

June 2022 A Special Supplement to

**The Stanly News & Press** 

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# Warning signs that you're working out too much

Routine exercise is an important component of a healthy lifestyle. Significant exercise benefits all parts of the body, including the heart. In fact, the American Heart Association urges individuals to heed exercise recommendations from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Disease Prevention and Health

Promotion. Those guidelines indicate that adults should get at least 150 minutes per week of moderate-intensity aerobic activity (or 75 minutes of vigorous aerobic activity) and pair it with moderate- to high-intensity strength training activities at least twice per week.

Many individuals have no problem taking that advice to heart, and some even go above and beyond. While exceeding exercise guidelines isn't necessarily detrimental to individuals' overall health, that doesn't mean it's not important to be careful and incorporate routine days of rest into a workout regimen. Devoted athletes may find it hard to know when to step back and take a breather. In such instances, learning the warning signs for fitness fatigue can be invaluable. Routine breaks give muscles time to heal, which can improve performance and reduce injury risk. The National Library of Medicine notes that these are some common signs of fitness fatigue.

- An inability to perform at the same evel
- Needing longer periods of rest



- Feeling tired
- Depression, which can include feelings of sadness, tearfulness, emptiness, or hopelessness
- Mood swings or irritability
- Difficulty sleeping
- Muscle soreness or a feeling that limbs are heavy
- The presence of overuse injuries, which include shoulder impingement, tennis elbow and stress fractures
- Loss of motivation
- More frequent colds
- Unexplained weight loss
- Anxiety

Individuals who want to keep going in the face of fitness fatigue should remind themselves of why they exercise. Various factors motivate people to exercise regularly, but that motivation is often rooted in a desire to be as healthy as possible. Overdoing it compromises individuals' physical and mental health, which underscores the importance of rest and how it's vital to a successful workout regimen.

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# How to navigate the confusion around stretching

itness and health care professionals generally agree that stretching is an important component of an effective workout regimen. However, there remains some confusion as to when to stretch and which stretches athletes should perform to maintain optimal health and flexibility. For example, Harvard Medical School notes that stretching was once believed neces-

ance. That may be a concern for competitive athletes and can add to the confusion non-competitive fitness enthusiasts have about the importance of stretching. Individuals who exercise to improve their overall health can stretch after their five-to 10-minute warmup and then again after completing their cardio and strength training. Competitive athletes can consult their coaches



sary to warm up muscles and prepare them for activity. However, the Mayo Clinic now notes that stretching should not be considered a warmup activity. Rather, the general consensus among health care professionals is that individuals should first warm up their bodies for five to 10 minutes with some light exercise, such as low-intensity walking or jogging. In addition, the Mayo Clinic notes that some research has suggested that pre-event stretching adversely affects athletes' perform-

and trainers about when to stretch and which stretches to perform. When stretching, all people, including competitive athletes and individuals who exercise as part of their health care routines, should focus on proper form. Numerous online tutorials indicate how to stretch the various muscle groups in a way that improves flexibility and decreases injury risk.

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# How to overcome mental fatigue

Natigue and exhaustion are doften discussed in terms that characterize the physical effects that they have on the body. However, mental fatigue can be just as draining as physical exhaustion, even if its symptoms are not as evident as achy muscles or tired feet. The online medical resource WebMD notes that mental fatigue typically arises when individuals focus on mentally challenging tasks for extended periods of time. Many individuals also experienced mental fatigue during the pandemic. Pandemic-related restrictions forced individuals across the globe to confront a number of unforeseen, unexpected challenges, including a sudden shift to remote work and school closures that forced working parents to juggle the rigors of their careers with the difficulties of remote learning. That upheaval contributed to prolonged mental fatigue for many individuals.

Much like athletes need routine breaks from exercise to let their muscles recover, individuals need to look for ways to give their overworked minds a chance to recuperate from fatigue.

Each person is different, but these strategies can help people overcome mental fatigue.

Take breaks from the news. Overconsumption of news is one potential contributor to mental fatigue. That's especially so in the digital age, when the latest headlines are never further than a smartphone away. The Johns Hopkins Women's Mood Disorders Center notes that limiting news consumption during stressful times can be an effective way to

reduce symptoms of stress, including mental fatigue.

Schedule time to relax. The pressure to feel as if you should always be doing something, whether it's working, taking care of your family or tackling a to-do list around the house, can contribute to mental fatigue. Schedule time to relax and make a concerted effort to keep that time open. Avoid using scheduled relaxation time to work on household chores or check work emails. Instead, use this time to do something you find genuinely relaxing, even if that activity feels like you're doing "nothing."

#### Spot the signs of mental fatigue.

Another way to overcome mental fatigue is to learn to recognize its symptoms. Recognition of these symptoms allows individuals to use them as alarm bells that alert them when it's time to take a step back and unwind. WebMD notes that mental fatigue symptoms include mood-related issues like increased irritability or anger; difficulty concentrating that makes it hard to finish tasks; zoning out; difficulty sleeping; and engaging in unhealthy behaviors, including overconsumption of alcohol.

The signs of mental fatigue may not be as instantly recognizable as the symptoms of physical exhaustion. But mental fatigue can be just as dangerous as physical tiredness if left unchecked.

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### Warning signs of mental health issues

2017 study from the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation estimated that 792 million people across the globe lived with a mental health disorder. If that figure is startling, it's likely even greater as a result of the pandemic.

Data from the Kaiser Family Foundation indicated that about four in 10 adults in the United States reported symptoms of anxiety or depressive disorder during the pandemic. That marked a significant uptick since the summer of 2019, when one in 10 adults reported such symptoms.

The pandemic undoubtedly posed significant challenges that affected the mental health of people across the globe. But those challenges won't necessarily go away if and when life returns to pre-pandemic normalcy. Nor is there any guarantee that new challenges that pose a threat to individuals' mental health won't arise in the years to come. That reality underscores the importance of learning to recognize signs of mental illness in both adults and children.

The National Alliance on Mental Illness notes that each mental illness has its own symptoms, so anyone concerned about their own mental health or the health of a loved one can speak with a mental health professional for more information. In the meantime, the NAMI notes that these are some common signs of mental illness in adults and adolescents.

- •Excessive worrying or fear
- •Feeling excessively sad or low
- •Feelings of confusion or difficulty concentrating and learning
- •Extreme mood changes, including uncontrollable "highs" or feelings of euphoria
- Prolonged or significant feelings of irritability or anger
- Avoiding friends and social activities
- Difficulty understanding or relating to other people
- •Changes in sleeping habits or feelings of fatigue and low energy







- Changes in eating habits, such as increased hunger or lack of appetite
- Changes in sex drive
- •Difficulty perceiving reality (delusions or hallucinations, in which a person experiences and senses things that don't exist in objective reality)
- •Inability to perceive changes in one's own feelings, behavior or personality. Some individuals experience a lack of insight known as anosognosia, which NAMI describes as unawareness of one's own mental health condition.
- •Overconsumption of substances such as alcohol or drugs
- Multiple physical ailments without obvious causes, such as headaches, stomach aches and vague and ongoing aches and pains
- Suicidal thoughts
- •Difficulties handling daily life, including an inability to carry out activities or handle problems and stress that arises each day

•An intense fear of weight gain or concern with appearance

Pre-adolescent children also can experience mental illness, which can manifest itself through these symptoms:

- Changes in academic performance
- •Excessive worry or anxiety. Some children may fight with parents to avoid going to bed or school.
- Hyperactive behavior
- Frequent nightmares
- Frequent disobedience or aggression
- •Frequent temper tantrums

Individuals who are experiencing any of these symptoms or those who recognize them in loved ones, including children, are urged to contact a health care professional, including their general physicians, who may be able to recommend a mental health specialist. More information is available at www.nami.org.

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# How to heal from mental health issues that arose during the COVID-19 pandemic

Perhaps no event in recent history affected the mental health of more people across the globe than the COVID-19 pandemic. Research published in late 2021 in the medical journal *The Lancet* indicated that cases of major depressive disorder and anxiety disorders increased by more than 25 percent worldwide due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the world emerges from the pandemic and governments across the globe gradually implement measures designed to make coexisting with COVID-19 less restrictive, mental health professionals recognize that individuals may need help recovering from the prolonged stress and trauma brought about by the pandemic. Mental Health America, an organization committed to promoting mental health as a critical component of overall wellness, recommend various strategies to help individuals move forward in the aftermath of the pandemic.

Recognize that recovery can't be rushed. MHA urges individuals to give themselves time to adjust, noting that it will take time before a sense of safety and security returns. That means it could be awhile before individuals feel like themselves again, and that's not only acceptable, but normal.

Ask for help. The pandemic was proof that it's impossible to go it alone through difficult situations, so individuals should not hesitate to rely on loved ones as they recover. MHA notes that social support is crucial when healing from trauma and touts the value of sharing one's story. Such sharing enables individuals to process their thoughts and feelings.

Embrace healthy behaviors. During the pandemic, many individuals, even those devoted to healthy living prior to 2020, found it difficult to continue engaging in behaviors and activities that promoted their overall health. Embracing these behaviors, which can

include eating a healthy diet, exercising regularly and getting sufficient sleep, improves individuals' ability to cope with stress. Re-establishing old routines also can return a sense of structure to daily life that might have gone missing over the last two years.

Seek professional health care help if necessary. MHA urges individuals who are putting in the work but still struggling to contact a health care professional. Hundreds of millions of people across the globe have had to confront issues affecting their mental health since the start of the pandemic, and health care professionals are prepared and ready to help individuals overcome those issues as the world returns to normalcy.

More information about accessing mental health help can be found at mhanational.org.

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# Factors that can adversely affect mood

o one is immune to the occasional bad mood. A bad mood can make a difficult day feel even more so, and multiple-person households can become uncomfortable places to be if one person's mood is less than welcoming.

Bad moods can be easy to shrug off, and that may not inspire people to wonder why their generally upbeat outlooks can suddenly take a turn for the worse. Each person is different, so what triggers a mood swing in some individuals may not necessarily do so in others. However, various factors can adversely affect mood. Taking steps to avoid or minimize such factors can re-

Lack of physical activity: A 2019 study from the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health found that running for 15 minutes a day or walking for an hour reduces the

duce the number of days when

you feel as though you woke

up on the wrong side of the

bed.

risk of major depression. That link is likely connected to the release of endorphins triggered by exercise. Endorphins are hormones that studies have shown contribute to a general feeling of wellbeing, which explains why a lack of physical activity can adversely affect mood.

Chronic stress: Chronic stress has long been linked to a host of health problems. According to the Mayo Clinic, chronic stress puts individuals at increased risk for heart disease and weight gain but also issues that affect mood, including anxiety and depression. Individuals who find themselves

routinely confronting bad moods may be dealing with chronic stress. Identifying the source of that stress and speaking with a health care professional about how to reduce and manage it may lead to improvements in mood.

Hunger: A 2018 study from researchers at the University of Guelph in Ontario found evidence that a change in glucose levels can have a lasting effect on mood.

The study, published in the journal *Psychopharmacology*, found that rats injected with a glucose metabolism blocker experienced stress and depressed mood due to the resultant hypoglycemia. The study lends credence to the notion that many people have about feeling moody when they don't eat.

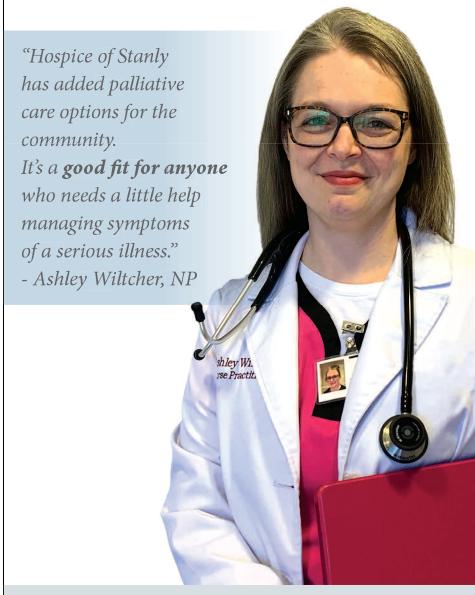
Weather: Seasonal Affective Dis-

order is a type of depression that adversely affects certain individuals' moods during winter, when hours of sunlight are fewer than during spring, summer and fall and when temperatures outside can sometimes be so cold as to keep people indoors for extended periods of time. In addition, a 2013 study published in the journal Social Indicators Research found that individuals report greater life satisfaction on exceptionally sunny days than they did on days with ordinary weather.

Bad moods come and go for most people. Identifying common triggers for bad moods can help individuals prepare for potential mood swings and navigate them in healthy ways.

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## Strategies to prevent back pain

en and women are well aware that minor aches and pains are part of aging. A balky knee that acts up on rainy days or an old sports injury that still triggers periodic discomfort may not be much to worry about, but a more serious condition such as chronic back pain can be so debilitating that it's wise for individuals to do whatever they can to avoid it or delay its arrival.

Millions of cases of chronic back pain undoubtedly go unreported. That's because many individuals accept back pain as a side effect of aging, while others lack access to health care, making it difficult to pinpoint just how prevalent chronic back pain is. However, the Global Burden of Disease Study 2017 estimated that around 577 million people across the globe experience lower back pain, or LBP.

That prevalence should not give the impression that chronic back pain is unavoidable. In fact, various strategies can be employed to prevent back pain and all the negative consequences that come



with it.

Be active. The Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion notes that physical activity strengthens the back and lowers the risk for developing back pain. The ODPHP recommends individuals engage in back-strengthening and stretching exercises at least two days per week. Chiropractors or personal trainers can recommend safe back-strengthening exercises, which the

Mayo Clinic notes include the bridge exercise and shoulder blade squeeze. Stretches individuals can try include the knee-to-chest stretch, the lower back rotational stretch and the cat stretch.

Embrace new exercise routines. Individuals accustomed to strength training that involves dumbbells and circuit training machines should know that there are other ways to build strength and benefit the back at the same time. For example, studies have shown the value of Pilates in increasing the strength of core muscles, including those in the lower back. In addition, the ODPHP recommends yoga to individuals who want to make their backs stronger and lower their risk for back pain. Many fitness facilities have long since recognized the value of yoga and pilates and now include each approach in their class schedules.

**Perfect your posture.** Another way to prevent back pain is to make a concerted effort to maintain good posture. The ODPHP urges individuals to avoid

slouching when standing and sitting and to stand tall with head up and shoulders back. When sitting, sit with back straight against the back of the chair and feet flat on the floor. If possible, keep knees slightly higher than hips when sitting. Alternate between sitting and standing to avoid being in the same position for too long.

Lift correctly. Poor technique when lifting things, even items that are not excessively heavy, can contribute to back pain. When lifting items, do so with the legs and not the back. The ODPHP urges individuals to keep their backs straight and bend at the knees or hips when lifting items. Avoid lifting especially heavy items without assistance.

Despite its prevalence, back pain is not a given. Individuals can keep various strategies in mind to avoid joining the hundreds of millions of people across the globe who suffer from back pain every day.

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he human body is a complex marvel. Various systems within the body work together to make life as humans know it possible, and though these systems are resilient, they're not invulnerable to injury.

The nervous system is a fascinating part of the human body that includes the brain, the spinal cord and nerves. This system controls much of what the body does, so it's no surprise that nerve injuries can have a profound effect on individuals' daily lives.

#### What do peripheral nerves do?

Johns Hopkins Medicine notes that peripheral nerves send messages from the brain and spinal cord to the rest of the body. This is done through a network of 43 pairs of motor and sensory nerves that control the functions of sensation, movement and motor coordination.

### Are peripheral nerves vulnerable to injury?

Peripheral nerves are fragile and easily damaged, so they are vulnerable to injury. Serious injury or trauma may require surgery, and the grade of severity, which can be determined using the Sunderland scale, will help doctors determine a treatment plan. The Mayo Clinic emphasizes the importance of seeking immediate treatment for peripheral nerve injuries, as doing so can prevent complications and permanent nerve damage.

### What causes peripheral nerve injuries?

Johns Hopkins Medicine indicates that peripheral nerve injuries can occur after suffering a laceration (a cut or tear in the nerve tissue), severe bruising, stretching, electrical injury, or drug injection injury. Gunshot wounds also can cause peripheral nerve injuries.

### The human body is a complex marvel. Various systems within **what are the symptoms of peripheral nerve injuries?**

The Mayo Clinic notes that symptoms of peripheral nerve injuries, including pain, range from mild to severe. Severe symptoms can seriously limit individuals' ability to perform and engage in daily activities.

Symptoms differ depending on which nerve fibers are affected. Motor nerves regulate all the muscles under conscious control, helping people to walk, speak and hold objects. Sensory nerves relay information about touch, temperature and pain, while autonomic nerves regulate activities that are not consciously controlled, such as breathing, heart function and digestion. Since these functions are so different, it's no surprise that injuries to each type of nerve produce different symptoms.

**Motor nerves:** Muscle weakness, uncontrollable muscle twitching and painful cramps are characteristics of motor nerve injuries.

Sensory nerves: Sensory nerve injury symptoms may include numbness, tingling in the hands or feet and difficulty sensing pain or changes in temperature. Individuals also may experience difficulty walking, maintaining their balance with their eyes closed or fastening buttons.

Autonomic nerves: Excessive sweating, changes in blood pressure, an inability to tolerate heat, and gastrointestinal issues are potential indicators of autonomic nerve injuries. Peripheral nerve injuries can adversely

affect quality of life. But reporting symptoms early can help doctors devise treatment plans to minimize pain and reduce risk for permanent damage.

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# The benefits of building a strong core

Titness professionals recognize the importance dof a well-balanced workout. Much like a diet that includes foods from each of the major food groups can provide the balance of nutrients and vitamins bodies need to achieve optimal health, a workout routine that includes an assortment of strength and cardiovascular exercises is the recipe for a fit and healthy body.

Core exercises are a vital component of a wellrounded workout. Core exercises can help individuals build sculpted abdominal muscles, and while that's a goal for many core devotees, the benefits of core exercises extend well beyond the cosmetic.



Build a strong, healthy back: The International Association For the Study of Pain reports that lower back pain has been the leading cause of years lived with disability across the globe since 1990. Lower back pain can be debilitating, but core exercises strengthen muscles in the core, including those in the back. The Mayo Clinic notes that core exercises train

muscles in the pelvis, lower back, hips, and abdomen to work together, creating greater balance and stability and contributing to a healthy back.

Make daily life easier: Individuals may not realize it, but their cores play a vital role in performing a great number of daily tasks. Core muscles are activated when doing everything from taking out the trash to getting dressed. If those muscles are weak, the cumulative effect of that weakness can add up and contribute to aches, pains and other health problems. Strong core muscles make daily tasks easier and less taxing on the body, providing both short- and long-term benefits.

Become a better athlete: Core training has long been a key component of professional athletes' exercise regimens, and it's just as beneficial to amateur athletes as well. The Harvard Medical School notes that a strong core powers a host of athletic activities, including golf, tennis, cycling, running, swimming, and team sports like baseball and volleyball. A strong core also benefits outdoor enthusiasts who love to kayak and hike difficult terrain.

Sculpt abdominals: The cosmetic benefits of building a strong core should not be overlooked, as individuals might gain additional motivation to keep exercising and eating right when they see desirable results in the mirror. Core exercises strengthen and sculpt abdominal muscles, creating a win-win situa-

tion for anyone who wants to get healthy and look

good doing it.

Core exercises are vital to building a healthier, stronger body.

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## Strategies to lose weight safely

he struggle millions of individuals experience in regard to maintaining a healthy weight has led public health agencies to characterize overweight and obesity as a major public health crisis. According to the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, nearly one in three adults in the United States are overweight, while more than 40 percent are considered obese. Data from Statistics Canada indicates individuals also are struggling with their weight in Canada, where nearly 27 percent of adults can be classified as obese and more than 36 percent are classified as overweight.

With so many adults in North America classified as overweight or obese, it's no wonder that fad diets and additional programs to lose weight are so easy to find. Individuals who are overweight or obese should aspire to lose weight, as doing so can lower their risk for various conditions, including some which can be deadly, such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes. But it's vital that individuals lose weight in a safe way that gives them the best chance to keep weight off. In recognition of that, the U.S. Department of Agriculture offers these tips to lose weight safely.

Recognize what makes up a healthy weight loss program. Individuals have all sorts of options that promise to help them lose weight, but that doesn't mean each of those options is safe and/or effective. For example, the American Academy of Family Physicians notes that the typical fad diet is unhealthy and does not result in sustainable weight loss. Some such diets can even be dangerous to your overall health. The USDA describes healthy weight loss programs as those that consist of reasonable and realistic weight loss goals. A reduced-calorie, nutritionally-balanced eating plan is another feature of a healthy weight loss program. Such programs also should encourage routine physical activity and a plan to help people change their be-

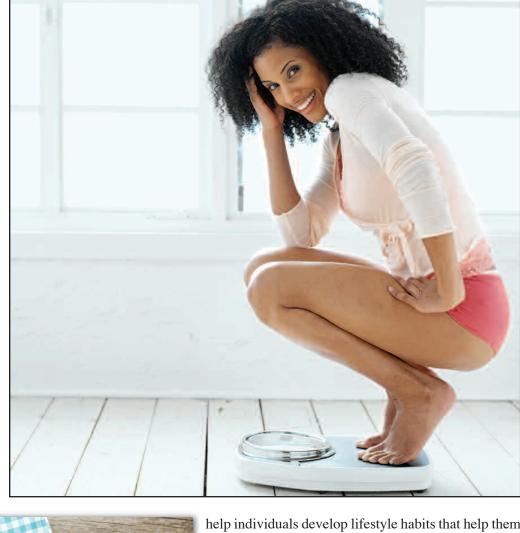
haviors so they can stay on track and meet their goals.

#### Know what to expect out of a healthy meal.

The USDA notes that calories, portion sizes and nutrition all combine to make a healthy meal. Avoid high-calorie meals by limiting portion sizes. The online health resource Verywell Fit offers a useful breakdown that can help people determine healthy portion sizes:

- 1 palm: a serving of protein
- 1 fist: a serving of vegetables
- 1 thumb: a serving of fats
- 1 cupped hand: a serving of carbs

This breakdown can act as a guideline for individuals, who also can discuss appropriate portion sizes with their physicians or a licensed dietician.





maintain healthy weights. Fad diets and other quick fixes only provide short-term weight loss, and the USDA urges individuals to avoid programs that they "go on" and "go off" at predetermined intervals. Longterm, healthy weight loss is achieved by changing one's lifestyle, which requires a permanent commitment to physical activity and healthy eating.

A significant percentage of adults in both the United States and Canada is considered overweight or obese. When attempting to lose weight, those individuals can look to a comprehensive approach rooted in

healthy eating and routine exercise that can help them shed pounds and keep those pounds off for good.

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