



Have You Got Your Back?

Or has your back got you with ongoing pain? Back pain is a very common reason people seek health care, miss work and miss out on everyday activities.

Up to 80% of Americans will experience low back pain at least once. It can range from a dull, constant soreness to a sharp, shooting pain. It often starts by straining the back muscles, such as lifting something heavy. Or it can develop over time as we age, leading to degeneration of the spine from normal wear and tear.

Most low back pain can be treated without surgery, and 90% of low back pain cases get better in six weeks. However, if it persists for more than four to six weeks, talk to your health care provider.

Several factors can increase your risk for developing back pain:

Age: The back loses strength and flexibility as the discs lose their ability to cushion the vertebrae.

Lack of fitness: Back pain is less common among physically fit people. Strong back and abdominal muscles support the spine. Low-impact aerobic exercise helps build back strength.

Weight: Being overweight stresses the spine, causing low back pain.

Smoking: It restricts blood flow and oxygen to the spinal discs, contributing to their degeneration.

Sitting: Being confined in a chair all day can cause pain, especially from poor posture or lack of proper back support.

Mental health: Ongoing stress often causes muscle tension and pain throughout the back.

Heavy lifting: Don't lift, push or pull something that's too heavy.



Proactive approach: Protect your back through simple routine exercise. Strengthening the core and abdominal muscles that support your back can significantly reduce chronic pain. Talk to your health care provider about back care. Reduce backache now for a more comfortable life ahead.

Liquid Meal Replacements: Pros and Cons

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD



It's a busy day and you don't have time to stop to eat. Is a meal replacement shake the right answer?

Meal replacements are liquid drinks or snack bars that are formulated to copy the nutrients found in a meal. They have about 200 to 400 calories and contain protein, fat, carbohydrates, vitamins and minerals, just like a regular meal. But they often lack fiber and antioxidants found in whole foods and they may not have enough calories.

Review the pros and cons for each:

Some people have a replacement drink when they are on the go.

Pro: It's better than skipping a meal, it's convenient and it's more nutritious than fast food.

Con: It's highly processed, so it's not as nutritious as whole foods.

Meal replacements can be used to replace meals to cut calories and lose weight.

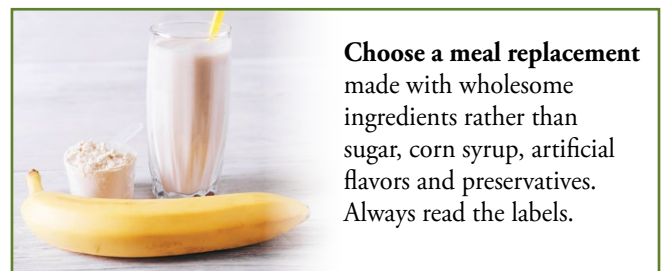
Pro: It can help with weight loss in the short term.

Con: It's not a sustainable way to eat and doesn't meet the requirements of a long-term healthy eating plan, so you'll likely regain weight when you stop using the meal replacements. Some people complain of taste fatigue or boredom from frequent use.

Health care professionals may recommend using these drinks short term during illness, after surgery, dental work or during chemotherapy.

Pro: It's helpful for low appetite or when chewing is difficult.

Con: Short-term use has few disadvantages.



Choose a meal replacement made with wholesome ingredients rather than sugar, corn syrup, artificial flavors and preservatives. Always read the labels.

5 Exercise Missteps

By Diane McReynolds, Executive Editor Emeritus

Best advice for new and practiced exercisers:

Ensure that your physical activity progresses effectively and safely. Here are key oversights to watch for:

1. Skipping your warm-up. Always prepare your muscles, heart and lungs for physical activity to ensure better flexibility and range of motion and to lower your risk of injury. Start your routine slowly, working the major muscles for five to ten minutes; then pick up the pace.

After you exercise, cool down. Stretch to relax muscles throughout your body for five to ten minutes. Choose a series of slow movements to gradually slow your breathing and heart rate, which can help prevent cramps and dizziness.

2. Doing the same exercise routine for several months. This increases your body's efficiency, so you use less energy and burn fewer calories. Mix up your activities to target cardio fitness, strength training and flexibility.

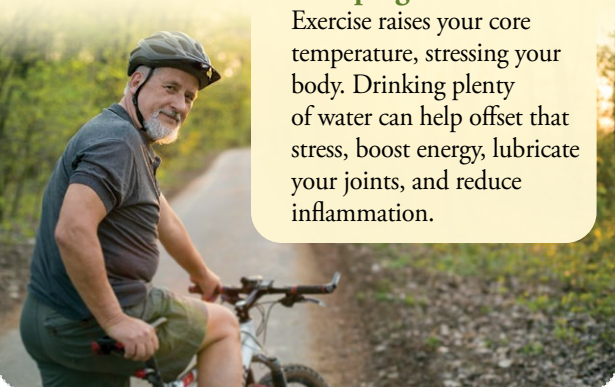
Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity cardio exercise (to work your heart and lungs), and strength train your muscles at least twice a week. Include stretches for improving flexibility.

3. Exercising beyond your fitness level. This can lead to injuries. If you have arthritis, excess weight or back trouble, for example, get your health care provider's OK first.

4. Failing to support your back. Learn proper form, whether you're doing tai chi or lifting weights; check with your instructor or trainer. When using exercise machines, avoid slumping and keep your back erect.

5. Skipping on fluids.

Exercise raises your core temperature, stressing your body. Drinking plenty of water can help offset that stress, boost energy, lubricate your joints, and reduce inflammation.



Give January a Boost

By Eric Endlich, PhD

Some people feel a bit blue when the holidays are over and the new year starts. Other triggers for feeling sad include:

- Feeling it's time to stop celebrating and get back to business.
- Friends and family who were visiting are gone.
- The holidays didn't meet their hopes or expectations.
- Overindulging in holiday food and drink, which may have caused weight gain.
- Enduring winter days, which can be short and cold.
- Bills from holiday spending are coming due.
- New Year's resolutions which may have already gone awry.



Here are some strategies to start feeling better:

- Walk outside, even briefly, and observe nature around you.
- Call or video chat with loved ones.
- Plan a spring garden or summer vacation.
- Try a new recipe or hobby.
- Find ways to help others.
- Eat a well-balanced diet with very few processed foods.
- Take a break from negative news or social media.
- Explore the world by going on virtual vacations via travel shows.
- Instead of focusing on fixing flaws, pick a strength and find new ways to use it.
- Visualize uplifting images: a beautiful summer day or a positive memory.
- Review the things you are grateful for.



If sad feelings worsen or persist, talk to your health care provider.

Q: What is contact tracing?

A: Contact tracing is a public health technique used to prevent the spread of infectious disease. It identifies people who have an infection (called cases) and those with whom they came in contact (called contacts) and working with them to stop disease spread.

Contact tracers:

- Interview cases to help them recall everyone they had close contact with when they were contagious.
- Notify contacts of their potential exposure as rapidly and sensitively as possible, not revealing the case's identity.
- Refer contacts for testing.
- Monitor contacts for signs and symptoms of infection.
- Connect contacts with services they might need during self-quarantine.

Public health contact tracers usually ask cases to isolate themselves until they're not contagious. They also ask contacts to self-quarantine at home, monitor their temperature and watch for the onset of symptoms.

— Elizabeth Smoots, MD

Note: Due to production lead time, this issue may not reflect the current COVID-19 situation in some or all regions of the U.S. For the most up-to-date information visit [coronavirus.gov](https://www.coronavirus.gov).

The **Smart Moves Toolkit**, including this issue's printable download, **5 Ways to De-Stress Now** is at personalbest.com/extras/21V1tools.

