Walking for the health of it

by julie estlick

... the only thing you need to get started is a comfortable pair of shoes.

~ Kimberly Burke, instructor in the college of Health and Human Sciences at CSU

Moving our bodies, especially as we reach middle age and beyond, helps us stay healthier and live longer. For some, that means regular cycling classes, playing hours of pickleball, or skiing black diamonds. But physical activity doesn’t have to be intense or expensive to provide health benefits.

Walking, something most of us do every day, is a great form of exercise, says Colorado State University’s Kimberly Burke, an instructor in the College of Health and Human Sciences. “Walking gets your heart rate up while being gentle on your joints. It helps build strong bones and avoid bone loss. And the only thing you need to get started is a comfortable pair of shoes.”

There are also no new movements to learn, no gym memberships or class fees, and you can do it whenever your schedule allows. A post-meal walk, for example, can aid in digestion by increasing blood flow to the digestive system, moving food along the digestive tract quickly and effectively.

Research has shown that walking at a moderate pace for 30 to 60 minutes, 3 to 5 days a week can help lower blood pressure, reduce the risk for chronic diseases, boost muscle power and endurance, and offer other physical and mental health rewards.

It’s a message nurses at the Health District of Northern Larimer County try to drive home at cholesterol and blood pressure screenings. “We make it a point to tell clients that you don’t need to be...”
Energy-Boosting Breakfasts

Simple, whole foods get you through a busy morning

by betsy lynch

Even if you don’t wake up craving calories, your body needs energy to start the day. But not just any fuel will do, says Shelby Cox, registered dietitian nutritionist and recent director of Colorado State University’s Kendall Reagan Nutrition Center.

“If there’s one thing we need for breakfast, it’s balance,” she says. “That’s so critical.” Your morning medley should satisfy hunger and provide staying power by including whole foods that are rich in vitamins, minerals, complex carbohydrates, high quality protein, healthy fats, and fiber. Breakfast can be as traditional or as modern as you care to make it—quick oats or a quinoa porridge—there are infinite choices.

Oats continue to be a breakfast staple because they’re affordable, versatile, and nutritious. They earn high marks for soluble fiber, which slows digestion, stabilizes blood sugar, and promotes heart health. But in fact, many whole grain breads and cereals, fresh fruits and berries, and even veggies added to an omelet, smoothie, or tofu scramble, provide the energy, fiber, and micronutrients we need to keep going all morning long, Cox notes.

Eggs, avocado, Greek yogurt, skyr (an Icelandic yogurt), nuts, and seeds are also popular breakfast items because they provide protein and healthy fats which also stabilize blood sugar, keep us energized, and help us feel full longer.

If you can’t imagine starting your day without a cup of coffee, there’s no harm in that. Just know that caffeine provides “a false sense of energy,” according to Cox. Your brain and body still need actual nutrients for peak performance. And since we’re only human, if we acquire a pastry to go with our favorite breakfast beverage, she suggests circumventing a sugar crash by balancing the carbs: eat a protein (think eggs, cheese, nuts, plain yogurt) along with the Danish.

It’s also easier to resist temptation when we’re not feeling famished. A power bar or packaged cereal is likely a better choice than forgoing food altogether, suggests Cox, especially when we choose products that use whole grains, dried fruits, nuts, seeds, and other ingredients—without added sugar. You can also prepare nutritious, ready-to-eat breakfast items yourself. The Kendall Reagan Nutrition Center offers a list of ideas at www.chhs.colostate.edu/krnc/recipes/breakfast.

**Overnight Oats**

1/2 cup rolled old-fashioned oats  
1/2 cup milk of choice (low-fat milk or unsweetened oat milk)  
Optional:  
1/4 cup yogurt of choice  
1/2 tablespoon chia seeds  
1 teaspoon sweetness (honey or maple syrup)  
1/4 teaspoon vanilla extract  

**DIRECTIONS:** Place oats, milk, and optional yogurt, chia seeds, sweetener, and vanilla extract into a mason jar or food storage container with a lid. Shake until all ingredients are combined. Refrigerate for at least 4 hours, or overnight. Remove lid and serve.

For more topping suggestions and nutrition information:  
chhs.source.colostate.edu/krnc/recipes-of-the-month-customizable-overnight-oats

Images: hakkiarslan/istock/GettyImagesPlus; etiennevoss/istock/GettyImagesPlus; AlexeyBorodin/istock/GettyImagesPlus
The Health District’s 2022 Community Health Survey found broad declines in mental health for Larimer County adults, with younger adults*, those with lower income**, and LGBTQ+ residents facing the greatest challenges.

Percent of respondents experiencing 10 or more days of poor mental health in the previous month

- **ALL ADULTS**: 20%
- **YOUNGER ADULTS**: 32%
- **LOWER INCOME**: 33%
- **LGBTQ+**: 51%

Among all adults, respondents reported experiencing 4.5 days of poor mental health per month, an increase of one day from 2019.

More adults say they’ve been diagnosed with a mental health disorder. A quarter of adults say they cannot afford to get the help they need.

Social isolation

12% of adults rarely or never have someone to:
- Confide in
- Have a good time with
- Take them to a doctor

Adults from households with lower incomes are nearly twice as likely to have reported struggling with these social interactions.

More health data available

The 2022 Community Health Survey was a random survey with responses from 2,700 adults in Larimer County who completed the survey in writing or online in the spring and summer of 2022. For more key findings from this survey, visit healthdistrict.org/community-health-assessment.

* Younger adults refers to adults ages 18-34
** Lower income refers to households whose income is 250% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) or below. In 2022, that amount was $33,975 or less for an individual, or $69,375 or less for a family of 4.


IF YOU ARE IN CRISIS:

SummitStone Health Partners Crisis Care
1217 Riverside Ave., Fort Collins (8 a.m. – midnight);
970-494-4200, ext. 4 (24/7)

Colorado Crisis Services
844-493-8255 or text "TALK" to 38255 (24/7)
“Adolescence can be a turbulent time,” says Laurie Klith. Yet in her 23 years advocating for kids with emotional, behavioral, and substance use issues, she’s found area teens to be respectful and cooperative with staff offering a healthier path.

“Sometimes people have a stigma about teenagers, but once you understand who they are and what they want their lives to be, you just want to help them get there,” says Klith, founder and director of The Center for Family Outreach (TCFFO).

When a student is referred to the Center, Klith doesn’t see a “troubled teen.” Rather, she sees a smart and capable individual who has yet to learn the life skills needed to successfully navigate this complex world.

Teens are naturally curious, experimental, and sometimes impulsive. They might want greater independence. They may not think about the consequences of high-risk behaviors such as drinking alcohol, drug use, unprotected sex, fighting, online interactions, skipping school, or other self-harming choices. Add stress, anxiety, depression, peer pressure, insecurity, bullying, family dysfunction, and other challenges to the mix, and it’s not surprising that some teens find themselves failing in school, arguing with parents, addicted to substances, or in trouble with the law.

Rather than let these youth continue down such treacherous roads, the Center provides counseling, therapy, and classes to raise self-esteem, improve communication, and address emotional and behavioral problems so teens can get back on safer footing.

The Center’s staff includes therapists, counselors, educators, and case managers who work with approximately 250 students and their families each year. Referrals come from teachers, parents, school counselors, juvenile justice officials, social workers, and mental health professionals.

“I feel so privileged to be able to work in Larimer County, a community that advocates for its young people,” Klith says. “We are united in our efforts on behalf of our kids.”

The organization partners with the Health District of Northern Larimer County’s Child, Adolescent, and Young Adult Connections (CAYAC) team when teens need a higher level of treatment than TCFFO can provide. CAYAC staff includes a child psychiatrist, psychologists, and care coordinators who promote early identification and treatment of mental health and substance use disorders for young people, including psychological testing, short-term counseling, and brief medication management. They also connect families to community resources that meet their needs.

TCFFO has offices in Fort Collins and Loveland, where classes such as “Navigating Life” and “Power of Conversation” are taught in age-appropriate groups. There’s also a Parent Navigators Program that teaches strategies for interacting more effectively with teens.

Services are provided on a sliding fee scale. No one is turned away due to an inability to pay. To learn more about TCFFO and its programs, go to tcffo.org, or call 970-495-0084.

**What parents need to know**

Sometimes, parenting is no picnic. If you’re dealing with a crisis or looking for the “missing manual,” The Center for Family Outreach has a guide called The Parents Need to Know Book. It’s a collection of local resources, including legal, financial, housing, education, employment, addiction, domestic violence, health care, childcare, LGBTQIA+, and other available services, updated annually.

Download the manual at tcffo.org/parents-need-to-know-book or call 970-495-0084 to request a copy.
any of us may not remember exactly what’s in our medicine cabinets, or just how long those products have been there. But our tendency to hold on to expired medications “just in case” is neither advisable nor safe, says UCHealth’s Gina Harper, clinical co-coordinator for Poudre Valley Hospital’s Department of Pharmacy. Harper recommends that we take inventory at least once a year and clear out anything that’s past its prime or no longer prescribed.

Prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) medications are sold with expiration dates for a reason. For starters, the potency and power to produce the desired result of what’s in the bottle changes over time. This is especially true once drugs leave the pharmacy. We tend to keep medications in bathrooms, kitchens, and cars, where changes in light, temperature, and humidity can take a toll on active ingredients.

“We don’t really know how drugs age over time,” Harper says, noting that cool, dry, dark, child-proof closets, cupboards, or drawers are better storage options—as long as you won’t forget to take your meds.

Body chemistry and health concerns also change. Perhaps your doctor has prescribed new medications and eliminated others. Avoid bad drug interactions by keeping prescriptions current and taking only what your health-care providers have approved.

Of special concern are painkillers, opioids, and other potentially addictive medicines. If you no longer need a prescription, pitch it—properly, of course. You’ll eliminate the temptation to self-medicate, and keep children or other adults from taking them.

“The goal is to prevent prescription medications from falling into the wrong hands and to keep drugs from being misused or abused,” Harper says.

In Larimer County, expired pharmaceutical drugs are treated as hazardous waste. Flushing medications is not advised. Nor is simply tossing them in the trash. That’s because chemicals can leach into groundwater or circulate through the municipal water system with no way to filter them.

The best method for disposal, Harper says, is to deliver unwanted medications to authorized drug take-back sites. She offers the following tips to make handling safer for everyone:

- Transfer tablets, capsules, powders, and gummies from their original bottles into resealable plastic bags.
- Resist the temptation to dump liquids down the drain. Leave them in their original bottles, make sure the cap is screwed on tight, and then put the container into a resealable plastic bag.
- Handle ointments, creams, gels, and patches the same way. Place the original tube, package, or dispenser in a resealable plastic bag.
- Remove labels or completely black out any patient or prescription information on bottles and packaging.
- Recycle empty prescription bottles.
- If you can’t get to an authorized disposal site, consider a product like DisposeRx, which makes the medication unusable. The sealed packets can then go to the landfill.

Harper understands the human impulse to squirrel away medicines. Prescription drugs are expensive. Yet she hopes cost concerns won’t cloud people’s judgment. Disposing of outdated medications is potentially lifesaving—and community drug take-back programs make it easy to dispose of medications properly.
a marathon runner to get the benefits of exercise,” says Julie Abramoff, clinical nurse manager for the Health Promotion Program. “Taking a walk provides amazing health benefits and it can be done anywhere.”

Unfortunately, as Americans age, they are not getting the recommended amount of aerobic exercise, which is any exercise that improves blood flow and sends oxygen to different parts of your body. Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans set by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in 2018 recommend at least 150 to 300 minutes a week of moderate-intensity, or 75 to 150 minutes a week of vigorous-intensity aerobic activity (or a combination of moderate- and vigorous-intensity exercise). The guidelines also include doing muscle-strengthening activities two days a week or more.

In 2020, just 28 percent of American men and 20 percent of women met the guidelines for both aerobic and muscle-strengthening exercise. Locally, 46 percent of men and 36 percent of women in Larimer County said they met the guidelines, according to the Health District’s 2022 Community Health Survey.

Finding activities that get you moving and don’t feel like a chore can help. “It’s important to enjoy whatever ways you choose to be physically active,” says Burke, who also directs the CSU Adult Fitness Program with the Department of Health and Exercise Science. Students help run the program to gain practical experience, providing fitness assessments and working with community members to improve participants’ cardiovascular fitness, strength, and flexibility.

Walking is often used as a warm-up or cool down, and sometimes as a main form of exercise in the program.

Need for speed?

You may be wondering if you need to walk at a certain pace to get the most out of your fitness routine. Some research suggests that walking around 2 miles per hour, or covering a mile in 30 minutes, is a good goal.

Burke puts it another way. “Our recommendation is that a brisk walk is ideal,” she says. “For instance, you ‘stroll’ at the store or to the mailbox, so ‘brisk’ is a little faster than that.” On a subjective scale with 0 being sitting, and 10 the hardest you have ever worked, 5 is moderate. Your pace should be in the 4-5 range.

The ‘talk test’ can be used to gauge your intensity. Let’s say you’re walking with a friend. If you can recite the Pledge of Allegiance, then you’re at a zero. Start walking faster, and you should be able to use natural pauses in the conversation to keep breath regulated. If there’s an opportunity to pick up the pace a little, do it, but if you find yourself stopping to catch your breath, slow down.

Before lacing up your sneakers, remember to keep safety and comfort in mind. Use sun protection, wear layers, and bring water to stay hydrated. If you’re walking at night, wear bright clothing or a vest so you can be seen.

When it’s hot out, walk with less intensity or do it at a cooler time of day or evening. Or walk at a mall or someplace that has air-conditioning.

If you want a more vigorous workout, do intervals—move at a faster pace for a few minutes, then slow down and recover, then speed up again. Treadmills are a good option because you can increase elevation on the machine to get your heart rate up quicker, plus you’re indoors in a controlled environment.

An indoor track offers an even surface, no cars or pets to dodge, and you don’t have to deal with heat or cold, wind, or bugs. There are several in the region you can use for a small drop-in fee or as part of a fitness program (see breakout box). As with any exercise, if you feel pain or discomfort during a walk, slow down or stop. Some symptoms can be resolved by better footwear, but others may require a trip to your health-care provider. If you develop heel swelling or pain from plantar fasciitis, or you notice pain on the top of the foot, consider replacing your shoes, Burke says. Pain in the knee, hips, or back: have your gait assessed for any changes in the way you walk.

When in doubt, talk to your primary care provider.

Mood buster

In addition to the physical benefits, exercise improves our mental outlook and can help with depression and anxiety. “Walking when the sun’s out, seeing the green around you, it boosts your mood,” Burke says “It gives your brain a chance to slow down and gain some context.”

For her part, Burke schedules weekly walks with a friend on campus to make sure she gets out of her work chair and gets a good dose of social time, too.
Liane Jollon named new executive director

Liane Jollon joined the Health District as the new executive director on July 1.

Prior to her new position, Jollon had served as executive director of San Juan Basin Public Health, a health department serving La Plata and Archuleta counties in southwest Colorado, since 2013. She also served as the agency’s Health Services Division director and manager of the Family Planning Clinic and Immunization and Family Planning Program in the past.

In 2022, she was named a Gates Family Fellow as a Senior Executive in State and Local Government at the Harvard Kennedy School at Harvard University. She is a past president of the Colorado Association of Local Public Health Officials.

“The board is thrilled to have Liane Jollon become the next executive director for the Health District of Northern Larimer County,” says Molly Gutilla, president of the Health District board of directors. “Liane is an experienced, thoughtful, strategic, and passionate leader in community health. We are excited to work with her moving forward as we pursue our organizational mission of enhanced health for all.”

Hottenstein, McKay join board

Erin Hottenstein and John McKay were elected and sworn in to the board of directors for the Health District in May. Six candidates ran for two open seats on the board. A total of 2,066 ballots were cast.

The Health District is governed by a five-member board of directors. Members serve staggered four-year terms and are elected at-large by Colorado voters who are either residents of the district, or who own—or whose spouse or civil union partner owns—property within the district.

Elections are held every two years in odd-numbered years.

Fire Hydrant 5k

The Health District’s Ruff Around the Edges team completed the Fire Hydrant 5K in rainy, cold conditions, and raised $1,223 for the Larimer Humane Society. It was the largest team at the event with 17 staff members, former employees, family, and some dogs—including several people who participated virtually—and finished fourth in fundraising.

Comings and goings

Tonya Kron has joined the Health District as the Mental Health Connections Manager. Tonya will oversee the Connections adult mental health and substance use team and the Child, Adolescent, and Young Adult Connections (CAYAC) team.

Lindsey Floyd has been hired as the Community Impact Team (CIT) Manager. CIT coordinates partnerships with community organizations, agencies, and individuals to tackle critical public health issues in northern Larimer County.

Allyson Williams was promoted to the new position of Director of Planning and Research and Evaluation. Williams was previously policy analyst for the Health District.

Prescription Assistance (PA) Specialist Ann Martin retired after 24 years of service. Larimer Health Connect Health Coverage Specialist Rogelio “Roy” Ramirez Jr. has taken over PA program duties.

Research and Evaluation Manager Sue Hewitt is retiring in September after 23 years. Hewitt headed the team that carries out the Health District’s triennial Community Health Assessment.

Pedal power

The Health District and Jax Fort Collins Outdoor Gear co-hosted a breakfast station at the corner of N. College Ave. and Conifer St. for the 35th Annual Summer Bike to Work (or Wherever) Day in June. Visitors were treated to freshly made pancakes, drinks, and the Health District’s ever-popular energy bites. Several staff members participated and/or volunteered during the event.
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