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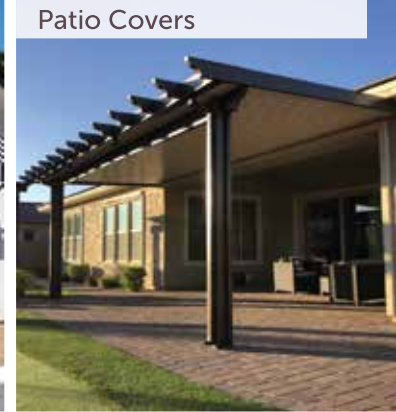
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Group travel is an amazing way to meet like-minded people. The activities and meals are designed to spark conversations and create a friendly and welcoming atmosphere. It's the perfect setup for those looking to make connections and possibly form long-lasting friendships during their trip.

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Package tours allow you to explore hidden gems and off-the-beaten-path destinations that you might not have considered visiting on your own. With carefully crafted itineraries and local guides, you're sure to have an enriching and unforgettable travel experience.

### MORE AFFORDABLE

Group travel is a fantastic way to get more bang for your buck. You get to split transportation and accommodation expenses with others, and travel agencies can often secure great deals on meals and activities for groups. It's a win-win situation! In short, organized group travel is a wise choice for those seeking a safe and rewarding experience. Book your next getaway in good company today!



**JANUARY 2025**

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### West Valley Star

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"Be quick to listen,  
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 and slow to anger."

— James 1:19

Dwayne Johnson is riding a Christmas movie high with "Red One," an exceptional action/thriller co-starring Chris Evans, J.K. Simmons and Lucy Liu. He also has the animated film "Moana 2" and the live-action "Moana" (due in July 2026). Back in 2002, he informed his agents that he wanted to be bigger than Will Smith or George Clooney. When they expressed skepticism, The Rock delivered a TKO punch and sacked them!

★ ★ ★

Social media's been buzzing about "Blue Bloods," with fans inferring that it'll be renewed for season 15. Official blurbs claim that Tom Selleck is certain CBS will come to their senses and renew it. But even as a producer and an Emmy winner for "Magnum, P.I.," he couldn't get the hit series past eight seasons.

When "Blue Bloods" began in 2010, the actors' contracts had automatic salary bumps yearly. By season 13, actors had to take pay cuts to reduce the high cost of producing the show or face cancellation. Selleck, of course, was the highest-paid at \$200,000 an episode, while Donnie Wahlberg earned \$60,000 in the beginning but was bumped up to \$150,000. Will Estes earned \$100,000, and when you're in all 288 episodes as they were, it becomes a big payday! Add in the escalated costs of

shooting in NYC, and CBS had to cancel the show!

Had it remained a top-10 show (it's currently placed 37), it might have swayed CBS Entertainment president Amy Reisenbach, who explained, "It is a function of having a really strong schedule that we have to refresh, and that means in order to refresh, shows have to eventually end."



PHOTO CREDIT: IMDB

**Tom Selleck in Blue Bloods**

There were even alleged quotes from Selleck saying that he needs "Blue Bloods" to be renewed in order to maintain his avocado farm, which had to be untrue since his net worth is estimated to be at \$45 million!

★ ★ ★

Matthew McConaughey has been busy making two new films. The first is a crime thriller titled "The Rivals of Amziah King," co-starring Kurt Russell and Cole Sprouse. McConaughey plays a mentor to his former foster child after the loss of her mother. He will also star in Apple TV+'s "The Lost Bus" with America Ferrera.

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## Changes to Social Security login

If you use the **My Social Security** account online, you'll need to make several changes or you'll be locked out.

If you haven't updated your account since Sept. 18, 2021, using the new method, the login for checking your Social Security account is no more and your username won't work. You'll now need to create a new account using one of their credential service providers at [www.Login.gov](http://www.Login.gov).

Having access to your Social Security information can have several benefits, whether you currently receive benefits or not. You can get an estimate of future benefits, check on the status of your application or get a replacement card. You can confirm your earnings or get an SSA-1099 tax form. You can update your information such as address and either set up or change your direct deposit.

Security is one big reason they've made this change. You'll be using federal authentication standards that provide safe and secure online access.

To get started on creating your new **My Social Security** account, go online to [www.ssa.gov/myaccount](http://www.ssa.gov/myaccount). Scroll down to click the link to a 3-minute YouTube video that will give step-by-step instructions. (Beware: Below the video are links to several other videos, but only click on ones listed as the U.S. Social Security Administration.) Also take a look at the Frequently Asked Questions for more good information.

During the process of creating your account, you'll need to receive a call or text that will give you a special code to verify your identity. If you run into problems and can't access an activation code, you might need to receive your activation code by mail. Call for assistance at 800-772-1213, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. When the machine answers, say, "Help desk."

Each time you sign into your account, you'll be sent a one-time code for security as part of two-factor authentication.



## Strange But True

by Lucie Winborne

*A theory suggests that the entire internet, based on the mass of moving electrons, weighs about as much as a strawberry.*

*Spiked and studded dog collars derive from the days of the ancient Greeks, who would give their sheepdogs sharply spiked collars to protect their necks from wolves while they watched over a shepherd's flock at night.*

*The "Ding" bowl, purchased for \$3 at a New York garage sale, turned out to be a 1,000-year-old Chinese bowl from the Northern Song Dynasty. It later sold at auction for \$2.2 million.*

*Big League Chew bubble-gum created its biggest-ever pouch for Shaquille O'Neal, at an impressive 24 inches by 18 inches, more than 15 times the size of a regular pouch.*

*Contrary to popular belief, the bottom figures on a totem pole usually hold the most significance, as their placement keeps them closer to viewers.*

*Montana's Flathead Lake looks shallow due to its crystal-clear water, but is actually 370 feet deep.*

*The expiration date on bottled water is for the bottle, not the water.*

*In 2004, farmers in India used Pepsi and Coca-Cola instead of pesticides because they were cheaper and got the job done just as well. Not surprisingly, Pepsi and Coca-Cola strongly disagreed.*



# DISASTER IS CLOSER THAN YOU THINK

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Water leaking from the tubing to your ice maker or a broken valve in your bathroom can cause extensive damage to your home. Older adults experience a significantly higher rate of home fires compared to the general population. And we've all seen the roof damage an Arizona monsoon can cause.

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## POTTERY: find your inner peace

process requires focus and attention to detail, making it an ideal mindfulness activity. Research has shown that pottery can help combat anxiety and depression, offering a therapeutic escape from everyday stress.

### SENSE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT

The beauty of pottery lies in its tangible results. After shaping, drying and firing, your creation comes to life as an object you can use. The sense of accomplishment that follows not only boosts your mood but also contributes to your overall well-being.

### ACCESSIBLE TO ALL

The great thing about pottery is that it's suitable for everyone, whether you're a child, an adult, a beginner or a seasoned pro. It's even suitable for expectant mothers and parents of young children, offering a soothing and rewarding experience.

Do you want to get started? Sign up for an individual, group or family pottery class and enjoy this zen-like experience all year round. An online search will yield several options in the West Valley.

Are you looking for an activity that improves your dexterity and reduces stress? Pottery classes have been gaining popularity, and for good reason.

### MINDFULNESS PRACTICE

Pottery involves shaping clay into functional or decorative objects, often using a potter's wheel. This

A promotional graphic for Saddle Mountain Brewing Company (SMB). The background is white with a pattern of small, golden-brown beer grains. The text is in bold, black, sans-serif fonts. At the top, it says "DRINK LOCAL. EAT LOCAL." Below that, it reads "AWARD-WINNING BEERS &amp; GREAT FOOD ALL RIGHT HERE IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD." The central focus is the large, stylized letters "SMB" and "BC" in a distressed, black font. At the bottom left, there is contact information: "SADDLE MOUNTAIN BREWING COMPANY", "15651 W ROOSEVELT ST", "GOODYEAR, AZ", "(623) 249-5520", and "SADDLEMOUNTAINBREWING.COM". A circular logo for Saddle Mountain Brewing Company is at the bottom left.



# MISSION 2025

by Matilda Charles

“Your mission, should you choose to accept it...” you know that quote, from “Mission: Impossible”. Members of the team are always tasked with stopping enemy forces, a job that always seems to be impossible but really isn’t. That’s our challenge for 2025— to stop the “enemy forces” who want to steal our money, our identification and our peace of mind.

## Some ideas for staying safe from scammers:

- Ask your senior center to host a seminar about scams aimed at seniors.
- Don’t click on links in email or text messages.
- Don’t answer the phone if you don’t know who it is. If a caller says they’re from your bank, hang up and call the bank to see if they really did call you.
- Don’t give out any information over the phone, no matter who it is. The IRS, Medicare or Social Security aren’t going to call you to ask for your account numbers or threaten to have you arrested.
- If a caller asks, “Can you hear me?” never say “yes.” That one word will be recorded and give them permission to authorize charges on your credit card, or to make a payment. Just hang up.
- If a company claims you’re having a virus problem with your computer and wants access to fix it, just hang up.
- Never announce on social media that you’re going away on vacation. It alerts thieves that your house will be empty.
- Go online and search for scams against seniors. Become familiar with all the tricks thieves use to get you to let down your guard. Learn about the red flags for the grandparent scam, the lottery scam, the counterfeit check scam, the undelivered package scam ... there are just so many of them, and they rob seniors of billions of dollars each year.

Make your goal — I mean your mission for 2025 not to fall for any scams. It’s not impossible.

# Do you really lose the ability to learn new things as you age?

Are you in your fifties and considering returning to school or taking a course in a new subject, such as art, languages, music or history? You might hear some people saying that your brain is "too old" to learn. Don't listen to them.

First and foremost, there's no age limit on learning something new. The idea that young people always learn better than their elders is a myth. Research has proven that the brain remains adaptable throughout your entire life, thanks to a fascinating process called "neuroplasticity."

In practical terms, when you stimulate your brain by taking a course or memorizing a concept, the existing connections between your neurons strengthen and new ones form. To really "boost" your brain, pick an area that genuinely interests you but also pushes you out of your comfort zone. In other words, it must be fun, but not too easy.

It's true that aging has an impact on working memory, making it more challenging for you to recall events and connect them with their context. This is a perfectly normal phenomenon and should in no way discourage you from pursuing your desire to learn. Want to keep your brain healthy? Look for courses and workshops in your area and sign up today.



## Here's a Tip

by JoAnn Derson

*"A great thing to do for house guests is to print out a copy of the channel lineup for your cable service provider or TV instructions for streaming movies, etc. You could also include the wi-fi password and common remote control buttons for any remote-control or This helps us older folks enjoy a few hours of TV time while the younger kids are out at work or school." -- H.P. in Nebraska*

*Want to keep your cut flowers fresh longer? Add a teaspoon of chlorine bleach to the water and change it every few days.*


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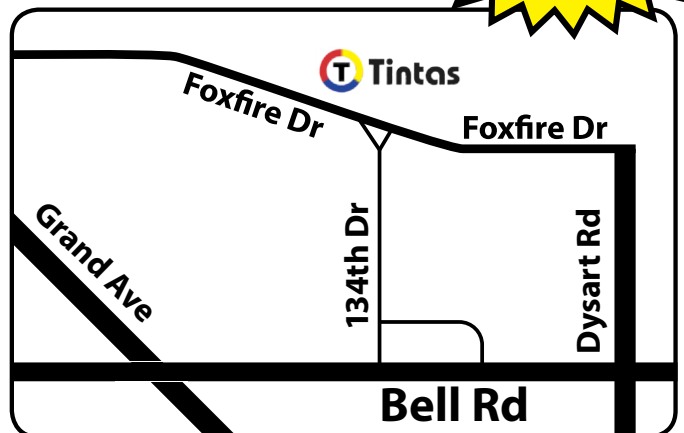
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## The OIG Always Comes Through

Things are going to be different in 2025. If there's one thing I hope, it's that the Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General isn't hit with any budget or staffing reductions. As time goes on we need them more than ever to dig out, investigate and expose all the problems in the VA.

The PACT Act of 2022, for example, required screenings for toxic exposures -- as well as training for the VA medical staff to do those screenings. Within a short time, screenings had been done on 4 million veterans out of the 9 million who were enrolled in VA health care. That's approximately 45% of the total. Training for staff, however, didn't come close. When additional training was required, only 21.4% of staff completed it, which means that a lot of veterans were screened by staff who hadn't done all of their training.

Then there is the matter of communication that the VA OIG exposed: A "package manager" computer program at the VA bundles up the documents for a veteran's claims and then sends them off to a printer. The VA OIG discovered that, because nobody was paying attention to the problem, over 2 million packages weren't printed...

because nobody hit the "send" button. The veterans, therefore, did not receive the communications from the VA, which might have been asking for more evidence for a claim to be processed or notification about a claim decision and information about options for responding to that decision.

Equally valuable are the frauds that the OIG nails. A recent scam involved a pharmaceutical company that offered a particular test kit, claiming that the kit could diagnose a certain condition. Then they were able to push the very expensive therapy drug they produced for that condition. Kickbacks were involved, of course. The company ended up paying \$47 million for their scam. Keep your fingers crossed. In a perfect world, the VA OIG will maintain an adequate budget and staffing. Doubling it would be better.

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# Paying with cash: beneficial or not?

In case you hadn't noticed, cash is no longer king.

When shopping in-store, consumers often prefer to use credit and debit cards. Many businesses and restaurants in the Valley no longer even accept cash. However, as some herald the decline of cash payments, others are committing to using physical currency. Whether it's a matter of habit or principle, is there a benefit to paying with cash?

## ADVANTAGES

There are still plenty of great reasons to use cash for your purchases. There's no worry about equipment failure or downtime, and it saves you from fees and interest. Plus, it keeps you on budget. You only spend the money you actually have instead of dipping into other funds.

Additionally, cash transactions are free of charge for merchants. Businesses pay fees to handle credit card transactions, and payment terminals and the contactless function also entail certain costs. Because of these expenses, some merchants have started offering discounts to customers to encourage them to pay with cash.

## DISADVANTAGES

Cash transactions don't enable you to establish a credit history, which could affect your ability to obtain loans or

a mortgage. Online or remote purchases using cash are almost impossible. Moreover, visiting a physical counter can be a hassle for consumers. Digital transactions can save business owners time when it comes to reconciling the days receipts, and for some businesses, cash presents an easier opportunity for employee theft.

The verdict? Paying cash has both pros and cons. Take a moment to reflect on your spending habits and be open to switching up your payment methods.



## ARIZONA RATTLEERS 2025 FOOTBALL SCHEDULE

	<b>MAR 30 (SUN) 3:05 PM</b> <b>Tucson Sugar Skulls</b> Glendale, AZ		<b>MAY 31 (SAT) 6:05 PM</b> <b>Vegas Knight Hawks</b> Henderson, NV
	<b>APR 6 (SUN) 1:05 PM</b> <b>Green Bay Blizzard</b> Green Bay, WI		<b>JUN 7 (SAT) 4:05 PM</b> <b>Jacksonville Sharks</b> Jacksonville, FL
	<b>APR 12 (SAT) 6:05 PM</b> <b>San Antonio Gunslingers</b> Glendale, AZ		<b>JUN 14 (SAT) 6:05 PM</b> <b>Tucson Sugar Skulls</b> Glendale, AZ
	<b>APR 26 (SAT) 6:05 PM</b> <b>Northern AZ Wranglers</b> Glendale, AZ		<b>JUN 21 (SAT) 6:05 PM</b> <b>Bay Area Panthers</b> San Jose, CA
	<b>MAY 3 (SAT) 6:05 PM</b> <b>Tucson Sugar Skulls</b> Tucson, AZ		<b>JUN 28 (SAT) 6:05 PM</b> <b>Green Bay Blizzard</b> Glendale, AZ
	<b>MAY 10 (SAT) 6:05 PM</b> <b>Bay Area Panthers</b> Glendale, AZ		<b>JUL 12 (SAT) 6:05 PM</b> <b>San Diego Strike Force</b> Glendale, AZ
	<b>MAY 17 (SAT) 6:00 PM</b> <b>Vegas Knight Hawks</b> Glendale, AZ		<b>JUL 19 (SAT) 4:05 PM</b> <b>San Antonio Gunslingers</b> San Antonio, TX
	<b>MAY 24 (SAT) 6:05 PM</b> <b>Northern AZ Wranglers</b> Prescott Valley, AZ		<b>JUL 27 (SUN) 6:05 PM</b> <b>San Diego Strike Force</b> San Diego, CA

## Cardiologist Doesn't Recommend OTC Sleep Aids

**DEAR DR. ROACH:** I am an 81-year-old man in reasonably good health. When I had trouble falling asleep, I would take a swig of Zzzquil, which worked perfectly every time. However, since then, my cardiologist told me to stop taking such products, so I turned to 5-mg tablets of melatonin in the evening to help induce drowsiness. Sometimes it worked, and sometimes it didn't.

One night, after I had three beers, I also took two gelscaps of Gas-X to alleviate the bloated feeling just before bed. It was about an hour or so after the melatonin, and I quickly dozed off to sleep. Since then, I noticed that if I awaken in the night and take another Gas-X, I shortly doze off again and have remarkable, complex dreams. Is this self-protocol of mine medically unsound in any way? -- W.G.

**ANSWER:** There's a lot going on here. First off, I completely agree with your cardiologist that the sleep aid you were taking, like most over-the-counter sleep aids, contains diphenhydramine, an antihistamine that sedates some people. The problem with this medicine is that the quality of sleep isn't good for many people. It also increases the risk of falls in older people and the risk of motor vehicle accidents in people who drive. It's not a good choice for older adults.

Melatonin is safer and has fewer side effect, one of them being vivid dreams. However, 5 mg is a big dose. I usually recommend 0.5-1 mg in my older patients. Gas-X (simethicone) isn't absorbed into the body and shouldn't cause vivid dreams. A search found no reports of abnormal dreams with simethicone, so it was almost certainly the melatonin that caused the dreams. Maybe Gas-X allowed you to sleep while the melatonin was still around enough to give you vivid dreams.

In addition, three beers on a regular basis are more than what is considered healthy for anyone, and a man in his 80s will be affected by three beers much more than a younger man of the same size.



*Dr. Roach regrets that he is unable to answer individual questions, but will incorporate them in the column whenever possible. Readers may email questions to [ToYourGoodHealth@med.cornell.edu](mailto:ToYourGoodHealth@med.cornell.edu).*

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# Paws and Claws

by Sam Mazzotta



## Introducing a new pet to your cat

**DEAR PAW'S CORNER:** I recently adopted a year-old puppy. "Max" is a friendly, well-socialized dog, and during the trial stay a month ago, my 10-year-old cat, "Nora," seemed to tolerate him. Well, on the second day that Max was home, he started barking excitedly. Nora sprang up and attacked him, cornering Max on the sofa. She batted him around the snout several times. Now, Max slinks out of the room anytime that Nora appears. How can I make peace between them? -- *Gerry G., Manchester, New Hampshire*

**DEAR GERRY** I'm sorry to hear that! Introducing a new pet into an established household can be stressful for both pets and sometimes unpredictable. And any negative interactions that occur -- from hissing and barking to an all-out boxing match -- can make future harmony nearly impossible to achieve. One or both pets may begin to exhibit behavioral issues like aggression, soiling in the house, chewing and scratching, and more.

For the foreseeable future, you'll need to manage and monitor all interactions between Max and Nora. As soon as they begin to react negatively, they need to be separated.

Reintroduce the two gradually. I recommend taking Max for a nice, long walk before each meeting so that some of his puppy energy is worked off beforehand. Work intensively with Max on basic commands like sit, stay, lie down and come here. When Max is in the room with Nora, have him sit or lie down close to you -- they don't have to meet face to face. Limit interaction time to five minutes or less at first, then gradually increase the time.

How do you keep peace between pets in your house? Tell me about it at [ask@pawscorner.com](mailto:ask@pawscorner.com).

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How's your

# HEALTH?



## Sedentary Lifestyle = Danger!

Most people spend a lot of time sitting at the computer, binge-watching TV shows, playing video games or scrolling on their phones. However, did you know that this sedentary lifestyle can lead to serious health issues like type 2 diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, cancer and even depression? It's also linked to a higher risk of mortality.

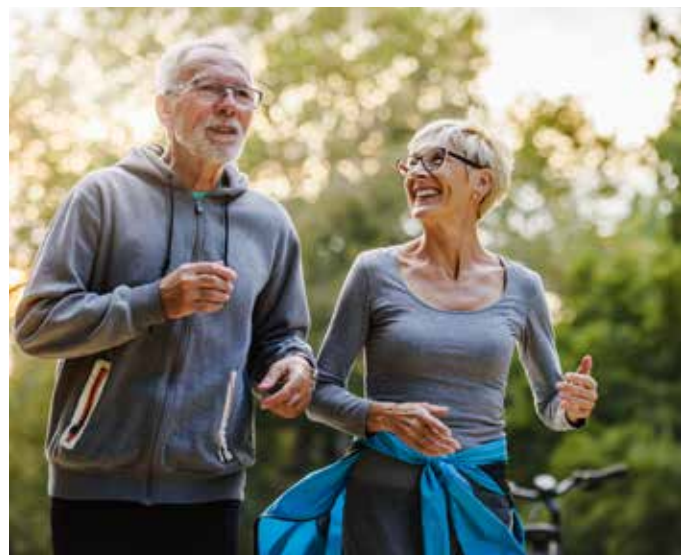
### RECOMMENDATIONS

According to specialists, adults aged 18 and over should aim to get at least 150 minutes of moderate- to high-intensity aerobic physical activity per week. This means getting your heart rate up and breaking a sweat with activities like jogging or dancing.

Although physical activity can help reduce your risk of developing certain health problems, it doesn't cancel them out entirely. If you spend most of your time virtually immobile, you're still subject to its harmful effects.

Get into the habit of moving throughout the day. Take the stairs instead of the elevator, walk while talking on the phone or stand instead of sitting while riding the

bus. These little changes can make a big difference in thwarting a sedentary lifestyle and improving your overall health. Time to get moving!







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measured with money, and that is sincerity and integrity." — Douglas Adams



## Adopting a vegetarian diet: 3 tips for a successful transition

Thinking about switching to a vegetarian diet? If you're used to eating meat regularly, this change can be a big adjustment. Check out these three proven tips to help you stay motivated and avoid any nutritional gaps:

**1. Consult a healthcare professional.** Talk to your doctor, pharmacist or dietitian-nutritionist about your intention to start eating vegetarian, especially if you are pregnant or have a health problem like diabetes. They can help you make sure you're getting all the nutrients you need, such as iron, calcium and vitamin B12.

**2. Start gradually.** No one is forcing you to give up meat overnight. To prevent relapsing—and don't be discouraged if you do—ease into the transition. Start by going vegetarian one day a week, then gradually add more meatless days. This will help you get used to your new diet and make the transition smoother.

**3. Vary your meals.** Visit bookstores to discover vegetarian recipe books, or check out specialized websites. Find the ingredients you need—ideally fresh and local—to bring these new recipes to life. Shake up your meal routine by experimenting with diverse cuisines like Indian or Moroccan.

You'll quickly reap the benefits of your decision by being open and staying organized.





## 3 myths to deconstruct about obesity

Obesity often falls victim to unfair prejudices and misconceptions. Here are three misconceptions about this chronic disease.

### 1. "Body mass index (BMI) determines if you're obese"

For a long time, having a BMI of 30 or more meant you were obese. However, this calculation no longer holds true. BMI doesn't consider factors like muscle mass or fat distribution. Waist circumference is a much more accurate metric in determining obesity than body mass index.



### 2. "Obesity is caused only by eating a poor diet"

This is probably THE most persistent myth. The truth is that obesity is a complex disease influenced by various factors. While it's true that eating too many processed foods and added sugars, and not enough fiber, fruits, and vegetables contributes to unhealthy weight gain, different people can have varying amounts of body fat and weight, even with similar diets and exercise routines.

Health conditions, like an underactive thyroid, contribute to weight gain. Some medications can cause weight gain or make it harder to lose weight. Spending too much time sitting down and not getting enough exercise, having poor quality sleep or not getting enough sleep are also factors.

### 3. "Genetics don't play a role in obesity"

Nothing could be further from the truth. According to the latest scientific research, genetics and early exposure in the womb can significantly impact weight. These factors are often more influential than individual choices regarding physical activity and diet.

Finally, studies have shown that obese people who are physically active have fewer health issues, like cardiovascular disease and diabetes, compared to inactive individuals of normal weight.

No matter your size, an active lifestyle offers numerous health benefits.

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The fundamental cause of obesity is consuming more calories than you expend through physical activity.

Visit with your health care professional and start a new chapter in living a healthy lifestyle this year!



# Here's a Tip

*"A beautiful but stained or worn tablecloth can find a new life at your dinner table. Cut into napkin sizes, and give any frayable ends a hemming."* -- A.S. in Oregon

*A great winter tip that's double purpose: After your dishwasher has done its job, open the door and let the dishes air dry rather than machine dry. You'll save on energy, while you add warmth and humidity to your home's air.*

*Spruce up indoor greenery with a little mineral oil. To get your green plants' leaves shining and healthy, wipe them down with a clean cloth dipped in mineral oil. Rub off any excess.*

*"Cornstarch is great for itchy, rashy skin. This is true for babies' bottoms and for doggy bellies, which is what I use it for. My pup is allergic to grass but loves to romp. Sometimes his belly gets red, and I clean it with mild soap and water, then give him a cornstarch rub. It sure helps."* -- T.W. in Ohio

*Remove price tag residue off hard surfaces with hairspray. Or WD40 works well too.*

*Damp cloth plus baking soda should be your first weapon against stains in the kitchen and bathroom. It's eco-friendly, and a mild abrasive, which works without scratching!*

Send your tips to:  
**Now Here's a Tip**  
 628 Virginia Drive  
 Orlando, FL 32803



MENTAL HEALTH  
**Is loneliness getting you down?**



Feeling lonely? It's not just about being physically alone. You can feel lonely even when surrounded by others. This emotion can be caused by a recent breakup, the loss of someone important in your life or simply a sense of being out of place in a social group.

## WINNING STRATEGIES

If loneliness is getting the better of you, you may be better able to cope by trying these strategies:

- Avoid comparing yourself to others, especially the people you see on social media
- Be patient during times of change, such as moving to a new place or starting a new job
- Embrace your alone time by picking up a new hobby you enjoy
- Work on building your social connections, maybe by joining a club or group

If you need help dealing with feelings of loneliness, don't hesitate to seek help from mental health professionals and resources. You're not alone in this!

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January 19, 2025  
**National  
 POPCORN DAY**

**COUNTLESS WAYS  
 TO ENJOY IT**

January 19 is National Popcorn Day. Mark the occasion by exploring exciting ways to enjoy this classic snack. Get ready to elevate your popcorn game with these creative ideas:

- **Herbs and spices.** Fresh or dried herbs and spices are perfect for flavouring your popcorn without adding empty calories. Why not season your popcorn with chopped rosemary, herbes de Provence, freshly ground pepper or curry powder? Let your creativity run wild.
- **Gourmet toppings.** Are you in the mood for a decadent snack? You can go savoury with toppings like crumbled bacon or cheese, or try something sweet with chocolate, caramel, coconut, candy pieces or maple flakes. Treat yourself to a flavor experience.
- **Bold flavors.** Awaken your taste buds with a kick of heat by coating your popcorn with hot sauce or vinegar. Use a spray bottle to avoid soaking the kernels. Another option is to sprinkle it with cayenne pepper or hot pepper flakes. Get ready to bring the heat!

Popcorn makes the perfect topping for cakes, pies, ice cream, waffles, dessert coffees or even corn soup.



- **Pre-made seasonings.** Do you want something easy? Explore a world of unique popcorn seasonings in flavors like ranch, ketchup, barbecue, apple pie and maple. There's a seasoning out there to suit every taste preference.
- **Trail mix.** Mix dried fruits, seeds and nuts with plain popcorn for a healthy and energizing trail mix snack. It's as easy as that!

**HAPPY SNACKING!**

**FUN FACTS ABOUT POPCORN**

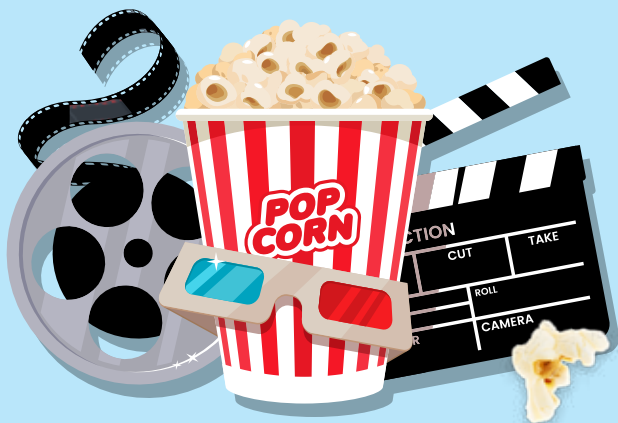
From buttered and salted to caramelized and spiced, popcorn is a must-have at parties, movie nights and sporting events. To celebrate National Popcorn Day, check out these six facts about this legendary snack:

1. The oldest popcorn kernels were discovered by archaeologists in New Mexico. They date back 5,600 years!



2. Although corn comes in thousands of species, only a handful produce kernels that can be popped and transformed into this irresistible snack. These special kernels have a high moisture content and a tough shell.
3. The country that consumes the most popcorn worldwide is... us! Americans enjoy 60 billion cups every year.
4. When a popcorn kernel bursts, it can travel almost 3 feet.
5. Popcorn first appeared in movie theaters during the Great Depression of 1929. The inexpensive treat helped these businesses generate extra revenue.
6. In the 1800s, it was common to eat popcorn like breakfast cereal—in a bowl with milk and sugar.

Pop up a batch, grab a bag at the grocery store, or visit your favorite movie theater to celebrate National Popcorn Day.



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### TO WIN Enter by January 22, 2025

**OFFICIAL CONTEST RULES.** Solve the puzzle and mail in this page to win. Circle all or part of the names of advertisers found in this month's West Valley Star ads. Names may run left, right, up, down or diagonally. Must be 21 or older to enter. Employees of the West Valley Star or its advertisers are ineligible. A drawing will be held from all correct entries. One Grand Prize Winner will receive dinner for two plus two movie passes. One winner will receive a consolation prize of two movie passes. Winners will be notified by phone, and prizes will be sent by mail.

Check [www.westvalleystar.com](http://www.westvalleystar.com) for any corrections or announcements. Scan and email completed puzzles to [info.westvalleystar@gmail.com](mailto:info.westvalleystar@gmail.com) or...

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Mail puzzle with answers to:

West Valley Star Puzzle, P.O. Box 5731, Sun City West, AZ 85376

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**ACROSS**

- 1 Nuisance
- 5 Emmy winner Alan
- 9 Blond shade
- 12 Actor Epps
- 13 -- -do-well
- 14 Female rabbit
- 15 Biscuit type
- 17 Poetic tribute
- 18 Big bargains
- 19 Himalayan land
- 21 Baseball's Cobb
- 22 Meager
- 24 Boxing arbiters
- 27 Hasten
- 28 Flintstones' pet
- 31 Capote nickname
- 32 Very long time
- 33 Itinerary word
- 34 Long tale
- 36 Boring routine
- 37 Superman's alias
- 38 Alphabetized list
- 40 Yours truly
- 41 Lauder of cosmetics

**DOWN**

- 43 Tyke
- 47 Marseilles monarch
- 48 Relating to the intellect
- 51 Calendar abbr.
- 52 Sandwich treat
- 53 Exploits
- 54 Away from WSW
- 55 Canine cry
- 56 Section
- 1 Seed holders
- 2 Send forth
- 3 Stuffing herb
- 4 Goodies
- 5 Picnic interlopers
- 6 Maui memento
- 7 "Lion" star Patel
- 8 Stadium
- 9 Like some parents
- 10 Fizzy drink
- 11 Cad
- 16 Devious
- 20 Conclusion

- 22 Crazy Horse, for one
- 23 Penny
- 24 ACLU concerns
- 25 Time line period
- 26 Escapee
- 27 Roll call reply
- 29 French diarist Anais
- 30 Feedbag tidbit
- 35 Hydrocarbon suffix
- 37 Didn't lag
- 39 Shill
- 40 French pronoun
- 41 Sea eagle
- 42 Any time now
- 43 L-Q bridge
- 44 Tower city
- 45 Always
- 46 Try out
- 49 Raw rock
- 50 Solidify

**Answers on Page 29**

Time to beat: 25 minutes

**DECEMBER WINNERS**



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GOODYEAR

**WINNER OF MOVIE PASSES**  
**Ron Huston**  
GOODYEAR

Jenny's camera shy, but her dog Kensington isn't!

**Sudoku**

by Linda Thistle

3			1	7	2		6	
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1					6	4	5	
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Place a number in the empty boxes in such a way that each row across, each column down and each small 9-box square contains all of the numbers from one to nine.

**DIFFICULTY: ★★**

★ MODERATE ★★ CHALLENGING

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**Answers on Page 29**

**Dinner and a Movie DECEMBER SOLUTION**

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# Chicken Marsala

## INGREDIENTS

4 thin boneless skinless chicken breasts, or 2 thick breasts sliced in half  
1/2 teaspoon salt  
1/2 teaspoon black pepper  
1/2 cup all-purpose flour  
4 teaspoons olive oil divided

4 cloves garlic minced  
8 ounces white or cremini mushrooms sliced  
2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley  
1 cup Marsala Wine  
1/2 cup chicken broth  
12 ounces cooked spaghetti pasta for serving (optional)

## INSTRUCTIONS

Season chicken breasts with salt and pepper. Spread flour onto a plate or shallow bowl. Dip chicken breasts into flour to coat. Shake off excess and set aside.

Heat 2 teaspoons olive oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add chicken breasts and sear on each side until golden brown and cooked through, about 7 minutes per side. Remove from skillet and set aside while you make the sauce. Keep warm.

In the skillet used to make the chicken, heat another 2 teaspoons olive oil over medium-high heat. Add mushrooms and sauté until soft, about 3 to 4 minutes. Add garlic and cook 1 minute more. Pour in marsala wine and chicken broth. Bring to a simmer and cook until liquid is reduced by half, about 6 to 7 minutes. Reduce heat to low and add chicken back to the pan. Spoon some sauce and mushrooms over the top of the chicken breasts.

Serve chicken warm topped with mushroom marsala sauce. Chicken Marsala is often served over cooked spaghetti pasta.

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f i t y s

# Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

## His dream is marching on

January 20, 2025, is more than a date on the calendar—it's a powerful reminder of one man's enduring legacy. King has become a symbol of hope and justice, inspiring several social movements and causes, both during his life and after his death. Consider these three notable movements he helped to inspire:

### Civil Rights Movement

King's leadership, particularly his advocacy for non-violent resistance, was pivotal to the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. This movement sought to end racial segregation and discrimination, and it led to key legislative victories, including the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the transformative Voting Rights Act of 1965.

### Anti-Apartheid Movement

King's principles of non-violent resistance and his opposition to global racial oppression inspired activists in South Africa who were fighting apartheid. Nelson Mandela and other leaders referenced King's work as they fought against the institutionalized racial segregation and discrimination in South Africa.

### Black Lives Matter (BLM)

This modern social justice campaign has drawn inspiration from King's legacy of fighting racial injustice. Activists frequently invoke his inspirational words, turning them into rallying cries for justice. Through peaceful demonstrations and united voices, they continue to honor King's commitment to challenging oppressive systems and advocating for a brighter future.

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# Thinking of switching financial institutions?

Are you feeling dissatisfied with your current financial institution and considering moving your money elsewhere? If so, consider these factors before making a move.

## YOUR FINANCIAL SITUATION

Before making any changes, assess your finances. If you have substantial assets, you'll be in a better position to negotiate attractive deals with a new financial institution. It's also crucial not to overlook the importance of your credit rating. If your credit score has declined in the past few years, it could impact the benefits you're eligible for with a new institution.

## POTENTIAL FEES

Some banks charge fees and withhold taxes when they release funds to be transferred. The amounts vary based on the nature of your accounts (investment or savings accounts, for example). Keep a few hundred dollars as a buffer in each of your accounts so you have enough to cover any pre-authorized payments you may have overlooked. Defaulting on payments could result in penalties, so it's important to stay on top of your financial commitments.

Once your move is complete, be sure to close your old accounts. Many institutions charge fees for inactive accounts, so it's best to tie up loose ends.

## THE COMPLEXITY OF THE PROCESS

The idea of switching to a new bank may be appealing for the prospect of better interest rates, waived transaction fees and enticing rewards programs. However, it's not a quick and easy task. You'll have to notify your employer, the government, your service providers, creditors and anyone else who automatically deposits or withdraws money from your account.

## ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS

If switching institutions seems too tedious, there are other ways to improve

your satisfaction with your financial services. Speak up about your dissatisfaction with your current institution. By expressing your willingness to switch institutions, you could negotiate better terms or a more attractive transaction package. Your feedback can make a real difference.

**Tip:** Before starting the conversation, review the fees associated with each of your accounts. These fees could be silently eating away at your money, adding up to hundreds of dollars a year. Don't be afraid to negotiate!

Consider doing business with more than one institution. You could keep your current accounts with one and let another handle your investments. You might snag advantageous rates without having to completely switch.

Do you need help finding a new institution or renegotiating with your current one? Contact a local financial expert for guidance.

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# Celebrity Extra by Dana Jackson

**Q:** Is it true that there will be a “Yellowstone” spin-off with Rip and Beth continuing their story? I hope so. -- M.E.

**A:** Without spoiling the ending of the series finale of “Yellowstone,” I can say there’s a strong indication that the show will continue, likely in the form of a spin-off, with the love story of Rip and Beth. According to Deadline.com, both Cole Hauser and Kelly Reilly, who portray the respective characters, have reportedly signed deals to reprise their roles in a new spin-off that will contain the name “Yellowstone” in some capacity in the title.

Rebranding the show with a spin-off instead of just continuing season six allows Paramount to air episodes on its own streaming service, Paramount+. The current “Yellowstone” series has an exclusive deal with NBCUniversal and can only stream on the competing streamer Peacock. The spin-off will likely be a huge hit and moneymaker for Paramount.



PHOTO CREDIT: PEACOCK

**Cole Hauser as Rip Wheeler and Kelly Reilly as Beth Dutton**

**Q:** I just read that Robert De Niro is going to star in a TV series soon. Has he ever done TV before or just movies? -- K.E.

**A:** According to TV Guide, two-time Oscar winner Robert De Niro was “pretty much Hollywood’s last A-list hold-out” when it came to starring in a regular television role. The series that lured him away from motion pictures is “Zero Day,” a six-episode miniseries that will premiere on Netflix on Feb. 20, 2025. It also stars Emmy nominee Connie Britton (“Nashville”) and Oscar nominees Jesse Plemons (“The Power of the Dog”) and Angela Bassett (“Black Panther: Wakanda Forever”).

While the conspiracy/political thriller will be De Niro’s first contract role in a series, he has guest-starred on a few others, playing himself on the NBC sitcom “30 Rock” and the British series “Extras.” In “Zero Day,” which he also produces, De Niro will play the former leader of the free world, who faces a global cyberattack.

One of the creative minds behind the series is Michael Schmidt, who won a Pulitzer Prize for his reporting on the sexual harassment case against Bill O’Reilly. He also wrote the book “Donald Trump v. The United States,” which was published in 2020. “Zero Day” is his first TV script.

Send me your questions at [NewCelebrityExtra@gmail.com](mailto:NewCelebrityExtra@gmail.com), or write me at KFWS, 628 Virginia Drive, Orlando, FL 32803.

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# Is Print Marketing dying?

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### **PRINT IS A POWERFUL MEDIUM FOR MARKETERS**

- Direct mail and content print publishing are alive and well.
- According to PAMCo, print media reached an average of 30 million monthly consumers and 12 million daily consumers over a 15-month period.
- Print can be more engaging and effective than digital media, with a higher brand recall rate.
- Print advertisements for certain industries boast higher engagement rates compared to digital ads.
- Print materials have a longer shelf life than digital ads, with studies showing that print advertisements can be remembered for weeks or even months after being seen.
- **Print is more tactile than digital media and works well to target certain demographics, such as older generations.**

Digital media and instant online communication may have dominated over the last decade, however, print continues to play a vital role in our advertising, adapting and thriving in various forms. From the tactile experience of a well-crafted booklet to the immersive quality of a print magazine, print holds a unique appeal that screens can't replicate. Businesses and creatives are rediscovering the value of print for branding and marketing, forging deeper connections with their audiences.

### **THE TRUST FACTOR**

Print media is often perceived as more trustworthy than digital content. 65% of consumers report feeling more confident in brands that invest in printed marketing materials, and this trust extends to the overall perception of professionalism and reliability in service providers.

### **LEVERAGE THE UNIQUE ADVANTAGES OF PRINT**

- **Increased Brand Visibility**
- **Targeted Outreach**
- **Enhanced Credibility**
- **Longer Lifespan**
- **Improved Response Rates**

### **Print and digital can and should be combined**

Beware of the sales rep who tells you that print advertising doesn't work, or that digital advertising is better. Digital marketers have been saying that for years and it is simply not true.

Print and digital both have pros and cons, so the best way to draw on their respective positives is to combine the two.

Integrating print advertising into your marketing strategy can significantly enhance your overall marketing efforts.

While digital content is essential for immediate engagement, print offers a tangible touchpoint that complements online and digital marketing.

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# Green living

## 5 tips to make your business trips greener

Do you travel often for work? Are you looking for ways to make your trips easier on the environment? Follow these five tips:

**1. Choose public transportation.** Choosing to ride the train or bus instead of driving a gas-powered car is an excellent way to help the environment. As a bonus, you can use your travel time productively to catch up on work, read documents or prep for presentations. Many public transportation options offer free Wi-Fi.

**2. Book direct flights.** If flying is your only option, book a direct flight whenever possible. Despite being pricier, direct flights can save you time, giving you higher productivity value. Flying direct is much better for the environment than taking routes with stopovers.

**3. Reserve eco-friendly accommodations.** It's always a good idea to book your motel or hotel in advance to seek out one whose practices promote environmental sustainability. Look for establishments that are committed to minimizing resource use and managing waste responsibly.

**4. Use reusable accessories.** During your business trip, ditch the single-use items and opt for reusable accessories instead. Pack washable items like a coffee mug, straws, utensils and shopping bags.

**5. Support local businesses.** Between business meetings, explore the unique stores and eateries in the area. Rather than choosing international franchises, seek out local gems that support community suppliers and minimize their carbon emissions.

Have fun "greenifying" your work trips!



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## PUZZLE ANSWERS

Answers to Puzzles on Page 22

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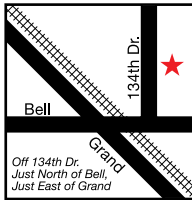
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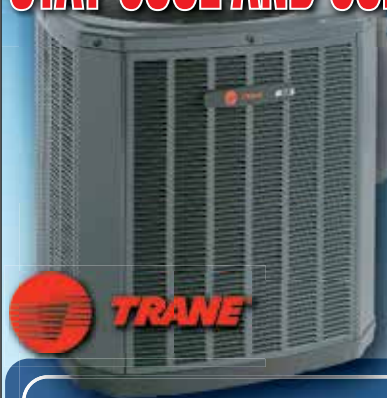
Are you a java junkie? Scientists found specific genes that are more caffeine-loving than others, so addiction to it might be genetic. In other words, you can go ahead and blame your parents for your coffee obsession.

"Family Feud" host Richard Dawson met his second wife, Gretchen Johnson, when she was a contestant on the show in 1981. And yes, he did kiss her.

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