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Wellness Through Answers News

November - December, 2021

***Linking Connecticut Patients, Families, and Residents to
Reliable Health Information***

A Recipe for a Holiday Cheer

This "recipe" comes from the Public Health Communications Collaborative [Safety Tips for Thanksgiving 2021](#). You can download the tips and accompanying social media posts in English or Spanish.

Follow these steps for a safe holiday:

- Get vaccinated - Children and adults age five and up should get a COVID-19 vaccine.
- Wear a mask - Wear a cloth or surgical face mask over your mouth and nose when grocery shopping or in other public indoor settings, or when serving food.
- Wash your hands before eating or serving food.
- Hold your meal outdoors, weather permitting.

- Communicate in advance with guests about your COVID-19 rules and precautions. Cancel plans if you're sick.
- Travel safely - Delay travel if you are not vaccinated or feeling sick. If traveling with unvaccinated family members, avoid crowds, wear a mask, and get tested.

Don't Let Salmonella Ruin Your Holiday Meal

Investigative journalists at ProPublica [reported on a deadly strain](#) of Salmonella that has been allowed to spread in US poultry processing plants due to ineffective food safety regulations. ProPublica blames a toothless food safety system for allowing the sale of contaminated chicken and turkey. Consumers should not assume the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) seal on the packaging means poultry is safe.

Consumers who want a healthy holiday turkey can use ProPublica's "[Chicken Checker](#)." The Chicken Checker is a searchable database of salmonella records at US poultry plants. Consumers type in the "P Number" on the poultry packaging to find the salmonella contamination rate for the plant that processed that bird. The USDA assigns P Numbers to poultry processing plants. The number appears near the use-by date, inspection stamp, or price tag.

Follow these CDC and USDA kitchen safety practices to prevent bacterial contamination:

- Don't rinse the turkey - splashing water can cause cross-contamination
- Wash your hands and work surfaces frequently with soap and water
- Use a separate cutting board for raw meat
- Use a meat thermometer to make sure the turkey cooks to 165 degrees to kill Salmonella
- Cook stuffing by itself until it reaches 165 degrees

Additional food safety resources:

- [Partnership for Food Safety Education](#) - food safety basics, food poisoning, safe recipes
- [CDC - How to Wash Your Hands](#)
- [CDC - Food Safety Tips for Your Holiday Turkey](#)
- [USDA - tips for safe stuffing](#)
- [USDA poultry basting, brining and marinating](#)
- [USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline](#) - 1-888-674-6854 year-round Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. ET (English or Spanish)

Radon and Lung Cancer

Radon is the [second leading cause of lung cancer](#) in the United States and is responsible for about [21,000 lung cancer deaths each year](#). It is a colorless, odorless gas that forms when radioactive elements in the soil and rock decay. The gas enters buildings through cracks in floors or walls, construction joints, or gaps in foundations around pipes, wires, or pumps. Building materials including wallboard and granite used for countertops may also emit radon.

Testing is the only way to find out if your home has elevated radon levels. Consumers can order a free radon test kit from the Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH) in January, Radon Action Month. Contact the DPH Radon Program for order information: (860) 509-7300 or DPH.RadonReports@ct.gov. Consumers can buy test kits from The American Lung Association of New England (1-800-LUNG-USA) or local hardware stores.

Helpful resources for learning more about radon, testing, and home repairs are available from the [US Environmental Protection Agency](#) and [DPH websites](#).

Vaccine News

- Booster dose and messaging [outreach toolkit](#)
- Everyone 18 and older can get a [booster shot](#)
- [Protein-based vaccines](#) could change the pandemic's course
- A large and [growing share](#) of unvaccinated Americans identify as Republican
- [Who are](#) the scientists and executives who made COVID vaccines a reality?
- January 4 [vaccination deadline](#) for big US employers
- What do [vaccine mandates](#) mean for firms and employees?
- What do [young Americans think](#) about COVID vaccines?
- Vaccines don't cause [menstrual changes](#)

COVID-19 Updates

- Eight things to know about [antiviral pills](#)
- CT changes COVID [quarantining policy](#) for schools
- CDC designates more European countries as [high-risk travel](#) destinations
- [Antibody protection](#) from mild COVID-19 may not last
- NIH-funded researchers discover [more clues](#) to why the Delta variant spreads so quickly
- [COVID coinfections](#) aren't always bad news for patients

- What does it mean when a virus becomes [endemic](#)?
- NIH starts a [long-term study](#) of children with COVID
- [COVID misinformation](#) continues unchecked on podcasts and radio shows
- Scientists deliver a [gloomy COVID forecast](#) for the winter
- [New clues](#) are emerging about the biology of Long COVID
- Progress in [at-home treatments](#) for people with COVID
- Regeneron [antibody cocktail](#) may offer COVID protection for people who do not respond to COVID-19 vaccines
- No [survival benefit](#) with Ivermectin
- New Kaiser Family Foundation report on [COVID-19 misinformation](#)
- "[When to Test](#)," calculator tells you when to get tested for COVID

FDA Approves the First Eye Drop for Presbyopia

Older adults who struggle with blurry near vision may soon be able to toss their reading glasses. The [Food and Drug Administration](#) approved the first eye drop medication to treat presbyopia. The once-daily eye drop, called Vituity (pilocarpine), appears to be safe and effective.

Presbyopia is the age-related gradual loss of your eye's ability to focus on objects up close. It affects [one in eight Americans over age 50](#) and billions of people worldwide. How does the medication work? As we age, our lenses become stiffer. The lenses sit just behind your pupils, and this stiffness makes it harder to see things up close. Vituity makes your pupils temporarily smaller so they can better focus on objects that are close to you. [Clinical trials](#) showed within 15 minutes of taking the medication, participants experienced vision improvements that lasted for six hours. The most common side effects of Vituity were headaches and eye redness. Less common side effects that occurred in these trials [included](#):

- Altered vision
- Blurry vision
- Eye irritation
- Eye pain
- Watery eye

Vituity will probably [work best](#) for people with mild to moderate presbyopia.

Smartphone Technology May Help People with Mild Dementia Remain Independent Longer

Alzheimer's disease and related dementias (ADRD) rob people of their ability to follow through on intentions they set, like attending appointments, taking medications, or relaying messages. Brain scientists refer to the ability to remember as "prospective memory." It helps people manage daily activities and keep their lives on track. Loss of prospective memory eventually prevents patients with ADRD from living independently.

In the absence of effective drug treatments, researchers have focused on behavioral therapies like brain training, mnemonics, and electronic memory. Smartphones with reminder apps may help adults with ADRD live independently longer. [A new study](#) randomly assigned adults with mild ADRD smartphones with a reminder app or a digital recorder app. Study participants and their caregivers received training on smartphone features and how to use the apps. Researchers assessed prospective memory through experimenter-assigned tasks, structured interviews, and questionnaires. They also measured participant phone and app usage, acceptability ratings, quality of life, and independent activities of daily living.

After four weeks of using smartphone memory aids, two-thirds of participants reported improved prospective memory functioning. Improvements in memory paralleled participants' quality of life improvements.

Set a Healthier Holiday Table with Plant-Based Dishes

Poor dietary choices lead to poor health outcomes. Many Americans have [suboptimal diets](#) - high in processed meats, sodium, and added sugar and [low in fruits, vegetables](#), and whole grains. Suboptimal diets [are associated with 45%](#) of diabetes, heart disease, and stroke deaths. By contrast, whole-food plant-based diets improve the management of chronic health conditions. Patients with Type 2 diabetes on a low-fat plant-based diet [reduced their A-1 C levels](#) comparable to reductions achieved by patients taking medications but without harmful drug side effects. Patients enrolled in the [Lifestyle Heart Trial](#) reversed their heart disease by following a low-fat vegetarian diet along with lifestyle changes.

Plant-based foods are healthier because:

- plants are lower in fat and rich in essential fiber
- plants have no cholesterol
- plants are rich in antioxidants that reduce inflammation and fight disease

Dietary changes can be daunting, especially around the holidays. Fortunately, people do not have to become vegans or vegetarians to reap the benefits of plant-based diets. Simply adding more plant-based recipes or swapping a plant-based protein for meat will yield results. Here are some resources for taking a plant-forward approach to meals:

- [Physicians' Committee for Responsible Medicine](#) - plant-based nutrition, vegan diet kickstart, recipes, cooking classes
- [T Colin Campbell Center for Nutrition Studies](#) - a primer on living a whole-food, plant-based life, recipes, cooking tips, and a free plant-based foods "mini-course"
- [Cookie and Kate](#) - whole foods and vegetarian recipe blog
- [MyPlate](#) - meal planning resources, recipes, tips for increasing fruit and vegetable consumption
- [Old Ways](#) - meal planning, recipes, and education about African, Asian, Latin American, and Mediterranean cultural eating traditions
- [American Institute For Cancer Research](#) - articles, recipes, and activities for plant-forward eating.

More News and Resources You Can Use

- Lonely Planet's tips for safe pandemic [road trips](#)
- Best holiday gifts for [caregivers](#) and for [adults with dementia](#)
- Calculate how much of your life [you will lose](#) by returning to the office
- Instagram tests the "[Take a Break](#)" tool to let users self-regulate
- What you need to know about the science of [climate change](#) in six charts
- Tips for keeping a [gratitude journal](#)
- NutritionFacts.org video about health problems caused by [cannabis](#)
- Signing up for Medicare? Beware of [scammers!](#)
- Prevent accidental falls in your home with these [home assessment tools](#) and home modification programs
- [Constraint-Induced Movement Therapy](#) yields significant long-term results in children with cerebral palsy
- New cars [will stop](#) if the driver has a heart attack
- How states are handling [lead](#) in school drinking water
- Best free or low-cost apps for planning [epic hikes](#)
- [Mobility exercises](#) for healthy hips
- [Brain reprocessing therapy](#) successful for some types of chronic pain

Have a Personal Health Question?

Wellness Through Answers staff can help you find answers. Our medical librarians research personal health questions for Connecticut residents. Our service is free and confidential. Call or email us with your question: (860) 679-4055 / hnet@uchc.edu

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