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UNDERSTANDING BIPOLAR DISORDER



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Not All Disabilities Are Visible

Most of us associate disability with someone in a wheelchair, walking with a white cane or using a hearing aid, but many disabilities are invisible.

These could include mental disabilities such as bipolar disorder (BPD), autism spectrum disorder (ASD), depression, and learning disabilities like Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and dyslexia. People with these invisible disabilities are often accused of faking or imagining their disabilities just because they are not always obvious to the onlooker.

In this month's issue, we're highlighting Bipolar Disorder in particular and what it's like to live with someone who has it. Choosing your words carefully can heal relationships, help in the recovery, and make for a better quality of life for everyone. But when words are used thoughtlessly, carelessly, or hurtfully, they can pierce a person's spirit, ripping away at self-esteem, and making a person feel belittled. And especially vulnerable are people who have bipolar disorder.

Here are three examples of what not to say to someone with bipolar disorder:

- 1. I thought you were taking your medication. Confronting a chronic, serious illness is an ongoing process, and there are bound to be ups and downs. There are no quick fixes. The more you take the time to learn about bipolar disorder, the more you will understand how difficult managing such a condition can be.
- You sound a little "off" today. Most people with a mental illness already know how they feel. Being told you are sounding "off" is not constructive, nor is it a substitute for true compassion.
- Don't take everything so personally. For someone with bipolar disorder, a promised phone call that never comes may be taken much harder than you might imagine. Likewise, saying things that ignore or make light of their sense of self-esteem should be avoided.

Here are some helpful words you can say instead:

"I'll be your friend no matter what."

You can help improve the quality of life of someone with a mental disability by choosing to be kind.

Best of health, Romy Sia romy@healthyoptions.com.ph

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[&]quot;I'm always willing to listen."

[&]quot;I'm sorry you're in so much pain."

[&]quot;This too shall pass and we can ride it out together"

[&]quot;I love you, and I care."

10 Surprising Health Benefits of Chili Pepper

Written by Team Nutrisense. Reviewed by Heather Davis MS, RDN, LDN



Chili peppers are popular for their ability to improve the taste of any meal with their hot flavor. However, chili peppers are more than just a little bit of heat. Chili peppers are mainly used as a spice and can be cooked or powdered and dried.

The most valuable characteristic of chili peppers is the compound capsaicin. Capsaicin is the primary compound in chili peppers that gives the peppers their distinct taste and a number of health benefits. Let's explore 10 of those amazing health benefits.

1. Improves Digestive Health and Metabolism

One of the biggest advantages of capsaicin is its contribution to gut health and weight loss. Contrary to popular belief, chili peppers can actually be an anti-irritant to your stomach and a great way to treat stomach ulcers.

Secondly, chili peppers, especially in its powder form, are rich in antioxidants and other compounds that can soothe other digestive issues, like upset stomachs, intestinal gas, diarrhea, and cramps. Peppers are able to accomplish this because they stimulate gastric juices and work against the acidity in your digestive tract.

Thirdly, chili peppers can accelerate your metabolism. By speeding up your metabolism, you curb your cravings and improve the rate at which you burn fat. In general, it is thought that the consumption of chili peppers along with other healthy lifestyle practices can improve weight loss.

2. Alleviates Migraines

Capsaicin from chili peppers has also shown potential in treating headaches and migraines. According to a study by the American Academy of Neurology Annual Meeting in Philadelphia, 18 patients with headache diagnoses were treated with an intranasal capsaicin.

As a result, 13 patients had full relief. Majority of the other patients experienced some relief, and only one patient had no relief. The researchers found that the capsaicin desensitizes the trigeminal nerve and decreases the Calcitonin Gene-Related Peptide-both of which are responsible for creating migraine pain.

3. May Reduce Risks of Cancer

Chili peppers also present a potential natural remedy for fighting cancer. According to the American Association for Cancer Research, the capsaicin and antioxidants in chili peppers can kill cancer cells in leukemia and prostate cancer. This is largely due to the high antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties of chili peppers.

For example, in the case of prostate cancer, capsaicin reduces the growth of prostate cancer cells by triggering a depletion of the primary types of cancer cell lines. Similar effects can be found in breast, Pancreatic, and bladder cancer.

4. Fights Fungal Infections, Colds, and the Flu

The characteristic red color of chili peppers is an indication that it is rich in beta-carotene or pro-vitamin A. Vitamin A is key in maintaining a healthy respiratory, intestinal, and urinary system. Also, vitamin A and vitamin C in the chili peppers are vital in building up your immunity against infections and illnesses.

If you suffer from congestion or allergies, a capsaicin nasal spray can help relieve your symptoms. Moreover, capsaicin has a number of antibacterial properties that can fight chronic sinus infections.

If you are suffering from a high fever, hot chili peppers can not only relieve the pain, but they can also stimulate the immune system to fight off the virus.

"Capsaicin is the primary compound in chili peppers that gives the peppers their distinct taste and a number of health benefits."

Chili peppers can also be used for their anti-fungal properties. Specifically, it can kill food pathogens, bacteria like H. pylori and cure a number of inflammatory bowel diseases.

5. Provides Joint Pain Relief

In addition to being a natural source of pain relief for headaches and migraines, chili peppers can be used to reduce joint pain. Essentially, you can apply the chili pepper to the skin to reduce the presence of chemical P which is the compound responsible for transmitting pain messages to the brain.

Capsaicin binds with pain receptors and induces a burning sensation that may desensitize your pain receptors over time. In this way, capsaicin acts as a pain reliever. Typically, it can be used to treat shingles, joint pain, and HIV neuropathy.

6. Fights Inflammation

Another one of capsaicin's valuable characteristics is that it inhibits substance P, which is a neuropeptide that is responsible for inflammatory processes. As such, capsaicin is thought to be a potential treatment for a number of sensory nerve disorders, such as arthritis pain, diabetic neuropathy, and psoriasis.

An animal study found that animals who were treated with a substance that caused inflammatory arthritis responded well to a diet high in capsaicin. Thanks to the diet, the animals experienced a delayed development of arthritis and a significant decrease in inflammation throughout their bodies.



7. Supports Cardiovascular Health

Chili peppers can also be a great, natural way to support your cardiovascular system and prevent heart disease. Chili peppers are high in potassium, which is a mineral with a number of functions in the human body.

Potassium combined with folate can reduce your chances of developing heart disease. Moreover, potassium can help relax your blood vessels, which makes blood flow much easier in your body.

Chili peppers also contain riboflavin and niacin. The latter is responsible for maintaining healthy cholesterol levels and in turn, lower the risk for heart disease. Chili peppers can also protect fats in your blood against free radicals.

For example, one study found that eating fresh chili increased the resistance of blood fats to oxidation, which is free radical damage to your triglycerides and cholesterol levels.

8. Decrease Risks of Type 2 Diabetes

In addition to maintaining your heart health, chili peppers can reduce the risk of developing high blood levels of insulin, which is a common symptom of Type 2 Diabetes.

According to the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, a number of Australian scientists discovered that a meal containing chili pepper can result in the right amount of insulin to reduce blood sugar levels.

This is a particularly useful fact for individuals with high BMIs or those who suffer from obesity. Lastly, remember that chili peppers are high in antioxidants, carotenoids, and vitamin C. These contribute greatly to insulin regulation as well.

9. May Improve Cognitive Functions

One of the key ways of maintaining strong cognitive performance is a proper amount of oxygen and iron. Fortunately, chili peppers are rich in iron. This leads to an increase in the blood flow and hemoglobin production in your brain. In turn, chili peppers can help improve your cognitive performance. Additionally, they can also decrease your chances of developing cognitive disorders like dementia and Alzheimer's.

10. May Improve Longevity

A study conducted by the Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences discovered that people who consume spicy food have a better chance of having a longer life. In other words, common spices have the potential to increase a person's chance to live a longer, healthy life.

Over the course of seven years, the researchers found that individuals who ate spicy foods three to seven times a week have a smaller chance of experiencing cancer, heart disease, and respiratory illnesses.

This can be credited to capsaicin's ability to reduce inflammation, clear the respiratory tract, and overall reduce the development of lifelong diseases.

Conclusion

All that being said, the next time you put together a meal, consider adding a dash of spice. As you can see, with chili peppers, a little can go a long way. So, a slight burn on your tongue or a teary eye might be worth its amazing health benefits.

If you are looking for a natural way to deal with some of your health issues, chili peppers are the way to go. 6



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What is Bipolar Disorder?

By Dina Cagliostro, PhD and Jennifer Nelson



Like the name suggests, bipolar disorder is marked by polar opposite mood swings—at one point, you feel like you can conquer anything; at another, you can barely get your butt out of bed.

Once called manic depression, bipolar disorder affects up to 5.7 million adults. It impacts both men and women equally and the typical onset of symptoms usually occurs between ages 15-25. Of course, those years are notoriously emotional ones—first loves, college, new careers!

Like many mental disorders, bipolar illness is genetic and tends to run in families, meaning oftentimes, one or more family members also have a form of bipolar disorder. (It's important to note that the illness can start in early childhood or as late as the 40s-50s.)

Types of Bipolar Disorder

Three of the most common types and each defined by their own symptoms and episodes include Bipolar I disorder, Bipolar II disorder, and Cyclothymic disorder. Here's what you need to know.

Bipolar 1 Disorder. Bipolar I is characterized by the occurrence
of at least one manic episode, preceded or followed by a
hypomanic or major depressive bout lasting at least a week. Manic
episodes may be so severe they significantly disrupt your daily
functioning or may even trigger a break from reality (psychosis).

People who have a manic episode often describe it as feeling invincible and euphoric. You'll usually experience three or more

symptoms such as inflated self-esteem, decreased sleep, being more talkative, distracted, goal-directed, or idea-driven, or get involved in activities that can have painful or even financial consequences, like spending thousands (you don't have) on a designer handbag—or five. You may even need hospitalization with bipolar I. The disorder is characterized by the distinct periods of mania and depression.

- 2. Bipolar 2 Disorder. If you are living with bipolar 2, you'll likely experience at least one major depressive episode lasting two weeks or more and at least one hypomanic episode lasting at least four days. But you won't have manic episodes, says Anandhi Narasimhan, MD, a double board-certified staff psychiatrist at Masada Homes in Gardena, California. With bipolar II, episodes of mania are replaced with hypomania, a less severe form of mania, but one that can still impact your daily life. Bipolar II symptoms don't typically require hospitalization. However, the symptoms may be harder to identify with this type because they're less severe, prolonging diagnosis and treatment.
- 3. Cyclothymic Disorder. Cyclothymic disorder is a rarer form of bipolar affecting about 3.29 million people in the U.S. that's characterized by at least two years of multiple occurrences of hypomania and depressive symptoms. While symptoms are less severe than typical hypomanic episodes and major depressive episodes, they are more chronic.

Symptoms can stay constant for at least two months. People who have cyclothymia are affected by impulsivity and poor decision making, affecting relationships, family, and social life, and they may also experience problems with the law and financial difficulties. Less than half of those with cyclothymia will go on to develop a more severe form of bipolar disorder.

Signs and Symptoms

Before you self-diagnose, remember, we're not talking about being down in the dumps over a breakup or having a bad day, or being super-happy over a promotion or a new relationship. These are natural highs and lows that everyone experiences. The classic symptoms of bipolar disorder are kind of like being on the steepest roller coaster, where moods dip from the lowest depression to the highest high (mania or hypomania).

Manic Episodes

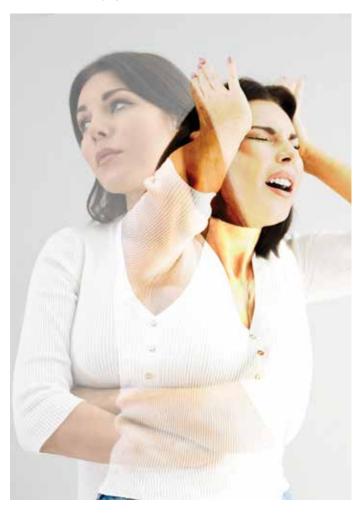
When you live with bipolar disorder you can feel energetically happy with boundless energy during manic states. You may make reckless decisions or act impulsively. You can get irritated and agitated easily and act out, you can even feel euphoric, have a decreased need to sleep or insomnia, and have racing thoughts or a grandiose self-image.

You may feel elated, like you just won the lottery, while really, it's just any old day and you're slogging through a pile of dirty dishes. Hypomania, which people with bipolar may also experience, is a less severe form of mania, where you generally feel pretty good—with a better sense of well-being and higher productivity.

"At one point, you feel like you can conquer anything; at another, you can barely get your butt out of bed."

There's a laundry list of different symptoms for this manic phase, and they generally center around an elevated or irritable mood. They may include goal-directed activities like staying up all night cleaning obsessively or going on a shopping spree—things you wouldn't do typically. Manic behaviors may interfere with school, work, and relationships. Specific signs and symptoms include:

- Abnormally talkative. You want to express all of these thoughts, so you're extra chatty and may jump from topic to topic.
- Abnormally upbeat. This isn't just a normal good mood. We're
 talking feeling zippy and energized, even in situations that don't
 warrant it, like feeling giddy taking out the trash. It's like you're
 not in charge of your mood, or responding to your environment.
 Instead, you're just stuck on cheerful mode.
- Cranky and/or impatient. You feel like no one can keep up with you, and it's frustrating.
- **Easily distracted.** With all this internal racing going on, it's nearly impossible to focus.
- Euphoric. This is beyond happy; your excitement and energy are almost uncontained.
- Excess energy. You have all these ideas and energy and start taking on a lot of new projects.
- High sex drive. You're constantly thinking about and wanting sex
- **Invincibility.** Along with this surge of energy and risk-taking, you get a huge boost in self-confidence. Even people who are shy or humble may suddenly seem arrogant and think they can literally do anything.
- Jumpy. You can imagine when you have this kind of energy surge, you feel reactive. Picture electricity zooming through your body.



- Poor decision-making. As you might imagine, a manic episode is not a great time for decision-making. Your emotions are skewed, and your sense of consequence and danger are dulled. It's a pretty scary combo. You may take risks like making financial investments, engaging in sexual indiscretions, or going on shopping sprees.
- Pressured speech. This is a giveaway sign of a manic episode.
 It goes along with being talkative and is marked by a stream of
 talking, without pausing in the normal way you would during
 conversation. It's like just bulldozing right through and not
 allowing the other person to talk, talking over them.
- Psychosis. A detachment from reality that may include delusions or hallucinations.
- Racing thoughts. It's hard to keep track of everything swirling around in your brain—you have all kinds of ideas, plans, and opinions.
- **Unattainable plans.** You're determined to book a trip to Paris—even though you don't have the funds.
- Wired. People having a manic episode feel like they can stay up all night or don't need as much sleep.

Depressive Episodes

And here comes the crash. You may feel overwhelming sadness or an urge to cry, experience feelings of hopelessness and worthlessness, and have a negative outlook on life. You may have an increased need to sleep, feel unable to complete daily tasks, and feel deeply demoralized. This isn't just mild sadness. But for some, it can be debilitating depression that can even lead to suicidal thoughts.

"In the most severe instances of bipolar, psychotic features including hallucinations or delusions can be present during extreme mood events," says Michael Pipich, MS, LMFT, a psychotherapist and author of Owning Bipolar: How Patients and Families Can Take Control of Bipolar Disorder.

Specific signs and symptoms include:

- Feeling sad. On a daily basis, you feel empty, hopeless, or tearful.
- Feelings of fatigue. You feel so tired and just want to sleep.
 (Though insomnia is also a symptom.)
- **Hopelessness.** You can't picture anything good in the future.
- Inability to concentrate. You lose your focus.
- Indecisiveness. Maybe it's because you feel hopeless or ambivalent about everything, but you really can't make your mind up, even about small things.
- Loss of interest and finding no pleasure or interest in dayto-day activities. This is a classic depression syndrome—things that used to be interesting and fun hold no appeal anymore.
- Low energy. This is the kind of energy drain that makes you just want to lay on the couch or under the covers all day.
- · Low motivation. You just don't feel like doing anything.
- Weight fluctuations. Depending on whether depression zaps or increases your appetite, a person suffering may gain or lose a significant amount of weight.

And just when you think your mood has hit rock bottom, the ride takes you back up to the summit with feelings of euphoria and endless energy. It's these extreme mood swings that define bipolar disorder. They can occur as frequently as weekly, or, show up more sporadically—maybe just twice a year.

Unlike a predictable monthly cycle or known allergy that triggers a reaction, there's no defined pattern or predictability to the mood swings—i.e. you can't plan a job interview or vacation a week from Monday when you'll be symptom-free. The condition just doesn't work like that. And, there's no rhyme or rhythm to which will come first, the depression or the mania or vice versa. What's more, the length of time you're in one state or the other can vary, too.

source: psycom.net

Married to Bipolar

By Karina Margit Erdelyi



Living with a partner who has bipolar disorder can present some pretty unique challenges. See how this couple from Washington state has navigated the sometimes turbulent waters.

To get the scoop on what it's really like, we caught up with Megan and Kyle Amaya. They didn't hold back in describing their journey with bipolar disorder. Megan was formally diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder I almost two years ago, and has been chronicling her mental health journey and mental health activism online in both her Instagram account and YouTube channel. Here's their story.

How did you meet?

Kyle: I was introduced to Megan while hanging out with friends and an old college teammate. We hit it off. I wanted to make a good impression, so I tried to make her laugh and show her a fun time. I suspect we may have been set up (happy laughter).

Megan: That was in 2010. We've been together for 10 years and married for six years. I was in cosmetology school at the time and we were both 23 years old. I wasn't really looking for a boyfriend. But Kyle was different from all the other guys. He was very genuine. Old fashioned. A gentleman. He's from a tight-knit community (Mount Vernon, WA) which I think is part of it.

We have had two short break ups. The first was a year into our relationship. Then we separated again during one of my manic episodes. It wasn't long after we separated the second time that I got diagnosed. Once Kyle understood that my behavior was not my fault, that I had a mental illness, he wanted to support me, be there for me, and we got back together.

A part of our story about my mental illness is that it played out publicly. I wrote a bunch of really embarrassing, delusional posts on Facebook. And all of our social circle, our friends from childhood, middle school, college—all the people—witnessed it. And so many thought it would have been better if Kyle had just walked away from me. But he was really there for me when I later slipped into a suicidal depression. So many other people abandoned me.

Tell us more about the circumstances around finally being diagnosed with bipolar disorder?

Megan: I was diagnosed April 7, 2018 in jail. A mental health professional came to my cell and held up her phone which had my Facebook profile pulled up, and she said: "You have bipolar I disorder. We are transferring you out of jail to a mental health facility." She had researched my past because I had a successful business, lots of friends—but had gotten arrested three times in one month (for non-violent crimes) and had never been arrested before. They were looking at me like, "This girl has no previous record, and then she gets arrested three times in a month?!" So, they started doing research on me. They called my family, got in touch with my psychiatrist, who had (mis)diagnosed me with depression, and looked through my social media.

BP is often misdiagnosed with depression—and while depression is serious, it's very different from bipolar disorder. You can't take the same meds for depression if you have BP. A few years earlier, I was put on an SSRI, which if you have BP can be extremely dangerous.

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Two months after taking them, I had my first manic episode. It crept up slowly, but surely. I became more and more manic and my family, close friends, Kyle, no one understood why I was acting the way I was.

They did not react in a very compassionate or understanding way. In fact, people in my life reacted pretty aggressively to me, saying things like "What the hell is wrong with you?" It was coming from all angles of my life. And I was very confused. I didn't understand I was manic. I thought that everything was fine; that I was finally feeling better after my depression. Yet, I felt attacked. I started making really terrible decisions that I had never made before.

What kinds of bad decisions were you making?

Megan: I started doing cocaine. I started hanging out with people I would never normally hang out with. Staying up all night. I started smoking cigarettes in my backyard, which I had never done. I would walk to the gas station and buy weird hats; I was dressing very strangely.

I was posting a lot on social media, which was unusual. I was being very blunt and direct and rude to people. I had no filter. I would just say the first thing on my mind. I would talk really fast and had tons of really creative ideas. I was just going a million miles an hour. In my head I felt better than ever, but everyone else was just so confused by my behavior.

And I was also drinking excessively. This is all in early 2017. I had taken a leave of absence from my business during my suicidal depression. But I'm going to back up a bit further so you can understand a bit better. In July of 2016, I stopped sleeping. And I don't mean I had trouble sleeping, I stopped sleeping. I lost 20 lbs. I couldn't function. Soon after, I started having suicidal ideation—and I had never had that before.

On September 7th, I made a plan to end my life. I was scared but was very serious about killing myself. The only thing that really stopped me was how it would affect my family and friends, because when I was 23, my best friend committed suicide and that really traumatized me, and I couldn't do that to the people in my life. So, I decided to be honest with everyone, with my husband, about what I was going through.

On December 7, 2016, I was checked into my first facility. I had never been committed. I didn't know what to expect. And it was the most terrifying experiences of my life. I went in there to get help, but instead of getting help, I was misdiagnosed with depression. I was even more suicidal when I was released from that hospital. But I knew that I never wanted to go back there. So, I basically told myself that if I was more grateful and thankful for my life that the depression would go away. I hated myself. I thought—you have a great husband, you have a successful business, you make good money, you drive a brand-new car—why do you feel this way?

But things continued to get worse and worse. When I got out of the psych facility, I stopped taking my medicine. But then I found a psychiatric nurse practitioner and she told me that I needed to get on my medication again. She said that I had to stay on it and let it work, because it takes six to eight weeks for the medication to work.

I listened to her and started taking the medication. But in my gut, I knew it was bad for me. As soon as it started kicking in eight weeks later, that's when my behavior really changed for the worse.

Kyle, what was your take on what was going on at the time?

Kyle: I felt like I had zero control of her situation, period. When she was in that deep depression, I didn't know she was bipolar, that was never even a thought. I encouraged her to listen to the nurse practitioner. I just figured that she'd studied this in school, that this was her profession, so I thought that this was the best option for Megan. It was really challenging watching her struggle, to not be able to really help.

Megan: I just want to add that you really did alleviate the situation, because you really stepped up during that time and did all the grocery shopping, all the laundry. He took care of our dog, he paid all the bills, he went to work. He did literally everything to step up to help me and be there for me. And he didn't put any pressure on me at all.

Any of the times I've ever been depressed, he's always been very supportive. He didn't ask me, "What's wrong with you." Or "Why can't I do this or that?" He's been so respectful. And I'm so grateful to have a husband like that, to support me and be there for me. He doesn't understand what depression feels like—but he's witnessed me not being able to shower, not being able to get off the couch, being in the same clothes I've worn for five days in a row. And while he doesn't know what I feel, he understands that the struggle I deal with is real. And I just really appreciate him so much, because it takes a really strong partner to be with someone who's struggling with mental illness.

Can you share your experience with medication adherence?

Megan: I take my medication every day and I don't mess around with it. I learned my lesson. I don't want to live my life being stable and then unstable and stable and then unstable. I just want to continue on this good path. And a huge way that I've done that is by removing alcohol from my life, which is literally the hardest thing I've ever done.

Kyle: I live a primarily sober lifestyle, but maybe two or three times a year, I'll have a beer. We have a conversation about it beforehand. And I wouldn't do it in front of her.

Megan: I just want to give him a lot of respect. I hope that his example might inspire other people. You know, it's so important for my health that I don't drink, and he has gone above and beyond to support me. If you want to have a healthy marriage and live with a mental illness, it's very important to be a team and stick together and communicate.

What's it been like staying sober?

Megan: When I got diagnosed with a mental illness, it felt like a death sentence. I knew deep down in my gut that I shouldn't drink anymore because of this diagnosis. But there's societal pressure everywhere to drink. I thought drinking was fun, but now I wake up every day without a hangover. I'm able to do my self-care, like exercise, and do positive things for myself. I love to clean and organize and that helps me feel good.

Are there any other mental health challenges that you deal with, aside from bipolar disorder?

Megan: I've also been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder from both some trauma I experienced in my childhood, as well as from when my best friend committed suicide when I was 23 and I never got any help. I never saw a therapist or anything. I just kind of brushed it under the rug and tried to move on with my life. I kept those feelings down so deep.

Are you two interested in starting a family?

Megan: Yes, we very much want to start a family. But we think it's important for me to be in a stable place before we take those next steps, especially because things really started to get out of hand for me when I stopped taking birth control back in 2016, before I was diagnosed. I absolutely believe that everything happens for a reason. I believe that God or the universe or the spirit wanted me to know that I have a mental illness before I became a mom. Now that I have that awareness, if I do start struggling, we can get help right away.

Have you guys spoken with someone to help manage medication and care while you are potentially pregnant?

Megan: Yes, we look at it as a team situation. I've talked to the reproductive doctor and she said that she wants me to stay on my bipolar medication throughout the entire pregnancy. She said that in my case, with the mental illness that I have, the benefit of taking the medication during pregnancy outweighed not taking it.

How are you feeling right now?

Megan: I would say things are going really well, for the most part, with my health. I am one year and nine months sober, which is something I'd like to highlight. I live so much better with my mental illness being sober. When I used to drink and get hung over, I'd wake up and not really want to take my medication—and that's pretty much a disaster for someone who has bipolar disorder. Happy to share that right now I feel pretty stable. Yes, I have my good days and my bad—but overall, the combination of extreme self-care, taking my medication, and staying away from toxic people has been the best way for me to manage things.

How has your marriage changed through this?

Megan: From my perspective, we're doing well. We have gone through a lot of healing. It's a journey. It's not linear—you take a step forward, then take a couple steps backwards. I think marriage is difficult, no matter if you have a mental illness or not, but having a spouse with a mental illness does make it more challenging.

Kyle: I would say we've been on an upward trajectory ever since she was diagnosed. We've definitely had times where we have had to take a step back. But we learn from it and just keep on marching forward. The last few years have made me more sympathetic to mental health struggles. No one in my family or circle of friends was ever deeply affected.

What things do you do to help keep your relationship on track?

Kyle: We enjoy taking our dog on a walk slash run, it gives us a chance to bond together. We also make dinners and go to the gym together.

Megan: Kyle is a CrossFit coach and I always make the effort to go to his class because it's more time that we can spend together doing something positive. Our gym community is so supportive. Back in September of 2019 we did a mental health awareness night, where I shared my story publicly and about 60 people were there. I felt myself shed layers and become my true vulnerable and honest self. Admit that I'm sober. Admit that I have bipolar. Admit that I take medication.

What would you like to share with others who find themselves in the same situation?

Kyle: Just being open and honest with your loved ones and those around you.

Megan: Devastated doesn't even describe the despair and pain that I felt after my manic episode and my psychotic social media posts. So many people in my life at that time, in my social circle, that I trusted and thought were my closest friends abandoned me. They didn't try to understand, be forgiving, and compassionate for me. And that was devastating. But it turns out that was actually the biggest blessing because it showed me who was a true, solid friend. It's so important for people with mental health illnesses to have a strong support system.

source: psycom.net

How Do Processed Foods Affect Your Health?

By Jamie Smith. Medically reviewed by Amy Richter, RD Nutrition



Processed foods, such as ready meals, baked goods, and processed meats, can have negative health effects. Most food needs some degree of processing, and not all processed foods are bad for the body. However, chemically processed foods, also called ultraprocessed foods, tend to be high in sugar, artificial ingredients, refined carbohydrates, and trans fats. Because of this, they are a major contributor to obesity and illness around the world.

In recent decades, ultra-processed food intake has increased dramatically worldwide. These foods now account for 25–60% of a person's daily energy intake throughout much of the world. This article looks at how processed foods can affect a person's health and what to avoid.

What are processed foods?

The term "processed food" can cause some confusion because most foods are processed in some way.

Mechanical processing — such as grinding beef, heating vegetables, or pasteurizing foods — does not necessarily make foods unhealthful. If the processing does not add chemicals or ingredients, it does not tend to lessen the healthfulness of the food.

However, there is a difference between mechanical processing and chemical processing. Chemically processed foods often only contain refined ingredients and artificial substances, with little nutritional value. They tend to have added chemical flavoring agents, colors, and sweeteners. These ultra-processed foods are sometimes called "cosmetic" foods, as compared with whole foods.

Are processed foods bad for you?

Ultra-processed foods tend to taste good and are often inexpensive. However, they usually contain ingredients that could be harmful if consumed in excess, such as saturated fats, added sugar, and salt. These foods also contain less dietary fiber and fewer vitamins than whole foods.

One large study, involving more than 100,000 adults, found that eating 10% more ultra-processed foods was associated with a 10% increase in the risks of cardiovascular disease, coronary heart disease, and cerebrovascular disorders.

The researchers reached this conclusion after accounting for saturated fat, sodium, sugar, and fiber intake. Other research indicates that eating highly processed foods can lead to weight gain.

Below, we look at seven reasons why processed foods can increase the risk to a person's health.

1. Added sugar

Processed foods tend to contain added sugar and, often, high fructose corn syrup. Added sugar contains no essential nutrients but is high in calories.

Regularly consuming an excess of added sugar can lead to compulsive overeating. It is also linked with health conditions such as obesity, metabolic syndrome, type 2 diabetes, and inflammatory diseases.

Processed foods and beverages are among the major sources of added sugar in the diet. Sweetened beverages are a particularly significant source; people tend to consume much more sugar than they realize in soft drinks.

Cutting down on added sugar — by drinking sparkling water instead of soda, for example — is a quick and effective way to make the diet more healthful.

2. Artificial ingredients

The ingredients list on the back of processed food packaging is often full of unrecognizable substances. Some are artificial chemicals that the manufacturer has added to make the food more palatable.

Highly processed foods often contain the following types of chemicals:

- artificial coloring
- chemical flavoring
- · preservatives, which keep the food from going bad quickly
- texturing agents

Also, processed foods can contain dozens of additional chemicals that are not listed on their labels. For example, "artificial flavor" is a proprietary blend. Manufacturers do not have to disclose exactly what it means, and it is usually a combination of chemicals.

Official organizations have tested most food additives for safety, though the use of these chemicals remains controversial among doctors and researchers.

3. Refined carbohydrates

Carbohydrates are an essential component of any diet. However, carbs from whole foods provide far greater health benefits than refined carbohydrates.

The body breaks down refined, or simple, carbohydrates quickly, leading to rapid spikes in blood sugar and insulin levels. When these levels then drop, a person may experience food cravings and low energy.

Because refined carbs cause frequent increases and decreases in blood sugar, consuming them is linked with an increased risk of type 2 diabetes. Highly processed foods are often high in refined carbohydrates.

4. Low in nutrients

Ultra-processed foods are very low in essential nutrients, compared with whole or minimally processed foods. In some cases, manufacturers add synthetic vitamins and minerals to replace nutrients lost during processing. However, whole foods provide

additional healthful compounds that ultra-processed foods do not. Fruits, vegetables, and grains, for example, contain healthful plant compounds with antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, and anticarcinogenic effects. These include flavonoids, anthocyanins, tannins, and carotenoids.

The best way to get the full range of essential nutrients is to eat whole, unprocessed, or minimally processed foods.

5. Low in fiber

Dietary fiber has a wide range of health benefits.

Fiber can slow the absorption of carbohydrates and help people feel more satisfied with fewer calories. It also acts as a prebiotic, feeding the friendly bacteria in the gut, and can help boost heart health.

Most ultra-processed foods are very low in fiber, as natural fiber is lost during processing. Healthful high fiber foods include:

- fruits
- vegetables

whole grains

- legumes
- nuts and seeds

6. Quick calories

The way that manufacturers process foods makes them very easy to chew and swallow. Because much of the fiber is lost during processing, it takes less energy to eat and digest ultra-processed foods than whole or less processed foods. As a result, it is easier to eat more of these products in shorter periods. In doing so, a person consumes more calories — and uses fewer in digestion — than they would if they had eaten whole foods instead.

This increases a person's chances of taking in more calories than they use up, which can lead to unintentional weight gain.

7. Trans fats

Ultra-processed foods are often high in unhealthful, cheap fats. For example, they often contain refined seed or vegetable oils, which can be easy to use, inexpensive, and last a long time. Manufacturers create artificial trans fats by adding hydrogen to liquid vegetable oils, making them more solid.

Trans fats increase inflammation in the body. They also raise levels of low-density lipoprotein, or "bad," cholesterol, and decrease levels of high-density lipoprotein, or "good," cholesterol. Eating trans fats is associated with an increased risk of heart disease, stroke, and type 2 diabetes. For example, according to a 2019 study, a 2% increase in energy intake from trans fats is linked with a 23% increase in cardiovascular risk.

The best way to avoid refined oils and trans fats is to avoid processed foods. A person can replace these with healthful alternatives, such as coconut oil or olive oil.

Summary

In recent decades, ultra-processed foods have become common in diets worldwide. However, eating large amounts of these foods increases risks to health.

To rebalance the diet or make it more healthful, a person can replace ultra-processed foods with whole foods, including grains, nuts, seeds, lean meats, fruits, vegetables, and legumes.

source: medicalnewstoday.com

Glucosamine Chondroitin with MSM Natural Arthritis Pain Relief

By Jamie Smith. Medically reviewed by Amy Richter, RD Nutrition





Many people with arthritis — especially osteoarthritis — use supplements in their diet to ease the pain of arthritis. **Glucosamine** and chondroitin are the most well-known. **Methyl sulfonylmethane** (**MSM**) is another supplement used to ease the pain of arthritis, but it has not been through as much scientific testing.

It is important to check with your doctor before starting any new treatments. Your doctor can review the other medications you are taking and help you decide whether or not these arthritis supplements are right for you. In addition, always follow the instructions on the medication label. Do not take more of the supplements than is recommended.

What Are Glucosamine and Chondroitin?

Glucosamine and chondroitin sulfate are components of normal cartilage. In the body, they are the building blocks for cartilage and appear to stimulate the body to make more cartilage.

The supplements, which are available in pharmacies and health food stores without a prescription, are well-tolerated and appear to be safe. However, there are no long-term studies to confirm their long-term safety and effectiveness. Keep in mind that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulates supplements, but treats them like food rather than drugs.

Many physicians may still recommend a trial of glucosamine at this point, And if there is no apparent improvement by three months, it would be reasonable to stop glucosamine. Research is ongoing.

Which Brand of Arthritis Supplement Should I Use?

There are many different brands of glucosamine and chondroitin, which are usually sold together as one arthritis supplement. Again, there is no government monitoring to ensure the purity of these products.

In order to assure that you get a consistent dose of the supplements, stick with a reputable manufacturer; choose products sold by large and well-established companies. If you don't recognize a brand name, ask about the company's reputation, how long it has been in business, and how long the store has stocked the brand.

Who Should Not Take These Arthritis Supplements?

People with diabetes should use caution when taking glucosamine because it may raise blood sugar. People taking blood-thinning medication (anticoagulants) should check with their doctors before taking glucosamine and chondroitin.

These arthritis supplements may also have a blood-thinning effect, so people taking these supplements in addition to an anticoagulant may have to have their blood tested more often. People who are allergic to shellfish also should consult their doctors before using glucosamine and chondroitin. Glucosamine is extracted from a substance in shellfish.

The effects of these supplements on a growing child or developing baby are not yet known. For that reason, glucosamine and chondroitin are not recommended for children, women who are pregnant, women who are nursing, and women who could become pregnant.

What Are the Side Effects of Glucosamine and Chondroitin?

These arthritis supplements are generally well-tolerated. However, side effects can occur. The most commonly reported side effects of glucosamine and chondroitin include:

- Diarrhea or constipation
- Heartburn
- Increased intestinal gas
- Nausea

What Is MSM and Can It Help My Arthritis?

MSM, or methylsulfonylmethane, is a supplement that is used to try to help a wide range of conditions, including arthritis, allergies, and even snoring.

MSM is an odorless and tasteless natural sulfur compound found in all living things. Sulfur is needed by the body for healthy connective tissue and joint function and has pain-quashing and anti-inflammatory properties.

While MSM is found in many foods —including meat, fish, certain fruit, vegetables, and grains — it is destroyed when foods are processed. MSM supplements have become increasingly popular in recent years and many people feel they have had some pain relief since taking MSM. Although some studies have reported improvement in pain with MSM, more research needs to be done to support its use as an arthritis supplement.



Those patients with multiple health conditions should be aware that current prescription medication may interact with dietary supplements, and they should consult their doctor so that side effects can be best monitored. Moreover, as with many supplements that have not been studied, the long-term benefits and safety of the chemical are unknown. Talk to your doctor before taking MSM.

What Are the Side Effects of MSM?

MSM is considered very safe, and side effects are rare. Side effects that have been reported include:

- Diarrhea
- Fatigue
- Headache
- Skin rash

source: webmd.com

10 Surprising Foods with Hidden Sugar

Written by Team Nutrisense. Reviewed by Heather Davis MS, RDN, LDN



You may think that limiting sugary foods like ice cream, desserts, and soda is all you need to do to reduce your added sugar intake. But high amounts of sugar can be found in some surprising products.

In fact, a recent report found that an estimated 74 percent of packaged foods contain added sugar. These foods can even include those that are labeled as "healthy" or "natural," which doesn't always translate to a low-sugar option.

The Many Faces of Sugar

Sugar has many different names, so it can be hard to detect added sugars in ingredient labels. If you aren't sure that a food is high in added sugar, a good rule of thumb is to check the nutrition facts listed on the package for any of the names sugar may fall under.

Here are some hints to help you catch hidden sugars on the ingredients list:

- The ingredient on the label ends in "-ose."
- The ingredient list contains the words "sugar," "syrup," "juice," or "concentrate."
- · The food includes a "honey" or a "nectar."

Just a few of the names added sugar can masquerade under include:

- Agave nectar
- Corn sweetener
- · Corn syrup or corn syrup solids
- Dextrose
- Brown sugar
- Fruit juice concentrate
- Glucose or glucose solids
- · High-fructose corn syrup
- Maltose
- Sucrose
- Fructose

Top 10 Foods With Hidden Sugar

You might expect to find added sugar in products such as baked goods, desserts, and sodas. But in addition to the usual suspects, there are some foods that can contain a surprising amount of added sugar.

Here are a few common foods with hidden sugars.

1. Yogurt



Yogurt contains probiotics, which may have numerous benefits for your gut. Some types of yogurt, such as plain Greek yogurt, for example, are also great sources of protein and can even have a positive impact on bone health for some people.

Flavored yogurts, however,

tend to be packed with sugar. A typical store bought strawberry yogurt can have as much as 32 grams of sugar in a six ounce container, which is more than a Snickers candy bar!

To cut the sugar, stick with plain Greek yogurt, which only contains 5.5 grams of sugar per six ounces. If you crave some sweetness, add a small handful of fresh or frozen fruit, which will contain less sugar than flavored yogurt and add a boost of fiber and other nutrients.

2. Instant Oatmeal



Oatmeal is a type of whole grain that is high in fiber and even contains some antioxidants. However, many varieties of instant oatmeal contain added sugar, especially if they are flavored. Supermarket bought Instant Oatmeal can have anywhere from 12-15 grams of added sugars per packet.

Instead, opt for plain oatmeal or

steel cut oats, which usually have no added sugar. You may also look for steel cut or rolled oats, which have a lower GI than instant oats and tend to be less processed.

3. Nut or Seed Butter



Nut and seed butters like peanut, almond, cashew, or sun butter are a great way to reap the potential health benefits of nuts and seeds. The American Heart Association recommends eating four servings a week to benefit heart health.

Nut and seed butters come in many varieties, and some have no added sugar. However, some of the

common grocery store brands do contain added sugars.

To reduce some of your sugar consumption, take a close look at the label and choose a brand with no added sugars.

4. Dressings, Sauces, and Marinades



Sugar often sneaks into dressings, sauces, marinades, and other condiments. Ketchup, honey mustard, salad dressings, BBQ sauce, and others may all be secret sources of added sugars depending on the brand.

The serving size is often very small when it comes to condiments and sauces, sometimes just one to two

tablespoons. If you eat more, it's easier for the added sugar to add up, so pay attention to your nutrition labels.

If you want to reduce your added sugar intake, try paying close attention to ingredient labels and choose low-sugar options. Or, you can even make your own!

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5. Dried and Canned Fruits



Because dehydration can concentrate sugar content, dried fruits are often naturally higher in sugar as compared to canned fruits. However, many canned fruit products also contain added sugar. This is because canned fruits will also often have sugar added as a preservative. Canned peaches, for example, can have up to 26

grams of sugar in just one cup, even though a large whole peach has only 15 grams.

To cut the sugar, make sure to read your nutrition labels carefully. Choose dried fruits with no sugar added, and instead of canned fruits, go for fresh or frozen varieties.

6. Pasta Sauce



the ingredient labels closely.

Even though pasta tends to be a savory food, many prepared pasta sauces contain a surprising amount of sugar. A supermarket brand of traditional Italian tomato sauce, for example, contains four grams of added sugar in per half cup.

Like always, make sure to read

7. Non-Dairy Milk



Many of the non-dairy milk alternatives that have become popular in recent years contain added sugar. Almond milk, for example, can contain 7.2 grams of sugar per cup and vanilla almond milk can contain 15 grams. Some brands of oat milk found in the supermarket contain seven grams of added sugar per cup.

Instead, you may want to opt for unsweetened versions of non-dairy milk with fewer ingredients. Unsweetened almond milk contains only 0.2 grams of sugar per cup.

8. Crackers and Bread



Surprisingly, many cracker brands list sugar as an ingredient. Wheat Thins, for example, contain three different kinds of sugar: sugar, refiner's syrup (a refined sugar invert made from cane or beet sugar), and malt syrup made from barley and com. Some crackers contain both sugar and high fructose corn syrup. A loaf of bread can also contain sugar. For example, one slice of

refined white bread contains 2.1 grams of added sugar.

If you're watching your sugar intake, try to choose brands with less or no added sugar. Plain brown rice cakes make a nice substitute for a higher sugar cracker option. You can also experiment with replacing bread or crackers with more creative options, like lettuce, portobello mushrooms, or bell peppers.

9. Protein Bars



Even though their labels tend to emphasize protein, some manufacturers still seem to pack sugar into protein bars. To cut the sugar, focus on some low-sugar protein-rich options.

You can also try to get protein right from the source. Things like uncured beef jerky (with minimal or no added sugar) can also be a great option for extra protein.

10. Alcoholic Drinks or Mixers



Finally, cocktails and cocktail mixers can be loaded with added sugars. Some margarita cocktail mixers can have as much as 28 grams of sugar per ounce!

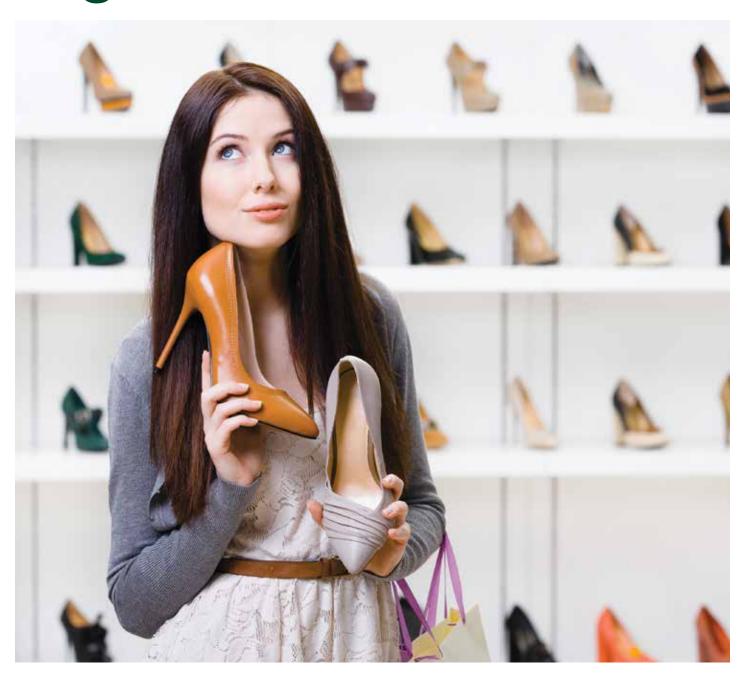
One daiquiri can have 23 grams of sugar, while a Jack and Coke contains somewhere around 15 grams.

To cut down on some sugar, avoid or limit sweet wines or drinks mixed with sugary juices or sodas. These numbers will also vary depending on what ingredients are in the drink. Go for a low-carb beer or a glass of red wine, which has 0.9 grams, instead.

sources: nutrisense.io



Are You Wearing The Right Shoes?



Shoes serve many functions. They protect our feet. They cushion our body weight. They can make our feet feel comfortable or fashionable — hopefully both!

Finding the proper shoes and making sure they fit are important for keeping your feet and your body healthy and happy. Poorly fitting shoes can be painful and cause foot problems like bunions, corns, calluses, hammertoes, plantar fasciitis, stress fractures, and more. Follow these tips from Foot and Ankle Orthopedic Surgeons to find the right shoes for you:

- Have your feet measured. Your foot size and shape can change over time. Don't rely on the fact that you have always worn a certain size.
- Fit your shoes to the larger foot. Most people have one foot that is larger than the other, so make sure you have BOTH feet measured.
- 3. Get measured at the end of the day when your feet are the largest. When you are up during the day, your feet will swell and settle some. You want to make sure you are comfortable throughout the day and not just when you head out of the house in the morning.
- 4. Don't rely on shoe size alone. Just like clothes, the size marked inside the shoe may be different depending on the brand. So your shoe size is a just a starting point in selecting the correct shoe.
- 5. Look at the shape of the shoe. Make sure the shoe shape resembles the shape of your foot and fits your foot comfortably.
- Don't plan on shoes stretching over time. They should fit well when you buy them.
- 7. Check the width of the shoe. The ball of your foot (the widest part just before your toes begin) should fit comfortably in the widest part of the shoe.
- 8. Check the depth of the shoe. The shoe should be deep enough to fit your toes, especially if you have hammertoes or other conditions. If the shoe's toe box is too small, your toes will rub against the top of the shoe and you will get calluses or sores.
- 9. Check the space at the end of the shoe. Stand up and make sure there is 3/8" or 1/2" (about the width of your finger) between your longest toe (usually the second toe) and the end of the shoe.
- 10. Always stand and walk around in the shoes to see if they are comfortable. Check if they fit well and make sure they don't chafe or rub anywhere. Your heel should not slip or slide while walking.

Additional Tips

Match the shoe to your activity

Your ideal shoes will change based on the activity you want to do while wearing them.

- Running shoes are specially designed to provide the proper cushioning at the heel and flexibility at the toes that athletes need.
- Walking shoes have a shock absorbing heel and flex at the ball of the foot.
- Cross-trainers are often good all-purpose shoes for general exercise. Basketball shoes are meant for basketball and may not be the best choice if you do a lot of walking.

- Cycling shoes are stiffer to help you pedal more efficiently but don't work well for most other activities.
- Dress shoes can be comfortable as well as look good. Many dress shoes are now made with a sneaker-like sole that provides better cushioning and tread and better arch support. Expensive Italian loafers are not for everybody.

Look for good shoe construction

Some basic principles of a good shoe include a cushioned heel, firm sole that doesn't easily twist or bend, and flexibility at the proper area depending on the type of shoe.

- If the upper part of the shoe is made from a soft, breathable material, it will be more comfortable for a longer period of time.
- The upper part of the shoe should have laces or straps to hold the foot in place comfortably with activity.
- There should be some arch support in the shoe or in the insert inside the shoe. Many shoes can be made to fit better simply by removing the factory insert and replacing it with a high-quality off-the-shelf orthotic. Custom orthotics are rarely necessary and should be prescribed by your foot and ankle orthopedic surgeon for specific foot disorders.

How do I choose for my child?

Children may require new shoes every 3-4 months. How often you replace their shoes depends on how active your child is and how fast their feet are growing.

Children's feet grow in spurts. Most early toddlers (under 16 months of age) grow more than one-half a foot size in 2 months. Toddlers from age 16-24 months grow an average of one-half a foot size every 3 months. Children 2-3 years old grow approximately one-half a foot size every 4 months, and children over 3 years of age experience increases of one-half a foot size every 4-6 months.

You should ask yourself the following questions when selecting your child's shoes:

How does the shoe fit?

Is the type of shoe appropriate for your child's age?

The Fit

Pay attention to the shoe's length, width, and depth when fitting your child's shoe. Poorly fitting children's shoes can cause toe problems, ingrown toenails, hammertoes, blisters or calluses, and bunions.

- If the shoe has a removable insert, take it out and have your child stand on it to give you a better sense of how much room there is. With your child's heel at the back of the insert, there should be about one-half inch of space between your child's toes and the front of the insert.
- If the inserts are not removable, have your child put the shoe

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on and press down on the front of it. You should be able to fit the tip of your finger between your child's toes and the front of the shoe.

- Examine the depth of the shoe to make sure the top of the shoe doesn't press on the toes or the toenails.
- Look for shoes with rounded toe boxes to give the toes more room to move.

Remember, shoes should be comfortable from the start. If new shoes need to be "broken in," it means either they were not properly designed or not properly fitted for your child's foot. Frequently check your child's feet for redness or blisters, which may indicate they need larger or wider shoes. If you have concerns, make an appointment with a foot and ankle orthopedic surgeon.

The Appropriate Shoe

The Pre-Walking Shoe

Babies and crawlers do not need shoes. They only need booties, warm wide socks to keep their feet warm, or pre-walking shoes that do not bind their feet. The shoe should be flexible rather than provide a rigid support, and it's very important that the shoe be shaped like the child's foot. Your child can go barefoot in a protected environment such as indoors.

Toddler Shoes

Shoes for toddlers (age 9 months to 3 years) should allow the foot to breathe since their feet perspire heavily. Avoid synthetic materials that don't breathe. For children 9-18 months, choose a high-top shoe that will stay on the foot better than an oxford or a low-top athletic shoe. A leather or canvas tie shoe is more secure, will stay on the foot, and will fit little feet better. The sole of the shoe should be smooth, like the palm of your hand, to prevent falls. Choose a lightweight shoe since children use a lot of energy walking at this age. Toddlers can go barefoot in a protected environment such as indoors.

School-Age Children's Shoes

Style and shoe fit is important for school-age children. At this age, they can choose from a variety of options, including athletic shoes, sandals, hiking shoes, etc. Look for reasonably priced, flexible, well-ventilated shoes that allow plenty of room for growth.

source: footcaremd.org

5 Ways a Woman's Body Changes at 40

By Emma Haak



You know about the stubborn weight gain and the sometimes-painful sex (thanks so much, dryness down there), but here are some other unexpected changes you can expect in your 40s.

Hair Loss Is More Widespread Than You've Heard

What you know: Hair often gets thinner with age, and it can become more noticeable starting in your early 40s. Why? In a word: perimenopause, which typically starts in your 40s, but for a small percentage of women, it can start as early as the 30s.

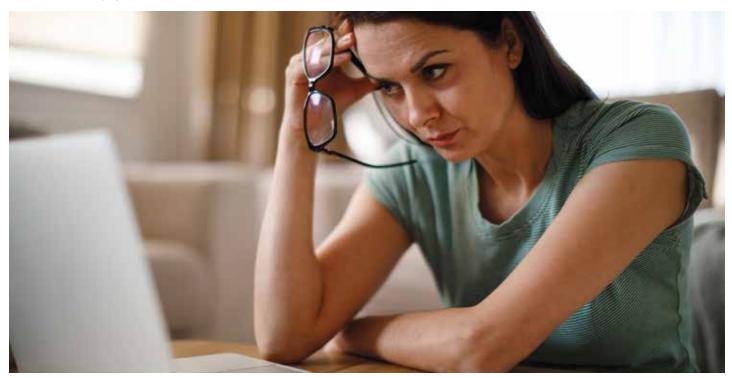
What might surprise you: "The hair loss happens everywhere," says Elizabeth Roth, MD, an internist at Women's Health Associates in the department of medicine at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. That means potentially less leg hair (three cheers for not having to shave as often!) and less pubic hair, which, depending on how your feel about grooming down there, could be good or bad.

What you can do about it: There are effective options for hair loss on the head, but if you're worried about other areas of your body, you'll be happy to hear "it's not an overnight change," says Roth. "It starts years before menopause and progresses pretty gradually."

Key Parts of Your Brain Are Affected

What you know: You might feel a little foggy and notice that you're having trouble remembering everything on your to-do list. And that actress who was in that show with whatshisname? Her name isn't even close to the tip of your tongue.

What might surprise you: This is not just because of the normal aging process—it's part of the normal female aging process. "We have estrogen receptors in two brain areas that control memory, and when there's less estrogen, there are structural changes in those areas," explains Pauline Maki, PhD, a professor of psychiatry and psychology



at the University of Illinois. The first area is the hippocampus, considered the memory center of the brain, and the second is the prefrontal cortex, "which organizes information in meaningful ways so we can remember it better," says Maki. Estrogen also boosts levels of acetylcholine, a neurotransmitter that helps us form new memories.

What you can do about it: The good news, though, is that your forgetfulness isn't permanent. "The brain bounces back after menopause," says Maki. "It adapts to lower estrogen levels, and it compensates." You might be wondering about skipping the whole forgetfulness phase with estrogen therapy. It does seem to help, as women placed in brain scanners during memory tasks showed more activity in the hippocampus when they were put on the therapy, says Maki. But she notes that memory issues alone aren't a convincing reason to go on hormone therapy, as it comes with risks like increased chances of breast cancer, heart disease, and stroke.

Your Monthly Cycle Goes Rogue

What you know: Eventually, you stop ovulating altogether, and your periods are done.

What might surprise you: "It would be nice if the ovaries gradually made less estrogen, but it's a very unpredictable pattern," says Jan Shifren, MD. They can pump out wildly different amounts of estrogen each month once perimenopause hits, which means cycles can be closer together (say, every 25 or 26 days instead of 28) or much farther apart; you could have extremely heavy ones now and again, and there will probably be months where you unexpectedly skip your period altogether. Like we said, chaos.

What you can do about it: If the irregularity is bothering you, ask your doctor about options that can help regulate it, like oral contraceptives or hormone-releasing IUDS.

Your Bladder Isn't Completely Under Your Control Anymore

What you know: Childbearing can do a number on your bladder, and much older women often have issues with incontinence.

What might surprise you: Even if you Kegel like it's your job, you may have problems in your 40s, because with less estrogen, the bladder muscle and the muscles that support the urethra get weaker, leaving you more vulnerable to leaks. (Oh, the joys of being a woman, right?)

What you can do about it: Luckily, there are a handful of very effective fixes for incontinence, both the stress variety (leaking when you exercise or laugh) and the urge kind (you can't get the bathroom fast enough).

UTIS Happen More Frequently

What you know: A lot changes below the waist (vaginal dryness being chief among them) thanks to, you guessed it, lower estrogen levels.

What might surprise you: Urinary tract infections become more common in women after menopause because of those estrogen changes, says Lauren Streicher, MD. Estrogen appears to play a role against the bacteria that lead to UTIs. "We see this issue in 60 to 70 percent of women after menopause."

What you can do about it: Streicher recommends local estrogen like a topical cream, Which delivers more than traditional hormone therapy. At low doses, little of the hormone gets absorbed into the bloodstream, so it's unlikely to affect the rest of your body. (If you're still concerned, ask your doctor about the most minimal amount that would still help with your problem.) Local estrogen can help restore normal function to urethra tissue, decreasing the risk of UTIs.

source: oprah.com



