

Wellbeing Insights



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Looking for ways to boost your self-care routine? [Click here](#) for your daily inspiration!

Brain-Boosting Benefits of Books

Most of us were encouraged to read as children. Reading helped us learn, grow, and explore the world. As adults, reading for pleasure often takes a back seat to work, family responsibilities, and endless to-do lists. Yet making time for a good book may be one of the simplest ways to support your mental and emotional wellbeing.

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Brain-Boosting Benefits of Books

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Why Reading Is Good for You

Reading offers a surprising number of benefits that go far beyond entertainment:

- **Strengthens the brain.** Reading challenges the brain to process information, build connections, and imagine new ideas. Regular reading keeps the mind active and engaged, which may support cognitive health as we age.
- **Improves memory and concentration.** Following a storyline, remembering characters, and connecting events all require focus. Over time, this mental exercise can improve attention span and strengthen memory skills.
- **Builds empathy and understanding.** Fiction allows us to experience the world through someone else's perspective. By seeing situations through the eyes of different characters, we practice understanding thoughts, feelings, and experiences that may be different from our own.
- **Reduces stress.** Getting lost in a good book provides a break from daily pressures and worries. Even a short reading session can help create a sense of calm and give the mind time to reset.
- **Supports better sleep.** Replacing screen time with 15 to 20 minutes of reading before bed can help signal to your brain that it's time to wind down. Many people find that a consistent reading routine helps them relax before sleep.
- **Encourages creativity and resilience.** Stories are filled with challenges, uncertainty, and problem-solving. Watching characters navigate obstacles can inspire us to approach our own challenges with greater flexibility, creativity, and optimism.

Don't Overlook Your Local Library or Used Bookstore

The benefits of reading may actually begin before you open the first page.

Visiting a library or used bookstore can provide its own wellbeing boost. These spaces create a calm environment that encourages curiosity, exploration, and learning. Browsing without a specific goal can spark creativity, introduce new ideas, and provide a welcome break from screens and daily distractions.

Libraries also create a sense of community by offering book clubs, lectures, classes, and other events where people can connect over shared interests. Used bookstores often provide a similar experience, with the added thrill of discovering unexpected treasures at an affordable price. Many readers find that simply spending time in these spaces feels restorative and inspiring.



As an added bonus, libraries make it easy to experiment with different genres and authors at no cost, while used bookstores offer an inexpensive way to build a personal collection.

How to Start Reading Again

If you haven't read for pleasure in years, don't worry. You can rebuild your reading habit with small, manageable steps.

- **Start with your interests, not what you think you should read.** Think about topics you already enjoy. If you love history podcasts, try historical nonfiction. If you enjoy crime shows, explore mystery novels. If you're fascinated by personal growth, pick up a self-development book.
- **Sample different genres.** Many adults assume they don't like reading when they simply haven't found the right type of book. Consider trying:
 - » Mysteries or thrillers for suspense
 - » Historical fiction for storytelling with historical context
 - » Memoirs and biographies for real-life inspiration
 - » Science fiction or fantasy for imagination and escape
 - » Humor for a lighter reading experience
 - » Nonfiction on topics that genuinely interest you
- **Give yourself permission to quit a book.** Not every book will be a good fit. If you're not enjoying it after a reasonable effort, move on and try something else.
- **Start small.** Aim for 10 to 15 minutes a day rather than setting ambitious goals. A few pages each day can quickly become a rewarding habit.
- **Consider audiobooks.** Listening while walking, commuting, or doing household tasks lets you enjoy stories and ideas, making reading more accessible when life gets busy.
- **Ask for recommendations.** Librarians, bookstore staff, friends, and online reading communities can be excellent resources for finding books that match your interests.



ON THE MENU

Walnuts

Walnuts may be small, but they deliver an impressive nutritional punch. Packed with healthy fats, antioxidants, vitamins, and minerals, they're one of the most nutrient-dense foods you can keep on hand.

One of walnuts' standout benefits is their high omega-3 fatty acid content. These healthy fats support heart health, brain function, and healthy aging while helping to combat inflammation throughout the body. Research also suggests that regularly including nuts like walnuts in your diet may support cognitive health and overall wellness.

In addition to healthy fats, walnuts provide important nutrients such as vitamin E, magnesium, and phosphorus. Together, these nutrients support bone health, immune function, muscle performance, and energy production. Walnuts also contain a satisfying combination of protein, fiber, and healthy fats, making them a filling snack that can help keep hunger at bay between meals.

Interestingly, walnuts are not technically nuts. They are seeds found inside the fruit of the walnut tree. The two most common varieties are English walnuts and black walnuts. English walnuts have a mild flavor and softer texture that work well in both sweet and savory dishes, while black walnuts offer a bolder, earthier taste that is often featured in baked goods and desserts.

Walnuts are also incredibly versatile in the kitchen. Sprinkle chopped walnuts on oatmeal, yogurt, or salads, add them to grain bowls, or enjoy them as a simple snack. They can even be crushed and used as a flavorful coating for chicken or fish.

Keep It Fresh

Because walnuts contain natural oils, proper storage helps preserve their quality and flavor. Store walnuts in an airtight container in the refrigerator, where they'll stay fresh for up to three months. For longer storage, freeze them for up to one year.



Herb Toasted Walnuts

Ingredients

- 2 cups raw walnuts
- 2 tablespoons fresh herbs (or ½ tablespoon dried herbs), such as rosemary, thyme, or herbs de Provence
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon pepper
- ¼ cup olive oil or avocado oil

Directions

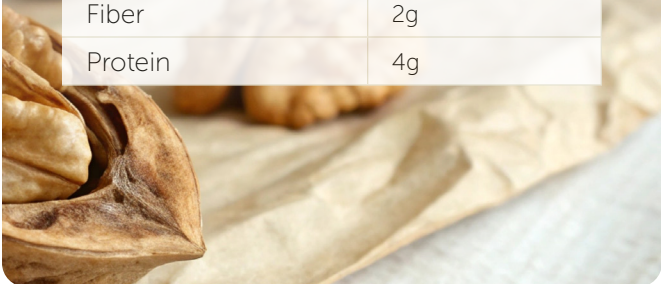
1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. In a bowl, whisk together the oil, herbs, salt, and pepper.
3. Add walnuts and toss until evenly coated.
4. Spread walnuts on a parchment-lined baking sheet.
5. Bake for 10-15 minutes, stirring every 4-5 minutes, until lightly golden and fragrant.

Serve as a snack, add to a charcuterie board, sprinkle over salads, or use as a crunchy topping for Mediterranean- or Italian-inspired dishes.

Nutrition Information

Per Serving (1/4 cup)

Calories	253
Total Fat	25g
Carbohydrates	4g
Sugar	4g
Fiber	2g
Protein	4g



Mold Exposure:

Could Your Home be Making You Sick?

Have you ever walked into a room and noticed a musty smell? Maybe you've discovered water damage after a storm or found mold growing around a window or in a basement. While mold is a natural part of your environment, excessive indoor mold can impact both the quality of your home and your health.

What is Mold?

Mold is a type of fungus that grows in damp environments. It thrives where moisture is present, including around roof leaks, plumbing issues, flooding, condensation, and areas with poor ventilation. Mold can grow on drywall, carpeting, ceiling tiles, wood, fabric, and other household materials. Because mold spores are naturally found both indoors and outdoors, complete avoidance isn't realistic. The key is to prevent mold from growing and spreading inside your home.

Can Mold Affect Your Health?

For some individuals, exposure to too much mold may trigger symptoms such as:

- Stuffy nose
- Sore throat
- Coughing
- Red, itchy, or watery eyes
- Skin irritation or rashes
- Worsening asthma symptoms

People with allergies, asthma, chronic lung conditions, or weakened immune systems may be more sensitive to mold and experience more significant symptoms.

Warning Signs of a Hidden Mold Problem

Mold isn't always visible, but some common indicators include:

- A persistent musty or earthy odor
- Water stains on ceilings or walls
- Peeling paint or wallpaper
- Condensation around windows
- Past flooding or water damage
- Visible discoloration on walls, ceilings, or flooring

Hidden mold may also be found behind drywall, under carpeting, inside HVAC systems, or in poorly ventilated areas.

Preventing Mold Growth

The best way to manage mold is to control moisture. The CDC recommends:

- Repairing leaks promptly
- Keeping indoor humidity levels low
- Using exhaust fans in kitchens and bathrooms
- Addressing water damage within 24 to 48 hours
- Cleaning and removing moldy materials when needed

It's important to remember that cleaning visible mold may not solve the problem if the underlying moisture source remains.

Supporting Indoor Air Quality

In addition to moisture control and mold remediation, improving ventilation and using HEPA filtration can help reduce airborne mold spores and other indoor air contaminants. Some individuals also choose natural products such as tea tree oil gels, botanical sprays, or essential oil-based candles to help reduce musty odors and create a fresher indoor environment. While certain essential oils have demonstrated antifungal properties in laboratory studies, these products should be viewed as supplemental measures for odor management and indoor comfort rather than primary methods for mold prevention or removal.

When to Talk with a Healthcare Provider

If you are experiencing ongoing respiratory symptoms, worsening allergies, asthma flare-ups, or other health concerns and suspect mold exposure may be contributing, consider discussing symptoms with your doctor.

Mold is a signal, not just a surface problem. Musty odors, leaks, and excess moisture are your home's way of telling you that something needs attention. Taking action early can help protect your property and support a healthier living environment for you and your family.





Autumn Fitness Amp-Up

As summer winds down and routines begin to shift, fall is the perfect time to refresh your approach to physical activity. Cooler temperatures and beautiful scenery make it easier to get outside, but shorter days, packed schedules, and dipping energy levels can make it harder to stay consistent. A little planning now can help you build momentum, boost your mood, and maintain healthy habits through the holiday season.

Consider Your “Harvest”

Autumn is traditionally a season of harvest, making it a great time to think about what you hope to gain from being active. While weight management may be one goal, consider the many other benefits movement can provide. Perhaps you want more energy, better sleep, reduced stress, improved mental health, or greater social connection.

Identifying your personal reasons for staying active can help keep you motivated when the weather changes or life gets busy. The most sustainable fitness routines are often tied to goals that feel meaningful and relevant to your daily life.

Join a Challenge or Community

One of the easiest ways to stay motivated is to connect with others. Today, there are more options than ever. Many fitness apps, wearable devices, and online communities offer seasonal step challenges, activity streaks, walking groups, and wellness programs that encourage consistency through friendly accountability.

If virtual options aren't your style, consider joining a local walking group, recreational sports league, fitness class, or community event. Having people who are working toward similar goals can make movement more enjoyable and help you stick with it over time.

Plan for Flexibility

Fall weather can be ideal one day and unpredictable the next. While outdoor walks, hikes, bike rides, and pickleball games are great ways to take advantage of the season, it's helpful to have a backup plan.

Think about a few indoor options you can turn to when schedules get hectic or temperatures drop. Home workouts, fitness apps, exercise videos, community centers, and gym memberships can help you stay active without missing a beat. The goal isn't perfection. It's finding ways to keep moving, regardless of the circumstances.

Create Meaningful Rewards

Tracking your progress can help you stay engaged and recognize your successes. Consider keeping a simple log of workouts, daily steps, or active minutes and periodically reflect on what's working well.

When it comes to rewards, focus on choices that support your wellbeing rather than undermine it. Treat yourself to a new pair of walking shoes, a massage, workout gear, a fitness class, or even an afternoon doing something you enjoy. Celebrating consistency and effort, rather than focusing solely on outcomes, can help you build habits that last.

Protect Your Smile and Your Budget

Taking care of your oral health can support your overall wellbeing, but many people don't fully understand how to use their dental benefits or find affordable care. A little knowledge can help you get the most value from your coverage and avoid unnecessary expenses.

Start by learning the basics of your dental plan. Most plans cover preventive services such as exams, cleanings, and X-rays at little or no cost when you visit an in-network provider. Preventive care can help identify problems early, often before they become more complex and expensive to treat.

Another important feature is the annual maximum, which is the amount your plan may pay toward dental care each year. If you know you'll need additional treatment, talk with your dentist about scheduling services strategically to make the most of your available benefits. Also review your deductible, network requirements, and any waiting periods that may apply.

To maximize your benefits:

- Schedule preventive visits every year.
- Use in-network providers whenever possible. You can save between 25% and 50% on your dental bills.
- Review treatment estimates before major procedures.
- Track your deductible and annual maximum.
- Ask your dentist about lower-cost treatment alternatives when appropriate.

Don't have dental insurance? You still have options. Many dental offices offer payment plans, cash discounts, or membership programs that provide reduced fees for routine services. Community dental clinics and dental schools may also offer care at a lower cost. Find out about free and low-cost dental services here: [Finding Dental Care | National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research](#).

If you're evaluating dental coverage during open enrollment, look beyond the monthly premium. Consider what preventive services are covered, whether your preferred dentist participates in the network, the annual maximum, deductible requirements, and expected out-of-pocket costs. The right plan is one that fits both your oral health needs and your budget.

Good oral health starts with consistent preventive care and informed decisions. By understanding your benefits and planning ahead, you can protect your smile while making the most of every healthcare dollar.



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