Living HEALTHY

FINDING LUNG CANCER SOONER

NO FLU FOR YOU!
3 ways to avoid this seasonal menace

HEALTHY LUNCHES
kids will love

OPIOID ADDICTION
guide to local resources

Diabetes:
HOW TO REDUCE YOUR RISK NOW
DEAR FRIENDS,

Our children are our best hope for the future, and at Summit Health we believe that their nurturing and care are among the most important aspects of our work. In this issue, we write about how learning to read well early in life helps children to reach their full potential, and share how one primary care practice is supporting that goal by providing books to young patients. We also outline some creative ideas for packing children’s lunch boxes with healthy items they’re sure to enjoy.

On a more somber note, our area is facing an epidemic of addiction to opioids, medications that are prescribed for pain but can easily be abused. Our article explains the facts and shares resources that are available to help anyone who is struggling with the disease of addiction.

Keeping our community healthy is a primary goal at Summit Health. Toward that end, this issue also includes articles on preventing diabetes, screening for lung cancer, and avoiding the flu.

I wish you a happy, healthy fall and winter, filled with life’s small pleasures.

Warm regards,

Patrick O’Donnell
CEO and President
Summit Health

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Healthy Lunches KIDS LOVE

HOW DO YOU PACK a school lunch that’s healthy, but has enough kid appeal that even the pickiest eater won’t trade it or toss it? In general, focus on foods that are low in sugar, trans fats, and high-fructose corn syrup, but provide plenty of brain-boosting vitamins and minerals—and a dash of fun. Here are some packed-lunch ideas to keep your conscience clear and your children satisfied.

**Applewiches**
Switch carb-loaded bread out for pairs of crisp apple slices, filling the space between with your choice of cheese, almond butter, or peanut butter. (Check the rules regarding peanut products at your child’s school.) Applewiches are a good source of brain-friendly vitamin B6, protein, and folic acid. If you’re using a nut spread, mix a few raisins in for a sweet surprise that adds fiber and iron.

**Colorful veggies and hummus**
Kids love to dip. And if they’re dipping raw vegetables into calcium-rich, uber-healthy hummus, so much the better. If hummus doesn’t pass your child’s taste test, pack some low-fat ranch dressing. For dippers, try crunchy slices of cucumber, carrot sticks, slices of red pepper, or sugar snap peas.

**Cheese wheel and crackers**
Pump some calcium and protein into those growing bones by putting a fun spin on cheese and crackers. Individually packaged cheese mini-wheels travel well, and are fun to open and eat. (Check the ingredients to be sure you’re getting a real, rather than processed, cheese product.) Add whole-wheat crackers and you’re good to go.

**Easy add-ons**
Kids love lots of little items at their disposal. Tossing a yogurt “squeezer” (Greek yogurt packs more protein) or prepackaged fruit smoothie in with lunch is easy to do and keeps calcium, protein, and B12 flowing. Look for brands and flavors with less sugar.
Saving Lives by Screening Smokers

A Summit Health screening program helps detect lung cancer early, when it’s most treatable.
T

ough effective screening techniques for breast cancer and colon cancer have been widely used for many years, screening for lung cancer had never been proven effective. That changed when the results of a large trial designed to evaluate a lung-cancer-screening program were published in the New England Journal of Medicine in 2011. The trial involved more than 53,000 patients, and the results were promising: Lung-cancer deaths were reduced by 20 percent in high-risk patients.

“The magnitude of this benefit is greater than the benefit of any other intervention for lung cancer, with the sole exception of smoking cessation,” says Dr. Peter M. Jablin, a pulmonologist at Summit Pulmonology in Chambersburg.

Last year, 224,000 Americans were found to have lung cancer. It is one of the most common types of cancer in both men and women—and one of the most deadly.

The screening program uses yearly low-dose computerized tomography (CT) scans to monitor changes to a patient’s lungs. CT scans, a specialized type of X-ray that combines multiple images from different angles, help save lives by enabling doctors to detect lung cancers when they are smaller and potentially curable.

“A CT scan of the chest allows the detection of X-ray abnormalities that are very small—less than 6 mm (¼ inch),” says Dr. Jablin. “Even abnormalities as small as 2–3 mm can be detected reliably. Abnormalities in this size range are not detectable with a standard chest X-ray. Even if very small abnormalities are evident on a chest X-ray, they cannot be measured with dependable precision in order to determine whether the abnormality is remaining stable or growing.”

Many people have small nodules in their lungs, which are aftereffects of infections earlier in life. That’s why it’s important to do the annual screening. One of the things doctors look for is not simply whether there is a nodule, but how big it is and whether it shows any evidence of growth.

Lung cancer is strongly related to cigarette smoking: Only about 10 percent of all lung cancers occur in nonsmokers. Cigarette smoking also is associated with a dramatically increased risk of cancers of the mouth, esophagus, stomach, kidneys, ovaries, and bladder. “Smoking cessation dramatically drives down the risk of many of the deadliest cancers,” says Dr. Jablin. “It also dramatically reduces the risk for heart attack, stroke, and the development of a destructive lung disease, COPD.”

Medical studies have shown that 25 percent of smokers who participate in a lung-cancer-screening program are able to quit, compared to the national average of 5 to 7 percent.

The lung-cancer-detection rate from Summit Health’s low-dose CT program is consistent with the rates at large university centers. Since it began in 2014, Summit Health’s screening program has found 11 lung cancers and one esophageal cancer. None of the patients were experiencing symptoms.

“All of these patients would have become aware of their cancer at a later date when they had symptoms,” says Dr. Jablin. “But because most of the symptoms related to lung cancer are the result of progression of the cancer to other crucial structures of the body, the detection of lung cancer when it is not causing symptoms is the detection of cancer at an earlier stage when the likelihood of cure is much higher.”

WHO’S ELIGIBLE?

To participate in Summit Health’s Lung Cancer Screening Program, patients must meet the conditions listed in one of the bullet points below.

• Non-Medicare Guidelines: People 55–80 years of age who have smoked at least one pack a day for 30 years, including people who still smoke or have quit within the last 15 years.

• Medicare Guidelines: People aged 55–77 who have smoked at least one pack a day for 30 years, including people who still smoke or have quit within the last 15 years. A one-time visit with ordering provider to discuss entry into the program.

Most insurance providers cover the screening. For more information about whether your insurance plan does, or to schedule a screening, call Program Navigator Leslie Clever at 717-217-6001.

The Lung Cancer Screening Program office is located at Summit Pulmonology, 601 Norland Ave., Suite 100, Chambersburg.

**These Tips Are for Quitters**

When it comes to smoking, the opposite of the old adage is true. Quitters always win. If you want to quit smoking and make it stick, keep these simple but powerful tips in mind.

**Find Your Motivation.** Define a concrete reason to quit, whether it’s to improve your health, be a good example for your children, or save money.

**Be Accountable to Someone.** Let friends and loved ones know that you’re trying to kick the habit. It will help to keep you honest and on-track, and allow them to lend support along the way.

**Don’t Make Deals With Yourself.** Letting yourself sneak a cigarette today will only make it harder for you to get through tomorrow.

**Do Something Else.** Find stress-relief alternatives: taking walks, biking, talking to friends, knitting—whatever works for you.

**Find Strength in Numbers.** Support groups foster a sense of solidarity and let you know you’re not in it alone.

**Don’t Latch onto Lapses.** There’s no shame in stumbling. If you fall off the wagon, don’t beat yourself up, just climb back on.
An emergency room is the best place to seek treatment when significant symptoms happen suddenly or are life-threatening. Emergency symptoms include:

- Change in mental status
- Chest pain or other heart symptoms
- Choking
- Coughing up or vomiting blood
- Fracture with bone visible
- Head or spine injury
- Loss of consciousness
- Major trauma, injury or burn
- Seizures
- Severe abdominal pain or pressure
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Snake bites
- Stroke symptoms
- Sudden dizziness, weakness, or change in vision
- Sudden, severe pain anywhere in the body
- Swallowed a poisonous substance

If you think you’re having a medical emergency, call 911 immediately.

Today there are more options for receiving health care than ever before. This guide explains which choices work best for specific medical situations.

The Importance of Primary Care

In an increasingly complex medical world, having one doctor who knows your health history has become highly important. In fact, researchers at the journal Health Affairs found that patients who have a primary care provider benefit from better management of chronic disease, lower overall health-care costs, and a higher level of satisfaction with their care. So during normal office hours, if you’re not having emergency symptoms, your primary care doctor is your best choice for routine illnesses and checkups.
When possible for illnesses and concerns that are not life-threatening, make an appointment with your primary care provider. If you can’t get in to see your provider, Summit Health urgent care, walk-in care, and FastCare locations enable you to see a provider as soon as possible without an appointment. For locations and hours, see the next column. Choose this option when the need for care is pressing, but not life-threatening. For example:

- Athlete’s foot
- Basic labs (such as pregnancy tests)
- Bronchitis
- Cough
- Ear & sinus infections
- Gout
- Illnesses (such as cold & flu)
- Insect bites
- Minor abrasions, burns & rashes
- Physicals (driver’s permit & sport)
- Pink eye
- Poison ivy
- Seasonal allergies
- Sore throat & strep throat
- Stitches (walk-in & urgent care only)
- Stomach viruses
- Swimmer’s ear
- Urinary tract infections
- X-rays (urgent care only)

WALK-IN LOCATIONS
Summit Health gives you options for care when you’re sick or injured, but can’t see your primary care doctor. No appointment needed.

URGENT CARE
WALK-IN HOURS: seven days a week from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.
CHAMBERSBURG: 1000 Norland Ave., 717-267-6363.
SHIPPENSBURG: 46 Walnut Bottom Rd., Suite 100, 717-477-2764.

SUMMIT PRIMARY CARE AND WALK-IN
WALK-IN HOURS (both locations): 7 days a week from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m.
GREENCASTLE: John L. Grove Medical Center
50 Eastern Ave., Suite 144, 717-597-5553.
Primary care: Monday–Wednesday 7:30 a.m. to 7 p.m.
Thursday 7:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. Friday 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.
WAYNESBORO: Waynesboro Medical Office Building
601 E. Main St., Level 1, 717-765-5060.
Primary care: Monday–Thursday 8 a.m. to 7 p.m., and Friday 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

SUMMIT FASTCARE
WALK-IN HOURS: Monday–Friday 9 a.m. to 7 p.m., and
Saturday–Sunday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Services are available for patients age 18 months and older.
CHAMBERSBURG: 993 Wayne Ave. (inside GIANT), 717-264-3278.

View more information and the number of patients waiting at www.OnTheGoCare.com.
PREVENTING Diabetes

GET FIT NOW CLASSES

EXERCISE AND GOOD NUTRITION help reduce your risk of diabetes and manage the disease if you have it. Summit Health’s Get Fit Now series teaches healthy strategies.

SUMMIT HEALTH CENTER
12 St. Paul Dr., Chambersburg
2017: OCT. 2, 9, 23, 30, NOV. 6
Mondays, 12–1 P.M.
2017: OCT. 2, 9, 16, 23, 30
Mondays, 5–6 P.M.
2018: JAN. 15, 22, 29, FEB. 5, 12
Mondays, 5–6 P.M.

WAYNESBORO HOSPITAL
501 E. Main St., Waynesboro
2017: OCT. 4, 11, 18, 25, NOV. 1
Wednesdays, 12–1 P.M.
2018: JAN. 8, 15, 29, FEB. 5, 12
Mondays, 12–1 P.M.
2018: JAN. 9, 16, 23, 30, FEB. 6
Tuesdays, 5:30–6:30 P.M.
Learn more or register at:
www.SummitHealth.org/GetFitNow

ARE YOU AT RISK?

You may be at risk for prediabetes if you:
• Are 45 years of age or older
• Are overweight
• Have a family history of type 2 diabetes
• Are physically active fewer than three times a week
• Ever had gestational diabetes (pregnancy diabetes) or gave birth to a baby weighing more than 9 pounds
One in three American adults has prediabetes: Their blood-sugar levels are borderline high, but not high enough to be considered full-blown type 2 diabetes. Though prediabetes is a serious condition, most people who have it don’t know because they don’t experience any symptoms. But that doesn’t mean it isn’t affecting their health. Prediabetes can lead to diabetes, which can cause serious complications, including heart disease, stroke, kidney disease, blindness, and amputations.

People with prediabetes and diabetes have a problem with the hormone insulin: Either their cells have become resistant to insulin or their pancreas doesn’t make enough of it. (In some patients, both conditions exist.) Insulin helps move glucose (sugar) from the bloodstream into the cells, where it’s needed for energy. When glucose can’t be processed the way it should be, it stays in the bloodstream.

To prevent prediabetes from progressing to type 2 diabetes, it’s crucial to keep blood-sugar levels as close to normal as possible. Exercise (30 to 60 minutes of moderate physical activity most days of the week) and a healthy diet (low in fat and high in fiber) are key. Weight-loss also is important, and patients who smoke should quit.

Sound overwhelming? Changing long-term habits is a challenge, but not one that patients have to face alone. Summit Health offers a proven lifestyle-change program, Prevent T2, which was developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to help patients take control of their diabetes risk factors. The program includes a CDC-approved curriculum to help you make healthy changes, meetings led by a trained lifestyle coach who keeps the program fun and engaging, and a support group so you can give and receive encouragement from others in the same situation.

Read about the experience three participants had with the program in the section “How Prevent T2 Can Help.”

If you have risk factors for prediabetes (see section “Are You at Risk?”) talk to your provider about them. If needed, he or she can order a screening test to see whether you have prediabetes, and then recommend a plan to help you manage it and keep the disease from progressing.

LEARN FIRSTHAND ABOUT THE PREVENT T2 PROGRAM FROM THREE PARTICIPANTS.

**ELAINE WEAVER**  
> **AGE:** 55

**WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM PARTICIPATING IN PREVENT T2?**

The Prevent T2 program taught me how to make better choices by comparing labels and making substitutions. I also learned that even small changes can make a big difference. Now, instead of continuing down the wrong path if I have a bad day or two, I look at the positive and start again.

**WHAT DID YOU ENJOY MOST ABOUT THE PROGRAM?**

It wasn’t just listening to someone talk giving you a lot of facts. Everyone was able to participate, and every class was a little different — there were even a few field trips.

**LUANN MUNSON**  
> **AGE:** 60

**WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM PARTICIPATING IN PREVENT T2?**

I had no clue how critical movement and exercise was in helping to prevent diabetes. I used to think that for exercise to make a difference it had to last 30 minutes to an hour, but even a 10- or 15-minute walk is beneficial.

**WHAT DID YOU ENJOY MOST ABOUT THE PROGRAM?**

Our instructor made it a lot of fun. Beside the regular meetings, we had guest speakers and a field trip to the grocery store. She made a competition out of it to see who could come up with the healthiest meal for the least amount of money. Old habits are easy to fall back into, and being in this yearlong program gave me time to establish new habits.

**POLLY FIEGL**  
> **AGE:** 50

**WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM PARTICIPATING IN PREVENT T2?**

The program is about education and lifestyle changes. I learned that making positive choices in diet and exercise more consistently can result in successes. I am now more cognizant about increasing my protein and eating more whole foods in general, while trying to limit my carbohydrates and overall sugar intake. In addition, I’ve increased my exercise and improved my consistency. If I miss a day, I don’t consider it a failure. I just get back at it.

**WHAT DID YOU ENJOY MOST ABOUT THE PROGRAM?**

This is a yearlong commitment, and our group of participants really became invested in each other. I believe that added to each person’s success.

The next Prevent T2 class series will start Tuesday, Oct. 3. To learn more, call 717-262-4472.
Opioid medications are an important tool for managing severe pain, but they can be highly addictive.
The data from Overdose Free PA is sobering. In Franklin County in 2016, the most recent year for which data is available, there were 39 deaths attributed to overdoses—an average of more than three overdose deaths each month. The top three drugs responsible for the deaths were heroin, fentanyl, and oxycodone—all part of the opioid family.

There are a lot of misperceptions surrounding the opioid addiction occurring daily across the United States, specifically regarding the type of person struggling with the disease. But addiction isn’t just happening to families living at the poverty line; it’s occurring within the middle and upper classes, as well. Addiction is happening behind white picket fences, most often to people 25–34, people who should be at the peak of their lives. The overuse and abuse of opioids is a national health crisis of epidemic proportions that does not discriminate.

WHAT ARE OPIOIDS?
Opioids are drugs that interfere with the signals that cause the brain to recognize pain, reducing a person’s perception of pain. In some people, opioids also activate areas of the brain that produce pleasure and create euphoria, or the feeling of being “high,” which fuels addiction.

Codeine, hydrocodone, oxycodone, morphine, and fentanyl are opioids commonly prescribed to relieve pain. Opium and heroin are also opioids and some people who become addicted to prescription pain medications begin using heroin because it is easier to acquire.

In 2015 in Pennsylvania, 10 people died each day from drug poisoning stemming from prescription opioids and/or heroin use. Nationwide, 91 people die each day from an opioid overdose, according to the Centers for Disease Control.

Although the data is frightening, it is possible to use opioids safely without developing substance abuse problems, as long as you carefully follow the dosage directions and contact your provider if you suspect you could become addicted.

People are more likely to become addicted to opioids if they take high doses for long periods. Over time, the body can develop a tolerance to the medication, causing the person to need a higher dose to experience the same level of pain relief. The body also can develop a physical dependence on the medication, which causes withdrawal symptoms (like nausea, shaking, and chills) if the person stops taking it.

Someone with an addiction can’t function properly without the drug in his or her system, which is why patients who have an addiction continue using opioids after their health-care provider has told them to discontinue use.

IS ADDICTION A DISEASE?
Opioid addiction isn’t a sign of weakness, it’s a brain disease. Millions of Americans from all walks of life are affected.

If you think you or someone you care about may have an addiction to opioids, seek medical help. Most people wouldn’t hesitate to see a doctor to receive treatment for diabetes or high blood pressure. Just like those conditions, addiction is a disease.

RESOURCES
Help and resources are available. For more information, visit:

- South Central PA Opioid Awareness Coalition
  www.opioidaware.org
- Franklin County Drug Task Force
  www.drugtaskforce.org
- OverdoseFreePA
  www.overdosefreepa.pitt.edu

UNUSED MEDICATIONS can be dropped off at Drug Take Back locations at the Chambersburg and Waynesboro Police Departments.

HELP REDUCE THE PREVALENCE OF OPIOID ADDICTION

- Ask your health-care provider about non-opioid options to manage pain.
- Lock up ALL medications at all times and safely dispose of any leftover medicine.
- Cooperate when you may be asked by a provider or pharmacist to sign a controlled-substance agreement, and be willing to participate in urine drug screens and pill counts.
- Tell your provider or pharmacist if you have any problems, especially if you are concerned about misuse of your medication.

SYMPTOMS TO WATCH FOR
Symptoms of opioid use disorders include:

- Strong desire for opioids
- Inability to control or reduce use
- Continued use despite interference with work, school, family obligations, and social functioning
- Use of larger amounts over time
- Development of tolerance
- Spending a great deal of time to obtain and use opioids
- Withdrawal symptoms that occur after stopping or reducing use, such as negative mood, nausea or vomiting, muscle aches, diarrhea, fever, and insomnia
NO FLU FOR YOU!

3 ways to reduce the impact of this seasonal menace.
Why take the chance that the flu—with its fever, dry cough, sore throat, body aches, and chills—will strike you this year? The influenza virus, a contagious infection of the respiratory system, affects 10 to 20 percent of the population annually. Each year the flu is different, and more or less severe. Since 2010 in the U.S., deaths from the flu or its complications have ranged from 12,000 to 56,000. Fortunately, there are preventive steps you can take to avoid the flu.

**GET A FLU SHOT**
The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that everyone six months and older get a flu vaccine every season. It will reduce your risk of coming down with the flu, and of spreading it to others. This is especially important if you spend time with someone at higher risk of flu complications (see side column) or if you have a child who is too young to be vaccinated.

Ideally, have your shot at the start of the season, which means in October or November. The vaccine is very safe, there typically are no serious side effects, and it’s often covered by insurance.

Talk to your doctor before getting a flu shot if you have an allergy to eggs or any of the ingredients in the vaccine, a history of Guillain-Barré Syndrome, or an acute illness. To find locations to receive flu vaccines and other immunizations, visit vaccinefinder.org.

**AVOID GERMS**
This might seem to be common sense, but it bears repeating: Try not to have close contact with anyone who’s infected. And if you’re sick yourself, stay home and get well. When someone who has the flu coughs or sneezes, the virus is expelled into the air and may be inhaled by others. That’s why health experts recommend sneezing or coughing into the crook of your arm. Other ways to protect against both spreading germs if you’re sick and catching germs if you’re not: Wash your hands frequently, and keep them away from your eyes, nose and mouth (touching these areas can spread the bacteria).

**KEEP YOUR IMMUNE SYSTEM STRONG**
Boost your immune system by staying on top of fundamental healthy habits. Get plenty of sleep and exercise, drink a lot of fluids, maintain a balanced diet, and manage stress.

**IS IT THE FLU—OR JUST A COLD?**

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**DRIVE-THRU FLU SHOTS**
ON SATURDAY, OCTOBER 14, 8 a.m. to noon and while supplies last, adults and children 6 months and older can stop into the parking lot of Summit Health Center at 12 St. Paul Drive, Chambersburg, for the most convenient way to get a flu shot this year.

Some people may have a health condition or allergy that prevents them from being able to get flu shots. If you have questions about whether or not you can receive a flu shot, please contact your primary care physician.

Most insurance plans cover the cost of the flu shot. If you have questions about whether or not your plan will cover the shot, contact your insurance company’s member services helpline. Maryland Medical Assistance Program is not accepted. There will be a cost for self-pay patients.
6 Tips for Healthy Dining Out

These simple substitutions can keep restaurant meals from sabotaging good eating habits.

With fall comes the start of the holiday season, when many people eat more of their meals away from home—whether grabbing a bite at the mall, attending an office party, or connecting with friends. It can be hard to commit to a good-for-you meal when your companion orders a burger and fries or the aroma from the next table is overwhelmingly enticing. Deciding in advance that you’ll eat a healthy meal at the restaurant will make you more inclined to choose better options from the menu.

What you order is only part of the equation: Many restaurants serve too much food, which is contributing to the obesity epidemic nationwide. If the portion you’re served looks twice as big as the helping you’d have at home, bring half of your meal back as leftovers.

Special occasions and eating out make it easy to justify indulging. But indulgences add up, leading to weight gain that can be hard to offset come the new year. Ensure a healthy holiday season and a strong start to 2018 by committing to these six good-for-you swaps when you’re eating out.

**SOUPS: Broth, not Chowder**
Stick with broth-based soups like chicken or vegetable, rather than cream-based soups like cheddar broccoli or clam chowder. Research shows that broth-based soup at the start of a meal can help to fill you up, so you’ll be inclined to eat about 20 percent fewer calories during your meal.

**SALADS: Dry, not Drenched**
Many restaurants pour more fattening salad dressing onto a salad than you’d serve yourself. When you order salad, ask your server to bring the dressing on the side. Then dip the tines of your empty fork into the salad dressing before you stab your greens. You’ll taste dressing with every bite, and you’ll eat much less of it than you would if you coated each leaf of lettuce.

If you choose an entrée-sized salad, order yours with healthy grilled chicken instead of greasy, calorie-laden crispy (fried) chicken. Or opt for salad entrées that are topped with heart-healthy and fiber-rich avocado slices, nuts, or beans.

**APPETIZERS: Veggies, not Fritters**
Stay away from onion rings, fried chicken wings, and mozzarella sticks; deep-fried anything isn’t good for your heart. Instead, look for lower-calorie dishes featuring vegetables: roasted asparagus spears, beet salads, hummus, and guacamole can all be good choices. Order one appetizer for the table, so you don’t overeat.

**ENTRÉES: Grilled, not Breaded**
Whether you’re ordering chicken, beef, seafood or even a vegetarian option, remember that grilled and baked foods are healthier than those coated in breadcrumbs and deep-fried. Ask for rich, creamy sauces on the side, because you won’t need as much as the chef doles out.

Instead of filling up on fries, order healthy sides like mixed vegetables, rice, a baked potato, or a side salad. Many restaurants allow for substitutions.

**DESSERTS: Fruity, not Fatty**
Sweets can be decadent, laden with fat and calories. Choose lighter options, like raspberry sorbet, rather than a giant brownie à la mode. Share one dessert to avoid overeating.

**DRINKS: Water, not Soda**
Soda, sweetened teas, and juices are filled with empty calories. Drink water or unsweetened tea instead.
It’s hard to overstate the importance of reading: It has a positive effect on the development of everything from vocabulary and general knowledge to thinking skills. Studies have shown that whether or not a child reads for pleasure is more likely to determine how well he or she does in school than either social or economic background. Students who don’t read well will have difficulty learning academic content, succeeding in school, and fulfilling their potential afterward. Researchers have found that reading makes those who read smarter, regardless of their natural intellectual abilities.

Parents play a critical role when it comes to instilling a love of reading in children. Reading together from an early age is an important way to help children develop not only a love of reading, but also an understanding of print, an important first step in learning to read. When reading with young children, draw their attention to the text itself so they can begin to understand what letters are; how groups of letters form words; our convention of reading left to right; and the fact that printed words map directly to spoken words. Another way parents can send children a positive message about reading is to be readers themselves.

From an early age, children should be exposed to a wide variety of books and other reading materials. That doesn’t mean they need a huge personal collection of books. Reading at the library and borrowing books to bring home is a wonderful bonding experience and an excellent way to show children that reading is a valued and fun activity for many people in the community.

For one Summit Health doctor, encouraging reading is part of his calling as a family-practice physician. In fact, he says, it’s an issue he can’t afford not to take a stance on given Franklin County’s poor literacy rates.

BOOKS FOR KIDS

“Through my work with the varied patient populations for which I provide care, I can testify to the fact that we need new ways to stimulate childhood and adult literacy,” says Dr. Stephen Flack. “Encouraging children to read is a huge part of their wellness and development.”

In April 2017, Dr. Flack’s practice, Summit Primary Care in Chambersburg, opened a new chapter in the fight against poor literacy rates by creating a “Book Nook.” Following each wellness visit, pediatric patients can select an age-appropriate book to take home with them. The office has been designated an approved site by Reach Out and Read, a national program recognized by the American Academy of Pediatrics. That means providers are following evidence-based standards to help promote early literacy and school readiness. The program is coming this fall to Summit Primary Care in Shippensburg.

The project has gained the support of community members. The Rotary Club of Chambersburg donated $500 to help support the program. “It’s an amazing feeling to know the community stands behind this effort,” says Dr. Flack. “We know our children are our future, so we must make sure we are incorporating care for not just their physical health, but setting them up with the skills they need to succeed in their education and future careers.”

Encouraging reading goes beyond children’s intellectual development. When parents nurture their little ones through activities like reading, playing, and singing, they’re creating meaningful bonds, which can help to reduce child abuse and neglect. “Life is busy and it often seems there’s a never-ending list of tasks for families to get through. This worsens stress, which has an adverse effect on relationships with others, including our children,” says Dr. Flack. “Taking time for things as simple as reading, playing, and singing with our children helps us bond with them, helps alleviate our stress, and improves their cognitive development.”
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