

Perils of Self-Diagnosing

People who use artificial intelligence to search for information about their health can find a deceptive landscape. An AI engine might be helpful explaining tests or language that is too technical for the average person.

But there are ways an AI can lead you astray. The AI may be designed to please you, so it might try to agree with something you post in a search, even if such a thing is not factual.

Here is some advice from Yale-New Haven Health:

First, you may get unnecessary anxiety that comes from going to the worst-case scenario provided during a search.

Second, you could make an unsafe decision or try something unnecessary or dangerous because your search doesn't include all the information required. Maybe you don't include an allergy you have, or you don't mention the supplements you are taking that you believe help your arthritis knee pain. Also, an AI may recommend you take over-the-counter medication that isn't right for your symptoms or interferes with your prescription medication.

You can also risk overestimating and underestimating a problem due to AI advice. Talking with your health care provider is likely to provide the appropriate context. To make a diagnosis, your provider considers your age, gender, weight, and physical activity level, as well as other conditions or risks you have, such as type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, unhealthy cholesterol, or a family history of cancer.

Providers spend years learning how to interpret test results or other information within the larger context of human physiology. They are trained to determine how those factors interact with other systems of your body. A web search or AI cannot provide that context.

In terms of mental health, experts also recommend caution. More people are turning to chatbots and social media to self-diagnose depression, anxiety and other conditions. These tools aren't substitutes for a professional who knows your medical history.

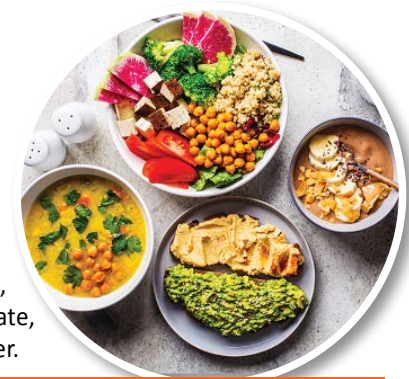
Speaking with your health care provider gives proper context and avoids self-diagnosis mistakes.



Plants on Your Plate

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

A plant-based diet centers on foods that grow in nature, such as vegetables, fruits, whole grains, beans, nuts and seeds. In this eating pattern, plants fill most of your plate. Smaller amounts of animal products, such as dairy, eggs, fish, or poultry, can also go on your plate, without excluding them altogether.



What's most important is the proportions of food on your plate:

- Fill half your plate with vegetables and fruits, which are plants.
- Fill a quarter of your plate with whole grains, which are plants.
- Fill the remaining quarter of your plate with protein-rich foods from plants (beans, soy, lentils, tofu) or animals (chicken, eggs, yogurt, fish).

The Mediterranean diet is an example of a plant-based eating pattern. A well-planned plant-based diet emphasizes whole or minimally processed foods, such as whole grains, beans and vegetables, over ultra-processed options, including hotdogs, chicken nuggets, soda and candy. That means choosing:

- An apple instead of apple pie.
- A baked potato instead of potato chips.
- Grilled chicken breast instead of chicken tenders.
- Steel-cut oatmeal instead of sweetened breakfast cereal.

Why eat more plants? Studies show plant-based diets lower the risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes and some types of cancer. It's likely due to the abundance of fiber and antioxidants in plant-foods, which quell inflammation, and support healthy blood sugar and blood pressure levels.

Other reasons for choosing plant-based diets include saving money and environmental protection. Plant-based eating can cost you about 30% less, since plants cost less than animal-based foods. Plus, growing plants requires fewer natural resources and generates fewer greenhouse gases than raising livestock.

Ultimately, putting plants on your plate is about shifting the balance. Crowd your meals with colorful, fiber-rich plant foods while allowing flexibility to meet cultural, nutritional and personal preferences and keep your taste buds happy.

Emotional Intelligence at Work

Ever wonder why some coworkers seem to handle stress, teamwork and conflict with ease? It could be their emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is defined by Mental Health America as “the ability to manage both your own emotions and understand the emotions of people around you.”

This includes self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and having social skills. Some studies show having high EI can make you more productive and more engaged at work, navigate stress, improve communication skills and be a better coworker.

If you want to learn how to be more emotionally intelligent, here are some tips:

- 1. Recognize your feelings.** Are you feeling happy, anxious or excited?
- 2. Understand your feelings.** Ask yourself why you're feeling this way through a series of questions such as: *What just happened? Did something occur earlier that affected my feelings?* Once you understand them, you can think before you react. For example, if you are angry, don't immediately write an email lashing out at someone.
- 3. Label your feeling.** What most accurately describes it? For example, you could be stressed or maybe the word **overwhelmed** describes it better.
- 4. Try to understand how others are feeling, too.** Read verbal and nonverbal clues. Is someone hesitant?
- 5. Express your feelings.** Once you understand them, you can communicate more openly and effectively.
- 6. Regulate your feelings.** Don't avoid emotions; accept them and adjust to them. It could be as simple as stepping away from someone who upsets you or taking deep breaths to cope with stressful situations.



Q: Alcohol-anxiety link?

A: People often drink to take the edge off. While alcohol can indeed have short-term calming properties, it can also increase your anxiety later on.

This happens as a result of several factors:

- Mild withdrawal — as alcohol leaves your system, your body experiences the opposite of its intoxicating effects.
- Disturbed sleep — while alcohol may cause drowsiness initially, it also suppresses REM cycles, which are critical for restful sleep.
- Embarrassment — you may regret what you said or did under the influence.

If you turn to alcohol regularly to manage your anxiety, these consequences are likely to be even worse. For example, the more you drink, the more severe — and potentially even dangerous — your withdrawal symptoms are likely to occur when you stop drinking. In addition, you could develop an alcohol use disorder or other medical complications. **The solution?** Address your anxiety through proven, time-tested strategies such as meditation, exercise or professional help. — Eric Endlich, PhD



Floods and Respiratory Health



The dangers of floods don't always end when the waters recede. Contaminants, such as toxic chemicals, sewage and water-borne pathogens, are left behind and can continue to affect your well-being, especially your respiratory health.

After the water dries, harmful toxins can remain in the leftover sediment. When that sediment gets disturbed by walking or cleaning, it can turn into tiny, airborne dust particles. That means anything left by the flood residue — chemicals, toxins or biotoxins — can end up in the air you breathe. Mold can also form in areas invisible to the eye, leading to other respiratory issues.

How can you protect yourself? If you live in a flood-prone area, here are some before and after tips.

Before:

- Clear gutters; repair roofs; seal doors, windows, vent pipes, chimneys and skylights.
- Empty septic tanks and clear drains.
- Seal walls and windows.
- Install a sump pump with a battery backup to drain water.

After:

- Stay away from flooded areas and buildings until they are deemed safe.
- Drain any water and dispose of remaining sediment.
- Check for traces of water, dampness and mold growth immediately after flooding.
- Remove all porous materials affected by flooding. Dry outdoors under the sun.
- Open all windows and use a large exhaust fan to dry the area quickly.
- Use a dehumidifier.
- Upgrade your HVAC air filters (MERV 13) or use portable air cleaners with HEPA filters.

Caution: If you see mold growth, wear a well-fitted N95 mask, gloves and boots to clean and disinfect everything in contact with the mold. Any moldy materials that cannot be cleaned should be disposed of in sealed heavy-duty plastic bags.

