



LEWIS & CLARK CITY-COUNTY
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Staying Healthy While Staying On Your Budget

By Melanie Reynolds

I know I don't need to tell you that health care is expensive.

In 2010 alone, Americans spent almost \$2.6 trillion, more than 10 times as much as they spent in 1980, according to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. And the rate is expected to continue growing faster than our national income for the foreseeable future.

Policymakers have been working for decades to try to address this growing burden, and it continues to be a major priority.

In the meantime, there's lots you can do as an individual to stay healthy without breaking the bank. By making smart choices, you can help prevent injury, disease, and disability – and save money, too. And when you do need health care, lower-cost options are available.

Be Active

You don't need anything fancy, expensive, or complicated to be active. Walking, hiking, and bicycling are recognized as simple, effective, and successful ways to meet your daily physical activity requirements (at least 2.5 hours a week for adults, 7 hours for kids and teens).

There are lots of free opportunities for physical activity in Lewis and Clark County. As just one example, Bike Walk Montana and the Recreational Trails Program have teamed up to identify trails and create maps and walking guides you can use. A guide to the new fitness trail in Centennial Park is already available, and more are in the works.

To learn more, visit www.bikewalkmontana.org or call Melinda Barnes, 449-2787. Or visit <http://stateparks.mt.gov/recreation/recTrailsProgram.html> or call Beth Shumate, 444-4585.

Quit Smoking

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Smoking is expensive, even if you don't count the cost of treating the diseases it causes. Did you know that if you saved the money you spend on a pack of cigarettes a day, you'd have enough in a year to buy a top-of-the-line washer and dryer? In 10 years, you'd have enough to buy a brand-new car!

And, of course, quitting improves your health and reduces your chances of heart disease, cancer, lung disease and other costly diseases.

Quitting is hard, but it's worth it. If you want help, call the Montana Tobacco Quitline at 1-800-QUIT-NOW. The quitline offers coaching, nicotine-replacement tools, and other help, all for free.

Get Recommended Shots

Make sure you and your kids have all recommended vaccinations. Not only will you save money on doctors' visits to treat the diseases that vaccinations prevent, but you'll save on missed time at work, too.

The Lewis and Clark City-County Health Department offers walk-in immunization clinics Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 11 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Some adult immunizations are available on a sliding fee scale, depending on income.

If your child is not insured, or if the insurance doesn't cover vaccinations, your child may be eligible for lower-cost shots through the federal Vaccines for Children Program.

To find out what shots you and your family need, visit www.LewisAndClarkHealth.org and click on Immunizations or call the health department at 443-2584 and ask for the Immunization Program.

Breastfeed Your Baby

Unlike formula, breast milk is free. Formula and feeding supplies can cost more than \$1,500 a year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Breastfed babies are sick less often, because breast milk contains antibodies and hormones that can protect them from illness. Breastfeeding helps protect babies from ear infections, asthma, obesity, and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).

Breastfeeding also benefits mothers. It reduces the risk of type 2 diabetes, breast cancer, ovarian cancer, and postpartum depression

For breastfeeding support, call the health department's Healthy Families Program at 457-8912 or visit www.womenshealth.gov/breastfeeding/.

Stretch Your Food Dollar

There are plenty of ways to save money on food without sacrificing good health. Here are some of them:

- **Do it yourself.** Convenience foods like frozen dinners are more expensive than meals you make from scratch. Processed foods can contain hidden sugar, sodium, and fat that can

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sabotage a healthy diet. Prepare your own meals to save money and eat well. You may want to prepare large batches on your day off so you can freeze portions to eat throughout the week.

- **Plan before you shop.** Plan all your meals for the week and include entrees like stews, casseroles, and stir-fries that allow you to stretch expensive items into more portions.
- **Get the best price.** Check ads for sales and coupons. Look for specials or sales on meat and seafood, which are often the most expensive items on your list. Buy in bulk, and buy fruits and vegetables in season.
- **Choose beans instead of meat.** They're a cheaper way to get protein into your diet and contain no saturated fat.
- **Drink water.** It's free and much healthier than something loaded with calories and sugar. Plus, drinking fluoridated water helps protect against tooth decay.
- **Limit food portions.** Food portions in America's restaurants have doubled or tripled over the last 20 years, a huge factor in today's obesity epidemic. Those super-sized portions have distorted what we consider a normal portion size, and that affects how much we eat at home, too. One way to keep calories in check is to keep food portions no larger than the size of your fist.

Grow Your Own Food

It doesn't take an experienced green thumb to grow colorful and healthful produce from a \$3 packet of seeds. The Lewis and Clark County Extension Services offers lots of great gardening advice on its website at www.lccountymt.gov/extension.

If you don't have space for a garden, or if you live in an apartment or condo, there are several community gardens around town with plots available for rent. You can find out more at <http://helenagardens.org/>.

Finally, if you prefer to leave the growing to others, take in the Farmer's Market in downtown Helena on Saturdays. Participants in the WIC supplemental nutrition program can get vouchers to cover the cost of fresh fruits and vegetables.

To learn more, contact WIC at 457-8912.

Find Affordable Care

When you do need health care, there are free and low-cost programs available.

The Cooperative Health Center (CHC) is one of about 1,200 federally qualified health centers across the nation that provides a health-care safety net for those who are low-income, uninsured, or on Medicaid. But its services are available to all, regardless of income.

Those services include primary care, basic dental care, chronic disease management, and mental health counseling. The CHC accepts all insurance and bills on a sliding fee scale.

According to the National Association of Community Health Centers, patients who rely on health centers spend significantly less per person per year on health care compared to those who don't use health centers.

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If you'd like to learn more about the Cooperative Health Center, visit www.lccountymt.gov/health/chc-health-clinic.html or call 443-2584.

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