

Healthy Lifestyles

April 1, 2026

Not all walking is equal: Why pace matters more than you think

By Christian Campilii
PT, DPT

Walking is one of the most commonly prescribed forms of exercise—and for good reason. It's accessible, low-impact, and easy to maintain long-term. But here's the part that often gets missed: Not all walking creates meaningful change in the body.

From a physical therapy perspective, the quality and intensity of walking matter just as much as the act itself.

The Problem with “Comfortable Pace” Walking - Most people walk at a pace that feels easy and sustainable. While that's a great place to start - especially after injury or surgery - it often becomes the default long-term habit.

The issue? Your body adapts quickly. If your walk doesn't challenge your cardiovascular system, your muscles, or your neuromuscular control, it stops driving progress.

In rehab and performance, we follow a simple principle: The body only changes when it's challenged.

What Happens When You Walk Too Slowly - Walking at a very slow pace can:

- Limit cardiovascular benefit
- Reduce muscle activation (especially glutes and calves)
- Decrease stride efficiency
- Reinforce poor gait patterns
- Fail to stimulate balance and coordination systems

In other words, you're



Stepping out with the Center for Physical Therapy are, from left, Maggie Bottjer, Joseph Selback, Kristin Rose-DaCosta, Chris Campilii and Tracy Quinlan. Photo by Curtis Schmidt

moving—but not improving.

What “Effective Walking” Looks Like -

From a physical therapy standpoint, effective walking should include at least one of the following:

1. Increased Pace

You should feel slightly out of breath—but still able to talk. This is where cardiovascular and metabolic benefits begin.

2. Purposeful Stride

Longer, more intentional steps activate the posterior chain (glutes, hamstrings), which are critical for spine and hip health.

3. Arm Swing and Trunk Rotation

Efficient walking is a full-body movement, not just legs on autopilot.

4. Variable Terrain or Incline

Adding hills or uneven

surfaces challenges balance, strength, and joint stability.

But What If You're Recovering from Injury?

This is where nuance matters. Slow walking is absolutely appropriate in early recovery—especially after procedures like a lumbar decompression or nerve-related surgery. In these cases, the goal is:

- Restore movement safely
- Reduce irritation to sensitive structures (like nerve roots)
- Gradually rebuild tolerance

But staying in that slow, guarded pattern for too long can actually delay full recovery. Progression is the key. Here is a simple Progression Strategy. If you've been walking at a comfortable pace, try this:

- Start with your normal walk
- Add short intervals (1–2 minutes) of faster-paced walking
- Return to your comfortable pace to recover
- Repeat 4–6 times
- Over time, increase the duration of the faster intervals.

This mimics how we progress patients clinically—gradual, controlled exposure to higher demand. Walking is one of the best things you can do for your body—but only if it continues to challenge you.

If your walk feels exactly the same every day, your body has likely stopped adapting. Don't just walk—walk with purpose.

For more information, visit centerforphysicaltherapy.com or call 845-297-4789.

April Fools' Day: Why laughter is no joke for your health and well-being

By Brian Zeidan, LNHA, SPHR

April 1st is often associated with jokes and lighthearted pranks, but beyond the humor of the day, it offers a simple reminder of something important — laughter plays a meaningful role in our overall health and well-being.

While humor is often seen as something casual, research shows that laughter can have real benefits for both physical and emotional health, particularly as we age.

Laughter Supports Emotional Well-Being - Laughter helps reduce stress, improve mood, and create a sense of connection with others. Even a brief moment of humor can shift perspective and provide relief during challenging times.



At the Brookmeade Community, residents and staff often see how small moments of laughter - during activities, meals, or daily interactions - help create a sense of comfort, familiarity, and belonging.

Courtesy photos by Melissa Lasher



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The Mayo Clinic notes that laughter can stimulate stress relief by increasing oxygen intake, activating circulation, and promoting muscle relaxation — all of which contribute to an improved sense of well-being.¹

For many older adults, maintaining a positive outlook is closely tied to staying socially engaged and emotionally connected — and humor plays a key role in that.

Physical Benefits of Laughter - Studies have shown that laughter can:

- Reduce stress hormones such as cortisol
- Improve circulation and heart health
- Support immune system function
- Promote relaxation
- Even assist with pain tolerance

According to Harvard Health Publishing, laughter can trigger the release of endorphins — the body's natural feel-good chemicals — which can promote an overall sense of wellness and even temporarily relieve discomfort.²

While it's not a replacement for medical care, laughter is a simple and accessible way to support overall health.

The Social Power of Humor - Shared laughter strengthens

Ten reasons why you should see a podiatrist

By Premier Medical Group

April is National Foot Health Awareness Month - a perfect reminder that healthy feet are essential to your overall well-being.

From supporting your daily movement to keeping you active and independent, your feet play a vital role in your quality of life. Yet, foot and ankle issues are often overlooked until they become painful or disruptive. Whether caused by chronic conditions like diabetes and arthritis or everyday factors like improper footwear, many foot problems can be prevented or effectively treated with the right care.

Here are ten important reasons why seeing a podiatrist should be part of your healthcare routine.

1. You Have Diabetes

Diabetes makes you significantly more prone to foot problems. Diabetics are more prone to losing sensation in their feet and developing ulcers and wounds that can cause infections. If you have diabetes, you should have a foot exam performed by a podiatrist at least once a year. According to studies, having a podiatrist as part of your healthcare team can significantly lower the risk of amputation due to complications from diabetes.

2. Heel Pain

There are many causes of heel pain. You may have a bony growth on the heel known as a heel spur. On the other hand, one of the tendons that connects to the heel may be inflamed. If you have persistent heel pain, see a podiatrist for a diagnosis. A proper diagnosis is the first step toward developing a treatment plan.

3. Ingrown Toenail

When a toenail grows into the skin, the ingrown nail may cause an infection. Ingrown toenails most often affect the big toe. If your toe is very red or has lots of drainage, visit a podiatrist for treatment. In some cases, the doctor will remove part of the nail. Your doctor may prescribe antibiotics if the area is infected, and discuss strategies to prevent an ingrown nail from coming back.

4. Walking or Running for Exercise

People who are active or play

sports are especially prone to foot or ankle injuries or conditions. Runners are especially prone to aches and pains like shin splints and other issues. A podiatrist can assess your feet to flag potential problems and recommend strategies to avoid them. He or she can also recommend the best type of athletic shoe for your foot type.

5. Feeling Pain in Your Feet or Ankles

Arthritis is a condition that affects the long-term health and function of joints. Arthritis cause swollen, red, stiff or tender joints in your feet. Arthritis can change the way the feet function and lead to disability. A podiatrist can suggest treatments that may preserve joint health and make it easier for you to carry out your daily activities.

6. Trauma to Your Foot or Ankle

Podiatrists are experts at treating sprains, strains, and broken bones in the foot or the ankle. They can diagnose your injury and suggest treatment. Swelling, trouble walking, redness, and increasing pain following an injury are all reasons to visit a podiatrist.

7. You Need Foot Surgery

Surgery is often the last treatment a podiatrist recommends for many foot conditions. Podiatrists perform surgery for various types of foot problems. Conditions that may require surgery include bunions, contracted toes (Hammertoes), recurring ingrown toenails, and broken bones.

8. Corns or Calluses

Corns and calluses are some of the most common reasons people visit a podiatrist. These areas of built up skin are painful, like walking on a pebble. Often, your doctor will reduce their size using a surgical blade. A podiatrist may recommend properly fitted shoes as well as padding and skin softener to prevent corns and calluses.

9. Painful Bunion

A bunion is a bump at the base of the big toe. This condition occurs when the bones or joints of the big toe have shifted and now they are out of place. Bunions tend to get worse unless they are treated. A podiatrist can suggest treatments, such as padding, taping or medication. Surgery is also an option in severe cases.

10. Itching in the Foot that will not go Away

Athlete's foot is a fungal infection that can make the skin on the bottom of your feet scaly, and between your toes look raw and feel itchy. Over-the-counter antifungal cream may help. If the infection does not seem to improve after a couple of weeks, visit a podiatrist. Oral antifungals and cream-based prescription medicines are more effective.

Podiatrists also diagnose and treat many other foot and ankle conditions. Not many people consider going to a podiatrist until they have a serious foot or ankle condition. While many people typically overlook their feet, podiatric care has proven to play a key role in prevention and management of chronic disease, increasing mobility and improving quality of life.

If you have foot problems that persist or worsen, seek professional help. A podiatrist can diagnose and treat foot conditions and provide advice on proper foot care. Contact the Premier Medical Group Podiatry care team today to schedule an appointment at 1-888-632-6099.



Laughter continued from page 2

relationships. Whether it's a funny story, a lighthearted moment, or simply enjoying time with others, humor brings people together.

At Brookmeade, we often see how small moments of laughter - during activities, meals, or daily interactions - help create a sense of comfort, familiarity, and belonging.

From a personal perspective, I've found that humor can be one of the most effective ways to break the ice, ease tension, and help people feel at ease - whether with residents, families, or staff. In environments where emotions can run high, a simple moment of lightness can create connection and remind us that we're all human first.

Keeping Humor Positive and Inclusive - While April Fools' Day is traditionally associated with pranks, it's important to approach humor in a way that is inclusive and respectful - especially in senior communities.

The best kind of humor is the kind that brings people together, not catches someone off guard.

Simple, shared joy — a funny memory, a lighthearted conversation, or even a smile — often has the most lasting impact.

Finding Everyday Moments of Joy - Humor doesn't have to be planned. It often comes from everyday moments:

- Sharing stories with friends or family
- Watching a favorite show or movie
- Participating in group activities
- Enjoying time in community settings

These small experiences contribute to a greater sense of well-being and connection.

A Reminder Worth Keeping - April Fools' Day may only come once a year, but the benefits of laughter are something we can carry with us every day.

At Brookmeade, we recognize that wellness is not only about physical health - it's also about joy, connection, and meaningful experiences.

Sometimes, the simplest things — like laughter — make the biggest difference.

Brian Zeidan, LNHA, SPHR, is Administrator of The Brookmeade Community in Rhinebeck, NY, where he is committed to fostering a supportive, engaging environment for older adults through person-centered care and community connection. He holds a master's degree from NYU and a bachelor's degree from Harvard University.

Sources - Mayo Clinic. *Stress relief from laughter? It's no joke.* Harvard Health Publishing. *The health benefits of laughter.*



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Safety concerns around the home are paramount for senior citizens

By Donna J. Slavin
V.I.P. Companion Care
Safety - Part 1

So much is written regarding Fall Prevention in your house or apartment, and it is so important! There are safety concerns no matter what age we are, but especially as we get older!

Doors & windows

Let us start with the front door, back/side door, garage and possibly fire escape too! A ring camera or security viewer should be installed, as well as good lighting. Your doors should have strong locks and deadbolts that work well.

Always keep all your doors locked, even when home. Keep some lights on when you are out at night and change light's location periodically. Make sure your outside light is on and bright enough should you come home in the dark. Also never hide your key. Give an extra key to a trusted neighbor or family member.

If someone comes to your door and you do not recognize them, ask for identification before you open that door.

Do your windows have locks? If you have small children, please make sure safety precautions are taken so they do not climb out. Please, if your windows are older where they do not stay open but come down like a guillotine, please get them fixed. Think about what could happen!

Do you have a carbon monoxide detector and smoke alarms? They are not expensive and they could save your life! You need to check them periodically to see if they need new batteries. Do you have a fire extinguisher? Do you know how to use it? If you need help call your local fire dept for assistance.

If a smoke or carbon monoxide detector does go off leave the home or apartment and then call 911.

Be careful with rugs & cords

In your living room, if electrical cords are under the rugs and multiple electrical cords are plugged into one outlet, this could be a cause of electrical fire. Please make sure your cords are not frayed or that your outlet is not overloaded with extensions. If you are using a space heater please have the fire department check it over to see if it's in good working order and if it is safe for you to use!

Throw rugs that are not tacked down are a definite fall hazard, as well as carpets!

Make sure you have a clear path leading from room to room, especially if you use a walker or cane. Chairs should be sound and not be wobbly. Always feel for the chair before you sit. Tables should be strong! Lights should have proper wattage of bulbs to avoid electrical problems.

Kitchen tips

In your kitchen area, get rid of the throw rugs unless you tack them down with rug grips please!

Always make sure your burners are off and check the hood and fan for grease! Are your outlets overloaded? Make sure all appliances are clean and in g

Get yourself a sturdy step stool or ask someone you know to assist you. It is better to place your kitchen needs within reach. Spills need to be cleaned up immediately on stove or on floor.

In the bedroom, no throw rugs, unless they are rubber backed or tacked down by rug grips. Bed spreads or bed skirts should rest just below the bed frame. Nightstands should have lamps that are reachable from your bed, and you should have a portable land line phone or cell phone (fully charged) reachable as well. Dresser draws should not be overstuffed or difficult to open.

Clothes should be hung in closet not where you can trip over them and closet shelves should not be overloaded where things can fall on you, throw blankets should be folded and put on chair or at the end of bed. Clutter free path from bed to other areas of home especially bathroom

Bathroom dangers

Speaking of bathroom, this is the room where most falls occur! When you walk from carpet to tile, especially using a walker or cane, you must be careful. Rubber soled shoes or slippers must be used throughout the home never socks unless the socks have grips on the bottom.

Towel racks should never be used as grab bars they can easily be pulled off the wall. Grab bars should be in shower /tub and bath chair. Shower head should be handheld. Grips or rubber bathmat should be in tub/shower. If you are using bathmats to get out of tub/shower they must be rubber backed.

Make sure your towel is within reach and make sure everything you need to wash up is within reach! Grab bar should be by toilet and never lean on sink. If there is

water on your bathroom floor, please wipe up before walking out of bathroom. NO electrical appliances close to water! If you are still able to take a bath, you need a grab rail on tub to get up safely.

Whether your medicines are in your bathroom or kitchen cabinet, please check the expirations dates. If they have expired, please see if your local police or pharmacy can discard them for you.

Lastly stairs should have handrails on both sides and not have clutter on them and if carpeted the carpet should not be torn or loose.

If your loved one has Alzheimer's or one of the many Dementias, there are more safety concerns which need to be addressed.

As far as garage and basement well that is for another article!

Just remember - safety first in everything you do!

Donna Slavin has over 30 years of experience in personal care-giving. Please contact her at V.I.P. Companion Care - 845-249-8186 email: dolphindonna622@yahoo.com.

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Healthy Weight, Healthy Life: Helping Pets Stay Active, Fit, and Thriving



Dr. Joseph A. D'Atbraccio DVM

One of the most powerful ways pet owners can improve their companion's health, and extend their lifespan, is by maintaining a healthy body weight. While

we often associate weight with appearance, it is far more than cosmetic. Proper weight management directly impacts heart health, joint comfort, metabolism, and overall quality of life.

Studies estimate that more than half of dogs and cats in the United States are overweight or obese. Excess weight places strain on nearly every organ system and increases the risk of arthritis, diabetes, heart disease, respiratory compromise, and reduced lifespan. Fortunately, thoughtful nutrition and regular activity can dramatically improve both longevity and daily comfort.

Weight management is not about restriction. It is about balance, supporting the body in the way nature intended.

Nutrition: Feeding for Health, Not Just Satisfaction

A balanced, species-appropriate diet is the foundation of lifelong health. Commercial veterinary-recommended diets are carefully formulated to provide complete nutrition without excessive calories. However, even the best diet can lead to weight gain if portions are too large or treats are given excessively.

Portion control is critical. Measuring meals accurately ensures pets receive the calories they need, without gradual excess.

Treats are an important part of bonding and training but should represent no more than 10% of a pet's daily caloric intake. Healthier treat options include:

- Small pieces of carrots or green beans for dogs
- Measured portions of their regular food used as rewards
- Veterinary-approved low-calorie treats
- Small amounts of freeze-dried meat treats for cats

Excessive table food should be avoided. Foods designed for human consumption often contain high levels of fat, salt, and preservatives that contribute to weight gain and long-term health risks. While sharing food may feel like an act of love, maintaining a healthy body condition is one of the most important ways to protect your pet's future well-being.

Walking: One of the Most Powerful Tools for Health

Walking is one of the simplest and most effective forms of exercise for dogs, and it benefits owners just as much. Walking is a low-impact activity that builds muscle, improves cardiovascular health, burns calories, and supports joint mobility without excessive strain.

WAGS TO WELLNESS



Research in both veterinary and human medicine consistently shows that regular walking improves heart health, strengthens muscles, and supports healthy aging. Even moderate daily walking can reduce the risk of chronic disease.

For many dogs, two walks per day lasting 15 to 30 minutes can significantly improve fitness and weight management. Older dogs and those with joint disease benefit especially from gentle, consistent activity rather than intense bursts of exercise.

Walking also strengthens the human-animal bond and provides valuable mental stimulation through exposure to new environments, smells, and experiences.

Activity and Enrichment for Dogs

Beyond walking, dogs benefit from a variety of activities that promote both physical and mental engagement.

Healthy activity options include:

- Interactive play such as fetch or tug
- Puzzle feeders that require problem solving
- Structured training sessions
- Swimming, which provides excellent low-impact exercise

- Food-dispensing toys that encourage movement

Mental enrichment is equally important. Dogs are naturally curious animals that thrive on engagement and purpose. Enrichment activities reduce boredom, prevent behavioral problems, and support emotional well-being.

Understanding Cats: Natural Hunters Living in Indoor Worlds

Cats have very different exercise and feeding needs than dogs. To understand feline weight management, it helps to understand their natural behavior.

Cats are obligate carnivores and instinctive hunters. In nature, cats do not eat one or two large meals per day. Instead, they engage in multiple small hunting sessions—stalking, chasing, pouncing, and capturing prey. These short bursts of activity are followed by rest and recovery.

Indoor cats often receive calorie-dense meals without the need to hunt. Without opportunities for physical and mental stimulation, their caloric intake can exceed their energy expenditure, leading to gradual weight gain.

Excess weight in cats increases the risk of:

- Diabetes

- Arthritis
- Liver disease
- Urinary tract disease
- Reduced grooming ability

Maintaining a healthy weight allows cats to move comfortably, groom properly, and remain active and engaged.

Feeding Cats in a Way That Supports Their Natural Instincts

One of the most effective ways to support feline health is to mimic natural feeding behavior.

Instead of providing unrestricted access to food, consider structured feeding approaches such as:

Multiple small meals: Feeding 3–4 smaller meals per day more closely reflects natural hunting patterns.

Puzzle feeders: These require cats to bat, roll, or manipulate objects to access food, encouraging both mental and physical activity.

Food hunts: Placing small portions of food in different locations encourages movement and exploration.

Portion control: Measuring food carefully prevents gradual overfeeding.

These strategies transform feeding from a passive activity into an engaging and beneficial part of daily life.

Encouraging Safe and Effective Activity for Cats

Cats are built for bursts of activity rather than sustained exercise. Short, engaging play sessions are ideal.

Healthy enrichment options include:

- Feather wand toys that simulate prey
- Laser pointers used safely and responsibly
- Puzzle feeders and treat balls
- Cat trees and elevated climbing areas
- Window perches for environmental stimulation

Two to three short play sessions

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When I began teaching in private school, there was a plan to teach reading and we followed it. There were no computers or special reading programs. This plan was simple, straightforward, and consistent. We used a basal reader, a phonics book, and materials to teach special reading skills, e. g. locating information and finding details.

We divided our children into separate reading groups according to their needs. We used different materials to help those children who had more specific deficits to acquire the skills they needed. The more advanced readers were given more challenging material. Our children became successful and enthusiastic readers.

I have always believed that phonics should be an integral part of a successful reading program. I was quite surprised when a third grade teacher told me that she didn't think that she had to teach phonics. The fact is that phonics is an essential component of reading which is defined as a specific system of instruction. The other components are phonemic awareness, the connection between letters and their sounds, vocabulary development, fluency in reading, and reading comprehension strategies. I would also include the importance of using techniques to motivate children to read. When all these components are used consistently, children will learn to read.

MAKING EDUCATION WORK with Diane Fulves

When I left the private school and went into a public school to teach classified children in special education classes it became clear that many of our children needed specific instruction which they were not receiving. The enormity of this problem became more evident when I began teaching children who came to the resource room from their mainstream class. They came with assignments they could not complete because they could not read them with any amount of accuracy. One fifth grade student could not recognize at least 100 words in a few pages of the reader assigned to him. When I spoke to his teacher about this, he told me that he did not have time to revise the child's reading program! If not the teacher, then who would help this child? The problem with this teacher's response was that this little boy had an I. E. P., an Individual Education Plan, which stated specific reading goals to help him attain the skills he needed to overcome his deficits and learn to read. The teacher did not comply with the I. E. P., a legal document and the child continued to struggle and fail. The more serious problem is that there was no one in this district to enforce compliance. What, then, is the purpose of this legal document?

Other students were unable to read worksheets. They did not know the words on the page. They did not understand the questions. They could not locate information to answer the questions accurately. Reading science and social studies assignments was extremely difficult.

Finally, I decided to create a simple screening tool to assess the reading deficits of my students. Each child was asked to write the alphabet, both upper and lower case letters, identify long and short vowel sounds in isolation, and identify basic sight words. Most of these students who were recently classified with a learning disability, could not correctly write the complete alphabet without reversals, omissions, or correct letter formation. This was true even for students in fourth, fifth, and sixth grades. Most students did not know long and short vowel sounds and they had difficulty reading basic sight words. How could this happen? How could they read with success?

What do we do? Before we send children to committee to identify a possible learning disability, we need to take the time to repair the deficits. A few minutes each day to review vowel sounds do not disrupt our schedule and it works. Prepare

some vowel cards for children to review independently. Reinforce vocabulary in various assignments, not just one time, but as a continual review until the children can read the words in all reading materials. If they know the words, they can read and achieve. That's the goal! This review is time well spent. What we don't have time for is to allow our children to waste time struggling through assignments they cannot read!

When we consistently combine all aspects of reading instruction, using appropriate materials and strategies, review and reinforcement, and direct teacher instruction, our children can learn to read. Remember Jimmy, a fifth grader who had no reading skills? He learned to read.

Teaching our students to read is a serious responsibility. We cannot take shortcuts or make excuses. We must comply with the I. E. P. which will lead them on a path to success. What a wonderful opportunity educators have to open the world of words to our children. It is a gift that will last forever.

Diane Fulves is an educator and advocate for children and parents. She is director of Empowering Our Parents, which offers information and support to parents. She is the director of Nurture the Spirit and Shakespeare Odyssey, programs that enrich children with the magic of the arts. For more information, please contact her at dee076@verizon.net.

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- **Freshness:** Lilac, Magnolia, or Roses will bring the scent of blooming gardens into your home and suitable in any room.

- **Earthy:** Eucalyptus, Lavender, Mint, or Sage will create a calm and rejuvenating mood as you wind down in your bedroom. (don't forget to blow out the candle)

- **Beachy:** Cotton, Linen, or Sea Salt will refresh the indoors of your home and best suited for the bathroom.

Candle Care & Safety

Scented candles are safe if they are made with high-quality, non-toxic ingredients and are used according to the manufacturer's instructions. Always make sure that there are no curtains above or table cloths that can easily catch fire. While we encourage the use of creative candle holders, always

use one that is specifically designed for candle use. The holder should be heat resistant, sturdy, and large enough to contain any drips or melted wax. Always place your candles on a stable, heat-resistant surface to avoid heat damage and prevent glass containers from breaking. Never leave unattended and keep away from children and pets. Never burn a candle for more than 4 hours and trim the wick to ¼ inch before lighting to promote proper flame height. Additionally, keep candles away from drafty areas to avoid flame flickering; pool debris and black marks from forming on sides of the candle holder.

About

Sonya, the Candle Lady established herself as a trusted source for soy and beeswax candles when she opened Ye Olde Candle & Gift Shoppe in 2015 at Pleasant Valley with late husband, Dominick and relocated to Eastdale Village in 2020.

Ye Olde Candle & Gift Shoppe transitioned in May of 2024 from

storefront to focus on candle-making workshops; art galleries, local libraries, restaurants and schools. However, you can now visit her new showroom suite; place orders through social media and Door Dash.

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Lighting a spring candle represents a reset by replacing the winter scents with fresh, and uplifting aromas in addition to helping you create a memorable atmosphere if you are hosting family gatherings.

The right ambiance can be achieved when you select scents like citrus, fresh, or floral to freshen up your home after winter.

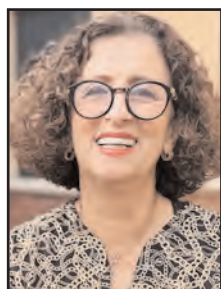
Turn the lighting of a candle into a ritual to welcome the Spring as you clear clutter and open windows.

If you are a person of faith, a cross shaped pillar candle will be a respectful centerpiece.

A pastel colored light scented

Meal prep tips for busy families: How to meal prep and save time, money and stress

By Roufia Payman, CDN,
Northern Dutchess Hospital,
part of Northwell Health



Roufia Payman, CDN

For many families, weeknights feel rushed. Between work, school, sports, and activities, dinner can quickly become a last minute decision. Learn how meal prepping can save you time,

money and stress.

Meal prepping is one of the most practical ways to stay organized during the week. When you invest a little time upfront, you gain time back later. You also reduce food waste, manage your grocery budget more effectively and bring more structure to your daily routine.

If you have ever wondered how to meal prep in a way that actually works for busy households, this guide will walk you through it.

What is meal prepping?

Meal prepping is the process of planning, preparing and organizing meals ahead of time. It can include:

- Cooking full meals in advance and refrigerating or freezing them to enjoy at a later time
- Preparing ingredients to combine later when you're ready to cook
- Packing lunch for the week
- Following a structured meal plan to help reach your diet and nutrition goals

Meal prep doesn't require an entire day in the kitchen. If you invest an hour or two over the

PATIENT FIRST

weekend, you can make better decisions about your meals before the week begins.

One of the best parts of meal planning is it already answers the daily questions of "what's for dinner?"

How to meal prep for the week

If you are new to meal prepping, start with a step-by-step system that feels manageable. You can begin by:

1. Creating a daily meal plan - Look at your calendar and identify your busiest days. Plan simple meals for evenings with sports practices or late meetings. Build your meal prep strategy around your real schedule, not an ideal one.

2. Choose a few core meal prep recipes - Select two or three meal prep recipes that use overlapping ingredients. For example, grilled chicken can be used in: Grain bowls, Tacos, Wraps, Salads and Pasta dishes. Using versatile ingredients keeps meal preparation efficient and cost effective.

3. Prep food components instead of full meals - One of the best meal prep ideas for families is ingredient preparation. Cook proteins, roast vegetables and prepare grains in batches. During the week, assemble them in different combinations to avoid repetition.

What type of food is best for meal prepping? - The best foods to meal prep are items that store

well for several days and can be used in multiple dishes.

Some of the best meal prep staples include:

- Lean proteins such as chicken, turkey, beans, tofu or eggs
- Whole grains like brown rice, quinoa or whole wheat pasta
- Roasted vegetables, like sweet potatoes
- Washed and chopped produce, like bell peppers
- Breakfast options such as egg muffins or overnight oats

The best foods to meal prep are sturdy ingredients that maintain texture and flavor after refrigeration. This makes them practical for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Ensure foods are stored in airtight containers to prevent moisture buildup. Excess moisture can lead to bacterial growth.

You should avoid meal prepping with ingredients like raw leafy greens, soft fruits and dairy-based items. These foods have a high water content and can become mushy very quickly.

What is the 5-4-3-2-1 grocery list? - The 5-4-3-2-1 grocery list is a grocery shopping method that helps you stay on track with meal prep and reduces food waste. The 5-4-3-2-1 grocery store method includes picking out: 5 vegetables, 4 fruits, 3 protein sources, 2 grains and 1 treat or snack.

This approach streamlines shopping and encourages variety without overcomplicating your meal prep plan. It also limits impulse purchases and supports budget friendly planning.

What is perimeter shopping and why does it matter?

Perimeter shopping means starting your grocery trip along the outer edges of the store. This is typically where you find fresh foods such as: Produce, Dairy, Meat and seafood and Eggs.

For families focused on nutrition and meal prep, perimeter shopping helps prioritize whole ingredients before moving into the center aisles for pantry staples. This strategy supports balanced meal prep recipes with fresh ingredients.

Meal prep ideas for breakfast, lunch and dinner - If you're looking for practical meal prep ideas, here are sample options that can be prepared in advance and rotated throughout the week.

Breakfast meal prep ideas

- Egg muffins with peppers and cheddar cheese
- Overnight oats with blueberries and almonds
- Yogurt with strawberries
- Smoothie ingredient packs stored in the freezer

Lunch meal prep ideas

- Chicken and vegetable brown rice bowls
- Turkey roll ups with a side of fruit and whole grain crackers
- Pasta salad with roasted vegetables
- Layered salads in jars with dressing at the bottom

Dinner meal prep ideas

- Taco kits with pre-cooked ground chicken and chopped toppings
- Beef stir fry with pre-cut vegetables and rice
- Sheet pan chicken with root vegetables
- Slow cooker chili or soup

Notice how many of these meal prep recipes rely on the same base ingredients. Repetition in meal prepping should be intentional. It reduces preparation time and simplifies grocery shopping.

Ways to get your children involved in meal prepping - Meal prep can also become a shared household activity. Involving children builds confidence and encourages them to try new foods!

Depending on your child's age, kids can:

- Wash fruits and vegetables
- Stir ingredients
- Portion snacks into containers
- Help select meal prep ideas for the week
- Label meal prep lunch ideas

Participation builds familiarity with ingredients and makes family meals feel collaborative.

What is the key to successful meal prepping? The key to meal prepping is consistency, not complexity.

To build a habit of meal prepping, start with: One breakfast option, Two lunch options and Three dinner meals.

From there, adjust meals and options based on what your family enjoys and what fits your schedule.

Meal prep works best when it reduces stress, saves money and makes weeknights more predictable. Taco Tuesday is a common household name for a reason!

The bottom line: Meal prep is one of the most practical strategies for families who want to manage their time and budget more effectively. When meals are planned and ingredients are ready, daily decisions become simpler. Learning how to meal prep takes intention at first. Over time, it becomes routine. The result is fewer rushed evenings, more structured mornings and greater confidence around family meals. For busy families, meal prepping is a small investment upfront that delivers the greatest return during the week.

For more information, visit nuvancehealth.org.

Wags to Wellness

per day can significantly improve activity levels and calorie expenditure.

Vertical movement is particularly beneficial. Cats naturally climb to feel safe and observe their surroundings. Providing elevated spaces encourages natural movement and muscle development.

Mental stimulation is just as important as physical exercise. Cats that are mentally engaged are less likely to overeat out of boredom.

Small Changes Create Meaningful Health Improvements

Weight gain often occurs gradually, and weight loss should be gradual as well. Even modest reductions in weight can significantly improve comfort, mobility, and metabolic health.

Maintaining a healthy weight helps support:

- Improved joint comfort and mobility
- Reduced risk of diabetes and chronic disease
- Improved cardiovascular health

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- Increased lifespan
- Better quality of life

Regular veterinary visits allow for monitoring of body condition and individualized recommendations for nutrition and activity.

Supporting Lifelong Health Through Daily Habits

Our pets rely entirely on us to support their health. By providing balanced nutrition, limiting excessive treats, and encouraging regular activity and enrichment, we help them live longer, healthier, and happier lives.

Whether it is a daily walk with your dog or a short play session with your cat, these simple routines provide powerful health benefits, for both pets and their owners.

At Catskill Veterinary Services, we believe preventive care, including proper nutrition, weight management, and activity is one of the most important investments in your pet's long-term well-being. With thoughtful care and daily engagement, we can help ensure our companions remain healthy, active, and thriving for years to come.



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