

JIFNEWS

A Quarterly Newsletter from the Somerset County Joint Insurance Fund featuring Safety, Health & Wellness

2015

FUN FACTS ABOUT NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS AND TRADITIONS

No matter where you celebrate the New Year, most of the tried-and-true traditions stay the same. If you've ever wondered why we make New Year's resolutions or watch the ball drop at midnight, you'll love these fun facts about the first holiday of the year.

- The top three New Year's resolutions among Americans are losing weight, getting organized, and spending less money.
- Although 45 percent of Americans make New Year's resolutions, only about 8 percent actually stick with them the whole year through!
- Even if you don't complete your resolution, studies show that you are 10 times more likely to achieve your goals than a person who doesn't make a resolution at all.
- The most popular New Year's Eve song, "Auld Land Syne," is an old Scottish song that dates all the way back to 1796.
- While you've probably watched the ball drop in Times Square for as long as you can remember, the tradition first began at midnight in 1907. The first ball was made of iron and wood, while today's is made of Waterford crystal.
- Many historians believe that the Babylonians were the first to make New Year's resolutions.
- While Americans celebrate at midnight with noisemakers, the Spanish celebrate by eating twelve grapes to achieve happiness in the upcoming year. In the Netherlands, people burn their holiday trees, while the Greeks eat a cake with a gold coin baked inside.



What's the Difference between Good and Bad Cholesterol?

An estimated 71 million Americans have high cholesterol. It doesn't present any obvious symptoms, so many individuals may not know that they have high cholesterol until it has already put them at risk for heart disease, a heart attack, or stroke.

To complicate matters, there are two kinds of cholesterol — and like a hero and a villain in a movie, they combat each other. How much do you know about HDL, LDL, triglycerides, and regulating your cholesterol level?

LDL | Low-density lipoprotein, or LDL, is the "bad" cholesterol, and it poses the biggest threat to your heart. Too much LDL in the blood can cause a buildup of dangerous plaque on the walls of the arteries leading to the heart and brain, putting you at serious risk of heart attack or stroke. A blood test measurement of less than 100 mg/dL is optimal; 130-159 mg/dL is borderline high; 160-189 mg/dL is high; and over 190 mg/dL is very high.

TRIGLYCERIDES | People who have high LDL levels also typically have a high level of triglycerides, a type of fat that's found in foods, belly fat, and blood. The body produces triglycerides quickly from sugar and refined flour, so triglycerides are higher in people who eat too many calories in the form of carbohydrate-laden and sugary foods, alcohol, and sweetened drinks.

Diabetics also often have high triglyceride levels. Fortunately, the treatment for both health problems is similar, and includes a special diet and weight loss. For triglycerides, a blood test that reveals a level of less than 100 mg/dL is optimal; less than 150 mg/dL is normal; 150-199 mg/dL is borderline high; 200-499 mg/dL is high; and over 500 mg/dL is very high.

HDL | While lower levels of LDL and triglycerides is ideal, it might surprise you to learn that you may need to raise your level of HDL (high-density lipoprotein) — the good cholesterol.

HDL prevents LDL from lodging in artery walls and forming plaque. Because it's so beneficial, it's important to maintain a level of more than 60 mg/dL. To raise your HDL, you should exercise 30-60 minutes most days of the week, and if applicable, stop smoking.

Cholesterol levels are a cause for concern, but learning how to regulate them can help you live a longer, healthier life without making drastic lifestyle modifications. Keeping up with your cholesterol levels is crucial: Adults over the age of 20 should have a fasting cholesterol test about once every five years, and more often than that if you're at high risk or have a family history of heart disease.



10 Winter Health Myths Busted!

1 MYTH: COLD AIR CAN MAKE YOU SICK

Despite being called the common “cold,” lower temperatures alone won’t make you sick. In fact, the exact opposite is true. “Cells that fight infection in the body actually increase if you go out in the cold,” says Dr. Rachel C. Vreeman, MD, co-author of “Don’t Swallow Your Gum! Myths, Half-Truths, and Outright Lies About Your Body and Health.” It’s your body’s way of combating the stress of freezing temps.

Plus, according to the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, cold viruses grow best at about 91 degrees; if you’re outside in the cold, your nostrils are surely colder than that.

2 MYTH: YOU SHOULDN’T EXERCISE IN THE COLD

Get ready to crawl out from under your comforter and run into the great (and yes, cold) outdoors. According to research published in *Medicine & Science in Sports and Exercise*, in cold temperatures, race times are actually faster -- and quicker paces burn more calories in less time. Plus, that harder, faster workout can spike your endorphin levels -- which, according to a review in *Environmental Science and Technology*, are already increased just by you being outside.

3 MYTH: ALLERGIES GO AWAY IN THE WINTER

Allergies might be the real source behind your stuffy nose and scratchy throat this season. According to the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, one in five people suffer from indoor/outdoor allergies, and the indoor variety can actually be worse in the winter. Pets don’t spend as much time outdoors, shut windows seal in poor air quality, and many molds even thrive in the winter, Vreeman says.

If your symptoms last longer than 10 days or ease up after taking an antihistamine, it might be time to visit an allergist.

4 MYTH: YOU DON’T NEED SUNSCREEN IN THE WINTER

Forget bathing suits. Department stores should stock sunscreen with the toboggan hats. “Because the Earth’s surface is closer to the sun during the winter months, we are actually exposed to more harmful rays without even realizing it,” says Dr. Robert Guida, a board-certified plastic surgeon in New York City.

What’s more, snow and ice can both reflect up to 80% of harmful UV rays so that they can hit the skin twice, according to the Skin Cancer Foundation. So even in winter, keep in mind that you need to protect yourself against skin cancer.

5 MYTH: YOU LOSE MOST OF YOUR BODY HEAT THROUGH YOUR HEAD

Contrary to the findings from one 1950’s Army study, most of your body heat doesn’t escape through your noggin, according to Vreeman. “In the now-infamous study, volunteers visited the Arctic with their heads exposed. However, the rest of them was outfitted in gear designed to protect against the cold, so it’s logical that they lost most of their body heat from their heads,” she says.

If you go outside without gloves, you’ll lose a disproportionate amount of heat through your hands.

6 MYTH: LACK OF SUNLIGHT CAUSES WINTER DEPRESSION

While dark days certainly don’t help, there are many other factors besides seasonal affective disorder that can contribute to winter depression -- especially around the holidays.

Busy schedules, family stress, and worries about holiday spending are more likely to trigger the blues than true SAD, which affects just 5% of Americans.

7 MYTH: WOMEN GAIN 10 POUNDS OVER THE WINTER

Between comfort foods, dreary days, and cozy blankets, it’s not hard to imagine why women put on winter weight. But it turns out that the average woman only gains one or two pounds over the winter.

Still, one Nutrition Reviews study shows that weight gain during the six-week holiday season accounts for 51% of annual weight gain. And, according to research published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, most women don’t shed that extra layer of insulation come springtime, so over the years, the weight can really add up.

8 MYTH: VITAMIN C PREVENTS COLDS

OK, this might be more of a half-myth. Meeting your 75 mg recommended daily allowance of vitamin C is important in maintaining a healthy immune system to prevent and even fight off colds, according to one 2013 study from the University of Helsinki. Other studies have shown that taking a large dose of vitamin C at the first sign of sniffles may help shorten the length and reduce the severity of a cold.

9 MYTH: COLD TEMPS CAUSE HAIR LOSS

Chilly weather might actually help you hold onto your hair. In one University Hospital of Zurich study, researchers followed 823 women for six years and found that they lost the most hair in the summer and the least in the winter.

It might be evolutionary -- just think how thick your dog’s fur gets in the winter. Still, dry scalps grow unhealthy, brittle, and breakable hair, so if your head gets itchy on cold, dry days, you might need to invest in a scalp-protecting shampoo for the season, Vreeman says.

10 MYTH: DRINKING ALCOHOL WARMS YOU UP

Alcohol makes you feel toasty on the inside, but that’s because it causes your blood to rush toward your rosy-red skin and away from your internal organs. That means your core body temperature actually drops post-sip, Vreeman says. What’s more, alcohol actually impairs your body’s ability to shiver and create extra heat.

From CNN.com