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EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA HEALTH CARE QUALITY UNIT

IT'S YOUR HEALTH FALL 2025

FALL HEALTH GUIDE

FOR MANY, AUTUMN CAN FEEL LIKE A TUG OF WAR BETWEEN WANTING TO ENJOY THE SCENIC BEAUTY AND THE REALITY OF SEASONAL ILLNESSES. THIS GUIDE IS DESIGNED TO HELP YOU NAVIGATE THIS SEASON WITH CONFIDENCE AND GOOD HEALTH.

AVOIDING DEHYDRATION IN AUTUMN

With falling leaves, cooler temperatures, and less humidity, most of us don't think of fall being a time when we're at risk for dehydration. However, the autumn months can pose the same risk as those hot and humid summer days.

In cooler weather, your blood vessels constrict to preserve heat, which dulls your brain's thirst response by up to 40% even if you're already dehydrated. Dry indoor air and fewer cues to drink, like sweating and high outdoor temperatures, easily add up to increase risk. Additional layers of clothing are also a factor. An autumn day in northeastern Pennsylvania can feel like all four seasons. It's important to plan ahead and have appropriate clothing available if it's a very cold morning with a hot afternoon! Fall activities, such as hiking and raking leaves, can also deplete fluids quickly.

Autumn is a time when dehydration can occur rapidly without us even realizing it but can easily be prevented! Here are some common signs of dehydration:

- Dry mouth/skin
- Lightheadedness/dizziness
- Nausea and/or vomiting
- Muscle cramps/weakness
- Headaches
- Brain fog or confusion

HCQU Trainings

Our Health Care Quality Unit is always available for trainings for groups large and small. In addition to group trainings, we offer web trainings 24 hours a day/7 days per week. If you are interested in scheduling a training, or have any questions about web trainings, please contact Heather Coleman, M.A., Director, Eastern PA Health Care Quality Unit 610-435-2700 or hs@theadvocacyalliance.org.

For a list of our current web trainings please go to [Eastern PA HCQU Trainings](#).

AVOIDING DEHYDRATION IN AUTUMN (CONTINUED)

Up to 75 % of Americans are chronically dehydrated, which can lead to serious complications such as kidney failure, seizures, and even death. Follow these tips to stay hydrated:



Up to 75% of Americans are chronically dehydrated, which can lead to serious complications such as kidney failure, seizures, and even death. Follow these tips to stay hydrated:

- Drink 8-12 cups of fluid daily and increase with activity - Consider carrying a travel water bottle with you
- Don't wait until you are thirsty to drink - Thirst isn't always a reliable sign, especially in colder months
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol - Both increase urination, which can lead to rapid fluid loss
- Water is best! - While other liquids can help, water offers the most benefit!
- Eat water-rich foods - Most fruits and many vegetables contain lots of water
- Use a humidifier - Cold, dry indoor air can pull moisture from your body

Staying well hydrated has many benefits, including better sleep, better mood and stronger immune system. Prevention is key!

Sources:

[Mercer Health](#)

[All Day Medical Care](#)

[Cleveland Clinic](#)

LYME DISEASE

Ticks and Lyme Disease have been around for thousands of years. In fact, a recent autopsy on a 5,300-year-old mummy indicated the presence.

Lyme Disease was first discovered in the United States in Lyme, Connecticut, in the mid-1970s. A cluster of children in the town were diagnosed with arthritis, and researchers investigated the cause. They identified a spirochete bacterium, *Borrelia burgdorferi*, as the culprit. The disease was named after the town where it was discovered.

Lyme Disease is transmitted to humans through the bite of infected black legged ticks (deer ticks) and feeds on their blood. Only nymphs and adult female blacklegged ticks can transmit Lyme Disease to people or animals, like dogs. Nymphs pose a greater risk of transmitting Lyme Disease because they are tiny (about the size of a poppy seed) and difficult to see, so they may not be noticed and removed promptly. Nymphs are found in leaf litter and on rocks, logs, tree trunks, or fallen branches under trees in oak woodlands or other shaded natural areas. Adult ticks are found on the tips of tall grasses and shrubs, often along trails. Nymphs are more active in the spring and early summer, while adult blacklegged ticks are more active from fall through early spring.

Symptoms of Lyme Disease are often flu-like, and can include fever, chills, headache, fatigue, muscle/joint pain, and swollen lymph nodes. Also, the individual may experience a rash which expands over time, sometimes with a central clearing giving a "bullseye" appearance. Not everyone who has Lyme Disease gets a rash (especially one that looks like a red bullseye). The rash can vary in shape, size, and color, and can look like a bruise on darker skin or may not be noticeable if it's on a part of the body that is difficult to see.

Early symptoms of Lyme Disease may disappear without treatment, but a person can still be infected. If early symptoms are not treated, they might develop into more severe health problems that can be more difficult to treat, including severe joint pain, arthritis, headache, neurological problems (such as facial palsy, numbness, paralysis, and memory issues) and /or arrhythmias. Although it is rare, Lyme Disease can cause death if serious symptoms are not treated.

LYME DISEASE (CONTINUED)

Lyme Disease is diagnosed through a combination of clinical symptoms, medical history, and laboratory tests. —ELISA and Western Blot are the blood tests typically used for confirmation. You can get Lyme Disease more than once.

The standard treatment for Lyme Disease is a course of oral antibiotics. The specific antibiotic and duration of treatment depend on the stage of the infection and the individual's response. In some cases, additional treatments may be necessary, such as anti-inflammatory medications for joint pain or corticosteroids for severe allergic reactions.



Post-Lyme Disease syndrome (PTLDS) is a condition that can occur after treatment for Lyme Disease. It is characterized by persistent symptoms that may have been present during the initial infection or may develop after treatment. The exact cause of PTLDS is unknown. PTLDS is diagnosed based on a history of confirmed Lyme disease, a persistent pattern of symptoms for at least six months after treatment, and the absence of other identifiable causes for the symptoms. The prognosis for PTLDS varies widely. Some people may experience significant improvement with treatment, while others may have ongoing symptoms for years.

PREVENTION Avoid tick infested areas, especially in Spring/Summer (adult ticks are more active fall through spring), wear light-colored clothing so that ticks can be easily spotted, wear long-sleeved shirts/pants/socks/closed shoes, tuck pant legs into socks or boots and tuck shirt into pants, walk in the center of trails to avoid overgrown grass and brush, after being outdoors in a tick-infested area, remove/wash/dry clothing, inspect the body thoroughly and carefully to remove any attached ticks, shower soon after being outdoors, apply insect repellent containing permethrin to pants, socks, and shoes, and compounds containing DEET on exposed skin (do not overuse these products).

TICK REMOVAL Tug gently but firmly with blunt tweezers near the “head” of the tick until it releases its hold on the skin. Grasp close to the skin and pull straight out, clean area and monitor for symptoms. To lessen the chance of contact with the bacterium, try not to crush the tick’s body or handle the tick with bare fingers. Swab the bite thoroughly with an antiseptic to prevent bacterial infection. Save tick in a container for possible testing. A tick must be attached for at least 24-48 hours to transmit the bacteria.

It's essential to remember that any activity should be undertaken safely. Dress appropriately for the weather, stay hydrated and always listen to your body. If an activity feels too strenuous, it's okay to take a step back and rest. The goal is to enhance immunity and overall well-being, and with these activities, autumn provides ample opportunities to achieve just that.

Sources:

[Mayo Clinic](#)

[CDC](#)

[Cleveland Clinic](#)

[American Lyme Disease Foundation](#)



NOT JUST BEHAVIOR: WHEN MEDICAL ISSUES PRESENT AS BEHAVIORS

When working with individuals who have intellectual or developmental disabilities (IDD), staff and caregivers often face the challenge of interpreting behavior. It can be easy to assume that refusal to eat, sudden outbursts, withdrawal, or agitation are simple behavioral in nature. In reality, these actions are often the only way a person can communicate that something is wrong. For those who struggle to express discomfort verbally, behavior becomes the dearest signal of an underlying medical problem.

Failing to recognize this can have serious consequences. What may be dismissed as noncompliance or aggression might in fact be untreated pain, infection, or another health condition. Effective care depends on being able to pause, look beyond the surface, and ask whether a change in behavior could be medical in origin.

WHEN MEDICAL PROBLEMS LOOK LIKE BEHAVIORS

The human body communicates distress in many ways, and when words are limited, actions become the primary language. Several medical issues are particularly common in individuals with IDD and can present as behavioral changes.

Pain or injury is one of the most frequent culprits. A person who cannot explain where or why they hurt may push others away, refuse to be touched, or lash out unexpectedly. Constipation and reflux can also cause behaviors that look like agitation or emotional distress. Rocking, moaning, or sudden irritability may be the body's way of responding to discomfort in the digestive system.



Urinary Tract Infections are another condition that can easily be misread. Especially in older adults, a UTI may lead to confusion, pacing, or changes in continence. These shifts can look like a decline in functioning or deliberate noncompliance, when they are actually signs of infection.

Seizures add another layer of complexity. Not all seizures are dramatic or easily identified. Silent or atypical seizures may appear as staring spells, brief moments of disorientation, or sudden emotional swings. Without awareness, these episodes may be misinterpreted as defiance or withdrawal.

Even changes in hearing and vision can alter behavior in ways that are misunderstood. Someone struggling to process sounds or visual cues may appear fearful, uncooperative, or isolated, when the real issue is sensory loss.

KEY TAKEAWAY

All behavior communicates something. For individuals with IDD, that communication may be the only available channel for expressing pain or distress. By approaching behavior with curiosity and a willingness to look deeper, staff and caregivers can avoid misinterpretation, reduce unnecessary conflict, and ensure that medical needs are not left untreated.

The next time a behavior seems puzzling or disruptive, pause and ask the essential question: Could this be medical? That simple step can make the difference between prolonged suffering and effective, compassionate care.

Sources:

May, Michael E., and Craig H. Kennedy. "Health and Problem Behavior among People with Intellectual Disabilities." *Behavior Analysis in Practice*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2010. PubMed Central

Escude, Craig. "Advancing Health Equity for People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities." *Health Affairs Forefront*, 20 Oct 2022

Advocacy Alliance Health Care Quality Units. "Behavior De-escalation". Internal Document

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

WHAT IS CONFLICT RESOLUTION?

Conflict resolution in communication involves applying strategies like active listening, expressing emotions clearly, and negotiating solutions to address disagreements and prevent misunderstandings from escalating into full-blown conflicts.

It is integral in maintaining harmonious interactions and enhancing individual well-being, from personal relationships to professional environments, typically enacted in many scenarios.

Here are a few key points to consider about conflict resolution:

- Utilized in personal and professional relationships
- Encourages active listening and understanding
- Often involves steps to mediate disputes and reach a resolution
- It can be applied in a variety of scenarios, from simple misunderstandings to complex disputes
- Skills in conflict resolution can be learned and improved over time.



WHAT ARE CONFLICT RESOLUTION SKILLS?

ACTIVE LISTENING Giving your full attention to the speaker, understanding their emotions, and creating a safe space for discussion

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE Considering the feelings and concerns of all parties involved to find common ground

PROBLEM SOLVING Focusing on understanding the problem and solving it in a way that benefits everyone

COMMUNICATION Expressing your thoughts and feelings honestly while being considerate of others

EMPATHY Being able to imagine yourself in someone else's shoes to defuse tense situations



NEGOTIATION Identifying common ground, brainstorming options, and finding compromises that address the needs of all parties

PATIENCE Being patient because conflicts are rarely simple to overcome

Other conflict resolution skills include: Stress management and Impartiality.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION (CONTINUED)

WHAT ARE CONFLICT RESOLUTION COPING SKILLS?

Coping skills are healthy strategies used to manage stress, difficult emotions, and challenging situations. Here are some effective coping skills:

RELAXATION TECHNIQUES:

- **DEEP BREATHING** Focus on taking slow, deep breaths to calm the mind and body.
- **MEDITATION** Engage in mindfulness practices to reduce stress and improve emotional regulation.
- **PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION** Tense and release different muscle groups to release tension.



SOCIAL SUPPORT:

- **TALK TO A TRUSTED FRIEND OR FAMILY MEMBER** Sharing your feelings can provide emotional support and validation.
- **JOIN A SUPPORT GROUP** Connect with others who understand your experiences and offer support.
- **SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP** Consider therapy or counseling if needed for more serious issues.

SELF-CARE ACTIVITIES:

- **ENGAGE IN HOBBIES** Spend time doing activities you enjoy to distract yourself and boost mood.
- **GET ENOUGH SLEEP** Adequate sleep is essential for emotional well-being.
- **EAT A HEALTHY DIET** Nourishing your body with nutritious foods can improve mood and reduce stress.
- **EXERCISE REGULARLY** Physical activity releases endorphins, which have mood-boosting effects.

PROBLEM-SOLVING:

- **IDENTIFY THE SOURCE OF STRESS** Understanding what's causing stress can help you develop effective coping strategies.
- **BREAK DOWN PROBLEMS INTO SMALLER STEPS** This can make them seem less overwhelming.
- **SET REALISTIC GOALS** Don't try to do too much at once.
- **SEEK HELP WHEN NEEDED** Don't hesitate to ask for assistance from others if you're struggling.



CONFLICT RESOLUTION (CONTINUED)

OTHER COPING SKILLS:

- **JOURNALING** Writing down your thoughts and emotions can help you process them and gain insights.
- **LISTENING TO CALMING MUSIC** Music can provide a soothing distraction.
- **SPENDING TIME IN NATURE** Immersing yourself in the outdoors can reduce stress and improve mood.

Remember, the best coping skills vary from person to person. It's important to experiment with different strategies and find what works best for you. If you're struggling to cope with stress or difficult emotions, don't hesitate to seek professional help.



Sources:

[Conflict Resolution Skills - HelpGuide.org](https://www.helpguide.org/articles/relationships/conflict-resolution-skills.htm)

[Coping With Conflict - Claire Newton](#)

[Conflict Resolution: Definition, Benefits, and Techniques](#)

FALL COMFORT FOOD RECIPE

MACARONI & CHEESE BEEF SOUP

Ingredients

1 lb ground beef (you can substitute ground turkey or a vegan substitution)

1 medium onion, diced

3 cups beef broth (you can substitute chicken or vegetable broth)

2 cups elbow macaroni

2 cups shredded cheddar cheese

2 cups milk

Salt and pepper to taste



- In a large pot, cook the ground beef and diced onion over medium heat until the beef is browned and the onion is tender. Drain any excess fat.
- Pour in the beef broth and bring the mixture to a boil.
- Add the elbow macaroni and cook until tender, about 7–8 minutes.
- Reduce the heat to low and stir in the milk and shredded cheese. Mix until the cheese is fully melted and the soup is creamy.

Season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve hot.

Find other Fall recipes at [EatingWell](https://www.eatingwell.com), including Noodle-Less Butternut Squash Lasagna and Slow-Cooker Buffalo Chicken Chili.

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Ideas for Our Newsletter?

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