

WELCOA\* | JUNE 2022

# WELL BALANCED<sup>o</sup>

*Leveraging Your  
Surroundings*  
FOR WELL-BEING

THE SOCIAL FACTORS  
**IMPACTING  
YOUR HEALTH**  
THE MOST

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HOW TO GET MORE  
OUT OF YOUR  
**DAILY WALK**

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TIPS AND TRICKS FOR  
**BUILDING  
BRAIN HEALTH**

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# Sugar Snap Peas Stir Fry

## WITH GARLIC AND SESAME

Here's an easy side dish that's ready in 10 minutes.

Stir-fried sugar snap peas have a delicious garlicky bite and plenty of crunch. Serve with brown rice.

1 teaspoon tamari, plus more to taste

1 teaspoon rice vinegar

¼ teaspoon toasted sesame oil

¼ teaspoon maple syrup

½ teaspoon canola oil, or your preferred oil

2 cloves garlic, minced

10 ounces sugar snap peas

Pinch of salt

1 teaspoon sesame seeds

SERVINGS: 4 people

### DIRECTIONS:

In a small bowl, combine tamari, rice vinegar, toasted sesame oil, and maple syrup. Set aside.

Bring a large skillet to medium heat with canola oil (or your preferred oil). Add minced garlic. Sauté for a couple minutes, until fragrant.

Add sugar snap peas to the skillet, and fully incorporate them with the garlic. Sauté for about 3 minutes more, until the sugar snap peas are fully warmed.

Add the tamari/rice vinegar mixture to the skillet. Combine it with the sugar snap peas, making sure everything gets coated. Cook another minute or two longer.

Add salt and 2 or 3 more dashes of tamari to taste.

Finish the dish by sprinkling it with sesame seeds.

### NUTRITION INFO:

Calories 44, Fat 1g, Carbs 6g, Protein 2g, Sodium 87mg



### SUGAR SNAP PEAS ARE A SEASONAL SPRINGTIME FAVORITE

This vibrant green veggie provides vitamin C, potassium, and iron. For the quickest preparation, look for sugar snap peas that are stringless and prepped. Then you can just give them a rinse, and enjoy them raw or cooked. If yours aren't prepped, snap off the stems, and pull back to remove the strings.



*From the Kitchen of* **CADRY NELSON** // Cadry is the writer, photographer, and recipe creator at Cadry's Kitchen, a vegan food and lifestyle blog. She shares plant-based comfort food classics that are ready in about 30 minutes. Cadry has been featured on Today, NBC News, Mashable, Reader's Digest, Shape, and Huffington Post. For more, visit [cadryskitchen.com](http://cadryskitchen.com).



# SAVE Money AND Reduce FOOD WASTE



These days, everyone is looking to save money – especially on food costs. As products become more expensive, we wonder how we can make the most of each dollar.

One place to save is in the kitchen. That's where uneaten food goes straight from the refrigerator to the trash all too often. Studies show that Americans waste 30 to 40% of the foods we buy. That's a lot of time and resources being frittered away.

By being more cognizant about what we buy and making sure to actually cook it, we can help our pocketbooks and our planet.

## Go to the grocery store with a plan

The supermarket is full of temptations. It's easy to just keep throwing things into the cart. So be intentional about what you buy. Here are some things to consider before your next grocery store run:

- » What do you already have in your pantry, refrigerator, and freezer that could be used in this week's menu?
- » How much time will you have to cook?
- » How often will you make simple deli sandwiches or frozen pizza? Will you have leftovers or get takeout?

» By counting the nights that you'll actually be home with the time, energy, and inclination to cook, it may affect how many fresh ingredients you buy.

» Consider how many servings will likely be eaten from each meal you cook.

» Then go to the grocery store with a list, and stick to it.

» Once you have brought those groceries home, make a point of using them up before returning to the market for more.

## Use the freezer

Lots of foods can be frozen. So if you find yourself getting tired of that big pot of chili or soup, throw it into a freezer-proof container before it's too late.

It's a win/win. You won't dump it out, wasting time and cash. And when hunger strikes in the weeks ahead, you'll have a healthy, homemade dinner waiting for you in the freezer.

## Repurpose food that's past its prime

Some foods can get a little dried out or stale in the refrigerator. But that doesn't mean they aren't completely fine to eat. Think loaves of

bread, pita, or corn tortillas. So transform them into something more inviting.

» Cut bread into cubes for homemade croutons. Toss in oil, lemon juice, and herbs. Bake or air fry until toasty brown. They'll take your salads and soups up a serious notch.

» Cut pita into wedges. Toss in oil, lemon juice, and dried basil. Bake or air fry until crisp around the edges. Homemade pita chips are perfect for salads or dipping in hummus.

» Cut corn tortillas into strips. Spray with oil. Then air fry or bake until crisp. Crispy tortilla strips are delicious sprinkled on chili, tortilla soup, or salads.

## Use odds and ends in smoothies

Smoothies are a great way of using up the ends of things. Whether it's a browning banana, the last scoop of nut butter, a handful of spinach, or that last leaf of kale, it can add a lot of nutrition while giving you the satisfaction of knowing nothing was wasted.

Remember to peel and break up browning bananas before throwing them into the freezer. They make smoothies wonderfully full-bodied.



**About CADRY NELSON //** Cadry is the writer, photographer, and recipe creator at Cadry's Kitchen, a vegan food and lifestyle blog. She shares plant-based comfort food classics that are ready in about 30 minutes. Cadry has been featured on Today, NBC News, Mashable, Reader's Digest, Shape, and Huffington Post. For more, visit [cadryskitchen.com](http://cadryskitchen.com).

# THE GREAT HEALTH DIVIDE!



## A Closer Look at the Social Determinants of Health

Whether we realize it or not, a myriad of factors impact our overall health and well-being. A few of these factors include physical activity, diet and nutrition, and regular healthcare visits and preventive screenings. However, some experts estimate that the most significant factors that influence our health—as much as 80 percent in fact—occur outside the walls of the hospital or clinic. <sup>(1)</sup>

These factors are often referred to as the social determinants of health (SDOH). The CDC defines SDOH as conditions in the places where people live, learn, work, and play that negatively affect a wide range of health risks and outcomes. Those who have steady, high-paying employment, who live in safe housing and neighborhoods, and who have easy access to healthcare may not experience as many negative impacts of their SDOH, and they are more likely to live healthier, longer lives. But this isn't the case for many other Americans. According to data from the U.S. Census Bureau, one in 10 Americans lives in poverty, which often means they don't have access to or can't afford things like healthy foods, safe environments for physical activity, healthcare, and/or safe housing. <sup>(2)</sup>

As a result, their overall health and well-being are impacted and their risk of health conditions like heart disease, diabetes, and obesity increases.

For those who are negatively impacted by SDOH, staying healthy isn't just a matter of making good lifestyle choices. For example, if one lives in an unsafe neighborhood, they don't always have the luxury of taking a walk around the neighborhood to get some exercise. Or if one doesn't have a reliable means of transportation, they're less likely to make healthcare appointments.

Indeed, social determinants of health have a major impact on people's health, well-being, and quality of life. Examples of SDOH include <sup>(3)</sup>:

- » Safe housing, transportation, and neighborhoods
- » Access to healthy foods and physical activity (i.e., trails, parks, bike paths)
- » Racism, discrimination, and violence
- » Education, job opportunities, and income
- » Polluted air and water
- » Language and literacy skills

### What Can Be Done?

As an individual, one of the best things you can do to start addressing the impacts of social detriments of health is simply being aware and educated about the issues. We need to understand that various inequalities make achieving health much more complex than simply exercising and eating a healthy diet. When there's collective understanding and knowledge, we're then in a better place to start making progress in our communities.

At the local, state, and national levels, there are several initiatives and strategies that can help improve individual and population health and advance health equity. Here are some of those top strategies:

**Leveraging technology and making it widely available.** Integrating health and social services systems can enable healthcare professionals to screen their patients for social needs and identify potential resources for them in their community. Having access to the Internet and knowing how to navigate trustworthy sites for health information is another essential component of health, yet many people still don't have reliable access

<sup>(1)</sup> <https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/explore-health-rankings/measures-data-sources/county-health-rankings-model> <sup>(2)</sup> <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2019/demo/p60-266.pdf>

<sup>(3)</sup> <https://health.gov/healthypeople/priority-areas/social-determinants-health>



to the Internet or understand how to navigate it. Some Internet service providers offer Internet service at a significant discount (around \$10 a month) to low-income households.

**Focusing on the physical environment.** The environment in which one lives, goes to school, and/or works has a tremendous impact on health status. Ensuring that communities, especially lower-income communities, have transportation options, and easy access to trails and parks are a few critical elements when it comes to promoting and maintaining healthy environments. Access to healthy foods is another crucial component. Farmer's markets and neighborhood gardens are a few ways in which communities can help address easier access to healthy, nutritious foods.

**Training healthcare professionals to address the social determinants of health.** Healthcare educators and professionals need to understand the issues and possible solutions that can help meet the needs of the local community. These strategies alone won't necessarily eliminate social determinants, but they are a start. It's important to note that there's also a significant amount of funding and legislation that will likely be required to create the needed programs and resources for communities in need.

### Healthy People 2030

For information and resources on the social determinants of health, check out Healthy People 2030 at [health.gov/healthypeople](https://health.gov/healthypeople). Healthy People 2030 sets data-driven, national objectives to improve health and well-being over the next decade.



## Ask the Expert...

### I've heard the term "food insecurity" but what exactly is it?

The U.S. Department of Agriculture defines food insecurity as a lack of consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy life. It is important to know that though hunger and food insecurity are closely related, they are distinct concepts. Hunger refers to a personal, physical sensation of discomfort, while food insecurity refers to a lack of available resources for food at the household level.

WELL BALANCED™ has an impeccable reputation for providing trustworthy information to improve your well-being and create healthier work cultures. Our network of physicians, dietitians, wellness professionals, and more are here to answer your crucial health questions.

*Have a question?* Ask our experts by going to [welcoa.org/expert](https://welcoa.org/expert). If your question is selected we will contact you directly with your answer and it will be featured in an upcoming issue.

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# THE BEST THINGS YOU CAN DO FOR Your Brain



When you really think about it, your brain is probably the most fascinating part of your body. Indeed, your brain is made up of billions of nerve cells that control your thoughts, memory, emotions, vision, breathing, temperature, and every other process that regulates your body. As important as the brain is, many people don't pay much attention to brain health until they notice cognitive changes or memory loss later in life. Regardless of your age, now is the time to start thinking about brain health, and there are many things you can do to keep your brain as healthy as possible throughout your lifetime. Here are some research-backed strategies to keep your brain in tip-top shape.

## Build a Better Brain

**Aim for movement every day.** Exercise and physical activity boost blood flow to the brain. Moreover, regular physical activity can reduce your risk of cognitive decline, including dementia. <sup>(4)</sup> One study found that cognitive decline is almost twice as common among adults who are inactive compared to those who are active. Any type of movement is beneficial—walking, dancing, swimming, golfing—so long as you're moving your body.

**Rest your brain for seven to nine hours a night.** This is also known as sleep! <sup>(5)</sup> Research shows that during sleep, the brain clears out toxins that build up during your waking hour. Sleep “resets” the brain, allowing it to recharge and heal.

**Feed your brain.** Whole foods, especially leafy green vegetables, fruits, nuts, avocados, and omega-3-rich foods like salmon and olive oil have been shown to be particularly beneficial for brain health.

**Stay socially engaged.** Research increasingly shows that staying connected is crucial to your brain health. Socializing stimulates your brain and can strengthen your neural networks. So, regularly plan social activities with friends and family.

**Do your best to prevent or manage chronic conditions and maintain regular check-ups with your doc.** Chronic conditions like diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and hypertension are all known to damage brain health. Fortunately, you can reduce your risk of each of these conditions with healthy lifestyle habits. If you have any of these conditions, there's still a lot you can do to manage and curb their effects. Work with your doctor to ensure you're reducing your risks and managing any chronic conditions.

**Challenge your brain.** Doing certain brain exercises can help boost your memory, concentration, and can help keep your brain sharp as you age. Here are some fun ways to challenge your brain:

- » Have fun and relax with a jigsaw puzzle
- » Try a crossword puzzle or games like Wordle
- » Play a card game
- » Learn a new skill or pursue a new hobby
- » Listen to or play music

Remember, it's never too late to focus on your brain health. Simple (and even fun) strategies can help improve your brain and mental well-being, so start adding some of these habits to your life today.



# WALK LIKE A *Champion!*

## How to make the most out of your daily walk.

Plain and simple, walking is one of the easiest, most effective, and not to mention most affordable forms of physical activity out there. <sup>(6)</sup> Some research shows that simply walking for an average of 30 minutes or more a day can lower the risk of chronic conditions like heart disease, stroke, and Type 2 diabetes. Walking can also help you maintain healthy body composition, strengthen your bones and muscles, improve your mood, and boost your creativity—that's a lot of benefits tied to the simple act of putting one foot in front of the other!

If walking is part of your daily routine, there's a lot you can do to reap even more health benefits. Here are some simple tips and tricks to make the most out of your walking habits.

**Mix up your pace.** Try walking at a faster pace for a minute or two and then slow down and recover. This is also known as interval walking, and it's a great way to increase the intensity of your walk without overdoing it. Feel free to experiment with paces and times. The idea is to challenge yourself while giving ample recovery time between the intervals.

**Focus on your form and use your arms.** Experts note that walking with the right technique and good posture can help decrease wear and tear on your joints, muscles, and ligaments and help prevent back, hip, neck, and leg pain. When it comes to your form, keep your head up and your eyes and gaze forward. Try to keep your shoulders loose and relaxed, not tensed up toward your ears. You also want to swing your arms while you walk because it helps you engage your core and the muscles in your upper back.

**Head for the hills.** Walking on an incline gives your muscles a challenge, increases your heart rate, and boosts energy expenditures. When you're making the climb, you might feel the need to lean forward, but don't lean too much. This can cause you to lose your balance and place too much pressure on your joints. Maintain an upright posture as much as possible and keep your shoulders over your hips and your hips over your ankles. Remember to swing your arms to help you power through those hills.

**Add in other movements.** Mixing in other types of movements and exercises can up the intensity—and fun—during your walks. Try breaking up your strolls with other movements like walking lunges, side-to-side shuffles, or stopping to do some jumping jacks.

**Give your walk closure with a cool down.** Take a moment to stretch and cool down before you head back to the grind of work or home life. Taking some deep breaths and doing some light stretching can help ease strain, stress, and fatigue.



Although moderate physical activity such as brisk walking is safe for most people, health experts suggest that you talk to your doctor before you start an exercise program if you have any health concerns.



<sup>(6)</sup> <https://walking.heartfoundation.org.au/benefits-of-walking>

# HOW YOU CAN HELP CREATE

# Nurturing Neighborhoods

No doubt about it, where you live can affect your health. If you live in a busy, heavily populated area, there are certain health risks to be aware of. For example, if you live on a busy street, noise from cars and other activities can increase your stress levels and interrupt your sleep. And people who live near busy streets may also breathe in more air pollution being produced by cars, buildings, and/or factories.

Of course, there are health risks in less populated areas too. Due to rural sprawl, people in rural areas are more likely to drive to popular destinations as opposed to walking to them. Combine this with fewer physical activity options like gyms and trails and people in rural areas may be at greater risk of being sedentary—and we all know that regular physical activity is critical to our overall health.

Access to healthy foods can also pose a problem, whether you live in urban or rural areas. In some neighborhoods, it's not easy to get healthy food. Some neighborhoods lack robust grocery stores, and instead only have smaller convenience-type of stores that sell cheap snacks that aren't very nutritious. The U.S. Department of Agriculture calls communities without full-service supermarkets "food deserts."

## Cultivating Healthier Communities

Although there are some things you can't easily change about your neighborhood (i.e. traffic, air quality) you do have the power to spark

change in several other areas. Identify what's most important to you. Talk about these items with your neighbors and other members of the community. Changes like making more walking paths, sidewalks, or bike lanes requires effort, coordination, and resource, so depending on what you want changed, you may need or want to talk to local officials. Other options include reaching out to your network or local institutions, such as churches and schools, to see if they have resources to aid the community.

Indeed, there are several ways you can make your neighborhood healthier. Here are just a few ideas to get you started:

- » Create a community garden
- » Attend local farmers' markets
- » Talk to store owners about offering healthier foods
- » Attend community planning meetings and talk about creating parks and trails
- » Plant a tree or find other ways to make your neighborhood greener
- » Start a walking group with friends, family, or neighbors
- » Participate in community activities that foster healthier and safer options for your neighborhood

Changing your neighborhood can require some work and effort. It may seem overwhelming but remember that it doesn't all have to be tackled at the same time. Anything that your community feels is relevant and important—if you can rally behind it, you can achieve change in your neighborhood.



The Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP) funds projects that develop and help increase access to and availability of local and regional farmers' markets. Learn more here: [ams.usda.gov/services/grants/fmpp](https://ams.usda.gov/services/grants/fmpp)