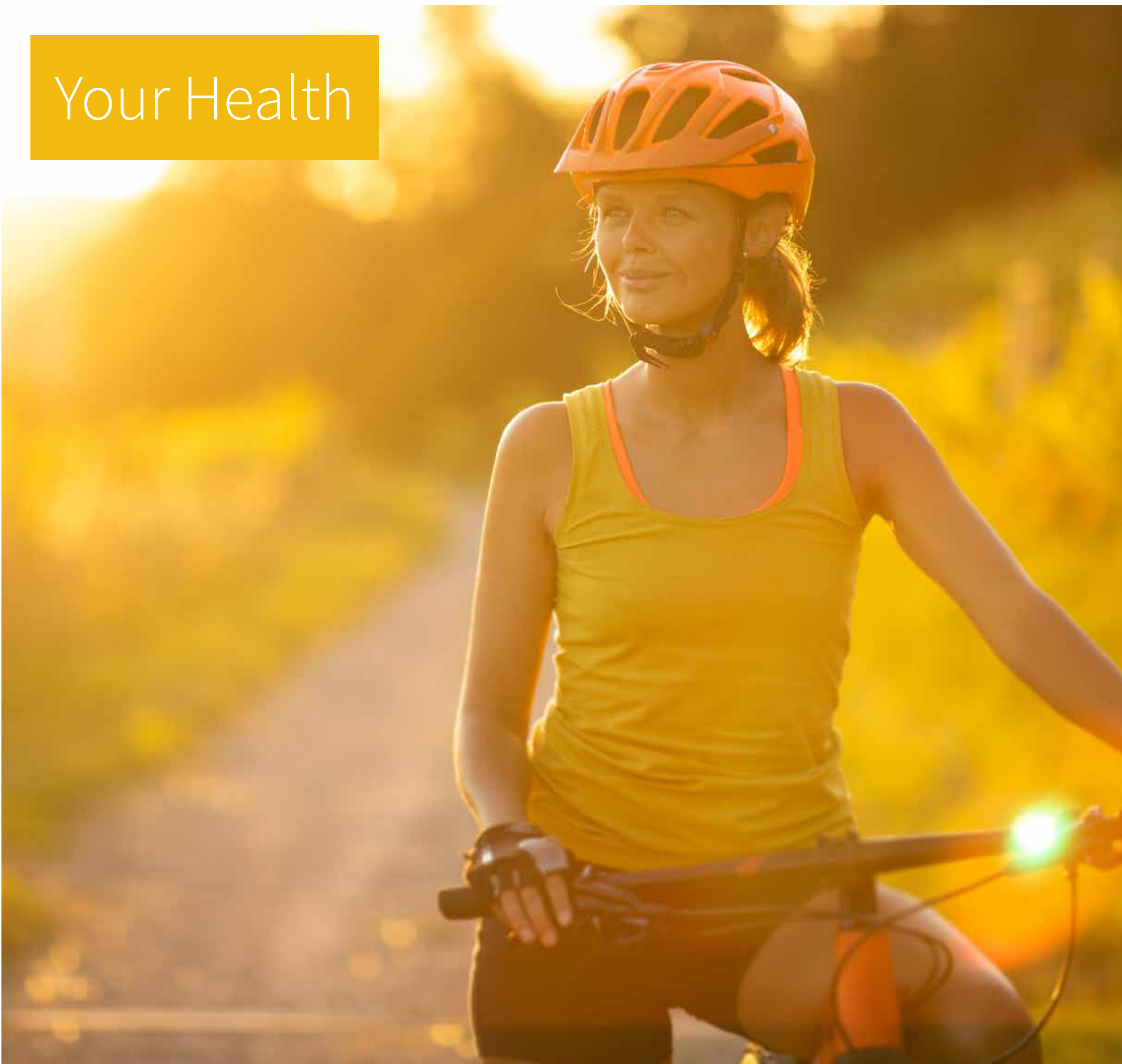


Your Health



Wellness in the Workplace

Get the most out of newly expanded employer health programs.

Medical costs are going up for everyone, including businesses. Health care coverage is more expensive, and modern-era Affordable Care Act stipulations have played a role, as well.

But companies aren't simply incentivized to help their staff stay healthy in order to cut down on insurance costs. They also are focused on morale and lost man hours. One way employers are looking to drive down these expenses, while also ensuring workers are living happier, longer lives is through innovative wellness programs.

GETTING CREATIVE

These programs have come a long way. Today, they illustrate how getting — and staying — healthy can be a fun and collaborative experience at work. Companies are sponsoring charitable runs or walks, fun sporting events and wellness goal-setting competitions in an effort to engage with everyone. This is a significant shift from the past, when employer health programs were geared more toward education than engagement. Some companies are bringing medical providers to their workers, sponsoring clinics or nurse visits to share information, advice and some preventative care like



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screenings and shots. Other initiatives include coordinating with health care professionals or expert speakers to discuss issues of importance to staff during on-site presentations.

MORE REWARDS

These programs often now include incentives beyond the result of healthier, happier lives. Corporate health programming, in some cases, will

offer gift certificates, invitations to social events or even bonuses for reaching certain benchmarks. Others have goal-based rate incentives relating to better lifestyle choices, including smoking and excessive alcohol usage. In this way, aligning cost goals with staff wellness helps everybody's bottom line.

KEEPING TRACK

Surveys and corporate

health program apps help track how staffers are doing, pairing biometric screenings or personal input data in order to follow trends like blood pressure, body-mass index and cholesterol levels. Beyond setting a baseline for incentive-based rewards, this information can also help medical professionals develop new programs to address looming health care issues. Companies may then create

informational meetings, hand-out materials and goals based on things like smoking cessation, obesity rates or medication adherence. It all works in concert toward lowering health-care costs, absenteeism and disability-related work stoppages, while at the same time encouraging higher productivity. Ultimately these programs can play a role in boosting employee loyalty and job satisfaction, too.

Importance of Washing Hands

One of the lockdown era's biggest pastimes still matters.

Before we knew exactly how COVID-19 spread, people were spending a whole lot of time scrubbing. It's still a good idea in the fight against sickness and the spread of germs.

A number of other conditions and diseases have been linked to dirty hands, either from improperly washing or not washing often enough. Scientists have determined the best process for effective cleaning, backed by numerous research projects and studies according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Those who don't follow this simple protocol may be needlessly putting themselves at risk for negative health outcomes every day.

INSIDE THE NUMBERS

Troubling statistics show that some 2.2 million children aged 5 and under die annually from pneumonia and diarrheal diseases. The CDC says proper hand washing with soapy water would work as a crucial protectant: One in three wouldn't get diarrhea, their research indicates, while one in six of those children would be protected from pneumonia. They estimate that proper hand washing can reduce the instance of respiratory illnesses including colds by more than 20%. People with weakened immunity



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would see instances of diarrheal illnesses drop by nearly 60%.

HOW TO WASH

Begin with a supply of clean, running water. Lather soap into your hands under the water, creating friction as you scrub. Highest concentrations of microbes can usually

be found under the fingernails, according to the CDC, so don't forget to focus there along the way. Rub hands together for at least 20 seconds for best results, about the amount of time it takes to sing the traditional song "Happy Birthday" from beginning to end two times. Friction helps the soap lift

germs and grime off the surface of your skin, which are then washed away by rinsing.

OTHER BEST PRACTICES

Most people assume that hot water is needed to best clean hands, but the CDC reports that water temperatures don't appear to have any impact the removal of

microbes. Always use clean running water when rinsing, since standing water may create a welcoming atmosphere for more germs that will then simply recontaminate your hands. Dry your hands immediately, since the CDC warns that germs are more easily transferred to and from wet hands.

Reducing Cervical Cancer Risks

Unfortunately, it's a slow-growing cancer which may not have symptoms.

Tens of thousands will be diagnosed with cervical cancer this year, according to the National Cancer Institute. Thousands of them will unfortunately die. Early detection is the key.

UNDERSTANDING THE DANGER

The cervix is the lower portion of the uterus, which connects to the vagina. The National Cancer Institute reports that cancer in this organ is caused by human papillomavirus, the most common sexually transmitted disease in the U.S. The issue begins with pre-cancerous cells, which may or may not lead to a cancer diagnosis. A shift from pre-cancerous to cervical cancer typically takes several years, but the American Cancer Society warns that some patients move through this process in a much shorter time frame. Regular testing can save lives.

EARLY DETECTION

Improved early detection through so-called Pap tests has helped drive down cervical cancer rates at a dramatic pace: In fact, both incidence and death rates fell by more than 60% in the first 30 years after its introduction in the '50s. Named after the doctor who invented the procedure,



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the Papanicolaou test involves microscopically examining a small sampling of cervical cells in order to identify any looming issues. Screening is recommended by the U.S. Preventative Services Task Force beginning at the age of 21, regardless of sexual activity.

TREATMENT OPTIONS

Once diagnosed, treatment

options for cervical cancers include chemotherapy or radiation therapy, immunotherapy, surgery and vaccine therapy. These treatments may be employed individually or, on a case by case basis, in combination with one another. Unfortunately, some treatment options may lead to infertility. Those who would one day like to become pregnant should discuss this possi-

ble outcome with the doctor. Storing eggs or embryos may be recommended before treatment starts.

COPING WITH CANCER

Any cancer diagnosis can bring with it a variety of emotions, from anxiety and anger to sadness and worry. Cervical cancer brings its own unique challenges, since it's associated with HPV.

Some may find it difficult to discuss their illness, symptoms or emotions because of the fear that others will connect behavior with the disease. In that case, a counselor, oncology social worker or clergy member might provide a better early sounding board. You can also call 800-813-HOPE or email info@cancercare.org to talk directly to oncology social workers.

Will Jogging Extend your Life?

Jogging has numerous physical and mental benefits, and it's an activity you can do alone or in a group.

Hitting the streets provides some immediate health benefits, and some long-term rewards, too.

Regular jogging sessions can improve heart and immune function, lessen stress and anxiety, help with maintaining flexibility and may help you lose weight with the proper diet modification. As little as 1 to 2.5 hours of jogging a week, even at a slow or moderate pace, can also lead to big dividends when it comes to longevity. An extensive Danish study found that regular jogging increases men's life expectancy by more than six years, while women's jumped more than 5.5.

HOW IT WORKS

Another study confirmed that any amount of running was associated with a 30% decrease in the risk of dying from heart disease — a critical element, since heart disease is responsible for so many deaths world wide. Running helps fight blood clots in blood vessels and arteries, while also supporting healthy blood pressure and diminished cholesterol. Jogging also translated into 23% less risk of dying from any form of cancer.

OTHER BENEFITS

Runners force their cardiovascular system to generate more capacity, opening more small arteries and capillaries to help lower blood pressure. Jogging lowers your blood sugar, decreases inflammation and stimulates our brain. (One researcher noted that vigorous physical activity has proven to be the best preven-

tative so far against Alzheimer's.). Running also helps regular hormone levels, maintain healthy weight and speeds up digestion, a trio of processes that can have big health impacts.

GETTING STARTED

Novices should gradually increase their intensity, rather than trying to immediately jog

long distances. Walking will improve your physical readiness: Once you can briskly walk for two hours without tiring, begin short intervals of running. Try 10 minutes at first, and gradually increase to 30 minutes. Continue lengthening the time you run, with shorter intervals of walking, until you've found a comfortable pace.

TAKE IT EASY

Researchers noted that the best results were, in fact, at this slow or moderate pace — and for no more than 2.5 hours per week. Those who jogged longer and especially those who ran at a higher-than-average rate actually had worse longevity outcomes. Slow and average runners fared better.



Taking a Break from Technology

The best way to slow down these days is sometimes to turn it all off.

Stress impacts our wellness in so many unseen ways, with smartphones, laptops, tablets and flatscreens creating frenetic surroundings that never allow us to completely relax.

Taking a break can lower our blood pressure and rebalance our emotions, while helping us reconnect with the people and places that surround us. You may discover that technology is also interfering with your ability to get enough rest, a common issue according to the National Sleep Foundation. Multiple studies have shown that making even small improvements in these areas can have lasting positive health impacts.

WHY YOU SHOULD PAUSE

A study conducted by Utah Valley University confirmed that too much time spent on social networks can directly cause stress, often in the form of user envy. Those dealing with their own issues, at home or at work, may become jealous or vengeful when they see others posting positive updates from their own lives. The pressure to keep up with the accomplishments of others may be overwhelming for others, according to the study.

SETTING TIME LIMITS

If you suspect that you're



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overly reliant on technology, start tracking how often you check your Facebook account, Twitter feed and email every day. Compare that with the number of meaningful conversations you hold with family and friends. If there is a noticeable discrepancy between one and the other, it may be time to

set some sort of limit on how much you're using technology. Consider returning emails only during certain time-frames. Check private messages and notifications during scheduled times, too. Smartphones also have handy do-not-disturb features that allow for long periods of quiet in order to reset.

RECONNECTING WITH LIFE OFFLINE

Set the laptop or tablet aside, unplug the headphones and close out all of your apps. Consider a return to the simpler things that life used to entail, whether that's reading a book, working the garden, taking an afternoon hike, bird watching or just going for a

long bike ride. It's still a good idea to have a smartphone with you, in case you need to take pictures, make an emergency call or reference a map on hiking or camping trips, but otherwise leave it in your pocket, purse or backpack. Exiting off the information superhighway every once in a while can be a real life saver.

Dealing with an Animal Bite

Depending on the injury, animal bites can be painful and sometimes very dangerous.

Every situation is different, so keep a first aid kit handy when you're outdoors. Then be ready to make a quick assessment since the first few minutes are so crucial.

MOST COMMON BITES

Because of their everyday proximity, domestic pets end up biting humans the most often — and dogs, the Mayo Clinic confirms, are far more likely to cause injury than cats. Cat bites are more likely to cause infection, however, since they cause thinner, deeper puncture wounds that may be more difficult to thoroughly disinfect. Next on the list of most common bites are the more troubling non-immunized domestic animals like squirrels, rodents and rabbits, since they may have rabies. In those situations, seek medical attention immediately. Roughly 5 million people are bitten by snakes worldwide each year, most of them in southeast Asia and in Africa. See a doctor as soon as possible since anti-venom treatments may be appropriate.

WHAT YOU SHOULD DO

For minor wounds, wash as thoroughly as you can with soap and water. Then apply an



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antibiotic, placing a clean bandage over the wound to protect it from infection. For deeper wounds, the first order of business is to stop the bleeding. Apply pressure with a dry, clean cloth. Whether you should drive or be driven to seek medical attention depends on the severity and location of the wound. You

may need to call 911 in certain emergency situations. For snake bites, immobilize the body part, then see a doctor. But do not apply a tourniquet or open the wound since that can worsen the effects.

CHECK WOUNDS

Be on the lookout for infections. If you notice redness,

swelling, oozing or increasing pain, have the wound checked by a doctor as soon as possible, since those are clear warning signs. If you've suffered a dirty or deep bite, medical professionals may recommend a tetanus booster — especially if your last shot was five or more years ago. (The Centers for Disease

Control and Prevention recommends getting these shots every 10 years.) If you discover that you or those in your hiking or camping party were sleeping in the presence of bats, seek medical care. Their bite marks are difficult to spot, so you may have been bitten by a bat and be at risk of rabies without knowing it.

Cut Down on the Sugar

Overconsumption of sugar leads to diabetes, obesity and other preventable chronic disease.

Like most things, sweets are fine in moderation. But if you find yourself regularly indulging, you could be setting yourself up for some serious health risks.

Even if you don't eat candy, you still might be getting far too much sugar in the form of added ingredients in items like soda, canned fruits, smoothies and yogurt. Worrisome government statistics have shown that U.S. adults are getting as much as 13% of their daily calories from sugar.

GOOD SUGAR?

Sugars are always found in food that also contains carbohydrates, including grains, dairy, some vegetables and fruits. These naturally occurring sugars are perfectly healthy because whole foods and dairy also contain high amounts of things like fiber, proteins, calciums, minerals and antioxidants. The body digests these things more slowly, leaving sugar to provide energy in the meantime. Problems occur when you ingest too much sugar, in particular sugars added by manufacturers in an effort to extend shelf life or increase flavor.

HEALTH IMPACTS

Excessive consumption of



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sugars, in candy and as an added ingredient, may create an imbalance in your bloodstream that causes irreparable damage to your liver. Diabetes then leads to other severe health problems. There is a clear relationship between high-sugar diets and cardiovascular health. One 15-year study showed that those who got between 17-21% of their daily

calories via added sugars had a 38% higher risk of dying from heart disease compared with those who followed guidelines. Ingesting excess sugars also leads to obesity, since our bodies begin storing calories when they're not immediately needed. Those who are grossly overweight are then at risk for related health issues like high blood pressure and heart

disease, among others.

SETTING LIMITS

Added sugars should be limited to half of your daily recommended sugar intake, according to the American Heart Association. For most American men, that equals no more than 150 calories. For most women, it's no more than 100 calories. That can be

harder than you think: Candy and many other top sources for added sugars are obvious sources for extraneous calories, but these sugars are also found in soups, cured meats, bread and ketchup, among other products. The National Cancer Institute has estimated that average adult male currently takes in about 385 calories in added sugar per day.