

# NIH News in Health

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**Inside News:** 3 Readers' Favorite Health Stories... 4 Cleaner Air, Healthier Lungs... Sarcoidosis... National DNA Day

## Sharing Reliable Health Information

### 10 Years of *NIH News in Health*

You hear and read health advice all the time—from friends, online sources, radio, TV, and more. How do you know what health information you can trust? This issue marks the 10-year anniversary of *NIH News in Health*, the monthly newsletter based on research supported by the U.S. National Institutes of Health—the nation's medical research agency. Every article in this newsletter is carefully reviewed by NIH experts, so you can be confident that the health news you read here is trustworthy.

So far, we've brought you 600 articles on all kinds of topics. They've ranged from healthy eating and physical activity to the microbes within you, personalized medicine, and the hazards of stress. We've learned from our tens of thousands of readers that you appreciate these stories and often share the information with your friends, family, and others.

People love exchanging health information. More than half of adults nationwide say they turn to friends or family for health information or support when facing a serious health issue. People also share health information within their communities—at school, work, places of worship, and various events.

The quality of the health information you get depends on the source. "When looking online for health information, it's a good idea to start with reputable websites, such as government websites," says NIH's Stephanie Dailey, who specializes in sharing health information with older adults. "Government agencies have well-researched information that's been vetted by expert scientists and doctors."

"Students and others can be drawn to websites with quirky or 'amazing' health stories that may be inaccurate," says Timothy Keady, who heads the student wellness center at the Rochester Institute of Technology in New York. "We always try to steer them back toward more appropriate health information that's based on science. We know that information from NIH, the CDC, and other agencies is going to be accurate."

Like all the information available from NIH, the stories in *NIH News in Health* undergo multiple levels of review before you ever see them. Researchers interviewed for each story read and comment on draft articles to make sure they're correct. NIH health and science experts also review each story before it's published. The goal is to give you reliable, science-based information so you can make informed decisions about staying healthy and seeking medical care.

In recognition of the newsletter's 10th year, we turned to readers like you to learn how you've been sharing *NIH News in Health* and other health information with your community. We've learned that the articles are shared in many different ways. Teachers in California and elsewhere have shared stories with their students on how sleep affects learning and health. A middle school nurse in Texas copies and shares articles with school staff and makes the newsletter available to visiting parents. And the staff of a



hospital in Montana says they read the online version and discuss the newsletter's stories, which ultimately helps to improve their conversations with patients.

Community health clinics, senior centers, libraries, and nonprofit organizations across the country share copies of *NIH News in Health* with their communities. In Florida, the Franklin County Health Department distributes the newsletter to patients and staff in 2 rural, remote public health clinics. At the Friend Family Health Center in Illinois, *NIH News in Health* is shared at large neighborhood clinics in the southeast and southwest sides of Chicago.

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In the Rocky Mountains, a nonprofit agency has been sharing *NIH News in Health* with older adults and their caregivers for nearly a decade. “The newsletter regularly offers relevant health information for our seniors. It’s something they really look forward to each month,” says Stephen M. Holland, director of the Upper Arkansas Area Agency on Aging,



### Wise Choices Is This Website Trustworthy?

Use this checklist to decide if the health information you’re reading online can be trusted:

- **Who runs the website?** Federal agencies, medical schools, and large professional or nonprofit organizations are often reliable sources of health information.
- **Who is sponsoring the website?** Be wary if it’s not easy to find the sponsor’s contact information or if the website is trying to sell you something.
- **Is the information current?** Sites should say when the information was posted or last reviewed.
- **Is your privacy protected?** Be sure you understand the website’s privacy policy. Be cautious about sharing personal information.
- **Does the site make claims that seem too good to be true?** See if you can find other, reliable sites with the same information.

based in Salida, Colorado. The newsletter is available at the agency’s meal sites. It’s also given to older adults who receive home-delivered meals. “Although some of our participants are active users of the Internet, others for the most part are not computer literate, so they really rely on the printed information,” Holland says.

In rural Oregon, copies of *NIH News in Health* are distributed to a largely Native American community by the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, a tribal organization that provides a range of services, including home health care visits and transportation to medical facilities. “We place the newsletter in our elders’ meal site and in the lobby of the community health clinic, in adult foster care, and next to the pharmacy, so people can read it while waiting for prescriptions,” says community health director Kari Culp. “We’ve found the newsletters to be very informative and much appreciated by our community members and also our medical staff.”

Many people share health information by putting it where people are waiting and where it will be seen. At several colleges and universities, for instance, officials have been placing easy-to-read health information in common bathrooms—an approach sometimes called “stall talk.”

In Rochester, Keady puts *NIH News in Health* in the school’s health clinic and counseling waiting rooms. He also brings the newsletters to lectures and presentations on health and wellness. “Although students search for a lot of health information online, they



### Web Links

For more about finding and sharing reliable health information, click the “Links” tab at: <http://newsinhealth.nih.gov/issue/Apr2015/Feature1>

still like to read some information on paper, especially while they’re waiting or relaxing in a common area,” Keady says. “Stories on stress and other psychological issues are of special interest to students. And they tend to gravitate to stories on exercise, sleep, and nutrition.”

School, church, and community newsletters often reprint *NIH News in Health* stories in their publications because they know they can trust the content. Organizations focused on diabetes, healthy aging, mental illness, and other medical issues also reprint *NIH News in Health* stories in their own publications. The articles aren’t copyrighted, so they can be freely republished, as long as *NIH News in Health* is credited as the source (see <http://newsinhealth.nih.gov/about> for details).

No matter where you gather and read health information, it’s a good idea to discuss what you’ve found with your health care provider. Your provider can help you understand and interpret what you’ve found.

“Being well informed about a condition can be helpful when you visit your doctor,” Dailey says. “You may wish to print out some of the information you find to share with your doctor during your appointment.”

We love hearing from readers who let us know how they share and use health information, including *NIH News in Health*. Thanks for sharing your feedback, story ideas, and other comments over the past decade. We look forward to bringing you 10 more years of evidence-based health information. Share your thoughts with us at [nihnewsinhealth@od.nih.gov](mailto:nihnewsinhealth@od.nih.gov) or send us a photo showing how you or others

use the newsletter, and we may post it to our Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/newsinhealth](http://www.facebook.com/newsinhealth). ■

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For more health information from NIH, visit



<http://health.nih.gov>

# Readers' Favorite Online Health Stories

## Rashes, Sore Throats, Kidneys, and More

*NIH News in Health* aims to bring you a wide range of health-related stories, including articles about healthy lifestyles and both common and rare diseases. Some topics are consistently popular, viewed by hundreds or thousands of people month after month on the <http://newsinhealth.nih.gov> website. Here are 5 reader favorites, representing our most-viewed Web articles over the past 2 years. See if any of these topics might be useful to you or someone you know.

**1. Red, Itchy Rash?** You've probably had a rash at some point or another, whether from poison ivy, soggy diapers, or something more unusual. Why does your skin break out in red blotches like that? More important, is there anything you can do about it? Dr. Stephen I. Katz, director of NIH's National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases, answers these questions and more while also addressing specific conditions, such as skin allergies, eczema, and psoriasis. "If you have any significant rash, you should see a dermatologist," Katz says. A dermatologist, or skin doctor, is specially trained to figure out what's causing a rash and help you get the right treatment. (<http://newsinhealth.nih.gov/issue/apr2012/feature1>)

**2. Soothing a Sore Throat.** When you've got a sore throat, your throat may feel scratchy, and it may hurt when you swallow. Most sore throats are caused by viral infections such as the common cold or the flu. The best way to protect yourself from the germs that cause these infections is to wash your hands often. Try to steer clear of people who have colds or other contagious infections. And avoid smoking and inhaling second-hand smoke, which can irritate your throat. (<http://newsinhealth.nih.gov/issue/mar2013/feature2>)



### 3. Keep Your Kidneys Healthy.

Your kidneys aren't very big—each is about the size of your fist—but they do important work. They keep you healthy by maintaining just the right balance of water and other substances inside your body. Unfortunately, if your kidneys start to malfunction, you might not realize it for a long while. Kidney disease usually won't make you feel sick until the problem is serious and irreversible. That's why it's important to catch kidney disease early, so you can try to prevent or delay health problems. You're at increased risk for kidney disease if you have diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, or a family history of kidney failure. Talk with your health care provider about whether you should be screened for kidney disease. (<http://newsinhealth.nih.gov/issue/mar2013/feature1>)

### 4. Should You Take Dietary Supplements?

More than half of all Americans take one or more dietary supplements daily or on occasion. Common supplements include vitamins, minerals, and herbal products, also known as botanicals. People take these supplements to maintain or improve their health. But not everyone needs to take supplements. "Learn about their potential benefits and any risks they may pose first," says Dr. Paul M. Coates, director of NIH's Office of Dietary Supplements. "Speak to your health care providers about products of interest and decide together what might be best for you to take, if anything, for your overall health." (<http://newsinhealth.nih.gov/issue/aug2013/feature1>)

### 5. Waking Up to Anesthesia.

When you face surgery, you might have many concerns, including worries about going under anesthesia. General anesthesia is a combination of drugs that dampens pain, knocks you unconscious, and keeps you from moving during the operation. Although anesthesia is typically considered quite safe for most patients, many people have concerns about possible risks and side effects. Some people, especially elderly patients and children, can have lingering confusion and thinking problems for several days after anesthesia. Talk with your doctor if you have concerns, but don't delay important surgery because of fear of anesthesia. (<http://newsinhealth.nih.gov/issue/apr2011/feature1>) ■



### Web Links

To see readers' favorite online health articles over the past 6 months, visit: <http://newsinhealth.nih.gov/favorite>



# Health Capsules

For links to more information, see these stories online:  
<http://newsinhealth.nih.gov/issue/Apr2015/Capsule1>

## Cleaner Air Tied to Healthier Lungs in Kids

As air quality improved in a once-smoggy region of California, lung function also improved in children during a critical period of growth and development. The findings point to the potential long-term effects of air quality on human health.

Air pollution has been linked to a wide range of health problems, including breathing difficulties, cardiovascular disease, and even death. In Southern California—long known for its high levels of air pollution—public policies have helped to improve air quality over the past few decades.

NIH-supported scientists took a closer look at the link between better air quality and breathing in 11- to 15-year-old kids. Those ages

are especially important to long-term lung function, because that's when lungs undergo rapid development. The researchers looked at data from 3 different groups of children taken during the time periods 1994–1998, 1997–2001, and 2007–2011. More than 2,100 kids participated.

The researchers found that as levels of air pollution declined, lung function development improved. Improvements were seen in both boys and girls, in children with and without asthma, and in children of different racial/ethnic backgrounds.

The proportion of kids with clinically low lung function at age 15 also dropped as the air got cleaner. Across the 3 time periods, the propor-

tion with low lung function fell from about 8% to 6% to less than 4%.

“We expect that our results are relevant for areas outside Southern California. Improved health was most strongly linked to reduced levels of nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter—pollutants that are elevated in any urban environment,” says research team leader Dr. W. James Gauderman of the University of Southern California. ■

## What Do You Know About Sarcoidosis?

Many people with sarcoidosis don't realize they have it. The disorder often has no signs or symptoms, or only mild ones.

Sarcoidosis is a chronic (long-term) disorder that causes **inflammation** and lumps called granulomas in the body's organs. The lungs are usually involved, although the condition can affect any organ, including the skin, eyes, liver, and brain.

Some people with sarcoidosis feel

tired or depressed. They may wheeze, cough, or feel short of breath. The illness may also cause lumps, ulcers (sores), or areas of discolored skin.

Sarcoidosis affects people of all ages and races, but it's most common among African Americans and people of Northern European descent. The cause is unknown, but genes and the immune system likely play a role. Treatment depends on symptoms and which organs are affected.

In 2008, Congress declared April as National Sarcoidosis Awareness Month to bring more attention to this rare and complicated disorder. Learn more about sarcoidosis, and watch a video about managing the condition, at [www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/sarc](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/sarc). ■

### Definitions

#### Inflammation

Heat, swelling, and redness caused by the body's protective response to injury or infection.



### Featured Website

#### National DNA Day

[www.genome.gov/DNAday](http://www.genome.gov/DNAday)

Join the celebration of National DNA Day on Friday, April 24. The day honors 2 major achievements: the first paper describing the DNA double helix in April 1953, and the completion of the Human Genome Project in April 2003. This website links to classroom tips, activities, and a Pinterest challenge for K-12 teachers and students—all aimed at sparking an enthusiasm for genetics, genomics, and scientific pursuits.



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