

Better Habits, Better Health

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Kidney beans, kidney cancer, kidney grille, and kidney garden — who knew kidneys were so versatile?

Interestingly enough, March is Kidney Cancer Awareness Month, and while beans, a grille and a garden can play a role in our kidney health, that kidney health is crucial to our overall health.

Kidney Cancer Awareness Month

Kidneys are a pair of bean-shaped organs (or perhaps beans are kidney shaped?). They are attached to the back wall of our abdomen, and our ribs help protect them. Our kidneys perform multiple jobs to maintain our body's homeostasis, a fancy word for our body systems working together seamlessly so we feel good. The kidneys also house the ever-important adrenal gland.

Kidneys work all day, every day to filter the blood coming from the rest of our body to remove water, salt and waste products. Once this waste is removed, our body excretes it through urine. The adrenal gland plays a huge role by helping to regulate your metabolism, immune system, blood pressure and response to stress (fight or flight and cortisol production).

If we are not taking care of our whole selves, the kidneys will start to suffer by either taking over for another body system, or another body system will have to work that much harder to help do the kidneys' many jobs, and I'm sure you can guess what happens as a result; disease, complications and potentially cancer.

Think of your kidneys as a whole-body Brita filter: They work to excrete the waste products out of our bodies and return the clean blood into our systems to transport vital nutrients to our other body systems. If we are constantly clogging our filters with unnecessary and unhealthy products, our kidneys will have to work overtime. And just like anything overworked for too long, they will start to break down, leading to conditions such as high blood pressure, kidney stones, renal disease and possibly cancer.

High blood pressure along with diabetes can also be detrimental to kidney function and lead to further problems. Too much or too little sugar in your bloodstream will cause damage to the kidneys, and if your blood pressure is also too high, it can lead to a breakdown in our blood vessel integrity and open new opportunities for clots, plaque buildup, heart attacks and/or heart disease.

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Moral of the story: If you don't take care of your kidneys, you aren't taking care of your whole self and the other body systems that work to make you feel good, and if you're not taking care of other body systems, your kidneys will suffer. So how do you take better care of those little beans in your back? We've provided some suggestions below.

DRINK WATER	STOP SMOKING AND DRINKING	MAINTAIN A HEALTHY WEIGHT	EXERCISE	SLEEP
Rinse the filters out every day with at least 64 ounces of refreshing H ₂ O. A good rule of thumb is follow any beverage that is not water with a full 8-ounce glass of water before moving on to another non-water beverage.	Anything we put into our bodies that is not usable by other systems will be excreted, and I'm sorry to say nicotine and alcohol are not necessary for the function of any body system.	Obesity is linked to multiple disease processes, and ridding yourself of excess weight will improve your mood, attitude and chances of deterring those disease processes.	Sweating is a form of excretion and helps the kidneys do just that. And as we all know, exercise is imperative for all body systems, including our mental health.	When you sleep, your body systems can do their cleanup work, which helps them perform that much better while we are awake.

What does all this have to do with beans, grilles and gardens? Well, kidney beans are actually quite good for your kidneys, as they are nutrient-packed with healthy fats, water, protein, fiber and low-content natural sugars. So do your kidneys a favor and add them to your chili, salad or garden. Yes, garden. There are resources out there that will teach you to grow a kidney-friendly garden with vegetables that promote kidney health. As far as the grille goes, it comes on a few BMW models. If you're asking yourself what that has to do with health, well, if you are taking care of yourself, feeling good, and motivated to work hard, you will hopefully live a fruitful life that will provide you the opportunity to own such a car with a grille that reminds you how well you take care of your kidneys. Happy kidneys, happy life!

March is Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month

Colorectal cancer affects both men and women and all racial and ethnic groups, and it is most often found in adults over the age of 50. Getting screened regularly can help detect and prevent the spread of precancerous and cancerous cells. Screenings can be done every five or 10 years depending on your risk factors. Discussing your risk factors with your doctor is important in determining how often you need to be screened. Common risk factors are:

- Being over the age of 50.
- Smoking or tobacco use.
- Being overweight or obese.
- Physical inactivity.
- Consuming high amounts of red meat.
- Heavy alcohol use.
- Personal and/or family history of polyps or colorectal cancer.
- History of inflammatory bowel disease.
- Type 2 diabetes.

It is important to get your preventive exams and screenings every year. Screenings can help with the prevention and early treatment of illnesses such as colorectal cancer, which reduces your risk of serious complications associated with the disease or cancer. Please contact your Lockton Nurse Advocate for more resources or with any questions you may have.

Save your vision

March is National Save Your Vision Month. We want to educate you on the importance of getting an annual eye examination and how to make simple changes to your daily routine that can give your eyes a break.

Early signs of serious age-related eye diseases like cataracts, diabetic retinopathy, glaucoma and macular degeneration can be detected from an eye exam. Unfortunately, many people don't understand that good vision doesn't always mean good eye health. Below are tips to provide your eyes relief throughout the day, as well as information on eye exams.

The 20/20 rule

Every 20 minutes, look at an object 20 feet or more away for 20 seconds.



Stare at that object 20 feet away for the full 20 seconds — it takes the FULL 20 seconds for the eyes to relax. This is a rest break for the eyes.

Get up, stretch and drink water. Water helps keep the body and eye tissues hydrated.

If you can't leave your workstation, just make a point to look out the window. This helps keep eye tissues flexible and oxygenated.

Also, keep the screen clean. Fingerprints and dust can actually cause more stress to the eyes.

MORNING COMMUTE

During your morning commute to school or work, be sure to wear sunglasses that block harmful UV light. This light causes skin cancer around the eyelids and is a major contributor to the development of macular degeneration.

WHILE AT WORK

Approximately 82% of Americans work on a computer or handheld device every day — give your eyes a break. Apply the “20/20 rule” to your daily routine to relieve some of the symptoms that are associated with Computer Vision Syndrome.

AFTER-SCHOOL SPORTS

Parents whose kids are involved in after-school sports should consider providing them with protective lenses, also known as “RecSpecs” to wear while practicing and playing. RecSpecs can protect children's eyes from accidents, like being hit in the face or poked in the eye, and are available in prescription, nonprescription or UV-blocking lenses.

WHY GET AN EYE EXAM?

Seeing your optometrist each year promotes overall health and wellness in addition to correcting vision problems. Having an annual eye exam can help prevent and even detect sight-threatening and, in some cases, life-threatening conditions.

Irish soda bread with raisins

Ingredients

- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter
- 4 ½ cups white whole-wheat flour
- ½ cup currants
- ½ cup golden raisins
- 1 tablespoon caraway seeds
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 2 ¼ cups buttermilk



Directions

Preheat oven to 425°F.

Warm a nine-inch cast-iron skillet in the oven for five minutes. Remove the pan from the oven and add butter, swirling to coat the bottom and sides.

Combine flour, currants, raisins, caraway seeds, baking soda and salt in a large bowl. Gradually add buttermilk, stirring just until the flour is fully incorporated. Do not over mix. The dough should be sticky and a little shaggy.

Transfer the dough to the prepared pan, using a spatula to spread it evenly. It's all right if it doesn't reach all the way to the sides. Use a sharp knife to score a deep X in the top of the loaf.

Bake until cooked through and golden brown, about 40 minutes. Let cool in the pan for five minutes, then transfer to a wire rack to cool for at least 30 minutes before slicing.



NEED A LITTLE HELP GETTING YOUR HEALTH ON TRACK?

If you find yourself wanting more, seeking a plan or needing assistance to execute your own plan for better health, reach out to your Lockton Nurse Advocate. They can help you create a plan, provide information and resources, as well as offer ongoing support to get you where you want to be.

Do you have a topic you want to learn more about, or feedback about past topics or articles?

Please feel free to contact the author at:

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