naps, especially in the afternoon.** Power napping may help you get through the day, but if you find that you can't fall asleep at bedtime, eliminating even short catnaps may help.

**4. Exercise daily.** Vigorous exercise is best, but even light exercise is better than no activity. Exercise at any time of day, but not at the expense of your sleep.

**5. Evaluate your room.** Design your sleep environment to establish the conditions you need for sleep. Your bedroom should be cool – between 60 and 67 degrees. Your bedroom should also be free from any noise that can disturb your sleep. Finally, your bedroom should be free from any light. Check your room for noises or other distractions. This includes a bed partner's sleep disruptions such as snoring. Consider using blackout curtains, eye shades, ear plugs, "white noise" machines, humidifiers, fans and other devices.

**6. Sleep on a comfortable mattress and pillows.** Make sure your mattress is comfortable and supportive. The one you have been using for years may have exceeded its life expectancy – about 9 or 10 years for most good quality mattresses. Have comfortable pillows and make the room attractive and inviting for sleep but also free of allergens that might affect you and objects that might cause you to slip or fall if you have to get up during the night.

**7. Use bright light to help manage your circadian rhythms.** Avoid bright light in the evening and expose yourself to sunlight in the morning. This will keep your circadian rhythms in check.

**8. Avoid alcohol, cigarettes, and heavy meals in the evening.** Alcohol, cigarettes and caffeine can disrupt sleep. Eating big or spicy meals can cause discomfort from indigestion that can make it hard to sleep. If you can, avoid eating large meals for two to three hours before bedtime. Try a light snack 45 minutes before bed if you're still hungry.

**9. Wind down.** Your body needs time to shift into sleep mode, so spend the last hour before bed doing a calming activity such as reading. For some people, using an electronic device such as a laptop can make it hard to fall asleep, because the particular type of light emanating from the screens of these devices is activating to the brain. If you have trouble sleeping, avoid electronics before bed or in the middle of the night.

**10. If you can't sleep, go into another room and do something relaxing until you feel tired.** It is best to take work materials, computers and televisions out of the sleeping environment. Use your bed only for sleep and sex to strengthen the association between bed and sleep. If you associate a particular activity or item with anxiety about sleeping, omit it from your bedtime routine.