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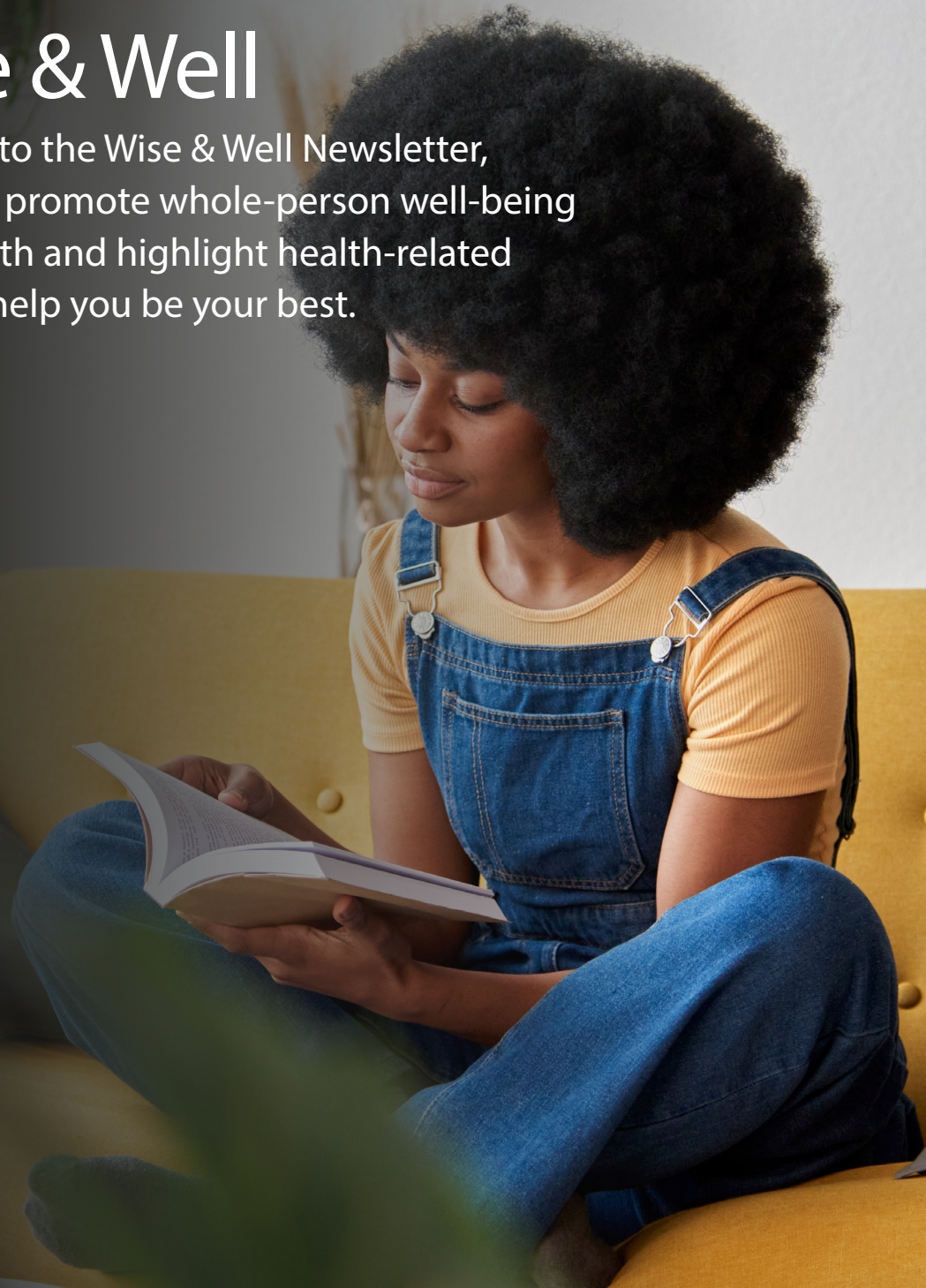
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Wise & Well

Welcome to the Wise & Well Newsletter, where we promote whole-person well-being each month and highlight health-related topics to help you be your best.



Stress Awareness Month

Life these days feels increasingly stressful. Ongoing inflation and economic uncertainty, demands at work and home, and even the never-ending negativity we experience navigating the news can make it seem like life is nothing but one big ball of stress. While some stress is productive – think working on an important project or getting ready to go on vacation – chronic stressors can take a real toll on our overall well-being. As April is Stress Awareness Month, it's an excellent time to review and assess our current levels of personal stress and revisit ways to better build and manage healthy coping habits.

In a nutshell, managing stress requires, to varying degrees, identifying its root causes, communicating struggles as they arise, and making the most out of stress-related coping strategies. This is incredibly important as chronic stress can put our mental and physical health through the wringer without proper management. In fact, prolonged activation of the body's stress response system and associated hormone release can disrupt almost every system over time — from cardiovascular to gastrointestinal to reproductive health.

Systemic Physical Effects of Chronic Stress

The Cardiovascular System – Surging hormones strain the heart long-term, inflaming blood vessels and raising stroke and heart attack risk.

The Reproductive System – Both men and women may experience reduced sex drive, menstrual disruption and fertility issues.

The Gastrointestinal System – Persistent chemical signals can upset digestion, cause intestinal inflammation and compromise gut lining integrity.

The Musculoskeletal System – The constant muscle tension experienced under stress may lead to chronic headaches, migraines and body aches.

Have you had trouble sleeping lately? Does your head hurt more often than normal? Have you felt more anxious, restless or susceptible to anger? If you've experienced any of these things, you may be showing signs of chronic stress overload. The good news is that while we cannot always control external stress-inducing situations, we have more agency than we realize over our physiological and psychological responses. The important thing is to be able to identify when stress levels become toxic.

Take a Breather or a Break with a Friend

Paying attention to subtle cues from your body and mind can help clue you in that it's time to take a breather and mitigate tension whenever possible. Another constructive way to take back some control is to openly communicate what's bothering you with trusted friends and family who can listen empathetically. Sometimes, simply verbalizing feelings and difficulties provides a healthy outlet for stress relief. Furthermore, reaching out for social support builds resilience when some challenges feel too overwhelming. Even just taking time over coffee to laugh and vent frustrations can make burdens from stress feel lighter and more manageable. It's a great reminder that we don't have to endure life's trials alone and that there exists an innate human capacity to lift each other up during times of adversity.

Coping Strategies

We can also build our resilience through coping strategies. Being able to mindfully mitigate our way through the toughest of stressful days can sometimes feel like a superpower. Despite its simplicity, engaging in activities like taking deep breaths, meditating for a few minutes, going for a walk in nature, or perhaps most importantly, switching off our phones, laptops, tablets and TVs for a set period to decompress can activate our relaxation response. Even occasionally reaching out for comfort food in lieu of a nutritious snack or decisively saying "no" to outside requests allows us to reclaim small pieces of agency amidst the chaos of day-to-day life.

Surviving to Thriving

Just remember, progress happens in increments. Consistently choosing tactics that nourish both your mind and body will help you emerge better equipped to tackle demands from a place of inner calm rather than utter depletion. By identifying when stress is getting the best of you, communicating when you feel overwhelmed, and engaging in stress resilience rituals, you can make that all-important shift from surviving to thriving.



Additional Resources

Upcoming Wise & Well Webinar — Register Now!

Brain ON! Mental Fitness Strategies to Combat Stress and Burnout to Achieve Peak Performance at Work

When: Tuesday, April 9 | Noon – 1:00 p.m. ET

Embark on a transformative journey with best-selling author and human performance thought leader, Deb Smolensky, in this upcoming webinar. Discover the secrets to unlock your brain's full potential to achieve peak performance at work. During the session, you'll gain valuable insights into optimizing your focus, boosting your energy, and maximizing productivity and joy in both your workday and personal life.

To register, [click here](#) or scan the QR code below. For more information about the webinar, view the [Employee Flyer](#).



Monthly Moves

5-Minute Stress Reliever Bodyweight Workout

It is possible to reduce the effects of stress within the confines of your office or the comforts of your living room in five minutes or less. This 5-minute stress reliever full-body workout from Gold's Gym will help you get an effective bodyweight-based workout that will not only get your heart pumping but also help reduce stress.

Perform 1-2 rounds of this workout at high intensity.

- 01 Jumping Jacks**
Begin standing with feet together and arms by your side. Jump up and out to the side with both feet so that your feet are wide apart. While jumping out, raise your arms straight up and out to your side until your palms are together above your head. Jump your feet back together as you return your arms to your side, and you've completed one rep.
The goal: 20 reps
- 02 Air Squats**
Start with your feet shoulder-width apart and toes slightly turned out. Bend your knees, lowering your hips until they're between your knees or as low as you can go while keeping your back as upright as possible. Repeat for reps.
The goal: 15 reps
- 03 Push-ups**
Get in a plank position on all fours from either your knees or your toes, depending on your comfort level. With hands directly below your shoulders and body straight, lower your body until your chest touches the floor. Press up from the floor until your arms are straight.
The goal: 10 reps
- 04 Glute Bridges**
Lie on your back, with arms comfortably at your sides and knees bent. Press your heels into the floor and raise your hips, shifting pressure to the upper shoulder. No pressure should be felt in the neck or back. For advanced-level positions, try touching your fingertips to the back of your shoes or clasping your hands behind your back and drawing your shoulder blades together.
The goal: 10 reps
- 05 Inchworms**
From a standing position, bend over as if you're going to touch your toes, but place your hands flat on the ground in front of you. (Depending on your flexibility, you may need to bend your knees slightly or place your hands a few inches away from your feet.) Slowly walk your hands forward until your body is in a plank position, and then slowly walk your feet forward to meet your hands, returning to the bent position.
The goal: 5 reps

Tap [here](#) for a demonstration.

Source: [goldsgym.com](https://www.goldsgym.com)



Braised Chicken Thighs with Olive, Orange and Fennel

April is a great month to focus on anti-inflammatory eating along with your stress awareness. This braised chicken thigh dish can help reduce inflammation and, by proxy, relieve joint stiffness, digestive issues and high blood pressure. As an added bonus, these delicious flavors will get you ready for spring and feeling your best.

Ingredients

- 4 teaspoons fennel seeds
- 4 large bone-in, skinless chicken thighs (1 3/4-2 lbs. total), trimmed
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon ground pepper
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 medium onion, chopped (1 cup)
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 1/8 teaspoon crushed red pepper
- 2 teaspoons orange zest
- 1/2 cup orange juice
- 1 (15 ounce) can no-salt-added diced tomatoes
- 1 bay leaf
- 2 tablespoons coarsely chopped pitted Kalamata olives

Directions

1. Place fennel seeds on a cutting board and crush them with the bottom of a small saucepan. Set aside.
2. Season chicken with salt and pepper. Heat oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add the chicken and cook, turning as needed, until browned all over, 5-7 minutes total. Transfer to a plate.
3. Add onion to the pan and cook, stirring often, until softened and starting to brown, 3-5 minutes. Add garlic, crushed red pepper and the crushed fennel seeds; cook, stirring, until fragrant, 30-60 seconds. Add orange juice and bring to a simmer. Cook for one minute. Add tomatoes and bay leaf; return to a simmer. Cook for one minute, mashing the tomatoes with a potato masher.
4. Return the chicken and any accumulated juices to the pan. Adjust heat to maintain a simmer. Partially cover the pan; cook until the chicken is tender and an instant-read thermometer inserted into the thickest part of the thigh without touching bone registers at least 175 degrees F, 40-45 minutes. Discard the bay leaf. Stir in olives and orange zest.

Source: [eatingwell.com](https://www.eatingwell.com)