

EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA HEALTH CARE QUALITY UNIT

IT'S YOUR HEALTH SPRING 2017

the Advocacy
Alliance

Toll Free 1-877-315-6855
www.theadvocacyalliance.org



MAY IS MENTAL HEALTH MONTH TIPS TO IMPROVE YOUR MENTAL WELLNESS

In honor of Mental Health Month in May, we are spreading the word that mental health is something everyone should care about. We are offering the community a few easy tips to kick-start this month with a focus on improving our mental wellness year-round:

EAT HEALTHY. The kinds of foods and drinks you consume determine the types of nutrients in your system and impact how well your mind and body are able to function. Avoid sugary drinks, excessive caffeine and skipping meals. Aim for a healthy diet that relies on fruits, vegetables, nuts, whole grains, fish and unsaturated fats.

SPEAK UP. Having healthy relationships and getting on a path to good mental health begins with being able to talk about how you feel. Support from family and friends is crucial and prevents us from feeling isolated and alone.

WRITE IT DOWN. Getting thoughts out of your head and onto paper can be helpful. This could be making a to-do list to organize your thoughts if your mind is racing and it's hard to focus, or writing in a journal to express what is bothering you.

DO A GOOD DEED. Volunteer your time and energy to help someone else, even if it's just holding open a door for the person behind you. Research shows that those who consistently help others experience a boost in their health.

EXERCISE. Get moving to get your body's feel-good chemicals flowing. Take a brisk walk, go up and down the stairs, or do some jumping jacks.

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 <http://www.easternpa-hcqu.org/Trainings/trainings.htm>.





MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR SPRING ALLERGY VISIT

This article was reviewed by Stuart A. Friedman, MD, Fellow of the American Academy of Allergy Asthma and Immunology (FAAAAI).

Spring is the busiest time of year at your allergist's office as patients begin experiencing the first symptoms of seasonal allergies, or 'hay fever'. An estimated 35 million Americans suffer from allergies to pollen and mold, according to the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology (AAAAI). Symptoms include sneezing, a stuffy or runny nose and itchy, watery eyes.

If you're planning to see an allergist/immunologist this spring, make sure you get the most from your appointment by writing down your questions and concerns ahead of time.

LET YOUR ALLERGIST KNOW IF:

You have any new symptoms or symptoms that are worse than in previous years. Be sure to mention if you experience coughing, difficulty breathing or loss of sleep, as these can be signs of asthma.

You have missed school or work due to allergy or asthma symptoms. It's very important that you report any related hospitalizations or visits to the emergency department. Your allergist can help you gain better control of your allergies and asthma.

You are taking any medications, even if they are over-the-counter. This includes any herbal supplements. This information will help your allergist/immunologist prescribe safe treatments.



YOU MIGHT ALSO WANT TO ASK THESE QUESTIONS:

Am I currently on the best treatment plan? With proper treatment, most allergies and asthma can be managed so they do not interfere with life.

What steps can I take to avoid allergy symptoms? There maybe simple changes you can make to prevent reactions.

What other treatment options are available? This may include allergy shots, less expensive medications or home remedies.

Visit www.aaaai.org, for information on preventing seasonal allergy symptoms, to learn more about allergy medications, check pollen counts in your area or locate an allergist near you.

DID YOU KNOW?

- ✓ Each year, more than 12 million doctor's visits result from allergic rhinitis.
- ✓ Symptoms from seasonal allergies are among the primary reasons people miss school or work.
- ✓ Allergists are the best doctors to diagnose and treat allergies and asthma. Find an allergist in your area at www.aaaai.org.
- ✓ Allergy shots can reduce symptoms in up to 85% of patients with seasonal allergies. Ask your allergist if they can work for you.

Many people confuse allergy symptoms with those of a common cold. What these people don't know is that the symptoms brought on by allergies and those caused by the sniffles can be very similar. Just because allergies haven't struck before doesn't mean they never will — even adults who have never had seasonal allergies can develop them suddenly.

IS YOUR SPRING BEING RUINED BY WHAT APPEARS TO BE A DRAWN-OUT COLD?

Make sure you aren't mistaking cold symptoms for those caused by seasonal allergies by following the American College of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology's Cold vs. Allergy Checklist:

- ✓ **Have you experienced symptoms for two weeks or more?** If your answer is yes, then your symptoms are more likely to be caused by allergies. Colds usually die out after a week or two, at most.
- ✓ **Are your symptoms escalating?** If your symptoms are escalating or progressing, then you probably have a cold. Colds tend to evolve, starting with a stuffy nose, irritated throat and fever followed by sneezing and a runny nose. Mucus also thickens as the cold progresses. In contrast, allergy symptoms tend to appear fairly quickly and don't evolve.
- ✓ **Do you have green or clear mucous?** Colored mucous that appears yellow or green is usually related to an infection, while clear mucous tends to be allergy-related. However, be careful because in some cases, the opposite can be true.
- ✓ **Are you itching or wheezing?** Itchy eyes, mouth, nose, throat or skin all tend to be signs of allergy, rather than a cold. Wheezing is a sign of asthma, which can be triggered by allergens such as mold or pollen. Asthma and allergy are related — between 75 and 80 percent of people with asthma are estimated to have allergies as well.

Pollen typically bears the brunt of the blame for seasonal allergies, but mold can be just as nasty. In fact, according to the ACAAI, mold counts can actually outnumber pollen counts, even during peak pollen season.

To the Point

In most parts of the country, trees are the first plants to pollinate, beginning in early spring. Grass pollen is present in the early summer months and weed pollen (such as ragweed) arrives in the late summer and fall. Allergy sufferers in many areas get relief in winter months when pollen levels are extremely low. Not so in Texas, where highly-allergenic cedar trees peak in January.

How allergies make us sneeze and wheeze

1. Pollen, dust or animal skin flakes enter the eyes, nose or lungs. When these allergic "triggers" enter the bodies of people who have allergies, their immune systems overreact.



2. The body produces antibodies, which work to fight the trigger.

3. The antibodies attach to allergy cells, which release strong chemicals into the tissues when they contact allergic triggers. The major chemical, called histamine, irritates the body, causing itching, swelling and tearing.

Source: American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology



SEVEN WAYS TO HELP YOUR NONVERBAL CHILD SPEAK

(Blog posted by Autism Speaks Chief Science Officer Geri Dawson, PhD, and Autism Speaks Assistant Director for Dissemination Science Lauren Elder, PhD)

This week, researchers published the hopeful findings that, even after age 4, many nonverbal children with autism eventually develop language. For good reason, families, teachers and others want to know how they can promote language development in nonverbal children or teenagers with autism. The good news is that research has produced a number of effective strategies.



Before we share our “top tips” it’s important to remember that each person with autism is unique. Even with tremendous effort, a strategy that works well with one child or teenager may not work with another. Even though every person with autism can learn to communicate, it’s not always through spoken language. Nonverbal individuals with autism have much to contribute to society and can live fulfilling lives with the help of visual supports and assistive technologies.

Here are our top seven strategies for promoting language development in nonverbal children and adolescents with autism:

1. Encourage play and social interaction.

Children learn through play, and that includes learning language. Interactive play provides enjoyable opportunities for you and your child to communicate. Try a variety of games to find those your child enjoys. Also try playful activities that promote social interaction such as singing, reciting nursery rhymes and gentle roughhousing. During your interactions, position yourself in front of your child and close to eye level – so it’s easier for your child to see and hear you.



2. Imitate your child.

Mimicking your child’s sounds and play behaviors will encourage more vocalizing and interaction, and also encourage your child to copy you and take turns. Make sure you imitate *how* your child is playing – so long as it’s a positive behavior. For example, when your child rolls a car, you roll a car. If he or she crashes the car, you crash yours too. However, don’t imitate throwing the car!

3. Focus on nonverbal communication.

Gestures and eye contact can build a foundation for language.

- Encourage your child by modeling and responding these behaviors.
- Exaggerate your gestures.
- Use both your body and your voice when communicating – for example, by extending your hand to point when you say “look” and nodding your head when you say “yes.”
- Use gestures that are easy for your child to imitate, such as clapping, opening hands, reaching out arms, etc.
- Respond to your child’s gestures: When she looks at or points to a toy, hand it to her or take the cue for *you* to play with it. Similarly, point to a toy you want before picking it up.





4. Leave “space” for your child to talk.

It’s natural to feel the urge to fill in language when a child doesn’t immediately respond, but it’s so important to give your child lots of opportunities to communicate, even if he isn’t talking. When you ask a question or see that your child wants something, pause for several seconds while looking at him expectantly. Watch for any sound or body movement and respond promptly. The promptness of your response helps your child feel the power of communication.

5. Simplify your language.

Doing so helps your child follow what you’re saying. It also makes it easier for her to imitate your speech. If your child is nonverbal, try speaking mostly in single words, for example if she’s playing with a ball, you say “ball” or “roll”. If your child is speaking single words, try expanding on this by using short phrases, such as “roll ball” or “throw ball.” Keep following this “one-up” rule by trying to use phrases with one more word than your child is using.

6. Follow your child’s interests.

Rather than interrupting your child’s focus, follow along with words. Using the one-up rule, narrate what your child is doing. If he’s playing with a shape sorter, you might say the word “in” when he puts a shape in its slot. You might say “shape” when he holds up the shape and “dump shapes” when he dumps them out to start over. By talking about what engages your child, you’ll help him learn the associated vocabulary.

7. Consider assistive devices and visual supports.

Assistive technologies and visual supports can do more than take the place of speech — they can foster its development. Some examples include devices and apps with pictures that your child touches to produce words, or on a simpler level, visual supports can include pictures and groups of pictures that your child can use to indicate requests and thoughts. Your child’s therapists are uniquely qualified to help you select and use these and other strategies for encouraging language development. Tell the therapist about your successes as well as any difficulties you’re having. By working with your child’s intervention team, you can help provide the support your child needs to find his or her unique “voice”.



Using speech generating devices to communicate during play

For more guidance on using visual supports, see <https://www.autismspeaks.org/science/resources-programs/autism-treatment-network/tools-you-can-use/visual-supports>.

Autism Speaks (<https://www.autismspeaks.org>) continues to fund research on therapies that promote language development as well as supports and services that can improve communication and quality of life for nonverbal individuals. Explore these and other projects supported by our community of volunteers and donors by using Grant Search at <https://www.autismspeaks.org/science/science-news/new-autism-speaks-grant-search-find-projects-your-area>. If you would like to help fund autism research, go to https://act.autismspeaks.org/site/Donation2?df_id=1500&mfc_pref=T&1500.donation=form1&s_src=AutismSpeaks.org&s_subsrc=DonateRedirect.

For more strategies that promote language and nonverbal communication through daily activities, see *An Early Start for Your Child with Autism*, by Sally Rogers, Geraldine Dawson and Laurie Vismara (<https://www.autismspeaks.org/blog/2012/06/22/early-start-your-child-autism>).



IS CHOCOLATE GOOD FOR YOUR HEART?

WHY A LITTLE, IN MODERATION, MAY BE BENEFICIAL

Chocolate has gotten a lot of media coverage in recent years because it's believed that it may help protect your cardiovascular system. The reasoning being that the cocoa bean is rich in a class of plant nutrients called flavonoids.

Flavonoids help protect plants from environmental toxins and help repair damage. They can be found in a variety of foods, such as fruits and vegetables. When we eat foods rich in flavonoids, it appears that we also benefit from this "antioxidant" power.

Antioxidants are believed to help the body's cells resist damage caused by free radicals that are formed by normal bodily processes, such as breathing, and from environmental contaminants, like cigarette smoke. If your body does not have enough antioxidants to combat the amount of oxidation that occurs, it can become damaged by free radicals. For example, an increase in oxidation can cause low-density lipoprotein (LDL), also known as "bad" cholesterol, to form plaque on the artery walls.

Flavanols are the main type of flavonoid found in cocoa and chocolate. In addition to having antioxidant qualities, research shows that flavanols have other potential influences on vascular health, such as lowering blood pressure, improving blood flow to the brain and heart, and making blood platelets less sticky and able to clot.

These plant chemicals aren't only found in chocolate. In fact, a wide variety of foods and beverages are rich in flavanols, such as cranberries, apples, peanuts, onions, tea and red wine.

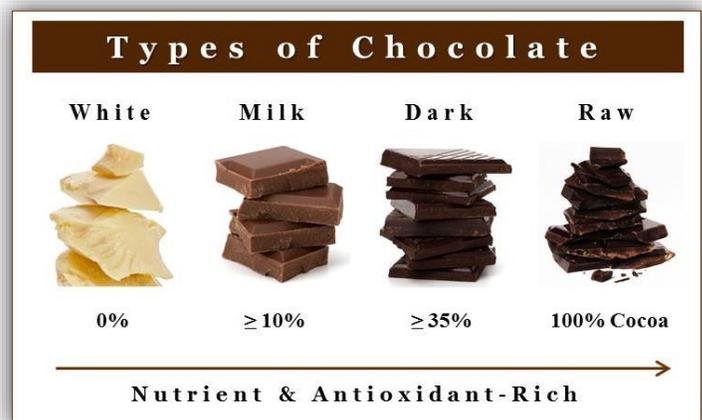
ARE ALL TYPES OF CHOCOLATE HEALTHY?

Before you grab a chocolate candy bar or slice of chocolate cake, it's important to understand that not all forms of chocolate contain high levels of flavanols.

Cocoa naturally has a very strong, pungent taste, which comes from the flavanols. When cocoa is processed into your favorite chocolate products, it goes through several steps to reduce this taste. The more chocolate is processed (through things like fermentation, alkalizing, roasting, etc.), the more flavanols are lost.

Most commercial chocolates are highly processed.

Although it was once believed that dark chocolate contained the highest levels flavanols, recent research indicates that, depending on how the dark chocolate was processed, this may not be true. The good news is that most major chocolate manufacturers are looking for ways to keep the flavanols in their processed chocolates. For now, your best choices are likely dark chocolate over milk chocolate — especially milk chocolate that is loaded with other fats and sugars — and cocoa powder that has not undergone Dutch processing (i.e., cocoa that is treated with an alkali to neutralize its natural acidity).



WHAT ABOUT ALL OF THE FAT IN CHOCOLATE?

You may be surprised to learn that chocolate isn't as bad for you as once believed.

The fat in chocolate comes from cocoa butter and is made up of equal amounts of oleic acid (a heart-healthy monounsaturated fat also found in olive oil), stearic and palmitic acids. Stearic and palmitic acids are forms of saturated fat. You may know that saturated fats are linked to increases in LDL cholesterol and the risk of heart disease.

However, research shows that stearic acid appears to have a neutral effect on cholesterol, neither raising nor lowering it. Although palmitic acid does affect cholesterol levels, it only makes up one-third of the fat calories in chocolate.

Still, this does not mean you can eat all the dark chocolate you'd like. First, be careful about the type of dark chocolate you choose — chewy caramel-marshmallow-nut-covered dark chocolate is by no means a heart-healthy food option. Watch out for those extra ingredients that can add lots of extra fat and calories. Second, there is currently no established serving size of chocolate to help you reap the cardiovascular benefits it may offer, and more research is needed in this area. However, we do know that you no longer need to feel guilty if you enjoy a small piece of dark chocolate once in a while.

So, for now, enjoy moderate portions of chocolate (e.g., 1 ounce) a few times per week, and don't forget to eat other flavonoid-rich foods like apples, red wine, tea, onions and cranberries.

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CHECK OUT THESE WEBSITES MENTIONED IN THIS EDITION OF "IT'S YOUR HEALTH"

<https://www.autismspeaks.org/>

<http://my.clevelandclinic.org/>

<http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/>

<https://www.aaaai.org/>

<https://www.autismspeaks.org/science/resources-programs/autism-treatment-network/tools-you-can-use/visual-supports>.

<https://www.autismspeaks.org/science/science-news/new-autism-speaks-grant-search-find-projects-your-area>. If you would like to help fund autism research, go to https://act.autismspeaks.org/site/Donation2?df_id=1500&mfc_pref=T&1500.donation=form1&s_src=AutismSpeaks.org&s_subsrc=DonateRedirect.

<https://www.autismspeaks.org/blog/2012/06/22/early-start-your-child-autism>

<https://www.autismspeaks.org/science/science-news/many-nonverbal-children-autism-overcome-severe-language-delays>

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The logo for The Advocacy Alliance, featuring the text "the Advocacy Alliance" in a stylized, cursive font. The word "the" is in a smaller font size and positioned above "Advocacy". To the right of the text are three wavy lines representing a stylized wave or ribbon.

Ideas for Our Newsletter?

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