

MAY
2026

Sprout support system

Learning to grow your own food is a rewarding and healthy experience. Here are a few tips to help new gardeners, including your children, succeed and develop a lasting love for fresh produce.

GARDENING HELPERS

- Begin with easy-to-grow plants like basil, cherry tomatoes, or lettuce. Let your child select a few things they are excited to eat.
- Use smaller, appropriately sized trowels and gloves for children's hands. Designate a specific container or small raised bed as "theirs" to foster ownership.
- Turn watering, weeding, and thinning into lessons about plant needs and life cycles rather than just chores. Discuss the health benefits of eating fresh produce.
- Make a big deal out of picking the first vegetable or herb. Use it immediately in a special meal or snack to connect the effort directly to the reward.

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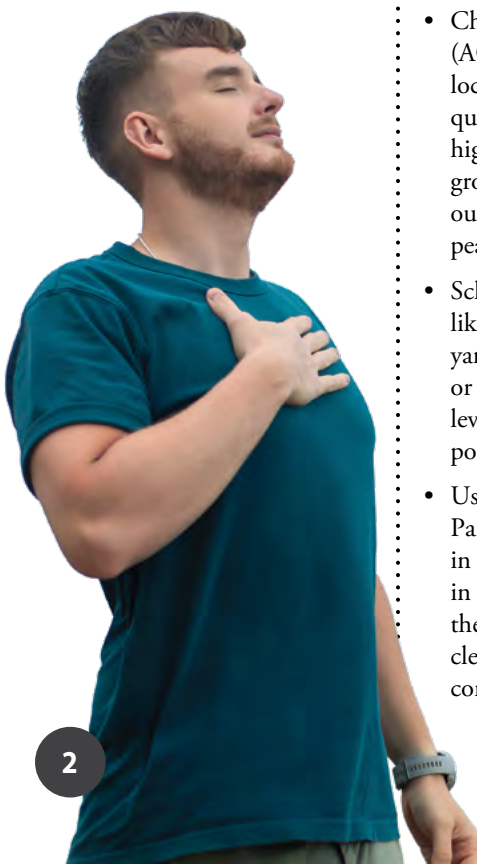
Breathe easy

Air pollution, both indoors and outdoors, can affect your respiratory and cardiovascular systems, and even your mental health. By taking a few simple, proactive steps, you can significantly reduce your exposure to harmful pollutants.



SIMPLE STEPS

- Check the Air Quality Index (AQI) in your area through local news or a reliable air quality app. When the AQI is high (especially for sensitive groups), limit your time spent outdoors, particularly during peak hours.
- Schedule strenuous activities like jogging, gardening, or yard work for early mornings or late evenings when ozone levels and traffic-related pollution tend to be lower.
- Use a High-Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) filter in your home, especially in rooms where you spend the most time. Change or clean your furnace and air conditioning filters regularly.
- Smoking is a significant source of indoor air pollution. Quitting is the most effective step for personal health, and avoiding secondhand smoke exposure is crucial for everyone.
- Control dust mites, pet dander, and mold by using dehumidifiers in damp areas. Also, clean surfaces regularly to prevent mold growth, especially after water leaks.
- A diet rich in fruits and vegetables provides antioxidants that can help protect your body from the oxidative stress caused by air pollutants. Focus on foods high in vitamins C and E.
- Cooking, using cleaning sprays, and burning candles can release harmful particulate matter. Use kitchen and bathroom exhaust fans, or open a window briefly, to cycle fresh air through your space.
- When possible, reduce your personal emissions by walking, biking, or using public transportation. This helps to lower the overall pollution burden and reduce your direct exposure while driving in heavy traffic.



Ankle aches



The Achilles tendon, connecting your calf muscles to your heel bone, is vital for running and walking, but it's prone to injury. Learning about common causes, prevention, and proper care can help you keep this powerful tendon strong and recover effectively if an injury occurs.

Tendon Safety

- Ankle injuries, often called tendonitis (inflammation) or rupture (a tear), usually occur due to a sudden increase in the intensity or frequency of exercise, particularly running and jumping. For example, the popularity of pickle ball has led to an increase in the number of older people suffering ankle injuries. Tight calf muscles and wearing unsupportive footwear are also common factors.
- Always start any physical activity with a warm-up and end with a cool-down, including gentle stretches. Increase the length or difficulty of your workouts gradually and wear proper, supportive shoes. Cross-training activities, like swimming or cycling, helps reduce repetitive stress on the tendon and build supporting muscle strength without constant pounding.
- If you hear a sudden pop in your heel or calf, experience severe pain, or cannot put weight on your foot, seek immediate medical attention. A medical professional, such as a doctor, can determine if you have a full or partial tear that requires surgery or immobilization.



- For mild ankle tendonitis or a strain, apply the R.I.C.E. method (Rest, Ice, Compression, Elevation) immediately to reduce swelling and pain. Rest the tendon by avoiding activities that cause pain. Applying ice for 15-20 minutes several times a day is particularly helpful, and compression bandages can provide support, but should not be wrapped so tightly that they restrict circulation.
- Once the initial pain subsides, rehabilitation involves stretching and strengthening exercises, as advised by a physical therapist or medical professional. Never rush back to high-impact activities; a gradual return prevents re-injury. Eccentric exercises, which focus on controlling the lengthening of the calf muscle, are often the cornerstone of Achilles tendon recovery.
- Focus on maintaining a healthy weight and overall cardiovascular fitness. Being physically active can reduce the risk of many chronic diseases and help support joint and tendon health. Staying hydrated is also important, as dehydration can affect tissue elasticity. Plus, wearing shoes with a slight heel lift can sometimes reduce strain on the Achilles tendon during prolonged walking or standing.

Recipe: Energy Bites



INGREDIENTS

- 1-1/2 cups rolled oats (old-fashioned)
- 1/2 cup peanut butter or almond butter (no added sugar)
- 1/3 cup honey (or maple syrup)
- 1/2 cup ground flaxseeds or chia seeds
- 1/2 cup dark chocolate chips or dried cranberries (optional)
- 1 tsp vanilla extract

DIRECTIONS

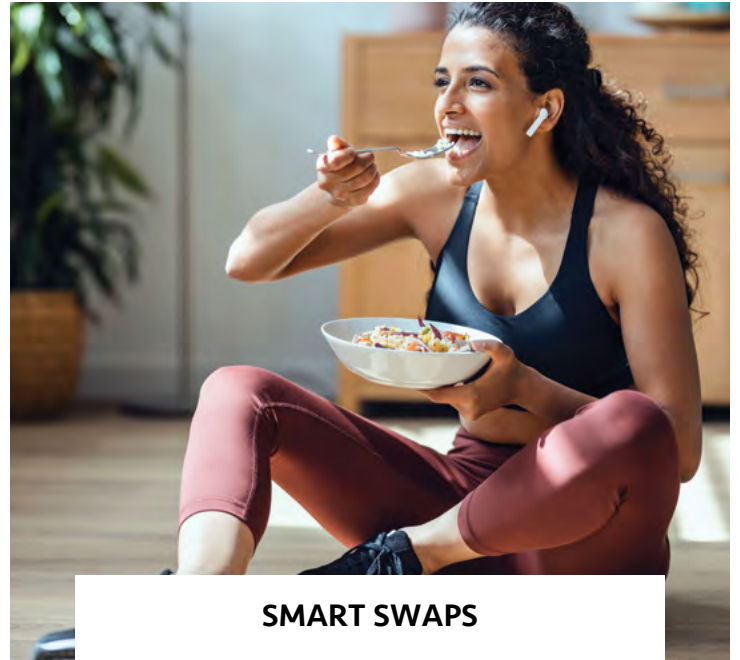
1. In a large bowl, stir together the oats, flaxseeds, and chocolate chips.
2. Add the nut butter, honey, and vanilla. Stir until the mixture is consistent and slightly sticky.
3. Place the dough in the refrigerator for 30 minutes to make rolling easier.
4. Form into 1-inch balls. Store in an airtight container in the fridge for up to one week.

NUTRITIONAL INFORMATION: Serves 12

Per serving: 115 calories, 6g total fat, 1g saturated fat, 13g carbohydrates, 5g added sugar, 2g fiber, 4g protein, 25mg sodium

The midday reset

The afternoon slump is real, and the wrong snack can make it worse. Swapping out junk food for nutrient-dense options can stabilize your energy and boost your concentration.



SMART SWAPS

- **Balance your blood sugar.** High-sugar processed snacks cause a rapid spike and crash in energy. Choose snacks that combine fiber and protein, like apple slices with peanut butter or Greek yogurt with berries, to maintain steady blood glucose levels and avoid the irritability often associated with a sudden sugar crash.
- **Manage your portions.** Mindless junk food consumption adds empty calories and often doesn't satisfy true hunger. A portion-controlled snack prevents overeating at dinner and helps you manage overall calorie intake throughout the day by signaling to your brain that your body is adequately nourished.
- **Fuel your focus.** Opt for snacks rich in healthy fats and complex carbohydrates. Proper nutrition supports cognitive function, meaning a handful of walnuts or a small avocado toast can enhance your afternoon focus and productivity while providing the essential brain fuel required for complex problem-solving tasks.
- **Support heart health.** Replace unhealthy fats found in chips and other ultra-processed snack foods with whole foods. Whole grains, nuts, fruit, and vegetables contribute essential vitamins and minerals, which can promote long-term cardiovascular well-being and help maintain healthy blood cholesterol levels.

Mind over mood

With stress or challenges, it's easy for thoughts and emotions to blur together, leading to disproportionate reactions. Learning to separate what is objective fact from subjective feeling and using cognitive reframing allows you to manage your responses more effectively and reduce unnecessary distress.



DEFINE THE DIFFERENCE

A fact is an observable, verifiable reality (e.g., “The email I sent has not been answered”). A feeling is an emotional state or internal reaction (e.g., “I feel ignored and anxious”). Recognizing that your feeling is a reaction to your thought is the first step toward regulating your emotion.



USE THE EVIDENCE TEST

When an intense feeling arises, ask yourself: “What is the concrete evidence supporting this thought?” and “What is the evidence against it?” If your thought is, “I’m going to fail,” the evidence against might be, “I’ve passed every test so far.” Focus on the most balanced and realistic conclusion.



IDENTIFY THOUGHT DISTORTIONS

Emotions often fuel cognitive distortions, which are irrational patterns of thinking. Common distortions include “catastrophizing” (assuming the worst outcome) or “all-or-nothing” thinking. It may help to identify these distortions to challenge and restructure negative thoughts.



EMPLOY COGNITIVE REFRAMING

This involves replacing a negative thought with a neutral or positive alternative. For example, instead of thinking, “I messed up the presentation,” reframe it as, “That presentation was a learning experience, and I know what to improve next time.”



PRACTICE LABELING YOUR EMOTIONS

Simply labeling an emotion (“I am feeling disappointed” or “I am frustrated”) rather than acting on it can reduce its intensity. This technique creates a mental space between the trigger and your response, improving your ability to choose a constructive action.



GROUND YOURSELF IN THE PRESENT

High emotion often pulls you into worries about the future or regrets about the past. Use simple grounding techniques—like noticing five things you can see, four things you can touch, etc.—to bring your awareness back to the present moment, where facts are observable.

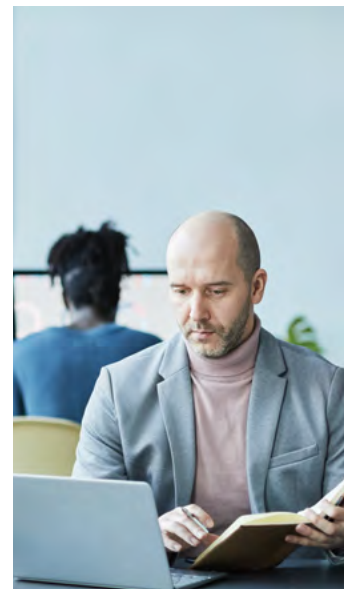
Stop the mental swivel

Modern work often feels like a constant juggle, but our brains aren't actually built for multitasking. By practicing task ergonomics, specifically batching, you can protect your mental energy. Grouping similar activities allows your brain to settle into a rhythm, reducing the "switching cost" that drains productivity.



STRATEGIES FOR FLOW & FOCUS

- Every time you jump from a complex report to a quick email, your brain suffers from "attention residue." Shifting between tasks can cost up to 40% of someone's productive time, making batching essential for efficiency.
- Dedicate specific blocks of time solely to high-concentration projects. By isolating these periods from interruptions, you allow your brain to reach a state of "flow." This allows complex problem-solving to become more intuitive and less exhausting.
- Moving from deep, concentrated work to lighter administrative tasks at the end of the day can reduce cognitive strain. This transition acts as a mental cool-down, preventing the burnout often associated with high-intensity cognitive demands.
- Constant multitasking is linked to increased levels of cortisol, a stress hormone. Organized workflows and task structures can help lower workplace anxiety by providing a sense of control.



THE BATCH EFFECT

- Instead of checking notifications as they arrive, batch your communication into three set periods per day. This prevents the constant "start-stop" cycle that disrupts focus and increases stress levels throughout the work week.
- When you batch similar tasks, your brain stays in the same "mode," which reduces the likelihood of errors.
- Batching leverages your brain's natural tendency to find patterns. When you perform similar actions in a row, your neural pathways prime themselves for that specific type of work, leading to a "momentum effect" that makes subsequent tasks in the batch feel easier than the first.

Dwelling well

YOUR LIVING SPACE IS MORE THAN JUST A SHELTER. IT IS A VITAL FOUNDATION FOR YOUR PHYSICAL HEALTH AND MENTAL CLARITY EVERY SINGLE DAY.



- Improve indoor air quality by opening windows and using HEPA filters to reduce allergens and pollutants that irritate the lungs.
- Test your home for radon, a colorless gas that is a leading cause of lung cancer among non-smokers.
- Maximize natural sunlight during the day to regulate your circadian rhythm, which helps improve sleep quality and boosts your daily mood.
- Keep humidity levels low to prevent mold growth, as damp environments can trigger asthma attacks and other respiratory issues.
- Switch to natural or low-VOC (volatile organic compound) cleaning products to limit the chemical vapors that can linger in poorly ventilated rooms.
- Organize your physical space to reduce cortisol levels, as a tidy environment helps lower mental stress and improves focus.

Mood magic for kids

Big emotions can feel overwhelming for little ones. Teaching simple coping tools can help children navigate their feelings with confidence, resilience, and calm.



THE TOOLKIT

- **Belly breathing:** Encourage slow, deep breaths to signal the nervous system to relax, which helps lower immediate physical stress.
- **The counting reset:** Slowly counting to ten provides a mental “pause button,” allowing the brain to shift from reactive emotions to logical thinking.
- **Naming the feeling:** Helping children label emotions—like “sad” or “frustrated”—reduces the intensity of the feeling and promotes emotional intelligence and self-regulation.
- **Physical movement:** Stretching or taking a short walk releases pent-up energy, as active play is a proven way to improve a child’s mood.
- **Safe spaces:** Create a quiet “calm-down corner” with soft pillows where a child can retreat to process feelings safely without external pressure or distractions.
- **The grounding game:** Ask the child to name three things they see and hear. This sensory focus pulls them out of an emotional spiral.

