Medical Testing @ Home

Major advances in medical testing technology have given us a growing number of tests we can use without leaving home. They are convenient, quick, confidential and usually available over the counter. Home tests help:

1. Screen for and detect silent health conditions (without symptoms) such as unhealthy cholesterol or hepatitis.
2. Diagnose conditions (with symptoms) such as pregnancy or urinary tract infection.
3. Monitor existing conditions, such as blood pressure and glucose levels or sleep disorders, to ensure control or detect a need for treatment changes.
4. Collect specimens such as blood, stool or urine samples for laboratory analysis.

Most tests are simple to perform. But they do not necessarily match the quality of laboratory testing. For example, at-home cholesterol tests may check for total cholesterol, but not provide a breakdown between LDL (harmful) and HDL (beneficial) cholesterol.

A concern with home tests is the ability to interpret their results, particularly tests that provide complex findings such as PSA levels or thyroid numbers. It's best to evaluate your results with your health care provider's help.

FDA Home Testing Guidelines:

- Use only tests regulated and approved by the FDA.
- Read the entire test kit label and instructions carefully.
- Follow all test instructions exactly for accurate results.
- Keep an accurate record of your test results.
- When in doubt, contact your provider.

Tune Up Your Self-Esteem

Your overall opinion of yourself is influenced by internal and external factors (e.g., thoughts, upbringing, media messages). Having a balanced, accurate self-image can foster happiness and success. To improve yours:

- Avoid over-relying on external factors (praise, money) to feel good about yourself.
- Get help to eliminate addictions or abusive situations and make healthier choices (hobbies, exercise).
- Avoid media that depict perfect bodies or degrading content.

Stay Active with Arthritis

A growing number of Americans contend with joint pain from arthritis. Needless to say, having achy joints discourages physical activity. But, the right exercise has the potential to offset the effects of arthritis.

If you've been diagnosed with osteoarthritis, exercise tailored to your affected joints can increase your range of motion and reduce stiffness. Exercise also strengthens your muscles to help cushion pain and improve mobility.

Start with your health care provider, who can offer safe, effective guidelines for increasing your activity. Next, consult a physical therapist to teach you specific exercises you can do at home. It's important to understand and closely follow your exercise prescription.

Keep it low impact. Good choices include aerobic exercise, such as walking, gentle yoga and modest muscle-strengthening routines. Aquatic exercise is especially beneficial for people with severe arthritis.
**Update: Trans Fats** By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

As early as 1988, medical literature linked trans fat (partially hydrogenated oil, or PHO) to heart disease. This artificially made fat raises bad cholesterol, lowers good cholesterol, and increases the risk for heart disease.

In 2006, trans fat information became mandatory on nutrition labels, and some states banned trans fats at restaurants and bakeries. By 2010, research showed that food manufacturers were replacing trans fat with healthier fats, and the CDC found a 58% decline in trans fat in blood samples of Americans between 2000 and 2009.

**Ban trans fat?** In 2013, the FDA submitted an opinion that PHO is no longer generally recognized as safe (GRAS). Without GRAS status, it will mean food companies cannot use PHO as an ingredient, so there will be less of it in the food supply. While the deadline for a decision was March 8, 2014, no answer has been given yet.

Meanwhile, trans fat is still in the food supply and remains damaging to heart health. Reduce your intake by:

- Avoiding foods that contain partially hydrogenated oil or shortening.
- Cutting back on fast foods or asking about the oil they are prepared with.
- Reading Nutrition Facts and choosing foods that list trans fat as 0 g.

**Why take these steps?** The CDC estimates that reducing trans fat in the food supply can prevent 7,000 deaths from heart disease and 20,000 heart attacks each year.

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**Self-Esteem**

- **Identify** situations triggering low self-confidence and make a plan to address them.
- **Engage** in activities that reflect your values and improve your skills.
- **Identify** and correct distorted thoughts. Limit excessive self-blame ("his bad mood is my fault").
- **Try** to accept your flaws and feelings, and learn from your mistakes.
- **Identify** your strengths. Ask a trusted friend if you can't think of many.
- **Notice** what your inner (and often illogical) critic is saying to you and respond with rational comebacks.
- **Avoid** reacting to situations with self-defeating, impulsive reactions. Stop, think and then respond in a more effective way.
- **Acknowledge** the positive things you do every day, no matter how small.

**Final thought:** Know that you are worthy of happiness and respect.

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**Q: Heat illness remedies?**

**A:** In hot weather, profuse sweating and inadequate water and salt intake can lead to heat-related illnesses. Mild heat cramps can progress to heat exhaustion or even life-threatening heatstroke. The signs of heat exhaustion include nausea, dizziness, rapid heartbeat, low blood pressure and cool, moist skin.

**For mild heat exhaustion, home remedies include:**

- Move into a cool place out of direct sunlight.
- Lie down and elevate the feet and legs.
- Remove unnecessary clothing.
- Drink cool beverages without caffeine or alcohol.
- Cool down with cool compresses, sponge baths or a fan.
- Apply ice packs to the groin, neck and armpits, but do not bathe in ice water.

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**May is Better Hearing and Speech Month.**

**QuickRisk™ Assessment: Hearing**

We live in a noisy world. Exposure to loud noise puts people of all ages at risk for noise-induced hearing loss. The primary cause of hearing loss is frequent exposure to loud noise. The good news: Most noise-induced hearing loss is preventable.

**How’s your hearing? Check the symptoms that apply to you:**

- I often have trouble hearing over a phone.
- I hear better through one ear than the other when on a phone.
- I often strain to understand conversation.
- I often need people to repeat speech.
- Sounds often seem distorted or muffled.
- People complain that I turn the TV volume up too high.
- I have pain or ringing in my ears.

If you checked yes to more than 2 statements above, or suspect you may have hearing loss, see your health care provider. You may need an evaluation to rule out correctable causes, or a hearing test.

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**Smart Moves toolkit is at www.personalbest.com/extras/15V5Tools.**

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