

Wellness Connection

Having a Girls' Day Out? Make It Healthy!

We always enjoy catching up with friends, whether it's every week or just a few times a year. But for many, these meet-ups seem to revolve around restaurant meals or an evening of drinks—not the most healthy practices.

How to break free? Here are a few options you and your friends can try.

COOK TOGETHER

There's a reason people congregate around food: It's a time-honored way to gather and enjoy each other's company. But restaurant meals are often unhealthy, sneaking in extra fat and sugar you wouldn't add at home. Before you destroy your diet by dining out, consider getting your friends together to make a healthy meal at your home. Or take a cooking class together to learn new skills and eat healthy in a fun environment.

TAKE A YOGA CLASS

Replace those calorie-laden catch-up lunches with a morning of bending and stretching. Chances are good there are several options near you, and you can expect to pay around \$10 per class, or less if you purchase a package deal. The potential health benefits of yoga are plentiful, including less pain, reduced stress, and more flexibility—great gifts to share with your friends.

INSIDE

2 Depression Can Run in the Family

3 Feel Fuller on Less Food!

4 A Fun Rx for Men's Health



SPEND A MORNING AT THE SPA

Day spas let you and your friends relax away your cares with soothing facials, massages, foot baths, or dozens of other therapies for your mind and body. A morning of luxury may be expensive, around \$100, but it's worth considering as an occasional treat.

EXPLORE A LOCAL TRAIL

On the other hand, friendly get-togethers don't have to cost a lot of money. Find a map or guide to local hiking trails, bundle up, and take a walk in the woods while catching up on conversation. ■

Zip into Zumba!

Bring your best pals to a zumba class, and burn calories while having a blast. Check the calendar at livewellnebraska.com for upcoming dates of this and other healthy events, like Date Night Yoga for you and your significant other or Kids Yoga for the little ones.

Make Healthy New Habits Stick

Achieve your 2012 resolutions with these strategies:

- Be realistic. For example, if you like to sleep in, don't plan to exercise before work.
- Set specific goals. If you want to lose 20 pounds, plan to lose 1 pound a week for 20 weeks by exercising an hour most days and cutting 200 calories from your daily diet.
- Keep tabs on yourself. Set up a way to track the time you're active if you're trying to get in shape, or the number of cigarettes you're smoking if you're trying to cut back.
- Plan for lapses. Instead of getting discouraged, look at why it happened, then get back on track quickly.
- Celebrate small changes on your way to your larger goal.

how to reach us

From a simple phone call to following our tweets, there are more ways than ever to connect with Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska.

.....
Call Member Services at 888-592-8960, Monday to Friday, 7:30 a.m. to 6 p.m.
.....

Write to us at P.O. Box 3248, Omaha, NE 68180-0001.
.....

Visit our website at nebraskablue.com.
.....

Follow us on Twitter @BCBSNebraska.
.....

Watch our videos at youtube.com/nebraskabluecross.



Is Depression in Your DNA?

Scientists have long believed depression was partly in the genes. In fact, they estimate that genetics explains about 40 percent of the risk for depression.

Now, two teams studying different groups of people have pinpointed at least one spot in our genes where depression may lurk: on chromosome 3.

Both new studies, one by British researchers and one by Americans, were published in the *American Journal of Psychiatry*. Their discovery may eventually lead to better depression treatments.

WHY GENES MATTER

We are born with 23 pairs of chromosomes, structures that hold our genes. Genes determine traits like eye color, hair color, and height.

Scientists also study genes to understand why some people are more prone to certain diseases. Knowing the genetic basis for a disease can help parents determine if they're likely to pass it along to their children. It can also help

doctors predict who will respond best to different therapies.

WATCH FOR DEPRESSION SIGNS

Even as researchers learn more about genes and depression, they stress that other factors also contribute to the development of the disease. For example, chemical imbalances, other illnesses, and stressful life events may play a role.

Tell your doctor if you have a family history of depression. He or she can screen you carefully for signs of depression, including:

- Feeling sad, anxious, or empty
- Restlessness and irritability
- Lack of energy
- Loss of interest in activities
- Sudden changes in eating or sleep habits
- Thinking about, or attempting, suicide

Treatment, including medications and psychotherapy, can help those with depression regardless of the cause. Get help if you have five or more symptoms of depression for two weeks or longer. ■

Free Guide for Dealing with Depression

At bluehealthadvantagene.com, you can print a free guide to help you or a loved one cope with depression. Go to "Health Library," select "Chronic Conditions," and choose "Dealing with Depression." Click the "Download the PDF" button in the top right corner for a reader-friendly version.

The New Diet Math: More Food, Fewer Pounds

Eat more. Weigh less. Sound too good to be true? It isn't—as long as you're eating more of the *right* foods. New research highlights exactly how you can pile your plate high but still shed pounds.

FIND FOODS THAT GO FAR

There's no magic pill that can melt fat. However, the latest studies show certain foods can fill your belly, curb cravings, and cut your calorie count.

For a study in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, researchers added pureed vegetables to certain meals. Participants ate 200 to 350 fewer calories without noticing a taste difference. They also boosted their daily nutrient intake from veggies.

Researchers for *Physiology and Behavior* reported that people new to spicy foods who added 1 gram of red chili pepper to meals ate about 65 fewer calories at the next meal. They also experienced fewer cravings for salty, sweet, or fatty foods.

The journal *Appetite* found that kids who were served a small bowl of vegetable soup before a pasta dish consumed fewer calories overall. The same group of researchers previously saw similar results in adults.

Vegetables and soups fill you up with water and fiber, experts point out. And hot pepper may not only help curb your appetite, it may stoke

your metabolism so that you burn more calories after you dine.

TRY IT AT HOME TONIGHT

You can use these findings to give your favorite recipes a makeover. For example, here's how to serve up a healthier macaroni and cheese:

- Choose whole wheat pasta instead of white, refined noodles.
- Use nonfat milk instead of whole milk, and light cream cheese instead of full-fat cheddar.
- Stir in cooked, pureed cauliflower, squash, or carrots.
- Also add spinach, tomatoes, or another favorite veggie.
- Sprinkle with a little hot red pepper or another spice.

Serve sensible portions of your redesigned casserole after a soup or salad. Choose a soup that's broth-based, not creamy, and packs plenty of vegetables. Stack salads with a variety of colorful veggies, and avoid extras like high-fat dressings, chunks of cheese, or bacon bits. ■



Get More Need-to-Know Health News

Follow us on Twitter to get the latest health headlines wherever you go this winter. Just visit twitter.com/BCBSNebraska to see our posts and join the discussion.



Low-Fat Broccoli Soup

Start each meal with soup to curb your calorie intake.

Ingredients

- 3 cups chopped broccoli (or 2 10-oz. packages frozen)
- ½ cup diced celery
- ½ cup chopped onion
- 1 cup low-sodium chicken broth
- 2 cups nonfat milk
- 2 tbsp. cornstarch
- ¼ tsp. salt
- dash pepper
- dash ground thyme
- ¼ cup grated Swiss cheese

Directions

Place vegetables and broth in a saucepan. Bring to a boil, reduce heat, cover, and cook until vegetables are tender (about eight minutes). Mix milk, cornstarch, salt, pepper, and thyme; add to cooked vegetables. Cook, stirring constantly, until soup is lightly thickened and mixture just begins to boil. Remove from heat. Add cheese and stir until melted.

Serves four; serving size is ¼ of recipe. Each serving provides: Calories 140, Total fat 3 g (Saturated fat 2 g), Cholesterol 10 mg, Sodium 270 mg, Total carbohydrate 20 g, Fiber 5 g, Protein 11 g.



Celia Juel,
Corporate Notification Specialist

Brian Pickering, APR, Vice President, Corporate
Communications and Brand Management

Wellness Connection is provided by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska for our individual members. This information is intended to educate readers about subjects pertinent to their health, not as a substitute for consultation with a personal physician. Your contract may not cover all services referenced in this publication. Please see your contract for specific coverage information. © 2011 Printed in U.S.A.

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association.

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Nebraska
P.O. Box 3248
Omaha, NE 68180-0001

Postmaster: Please deliver within
December 27 to 30.

PSRST STD
U.S. Postage
PAID
Blue Cross Blue
Shield of Nebraska

 Printed on Recyclable Paper

538M

OUR COMMUNITY



Admit One for Health Benefits

The latest prescription for men's health? Season tickets for his favorite baseball team—and the opera. Attending cultural and sports events may be linked to better health, especially in men.

In a new study, published in the *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, men who regularly visited museums, attended church services, and saw musical performances were 10 to 14 percent more likely to report being healthy. Women saw smaller but similar benefits.

Participating in these events also brought health perks, but observing them regularly was more strongly linked to well-being. Cultured men and women also reported less anxiety and depression, and greater satisfaction with their lives.

Long Hours Take a Toll on the Heart

For a study in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, researchers followed more than 7,000 civil service workers for about 12 years. Those who regularly worked 11 hours or more a day had a 67 percent greater risk for heart disease than those who clocked only eight hours.

Doctors suspect stress may be the culprit. If you can't cut back on overtime, try these tips:

- Prepare for stressful events, such as presentations, as well as you can.
- Exercise regularly. It eases tension and releases feel-good brain chemicals.
- Try deep breathing or meditation.

Reading to Babies and Toddlers Makes a Big Impact

Researchers of a study in the journal *Child Development* found the more regularly parents provided a positive learning environment at home, the better their child's language and literacy skills became. These skills are the building blocks for success in later school years.

The study showed the earlier you start good habits, the better the child will fare in school. Children who were exposed to a positive learning environment at 15 months fared better than those whose parents played catch-up in young childhood.

Begin by reading to your baby every day. Stock up on a variety of books at home.