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# ALASKA CARE

*Health Plans*



A Publication Of  
The Wellness  
Council Of America

★ HEALTH INFORMATION PRESENTED AS IF YOUR LIFE DEPENDED ON IT ★

## Have you been to the *AlaskaCare.gov* website?

You will find a variety of resources:

For Active Employees and Retirees this website has links to:

- Program Announcements
- Health Plan Forms
- Insurance Booklets
- Pharmacy Help
  - 24-Hour Pharmacy Help Desk / Locator
  - Costco Mail Order Pharmacy Form
  - Costco Mail Order Profile Form
- And more...

The *AlaskaCare.gov* website is divided into two easy to navigate sections: Employee Health Plan and Retiree Health Plan sections making it easy to find exactly what you need.

Don't forget you also have access to the 24 hour a day, 7 days a week Nurse Line. Call a nurse today at 1-800-807-2997.

If you have not been to the *AlaskaCare.gov* website don't delay... Go today! Enjoy the AlaskaCare experience.

# Back On Track...

## Tips For A Healthy Back

Keeping your back healthy is the best way to prevent low back injury. There are several practical things you can do:

- **Don't try to lift objects too heavy for you.**

Lift by bending your knees, not your back; keep your back straight and your head down and in line with your back. Keep the object close to your body, and don't twist when lifting.

- **Regular, low-impact exercises like walking, swimming, or stationary bike riding** for 30

minutes a day can increase muscle strength and flexibility. Yoga can also help stretch and strengthen muscles and improve posture.

Always stretch before exercise or other strenuous physical activity to prevent back injury.

- **Try to practice good posture.** Your back supports your weight most easily when it is straight. Wear comfortable, low-heeled shoes.

When standing, keep your weight balanced on both feet. Keep your shoulders back and don't slouch.

- **When sitting, try to use a chair with good lower back support.** A pillow or rolled-up towel placed behind the small of your back might help. Make sure your work surfaces, like your keyboard, are at a comfortable height. If you have to sit for a long period of time, rest your feet on a low stool or a stack of books. Switch sitting positions often, and walk around the office and gently stretch your muscles every so often to relieve tension.

- **Sleeping on a firm surface on your side** helps your back.

- **Eat a healthy diet** with enough calcium, phosphorus, and vitamin D to help promote new bone growth.

- **Keep extra weight off** your waistline, where it can strain your lower back.

- **If you smoke, quit.** Smoking reduces blood flow to the lower spine and causes the spinal discs to degenerate.



# LETTUCE- ON-LETTUCE GARLIC DRESSING

Measure	Ingredients
1 head	lettuce, romaine or green leaf
1 Tbsp	vegetable broth or white wine
2 cups	shredded lettuce
4 fresh	garlic cloves
½ cup	rice vinegar
1 Tbsp	Dijon mustard
1 Tbsp	honey or 2 tsp Splenda® Granular

### “Bacon” Bits

½ cup	Grape-nuts cereal
2 Tbsp	reduced-sodium soy sauce
	Dash of Liquid Smoke (optional)

### Preparation

In a dry sauté pan, roast 2 cups of shredded lettuce. When bottom of sauté pan browns, remove from heat. Deglaze the pan with vegetable broth or white wine.

Cool and add lettuce to food processor. Add garlic, rice vinegar, mustard and honey. Blend. Serve on a bed of lettuce. Dressing can be served warm or cold. Add tomato, green onions, or soy “bacon” bits for garnish.

To make “bacon” bits, mix Grape-nuts with soy sauce and a dash of Liquid Smoke flavoring, if desired. Combine. Let dry and sprinkle on lettuce greens.

### Nutrition

Calories 104, Total Fat 1g (Sat 0g), Cholesterol 0mg, Sodium 421mg, Carbohydrate 23g, Dietary Fiber 4g, Sugars 7g, Protein 4g

### Number of Servings: 4



ABOUT **Richard Collins MD**

Dr. Richard Collins, a leading authority and speaker on the prevention and reversal of heart disease, emphasizes the connection between eating well and living long. His delicious low-fat recipes have been shared with millions through his cookbook, videos, and his nationally-renowned cooking seminars. For more information, visit Dr. Collins' website at [www.thecoachingcardiologist.com](http://www.thecoachingcardiologist.com).

A HEALTHY RECIPE BY **RICHARD COLLINS, MD**

## ▶ VEGGIE ◀

# LASAGNA



## VEGGIE LASAGNA

Measure	Ingredients
6 cups	Vegetable cooking spray
3 cups	carrots, sliced
2 medium	mushrooms, sliced
1½ cups	zucchini, sliced
4 cloves	onion, chopped
2 15.5-oz cans	garlic, minced
1½ tsp	no-salt-added great northern beans, drained
15 oz	Italian seasoning
4 cups	Salt & pepper to taste
¾ cup	fat-free ricotta cheese
48 oz	nonfat mozzarella cheese, shredded, divided
12	Parmesan cheese
	tomato pasta sauce
	no-cook lasagna noodles

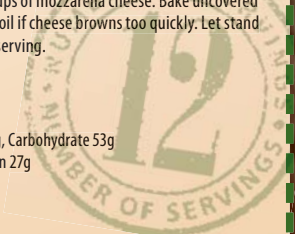
### Preparation

Preheat oven to 350°.

Spray a large sauté pan with cooking spray. On medium heat, add carrots, mushrooms, zucchini, onions and garlic. Cook covered until carrots are just tender, about 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Stir in beans and Italian seasoning; season with salt and pepper. Mix ricotta cheese, 2 cups of mozzarella cheese and Parmesan cheese in a medium bowl. Spread ¾ cup pasta sauce in bottom of sprayed 14x10x2-inch baking pan. Top with 4 lasagna noodles, overlapping slightly. Cover noodles with 1 cup ricotta mixture, ⅓ of the vegetables and 1½ cups of sauce. Repeat layers two more times; sprinkle with remaining 2 cups of mozzarella cheese. Bake uncovered for 45 minutes. Cover lightly with foil if cheese browns too quickly. Let stand 10-15 minutes before cutting and serving.

### Nutritional Analysis

Calories 353, Total Fat 4g (Sat 1g)  
Cholesterol 30 mg, Sodium 1,066 mg, Carbohydrate 53g  
Dietary Fiber 12g, Sugars 14g, Protein 27g



# HIDDEN PERSUADERS

## The Mindless Eating That Adds Pounds

**P**eople seem to gain weight easily but have a hard time taking it off. Americans are continuing to get heavier, increasing the risk of getting Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, cancer and various other health conditions. Healthy eating can play an important role in helping you avoid excess weight. It can also increase the quality and length of your life. Interesting new research is revealing that part of the reason why it's so difficult to eat healthy is that "hidden persuaders" can lead you to eat more than you think you're eating.

Dr. Brian Wansink, director of the Cornell Food and Brand Lab, reviewed the latest research into these hidden persuaders in a recent talk at National Institutes of Health. For example, the size and shape of containers, he said, can as much as double the amount of food you consume. In a field study at a Philadelphia movie theater, researchers gave participants free popcorn in large or extra large sizes. Unknown to the participants, they were randomly given popcorn that was either fresh or 10 days old. The researchers found that people eating from the extra-large popcorn containers ate 45-50% more than those eating from the large ones. Participants even ate 40-45% more stale popcorn when it was served in bigger containers.

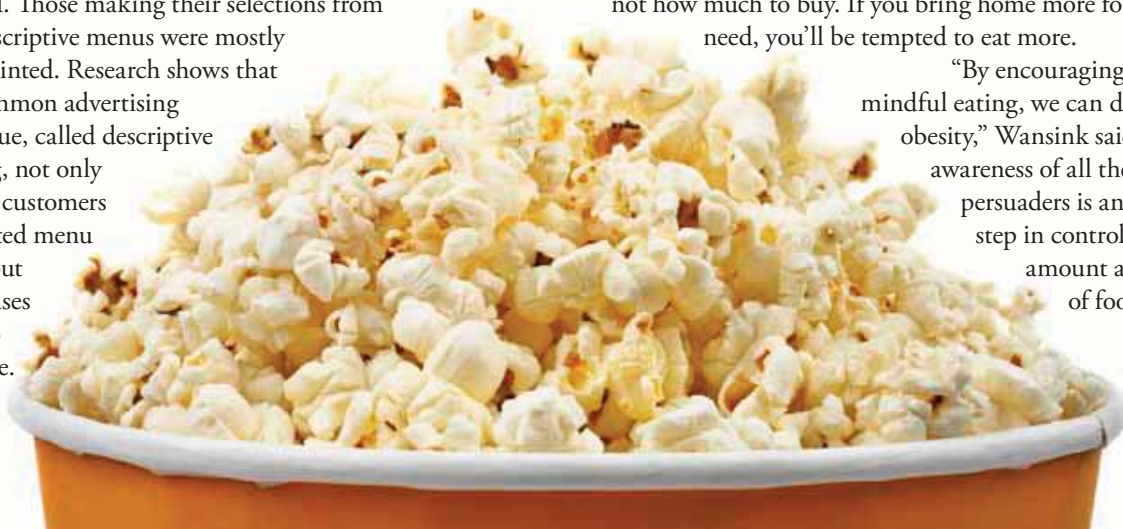
Food descriptions affect your food intake as well. Wansink described how researchers were able to help a cafeteria boost its business. Using creative terms that appeal to the senses, "seafood filet" and "chocolate cake" became "succulent Italian seafood filet," and "Belgium black forest double chocolate cake" on the menu. People making selections from these more descriptive menus were overwhelmingly more enthusiastic about the food they received. Those making their selections from non-descriptive menus were mostly disappointed. Research shows that this common advertising technique, called descriptive labeling, not only attracts customers to selected menu items, but also causes them to eat more.

Losing track of how much you're eating also leads you to eat more. In one study, students at a Super Bowl party in a restaurant were given free all-you-can-eat chicken wings. Plates were bused from some of the tables while bones were left to pile high on others. Those whose plates were not bused ate less. Participants from the bused tables seemed to have a harder time judging how much food they were eating. The researchers concluded that those people who saw reminders of what they were eating consumed less in the end. This conclusion was confirmed by another study showing that people wound up eating less candy when they saw their empty wrappers pile up as they ate.

Another interesting finding Wansink described is that healthier food doesn't always lead to healthier eating. Most people know that olive oil is a healthier fat than butter, but it's not healthier if you eat a lot more of it. Researchers gave a group of diners at an Italian restaurant either butter or olive oil with their bread. Those with the olive oil consumed an average of 16% more fat with each slice of bread. However, they did eat 19% less bread. Wansink stressed the importance of focusing not only on the targeted food but also on the companion foods. Think about eating a healthier meal rather than focusing on separate parts of the meal.

Eating healthy begins with what you buy in the first place. Wansink explained that we are highly influenced by quantities listed in signs. Our minds tend to anchor on the numbers that are suggested to us, and we then adjust our purchase from there. That's why signs often list items like "3 for \$3.00" rather than just saying "\$1.00 each." These signs can end up as much as doubling how much we buy, because we tend to focus only on what to buy when we go shopping, not how much to buy. If you bring home more food than you need, you'll be tempted to eat more.

"By encouraging healthy, mindful eating, we can decrease obesity," Wansink said. A keen awareness of all these hidden persuaders is an important step in controlling the amount and quality of food you eat.



# Oh, My ACHING BACK

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Searching For Better Pain Relief



If warmer spring weather lures you outside for heavy yard work, now's a good time to learn about how to prevent and treat low back pain. Four out of every five people have had low back pain at one time or another. With symptoms ranging from a dull ache to absolute agony, low back pain can put your life on hold. In fact, it's second only to the common cold in causing missed work days for adults under age 45.



Most low back pain clears up in a few days or weeks with a combination of rest, appropriate exercise, and over-the-counter pain medicines. But pain that persists for more than three months—chronic back pain—is more difficult to treat, in part because there are many different possible causes.

The lower, or lumbar, spine is a complex structure made up of powerful muscles, ligaments, bones, and joints. It provides the strength for standing, walking, lifting and other activities, and allows the body to turn, twist, and bend.

Back pain can be caused by a number of things, from sports injuries and other damage to simple wear and tear. If muscles are poorly conditioned or overworked, they are more easily strained. Someone who works all week at a desk, for example, can strain their back muscles doing heavy yard work on the weekend. Likewise, if the ligaments that help stabilize the low back are weak from inactivity or stiff from overuse, a sudden wrenching movement can cause a ligament sprain.

Aging can also bring low back pain. Bones lose strength over time. In someone with osteoporosis, the bones of the lumbar vertebrae can break or compress in a fall or even during some everyday activities. Arthritis can inflame joints, causing pain and stiffness. And “slipped disks,” in which the rubbery cartilage between disks bulge outward, can press against the spinal nerves to cause pain.

Since not every back injury can be prevented, researchers are always looking for new ways to treat low back pain. For example, NIH's National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) is funding the study of “chiropractic,” an ancient method of adjusting and manipulating body parts, to see if it helps with low back pain. So far, NCCAM says that studies of chiropractic treatment are not conclusive. Chiropractic treatment and conventional medical treatments seem to be about equally helpful.

NCCAM is continuing to study this and other alternative treatments.

Dr. Jon Levine, director of the NIH Pain Center at the University of California at San Francisco, is particularly interested in the first sensory nerve cell that begins the pain signal to the brain. Many patients with pain, including chronic low back pain, say that although their medication relieves pain, they don't want to take it because of side effects like cloudy thinking, sleepiness, fatigue, or even addiction. Levine explains that many of the side effects from pain medications originate in the brain, not in the outlying areas of the nervous system that reach out to various parts of the body.

“If we can make drugs that target mechanisms outside the brains such as the first sensory nerve cell,” he explains, “we can prevent those side effects.” His continuing work is supported by funds from NIH's National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke.

Another aspect of pain relief that Levine and his colleagues study is how men and women respond differently to pain medications. They discovered that one medication works at two different sites in the brain, a pain-relieving site and a pain-enhancing site, and that men have more of the pain-enhancing effect than women. They were able to find the pain-enhancing receptor and block it, reducing the pain-causing effect of the drug in men. This receptor-blocking technique also helped relieve pain in women at lower doses of the drug than before. Thanks to this research, a commercial biotechnology company is now doing further studies to see if the new drug proves to be safe and effective against pain.

Levine emphasizes that the cost of low back pain to society is immense. “Our ability to understand and control this problem—and prevent the recurrence of back pain—would be a major breakthrough for public health in this country,” he says.

# Safer Fun In The Summer Sun

## The ABCDEs Of Skin Cancer

**A**ny diagnosis of cancer can be frightening—including skin cancer, the most commonly diagnosed cancer in the United States. However, skin cancer accounts for less than 1 percent of all cancer deaths; 85% to 95% of all cases are cured. Prevention and early detection are the most important weapons in the battle against skin cancer. Continuing research is making them ever more effective.

Skin cancer is strongly associated with exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation, part of the energy that comes from the sun. It also can come from artificial sources like sun lamps and tanning booths. UV radiation is made up of two types of rays, called UVA and UVB rays. UVB rays are more likely than UVA rays to cause sunburn, but UVA rays pass more deeply into the skin. Scientists have long thought that UVB radiation causes the skin damage that can lead to skin cancer and premature aging. They now think that UVA radiation may have these consequences, too.

According to NIH's National Cancer Institute, the cure rate for skin cancers could be nearly 100% if they were all brought to a doctor's attention before they had a chance to spread. There are three different types of skin

cancer—melanoma, basal cell carcinoma and squamous cell carcinoma. It is particularly important to diagnose and treat melanoma early. Melanoma is the deadliest form of skin cancer, with 55,100 new cases and 7,910 deaths expected this year in the U.S. alone.

Melanoma usually begins as a mole. Twenty years ago, dermatologists noted that the typical warning signs of early melanoma follow an easy-to-remember formula:

- **Asymmetry**—the mole is not a circle, but lopsided
- **Borders**—the mole has uneven or ragged edges
- **Color**—the mole is not a uniform brown, but a mix of brown, black, red, blue, and white
- **Diameter**—the mole is wider than a pencil eraser
- **The dermatologists who devised that list now suggest adding “E,” for “Evolving.”**

“An evolving lesion is one that changes size, shape or symptoms, such as itching or tenderness,” Dr. David Polsky of New York University's Department of Dermatology explained.

The “E” captures a particular type of melanoma, called nodular, which often does not follow the original ABCs, Polsky said. Nodular melanoma is the most aggressive type of melanoma and accounts for 10% to 15% of all melanomas.

While melanoma may be the most deadly type of skin cancer, both basal cell carcinoma and squamous cell carcinoma are far more common. Researchers estimate that 40% to 50% of people who live to age 65 will be diagnosed with one of these skin cancers. They can occur anywhere but are typically on the head, face, neck, hands, and arms. They grow more slowly than melanoma and rarely spread to other areas, but need to be treated as well. Carcinomas can appear as small, smooth, shiny, pale or waxy lumps, or sometimes as a firm red lump.

Your overall chance of developing a skin cancer is related to your lifetime exposure to UV radiation. While most skin cancers appear after age 50, the sun's damaging effects begin at an early age. It's important to start sun protection in childhood to prevent skin cancer later in life. Check yourself regularly for new growths or other changes in your skin, and report any unusual growths to a doctor.



# Keep It Cool In Hot Weather

## Advice For Older People Applies To All



**O**lder people are at high risk for developing heat-related illness because the body's ability to respond to summer heat can become less efficient with advancing years. Fortunately, the summer can remain safe and enjoyable if you use sound judgment.

Heat stress, heat fatigue, heat syncope (sudden dizziness after exercising in the heat), heat cramps and heat exhaustion are all forms of "hyperthermia," the general name given to a variety of heat-related illnesses. Symptoms may include headache, nausea, muscle spasms and fatigue after exposure to heat. If you suspect someone is suffering from a heat-related illness:

- **Get the person out of the sun and into a cool place.**
- **Offer fluids like water, fruit and vegetable juices.**
- **Urge the person to lie down and rest, preferably in a cool place.**
- **Encourage them to shower, bathe or sponge off with cool water.**

Heat stroke is especially dangerous and requires emergency medical attention. A person with heat stroke has a body temperature above 104° and may have symptoms such as confusion, combativeness, bizarre behavior, faintness, staggering, strong rapid pulse, dry flushed skin, lack of sweating or coma.



Both lifestyle and general health can affect a person's chance of developing heat-related illness. Lifestyle factors that can increase risk include an extremely hot home, lack of transportation, overdressing and visiting overcrowded places. Health factors include:

- **Age-related changes to the skin such as poor blood circulation and inefficient sweat glands.**
- **Heart, lung and kidney diseases, and any illness that causes general weakness or fever.**
- **High blood pressure or other conditions that require changes in diet (for instance, salt-restricted diets).**
- **Certain medications—including heart and blood pressure drugs, sedatives and tranquilizers—and combinations of medications. Continue taking prescribed medications and consult a doctor.**
- **Being substantially overweight or underweight.**

To avoid heat illness, pay attention to weather reports. Older people, particularly those at special risk, should stay in an air-conditioned place on hot, humid days, especially when there's an air pollution alert in effect. Don't exercise or do a lot of activities when it's hot.

Make sure to dress for the weather. Natural fabrics like cotton can be cooler than synthetic ones. Light colors also reflect the sun and heat better than dark ones.

Remember to drink plenty of liquids on hot, humid days—mostly water or fruit and vegetable juices. Avoid drinks with caffeine or alcohol, which make you lose more fluids.

For free information on hyperthermia from NIH's National Institute on Aging, call 1-800-222-2225.

# If you've hurt your back:

- ♦ **Apply ice and heat.** As soon as possible after the trauma, apply ice to the tender spot several times a day for up to 20 minutes. After two to three days of cold treatment, apply heat (such as a heating pad) for short periods to relax muscles and increase blood flow to the area.
- ♦ **Get exercise.** Back-healthy activities can include stretching, swimming and walking. Ask your health care provider for advice about gentle exercises.
- ♦ **Try bed rest , but only for a day or two.** Too much bed rest can make back pain worse, so get back to your regular activities as soon as possible. The best position is on one side with a pillow between your knees.
- ♦ **Take pain relievers.** Over-the-counter pain relievers can ease mild to moderate low back pain. For more than occasional use or more severe pain, be sure to talk to your doctor.



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## INTERACTIVE MINDS

### Questions for dining out

#### Can you please:

- ♥ remove the bread basket?
- ♥ serve fat-free (skim) milk rather than whole milk or cream?
- ♥ trim visible fat from poultry or meat?
- ♥ leave all butter, gravy or sauces off a dish?
- ♥ serve salad dressing on the side?
- ♥ accommodate special requests?
- ♥ use less cooking oil when cooking?

Source: National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, NIH