

Vaccination Procrastination



August is
Immunization
Awareness
Month.

People have various reasons for putting off vaccinations — they think they don't need them, forget to get them or aren't aware they need them. What's important to remember is that scientists developed vaccines for 1 reason: to stop children and adults from getting sick and dying prematurely.

Vaccines have helped us live decades longer than a century ago by protecting us from the devastating epidemics of measles, polio, diphtheria, pertussis and other serious diseases. For example, in the early 1900s, 4,000 people in the U.S. died every year from pertussis (whooping cough); in 2014, that number was 13 thanks to the pertussis vaccine.

Vaccines build immunity by imitating an infection that causes your system to produce antibodies to fight the disease. After getting a vaccine, the imitation infection can sometimes cause minor symptoms, such as fever; this is normal and expected as the body builds immunity to the disease.

Many vaccines are given in childhood, but adults still need vaccinations to prevent some illnesses, such as tetanus, types of pneumonia, influenza and shingles, as well as travel abroad to high-risk countries.

While several diseases have become rare due to vaccination programs, many still exist. Until they're eradicated (such as smallpox), it's vital to keep immunizing against them. Removing that protection could result in diseases spreading and becoming epidemic again.



Your Anti-Disability Plan

Exercise and stay active at every age. Major studies indicate that regular exercise throughout life is the best strategy for slowing or reversing the effects of aging on several biological markers (biomarkers), including:



Muscle strength:

The more muscle you use the less you lose. You can increase muscle strength at every age.

Body fat percentage.

Without regular exercise your muscles shrink, fat tissue accumulates and you burn fewer calories, potentially leading to unhealthy weight gain.

Aerobic capacity.

The amount of oxygen your body circulates is a key indicator of overall fitness. Routine cardio exercise improves oxygen flow, boosting stamina and general health.

Blood sugar tolerance.

Aging may reduce your body's sensitivity to insulin. Exercise helps you control your blood sugar by making your body more sensitive to insulin. It also lowers your risk of type 2 diabetes.



Blood pressure.

It tends to increase as we age. But we can often prevent and reverse high blood pressure with regular exercise and weight control.

If you haven't already, discover how regular exercise can greatly improve your odds of aging well.

“Learning never exhausts the mind.”

— Leonardo da Vinci

Food Label Terms Defined By Cara Rosenbloom, RD



Grocery shopping used to be so easy. You'd head to the store, buy milk, bread and fresh produce, and you'd be set. Food shopping today is much more challenging with increasing product options and decisions to make based on label claims and marketing buzzwords. Here's your primer for what they mean:

>>Organic: This government-regulated term is only found on foods that are verified by a USDA-accredited certifying agent. **Organic** indicates the farming practices used for a food product's ingredients (e.g., grains, meat, etc.), but it does not necessarily mean the product is nutritious. So, for example, cookies and chips labeled organic are no better for you than versions made with ingredients from conventionally grown plants.

>>Non-GMO: A genetically modified organism (GMO) is a plant or an animal food source whose genetic makeup has been modified in a laboratory. If GMO products are a concern for you, look for the **Non-GMO Project** logo, which verifies that each product ingredient comes from a non-GMO source.

>>Natural: Because the government doesn't define or regulate this term, any food product can be labeled natural. The FDA is reviewing this term and may regulate its use in the future.

>>Plant-based: The ingredients are from plant sources (e.g., vegetables, beans, soy) rather than animal sources (e.g., meat, poultry, dairy).

>>Free-range: This is a farming method that gives animals time each day to roam around outside of their enclosure. Free-range is an unregulated marketing term; ask farmers what it means on their farm.

>>Hormone-free: This label is improperly used on animal-based foods, such as hormone-free steaks, because animals naturally have hormones. Some packages will say **no added hormones**, which means the animal was not given synthetic hormones.

Health Care Visits: Ask Questions

Doctors know a lot about medicine. What challenges them is the uniqueness of each patient. So, when it comes to diagnosing and treating a condition, the better you both communicate, the better your health outcome.

Questions are the answer. Health care providers depend on their patients' questions, according to patient experts Dr. Adrienne Boissy, chief of patient experience at Cleveland Clinic, and Dr. Ted Epperly, clinical professor of family medicine at the University of Washington School of Medicine. Here's what they recommend you ask your provider about your treatments:

- What is the test for?
- Why do I need this procedure?
- When do I need it or can I delay it?
- What are my treatment options?
- What are the side effects of my medication?
- Will it be emotionally stressful?
- What changes can I make to improve my condition?
- What outcome can I expect?
- Should I get a second opinion?
- What other questions should I be asking?

Because time is limited during provider visits, review your questions and come prepared to listen well. If possible, bring along a family member or close friend to help listen and take notes. Quality care is a team effort, and that includes you, the patient.



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Q: What is a black box warning?

A: It's a boxed statement on the label of prescription drugs or medical devices that calls attention to potentially serious or life-threatening product risks. A black box warning is the Food and Drug Administration's most severe warning; it's reserved for products with side effects that may cause grave injury, illness or death.

Many more drugs have received black box warnings in recent years. The FDA has created fast-track drug approval, allowing new drugs to reach the market more easily. But since the FDA has only a short time to review fast-tracked drug side effects before giving approval, the drugs are more likely to receive boxed warnings after release.

People who take new drugs are at the highest risk for serious unknown side effects. Ask your health care provider about older drugs you can take since they usually have been studied longer.

— Elizabeth Smoots, MD, FAAFP

