

HEALTH
FITNESS
NUTRITION
WELL-BEING

Matters®

10 FAST FACTS

Walking for 30 minutes burns about 150 calories. If you walked every day for six months, you'd burn off five pounds.

For a satisfying snack, eat something high in protein, like peanut butter on a cracker. Protein is the nutrient that tells the brain you've had enough to eat.

Cooking chicken with the skin on won't increase the fat content of the meat. Just be sure to remove the skin before eating.

Legumes (like chickpeas, kidney beans, brown beans, etc.) are the richest source of fibre in our diet.

Smoking, combined with taking birth control pills, increases the risk of heart attack in women.

Don't use the same mascara for more than three months. Old mascara can be a reservoir for infection-causing bacteria, fungi and viruses.

An average-sized avocado contains 30 grams of fat, most of which is healthy monounsaturated fat that can help lower bad HDL cholesterol levels.

Eating fruits and vegetables while they're fresh and in season ensures that they're at their tastiest and with the optimal nutrient content.

Tobacco stains teeth yellow. Foods that can stain teeth include soy sauce, curry, blueberries, coffee, red wine, colas, dark fruit juices and tea.

A ½ cup (125 mL) of white vinegar added to the final rinse cycle helps soften fabrics and reduce static cling without adding any scent or chemical irritants.

Living Gluten-Free



weight loss, skin rashes, canker sores, easy bruising and joint pain.

The only treatment for celiac disease is a strict gluten-free (GF) diet for life. Fortunately, many of the staples of a healthy diet are naturally gluten-free, including fresh vegetables and fruit, nuts, seeds, legumes, soy foods, lean meat, poultry, fish and milk products. Rice, flours made from corn, soy or other legumes, and small amounts of pure, uncontaminated oats are allowable grains in a GF diet. Amaranth, buckwheat, millet, quinoa, sorghum and teff are also highly nutritious grain alternatives. A good gluten-free cookbook (e.g., *Gluten-Free Diet* by Shelley Case) can provide guidance in adding these grains to meals and snacks. Gluten-free flours and baking mixes can be made or purchased to substitute into most recipes that call for wheat flour.

Since gluten is often a hidden ingredient in sauces, salad dressings, soups, prepared meats, deli meats and even candies, read the fine print on food packages. Obtain a detailed list of foods allowed, foods to question and foods to avoid from a registered dietician or reputable resource.

Many great GF versions of bread, cereals, tortillas, crackers and other grain products are now available in mainstream grocery stores (although it should be noted that some of these products lack the nutrients found in wheat-based versions). People who need to follow a GF diet should consult a dietitian about how to plan healthy GF meals and snacks and avoid shortfalls in iron, B vitamins or other key nutrients found in grain products.

NOTE: If you're experiencing the described symptoms, see your doctor. It's important to get an accurate diagnosis before beginning a gluten-free diet.

IN Canada, it's estimated that one in 133 people is affected by celiac disease, a genetic, autoimmune disease (not an allergy) in which proteins from wheat, rye and barley (known as gluten) cause damage to the small intestine. For people with celiac disease, continued consumption of gluten-containing foods can lead to an inability to absorb iron, folic acid, calcium and vitamins A, D, E and K, as well as increase the risk of developing osteoporosis, infertility and certain cancers. Common symptoms of celiac disease include bloating, gas, nausea, diarrhea, extreme fatigue,

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Edamame – The Healthy Snack



One of the hottest and healthiest snacks on the market today is edamame.

Enjoyed in East Asia for centuries, edamame is essentially green soybean pods that have been picked before they are ripe. Similar in appearance to pea pods, edamame pods are most often found in the frozen foods section of the supermarket, typically packed in microwavable containers that can be used to heat them. They can also be steamed, or boiled in lightly salted water.

After they are cooked, the beans are removed

from the pods and eaten as an appetizer (the pods are discarded). The beans can also be shelled and added to salads or main dishes.

Soybeans are an excellent source of vegetable protein and other important nutrients. A ½-cup serving of edamame beans (about 1 ⅓ cups of whole pods) contains 120 calories and delivers 11 g of protein, 3.6 g of primarily healthy fats, 40 mg of vitamin C, 130 mg of vitamin A and 9 g of fibre as well as iron, phosphorous and calcium.

Next time you've got a hankering for a snack, forget the potato chips and pass the edamame.

Choose Whole Foods

There's growing interest among health-conscious Canadians in eating foods in their most natural state; not those heavily changed or designed by humans. Natural food choices include whole grains, fresh fruits and vegetables, milk and fresh meats and poultry. It's a trend that's been partly fuelled by increasing concerns that the over-consumption of genetically modified foods and heavily processed foods may be contributing to poor health.

The human body is designed to slowly break down whole foods to extract the energy and nutrients the body's cells need to function. Advocates of eating whole foods believe that eating large amounts of heavily changed or highly processed foods disrupts the natural digestion process. In addition, processed foods are generally high in preservatives, fat, sugar and salt, and have lost fibre and many vital vitamins and minerals. Foods like white rice, instant mashed potatoes, cake, white bread, deli meats, snack bars and sodas are common examples of heavily processed foods.

Enjoying the occasional processed treat



won't compromise your health; it's when refined and processed foods make up most of your food choices that you could be setting yourself up for long-term health problems.

Eating whole, fresh foods has been proven to help stabilize blood sugar levels, provide more energy and assist with stabilizing weight. Choose an apple instead of a cookie or sports bar for your afternoon snack. Try to eat more fresh fruit and vegetables, cooked whole grains and natural meat choices. Save the processed, refined "fast foods" as an infrequent treat.

Delicious Kiwi Fruit

Kiwi, the exotic fruit shaped like a fuzzy brown egg and filled with green, tangy-sweet flesh is an excellent food choice. Just one cup of kiwi fruit packs as much potassium as a banana (552 mg), 164 mg of vitamin C, 154 IU of vitamin A and 2.5 mg of vitamin E. It also contains 2 g of protein and 5.3 g of dietary fibre, making it an excellent portable snack. Kiwi also contains an enzyme that dissolves protein, making it a fine meat tenderizer: simply mash a ripe kiwi, spread over the meat and refrigerate for 30 minutes before cooking.

Although the skin is edible, most people prefer to cut kiwi fruit in half and



scoop out the flesh and seeds with a spoon. It's also a delicious addition to fruit salads, smoothies or green salads.

When purchasing kiwi, look for fruit that yields to slight pressure, or allow the fruit to sit on the counter for a few days (out of direct sunlight) until it is ripe.

Allergy Alert: Kiwi is a potential allergen for some people. Symptoms can range from an itchy, tingly mouth to difficulty breathing. Kiwi allergy appears to be linked to latex allergies and hay fever, so people with these known sensitivities should avoid kiwi fruit.

There is no love sincerer than the love of food.
George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) Irish playwright

Fruit Juice – Too Much of A **Good Thing?**

Freshly squeezed or 100% fruit juices taste delicious and are generally a healthy addition to a balanced diet, delivering lots of vitamin C and other nutrients (plus many are now fortified with added calcium). Half a cup (125 mL) of fruit juice is also an effective way to get a serving of fruit into people who don't like fruit. However, drinking too much juice can cause problems – especially for children.

While 100% fruit juices do contain vitamins, they also tend to be acidic, are higher in carbohydrates (all in the form of sugars) than milk, contain only small amounts of protein and minerals, and contain little or no fibre. They're also high in calories: just ½ cup (125 mL) of most fruit juices contains 60 to 80 calories.

Children who drink too much fruit juice are at increased risk of becoming overweight (calories) and developing dental cavities (due to the sugar and acidity). Over-consumption of fruit juices can also cause gastrointestinal problems, including diarrhea, excessive gas and abdominal pain. Further, drinking juice fills up



small stomachs and may contribute to decreasing a child's appetite for more nutritious foods. Another concern is that increased consumption of fruit juices is reducing the consumption of

milk, greatly cutting the intake of bone-building calcium.

Fruit juices should always be enjoyed in moderation. When selecting fruit juice, choose 100% pure pasteurized fruit juice (avoid fruit drinks or fruit sodas, which often contain very little actual juice). Don't give juice to children under six months of age. Children ages one to six should drink no more than 2/3 cup (175 mL) of juice a day; young people ages seven to 18 should drink no more than 1½ cups (375 mL) of juice a day. Also, encourage your children to eat whole fruits by offering easy access to grapes, berries and apples, cut-up fruits or a fresh fruit salad.

Hiding Fruit in Food

- Fruit smoothies
- Add chopped apples or berries or fruit purées to muffins
- Add blueberries to pancakes
- Make frozen puréed fruit pops
- Served puréed berries over ice cream



Office Fridge Hazards

Your workplace may be harbouring a serious health hazard, also known as “the office refrigerator” – a chaotic mix of forgotten lunches, expired condiments and sticky spills.

Communal fridges everywhere too often fall into serious neglect as messes go uncleaned,

produce rots and a multitude of greasy lunch bags and abandoned plastic tubs stack up. Further, if the door seal of the refrigerator is cracked or the temperature dial is turned down, the bacteria contained in abandoned or outdated foods can multiply to dangerous levels.

Mouldy or sour-smelling foods are easily spotted, but the real threat lies in pathogenic bacteria, such as *Salmonella*, which grows rapidly in temperatures above 4°C (40°F) and cannot usually be detected by sight, taste or smell. Toxic amounts of these bacteria can cause serious illness, with symptoms that include nausea, diarrhea, cramps and fever. Even fresh food can become contaminated by coming into contact with spoiled items or from the unwashed interior of the fridge itself.

Here are some ways to keep your office fridge from giving you the chills:

- Set the fridge below 4°C/40°F (-18°C/0°F in the freezer). Keep thermometers inside to monitor the temperature.
- Tag every item with a date sticker and establish strict time limits. When the time is up, the food is tossed.
- Use dedicated covered tubs for every individual to reduce cross-contamination.
- Make cleaning the fridge (and coffee maker and microwave) part of one person's job description. If the responsibility must rotate, task someone with enforcing it.

Red meat is not bad for you. Now, blue-green meat, that's bad for you!

Tommy Smothers (1937-) Comedian



Antacid Overuse

For many people, the stresses of everyday life, together with lifestyle choices, have a way of hitting them right in the stomach. In fact, it's not uncommon to see bottles or rolls of antacid in the workplace.

Antacids act by neutralizing excess stomach acid and are taken orally to relieve acid indigestion, heartburn and upset stomach. Some also help with surplus gas and even absorb the excess acid.

While antacids provide a fast, effective way to gain relief from unpleasant symptoms, they are not intended to be used every day unless under the direction of your doctor. In fact, if you need to use antacids on a regular basis, you should see your doctor as your symptoms may actually be a sign of an underlying problem such as a stomach ulcer, hiatus hernia, mass (growth), a mal-absorptive disorder or a heart disorder.

It's easy to think of antacids as being a relatively harmless OTC medication, but like all medications, they must be taken with care. For example, antacids are known to interact with certain prescription medications (sometimes interfering with their absorption), so it's important to consult your physician or pharmacist before taking them. Further, if used incorrectly, antacids can cause diarrhea, constipation, headaches and cramps, among other side effects.

The bottom line is that antacids are helpful, but they can be harmful to your health if used inappropriately or for the wrong reasons. You could be masking the real problem or even make the problem worse. Reading antacid labels is also imperative as some people are allergic and/or intolerant to ingredients such as magnesium, sodium or calcium, and most antacids contain some form of these ingredients.

Stop self-medicating an ongoing stomach-acid problem. See your doctor for a proper assessment, to establish the diagnosis and determine the best treatment.



Do You Have Cellphone Elbow?

Cellphone elbow, also known as cubital tunnel syndrome, is a painful condition caused by bending the elbow for long periods of time, thereby damaging nerves.

The most common symptoms of cellphone elbow are numbness of the inside of the hand as well as the ring and little finger, and pain and muscle weakness in the hand, forearm and elbow.

Repeatedly bending your elbow for long periods of time (such as when you are on the telephone, typing, leaning on your elbows, or pulling, reaching or lifting) can irritate the ulnar nerve, which over time can cause constant strain. In addition, the ulnar nerve runs through a groove in the bone near the inside of the elbow at the site where the muscles and ligaments of the forearm attach. These structures can constrict the irritated nerve.

To diagnose cubital tunnel syndrome, your doctor may (in addition to a physical examination) do a nerve conduction test to measure the speed at which the impulses travel along your nerves and an electromyogram (EMG) to evaluate nerve and

muscle function.

Be aware of what you are doing that may be triggering the problem and focus on modifying your actions to minimize stress on your elbows.

Treatment for cubital tunnel syndrome will depend on its severity and may include:

- Reducing or eliminating the activity causing the irritation – for cellphone users this may include a recommendation to switch to a hands-free earpiece.
 - Limiting the amount of time you're doing activities such as pulling, talking on the phone, typing, etc.
 - Taking regular breaks to stretch your arms
 - Wearing an athletic elbow brace or splint to limit movement of your elbow
 - Wearing an elbow pad when leaning on hard surfaces
 - OTC anti-inflammatory medications or acetaminophen.
- If elbow pain persists, talk to your doctor. Treatment options can include manual therapy, prescription medications or even surgery.

NOTE:
Cubital tunnel syndrome should not be confused with carpal tunnel syndrome, which primarily impacts the wrist. Carpal tunnel syndrome is caused by the impingement of the median nerve that passes through the carpal ligament at the wrist.

Most people are about as happy as they make up their minds to be.

Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865) 16th American President

The Power of Forgiveness



Alexander Pope called it divine, and Ghandi called it an attribute of the strong. However, forgiveness is more than a virtue – it's an important part of well-being and good physical health.

People who practise forgiveness experience reduced hypertension, chronic pain and stress, better cardiovascular function, less anxiety, faster healing, and improved chances of recovering from addiction. Forgiveness also plays a role in improving personal relationships and increasing optimism and self-esteem.

Just as forgiveness can help heal, holding on to anger and frustration can do great harm, raising blood pressure and stress levels and increasing your susceptibility to disease. Sustained resentment can also block your ability to connect with others, leading to isolation and depression.

Practising forgiveness doesn't mean you must condone every wrong; it means making the effort to

put wrongs behind you. Forgiveness is a learnable skill and involves:

- + Preventing yourself from repeatedly replaying the injury in your mind
- + Reducing the importance of the event in your life
- + Changing the story of the event, so you are not the focus
- + Considering how your reaction to an offence may be doing more harm than the offence itself.

The benefits of forgiveness are not affected by whether or not the person who committed the transgression against you admits wrongdoing, or even by a lack of reconciliation. You can forgive someone while maintaining boundaries that protect you from further harm.

Don't let lingering anger, frustration or resentment eat away at your mental and physical well-being. Harness the power of forgiveness and move on.

Positive Attitude and Weight Loss

If you're having trouble sticking to a diet, the problem may lie in how you think.

It's easy to sabotage your efforts at making a change when you frame your "self-talk" in negative terms. How can you feel encouraged when you're telling yourself negative things like "I must lose weight because I don't want to be teased anymore", or "because I'm fed up with not being able to get into my clothes?"

Instead of focusing on what you *don't* want, shift your focus to what you *do* want. Positive reasons for losing weight might be "to be respected because I manage my weight", or "to feel more confident."

Brain studies have shown that negative thoughts and constant worrying generate negative emotions that prevent you from effectively dealing with the issue. In addition, flooding the body with stress hormones can cause you to crave calories and store fat. On the other hand, positive thinking calms the emotions, generating a happier, more optimistic disposition and allowing you to think more clearly. Feeling happier makes it much easier to achieve your weight-loss goal.

Throughout the day, take a few moments to think about what you do want to achieve. Let that positive feeling flow throughout your body. Whatever you can visualize you can achieve!



Early Starts, Less Stress

Do you routinely feel rushed in the morning? Do you skip breakfast, run around to get ready and then trudge out the door feeling stressed before the day even begins? Try becoming an early bird.

It's well known that stress affects digestion, weakens the immune system, increases the risk of heart disease and promotes anxiety. By setting your alarm one hour earlier in the morning, you create a window of time to start the day in a healthier and stress-free way. Use that time to:

- Eat at a relaxed breakfast
- Prepare a healthy lunch
- Meditate or do yoga
- Go for a jog or walk



How to Become an Early Bird

- ▶ Slowly reset your internal clock by going to bed and getting up a little earlier each week.
- ▶ Use positive self-talk to coax yourself out of bed upon waking.
- ▶ Keep your home dim in the evening and very bright in the morning.
- ▶ Maintain good sleep hygiene, such as avoiding caffeine after noon and maintaining a serene sleep environment.
- ▶ Stay hydrated to stave off morning headaches.
- ▶ Avoid the snooze button. Uninterrupted, quality sleep is better than a lengthier period of disrupted rest.

Forgiveness does not change the past, but it does enlarge the future.

Paul Boese (1668-1738) Dutch botanist

Bruxism – It's a Real Grind

Do you frequently grind or clench your teeth? This involuntary or habitual action is called bruxism, and depending on its severity it can produce symptoms ranging from mild jaw pain to damaged teeth or even a cracked jaw. Since it happens while you're asleep, you may not be aware you're doing it, but the typical symptoms are unmistakable. Headaches, toothaches or a sore jaw, especially in the morning, could be an indication that you grind or clench your teeth during the night.

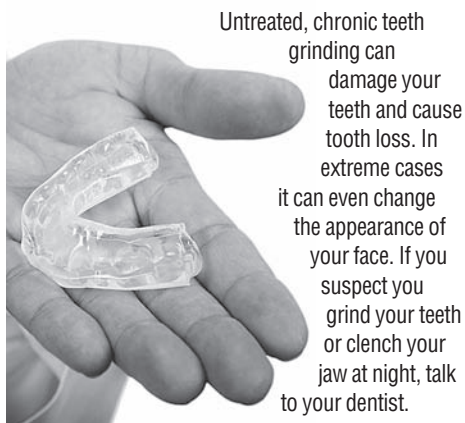
While the precise cause of bruxism is unknown, it's believed that stress and anxiety, or bad alignment of the teeth and/or missing teeth, may be significant factors in the development of this response.

Try to find the reason why you grind your teeth, as it could help you determine a course of action. Here are a few things you can try:

- + Reduce your stress by practising relaxation techniques, especially before bed.
- + Refrain from chewing gum, or on objects such as straws, toothpicks or pencils.
- + Avoid drinking caffeinated drinks after noon to promote a better sleep.
- + Relax your jaw muscles before bedtime by applying a warm cloth to your jaw.

If these suggestions do not work, consult your dentist, who may recommend that you wear a mouthguard while you sleep. While this appliance may prevent further damage to your teeth, it will not necessarily stop you from clenching your jaw or grinding your teeth. When choosing a mouthguard:

- + Choose a custom-fit appliance rather than an over-the-counter device.
- + Choose a hard night guard that fits your upper or lower teeth (consult your dentist).



Untreated, chronic teeth grinding can damage your teeth and cause tooth loss. In extreme cases it can even change the appearance of your face. If you suspect you grind your teeth or clench your jaw at night, talk to your dentist.

No Muscle with **Marijuana**

Regular pot smokers trying to pack on muscle probably won't reach their goals. That's because marijuana interferes with the hormone interactions necessary to build muscle.

Chemicals found in marijuana impair the transmission of signals to the pituitary gland. This interferes with the release of hormones – the chemical messengers that help regulate the functioning and development in the body. Just one marijuana “joint” can shut down production



of testosterone, which is essential for muscular development, for up to 24 hours. In test subjects who smoked two joints a week for 10 weeks, testosterone levels took nine weeks to return to normal.

Protein is also necessary for muscular development. Researchers have found that marijuana use interferes with the chemical bonding of the amino acids – the building blocks for protein in the body. Two joints a week can neutralize as much as 1.5 grams of nitrogen in the muscle cells (protein contains nitrogen). It takes more than 200 g of protein to replace that much nitrogen.

Unfortunately, even if a moderate marijuana smoker eats adequate protein, the cells may not be able to absorb it because marijuana impairs the messages carried throughout the cells during cell reproduction. Chemicals in marijuana cause the messages to be read incorrectly, and the cells are literally starved from receiving the cell-building nitrogen from the amino acids.

Exercise stresses the body; especially intense exercise like weight training. A good diet and adequate rest between workouts help the body recuperate from this stress by repairing, building and strengthening the muscles. However, the regular use of marijuana will interfere with the repair and building process, leaving you over-trained and underdeveloped.

Stress is an ignorant state. It believes that everything is an emergency. Nothing is that important. Just lie down.

Natalie Goldberg (1948-) American author

Battle Boredom with Fitness Fusion

If you're tired of the same old workouts, try mixing things up. The combination of different forms of exercise is aptly called fitness fusion and it's becoming an increasingly popular way to boost your fitness and burn fat while banishing boredom.

Fitness fusion involves mixing and matching two or three very different physical activities to challenge your muscles and your mind in different ways. For example, you can combine moves from pilates, yoga or ballet with boxing, martial arts or bicycling, etc. By mixing things up you're able to meet your goals for improved strength and endurance, core strength, balance and stability, or agility in a single workout.



Fusion-type classes will appeal to people who aren't interested in focusing on just one type of exercise, and to those who may feel intimidated by traditional classes.

To avoid injury, start by combining different activities with which you are already familiar. If you are taking classes, check that your instructor is qualified to teach the activities being combined.

Some of the more common fusion classes are circuit-training workouts (combining weights and cardio) or yogilates, which fuses yoga and pilates. Other unique combinations include disco yoga (yoga to disco music) and hydro riding (spinning, or cycling, in the pool).

THE BIG SPRING SHED

If your spring wardrobe is fitting a little tight you may be in for a shock. It's estimated that the average winter weight gain among Canadians can be as much as three to four pounds. And where you've packed on those extra pounds is important, too, because fat that accumulates around the belly increases your risk of heart disease. The Heart and Stroke Foundation reports that health risks increase at a waist size of 102 centimetres (40 inches) or greater for men, and 88 cm (35") or greater for women.

Don't let your weight and your waistline get away from you. Spring into action now by focusing on healthy eating and active living. For helpful tips, check out *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide* at www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide.



Watch How You Use Weights



It was long believed that using weights while you walk could deliver benefits. However, new research shows that using hand or ankle weights while you walk or run can actually increase your risk of injury. That's because the high repetition of swinging your weighted arms and legs places unnecessary stress on the joints and smaller muscles, and it can change your natural movements as well as impede proper exercise form. Further, research shows that carrying weights burns only about five to 10 extra calories; not the 30 to 300 extra calories as claimed in the past.

To avoid overuse injury, weights should be put down periodically during exercise. However, setting the weights down is difficult when you're outside running or brisk walking. Here are some safer options:

TIPS: Avoid using ankle weights. Hold hand weights by gripping them lightly and do not swing your arms. Keep arms bent at the elbows and pump the weights forward and back with each step.

- 1) Run or walk with a partner and take turns carrying the weights.
- 2) Use weights for short periods while using an exercise bike or treadmill, or during step training.
- 3) Use weights during a group exercise class, where the instructor can monitor how long and in what way the weights are being used.
- 4) When walking, instead of using weights, walk faster, do an occasional short sprint, swing your arms more, or walk on steeper terrain.
- 5) Belts or vests with pockets for inserting weights keep the resistance closer to your body, thus avoiding any risk of swinging weights from the ends of your arms or legs.
- 6) If you still insist on using weights during your outdoor activity, check with a fitness instructor to ensure you're using good technique.

If you train hard, you'll not only be hard, you'll be hard to beat.
Herschel Walker (1962-) All-American football star



It's So Easy Cleaning Green

Now is typically the time we give our homes a good spring cleaning. Before you reach for commercial household cleansers, consider this: Many cleaning products contain harsh, even toxic chemicals (e.g., sodium hypochlorite, ammonia, phenol and phosphoric acid). Exposure typically happens through inhaled vapours or absorption into the skin, sometimes leading to irritation of the eyes, lungs and skin, among other adverse effects. Chemical fumes and fragrances are common triggers for conditions like asthma or migraine headaches.

To reduce your family's exposure to the harsh chemicals found in conventional cleansers, switch to green or (better still) natural cleaning ingredients available in your own kitchen.

Green cleaners: Selecting products that are biodegradable, non-toxic, phosphate-free, chlorine-free and free of petrochemicals is a good way to start greening your cleaning. Look for green cleaners that list all the ingredients on the label – the shorter the list, the better. Look for recognizable ingredients, like sodium bicarbonate (baking soda) and citric acid (lemon juice), and select products that are fragrance-free if sensitivity is an issue.

Nature's Cleaners

Many products in your own kitchen cupboard make great cleaning agents. Here are a few common ingredients and what they can do:

- ▶ **Baking soda** (sodium bicarbonate) – cleans, deodorizes. Gentle abrasive for scouring jobs.
- ▶ **Borax** (sodium borate) – a natural mineral that cleans, deodorizes, disinfects, inhibits the growth of mould and mildew. Used in water softeners and soaps.
- ▶ **Lemon juice** (contains citric acid) – stain remover, natural deodorant, slight bleaching effect. Dissolves soap residue.
- ▶ **Salt** (sodium chloride) – can be used as a scouring paste.
- ▶ **Vegetable-oil-based soaps** (e.g., castile) – great general cleaners.
- ▶ **White vinegar** (acetic acid) – disinfects, deodorizes, cuts grease, dissolves mineral deposits, removes mildew and some stains. Good fabric softener.

What's a Stress Test?

A stress test (also called a treadmill or exercise stress test) is used to determine how well a person's heart responds to physical exertion. The test is ordered by a doctor to investigate certain types of heart conditions.

The stress test can:

- Determine if there's adequate blood flow to the heart during exercise
- Evaluate blood pressure response to exercise in people with elevated blood pressure
- Diagnose some types of coronary artery diseases
- Identify abnormal heart rhythms
- Check the effectiveness of heart medications or other treatments
- Determine a safe level of exercise
- Evaluate a patient's recovery from a heart attack or heart surgery.

Stress tests are usually conducted in a clinic or hospital. The person is first hooked up to an electrocardiogram (ECG) machine (a device that measures the heart's electrical activity) via leads attached to the chest and is fitted with a blood pressure cuff. The person is then asked to walk on a treadmill or cycle on a stationary bike.

During the test, the resistance on the treadmill or bike is slowly increased (or the incline on the treadmill is raised) causing the heart to work harder as the technician monitors ECG readings, heart rate and blood pressure. The test usually continues until the person has reached his or her maximum heart rate or if a problem arises. After the test, the person sits or lies down as all signs are checked. The entire test usually takes less than 45 minutes.



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