



Maine Municipal Employees Health Trust

Wellness Works

SPRING 2021

Best Wishes to Anne Wright!



It is with mixed emotions that we bid farewell to Anne Wright, Director of the Health Trust, as she retires from her full-time position with the Health Trust.

Anne started working at MMA in 1996, as a Health Trust Field Service Representative serving the southern and western areas of the state. Since that time, Anne has worked her way up in

the department and held a number of different positions in the Health Trust including: Plan Specialist, Field Services Manager, and Assistant Director. In 2015, Anne was promoted to the position of Director of Health Trust Services. In that position, she has used the skills and expertise developed over the years to continue to offer quality services to our members.

During her time at MMA, Anne took a few “sabbaticals”. For example in 2001, she left for a brief time to pursue her lifelong

dream of attending cooking school. After a few months she came back to the Health Trust – and all of the staff members have been well fed ever since! From 2008 - 2012, Anne took some time off to pursue other career opportunities in both the for-profit and not-for-profit sector. However, she couldn't stay away and came back to the Health Trust. As Anne likes to say, “Coming back to MMA and the Health Trust has always felt like coming ‘home’!”

Anne says that one thing that she looks forward to doing most during her retirement is “going back to what I used to do as a Field Service Rep, and traveling the state of Maine! There is so much to see, and so much beautiful scenery – the oceans, lakes, mountains, rivers, forests, farmland and so much more. I am looking forward to seeing it all!”

Thank you to Anne for her many years of service and cheers to a happy retirement!

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Wellness on the Web

Maine Trail Finder

Maine Trail Finder (MTF) is a free, interactive mapping site designed to help Maine residents and visitors find hiking, walking, mountain biking, and paddling trails across the state. The goal of MTF is to help people get outside, be active, and explore our state's treasures, both well-known and hidden. See all that MTF has to offer by visiting www.mainetrailfinder.com.



Rep Raps

Answers to the most common questions that our Member Service Representatives receive.



Health Trust Member Services Phone Calls

Do you know who you are speaking with when you call the Member Services phone number on the back of your medical ID card? The member service representatives that you reach are all Maine Municipal Association employees working in the Health Trust Services Department.

The Health Trust contracts with different organizations to process your claims. For example, Anthem processes medical claims for the Trust, and Northeast Delta Dental processes dental claims. While we work closely with these companies to administer your benefits, we are pleased to be able to provide our own personalized customer service to Health Trust members.

Medical providers (doctors, hospitals, etc.) have their own separate phone number by which they can contact Anthem. Medical providers should not be calling the Health Trust member services phone number for customer service. This number is specifically designated for Health Trust members, so that we can personally handle your issues and concerns.

Health Trust Member Services Representatives are available to take your calls at 1-800-852-8300, Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.. You may also reach them via email at HTMemberServices@memun.org.

For additional helpful contact numbers, please refer to the information on the back page of this newsletter, and keep it handy for future reference.

Future Moms

Nine months. Many questions.

Ever wish you had a go-to source for all of your questions about pregnancy? Now you do! Future Moms is a program that can answer your questions, help you make good choices and follow your health care provider's plan of care. It can help you have a safe delivery and a healthy child.

Future Moms is for pregnant women that are covered by a MMEHT health plan. You can sign up as soon as you know you're pregnant. To register simply call **800-828-5891**. A registered nurse will help you get started.

By enrolling in Future Moms, you'll get these free resources:

- A toll-free number so you can talk to a nurse coach 24/7 about your pregnancy. A nurse may also call you from time to time to see how you're doing.
- The *Mayo Clinic Guide to a Healthy Pregnancy* book that shows changes you can expect for yourself and your baby during the next nine months.
- A screening to check your health risk for depression or early delivery.
- Other useful tools to help you, your doctor, and your Future Moms nurse keep track of your pregnancy and help you make healthier choices.
- Free phone calls with pharmacists, nutritionists and other specialists, if needed.
- A booklet with tips to keep you and your new baby safe and well.
- Other helpful information on labor and delivery, including options and how to prepare.





How Does Your Garden Grow?

By: Abby DiPasquale

Mary, Mary, quite contrary
How does your garden grow?
With silver bells and cockleshells
And pretty maids all in a row!

Remember that nursery rhyme? Well, I certainly haven't found that silver bells and cockleshells help my garden much, and the pretty maids all in a row must have called out sick for the season because it is only me in my muck boots doing the gardening! But as a Certified Square Foot Gardening Instructor, I do have some great ideas for helping your garden grow better. If square foot gardening is a new term for you, let me first explain what it is and then we will get into the basics of how to get one (or more) started in your yard.

Square foot gardening is a "new" way of gardening invented by Mel Bartholomew in the mid-1970's as an alternative to the labor intensive and inefficient traditional gardening method of planting in rows. Instead of tilling up a huge area, planting only a small portion of it, and wasting lots of seeds and water, Mel created a method that focused on planting, spacing, weed control and nutrient-rich soil. If you have been a traditional gardener for years, you will probably discount this method as "hogwash," but if you are new to gardening or open to trying different things, this method will change the way you garden for ever more!

There are 10 basic steps for creating a square foot garden, with the sole purpose of getting the most produce out of the least amount of space, with lesser amounts of water and no weeds - that's right, NO WEEDS! How is that possible? Well, we begin these gardens from scratch and control everything that goes into them - especially the soil mixture that we create and fill the boxes with - to ensure that we don't plant weeds along with our vegetable seeds. While I can't go into great detail on each of these steps in this newsletter, I have recorded my Introduction to Square Foot Gardening class as a webinar, which you are invited to

watch. If you'd like more details on any of these steps, just send me an email at adipasquale@memun.org and I will send you the link to the webinar. You can also visit www.squarefootgardening.org for more resources.

Here is a quick, basic overview of the square foot gardening method:

1. Layout – Think squares, not rows. Plan and plant a square foot garden based on 12 x 12 inch growing spaces. A typical garden is a 4 x 4 foot box that has a grid which clearly marks off every 12 inch garden area. So for each box you will have 16 growing areas. (Check out the picture to see what this looks like!)



2. Boxes – Square foot gardens can range in size, but should be no bigger than 4 x 4 to ensure you can reach all areas of the garden to plant, water and harvest. These boxes do not need to be any deeper than 6 inches deep, to ensure you are not wasting soil and have enough capacity for growing your veggies.

3. Aisles - Space boxes 3 feet apart to form walking aisles.

4. Soil – Create your own soil blend! For example, use a blend of 1/3 compost, 1/3 peat moss, and 1/3 coarse vermiculite.

5. Grid – To be considered a true square foot garden, each box must have a permanent and prominent grid on the top of each box to organize the garden for planting.

6. Care – This one is easy! If it needs water, water it. If it needs to be picked, pick it. But don't ever walk on growing soil. Instead tend the garden from aisles, pulling weeds, if any, with your fingers.

7. Select/Spacing – Plant seeds and plants based on the "thin-to" instructions. Depending on the size of the plant (when grown) you will have either one, four, nine or sixteen plants in each square foot!

8. Plant – When planting seeds, mark a small indentation in the soil where you want the plant to grow and then put just a pinch (2 or 3 seeds) per hole. This cuts down on the amount of thinning you need to do and also reduces wasted seeds.

9. Water – Square foot gardens can easily be watered by hand, from the base of the plant or by using a hose or drip system. This also reduces the amount of water needed to keep your garden growing.

10. Harvest - After harvesting a square foot, add compost to replenish nutrients and re-plant with new and different crops.

As you thumb through your seed catalogs this spring, imagine how your garden could grow so much easier in a square foot garden!



Stress Relief from Laughter? It's No Joke

When it comes to relieving stress, more giggles and belly laughs are just what the doctor ordered, and here's why.

Whether you're guffawing at a sitcom on TV or quietly giggling at a cartoon or funny video, laughing does you good. Laughter is a great form of stress relief, and that's no joke. A good sense of humor can't cure all ailments, but data is mounting about the positive effects of a good laugh.

When you start to laugh, it doesn't just lighten your load mentally, it actually induces physical changes in your body. Laughter can do the following for you:

- **Stimulate many organs.** Laughter enhances your intake of oxygen rich air, stimulates your heart, lungs and muscles, and increases the endorphins that are released by your brain.
- **Activate and relieve your stress response.** A laugh fires up and then cools down your stress response, and it can increase and then decrease your heart rate and blood pressure. The result is a good, relaxed feeling.
- **Soothe tension.** Laughter can also stimulate circulation and aid muscle relaxation, both of which can help reduce some of the physical symptoms of stress.

Laughter isn't just a quick pick me up, it's also good for you over the long term, as it can:

- **Improve your immune system.** Negative thoughts manifest into chemical reactions that can affect your body by bringing more stress into your system and decreasing your immunity. By contrast, positive thoughts can actually release neuropeptides that help fight stress and potentially more serious illnesses.
- **Relieve pain.** Laughter may ease pain by causing the body to produce its own natural painkillers.

- **Increase personal satisfaction.** Laughter can make it easier to cope with difficult situations. It also helps you connect and bond with other people.
- **Improve your mood.** Many people experience depression, sometimes due to chronic illnesses. Laughter can help lessen your depression and anxiety and may make you feel happier.

Are you afraid you have an underdeveloped or nonexistent sense of humor? No problem - humor can be learned! In fact, developing or refining your sense of humor may be easier than you think.

- **Put humor on your horizon** by looking for a few simple items, such as photos, greeting cards or comic strips that make you chuckle. Then hang them up at home or in your office. Keep funny movies, books, magazines or comedy videos on hand for when you need an added humor boost. Look online at joke websites.
- **Laugh and the world laughs with you.** Find a way to laugh about your own situations and watch your stress begin to fade away. Even if it feels forced at first, practice laughing. It does your body good.
- **Make it a habit to spend time with friends who make you laugh.** It's a great pick-me-up if you need a positive boost. Then return the favor by sharing funny stories or jokes with those around you.
- **Knock, knock.** Browse through the selection of joke books at your local library or bookstore (or even online!) and find a few jokes that you can share with friends.
- **Know what isn't funny.** Don't laugh at the expense of others. Some forms of humor aren't appropriate, so use your best judgment to discern a good joke from a bad or hurtful one.

Go ahead and give it a try. Turn the corners of your mouth up into a smile and then give a laugh, even if it feels a little forced. Once you've had your chuckle, take stock of how you're feeling. Are your muscles a little less tense? Do you feel more relaxed or buoyant? That's the natural wonder of laughing at work.

Source: www.mayoclinic.org

A few jokes to get you started...

- **What happens to a frog's car when it breaks down?** *It gets toad away!*
- **What do dentists call their x-rays?** *Tooth pics!*
- **What did one ocean say to the other ocean?** *Nothing, it just waved!*
- **How does NASA organize a party?** *They planet!*
- **How many tickles does it take to get an octopus to laugh?** *Ten tickles!*



Put a Spring in Your Step With Walking

Spring is finally here, and it's the perfect time of year to get outside for some exercise. For folks who are looking to start an exercise regimen, the easiest way to do it is by walking. Walking is a great way to improve your overall health and decrease the risk of chronic diseases such as heart disease, cancer and diabetes. Best of all, walking does not require any special skills, a gym membership or expensive equipment. Just lace up your most comfortable pair of walking shoes and go out for a stroll; but keep in mind these basic safety tips:

- **Face the traffic.** If your walking routes do not have sidewalks and you are forced to walk on the road, always walk in the direction facing oncoming traffic.
- **Dress correctly.** If you are walking when it is still dark, ensure that you are dressed to be seen. Drivers at night or early mornings are rarely on the lookout for walkers, so you need to advertise your presence as vividly as possible.
- **Bring a buddy and let someone know where you are going.** Walking with a friend - or even your dog - can make your walks more enjoyable. For safety reasons, you should always let someone know where you are headed and when you anticipate being home.
- **Walk defensively.** Don't simply assume that all road-users know about the 'pedestrian has the right-of-way' rule. Many of them don't or are distracted by other things.
- **Carry an ID.** Always carry some form of identification in case of an accident or medical emergency.
- **Leave the headphones at home.** That way you will be alert to any potential dangers, be it a dog, a fast-approaching car, or the sound of other people around you. If you really want your music playing, be sure to keep it at a volume at which you can still hear what is going on around you.

Most importantly, just keep putting one foot in front of the other. Soon this new routine will become a habit and then your habit will become a healthy lifestyle!

Source: Adapted from *Runners World*

Why You Shouldn't Eat at Your Desk

It seems like a convenient way to get through your day. Rather than take a break to eat lunch, you grab a bite and eat while you're at your desk. But, this may be leading the way to unhealthy habits.

Here's why you should escape your workspace for your meals:

- **You need a mental break.** Getting up and eating away from your desk can help you clear your mind and boost mental energy.
- **Moving more is better.** A 5-10 minute walk is better than no walk at all. Being active and sitting less will improve your health. Walk to your local park and eat your lunch outside!
- **You may eat more mindfully.** If you munch on food while working or watching a screen, you may eat more than you need to. Instead, sit down away from a screen and focus on your food. This can help you pay attention to your feelings of hunger and fullness.
- **You could be missing out on fun.** When it can be done safely, bonding with others at your workplace can be fun and enjoyable.

Source: *American Institute of Preventative Medicine*

Healthy Lunch, Healthy Wallet

Packing a healthy lunch can be good for your health. It can help you steer clear of the vending machine or other unhealthy options. Plus, bringing your own lunch may be healthy for your wallet. The average American spends \$53 for lunch and coffee expenses during the work week. That adds up to more than \$2,700 a year!





Sleepy Time

More than 1 out of 3 U.S. working adults aren't getting enough sleep, and the prevalence of sleep deprivation has increased significantly since 2010, according to new research from Ball State University. So how much sleep is "enough?" The National Sleep Foundation recommends that adults get between 7 and 9 hours of good quality sleep each night.

Inadequate sleep is associated with mild to severe physical and mental health problems, injury, loss of productivity, and premature mortality. This is a significant finding because the U.S. is currently witnessing high rates of chronic disease across all ages and many of these diseases are related to sleep problems.

First responders report the highest prevalence of sleep deprivation, with 50% of first responders reporting that they are sleep-deprived. Women reported fewer hours of sleep than men each night, yet both have seen a nearly 8% increase in sleep deprivation over the past 9 years, jumping from 31% to 39%.

So what can you do to get a better night's rest?

- **Go to sleep and get up at the same time every day.** This helps set your body's internal clock and optimizes the quality of your sleep.
- **Avoid sleeping in – even on weekends.** The more your weekend/weekday sleep schedules differ, the more drag you will feel. If you need to make up for a late night, opt for a daytime nap rather than sleeping in. This allows you to pay off your sleep debt without disturbing your natural sleep-wake rhythm.
- **Be smart about napping.** While napping may be a good way to make up for lost sleep, if you have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep at night, napping can make things worse. Limit naps to 15-20 minutes in the early afternoon.
- **Avoid bright screens within 1-2 hours of your bedtime.** The blue light emitted by your electronic devices can be disruptive to sleep. You can minimize the impact by using devices with smaller screens or turning the brightness down.
- **Make sure your bedroom is dark.** Use dark shades to block light from the outside, or try a sleeping mask. Also, consider covering up electronics that emit light. If you need some light to move around safely, install a dim nightlight or keep a small flashlight next to the bed.

Source: *Safety + Health*, December 2019

Planning Can Ease the Burden of Caregiving

When it comes to caring for an aging loved one, most families don't have a plan until there is a problem. But as many working caregivers have discovered, the stress of making caregiving arrangements in crisis mode can be overwhelming. The best way to prepare the caretaker and the family member in need of care is to know what is expected of the disease, modifications, support groups and costs so that no one is caught off guard, causing more stress.

AARP's *Prepare to Care: A Planning Guide for Families* is a step-by-step guide for creating a caregiving plan in advance. Even if you have been a caregiver for years, the guide can help you get support and stay organized. The guides include the following information:

- Information on how to have vital conversations
- Ways to assess your loved one's needs
- Tips for organizing important documents
- A roundup of federal and national resources
- Information on caring for yourself
- Checklists, medication charts and contact lists

You can request this guide by calling AARP at 877-333-5885. Select option 1 and request the "Prepare to Care: A Planning Guide for Families," item #D20152.

Another good resource to help with caregiving is the Anthem Employee Assistance Program. Resources can be found at www.anthemaeap.com, login: MMEHT.





Quinoa Fruit Salad

- 1 cup quinoa
- 2 cups water
- Pinch of salt
- Juice of 1 large lime (3 tablespoons)
- 3 tablespoons honey
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh mint
- 1 ½ cup blueberries
- 1 ½ cup strawberries
- 1 ½ cup mango

Instructions:

Using a strainer, rinse the quinoa under cold water. Add quinoa, water, and salt to a medium saucepan and bring to a boil over medium heat. Boil for 5 minutes. Turn the heat to low and simmer for about 15 minutes, or until water is absorbed. Remove from heat and fluff with a fork. Let quinoa cool to room temperature.

In a medium bowl, whisk the lime juice, honey, and mint together until combined.

In a large bowl, combine quinoa, blueberries, strawberries, and mango. Pour the honey lime mix over the fruit salad and stir until well combined. Garnish with additional mint, if desired. Serve at room temperature or chilled.

Note – use your favorite fruit in this salad. Blackberries, peaches, kiwi, raspberries, pineapple and grapes, etc. are great options too!

Handy Portion Control

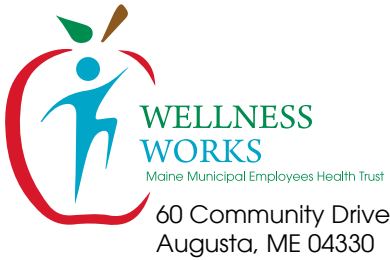
Portion control is difficult, and measuring food is not fun. Scales, measuring cups and spoons - who's got the time (or patience)? Here is an easy way to stay on target with portion sizes, food choices and nutrients. Simply use hand-sized portions when plating your meals and snacks! The hand-sized portion method works for most of us who aren't eating incredibly precise diets or needing specific macro/micro-nutrient tracking. Best of all, you don't need any special equipment, research or training - just your hands. Here is how it works:

Using the hand-sized portion method is a great starting point for getting a **hand**-le on your eating habits, but individual needs will vary. In general, for **each** meal, you might begin by eating:

- 1-2 palms of protein-dense foods;
- 1-2 fists of non-starchy vegetables;
- 1-2 thumbs of fat-dense foods; and
- 1-2 cupped handfuls of carb-dense foods.

Looking for more tailor-made suggestions or ways to tweak this **hand**-y guide for portion control? Check out Precision Nutrition's guide to Calorie Control at www.precisionnutrition.com/calorie-control-guide-infographic. While this method may not be as exact as measuring and weighing, it is far easier and **hands**-down a great way to start with portion control.





**WELLNESS
WORKS**

Maine Municipal Employees Health Trust

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Members Resources

Keep these numbers handy for future reference!

MMEHT Member Services **1-800-852-8300**

Representatives are available to assist you Monday through Friday 8:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. for questions on dental, medical, IPP and life benefits and claims

Anthem EAP

Available for anyone whose employer offers a Health Trust health plan

1-800-647-9151

Support for life's challenges for active members and those in their household

The following number applies to members in the Health Trust vision plan:

VSP

1-800-877-7195

Member Services for the Health Trust Vision Plan

The following numbers apply to members in the Health Trust health plan:

IngenioRx Home Delivery Pharmacy

1-833-236-6196

Service for managing your prescriptions filled via mail order

24/7 NurseLine

1-800-337-4770

Speak with a nurse anytime about non-emergent issues

Future Moms

1-800-828-5891

Pregnancy support any time of day

Anthem Condition Care

1-866-962-0960

Support for managing chronic health conditions