



The

Liker Health Report

Keeping People Focused on Staying Fit & Healthy

Fall 2020

Mask Up & Get Your Flu Shot

Reduce Your Risk of Serious Heart and Stroke Complications

A good reason to get a flu shot this year comes from a recent American Heart Association report. Vaccinated adults age fifty and older experienced lower cardiovascular risks in the following year -- 28% lower risk of heart attack; 47% lower risk of a transient ischemic attack (TIA); 85% lower risk of cardiac arrest; and 73% lower risk of death. Unfortunately, high risk patients (advancing age, underlying chronic diseases, communal living) are less likely to get a flu shot than people in the general population.

The 2020-21 season is also likely to be one of the most important times to get your annual flu shot -- and early. Even if you don't normally take a flu shot, now may be the time to reconsider. With emergency rooms and hospitals predicted to be filled with COVID-19 patients, reducing the risk of catching and transmitting the influenza viruses to others is an imperative, as is preserving limited healthcare resources. Seasonal flu symptoms are similar to COVID-19 symptoms, which could potentially delay an accurate diagnosis and medical care. Getting vaccinated against the flu helps remove one set of infectious pathogens from the equation.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends healthy people get this year's flu shot as soon as it becomes available. Older persons and those who are immunocompromised can wait a few weeks but no later than the end of October. This is because the vaccine's effectiveness wears off over time, and those at greater risk need protection throughout the flu season, generally between November and April. The CDC notes that individuals who get the flu shot reduce their risk of being admitted to an ICU (due to influenza) by 82%. Furthermore, people over age sixty-five should opt for the "high-dose vaccine." Compared to the standard version, the high-dose is approximately 24% more effective according to peer-reviewed research.

Nutrients to Strengthen the Immune System

Vitamin A is important in regulating the immune system and protecting against infections. Natural sources include carrots, sweet potatoes, broccoli, spinach, eggs; milk and cereals are often fortified with vitamin A.

Vitamin C is an antioxidant that helps reduce inflammation and helps the immune system produce antibodies. Vitamin C is plentiful in citrus fruits.

Vitamin D is the "sunshine" vitamin which the body makes when the skin is exposed to direct sunlight. Vitamin D is found in fatty fish, eggs, and fortified milk.

Vitamin E is an antioxidant that helps reduce inflammation. Sunflower seeds, vegetable oils, peanut butter, and fortified cereals contain vitamin E.

Zinc is a mineral that helps stimulate wound healing. The most absorbable sources are beef and fish; slightly less absorbable zinc is found in beans, wheat germ, and tofu.

*Fortified foods contain specific nutrients, but natural foods are best.

RESEARCH PEARLS:

Sleep Patterns May Predict Alzheimer's Onset

Researchers at the University of California, Berkeley have identified a way of estimating when an individual is likely to develop Alzheimer's disease. Baseline measurements of non-rapid eye movement (non-REM) slow-wave sleep were measured in patients who began experiencing more fragmented sleep (i.e., poor sleep quality), and this correlated with the accumulation of beta-amyloid plaque in the brain over time. So, this means that "the sleep you're having right now is almost like a crystal ball telling you when and how fast Alzheimer's pathology will develop in your brain." This research underscores the importance of getting a good night's sleep because this is the time when the brain cleanses itself and takes the memories of the day's events and puts them into long-term memory. More sleep earlier in life is key to a healthier brain later in life.

Current Biology, 2020 August 28.

The Clutter Conundrum

Does clutter impact mental health?

The average American household contains nearly 300,000 possessions, yet experts believe that being surrounded by so many 'things' does not equate with personal happiness. In fact, compared to other first world countries, Americans are notoriously unhappy and feel less overall satisfaction with their lives. Clutter is more than a physical impediment. Research shows that simply thinking your home is cluttered ('perceived clutter') can raise cortisol (stress hormone) levels.

Conversely, research suggests that de-cluttering can actually relieve stress and decrease cortisol levels. Taking control of the clutter reminds you of your own self-determination and may increase serotonin (feel-good hormone) levels. But for those people whose clutter is sentimental or emotionally charged with conflict or pain, the mental hurdles need clearing first before the items can be discarded without regret. Addressing the emotional connections to one's things can be difficult, but the process can be a very liberating experience. A good rule of thumb is: ***if a possession sparks joy, keep it; if it doesn't, get rid of it.*** Use these guidelines to help de-clutter your home (and life).

Go at a reasonable pace.

You don't have to get it all done in a day, a week, or even a month. Slow and steady is better than bolting from the starting gate and quickly fizzling out.

Everyone is different.

Don't feel like a failure just because you own more than 100 items like a de-clutter expert or influencer does. Achieving an amount less than what you begin with is what's important.

Start in the rooms where you spend the most time.

Typically, this is the kitchen and your bedroom. Get rid of gadgets you've never used, cookbooks and recipes that are available online, and non-perishable foods you'll never eat. Go through your closet and get rid of clothes that either don't fit anymore (and likely won't) or items you haven't worn in the last 2 years.

Remove donation items or trash ASAP.

If you boxed or bagged items for donation, don't leave them near the front door or in the garage. Take it to the donation drop-off station (or garbage can) right away.

Impose a self-embargo.

Commit to not bringing in any new objects for a certain period of time or for each item that enters, one leaves.

Make each day your masterpiece.

John Wooden

Dear Dr. Liker...

Is there a connection between inflammation and lack of motivation?



Yes, there does appear to be an association between chronic low-grade inflammation in the body and a reduction in motivation. Scientists at Emory University recently put forth their theory that chronic inflammation (due to the production of pro-inflammatory cytokines) is likely to cause a chain reaction that ultimately reduces the amount of dopamine in the brain. Dopamine is a neurotransmitter and a hormone, that among other functions, is necessary for reward-driven motivation.

The speculation is that this process might actually be an adaptive mechanism by the body which evolved in order to conserve energy reserves during times of severe distress. Lower motivation, leading to less activity, would allow the immune system to re-balance itself and heal the body. Certainly, this would have been advantageous long ago, but not necessarily in modern times. The increasing prevalence of unhealthy lifestyle factors such as poor nutrition, physical inactivity, insufficient sleep, and ongoing mental stress, contribute to the production of pro-inflammatory cytokines. The ensuing inflammation may trigger the chemical reactions that lead to lower dopamine levels. So, in this case, the body's adaptive mechanism would instead be 'maladaptive.' The solution is to try to improve the factors which otherwise contribute to inflammation.

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LIKER CONSULTING, INC.

The Center for Executive & Corporate Health

Harley R. Liker, M.D., M.B.A.

CEO

9675 Brighton Way, Suite 350
Beverly Hills, CA 90210

E-mail: hliker@likerconsulting.com
www.likerhealthreport.com

Publisher and Editor-in-Chief -- Harley Liker, M.D., M.B.A.
Senior Editor -- Karen Edwards, M.S.

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