

Community Health

COMMUNITYHEALTHMAGAZINE.COM | WINTER 2024

A woman with long, light-colored hair is shown in a brewery setting, holding and examining a piece of dark, textured pottery. She is wearing a grey t-shirt with a logo. The background features wooden walls, beer taps, and various brewery equipment.

Lifting the Community

Program prioritizes needs of area residents

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DID YOU KNOW?

In 2023, KLN paid approximately

\$9.4 Million

to supplement the cost of health insurance for employees.





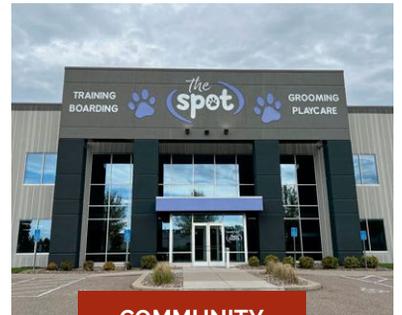
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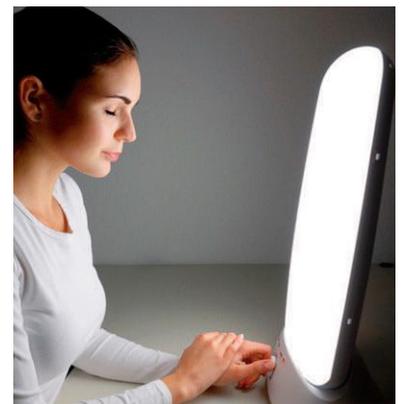
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New Year, Better Health

Hi, and welcome to the winter 2024 edition of *Community Health*, our quarterly health and wellness publication. We hope you had a safe, fun and healthy holiday as we jump into 2024. KLN Family Brands prides itself on putting people first and this magazine is part of that effort, along with resources available through the KLN company health plan. Our goal is to provide helpful information to inspire you on your wellness journey, whatever the season.

Those of us in Minnesota have been treated to a warmer December than normal and are curious to see when our “typical” winter arrives. Some may consider these temperatures a blessing while others feel as though something is missing. In the fall edition I mentioned my 5-year-old looking forward to snow, and I now dare say that I am ready for some winter activities such as sledding and snowshoeing as well.

This edition is full of a variety of topics: mood boosters, stretching, even plants! Some of our very own KLN employees are featured. Please read their articles and take time to talk with them about their passions.

We could not be more excited about the opening of the new company under the KLN Family Brands umbrella, The Spot. This facility directly speaks to KLN’s vision, as it will better the world by caring for others. Learn more about The Spot on pages 3-5.

A pillar of wellness that is often not recognized is social wellness. We are currently piloting a program called Let’s Get Social in Perham to help provide a sense of community and connection. Turn to page 7 to read more about this program and other community efforts to get people connected and working on their social well-being. You can also read about social connections and their impact on overall health on page 13.

We would love to hear more stories about our employees’ health, wellness and fitness endeavors. If you have something to share — a workout regimen, healthy eating plan, or places to enjoy the outdoors, just to name a few — please email me at mmoch@klfamilybrands.com.



Marni Moch
WELLNESS COORDINATOR
KLN FAMILY BRANDS

We could not be more excited about the opening of the new company under the KLN Family Brands umbrella, The Spot. This facility directly speaks to KLN’s vision, as it will better the world by caring for others.

Spot on



NutriSource facility trains service dogs for veterans and first responders

By Rebecca Fortner
Assistant Editor

Rescuing is a two-way street at The Spot by NutriSource.

“We are rescuing that animal and that animal is now rescuing us,” says Chris Heikkila, general manager and “pawspitality host” at The Spot.

Heikkila knows this firsthand.

He received his service dog, a German shepherd named Leo, through Soldier’s 6, a nonprofit Minnesota-based organization that provides specially trained “battle buddies” to veterans and first responders.

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continued from page 3

“Literally, I can’t say this enough,” Heikkila says. “He saved my life one day. I am indebted to this program.”

Now, Heikkila is working to provide the same for others at The Spot. The Greenfield, Minnesota, facility works with Soldier’s 6 along with shelters and breeders to provide training for dogs and their human companions, veterans and first responders. Heikkila says 95% of the dogs are rescues.

The Spot held its grand opening November 1 and officially opened to the public November 6

Trainers Mike Boehmer and Kylie Stenstrom assess the dogs and their temperaments, and plan training based on the needs of the person who will be getting the dog.

“We not only have to understand the dogs, we have to understand the people, too,” Heikkila says. “They may have a host of issues that they’re working through.”

Those issues can include post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health problems.

Heikkila notes those working at The Spot are serving others through their own experiences.

“We’re veterans. We’re first responders,” he says. “Many of us have been through the program and have service dogs as well.”

The 14,600-square-foot facility features a calm environment that includes a dining room, living room and kitchen in addition to retail, boarding and play areas.

“We can teach you right there in the comfort and safety of our facility,” he says.

The training is “for life,” Heikkila says. Recertification is done on an annual basis, but any changing need for the person can prompt additional training as well as “little tune-ups,” he explains.

The Spot has more than 180 dogs in some level of training. There is no cost to the recipients; funding for the facility comes from other services it offers to the general public, including boarding, grooming, and sales of food and treats.

There are 34 kennels, six “executive” suites and four cat condos. Dogs and cats can also come for play-care. Training services are available to the public.

Food and treats sold include Tuffy’s, Finley’s and Kenny’s Candy and Confections — covering dogs, cats and people, Heikkila laughs.

KLN is dedicated to the facility and the service it provides. Any profit made is reinvested back into The Spot.

“This isn’t, ‘Let’s see how we can cover our bottomline,’” he says. “This is, ‘How many people can we help?’”

Those who’d like to donate to the cause should direct their efforts to Soldier’s 6, says Heikkila.

“That’s where it all starts,” he explains. “That’s the catalyst that gets everything going.”

Heikkila joined The Spot following his retirement from his job in the banking industry. He says the entire staff is “purpose-driven.”

“Everybody has put everything they have into this place,” he says. “That’s how special this place is.”



Elevate provides adults with opportunities for physical, mental and social well-being

By Amanda Bolan

Because we all want to age well. That's the motto of Elevate, a program created to help Otter Tail County adults with their physical, mental and social health.

In 2021, Perham Health applied for a grant from Leading Age Minnesota Foundation and UCare Minnesota to address the expected increase of health care concerns for a growing population of adults. As one of only three initiatives in the state, Elevate is dedicated to its members by focusing on four "pillars" of well-being: Events, Volunteer, Health Coach & Resources, and Flex Work

Events, which offer a blend of fun and educational activities that promote personal growth, is a great way to expose one's self to and get familiar with Elevate and its mission.

Events Help Make Connections

An Elevate survey conducted via questionnaire indicated social isolation is the No. 1 health risk for members, says Elevate program manager Mindi Larsen. By offering a wide variety of events, the organization is hopeful people will find something of interest, Larson adds.

A recurring event is the Nosy Neighbor Tours, which enables members to explore local establishments.



"We toured both our boat and candy factories, and we got to sample all nine flavors of licorice they made," Larsen explains. "It's a way for people to see how the businesses in our community operate."

Elevate has offered classes on stained glassmaking, yoga and sound bath meditation as a way to sample experiences without long-term commitments. Every Wednesday is Coffee Talk, an educational and social gathering.

Elevating Voices Choir is a choir composed of people living with Alzheimer's, memory loss or dementia, along with their caregivers and volunteers. Larson says it provided "a safe place to be with others who understand what they are going through." It is one of seven such choirs in Minnesota.



A Sense of Belonging

Pilot social program connects KLN employees outside of work

By Rebecca Fortner
Assistant Editor

In their roles at KLN Family Brands, Wellness Coordinator Marni Moch and Dream Manager Courtney Rooney have learned that employees seek a sense of belonging.

Couple that with the KLN vision statement that includes the phrases “people first” and “trust-based relationships,” and Let’s Get Social was born.

The pilot program, led by Rooney and Moch, provides and promotes activities outside of work for KLN employees.

“We know that social outings not only provide a sense of community and connections, but are also a doorway to engaging in other self-care practices that complement both mental and physical health,” Rooney says.

A flier is created each month to promote social opportunities in the community, including physical activities and educational classes.

“Our goal is to have one event each month that is KLN-sponsored,” Moch explains. “With facilities that run around the clock, we try to rotate the time of day, type of gathering and day of the week we hold these events.”

Another goal is to ensure one event each quarter is family-orientated, and Moch says variety is the key. KLN events have included Disgruntled Brewery; Holiday Wooden Garland; Family Gingerbread Houses; and Coffee, Cocoa and Scones.

Events promoted by KLN and Elevate — the latter which helps adults in Otter Tail County with their physical, mental and social wellness — have included a Holiday Parade of Lights, Smart 911: Empower your Safety Information, Lights in the Pines, and Beginner Pickleball.

“It has been a joy watching employees interact outside of work,” Moch says. “The end-goal is to create longstanding relationships in and outside of work.”

Rehearsals were held weekly for eight weeks. The first concert was held in July and drew more than 110 attendees.

Also exciting is a new partnership with the Perham Area Community Center (PACC), where classes are designed to meet the availability and ability levels of “silver sneakers,” including an introduction to pickleball and a weekly walking club.

Elevate is planning to hold the Celebrating Aging Expo next September. The event will feature vendors and be tailored to the needs and interests of attendees, including an insurance agency that specializes in Medicare.

“It’s all about celebrating seniors that day,” Larson says.

Helping Out

Another of the pillars helping to support Elevate’s mission is connecting people with volunteer opportunities. Elevate purchased and customized an app, Helper Helper, to organize this component.

“The beauty of the app is that every opportunity is in front of our entire volunteer community,” Larson says.

Between July 1 and December 1, 538 volunteers collectively logged more than 1,346 hours, she notes. Libraries, schools, nursing homes and the Girl Scouts are among organizations that have used the service.

For more information about Elevate, events, volunteer opportunities, health coaching and resources, and flex work, visit elevateotc.org.

Mark Your Calendar

There is lots to do this winter, from roller skating and polar plunging to art classes and home shows

By Michael Gilbert

PACC Roller Skating Nights Feb. 2, 6-8:30 p.m.

Perham Area Community Center, 620 3rd Ave. SE
PACC Roller Skating Nights are held every Friday. Cost is \$7 and concessions are sold. For more information visit perhamareacommunitycenter.net/roller-skating.

2024 Ottertail Polar Plunge Feb. 3, 10:30 a.m.

Ottertail Lake Public Boat Landing

The Ottertail Polar Plunge is the biggest fundraiser for Special Olympics Minnesota and has raised more than \$330,000 in its four-year history. All funds raised by Plungers help Special Olympics Minnesota provide year-round training and services to thousands of athletes with intellectual disabilities across the state. The Polar Plunge is presented by Law Enforcement Torch Run, a movement of volunteers dedicated to increasing awareness and funds for Special Olympics Minnesota. If you are ready to take the plunge for something good, register at reg.plungemn.org/. Not up for taking a dip in the chilly water? Cheer on the plungers by heading out to the Ottertail Lake Public Boat Landing.

Elevate Walking Club Feb. 6, 10 a.m.

Perham Area Community Center, 620 3rd Ave. SE
Discover the endless benefits of walking in a supportive group setting by joining the PACC's Walking Club. If you are unable to join on Feb. 6, the group meets every Tuesday from 10-11 a.m. and accepts individuals of all ages and walking abilities. Visit elevateotc.org/event/walking-club/2023-12-05 for more information.

Black History of Otter Tail County Feb. 10

New York Mills Public Library, 30 Main Ave. North

The New York Mills Public Library is celebrating Black History Month with various events and exhibits throughout February. On Feb. 10, Otter Tail County Historical Society Education Director Missy Hermes will present "Black History of Otter Tail County." The event is free, but registration is required. Call (218) 385-2436 or visit nympubliclibrary.org for more information.

Candlelight Trek at Maplewood State Park Feb. 24, 5-8 p.m.

39721 Park Entrance Road, Pelican Rapids

Maplewood State Park is a winter wonderland and this popular event is a must-do. Ski, walk or snowshoe around Cataract Lake as it is lit by 150 candles. Guests not up for the trek around the lake can hang out with friends by the campfire while enjoying chili, s'mores and hot drinks. Chili will be ready to serve by 5 p.m. and candles will be lit from 6-8 p.m. A limited number of snowshoes will be available for rent. Skis are not available. A vehicle pass is needed.

Sherman's Woodsticks Author Talk

Feb. 24, 10:30-11:30 a.m.,

Wright County Historical Society, 2001 MN-25, Buffalo

Author Paul Hodenfield will visit the historical society to discuss his book "Sherman's Woodsticks: The Adventures, Ordeals and Travels of the Eighth Minnesota Volunteer Infantry During the Civil War." The book, which was released in April 2023, chronicles how the Eighth Minnesota Volunteer Infantry Regiment traveled more miles and served under more extreme conditions than any other unit in the Union Army. The soldiers endured dehydration, hunger and exhaustion while being exposed to scorching heat or bitter cold. Visit wriighthistory.org for more information.



Winter Market

March 9, 9 a.m.-noon

Community Center, 206 Central Ave., Buffalo

Farmers markets aren't just for the summer as Buffalo will host a winter market inside the Community Center. The market features dozens of local vendors selling their specialties. Fresh produce, meats, breads, plants, soaps and sauces along with crafts and artwork are some of the items available. For more information and a complete list of vendors, visit buffalofarmersmarket.com.

Buckthorn Hiking Sticks

March 10, 1-3:30 p.m.

Wright County Parks & Recreation,
3500 Braddock Ave. NE, Buffalo

Open to the entire family, this course will teach individuals how to select, cut and create a buckthorn hiking stick. Attendees will also have the opportunity to identify buckthorn shrubs and the importance to removing them from the park system. Register at wrightcountyparksandrec.perfectmind.com

Red Pines

March 13, 10:30-11:30 a.m.

Robert Ney Nature Center
5212 73rd St. NW in Maple Lake

Through games, story time and nature exploration, preschool children with an adult guardian will learn how red pines grow in cold climates. The cost is \$5 per child. Register online at wrightcountyparksandrec.perfectmind.com

Art For Lunch! March 14, noon-1 p.m.

New York Mills Regional Cultural Center
24 N. Main Ave.

Cultural Center Artistic Director Cheryl Bannes leads this class, which is designed to introduce attendees to new materials and processes. The \$10 cost covers materials. Attendees are encouraged to bring their own lunch, and a beverage will be provided by the Cultural Center. Visit kulcher.org/art-for-lunch-2024/ for more information.

The Lakes Area Home & Cabin Show

March 16, 7:30 a.m.

Perham Area Community Center, 620 3rd Ave. SE

Talk "cabin" with dozens of vendors selling new products and furnishings for your second home. There will be door prizes and giveaways throughout the event. For more information, visit member.perham.com/events.

Home & Sport Show

March 23-24

Kent Freeman Arena, 1310 Rossman Ave., Detroit Lakes

Home and sports professionals will be under one roof to offer ideas, inspiration and expert advice for home building, remodeling and maintenance projects, as well as showcase the latest in outdoor sports and recreation including boats, docks and lifts. There will also be gardening seminars and prize drawings. Admission is \$5; under 18 are free with a paid adult. Visit lakeregionbuilders.com/show-info for more information.

Maple Syrup Festival

April 13, 8 a.m.

Vergas Event Center, 140 W. Linden St., Vergas

Day begins with a 5K run/walk and continues with a maple leaf hunt, horse-drawn rides and pancake and sausage breakfast. Visit cityofvergas.com/ for more information.

Hello Spring Craft & Boutique Show

April 27, 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Legends Gym

310 S. Broadway, Pelican Rapids

Usher in spring with a fun day of shopping in downtown Pelican Rapids as dozens of local vendors sell their specialties. Food will also be available for purchase. Visit members.pelicanrapidschamber.com/events for more information.

DON'T PUT YOURSELF ON ICE

Keep the blood flowing and mind sharp by staying active this winter

By Jeff Vorva

In some places, staying fit during the coldest months of the year can present a different sort of challenge.

Those who live in states that have warm climates all year have little to worry or fuss about.

But for those who live in areas that are cold, icy and snowy for months, outdoor exercise is either reduced or eliminated by some people. Even getting out and heading to a gym might not be a favorite choice during the cold months, when the temperatures are in single digits or even below zero.

Those who want to continue to have a workout regimen in the winter months may need a different mindset.

"If you're in a cold climate, the weather is among the most difficult barriers to overcome in regard to staying active," says Christian Koshaba, a trainer, health coach and founder of Three60fit in the Chicago and Knoxville, Tenn., areas. "Due to seasonal change, the reduced daylight plays a factor as well. The sun helps to promote serotonin levels, which helps positive mood and energy levels.

"Increased seasonal depression is in effect during winter months, which minimizes the motivation to work out and stay active."

Despite the hurdles, Koshaba suggests exercising three to five times a week and maintaining a split of resistance and cardiovascular training.

Philadelphia-based health coach Alexandra Janelli says that if people don't want to get out of the house, they should find a way to work out in their homes even if they don't have exercise equipment at their disposal.

"Get creative and have fun with it," she says. "If something's not fun, it's work."

Janelli is a believer in the process of staying in shape and having a consistent work ethic. But if the winter curtails some of those plans, then she suggests thinking outside of the box, including using what old-timers call the ice box.

"Everything you do means something," she says. "You can commit yourself to doing 10 push-ups before you open the

fridge. If you keep going back to the fridge, commit to doing 10 push-ups or 10 sit-ups. Make it fun. Everything is cumulative. Do something. Take action. Those are the things that I really try to tell people.

"Try not to limit yourself with your belief systems of what it's supposed to look like and just do something."

Koshaba said there is plenty to do at home, with or without equipment.

"There are a multitude of workouts you can do from home," he says. There is yoga, Animal Flow, and other mobility-based programs. Squats, push-ups, lunges, sit-ups, planks and hollow holds to name a few body-weight exercises.

"If you were to purchase equipment for home: TRX, kettlebell, Bulgarian bag, Steel Mace, and resistance bands are fantastic tools to utilize for full body applications."

For those who like a mix of indoor and outdoor exercise in the winter months, he suggests cross-country skiing, snowboarding, indoor cycling, treadmill, rowing, indoor swimming, racquetball, indoor tennis, weightlifting, basketball, volleyball, indoor soccer, pilates, boxing and jiu jitsu.

He says that even sledding works.

"The hike back up the hill is a great workout," he says. "Plus, it's fun times spent with your kids."

Many of those activities are free.

He also says resistance exercises for workouts should be a part of a routine regardless of the season.

"You can get extremely effective workouts, though body weight can only get you so far, so added resistance would be recommended," he said. "It's a great way to add strength and increase overall fitness levels."

Staying safe while staying active is also important.

"Maintaining the right form and technique is always paramount," Koshaba says. "Make sure you're not going too heavy too quickly. Always ensure you're incorporating a proper warm-up and cooldown into each exercise. Don't forget to work on flexibility, mobility and some form of foam rolling."



Seasonally affected

Depression can be worse for some people during winter

By Alex Keown

As a dream manager at KLN Family Brands, Courtney Rooney wants her fellow employees to realize their fullest potential and live their best lives.

Describing her role as similar to that of a life coach, her job is to help people understand they can always keep striving to attain their goals.

“I want people to live their personal best and bring their dream to life,” she says.

To achieve that, Rooney provides guidance and helps her fellow employees make healthy choices that lead to positive mental health. It’s easier to achieve dreams when one is in the right headspace, she says.

Rooney prioritizes physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual health. When she meets with the employees who sign up for her services, she strives to ensure they feel cared for and acknowledged.

“We live in a world where we get caught up, and sometimes we need to slow down and take care of each other,” she says. “With the holidays and the busyness of work and life, we have to take care of each other.

“And if you’re struggling with things like SAD, you have to take care of yourself and give yourself some grace.”

SAD, or seasonal affective disorder, is a type of clinical depression triggered and exacerbated by the lack of sunlight prevalent during winter, when skies are frequently cloudy and the sun sets early. The exact cause is unclear, but mental health researchers think the gray days and lack of sunlight may trigger a chemical imbalance in the brain.

Symptoms associated with SAD — including lethargy, difficulty concentrating and loss of interest in normal daily activities — can be addressed, Rooney says.

“In my experience, SAD correlates with the weather and tends to disappear when winter becomes spring,” says Rooney, a licensed clinical social worker.

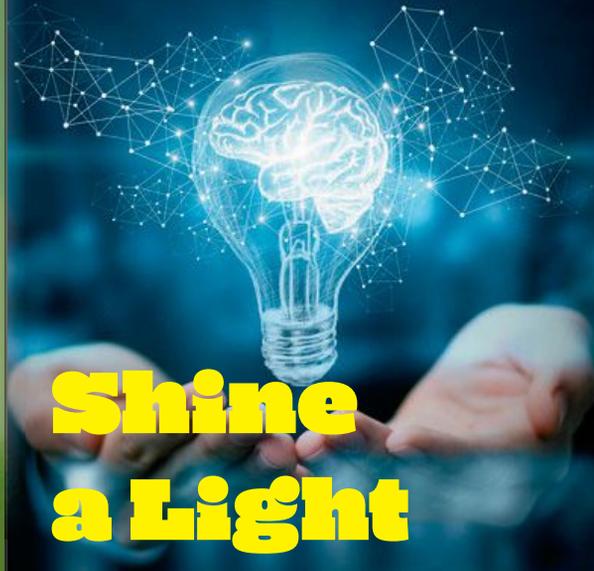
She notes SAD typically impacts younger adults, tends to affect women more than men, and may not affect a person every year. That can depend on how gloomy winter weather is that year, as well as the individual’s coping strategies.

If SAD is an issue for KLN employees, Rooney says there are ways to minimize the symptoms of the disorder. One step is to increase exposure to sunlight so our bodies can produce vitamin D. This includes opening the curtains and letting in natural light, taking a walk outside, or opting for light therapy with a special fluorescent lamp.

Other options are to change up daily routines, increase physical activity, eat a healthier diet, develop more effective sleep routines, and better stress management.



Courtney Rooney



Shine a Light

Light therapy may help alleviate symptoms of SAD

By Community Health Staff

Light therapy may help with seasonal affective disorder, a form of depression that mostly occurs during the fall and winter months, when weather cools and skies darken earlier in the day.

Experts say sunlight gives our bodies the ability to produce vitamin D, which helps strengthen the immune system, among other benefits. Exposure to the sun in the morning also helps regulate melatonin production, a hormone that informs the brain it’s time to sleep at night. The light also can elevate mood by increasing production of serotonin.

In general, light therapy involves sitting near a bright light for 20-30 minutes shortly after waking up, according to the Mayo Clinic.

As with any medical condition, talking with a health care provider is important. Light therapy may work on its own for some individuals or in conjunction with other treatments, such as talk therapy and medication. For others, especially those with certain medical conditions, light therapy may not be an option.

According to the Mayo Clinic, light boxes are not regulated by the Food and Drug Administration for SAD treatment. So it’s especially important to seek guidance from a provider. Boxes should be produced specifically for SAD to be most effective and should not emit harmful UV rays. They also come in different intensities, styles and sizes, so those shopping should have an idea of what may work best for them.

Mood BOOSTERS

Being active, enjoying the outdoors and connecting with others can positively impact mental health

By Michael Gilbert

From navigating education and career goals to dealing with personal challenges, mental health impacts overall quality of life.

Being in a positive state of emotional, psychological and social well-being allows for a better overall outlook on life, as well as the ability to accomplish daily tasks and maintain relationships. But according to the National Institute of Mental Health, 20% of adults live with a moderate to severe mental health condition. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention states more than 50% of Americans will be diagnosed with a mental illness in their lifetime.

The good news is even those in poor mental health can improve their overall well-being through natural mood-boosters and positive social interactions.

Get active and outdoors

“Regular exercise including walking, jogging or yoga has been proven to positively influence mood and contribute to overall well-being because physical activity releases endorphins, which are the body’s natural mood lifters,” says Ryan Sultan, a board-certified psychiatrist, therapist, professor and researcher at Columbia University. “Exposure to natural sunlight is also important because it helps regulate circadian rhythms and promotes the production of serotonin, contributing to improved mood.”

California-based psychologist Elena Herrera agrees with Sultan and says, “being outdoors is essential to boosting our mood.”

“Aim for at least a few minutes a day of sunshine and, if sunlight is not available, consider getting a solar lamp,” she says. “Movement is very important. The more inactive we are, the better chance our negative, internal mind has to loop in harmful thoughts. Movement gives us a different perspective.”

Make connections

Herrera says social interaction is one of the best ways to boost one’s mood.

“It’s effective, non-medicinal and free,” she says of social interaction. “When our mood is low, it’s common for us to pull away and isolate, but when we are with others in a social capacity, we have time to distract ourselves and feel a little less depressed. When we notice that and feel the difference, it motivates us to keep doing it and those small steps can yield

bigger results.”

Psychologist Bayu Prihandito explains that social interaction is more than just preventing loneliness but also is creating a sense of belonging and purpose.

“Social interaction validates our experiences and offers perspectives that can challenge and refine our own,” he says. “The absence of quality social interaction can exacerbate existing mental health issues such as depression and recurring anxiety.”

Reach out

Prihandito says bringing up the topic of depression with a loved one who may be depressed is a difficult but necessary conversation.

“It’s always best to approach this conversation with empathy, sensitively and without making assumptions, labeling or judgments,” he says. “Asking open-ended questions and actively listening can create a safe space for your loved one to share their feelings.”

Taylor Wilson, a California-based certified addiction recovery specialist, agrees it is important to approach the topic with sensitivity and empathy.

“Choose a private and relaxed setting, express concern without judgment, and actively listen,” Wilson says. “Encourage open communication and validate their feelings. It’s important to remind them that seeking help is a sign of strength and that they don’t have to face depression alone.”

When depression symptoms persist and begin affecting one’s daily life, Wilson says it’s time for professional help.

“A trained therapist can provide an accurate diagnosis, create an individualized treatment plan, and offer evidence-based therapies like cognitive-behavioral therapies or medication management,” Wilson says.

Seeking professional help can be a “crucial step” toward improving well-being, according to Sultan.

“If symptoms persist, interfere with daily functioning or escalate, it’s advisable to consult a mental health professional for help,” he says.

“Prioritizing natural mood boosters, fostering social connections, approaching discussions about depression with empathy and seeking professional help when needed are essential components of mental health care. By incorporating these strategies, individuals can take proactive steps toward maintaining and improving their overall well-being.”



The Human Connection

Social health can be an overlooked aspect of well-being

By Community Health Staff

Loneliness and a lack of social connection has a definite impact on overall health.

That impact gained attention in May 2023 when the U.S. Surgeon General declared loneliness an epidemic.

A report found a lack of connection is linked to a nearly 30% increased risk of heart disease, a 32% increased risk of stroke and a 50% increased risk of dementia in older adults. The risk of premature death increases by more than 60% for those who lack social connections, according to the report. In addition, the risk of depression rises significantly among those who report feeling lonely.

Healthy social connections can help counter stress, promote healthy behaviors and improve overall quality of life.

So, what can we do?

The Surgeon General report offered recommendations on a variety of levels. Individuals can:

- Invest time in nurturing relationships by reaching out to family and friends daily.
- Minimize distractions when talking with others.
- Seek opportunities to support others.
- Be responsive and practice gratitude.
- Engage with people of different backgrounds and experiences.
- Participate in social and community groups.
- Reduce activities that promote disconnection such as excessive social media use and screen time.
- Reach out in times of difficulty to family members, friends, a counselor or the 988 crisis line.
- Be open with your health care provider.
- Engage civically, such as attending local meetings.

Growing Wellness

Houseplants may help relieve stress, boost indoor air quality

By Erin Yarnall

Taking care of houseplants can be a lot of work — some require pruning, others require a delicate balance of watering. Despite the workload they create, the effort is well worth it, as plants can provide a mental health boost and act as a form of self-care.

“Caring for houseplants can have a significant positive impact on mental health,” says Nilou Esmaeilpour, a registered clinical counselor and founder of Lotus Therapy. “The act of tending to plants requires attention, nurturing and a connection to living things, which can offer several psychological benefits. Watering, pruning, and simply watching plants grow can have a calming effect. Engaging with plants can reduce cortisol levels, the primary stress hormone, and encourage relaxation.”

Not only can bringing plants into a home help to improve mental health, but there are also benefits to physical health that can be attributed to houseplants, according to gardening expert Diana Cox, the founder of The Gardening Talk, who says houseplants help to improve air quality by absorbing toxins in the air.

“Houseplants contribute to improved air quality by eliminating toxins like benzene, formaldehyde and trichloroethylene,” Cox explains. “These harmful substances can trigger headaches, fatigue and other health concerns.”

The gardener also notes houseplants help their owners connect to nature, even if they live in an urban setting with limited access to the outdoors, which can further improve mental health.

“Irrespective of urban life, caring for houseplants fosters a connection with nature, known to alleviate stress and elevate mood,” Cox says.

Houseplants can also fill up empty space in homes and can help provide mood-boosting aesthetic value.

“Houseplants are excellent for filling vacant areas in your home, imparting a more welcoming atmosphere,” Cox says. “The presence of plants establishes an environment of tranquility and serenity, particularly advantageous in urban settings or for individuals facing high levels of stress.”

When it comes to choosing the right houseplant, Esmaeilpour

notes it's important to choose plants “that fit your living conditions and care abilities.” Consider how much watering certain plants need, how much sunlight they need, what types of soil they will require and what pruning will be necessary.

“Growing and maintaining healthy plants provides a sense of accomplishment and can boost self-esteem,” Esmaeilpour says. “Seeing the tangible results of your efforts can give a rewarding sense of purpose.”





Cultivating Calm

Succulents are a good first step to start an indoor garden

By Amanda Bolan

Britta Larson began her indoor gardening endeavor with a unique way to ask friends to be her bridesmaids.

"I made each of them a small pot with a succulent and a note," says the HR generalist. "I had an extra, so I made myself one as well."

Succulents are low-maintenance plants known for their ability to store water in their leaves, stems and roots. Larson started with succulents because of these traits.

"I was actually able to keep the one from my bridesmaid gift alive," she laughs.

There are numerous reasons why people may decide to have plants in their home, whether to improve air quality or grow herbs, but Larson's initial motivation was purely aesthetic.

"I really love the outdoors and nature, and having houseplants is like bringing the outdoors inside for me," she says.

After her success with the first succulent, Larson began growing her indoor garden and now has eight varieties in her home.

"I realized that having more plants in our home reduces stress and helps create a sense of calmness," she notes.

When replanting or gaining new plants, Larson recommends taking the task outdoors because of the mess that potting soil creates. Most of her succulents are then kept inside, but she does have an *Aptenia cordifolia* "Variegata," or Variegated Baby Sun Rose, that she occasionally puts outside in the summer.

"I do have to be careful if it rains, as it can get too much water," she says.

After her accomplishment of keeping her succulents alive, she decided to share the joy of growing houseplants with her family.

"I have transplanted pots for my mom and grandma, and they were successful as well," Larson says. "My sister has also taken on having succulents and other plants in her house, and hers are also very successful."

While not everyone has a green thumb, Larson encourages people to try growing succulents because they are very low-maintenance.

"One interesting thing I discovered is when we pay too much attention to the plants, sometimes they don't do as well, possibly because we are over-watering them," she says. "All succulents need is a little water, and give them light."

Larson prefers to use the natural sunlight in her home, but for homes without a lot of natural light, grow lights are also an option. Grow lights differ from regular light bulbs in that they emit a full spectrum of light that plants need to photosynthesize, which is something regular light bulbs fail to do. Most nurseries will carry a variety of grow lights.

Larson has gotten her succulents from Jean's the Right Place in Perham and Grass Roots in Ottertail, and highly recommends visiting one of their businesses.

Don't Forget to Stretch

Improve blood flow, flexibility and posture

By Erin Yarnall

Maintaining a regular exercise routine is crucial to staying in shape and keeping your body healthy, but should include more than just lifting weights and doing cardio. Stretching should also be an important part of a workout routine, both before and after exercising.

When regularly done before and after workouts, stretching helps boost flexibility, and most important, helps prevent injury. Stretching helps break in and lengthen muscles before they're further lengthened during a workout.

"During stretching, our muscles and other soft tissues like ligaments and tendons lengthen, boosting flexibility and aiding in injury prevention," says Alex Stone, a doctor of physical therapy and conditioning specialist. "The prolonged stress on the tissues allows them to adapt and become more resilient against future stress, contributing to less pain and inflammation over time."

While it helps prevent injuries during a workout, stretching can also improve a workout, as it warms up the body before exercise.

"Stretching helps to increase flexibility and range of motion in the joints, which can improve overall athletic performance," says Mayank Pandey, a fitness trainer and founder of the website Healthroid. "When muscles are tight and inflexible, it can lead to limited mobility and an increased risk of injury during exercise. By incorporating stretching into your pre-workout routine, you can help to loosen up the muscles and prepare them for the physical demands of your workout."

Stretching can help prevent injuries like sprained ankles or soreness after a workout, but certain stretches can also help avoid more serious life-threatening problems like blood clots.

"Stretching can help prevent the formation of blood clots by promoting healthy blood circulation," Pandey explains. "Blood clots can form when blood flow becomes stagnant or slows down, leading to potential health risks such as deep vein thrombosis."

Stretching can also help those with jobs that require sitting for long periods of time; there are even stretches that can be done while sitting at work.

"For those with jobs requiring prolonged sitting, stretching is crucial in maintaining flexibility and combating the adverse effects of a sedentary lifestyle," Stone says. "Even while sitting, stretches such as neck and shoulder rolls can be done to alleviate tension in these areas."

It doesn't matter if you're spending hours at the gym or spending hours sitting behind a desk, there are overwhelming benefits when it comes to stretching, according to Pandey.

"Incorporating regular stretching into your routine can have numerous benefits for both your physical health and overall well-being," Pandey says. "Incorporating simple stretches throughout the day, such as neck rolls, shoulder shrugs, and leg extensions, can provide immediate relief and prevent long-term issues. Taking short breaks every hour to stretch not only benefits physical health but also improves mental focus and productivity."

Five Stretches You Should Do Daily

Pigeon Pose - A pigeon pose, commonly done in yoga practices, is a half split with one leg stretched behind the body and the other leg bent in front. According to Stone, this pose is great for releasing hip tension, stretches the hip rotators and flexors and helps with tightness.

Squat - Starting in a standing position, lower down to a squatting position. Stone says squats are a full lower body stretch, which promotes ankle, knee, and hip flexibility, and helps the body avoid joint issues in the future.

Neck and Shoulder Rolls - Neck rolls are done by lowering your chin to the chest and rolling the head in a circular motion. Similarly, shoulder rolls are performed by lifting your shoulders and moving them in a circular motion. Stone says neck and shoulder rolls are "simplicity at its finest," adding this stretch alleviates tension in the neck and shoulders that can be developed from stress or poor posture at desks.

Hamstring Stretch - To do a hamstring stretch, extend one leg in front of another, and lean forward until you can feel the back of your leg stretching. According to Pandey, hamstring stretches target the muscles at the back of the thighs and improve lower body flexibility. He notes that doing hamstring stretches can help reduce lower back pain and limited mobility.

Chest Stretch - Interlock the fingers of both hands behind the back and lift your arms behind you with shoulders pushed back. This stretch, says Pandey, can help people who have tight chest muscles from leaning over and sitting at a computer all day and can also improve posture.



The Skinny on Fats

Omega-3s and omega 6s can help joints and reduce inflammation

By Michael Gilbert



We are often told to limit our fat intake to enjoy a healthy and active lifestyle. There are, however, some fats the body needs for good health.

These are known as essential fatty acids. Humans must ingest them because the body cannot synthesize them. The two main essential fats are omega-3s and omega-6s. They are crucial for maintaining healthy joints as well as reducing inflammation and improving joint mobility.

While the body is unable to make these two essential fats, there are easy ways to obtain them, according to nutritionist Heather Dyc.

“These fats can be obtained from foods commonly found at your grocery store, like organic meats, walnuts, chia seeds, flaxseed, fish and green leafy vegetables,” Dyc says. “It is important to have these essential fats because there are potential health problems if the body doesn’t get enough healthy fats.”

Those health problems include dry skin, poor vision, joint pain, high cholesterol and an increased risk for developing

cardiovascular disease, says Ryan Hetrick, a therapist and psychologist for Epiphany Wellness.

“Additionally, inadequate intake of essential fatty acids can lead to depression, anxiety, fatigue and poor concentration,” he says.

Hetrick recommends “fatty fish” such as salmon, mackerel, herring and anchovies as the best options for those looking to boost their omega-3s. Fish are also low in saturated fat — a type of fat in which the fatty acid chains have all single bonds, allowing them to pack more tightly together — which is beneficial as experts advise reducing the intake of saturated fat to promote health and limit the risk of cardiovascular diseases.

An individual who routinely consumes a diet of animal-based foods like meat, butter and cheese is likely eating too much saturated fat, and that can result in high cholesterol and blockages in arteries, he says. The American Heart Association recommends aiming for a diet that includes



“Bring on the good fats. Your taste buds and your body will thank you.”

MATT BONESTROO, NUTRITIONIST

about 5% of calories from saturated fats. This translates to about 13 grams of saturated fats daily, while an average adult who consumes 2,000 calories should aim for 40 to 62 grams of unsaturated fat per day. Unsaturated fats are fatty acids in which there is at least one double bond within the fatty acid chains. Vegetable oils, nuts and seeds are all good sources of unsaturated fats.

Dietitian Blanca Garcia says to promote good health in her clients, she encourages replacing saturated fats with unsaturated fats when preparing meals.

“Unsaturated fats promote heart health by keeping your cholesterol levels at bay, thus reducing the risk of developing preventable cardiovascular diseases,” she says. “When you cut back on red meat and butter, fish, beans and nuts are excellent substitutes.”

Dietitian Meaghan Greenwood agrees with Garcia on the importance of substituting “bad” fats for “good” fats.

“It can definitely have a positive impact on the nutritional

quality of a dish,” Greenwood says. “Replacing butter or vegetable oil with olive oil or avocado oil can improve heart health. Other good fats to substitute include coconut oil, which can provide a boost of medium-chain triglycerides, and ghee (clarified butter), which is a good source of vitamin K2. When cooking with fats, it’s important to choose oils with high smoke points to avoid creating harmful compounds when heated.”

Nutritionist Matt Bonestroo says switching to “good fats” when cooking is “a great way to watch your health soar.”

“If ‘good fats’ were a superhero, they would be the Avocado Crusader fighting off the evil forces of unhealthy cholesterol and heart disease,” Bonestroo says. “Using ‘good fats’ in cooking can definitely make a dish healthier and improve your cholesterol levels, reduce inflammation and even promote brain health.

“Bring on the good fats. Your taste buds and your body will thank you.”

WINTER CALLING

Keep the chill outside with these warm, hearty — and healthy — recipes



Pear Salad with Balsamic and Walnuts

INGREDIENTS

4 cups mixed salad greens
2 ripe pears, sliced
1 fennel bulb, sliced paper thin
Lemon wedge
2 Tbsp dried cranberries
1 Tbsp chopped pecans
1 Tbsp chopped walnuts
1 Tbsp chopped hazelnuts, or more pecans or walnuts
1/3 cup shaved pecorino
Balsamic vinaigrette, (store bought,
or a 50/50 mix of olive oil & balsamic vinegar)
Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

DIRECTIONS

1. Assemble the salad with the mixed greens and top with pears and fennel. Squeeze a little lemon over the mixture and toss.
2. Top with the cranberries, pecans, walnuts, hazelnuts and pecorino. Drizzle with balsamic vinaigrette. Season to taste.

Mushroom Stroganoff

INGREDIENTS

1 medium onion, finely chopped
1 1/2 tsp ground paprika
1/4 tsp chili powder
2 garlic cloves, crushed
2 1/2 cups button mushrooms, sliced
1/3 cup light sour cream
1/4 cup fat-free plain yogurt
2 Tbsp flat-leaf parsley, finely chopped, plus extra to serve
oil spray

DIRECTIONS

1. Lightly spray a large frying pan with oil and cook onion for 6-8 minutes over medium heat until soft. Add spices and garlic and cook for 1 minute. Add mushrooms and cook for 7-8 minutes, or until tender.
2. Stir in sour cream and yogurt. Stir until melted. Stir in chopped parsley and season to taste.
3. Serve stroganoff sprinkled with extra parsley leaves.





Healthier Meat Loaf

INGREDIENTS

1 1/2 lbs. lean ground beef
 1 egg
 1 onion, chopped
 1 cup low-fat (1%) milk
 1 cup whole wheat bread crumbs
 1/2 cup chopped fresh parsley
 1 large carrot, grated
 salt and ground black pepper to taste
 1 Tbsp brown sugar
 2 Tbsp. prepared mustard
 1/3 cup ketchup

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Lightly grease a 9x5-inch loaf pan.
2. Combine beef, egg, onion, milk, breadcrumbs, parsley and carrot in a large bowl. Season with salt and black pepper. Place beef mixture in the loaf pan.
3. Stir together brown sugar, mustard and ketchup in a small bowl. Pour over meatloaf.
4. Bake in preheated oven until no longer pink in the center, about 1 hour. An instant-read thermometer inserted into the center should read at least 160 degrees.

Pumpkin Empanadas

INGREDIENTS

Dough

3 cups all-purpose flour
 1/3 cup white sugar
 1 1/2 tsp salt
 1/4 tsp baking powder
 1 cup vegetable shortening
 1 cup warm water

Filling

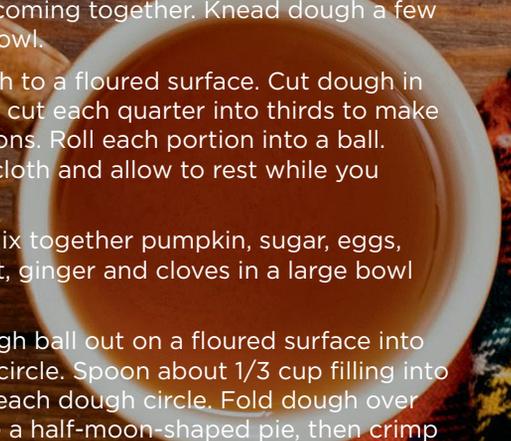
4 cups canned pure pumpkin
 1 cup white sugar
 2 large eggs
 1 1/2 tsp ground cinnamon
 1 tsp salt
 1 tsp ground ginger
 1/2 tsp ground cloves

Other

1 large beaten egg

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Line baking sheets with parchment paper.
2. Make dough: Whisk together flour, sugar, salt and baking powder in a large bowl. Cut shortening into flour mixture until it resembles coarse crumbs. Stir in warm water, 2 tablespoons at a time, just until dough starts coming together. Knead dough a few times in the bowl.
3. Transfer dough to a floured surface. Cut dough in quarters, then cut each quarter into thirds to make 12 equal portions. Roll each portion into a ball. Cover with a cloth and allow to rest while you make filling.
4. Make filling: Mix together pumpkin, sugar, eggs, cinnamon, salt, ginger and cloves in a large bowl until smooth.
5. Roll each dough ball out on a floured surface into a thin, 6-inch circle. Spoon about 1/3 cup filling into the center of each dough circle. Fold dough over filling to make a half-moon-shaped pie, then crimp the edges together with a fork. Place onto prepared baking sheets. Brush tops with beaten egg.
6. Bake in preheated oven until the filling is hot and crusts are shiny and browned, about 20 minutes.





DON'T HEAT SLEEP

Adults need at least seven hours of quality sleep each night, but it doesn't always come easy

By Rebecca Fortner
Assistant Editor

Sleep is a biological requirement for life, just like breathing, eating and hydrating.

And yet, it's the only one people will push aside when time is tight.

"You don't hear that about the other biological requirements for life," says Dr. Michael Grandner, director of the Sleep and Health Research Program at the University of Arizona. "Sleep is seen as unproductive, and there's nothing more un-American than unproductive time."

According to Grandner, who also directs the Behavioral Sleep Medicine Clinic at Banner-University Medical Center, the battle for more and better sleep is cultural rather than individual. Work, technology and the pressure to stay "busy" all play a role as larger systems.

"These aren't a bunch of individual choices," he says. "It filters down into your bedroom."

And there is a cost, he stresses, explaining that although sleep is adaptable, that flexibility has a limit.

Insomnia Explained

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, adults need at least seven hours of sleep each night, and more as they age. Insomnia is a condition in which it is difficult to fall asleep and stay asleep. Sleep, when it happens, may not be high quality. Poor sleep may include not feeling rested — even with an adequate number of hours — and repeatedly waking up during the night.

According to the National Sleep Foundation, about 40 million Americans experience insomnia each year, and more than 57% of older adults experience a decline in quality of life and overall health because of the condition.

Acute insomnia is short-term and can be triggered by stress. It generally resolves on its own. Chronic insomnia, however, is more serious and includes insomnia for at least three nights of the week for at least three months.

According to the foundation's 2023 Sleep in America poll, sleep health is strongly associated with mental health. Results showed adults who slept fewer than seven hours per weeknight were three times as likely to experience "moderate to severe depressive symptoms" as those who slept seven to nine hours each night.

Individuals may develop sleep issues when they feel like they have too much to do, have difficulty detaching from the day, and may have health issues like sleep apnea or chronic pain, says Grandner. Insomnia may also develop when the stress of sleep becomes predictable, which can mean even the sight of your bed brings a sense of dread.

"Your bed becomes the dentist's chair," he says.

What Can Be Done

Sleep should not be thought of as a "cost," but as an "investment in time," says Grandner.

"We're all living paycheck to paycheck with our sleep," he explains, stressing it's a mistake to ask how much sleep can be afforded.

Instead, he recommends calculating how much sleep may be needed to feel well-rested and productive the next day.

Continued on next page



According to the CDC, good sleep habits include going to bed and waking up on a consistent schedule, and ensuring the bedroom is quiet, dark and at a comfortable temperature.

Continued from previous page

From there, count backwards, allowing time to wind down before going to bed. Being in bed, he says, should not be the first time the brain has to process the events and issues of the day.

“Budget for it,” he says. “Plan that time earlier. Then the bed doesn’t become your thinking space.”

Flipping the script, he recommends setting an alarm for bedtime rather than for waking up.

“Your sleep is like a Labrador,” he says. “You want to change it, you have to train it.”

If sleep becomes difficult, Grandner suggests getting out of bed. Reading or listening to music or a podcast may help to relax.

Good sleep habits or sleep hygiene, says the CDC, includes going to bed and waking up on a consistent schedule, ensuring the bedroom is quiet, dark and at a comfortable temperature.

Electronic devices like TVs, computers and smart phones should not be kept in the bedroom.

Avoiding large meals, caffeine and alcohol before bed can help, as can being physically active throughout the day.

The National Sleep Foundation adds that spending time in bright light during the day — natural or the equivalent — can help. As can eating meals at consistent times, a consistent wind-down period and no electronics an hour prior to bedtime.

Melatonin, says Grandner, is a sedative that tells the body it’s nighttime, but that’s about it. Sleep medications also may have side effects. Rather than medications, he recommends cognitive behavioral therapy for insomnia.

Building better habits

Cognitive behavioral therapy for insomnia involves identifying and eliminating beliefs and behaviors that negatively affect sleep, and using strategies to develop good sleep habits, according to the foundation.

The American College of Physicians in 2016 recommended CBT as an initial treatment for chronic insomnia, stating the treatment could be initiated by a primary care physician and accessed in individual or group in-person sessions, as well as by telephone, online or through books.

In addition to developing a better wind-down and bedtime routine, as well as getting out of bed when sleep becomes difficult, as Grandner advises, CBT can also include learning relaxation techniques and how to remain “passively awake,” according to the Mayo Clinic. This involves learning to let go of worries about sleep. Biofeedback, in which a device is used to monitor heart rate and muscle tension, can also help to show patterns that affect sleep.

The Mayo Clinic notes sleep medications are short-term and may have negative side effects. While CBT may take longer to solve sleep problems, it can provide a more long-term solution. For some individuals, a combination of medication and CBT may be appropriate, experts say. The first step is seeking help.

Grandner credits a colleague with a quote that provides perspective on the issue.

“Sleep isn’t something you do. Sleep is something that happens when the situation allows it.”



“Your sleep is like a Labrador. You want to change it, you have to train it.”

DR. MICHAEL GRANDNER
DIRECTOR OF THE SLEEP AND
HEALTH RESEARCH PROGRAM,
UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

Did You Know?

COBRA costs are what employees would pay if KLN was not supplementing their health insurance.

UHC Monthly

Employee
Employee +1
Family

COBRA

\$733.09
\$1,470.21
\$2,089.62

You Pay

\$175
\$308
\$424

Surest Monthly

Employee
Employee +1
Family

COBRA

\$658.72
\$1,306.74
\$1,853.74

You Pay

\$165
\$290.50
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