

APRIL 2010

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## Not Quite Vegetarian

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

**A**re you curious about a vegetarian diet? It appeals to many and offers several health benefits. But there are folks who just can't picture life without a juicy porterhouse steak.

If that sounds like you, consider going *flexitarian* instead. Flexitarians are vegetarians who occasionally eat meat.

The number of flexitarians is growing, largely due to better understanding of the diet-health connection. People who choose vegetarian diets generally consume less cholesterol and saturated fat and more beneficial fibre, vitamins and antioxidants. They may also have a lower risk of heart disease, cancer and diabetes. Flexitarians can get the health benefits of being a vegetarian without entirely giving up meat.

The flexitarian diet satisfies meat cravings. Plus, including the occasional serving of lean meat provides protein, iron, zinc and vitamin B<sub>12</sub>, a nutrient sometimes lacking in animal-free dishes.

**Basic plan:** Choose main dishes based on legumes (chickpeas, beans, lentils), eggs, soy and low fat dairy products most often. Enjoy fish and chicken on occasion. Save meaty dishes for those must-have moments.



### APRIL GOAL

**Clear the clutter.** Clean up your space and make it as appealing and pleasant for you to work in as possible.



With flexitarianism, you enjoy a wider variety of foods when dining out or at a friend's house, where meat is sometimes the only item on the menu.

Whether you avoid meat or eat it occasionally, you can feel confident that you are doing well to protect your health.

*Note:* Talk to your provider before making major dietary changes.

If you try flexitarianism, start with small changes. Skip the bacon at breakfast. Or choose a few days a week as "meatless" days. Gradually switch to non-meat protein sources, such as tofu, beans and nuts.

### HEALTH notes

■ **Feeling tired and fuzzy-headed?** You may be dehydrated. And no wonder – on average, 60% of your body is water. You are probably getting enough fluids if you're rarely thirsty and produce 6.3 cups/1.5 litres or more of clear or slightly yellow urine daily.

■ **Alcohol link to allergy risk?** Danish study participants who said they had more than 14 drinks a week were at 78% higher risk of developing perennial allergic rhinitis (AR) than those who drank fewer than 1 drink a week. Researchers theorize alcohol consumption may be one reason for an increase in AR, given its established role as a hypersensitivity trigger and potential impact on the immune system. Nearly 6,000 Danish women aged 20 to 29 participated. None of the women had seasonal or perennial allergies when the study began.

■ **Knees, hips and backs are vulnerable to osteoarthritis, caused by thinning cartilage.** One key defence – prevent sports and exercise injuries. Wear proper shoes; vary exercise activities; stop if something hurts; and allow enough time for injuries to heal completely.

■ **The 6 most effective fitness tools:**  
① Realistic goals. ② Support from friends. ③ A journal to track food intake and log exercise. ④ Food-free rewards, such as a new exercise outfit, or spa day. ⑤ A pedometer – try to take at least 10,000 steps a day (2,500 steps will burn 100-125 calories). ⑥ Breakfast. Studies show that those who lost weight successfully never skip breakfast – make it low fat, healthy, and high-energy breakfast.



## Taking a Spin

**Curious about spin classes?** Indoor cycling classes move stationary bike riding to another level.

Groups of 10 to 20 participants go on a “virtual bicycle ride” led by a specially trained instructor. Spinning bikes are designed to withstand intense spinning workouts with varying resistance.

### The power of the pedal:

Regular cycling tones the lower body – quadriceps, thighs, calves and abdominals. A 45-minute class will burn from 380 to 500 calories. It can also increase cardiovascular efficiency by improving blood flow and increasing oxygen distribution throughout the body. *Bonus:* Spinning is non-impact, putting less strain on your knees, hips and lower back.

Because spinning is high intensity, it is not recommend for beginning exercisers.

If you do exercise regularly and want to give it spin, keep these points in mind:

- Get your health care provider’s okay before starting a spin class.
- Tell the instructor if you are a beginner, as some centers offer an introductory class.
- Go at your own pace. Listen to your body.
- Bring a full water bottle to stay hydrated.
- Wipe down your spin bike before and after use.

# Hidden Sources of Stress

**I**t’s spring and the sun is shining, so you shouldn’t be stressed – right? Even with the winter doldrums behind them, many people are stressed and don’t know why. Here are 2 surprising examples of stress and how to deal with them:

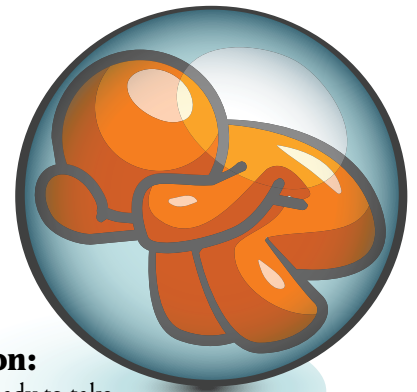
**A job promotion:** That’s good stress, right? Well, yes and no. The good stress comes from knowing you’ve been rewarded for a job well done, but the hidden stress comes from fear of the unknown. You may think, “What if I make a mistake? Or am I really worth that pay raise?”

*Solution:* Make communication a priority – being “in the know” helps reduce or prevent problems. Seek out a co-worker who can provide advice or perspective on your new role. Recalling past achievements can boost your confidence.

### Vacation:

Getting ready to take a vacation has its share of stressors. For example, you may feel rushed to finish work projects before you leave or get packed.

*Solution:* Prioritize. If some work doesn’t need to be done before you leave, save it for your return, when you’re refreshed and revitalized. At home, delegate tasks for trip preparation. For example, older children can do their own packing with some guidance.



## CAMPING SAFETY

**Is it the fresh air?** The excitement of “roughing it?” There’s nothing like camping to get away from it all!

### Use these tips to help you prepare:

1. Pick your destination and follow the weather and news about the area. Research the area online or use guidebooks.
2. Tell friends and family your destination and your return date.
3. Teach your kids what to do if they get lost. Give your kids whistles and bright-coloured clothing.
4. Wear layers of clothing that you can peel away or add to. Bring lightweight waterproof jackets and wear suitable hiking shoes.
5. Bring bottled water. Otherwise, purify water with iodine tablets or boil it.
6. Pack portable foods, such as dehydrated meals, granola bars and trail mix.
7. Wear long-sleeved shirts and pants to reduce exposure to poisonous plants, such as poison oak. Bring an over-the-counter antihistamine, calamine lotion and hydrocortisone cream.
8. Use insect repellents with no more than 10-30% DEET on clothing. Check for ticks if they are in the area.
9. Make your campsite less attractive to wildlife. Keep the campsite free of food odours and keep food out of your tent. Never feed or approach animals.



# Tricky Health Stories

Get the truth behind the headlines.

**I**n reporting health studies, a little information can produce a lot of confusion. While some sources get the facts straight, many reports are incomplete and distort or exaggerate research findings that mislead audiences. Here are some guidelines to help you interpret media coverage.

**Get beyond the headlines.** Some headlines overhype the story to gain attention (*Bras Cause Cancer – Thinking Makes You Fat – Junk Food During Pregnancy Leaves Kids Fat for Life*). If it sounds silly, it probably is.

**Get the whole picture.** Often the facts and advice may be in the article's middle or end. Read or listen to the entire story to get a clear perspective.

**Consider the source.** Studies reported in clinical journals or by leading nonprofit health organizations are generally reliable. Examples: *Canadian Medical Association Journal* and Health Canada. For reliable daily online health news, sign up at healthfinder.gov.

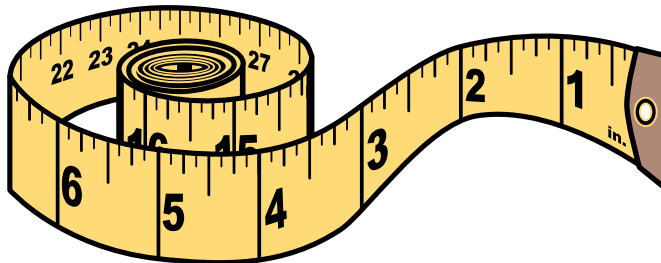
**Don't rely on just one report.** A single TV or newspaper story may be too brief to do justice to a complex subject. Likewise, be skeptical of single-source stories.



**Weigh the words.** Watch for phrases such as “preliminary research” or “linked to” or “associated with”, which suggest more study is needed. Stay tuned for more.

**Consider the type of study.** Generally, the larger the group studied and the longer the study, the more reliable the results. And human studies are more relevant to your health than animal ones.

## Caution: Fad Diets



**L**ose 20 pounds/9 kilograms in 2 weeks! I lost 50 pounds/22 kilograms with no exercise! These and similar claims are the mark of fad diets.

What's the harm in fad diets? Quick weight-loss plans are generally impractical and hard to follow long-term, making the weight loss temporary. If they omit entire types of foods, such as those high in carbohydrates or protein, you may miss out on essential nutrients.

### Look for these red flags:

- ❗ Claims that sound too good to be true, such as losing more than 1-2 pounds/.45-.91 kilograms a week.
- ❗ A diet program that does not include exercise and proper nutrition.

- ❗ Sells you a specific product, such as a supplement.
- ❗ Recommendations that ignore differences among individuals and groups.
- ❗ Eliminating 1 or more of the 5 food groups.

What's the best way to lose a pound? Cut 500 calories a day to lose 1 pound/.45 kilograms a week by exercising and switching to lighter versions (lower in sugar, fat and sodium) of foods you're eating (1 pound/.45 kilograms = 3,500 calories). Make realistic changes that lead to permanent weight loss.

More tips: Record calories consumed in a food-drink journal. Research shows using journaling doubles weight loss. Watch your beverages – their liquid calories add up quickly.

## QUIKRISK™

### Skin Cancer

**Did you know – skin cancer is the most common form of cancer.** It is also one of the most preventable and treatable types of cancer. Take this self-assessment to see if you may be at risk.

YES NO

- Have you ever been sunburned, even as a child?
- Do you have fair skin and light-coloured eyes and hair?
- Do you sunburn easily and have freckles?
- Has anyone in your family had skin cancer?
- Are you over age 50?
- Do you spend a lot of time outdoors in the sun?
- Do you use tanning booths?
- Do you have a lot of moles on your skin?
- Do you live or vacation in a southern, tropical or high-elevation area that gets more UV radiation?

These factors raise skin cancer risk. Answering “yes” to a few questions does not mean you'll get cancer.

However, it does mean you should take steps to protect your skin and discuss your risks with your health care provider. Check your skin monthly. Look for new or changing moles or growths. Have your health care provider check your skin annually.

**There is no such thing as a “healthy” tan. A tan, like a burn, is a sign that your skin cells have already been damaged by UV rays.**

**Keep those questions and suggestions coming!**

phone: 800-871-9525  
 fax: 205-437-3084  
 e-mail: editor@personalbest.com  
 website: www.personalbest.com

Editor: Susan Cottman  
 Assistant Editor: Kim Wake  
 Advisors: Marica Borovich-Law, MBA; John Brennan, MD, CCFP; Canada Safety Council; Leslie B. Hutchinson, PhD; Cara Rosenbloom, RD  
 Designer: Nicolai Petersen

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# Sorting Out Sugar Substitutes

People have been using sugar substitutes, also called artificial sweeteners, for decades – primarily to cut calories from sugar-sweetened foods and drinks. What are the other benefits or potential pitfalls of using these sweeteners? Test your knowledge.

## 1. Sugar substitutes can help:

- a. fight cavities
- b. reduce calorie intake
- c. control blood glucose levels
- d. all of the above

## 2. The sugar substitute that has NOT received Health Canada's approval for safety is:

- a. aspartame
- b. saccharin
- c. sucralose
- d. sugar alcohols

## 3. Stevia is approved for all uses in Canada.

True  False

## 4. Sugar-alcohol sweeteners provide an average of half the calories of sugar and other carbohydrates.

True  False

## 5. Sugar substitutes produce side effects in some people.

True  False

## ANSWERS

1. *d* – Sugar substitutes and artificial sweeteners are reasonable options if you're trying to cut calories or control your blood sugar while enjoying sweet foods and drinks.
2. *b* – Dozens of studies on aspartame and sucralose show these substitutes are safe for the general public. In the 1970s, saccharin was linked to bladder cancer in rats. Researchers have since found that saccharin's carcinogenic effect in rats is not the same in humans. Health Canada is considering allowing saccharin to be added to certain foods.  
*Note:* People who have *phenylketonuria* (a metabolic disorder) should not use aspartame, a warning required on all aspartame products.
3. *False* – The Natural Health Products Directorate (NHPD – an arm of Health Canada) approves limited use of stevia in natural health products if the stevia content falls within strict medicinal dosage limits. It is not widely approved for use in foods beyond NHPD.
4. *True* – Sugar-alcohol sweeteners contain fewer calories than sugar and include mannitol, sorbitol and xylitol. They are often recommended for people with diabetes because they raise blood sugar more slowly than sugar.
5. *True* – If you are sensitive to sugar substitutes or consume more than normal amounts, you may experience side effects. Most common are headache, gas, diarrhea and upset stomach.

## Recipe of the Month

# Mediterranean Spinach Soup

Enjoy a hearty, high-fibre bowl full of flavour.

- 1 tbsp/15ml extra virgin olive oil
- ½ medium onion, chopped
- 1 medium carrot, diced
- ½ tsp/2ml minced garlic
- 4 cups/1 L reduced-sodium chicken broth
- 2 15-oz cans/887ml red beans, drained and rinsed
- 8 cups/340g baby spinach leaves, coarsely chopped
- 3 tbsp/45ml fresh lemon juice
- Grated Romano cheese to taste

- 1 In large pot, heat oil over medium temp; add onion and carrot and cook, stirring, 4-5 minutes.
- 2 Stir in garlic; add broth and continue cooking.
- 3 Meanwhile, mash half the beans (with 1 tbsp/15ml soup broth) until creamy; stir into soup and add remaining whole beans.
- 4 Reduce heat, add spinach; cover and simmer 30 minutes.
- 5 Stir in lemon juice, and garnish with cheese.

## Nutrition Facts

Makes 7 cups/1.75 litres.

Amount Per Cup/250ml	Calories	152
	Protein	10g
	Total Fat	2.8g
	Carbohydrate	21g
	Fibre	8g
	Sodium	355mg

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