

# Live Well, Work Well

## U.S. Faces Shortage of Mental Health Professionals

Presented by  
**Cross Insurance**



# In the News



Catch up on the latest developments of the most significant health care news from the past three months.



## U.S. Faces Shortage of Mental Health Professionals

The COVID-19 pandemic worsened underlying mental health issues for many Americans. However, mental health care and treatment barriers have existed for some time. One of the most significant barriers is the lack of mental health professionals. Experts predict that within the next year, the United States will be short between 14,280 and 31,109 mental health professionals.

The latest Health Resources and Services Administration data estimates that 122 million Americans (37% of the population) live in areas with mental health professional shortages. It would take an additional 6,398 mental health providers to fill those gaps. Mental health shortages range in severity across the nation but are most common in rural areas.

Although many Americans are dealing with strained health care resources, there are still some ways to receive mental health support. Telehealth is a great place to start receiving virtual mental health care, especially if you live in a rural area. Additional support resources include:

- Primary care doctors who can suggest further mental health resources
- Work-based wellness and employee assistance programs
- The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) National Helpline, which is free, confidential and available 24/7 by calling 800-662-HELP (800-662-4357)
- SAMHSA's 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, a three-digit dialing code offering free, confidential and 24/7 call, text and chat options with trained crisis counselors

Remember to check in with yourself and reach out for help if needed.



## CDC Says Flu Vaccine Worked Well This Season

Early estimates from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) suggest that the current influenza (flu) vaccine performed well during the most recent winter flu season. CDC officials generally want to see vaccines being 40% to 60% effective in preventing adults from getting sick enough from the flu that they have to go to a clinic or hospital for treatment. This year's vaccine met that mark and was more than 40% effective. Consider the following CDC findings:

- The vaccine was 44% effective in preventing flu-related visits to urgent care clinics and hospital emergency rooms among all adults, and 39% effective among adults age 65 and older.
- The vaccine was 43% effective against flu-related hospitalizations among all adults, and 35% effective among older adults.
- The vaccine was 68% effective in preventing illnesses severe enough in children to require hospitalization, and 42% effective in preventing pediatric visits to the emergency department.

Health experts initially anticipated a severe flu season after infections took off quickly in November. In addition, COVID-19 and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV)

were also rampantly circulating and sending Americans to the hospital during this time. However, high flu activity seemed to decline by the end of November.

It's unclear why the flu season tipped so early, but flu seasons have been unusually mild and unpredictable since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although it seems that the flu season has concluded, CDC officials did caution that it might not officially be over, as increased flu activity has occurred during spring in the past.





## Record Number of Americans Delayed Medical Care in 2022 Due to Inflation

A record number of Americans (38%) postponed medical care [last year](#). This percentage is the highest since Gallup began tracking Americans' medical care decisions annually in 2001.

The survey, conducted from Nov. 9 to Dec. 2, 2022, asked respondents about medical treatments they've within the past 12 months. Given the poll's timing, most Americans said inflation is creating hardships for them, impacting their decisions to receive medical care. Moreover, it remains to be seen how quickly these inflation issues with subside after more than a year of unusually rapid increases. A full deceleration may be a long process, pushing Americans to continue making health care decisions based on cost.

Americans were more than twice as likely to report the delayed treatment in their family was for a serious condition rather than a nonserious ailment. In 2022, 27% of respondents said the treatment they delayed was for a "somewhat" or "very" serious condition, while 11% said such delays were for "not very" or "not at all" serious ailments.

### What Can You Do?

Not surprisingly, many Americans are deciding to hold off on medical care for financial reasons, and this behavior is expected to continue until inflation issues decelerate. Fortunately, employee benefits can help

lessen these financial strains. To stretch your health care dollars, consider the following tips:

- Use in-network providers when receiving medical care.
- Consider your health plan's deductible and opt for additional treatments once the deductible has been hit to save costs.
- Seek preventive care, including screenings and immunizations.
- Ask providers about treatments, alternative options and related costs to boost your health literacy.

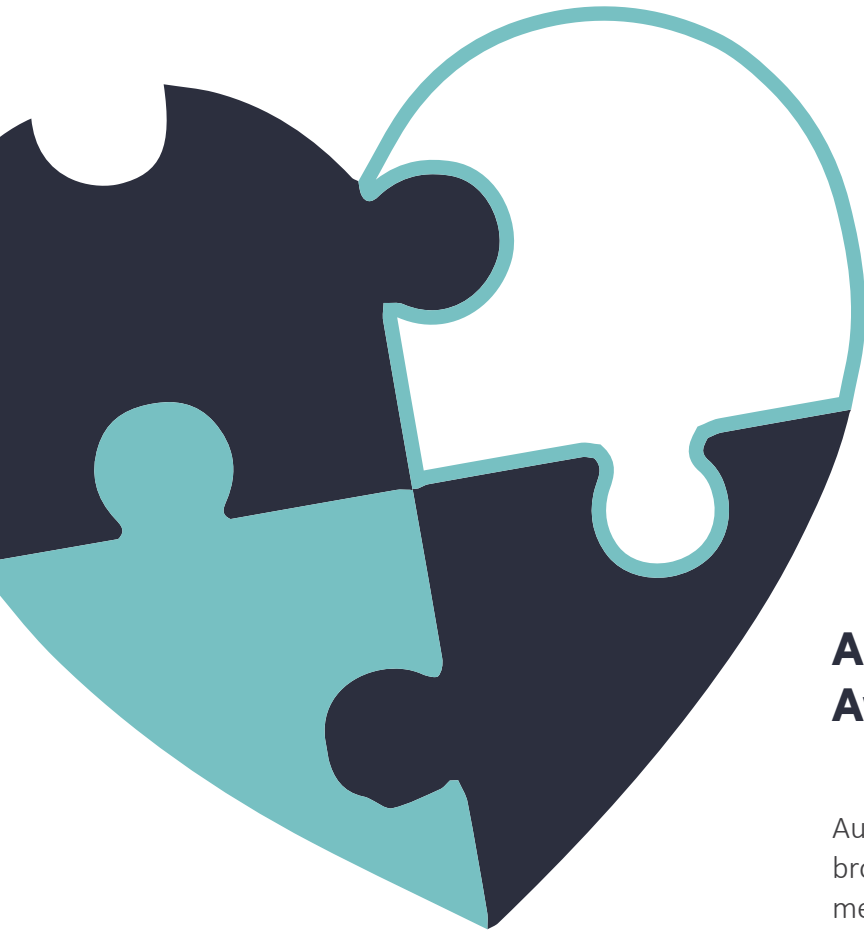
Talk to your employer if you have any questions about your health care benefits and associated costs.



# NHO



Learn more about the three upcoming national health observances (NHOs) in this section.



## April: National Autism Awareness Month

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD)—or autism—is a broad term used to describe a group of neurodevelopmental conditions typically characterized by differences in communication and social interaction.

April is National Autism Awareness Month, as ASD is the fastest-growing developmental disorder in the United States. According to the CDC, 1 in 44 children have this condition. Autism is usually diagnosed in early childhood, and it's a lifelong condition. Yet, early intervention can help children with ASD optimize their ability to learn, engage with others and develop independence.

Check out [autismspeaks.org](https://autismspeaks.org) to learn more about autism and the early signs of the condition.

## May: Mental Health Awareness Month

Mental illnesses are some of the most common health conditions in the United States. In fact, The CDC estimates that more than 50% of the population will be diagnosed with a mental illness at some point. Your mental health can change over time due to various factors.

May is Mental Health Awareness Month, so check in on yourself and others. Along with increased transparency and empathy around mental health, new resources, such as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (Lifeline), are also available. Americans can dial 988 for a direct connection to care for anyone experiencing mental health-related distress, including thoughts of suicide, mental health or substance use crises, or other emotional struggles. You can also call the Lifeline if you're worried about a loved one who may need emergency support.

To learn more about mental health conditions and resources, visit [mhnational.org](https://mhnational.org).



## June: Alzheimer's and Brain Awareness Month

Your brain is a vital organ; it manages your ability to communicate, make decisions and live a full, independent life. Alzheimer's disease is a type of dementia that affects memory, thinking and behavior. Symptoms may eventually grow severe enough to interfere with daily tasks.

June is Alzheimer's and Brain Awareness Month. It's important to understand that Alzheimer's is a brain disease—it's not a normal part of aging. There is currently no cure for Alzheimer's. Still, you can support brain health through lifestyle habits, such as exercising regularly, sleeping enough, eating a healthy diet and challenging your mind through continued learning.

Visit [alz.org](https://alz.org) to learn more about Alzheimer's and other dementias.

### Looking Ahead...

**July**

UV Safety  
Awareness Month

**August**

National Immunization  
Awareness Month

**September**

National Food Safety Edu-  
cation Month





# Health and Wellness



Remain on top of the latest trends in health and wellness with the three articles in this section.



## Understanding the Mediterranean Diet

The Mediterranean diet is a meal plan that emulates how people in the Mediterranean region have traditionally eaten, focusing on consuming whole grains and heart-healthy fats. This diet may help support brain function, promote heart health and regulate blood sugar levels.

Although there are no concrete rules for following the Mediterranean diet, there are some guidelines for incorporating the principles of this meal plan into your daily routine. The following foods are encouraged in the Mediterranean diet:

- **Fruits**—This includes apples, bananas, dates, figs, grapes, melons, oranges, peaches, pears and strawberries.
- **Vegetables**—This includes broccoli, Brussels sprouts, carrots, cauliflower, cucumbers, kale, spinach, onions, potatoes, spinach, sweet potatoes, tomatoes and turnips.
- **Nuts and seeds**—This includes almonds, almond butter, cashews, hazelnuts, macadamia nuts, pumpkin seeds, peanut butter, sunflower seeds and walnuts.
- **Legumes**—This includes beans, chickpeas, lentils, peanuts and peas.
- **Whole grains**—This includes barley, buckwheat, brown rice, corn, oats and whole-wheat bread and pasta.
- **Fish and seafood**—This includes clams, crab, mussels, oysters, salmon, sardines, shrimp, trout and tuna.
- **Herbs and spices**—This includes basil, cinnamon, garlic, mint, nutmeg, rosemary and sage.
- **Healthy fats**—This includes avocados, avocado oil, extra virgin olive oil and olives.

The meal plan also encourages poultry (e.g., chicken, duck and turkey), eggs, cheese and yogurt in moderation. Sweets, red meat and other highly processed foods should be limited.

A nonrestrictive healthy eating regimen such as the Mediterranean diet may be easier to follow and stay committed to. After all, you can start building Mediterranean-inspired meals with foods you already love or incorporate more fruits and vegetables into your meals and snacks. If you have any questions about your diet, talk to your doctor.

## Adding Walking to Your Daily Routine

Remote and office jobs typically require you to sit most of the day, which can take a toll on your physical and mental health.

Fortunately, walking is a feasible way to incorporate exercise into your routine and can provide several benefits, including higher energy levels, decreased stress and better sleep. In fact, just 30 minutes of physical activity each day can counteract a full day of sitting, according to an American Journal of Epidemiology study.

Walking doesn't require much additional time in your day and can be easily implemented into a routine. Consider the following tips for including more walking into your daily schedule:

- **Make small goals.** Create small goals, such as taking a 10-minute walk at lunch each day. By starting small, you are more likely to be successful in maintaining a new walking habit.
- **Diversify your routine.** Change your walking routes to keep yourself from becoming bored. You may also consider walking at different speeds throughout your route to keep things interesting.
- **Walk with friends.** Invite friends to join you on your walks. This not only encourages you to keep the habit because you know others are counting on you to show up, but it also keeps the walks from becoming monotonous.
- **Set reminders.** Decide when you want to walk during the day and set reminders to do so. It's easy to forget to take a break when you get into your work, so setting reminders can ensure this doesn't happen.
- **Get a walking pad.** A walking pad—or folding floor treadmill—is a small pad that fits under most standing desks. If you can't find time to take an outdoor walk during the workday, consider getting a walking pad. This allows you to walk at a standing desk anytime during the day.
- **Listen to your body.** Don't be afraid to take time off or modify your routine. It's important to pay attention to your body's signals and take care of yourself so that your new regimen is one you can maintain.

To learn more about creating an active routine, talk to your primary care provider and discuss what works best for you.





# Recipes

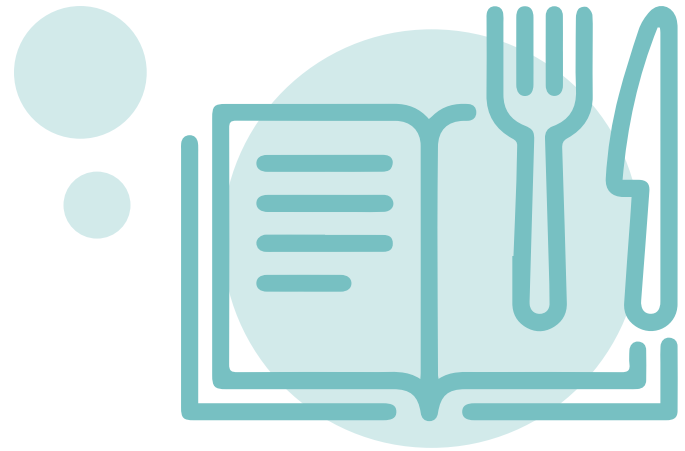


Try out these two healthy recipes from the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) MyPlate Kitchen website.



# Chickpeas and Spinach Saute

Makes: 4 servings



## Ingredients

- 1 Tbsp. vegetable oil
- 1 yellow onion (peeled and chopped)
- 1 clove garlic (peeled and minced)
- 1 celery stalk (chopped)
- 1 carrot (chopped)
- 14.5 oz. low-sodium diced tomatoes
- 16 oz. low-sodium chickpeas (drained and rinsed with cold water)
- ¼ cup water
- 10 oz. frozen spinach
- 1 tsp. fresh lemon juice (or red vinegar)
- ¼ tsp. crushed red pepper flakes

## Nutritional Information (per serving)

- Calories: 193
- Total fat: 7 g
- Saturated fat: 1 g
- Cholesterol: 0 mg
- Sodium: 256 mg
- Carbohydrate: 28 g
- Dietary fiber: 10 g
- Total sugars: 8 g
- Added sugars included: 0 g
- Protein: 10 g
- Vitamin D: 0 mcg
- Calcium: 213 mg
- Iron: 4 mg
- Potassium: 721 mg

## Directions

- 1 Put a skillet on the stove on medium-high heat. When the skillet is hot, add the oil.
- 2 Add the onion, garlic, celery and carrot to the skillet and cook this mixture for about 15 minutes until it becomes soft and the onions are lightly browned.
- 3 Turn up the heat to high and add the tomatoes (including the liquid), chickpeas and water to the skillet. Cook the mixture for 5 minutes. Drop the heat to low and top the mixture with the spinach. Cover the skillet and cook the mixture until the spinach has thawed and heated for about 10 minutes. Stir the mixture well.
- 4 Add the lemon juice and red pepper flakes to the skillet and stir the mixture thoroughly.
- 5 Serve the finished dish warm with cooked quinoa or brown rice.

# Pasta Primavera

Makes: 3 servings



## Ingredients

- 1 cup noodles (uncooked)
- 1 Tbsp. vegetable oil
- 2 cups mixed vegetables (chopped)
- 1 cup tomatoes (chopped)
- 1 Tbsp. margarine
- ¼ tsp. garlic powder
- ⅛ tsp. ground black pepper
- 3 Tbsp. Parmesan cheese

## Directions

- 1| Cook the noodles according to the package directions.
- 2| While the noodles are cooking, heat the oil in a skillet.
- 3| Add the vegetables to the skillet and saute them until they become tender, stirring constantly.
- 4| Add the tomatoes to the skillet and saute the mixture for two more minutes.
- 5| Toss the sauteed mixture with the noodles and margarine.
- 6| Add the seasonings to the finished dish and sprinkle it with Parmesan cheese. Serve the dish warm.

## Nutritional Information (per serving)

- Calories: 336
- Total fat: 11 g
- Saturated fat: 2 g
- Cholesterol: 3 mg
- Sodium: 147 mg
- Carbohydrate: 48 g
- Dietary fiber: 8 g
- Total sugars: 6 g
- Added sugars included: 0 g
- Protein: 11 g
- Vitamin D: 0 mcg
- Calcium: 103 mg
- Iron: 2 mg
- Potassium: 398 mg