



Wellness Works

WINTER 2026

Creating A Routine for Better Health

In a world that thrives on chaos and unpredictability, creating daily routine can be your anchor to better health. The word “routine” might sound boring - even restrictive - but a good routine can be empowering. When you build daily habits that support your mind and body, you stop making constant decisions about what to do next and start living with purpose, energy, and intention.

A daily routine for better health doesn't mean waking up at 5 a.m., running a marathon before breakfast, or turning into a robot. It means intentionally designing your day, so your body thrives, your mind sharpens, and your energy increases. It's about choosing habits that align with your goals, then repeating them until they become second nature.

Whether you're struggling with sleep, stress, nutrition, or just trying to get off the couch and move more, a well-structured routine can be your secret weapon.

Your morning sets the tone for everything that follows. Start in a rush and you'll feel frazzled and reactive. Start with intention, and you'll carry that energy into every part of your life. The goal is not to cram your morning with tasks, but to create a simple flow that energizes and grounds you.



Steps to start building a healthy daily routine:

1. **Wake up at the same time each day** to regulate your body clock and improve sleep quality.
2. **Hydrate first thing in the morning** to kick off digestion and boost energy.
3. **Move your body**, even if it's just 5-10 minutes of stretching, walking, or light exercise.
4. **Eat a nutritious breakfast** that fuels your body instead of spiking your blood sugar.
5. **Practice mindfulness**, such as deep breathing, journaling, or a few pages of reading, to center your mind.
6. **Start small and stay consistent** as it's better to master a few habits than overwhelm yourself with too many.

When your mornings are intentional, your days follow suit. Over time these small changes add up to better health, clearer thinking, and a more balanced life.

Source: www.sciencenewstoday.org

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New ID Cards

All members covered under a medical policy with MMEHT will be receiving new identification cards in late December or early January. Please provide your physician and pharmacy with your updated card information for yourself and your family members. If you submitted a change for 2026 which was received later in the Open Enrollment period, you may get two sets – one with 2025 info on it, and another later in January reflecting the changes you made for 2026.

You can also access your current ID card via the **Anthem Sydney app**. We strongly encourage you to download this helpful tool and always have your ID card readily available. Scan this QR code with your smartphone camera to sign up for the Sydney Health app and get easy access to your ID card and health plan benefits.

If you have any questions regarding your ID cards or your plan benefits, please contact Member Services at 1-800-852-8300 Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Email inquiries can be sent to htmemberservices@memun.org.



Menopause Book Discussion

Wellness Works is offering a book discussion on the topic of menopause. The book **How to Menopause** by Tamsen Fedal will be the book we will read and discuss. Although menopause is experienced by half the population, it has historically received limited attention. In recent years, however, women's health has moved to the forefront, making this an especially timely and important discussion. Men are invited to join the discussion too, so they can gain a better understanding about this significant life transition in a woman's life.

- The book club meeting will be held on **Wednesday, February 11 at noon or 7:00 p.m.** There are two times to choose from (just choose one to attend). Please contact Danielle Yale at d.yale@memun.org if you have questions or want to join the discussion (she will send you the link to register for the meeting).
- Participants will need to supply their own book – the use of public libraries is strongly encouraged. Purchasing a book or listening to audio is a great option too!
- Everyone who attends the book club meeting will receive a fun gift pack in the mail! Who doesn't love fun mail?

New Retiree Medicare Advantage Plan

Effective January 1, 2026, the Maine Municipal Employees Health Trust (MMEHT) began offering its Medicare-eligible retirees the Anthem Medicare Preferred (PPO) Medical and Prescription Drug with Senior Rx Plus plan. This Medicare Advantage Part D Prescription Drug (MAPD) plan offers retirees meaningful financial relief relative to the previous Companion Plan premiums, while maintaining strong, comparable coverage with minimal network and formulary disruption. Maine Municipal staff will continue to support the program and provide member services.

Information on the new MAPD plan was distributed to participating retirees in late October. Current Medicare Companion Plan Members were automatically enrolled in the new MAPD plan effective January 1, 2026. Participating retirees who have questions or concerns are encouraged to contact the Anthem Medicare Advantage First Impressions Welcome Center at 1-833-848-8729 and reference the Group Code "ME002GRS" Monday through Friday, 8:00 AM to 9:00 PM ET, except holidays. The MMEHT Member Service Representatives are also available to assist retirees with questions and issues at 1-800-852-8300.

If you are thinking of retiring soon, expect to be covered by Medicare, and may be interested in retiree health options though the Health Trust, it is vitally important that you contact the Health Trust prior to retirement. Under Medicare Advantage rules, the timelines to enroll are much tighter than under previous Trust requirements, and delays may result in late enrollment penalties. Please contact MMEHT Billing & Enrollment staff at 1-800-452-8786 ext. 2585 or by emailing htbilling@memun.org. We also offer a brochure about retiree health coverage options for members considering retirement, which is available on the Health Trust website.





Stop Thinking and Start Moving

For years, wearable devices have promoted 10,000 steps as the magic number for good health. Surprisingly, this guideline didn't come from scientific research at all, but it does have an interesting story. In 1964, after the Tokyo Olympics, there was a big spike in interest around fitness and health in that region. A clockmaker decided to repurpose his skills to create a pedometer and gave it the clever name, that when translated is "10,000 steps meter." Thus the 10,000 steps per day recommendation was born. While 10,000 steps a day can be a great goal, it's worth asking whether we focus too much on numbers and not enough on simply moving.

The truth is, most of us already know what supports good health - eating fewer processed foods, moving more, and getting better sleep. The challenge isn't knowing what to do, it's actually doing it.

Back to the Basics: Just Move

Are you counting steps every day? Tracking how long you walked, how many calories you burned, or looking to see if you closed all your rings? Sometimes we make getting and staying healthy way too complicated. We dive into all the guidelines and recommendations, then sit and wonder what to do next. Before we know it, we're overwhelmed and stuck in "analysis paralysis" - doing nothing because the choices feel endless.

Instead of focusing on all the data and charts, start with something simple: move your body. It doesn't have to mean long treadmill sessions or scheduled classes. Try adding "exercise snacks" (short bursts of movement lasting from one to fifteen minutes) throughout your day. These micro-movements are perfect for busy schedules and can deliver real health benefits over time, such as:

- Lowering your blood pressure
- Reducing cholesterol
- Boosting metabolism
- Burning calories
- Improving mood

Easy Ways to Add Movement

Beginning to move your body isn't rocket science and you don't need a structured plan to get started. Just start moving! One of the great things about "exercise snacks" is that you can do pretty much anything and you don't need a lot of equipment. Here are some simple ideas:

- Walk laps around your living room.
- March while sitting in your chair watching TV.
- Do squats while you wait for the coffee to brew.
- Take the stairs whenever possible.
- Do a quick set of 20-30 jumping jacks while you wait for your dinner to cook.
- If you're outdoors, do short sprints followed by a walking recovery period. Run from one telephone pole to the next or race someone to the mailbox.
- Try some push-ups. Even if you can't do a full push-up, modify it by using the wall or staying on your knees.
- Hold a plank, which engages your core, shoulders, arms, and legs. See how long you can hold it for and then try to increase your time the next time you do it.
- Stretch whenever you can. Shoulder rolls, touching your toes, and neck stretches can help loosen tight muscles.

Every little bit counts. Over time, you'll notice you are feeling stronger, breathing easier, and feeling better.

Don't Wait for Motivation

If you are waiting for the motivation to move, you might be waiting a long time! Start moving first - motivation often follows. Sneak movements into your day with these tips:

- Set hourly reminders on your phone to get up and move.
- Park in the very last parking spot in the lot. There are sure to be plenty of free spaces and it will get you some extra movement.
- Walk whenever possible - park in one spot and walk to all your errands or make multiple trips up and down the stairs with individual loads of laundry instead of waiting for the basket to be full.
- Move while relaxing. While watching tv, do leg lifts, knee raises, bicep curls, or lunges during commercial breaks.

Consistency is Key

There are countless ways to get fit, but the secret is consistency. Doing something every day - even small movements - can lead to big health benefits. So, stop overthinking it and just move!

Don't Avoid It - Address It: Tips for Tough Conversations

Have you noticed that it has become increasingly hard to have difficult conversations with people? In order to “keep the peace” or avoid confrontation, many of us have begun to avoid tough conversations all together. Tough conversations can feel awkward, be unpredictable, and make us feel very emotional. It makes perfect sense that most adults will sidestep these difficult conversations both at home and work.

However, when we avoid difficult conversations, we trade short-term discomfort for long-term dysfunction. This avoidance tends to just make us stressed, resentful, and more disconnected from the people and things we care about. Having these tough talks may be uncomfortable, but it can also help our relationships grow stronger and create better understanding between people.

Why We Avoid the Tough Talks

If you'd rather leave the room than address the elephant in it, you are not alone. There are a few classic reasons why many people hesitate to have these tough talks:

- We want to avoid conflict. Many of us are wired to steer clear of tension. Our minds jump to the worst-case scenarios - arguments, hurt feelings, awkward dinners, or damaged relationships - so we say nothing.
- We doubt ourselves. We worry we'll say it badly or be misunderstood, so instead of taking a chance, we stay quiet and swallow our feelings.
- We fear the unknown. Hard conversations don't come with a script. Not knowing how someone will react feels risky, so we avoid it. But unspoken issues usually grow, and the relationship suffers.



The good news is that you don't need perfect communication skills to start having hard conversations. You just need a few tools that you can use anytime you have to navigate a difficult conversation.

Small Strategies That May Make Those Big Conversations Easier

- **Choose your intention and your approach.** There is no one size-fits-all script. Before you speak, ask yourself what your intention for the conversation is? Are you trying to blame or understand? Try opening with a sentence that sets the tone for the conversation, like:
 - “Can I share something that’s been on my mind?”
 - “I’d really like to understand your perspective.”

Your approach can be very direct, but there are times that a softer approach may work better. For instance, if household chores have been piling up, you may say something like:

- “Can we talk about how we are dividing chores?” That is pretty direct. Or maybe you would choose a softer approach like: “I’m feeling overwhelmed. Can we figure how to get all these chores done together?”

Before you speak, think about the person, the topic, and your relationship. Regardless of the approach you choose, always be respectful, clear, and kind.

- **Be specific about your feelings.** “I’m mad” is a pretty broad statement and invites argument instead of conversation. Consider being more specific about what you are actually feeling, such as: “I felt stressed when I was left to handle it alone.”
- **Choose the right time and place.** Avoid late nights, rushed mornings, or emotionally charged situations to begin a tough conversation. Try to find a private, calm space that allows you to have a productive conversation and ask:
 - “Is now a good time?”
 - “Could we find a moment to talk today?”

Don't wait too long for the “right time” to present itself. The longer you delay addressing an issue, the more resentment can build. Even carving out 10 minutes for a quick talk can make a huge difference.

- **Ease into a difficult conversation and listen to the other person.** It can be tempting to get right to the point, but setting the tone for the conversation is important. Try:
 - Open questions: “What’s going on for you?”

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Strategies For Fighting Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is a type of depression triggered by a change in seasons, usually when fall starts, as daylight hours shorten. SAD is also known as the “winter blues”. It affects many people and it is normal to feel a little down during the colder months when you may be stuck inside because of wintry weather and shorter days.

A list of strategies to minimize the symptoms of SAD are listed below:

Light Therapy (Phototherapy): Light therapy boxes mimic natural sunlight and can be an effective treatment for SAD. They are most effective when used in the first 30-45 minutes of waking from sleep and require 20-30 minutes of exposure. This exposure should not be repeated and/or left on as an ambient light.

Increase Natural Light Exposure: Spend time exposures during daylight hours. Sunlight is always better than a lightbox. Do your best to obtain at least 10-15 minutes of natural, full spectrum light daily, regardless of outdoor temperature. Open curtains and blinds to let natural light into your home or workplace.

Consider Vitamin D Supplements: Some people with SAD have lower levels of vitamin D due to lack of sunlight. Consult with your healthcare provider about whether vitamin D supplements may benefit you.

Regular Exercise: Engage in regular physical activity because it will help boost your mood and reduce symptoms of depression. Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise most days of the week.

Maintain a Healthy Diet: Eat a balanced diet with plenty of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Consider incorporating foods rich in omega-3 fatty acids, which may have mood stabilizing effects.

Socialize and Plan Enjoyable Activities: Stay connected with friends and family. Social interaction can positively impact mood

and help combat feelings of isolation. Engage in activities you enjoy, even if you don't feel like it. Planning activities can provide a sense of purpose and pleasure.

Mind-Body Techniques: Enjoyable activities are great but engaging in self-soothing, stress-reducing activities is just as important. Practice relaxation techniques such as meditation, yoga, or deep breathing to manage stress and improve overall well-being.

Establish A Sleep Routine: Create a daily routine with regular sleep patterns. Consistent sleep is crucial for mental health, and disruptions in sleep can worsen depression. Focus on creating a consistent sleep routine that helps wind down prior to bed.

Seek Professional Help: You may find it beneficial to talk with a counselor to help manage symptoms of depression. A valuable resource is Anthem's Employee Assistance Program – www.anthemeap.com login: MMEHT.

Sources: www.nimh.nih.gov or www.clevelandclinic.org



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- Reflecting: “So you were worried about disappointing me?”
- Validation: “I can see why that was upsetting.”
- When someone feels heard and respected, they are more likely to listen in return.
- **Look for common ground.** Even if you disagree on the details, there is usually a shared goal. Try to identify what those shared things are before you dive into deep discussions, for instance:
 - “We both want less stress.”
 - “We both care about this family/project/event.”
 - The goal of a difficult conversation isn't to “win.” It's to understand each other and move forward.

- **Be comfortable with the uncomfortable.** It's okay to be vulnerable and it's completely normal. Say something like:
 - “This is uncomfortable for me, but I care about our relationship.”
 - “I might not say this perfectly.”
 - Own your emotions. Honesty builds trust and perfection is not required.

Difficult conversations are rarely comfortable, but they are often where the most meaningful growth begins. When we approach them with honesty, curiosity, and empathy, we create space for understanding rather than conflict. Choosing to lean in – even when it's hard – builds stronger relationships, clearer communication, and a culture of trust that lasts.



Your Stress-Free Guide to Healthy Eating

Eating healthy often feels daunting, but it doesn't have to be an overwhelming challenge. The simple secret to healthier eating is to start small. By making minor adjustments to your diet, you can achieve big results over time.

Think about the last diet you tried. Did you crash and burn? It wouldn't be surprising if you said yes. Most fad diets and "healthy" eating plans are just not sustainable. They want us to change everything all at once and that can be tough for anyone to swallow. But building healthy habits doesn't have to be a major upheaval in your life.

It all starts with focusing on JUST ONE THING. Forget the big picture and your ultimate goals - those things become distracting and overwhelming. Instead, pause and focus on what one thing you can do right now to improve your health. Here are five strategies to start thinking small:

Ditch one thing. Pick one food or drink you've been thinking about saying goodbye to and let it go. It doesn't have to be revamping your entire food plan today; it can be just getting rid of one thing and ...

Finding a healthy swap. That's right, when you let one thing go, it is a good idea to replace it with something else. This helps you to avoid that feeling of deprivation that tends to sabotage our healthy eating plans.

Bring a buddy. Healthy eating is way more fun when you aren't doing it alone. Team up for meal prep, share recipes with co-workers, and keep each other accountable.

Meal prep for the win. Healthy eating doesn't mean you have to become a professional chef. Pick one day a week to cook some of your favorite recipes. Bonus points if you try a new recipe! When you prepare a handful of meals ahead of time it can help curb some of the mindless eating and food prep stress during the week.

Make it fun! Healthy eating doesn't mean just salads. Experiment with new foods, create weekly meal plans, and throw in some healthy swaps that feel indulgent.

Healthy eating doesn't have to be overwhelming. Take it slow and celebrate the small wins!

Financial Wellness

Financial wellness is more than simply having enough money to pay the bills. It is a state of well-being in which a person feels secure, informed, and in control of their financial life – both now and in the future. Achieving financial wellness includes understanding how money works, making thoughtful decisions, and developing habits that support long-term stability and peace of mind.

At the core of financial wellness is awareness. Knowing where your money comes from and where it goes is essential. Creating a budget helps track income and expenses, identify spending patterns, and ensure that money is being used in alignment with personal goals. A budget is not about restriction; rather, it is a tool that empowers you to make intentional choices and avoid unnecessary stress.

Saving is another important aspect of financial wellness. Building an emergency fund can provide a safety net for unexpected expenses such as medical bills or car repairs. Beyond emergencies, saving for short- and long-term goals – like education, travel, or retirement – creates a sense of purpose and direction. Consistent saving, no matter what the amount, builds confidence and resilience over time.

Managing debt responsibly also plays a significant role. Not all debt is bad, but uncontrolled or high-interest debt can undermine financial wellness. Understanding loan terms, paying bills on time, and prioritizing high-interest balances can reduce financial pressure and free up resources for future goals.

Financial wellness is closely tied to education and mindset. Learning the basics of finances – such as interest, credit scores, and investing – helps people make informed decisions and avoid costly mistakes. Equally important is developing a healthy relationship with money. Reducing shame, comparison, and anxiety around finances allows individuals to focus on progress rather than perfection.

Financial wellness is a journey, not a destination. Life circumstances change, and financial plans need to adapt to those changes. By building knowledge, practicing healthy habits, and setting realistic goals, you can improve financial wellness that supports not only your financial stability but also your overall wellbeing and quality of life.

Anthem EAP has a variety of offerings to support your financial wellbeing – webinars, financial calculators, budgets, and unlimited phone support regarding finances.

Check out the resources at www.anthemep.com login: MMEHT.

Lasagna Soup



Ingredients:

- Cooking spray
- 14 oz. sweet Italian chicken sausage, casing removed
- ½ onion, chopped
- 2 crushed cloves garlic
- 4 tbs crushed fresh parsley, divided
- 3 cups low-sodium, fat free chicken broth
- 2 ½ cups water
- 2 cups marinara sauce
- 2 bay leaves
- Black pepper, to taste
- 6 oz. broken lasagna noodles

For topping:

- 6 tbs part-skim shredded mozzarella cheese
 - ½ cup part-skim ricotta cheese
 - 3 tbs grated parmesan cheese
 - 2 tbs chopped fresh parsley
 - ¼ cup fresh basil, chopped
1. Heat a large soup pot or Dutch oven over medium heat, spray with oil and add sausage; cook until browned, breaking it up as it cooks with a wooden spoon about 4 to 5 minutes.
 2. Add the chopped onion and crushed garlic and cook 2 to 3 minutes.
 3. Add the parsley, broth, water, marinara sauce, bay leaves and black pepper and bring to a boil; cover, reduce heat and simmer about 30-minutes.
 4. Add the broken pasta and cook uncovered according to directions.
 5. In a medium bowl combine the ricotta, parmesan, and 2 tbs parsley and mix.
 6. Divide soup between 6 bowls and top each with 2 tbs ricotta cheese topping.

** You can also use a slow cooker or Instant Pot. See the website for directions.

Nutrition: Serving: 1 1/3 cup; calories: 292; carbohydrate: 29.5 g; protein: 22.5 g; Fat: 10g; fiber: 4 g

Source: www.skinnytaste.com

Calmer in 5-4-3-2-1

When our thoughts begin to spiral our bodies can go into high alert. There is a simple technique that can help you calm your mind in just minutes: the 5-4-3-2-1 method.

Here is how to practice the 5-4-3-2-1 method:

1. **Name 5 things you can see.** Look around and name five things you can see right now. It could be the pattern on the rug, a tree outside, the sign on the wall. The key is to name them out loud.
2. **Name 4 things you can touch/feel.** You can feel the warmth of the sunlight, the hard chair seat, or the feeling of your shoes on your feet.
3. **Name 3 things you can hear.** Listen for three sounds in your immediate environment. Is there a ticking clock, a radio playing, or a quiet conversation going on?
4. **Name 2 things you can smell.** Grab something like a cup of coffee, a scented candle, or even the smell of the clean shirt you are wearing.

5. **Name 1 thing you can taste.** This final step brings all your senses into the process, but if you'd rather not taste something, you can always end with "One thing you love..." and name that instead.

The 5-4-3-2-1 method is simple, quick, and accessible to anyone, anywhere.





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Learn & Earn: Wellness Webinar Series

Last year, *Wellness Works* launched a new webinar series called “Learn & Earn” on our online wellness platform, WellSteps. This program was a huge success, and we are thrilled to announce that we have a whole new year of programming coming your way for 2026. Each month we will explore an important health and wellness topic (that’s the “Learn” part) and give you the opportunity to earn prizes.

What Do I Need to Do?

Each month, *Wellness Works* staff will release a new webinar for you to watch and then you will answer a few basic questions. You must be registered on our online platform (WellSteps) and login to participate. If you watch 6 out of 12 of the webinars, you will earn a \$50 Amazon gift card. If you watch 10 out of 12 webinars you will also earn a Maine State Park Day Pass. You must watch the webinar in the month it is available and answer all the questions correctly. (Note: E-gift cards and park passes will be sent out in January 2027, regardless of when you finish the webinars.)

Ready to “Learn & Earn” with Wellness Works?

If you’re registered in the WellSteps program, you’ll get an email each month about the featured webinar. Just choose the ones you’re interested in. If you’re not yet registered for the WellSteps program, email us at wellsteps@memun.org to get started!

