



# Wellbeing Insights

*Living a Better, More Vibrant Life*



## Cool Down Inflammation

We often think of inflammation as the redness, burning and swelling that occurs when we cut our skin, burn our mouths eating something hot or get sunburns. These are external signs of inflammation, and we know to reduce this inflammation with ice, water, aloe vera or any number of known remedies.

However, we don't always see or feel inflammation that occurs inside the body until extensive damage has been done. Inflammation is at the core of nearly every chronic disease, including heart disease, high blood pressure, digestive disorders, acid reflux, all autoimmune conditions (e.g., arthritis, Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes, irritable bowel disease, multiple sclerosis, thyroid disease), eye disease (e.g., glaucoma, macular degeneration), Alzheimer's disease, many cancers and several other conditions.

Nutrition and lifestyle can be integral in preventing and soothing inflammation. Even in the case of chronic disease that requires medical intervention, nutrition and lifestyle can complement medical treatment to mitigate the effects of the condition and possibly to prevent further damage. Here are some ways to cool your internal inflammation:

**Eat a primarily plant-based diet**, rich in non-starchy vegetables and some fruit. Plant-based diets reduce biomarkers of inflammation, such as C-reactive protein (CRP).

**Reduce grain and sugar-based carbohydrates.** Diets that are overly abundant in grains (whole grains and refined ones) and sugar (real and artificial) are highly inflammatory, causing insulin levels to rise, eventually keeping the

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hormone from getting the byproduct of glucose (blood sugar) to cells for energy.

**Eat more monounsaturated fats** (e.g., nuts, seeds, avocados, legumes, olives, olive oil) **and Omega-3 fatty acids**, which are available in fatty fish (e.g., cod, herring, salmon, sardines), fish oil and plant sources (e.g., walnuts, chia seeds, flaxseed and others). Omega-3 fatty acids in particular have a marked impact on reducing inflammation throughout the body. Americans typically have a 14:1 ratio of Omega-6 fats (found in meat and many grains) to Omega-3 fats. The ratio should be closer to 1:1 to 4:1.

**Diets high in antioxidants** help reduce inflammation as they preserve healthy cells throughout the body. Berries, dark green leafy vegetables and other colorful fruits and vegetables are good sources.

**Protein is critical** to the body's ability to maintain its blood sugar and insulin levels and, thus, helps prevent inflammation. Aim for efficient sources in grass-fed meats and free-range poultry and eggs.

**Consider avoiding major immune system aggravators**, especially in cases of autoimmune conditions, to reduce the inflammatory cytokines that tend to spike with their consumption. These include dairy, sugar, gluten and most grains.

**Exercise regularly.** You don't need to be an athlete, but daily, purposeful movement for at least 30 consecutive minutes is essential to your body's ability to regulate hormones that are keeping your body inflamed, including insulin and cortisol.

**Get adequate sleep**, aiming for at least eight consecutive hours. Lack of sleep often results in sugar cravings and poor metabolism and can induce insulin resistance.

**Lift your spirits and manage chronic stress** through mindfulness exercises, laughter, music, physical activity and connectedness to family and friends, and by removing stress triggers where possible. Insulin, cortisol and inflammatory cytokines spike during periods of stress; these interventions can act as buffers.

Reducing inflammation in our bodies can have a profound effect on how we feel in terms of our physical, emotional and mental health. While it takes daily, deliberate actions and choices to support one's wellbeing, the impact is often well worth it with reduced symptoms, improved mood, potential reversal of disease and overall better quality of life. If you have a chronic health condition, please consult your physician before making any significant diet and lifestyle changes.



## On the Menu

# Tahini

Tahini is the Arabic word for ground sesame seeds (i.e., sesame paste). A staple in Middle Eastern and Mediterranean cooking, tahini has been known to be used in recipes as far back as the 13th century. Throughout history the creamy paste was reserved only for aristocrats and the wealthy; in some cultures it was even used as currency. The ancient Greeks also used tahini as medicine.

Today, tahini is still widely popular and globally available. It's known for its peanut butter-like texture and may be served as a dip or as a component of other dishes like hummus. It has also gained popularity among vegans and vegetarians and makes for an excellent cooking and baking substitute for those with tree nut and peanut allergies. Tahini is loaded with nutrients, including:

- High amounts of B vitamins that are known to boost energy and brain function
- Vitamin E, which has antioxidant properties that can protect cells against the effects of free radicals
- A great source of vegan protein; it touts higher levels of protein per serving than milk and most nuts
- High levels of mono and polyunsaturated fats, which can lower harmful cholesterol levels
- A wide variety of important minerals, such as magnesium, calcium and iron

### Where to Purchase

Tahini can be found in most grocery stores in the condiment or oil aisle, as well as in the international food section. It can also be found in specialty Middle Eastern, North African or Mediterranean grocery stores.

### Keep It Fresh!

If kept in the pantry, unopened jars of tahini will keep for up to 6 months. Tahini is very high in oil, so it must be refrigerated once opened to prevent it from spoiling too quickly. Once opened, tahini will keep in the fridge for up to a year. Homemade tahini has a shorter storage life; it will usually keep in the fridge for up to 6 months.



### Tahini Dip

This dip is simple, yet flavorful. It pairs well with flatbread, crudité or atop a crunchy salad. It can also be used as a condiment on anything from roasted veggies to grilled meats.

#### Ingredients:

- 1½ cups water
- 1 cup tahini
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 Tbsp. lemon juice
- 1 Tbsp. white vinegar
- ½ tsp. cumin

#### Directions:

Add all of the ingredients together in a mixing bowl and stir thoroughly until blended and smooth. You may also use a food processor or blender on a low speed. Garnish with fresh parsley or olives. This recipe yields 3 cups.

### Nutrition Info

Per serving (¼ cup)

<b>Calories</b>	121
<b>Total Fat</b>	10.8g
<b>Carbohydrates</b>	4.6g
Fiber	1.9g
Sugar	0.2g
<b>Protein</b>	3.5g
<b>Sodium</b>	24mg



## Parenting Corner

# Navigating Back-to-School Uncertainty

There is no doubt that school is going to look different this year. Whether your student's school model is in-person, remote or a hybrid of both, there are a number of things you can do to help prepare yourself and your student.

### Prepare for Transition

While any plan that includes in-person learning will be fluid, there are still steps that parents can take to prepare, including:

- **Get back on schedule.** Refresh your rules about screen time and re-establish sleep and wake schedules at least two weeks before school starts.
- **Remind your child that this is new for their teachers as well.** Ask your child for ideas on how they can help support teachers and their classroom. From helping with needed supplies to learning how to clean their own desks, kids thrive knowing they're doing their part to help.
- **Keep your employer informed of your plans and try to manage expectations and workload.** If you anticipate your child will be engaging in remote classes, re-establish boundaries for your own at-home workspace and schedule. You may have "off-limits" hours or enforce a do-not-disturb rule during meetings.

### Physical Health & Safety

- **Have kids practice wearing a mask.** If your child is used to wearing a mask when school starts, it will help them stay calm and focus and will also relieve their teacher from having to teach them.
- **Work on amped up hygiene/handwashing in the home** so it's a habit at school.
- **Talk to younger kids about social distancing and keeping personal space.** It might be useful to use a hula hoop for reference.
- **Move forward with scheduled vaccinations.**

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“ When life's stressful, our kids **watch us for cues.** When we keep **calm amid chaos,** we teach our kids they can, too. ”

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### Mental Health

- **Talk openly with your child about their feelings and validate their concerns.** Remind them that this is new for everyone – adults and children, and it's normal to have fear, excitement, worry or any range of emotions. There is no right and wrong.
- **Keep any reservations or negativity you may have around the school situation away from your child.** Children often take emotional cues from adults, so it's important for us to manage our emotions well. If we are positive about change, our kids will be, too.
- **Encourage your kids to stay connected.** A sense of belonging is crucial to mental health. Kids may struggle with cancellations of sports, music, drama, clubs and other extracurricular activities that foster belonging. Help them find alternative activities, and if you notice any signs of depression, seek help.

If you need additional support, there are many online resources available. Here are just a few:

- [BoysTown National Hotline](#) for Parents can assist with all parenting concerns
- [List of Mental Health Resources and Hotlines for Teens](#)
- [AACAP COVID Coping Resource Center](#)
- [Child Mind Institute Family COVID Resource Center](#)
- Mental Health Compassionate Ear Warm Line: (913) 281-2251



# Too Connected for Comfort

## How to Adjust When Social Media Is Consuming Your Life



In the midst of the pandemic, people have taken to social media more than ever as they struggle to keep up with the latest recommendations and look for ways to maintain connections with friends and loved ones. However, while social media helps us meet some of our needs for connection and belonging, it also creates many additional challenges as we are pummeled with unsolicited advice and sift through copious amounts of conflicting media messages.

Research consistently shows it can also be detrimental to one's emotional wellbeing. For example, depression and anxiety are commonly associated with excessive Internet and social media use. Phenomena such as "Facebook depression" and "social media overdependence" are cited as modern day mental health issues. One recent [study](#) found that use of Facebook was correlated to less moment-to-moment happiness and less life satisfaction, plausibly due to feelings of social isolation. Another [study](#) showed that

after adjusting for time spent on social media, those individuals who reported using seven to 11 social media platforms had more than three times the risk of depression and anxiety than those who used just one or two.

A survey conducted by MyLife.com showed that 56% of social media users are afraid of missing important updates and events if they do not stay connected to their social networks. Moreover, while 52% of those surveyed said they have considered taking a break from one or more social networks in the past year, only 24% indicated they will likely do so.

Social media may feel addictive because it is designed to be. Known in the tech world as brain hacking, social media platforms are built to trigger the dopamine centers of our brains that make us feel good. Every like, comment, text message or positive online social connection has the potential to generate a dopamine release. The technology used is similar to that in slot

machines, which use variable reward schedules to keep the user engaged as much as possible. Specifically, they offer rewards at random (even rationing likes and comments by withholding them at times and releasing them in bulk other times), which leads users to check their social media sites habitually.

Time to take a break? One recent [study](#) showed a multi-faceted effect on wellbeing by taking a break from Facebook. Those participants who took a one-week break had increases in life satisfaction and greater positive emotions compared to the control group. If you notice yourself spending more time than you would like indulging in social media or if you feel it impacting your emotional wellbeing, relationships and more, it may be beneficial to step away. This month's Mindful Minute contains some helpful tips to curb social media use and maintain some control.

# Mindful Minute

## Social Media Break

In our pocket lies a device that, at the touch of a button, connects us to almost anyone we choose and provides an endless amount of information and entertainment. However, it can have its drawbacks. If taking a break from social media seems necessary or appealing, the following tips may be helpful in curbing your use and regaining control:

**Turn your phone to grayscale, removing the tantalizing color and making it less appealing.** For help in finding your phone's grayscale settings, click [here](#).

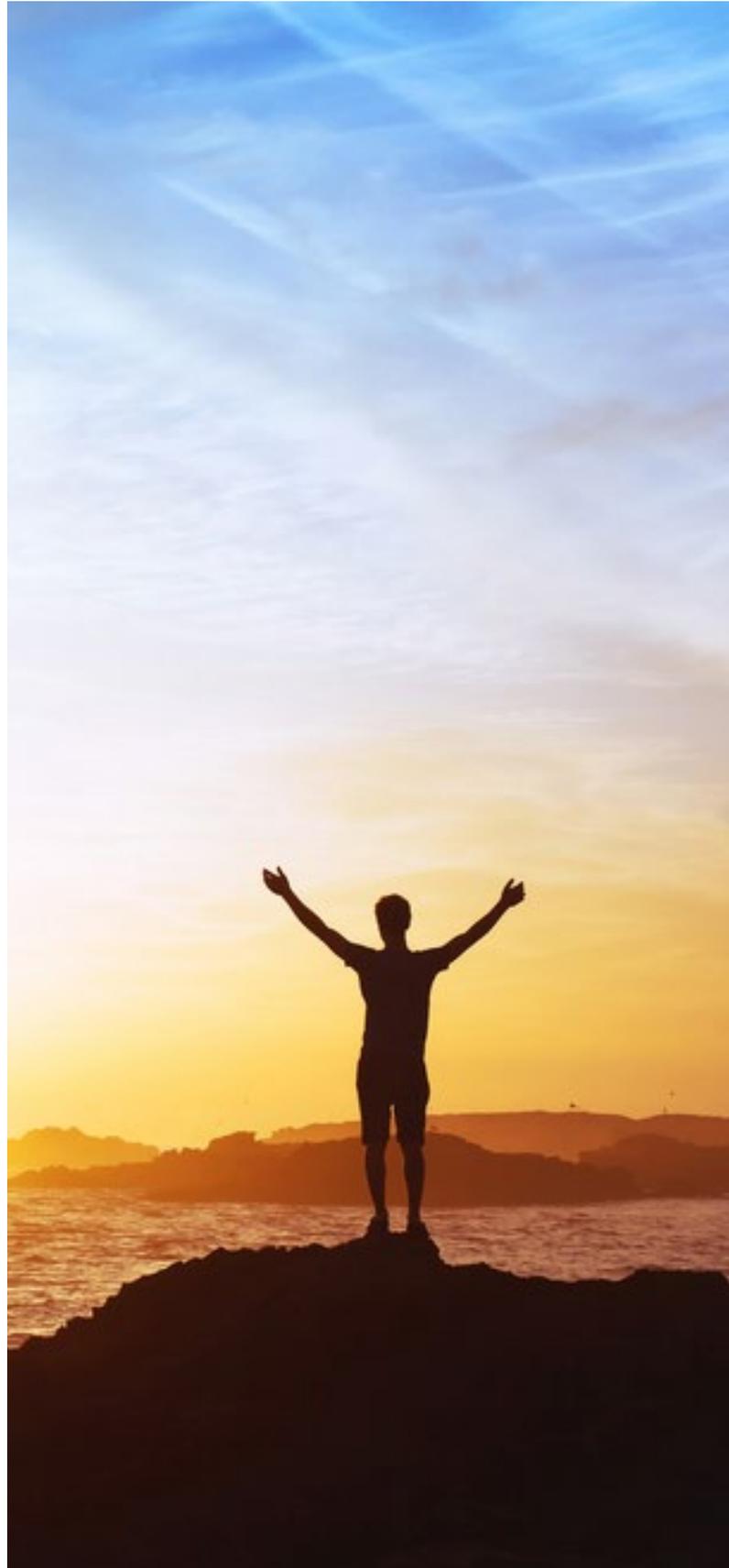
**Remove apps from your phone and switch to logging in and out of social media sites.** This extra effort can help build in time to reflect whether, indeed, you want to spend your time looking at a particular site.

**Turn off push notifications** that alert you of updates, posts, likes, etc., which can lead to impulsively opening an app.

**Try the [Space app](#),** which helps users break their phone addiction through a 60-day program designed to create more mindfulness around one's phone usage. It also provides helpful tips to create a better phone/life balance.

**Establish rules regarding times you will refrain from using your phone and stick to them.** Consider limiting or abstaining from phone use during meals, conversations, work meetings, playtime with children, in class, in bed, etc.

While overcoming the addictive nature of social media can be challenging for anyone, becoming conscious of your use through these methods or others may help you regain control.



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