

## HOW TO AVOID A HEALTH SCARE

*Contributed by Mandy Enright, MS, RDN, RYT*

Pumpkin spice is in full swing. The leaves are starting to turn. Jack-o-lanterns are making their way onto doorsteps. Spooky season is about to begin! There are lots of things to be scared of this time of year. BUT... what about the REAL boogeymen of health?

This October, don't let things lurking beneath the surface get the best of you. Habits such as a sedentary lifestyle, poor sleep, and an ultra-processed diet can sneak up on you and take over your health. And they can get really scary when they stay too long!

### Sedentary Lifestyle

It might be getting colder where you live, so outside activities start to dwindle. Maybe you have kids back in school, and activities are in full swing. Or work has picked up after the quiet summer months bringing mile-long to-do lists that take priority. Days getting darker earlier may mean more time on the couch watching TV and staying warm indoors. But making time for movement in your day is so important for your health. Physical inactivity can double the risk of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and obesity. It can even increase your risk of cancer, high blood pressure, osteoporosis, depression, and anxiety. If you find yourself sitting for long periods either during or after work, break it up with some movement. For every 20 minutes of sitting, try getting up and moving around. Something as simple as a walk can make a world of difference! Keep yourself moving this October and scare away that sedentary lifestyle. Here are some ways to move right at your workspace:

- Do 30 seconds of jumping jacks, squats, or running in place.
- Keep a resistance band handy to rep out some bicep curls.
- Do some stretches like neck rolls, twists, side bends, and a standing forward bend.

### Poor Sleep

Poor sleep hygiene can consist of not getting enough hours of sleep or not receiving quality sleep. Frequent sleep deprivation is linked to chronic health problems such as cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, stroke, and obesity. In fact, people who don't get quality sleep may be shortening their lifespan. No one wants to look and feel like a sleep-deprived zombie this Halloween, so clean up your sleep hygiene so that you look and feel ready for the day! Practice these better sleep habits:

- Cut off electronics use one hour before bedtime.
- Stick to a consistent sleep routine schedule of going to bed and waking up at the same time every day (yes - even weekends!)
- Avoid caffeine consumption after 3pm.
- Find relaxing activities to help you unwind at night.





## Ultra-processed Food

There's no doubt that foods high in sugar, salt, and fat are delicious. But, relying on these foods as a staple in our diet can take a toll on our health. These ingredients make the food we eat taste better, but an excess of them can increase your risk of heart disease, diabetes, and high blood pressure.

These foods are not just tasty, they are convenient as well. It's easy to consume these products more frequently than you should. Examples of ultra-processed foods are frozen meals, chicken nuggets, canned soups, hot dogs, soft drinks, and sweetened breakfast cereals. To reduce your intake of ultra-processed foods, emphasize these foods instead:

- Consume more plants throughout the day from fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.
- Focus on lean protein sources, including seafood and plant-based sources of protein like beans, legumes, nuts, and seeds.
- Limit intake of added sugars, especially in beverages. It's important to stay hydrated, so consume more water in your days. Flavoring still or sparkling water with fruit and herbs like mint or rosemary gives beverages a natural boost of flavor.

The key is moderation. Label reading is a skill you can use to help you identify processed foods more quickly.

## Stay Ahead of the Boogeyman!

A health scare may not make itself known until it's too late. The best way to keep the boogeyman at bay is to be proactive with your health, including:

- Getting an annual physical with your healthcare provider that includes blood work to assess your blood pressure, cholesterol, glucose, and potential vitamin or nutrient deficiencies.
- Being up to date on your family health history and knowing your risks.
- Scheduling routine screenings including pap smear, prostate exams, mammograms, colonoscopies, and skin checks.
- Make sure all your vaccines are up to date.
- Take any prescribed medications as directed.
- Consider working with a registered dietitian for help with eating habits.
- Monitor your health and reach out to a healthcare provider if you notice any changes.

***What changes can you make this October to keep health scares at bay and the boogeyman away?***



*Mandy Enright MS, RDN, RYT, is a Registered Dietitian, Yoga Instructor, and Corporate Wellness Expert, as well as main content contributor for Wellness Concepts. Mandy is a featured presenter, both virtually and onsite near her home in Neptune, NJ.*

