

HOPE Health Letter

“Life Is a Journey. Have Some Fun.”

Immunity Support on Your Plate

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

If you’ve read a headline that mentions *immune boosting*, don’t believe the hype. The idea of boosting the immune system with supplements or specific ingredients is misleading and scientifically inaccurate.

There are many things we can do to keep our immune system running smoothly, such as getting enough sleep, being physically active, minimizing stress and eating a balanced diet. But boosting immunity implies heightened action, which should be avoided — an overactive immune system is linked with autoimmune diseases, such as lupus or multiple sclerosis, and is equally harmful to your health as an underactive immune system. Immune boosting is a marketing term, not a medical term.

Let’s focus on supporting your immune system instead. Certain nutrients, including zinc, selenium, iron, protein and omega-3 fats, as well as vitamins C, D and E, are critical for the growth and function of immune cells. Build meals with a variety of foods to get the nutrients your body needs.



- 1. Get extra vegetables and fruit.** They should fill half of your plate at every meal. Fresh, frozen and canned are all great choices.
- 2. Add protein from fish, chicken, dairy, tofu or beans.** The building blocks of protein (amino acids) are essential for T-cell function, which protects the body against bacteria and viruses.
- 3. Choose nuts and seeds.** Include Brazil nuts for selenium; walnuts and flax for omega-3 fats; pumpkin seeds for zinc; and almonds or sunflower seeds for vitamin E.
- 4. Enjoy fermented foods.** Yogurt, kefir and fermented vegetables — such as sauerkraut or kimchi — contain probiotics, which may be linked to a strong immune system.
- 5. Look for vitamin D.** It’s found in fish, milk, fortified plant-based beverages and eggs. If you don’t eat any of these foods or get much sun, consider asking your health care provider to check your blood levels. You may need a vitamin D supplement.

It’s also important to minimize highly processed foods, such as soft drinks, candy, fast food and salty snacks. These foods lack nutrients and can impair the production of immune cells and antibodies.

The Smart Moves Toolkit, including this issue’s printable download, [Medications and Food](#), is at personalbest.com/extras/21V3tools.

Volume 41 • Number 3 • March 2021

BESTbits



■ **Colon cancer screening can be a lifesaver.** With early detection and treatment, the death rate for this disease has declined, but it is still a common form of cancer. The American Cancer Society recommends people at average risk start screening at age 45. Screening for colon cancer can easily be done using stool tests that look for blood or DNA changes. Or a health care provider can look inside the colon and rectum using colonoscopy, sigmoidoscopy or CT colonography to detect any polyps or cancer. Your provider will recommend which test is best based on your risk factors. During **Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month**, learn more at colorectalcaner.org.



■ **March 1 is Baby Sleep Day**, sponsored by the Pediatric Sleep Council, which offers support for families wanting to develop healthy sleep habits for their babies. When babies sleep well, their parents feel rested, too, and enjoy life more. Learn more about sleep in young children at babysleep.com.



■ **Multiple Sclerosis (MS) Awareness Week is March 14 to 21.** This complicated autoimmune disease affects the central nervous system. As well as pain, disability, anxiety and depression, MS can cause many physical disorders affecting mobility, walking, balance, speech, swallowing and bladder and bowel function. Symptom remissions and flare-ups can occur. Learn what’s new in MS research at mymsaa.org.

“The more colorful the food, the better. I try to add color to my diet, which means vegetables and fruits.”

— Misty May-Treanor



TIP of the MONTH

Bean Basics

New to eating chickpeas, beans and lentils? Start by buying canned cooked low-salt options, and drain well. Add some to salad, pasta or soup. Canned options are convenient since dried beans can take several hours to cook from scratch. Lentils cook faster than beans (probably because they are smaller). Red lentils cook in about 20 minutes, while green or brown lentils need to simmer for about 30 minutes. Use them in delicious soups or curry dishes.



eating smart

March is National Nutrition Month. 

Plant-Based: What Does It Mean?

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

Plant-based eating is a lifestyle where you choose to eat mostly whole foods that come from plants. The plan involves replacing highly processed foods with lots of vegetables, fruit, grains, beans, soy, lentils, nuts and seeds. Plant-based diets are good for human health and also for our planet.

Unfortunately, the popularity of the term *plant-based* has led some food companies to misuse the term *made from plants* in their advertising campaigns. This term has taken on an undeserved health halo and is being used to sell cookies, soda, chips and candy made with ingredients that were once plants, such as white flour, sugar and processed oils.

Those are not whole, nutritious foods, and this marketing ploy makes plant-based eating confusing. For example, an orange is a whole plant-based food; an orange-flavored soft drink is highly processed. Both are made from plants (sugar was once a plant) but not equally nutritious.

The bottom line? The term *plant-based* does not necessarily mean *healthy*, so buyer beware. Yes, cola, potato chips and veggie dogs may contain ingredients that came from plants, but they have been highly processed and are no longer as nutritious as the whole foods used to make them. To truly reap the benefits of a plant-based diet, choose more whole plant-based foods, including: roasted chickpeas, tofu, edamame, whole-grain noodles, canned beans, mixed nuts, nut butter, quinoa, oats and all vegetables and fruits. And, choose fewer of these processed plant-based foods: fake meat, chips, ice cream, cookies, cake, fruit-flavored candy, juice, white bread, white rice and soft drinks.



Vegetable Bean Soup with Quinoa

EASY recipe

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| 1 tbsp olive oil | 1 can (15 oz.) no-salt added mixed beans, drained |
| 1 onion, chopped | 3 cups chopped kale |
| 3 garlic cloves, chopped | ½ cup quinoa |
| 2 carrots, diced | 8 cups water |
| 2 stalks celery, diced | 1 tsp salt, or more to taste |
| 1 zucchini, diced | 1 cup fresh chopped basil |
| 1 can (28 oz.) crushed tomatoes | ¼ cup freshly shredded Parmesan cheese |

Add oil to a large pot set over medium heat. **Add** onion, garlic, carrot and celery, and stir to combine. **Cook** about 5 to 7 minutes. **Add** zucchini, tomatoes, beans, kale, quinoa, water and salt. **Stir** together and let cook about 15 minutes, until quinoa and vegetables are tender. **Season** with salt to taste. **Add** to bowls, and top with basil and parmesan cheese. **Serve** hot.

Makes 6 servings. Per serving: 208 calories | 11g protein | 5g total fat | 1g saturated fat | 3g mono fat | 1g poly fat | 35g carbohydrate | 6g sugar | 9g fiber | 478mg sodium

Always remember that you are absolutely unique. Just like everyone else.

— Margaret Mead



National Drug and Alcohol Facts Week is March 22 to 28.

Communicating with teens about drugs and alcohol can be difficult. Young people often have inaccurate information and may not understand the harm drugs and alcohol can do to their brains and lives. They can feel invincible, too. Parents and caregivers can find help at teens.drugabuse.gov.

There's also a section specifically for teens with the latest information on drug use and health.

work&life

Avoid Doom Scrolling

Repeatedly checking out bad news can be unhealthy.

Of course, the internet and social media are popular ways to stay informed about things that can potentially impact your safety or that of your region: a pandemic, hurricanes or earthquakes.

But **doom scrolling** (also known as **doom surfing**) — searching for and reading article after article filled with bad news — isn't healthy.



Constantly scrolling through bad news can trigger sadness, anxiety or anger and contribute to headaches and lost sleep. What's more, finding differing information about medical crises or worrisome topics can be confusing and result in even more doom scrolling.

"Information overload is incredibly anxiety-provoking — which is true even when the information is accurate," says Yale New Haven infectious diseases specialist Jaimie Meyer, MD.

Try these tips to avoid, or reduce, doom scrolling:

- Go on a doom scrolling diet; check the news just once or twice daily.
- Avoid surfing for varying opinions on medical news. Dr. Meyer advises sticking to reputable sources, such as the CDC and the National Institutes of Health.
- Take a 24-hour respite from technology from **sundown to sundown March 5 to 6** for the **National Day of Unplugging**. It's a good way to see how much calmer you can feel when you take a vacation from doom scrolling.



Recipe for Laughter

The ability to laugh easily and often is seriously good medicine. Laughter appears to strengthen immunity and cardiovascular health, improve attitude and memory, and ease pain and distressing emotions.

What's the connection? Laughter contracts and relaxes the muscles in your shoulders, abdomen and diaphragm, helping relieve physical and mental tension. Your breathing increases the oxygen flow to your lungs, which in turn can increase blood flow and decrease blood pressure and heart rate.

Studies suggest that laughter may reduce the damaging effects of stress by lowering the stress hormones cortisol and adrenaline. Laughing also triggers the release of endorphins, your body's feel-good chemicals.

Where to find more humor?

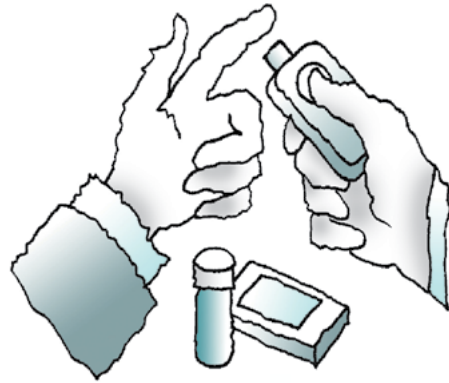
- Build friendships with people who make you see the silly side of life.
- Enjoy your favorite comics or watch a funny movie.
- Hang funny posters in your office or kitchen.
- Choose a computer screensaver that makes you chuckle.
- Spend time with pets who delight you and make you smile.
- Laugh at yourself often to improve your mood and outlook.
- Remember to laugh and smile every day.

Hopefully, you'll find that the more laughter you have in your life, the healthier your life.



Life is the art of drawing
without an eraser.

— John W. Gardner



American Diabetes Alert Day, on March 23, is a wake-up call. More than 34 million Americans have diabetes: 90% to 95% have type 2 and about 5% have type 1. Another eight million aged 18 and older have **prediabetes** (elevated blood sugar not yet high enough for a type 2 diagnosis). More than seven million Americans don't know they have diabetes. The good news? Type 2 diabetes can be prevented, controlled if you already have it, and sometimes reversed with diet, weight control and exercise. Learn more at diabetes.org.

body&mind

Q: What causes nightmares?

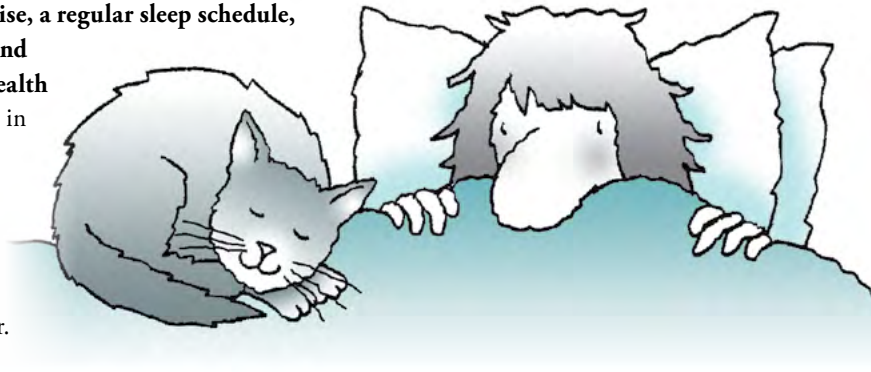
A: **Nightmares are vivid, disturbing dreams** that may awaken you, trigger fear and make it hard to fall back to sleep. The dreams typically involve plots that relate to safety or survival threats. Other factors commonly associated with nightmares include:

- Everyday life stressors or major setbacks, such as death of a loved one, loss of income, illness or traumatic events (e.g., physical injury or emotional shock).
- An irregular sleep schedule, interrupted sleep or decreased sleep time.
- Some medications, alcohol and recreational drugs.
- Sleep disorders, medical conditions and depression or other mental disorders.
- Frightening books and movies before bed.

Stress reduction, exercise, a regular sleep schedule, avoidance of triggers and resolution of mental health issues can all be helpful in reducing nightmares.

If nightmares persist and interfere with your daytime functioning, consult your health care provider.

— Eric Endlich, PhD



Take Care of Your Kidneys!



March is National Kidney Month and time to give your kidneys a health check. Your kidneys are small organs, but they perform many important functions: removing wastes and excess fluids, helping regulate blood pressure, and keeping certain nutrients, including potassium and calcium, balanced in the body.

Thirty million Americans have kidney disease, but many don't know it because symptoms usually aren't evident until the disease has progressed.

What's more, one in three Americans is at high risk for kidney disease, according to the National Kidney Foundation. Having other common health conditions, including type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure, increases the risk and so does a family history of kidney failure and being age 60 or older.

Kidney health tips:

- Be careful with over-the-counter nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as ibuprofen and naproxen. If taken for a long time, NSAIDs can cause kidney damage, the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases warns.
- If you have diabetes or hypertension (which can damage kidneys), work with your health care provider to keep those conditions controlled well.
- Eat a healthy diet, exercise regularly and see your provider for scheduled check-ups, including a check of kidney health.
- If you have any symptoms of kidney problems (including difficulty urinating, swelling in your face, legs or abdomen; bloody or foamy urine; fatigue or unusual thirst), contact your provider.



I will not follow where the path may lead, but I will go where there is no path, and I will leave a trail.

— Muriel Strode



On Sunday, March 14, we'll spring forward as Daylight Saving Time begins. As you move your clocks an hour ahead, here are some ways to adjust to the new time: Get regular exercise to help improve sleep quality; choose plenty of whole, unprocessed foods; and several days before the time change, head for bed 15 minutes earlier to acclimate your body clock and reduce fatigue. Eat, exercise and sleep at consistent times. A dose of bright light in the morning can help you adjust to the time change, too.

body&mind

Q: Drug interactions?

A: Drug interactions happen when a drug alters how your body processes medication. If you take two or more drugs, you may be at risk for unintended side effects, such as not absorbing a drug, metabolizing a medication too quickly or too slowly or even an overdose.

Drug interactions are common. For example, the antibiotic metronidazole may interact with the blood thinner warfarin to increase the risk of bleeding. Or the anti-seizure drug phenytoin can interact with oral contraceptive pills to reduce their effectiveness.

Take steps to avoid interactions: Keep your health care provider informed about all your prescription and over-the-counter medications and any dietary supplements. Maintain your own medication list and fill all your prescriptions at the same pharmacy. If you have medication questions, be sure to ask your provider or pharmacist.

— Elizabeth Smoots, MD



Meningitis: What You Need to Know

Meningitis occurs when the membranes covering the brain and spinal cord are inflamed. The disease usually results from a viral infection, while bacterial infections typically cause the most serious cases of meningitis. (Rarely, parasites or fungal infections spark meningitis.)

Viral meningitis is often mild and may improve without treatment. However, bacterial meningitis can cause permanent disabilities — including hearing loss, learning problems and brain damage — and may be deadly.

Seek medical care immediately if you or a child has any symptoms of meningitis, which include:

- A severe headache which may be accompanied by nausea and vomiting.
- A stiff neck.
- Loss of appetite and thirst.
- Confusion.
- Seizures.
- Extreme sleepiness.
- A bulge on the fontanel (soft spot) on a newborn's head.
- Light sensitivity.

Meningitis spreads quickly in groups through the respiratory tract. So, students living in dorms and kids in childcare facilities are at increased risk for the disease. Pregnancy and a compromised immune system also increase the odds of meningitis.

GOOD NEWS: Vaccines to protect against multiple strains of bacterial meningitis are highly effective. The CDC recommends meningitis vaccinations, including booster shots. It's important to make sure your children from babyhood through college age are current on these vaccines. CDC recommends meningococcal vaccinations, including booster doses, for some adults, too. Ask your health care provider what's appropriate for you.



By Jamie Lynn Byram, PhD, AFC

Digital money represents any form of payment that is purely electronic. With the disruption of our economy due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the idea of digitizing the dollar has entered the spotlight again.

According to the Federal Reserve, the idea of a digital dollar has been given serious consideration. At the beginning of the pandemic, spending slowed because consumers had less money. However, spending increased almost immediately after stimulus checks were received. This data supports the idea that a digital dollar is critical during a financial crisis. Digital dollars would allow easier access during the most challenging times.

A digital dollar would be backed by the U.S. government. If you use your debit card, you are using a form of digital money that is backed by your bank. A true U.S. digital dollar would be backed by the U.S. government (instead of a specific bank) and known as central bank digital currencies (CBDCs).

However, there are risks. Strengthening safeguards surrounding the platform will be a must. Safety controls to protect consumers from hackers are vital for consumers to willingly adopt the new form of payment. At this time, the outcome of the digital dollar as a national offering is still unknown.

Supplement Safeguards

Dietary supplements are regulated differently from conventional foods and drug products. Consumers should always check with their health care providers before taking dietary supplements. They can affect medications and sometimes cause potentially harmful side effects. Before you take any supplement or herbal remedy, follow these safeguards:



- **Check** with your provider or pharmacist if you are taking any medication and want to add supplements. For example, the herbal supplement St. John's wort makes many medications less effective. Some dietary supplements may harm you if you are taking certain prescription or over-the-counter medications or if you have a particular medical condition or risk factor.
- **Know** that what is listed on the supplement's label may not match what's in the product. For example, the FDA has found prescription-only drugs, including anticoagulants and anticonvulsants, in some products sold as dietary supplements. Search for **Tainted Supplement** at [fda.gov](https://www.fda.gov).
- **Remember** that the word **natural** doesn't mean safe. Some "natural" ingredients can cause harmful side effects.
- **Know** that the words **standardized**, **verified** or **certified** on the supplement label don't guarantee quality or consistency.
- **Follow** the directions on the label. If you experience side effects, stop taking the supplements and contact your provider.
- **Consider** that many supplements have not been tested for safety in pregnant women, nursing women or children.

Contact your health care provider well in advance of having surgery about any supplements you are taking. There are certain dietary supplements that may increase the risk of bleeding or affect your response to anesthesia.

SAFETY CORNER

Protect Your Brain

To help prevent traumatic brain injury in adults and children always:

- Use a seatbelt and use appropriate child safety seats while in vehicles.
- Wear a helmet when riding an open, unrestrained vehicle, such as a bicycle, motorcycle or snowmobile.
- Use a helmet when participating in contact sports, skiing, skating, skateboarding or horseback riding.
- Make living areas safer by installing window guards to prevent young children from falling out and using safety gates at the top and bottom of stairs.
- Check playground surfaces before allowing your children to play — make sure there is a soft material under play areas — such as mulch, pea gravel or sand.
- Keep walkways and stairs obstacle-free and well-lit.



Sleep on This

By Diane McReynolds, Executive Editor Emeritus

Are you getting enough shuteye? Most adults need an average of seven to nine hours of sleep daily. It's vital to our health and overall quality of life. Yet a majority of adults and children in the U.S. too often steal time from sleep to meet everyday demands and pursuits, according to a National Sleep Foundation (NSF) survey.

In addition to fatigue, sleep shortage can cause depression and reduced memory and productivity. Ongoing sleep deprivation can disrupt the production of hormones that regulate key bodily functions and lead to long-term poor health effects, including:

- reduced immunity and accelerated aging.
- reduced mental capacity.
- reduced fat metabolism.

And over time, continued sleep deprivation raises the risk for a number of chronic health problems, including obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease.

So, if you routinely feel tired and irritable or struggle to concentrate, you may need more or better sleep. Use the following NSF checklist to assess conditions that *often* disrupt your sleep:

- I have trouble falling asleep.
- I have too much on my mind to fall asleep or go back to sleep.
- I take more than 30 minutes to fall asleep.
- I can't go back to sleep when I wake during my normal bedtime.
- I feel tired upon waking, despite apparent normal sleep.

Checking two or more of these situations regularly indicates a sleep pattern that may be interfering with your health, work and lifestyle.



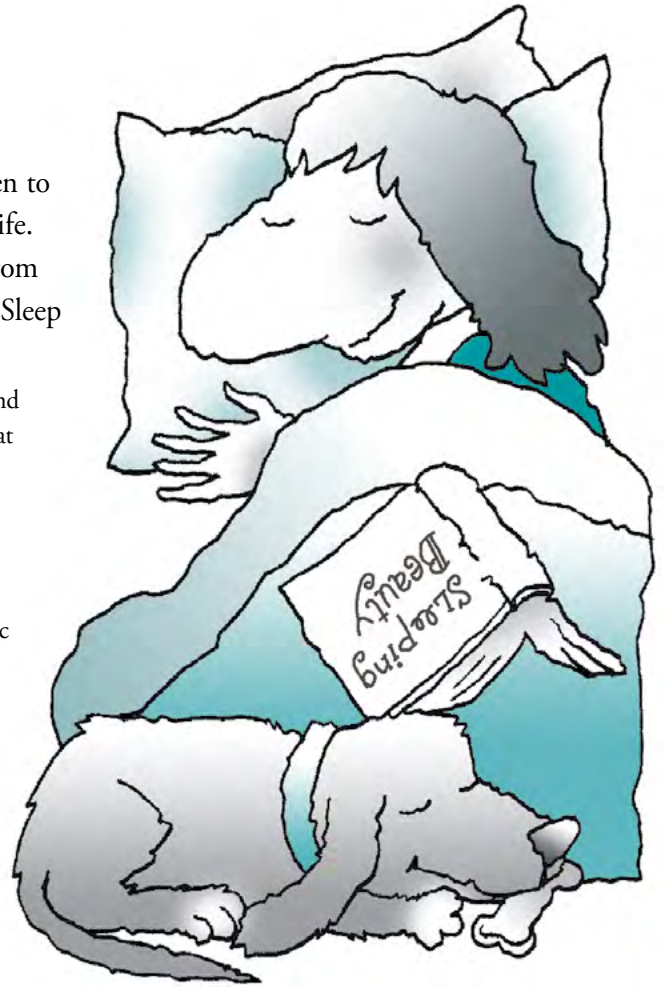
National Sleep Awareness Week is March 14 to 20. Wake up to these sleep-friendly measures that can help you feel rested and renewed every day:

- ✓ Stick to a routine sleep schedule.
- ✓ Cut back on caffeine and skip the alcohol.
- ✓ Exercise daily but not close to bedtime.
- ✓ Quiet your mind and leave worries for wake time.
- ✓ Practice mind/body relaxation or other stress-relieving techniques.
- ✓ Keep a cool sleep environment.
- ✓ Avoid extra screen time before bed.

Still can't sleep? Speak with your health care provider to explore more strategies for ensuring proper, healthy sleep.

Making sleep a priority can help you achieve your other wellness goals, such as exercising regularly, eating properly and managing stress. And when your body and mind are rested, you'll be able to meet daily demands in a positive light.

Shiftwork sleep disorder is a growing problem. With the increase of night jobs and 24-hour operations, America's workforce is more sleep deprived than ever. Working nights or irregular shifts makes staying awake and alert challenging as the body's internal circadian rhythm runs counter to conventional sleeping, working and living schedules. Proper napping during breaks or off-hours can be helpful.



Insufficient sleep can become

hazardous. A sleep shortfall can lead to daytime drowsiness and **microsleeps** — brief bouts of sleep that occur during wake time, typically lasting a few seconds. If you've ever briefly nodded off while sitting, you've experienced a microsleep. They usually last just a few seconds, but 10 or 15 seconds can pose a grave danger if they occur while you're driving. Drowsy driving is responsible for 1,550 fatalities and 40,000 nonfatal injuries in the U.S. each year.

March Fill-in-the-Blank Puzzle

Find out how well you know the topics covered in this issue of the newsletter.

- 1 One in three Americans is at higher risk for _____ disease.
- 2 The American Cancer Society recommends people at average risk for _____ start screening at age 45.
- 3 Not all foods made from _____ are nutritious.
- 4 Constantly searching for and reading bad news on the internet and social media is called _____.
- 5 Studies suggest that _____ may reduce the damaging effects of stress by lowering the stress hormones cortisol and adrenaline.
- 6 More than seven million Americans don't know they have _____.
- 7 If you take _____ or more drugs, you may be at risk for unintended side effects.
- 8 _____ occurs when the membranes covering the brain and spinal cord are inflamed.



You'll find the answers at personalbest.com/extras/Mar2021puzzle.pdf.

The **Smart Moves Toolkit**, including this issue's printable download, **Medications and Food**, is at personalbest.com/extras/21V3tools.

Dr. Zorba's corner Recurrent Heart Attacks

News on the heart attack front: From 2008 to 2017 the number of deaths from repeat heart attacks has dropped significantly, according to a University of Alabama and Amgen, Inc. study. However, the rates of recurrent heart attacks, hospitalization for heart failure, and death are still high among heart attack survivors. Researchers used data from more than 770,000 women and more than 700,000 men who were hospitalized for a heart attack. Besides better medicines to treat heart disease, quitting smoking, eating better and exercising more can improve your chance of surviving another heart attack. What we often overlook are the social determinations of health — having people around you who care, having a doctor, nurse practitioner or physician's assistant whom you relate to, and having a job that you like. All of these factors, taken together, are good for your heart.

— Zorba Paster, MD

Stay in Touch. Keep those questions and suggestions coming!

Phone: 800-871-9525 • Fax: 205-437-3084 • Email: PBeditor@ebix.com
Website: hopehealth.com

Executive Editor: Susan Cottman

Advisers: Patricia C. Buchsel, RN, MSN, FAAN; Jamie Lynn Byram, PhD, AFC, MBA, MS; Eric Endlich, PhD; Mary P. Hollins, MS, JD, CSHM; Kenneth Holtyn, MS; Reed Humphrey, PhD; Gary B. Kushner, SPHR, CBP; Diane McReynolds, Executive Editor Emeritus; Zorba Paster, MD; Charles Stuart Platkin, PhD; Cara Rosenbloom, RD; Elizabeth Smoots, MD, FAAFP; Margaret Spencer, MD

Editor: Aimie Miller

The content herein is in no way intended to serve as a substitute for professional advice. Sources available on request. © 2021 Ebix Inc. All rights reserved. Unauthorized reproduction in any form of any part of this publication is a violation of federal copyright law and is strictly prohibited. Hope Health® is a registered trademark of Ebix, LLC.

Two Perimeter Park South, Suite 160 East, Birmingham, AL 35243
Phone: 800-871-9525 • Fax: 205-437-3084.