



Dakota Wellness Program

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Inside this issue...

**The importance of
social health**

Monthly book club

**Are creatine supplements all
that they're pumped up to be?**

**From bed to better: how sleep
posture impacts morning pain**

**Nutritional benefits of this
month's recipe**

Move more month

**Monthly recipe: creamy,
gut-building artichoke soup**



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The importance of social health

Social health is a fundamental part of overall well-being, influencing how we cope with stress, maintain emotional balance and experience connection throughout life. Meaningful relationships – whether with family, friends, coworkers or community members – provide support, encouragement and a sense of belonging. These connections help reduce feelings of loneliness, lower stress levels and improve both mental and physical health.

Being socially engaged also strengthens resilience. During challenging times, supportive relationships offer comfort and perspective, reminding us that we are not alone. Community involvement further enhances social health by creating shared purpose and opportunities to connect beyond our immediate circles.

As we age, maintaining social connections becomes even more important for preserving emotional well-being, cognitive health and quality of life. At every stage, investing in relationships and nurturing social bonds supports healthier individuals and stronger communities.



Monthly book club

The Art and Science of Connection: Why Social Health Is the Missing Key to Living Longer, Healthier, and Happier by Kasley Killam

The Art and Science of Connection by Kasley Killam makes a compelling case that social health, the quality and depth of our relationships, is as essential to well-being as physical activity, nutrition and sleep. Drawing on research from public health, neuroscience and psychology, Killam shows how meaningful connection impacts longevity, resilience, immune function and overall happiness. She reframes connection as a skill that can be intentionally built, practiced and strengthened, rather than something that just “happens” naturally. The book explores how modern life, technology and busyness have quietly eroded our social well-being, even as we prioritize other aspects of health. Killam offers practical tools to assess social health, identify connection gaps and take small, realistic steps toward stronger relationships – at work, at home and in the community. Grounded in science but deeply human, the book positions connection not as a luxury, but as a foundational pillar for living longer, healthier and more fulfilling lives.

Discussion questions

- How do you currently define “social health,” and in what ways does it show up – or feel lacking – in your daily life? How does this compare to how you prioritize physical or mental health?
- Which modern habits or systems (work culture, technology, busyness, etc.) most interfere with your ability to form meaningful connections? What small, realistic changes could help counteract these barriers?
- Killam frames connection as a skill that can be practiced. What intentional actions could you take this week to strengthen one relationship or expand your sense of belonging – personally or professionally?

Ask the expert

Are creatine supplements all that they're pumped up to be?

Creatine supplements, once popular mainly with bodybuilders, are now widely promoted for muscle growth, performance and even brain health. Research strongly supports creatine's ability to increase lean muscle mass and improve strength and short bursts of athletic performance – especially when combined with resistance training. It may also help older adults counter age-related muscle loss, with emerging but limited evidence for bone and cognitive benefits. Creatine is considered safe for most adults and is especially helpful for vegetarians and vegans. However, benefits are modest, not universal and it won't work without exercise. Creatine monohydrate is the most studied and recommended form.



From bed to better: how sleep posture impacts morning pain

Sleeping posture plays a big role in morning aches and pains, according to medical experts. Hours spent in awkward positions can strain muscles, create gaps between the body and mattress and lead to inflammation, stiffness and poor sleep. The goal is to “sleep like you stand,” keeping the spine in neutral alignment from head to tailbone. Pillow choice and height matter: back sleepers need medium support, side sleepers need enough lift to fill the shoulder gap, and stomach sleepers should use little to no pillow. Extra pillows can support knees, hips or the lower back. A supportive mattress, replaced about every seven years, also helps reduce pain.

Nutritional benefits of this month's recipe

Artichokes are chock-full of antioxidants, including vitamin C and folate, which is a B vitamin. Artichokes contain a high amount of fiber, which may help normalize blood sugar levels and bowel movements. They also contain a special type of fiber called prebiotics, which feeds beneficial bacteria in the gut. Prebiotics also enhance the diversity and abundance of these healthy bacteria.

Onions are high in vitamin C, an antioxidant that helps enhance iron absorption and immunity and protects cells from free radical damage. Onions are rich in B vitamins that support the nervous system, energy production, brain function, hormone production and digestion. They are also rich in beneficial prebiotic fiber.

Other benefits of this recipe's ingredients:

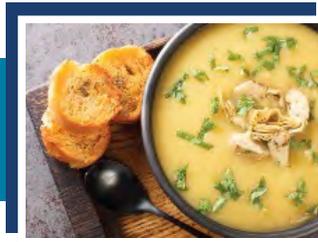
- Leeks are in the onion family and have many of the same antioxidant properties. There is greater prebiotic fiber content in leeks than in onions.
- Garlic provides the same benefits as onions and leeks but may also help support healthy blood pressure.
- Spinach is high in antioxidants and minerals such as magnesium and iron. Both are essential nutrients for energy.

Preventive health

Move more month

April is National Move More Month. Most Americans spend 7.7 hours of their day without any movement. Increasing movement or physical activity is one of the best ways to maintain or improve your overall health. When you become more active, you can begin to feel benefits from activity right away. Physical activity can improve your mental, physical and emotional health. It can sharpen focus, provide stress reduction, improve sleep and even boost mood. It can also keep you healthy and remain independent as you begin to age. Being physically active can reduce your risk of falls, manage health problems, make daily tasks like cleaning and grocery shopping easier and can also reduce pain. Adults need a combination of both aerobic and muscle strengthening activities. Aerobic activity is anything that makes your heart rate increase. Muscle strengthening activities cause your muscles to work harder. You should aim for 150 minutes of aerobic activity each week and aim for strength training two days each week. Speak with a physician about what activities would be best for you.

Creamy, gut-building artichoke soup



There is so much healthy goodness in this soup. It's like a meal in a bowl. Add a few almond crackers, and the satisfaction level is on point. Plus, there are quite a few gut-building ingredients in the soup. A healthy gut supports immunity, weight control and mood.

Ingredients:

4 Tbsp. butter or avocado oil
1 lb. chicken, shredded (optional)
1 medium onion, chopped
4 leeks, white part only, chopped
3 stalks celery, diced
3 cloves garlic, minced
2 cans (14 oz) artichoke hearts, chopped
2 Tbsp. lemon juice, or juice of 1 lemon
1 tsp. salt or more to taste

1 tsp. cracked pepper
4 cups chicken broth
1/2 cup white wine
1 cup unsweetened coconut cream
1 cup heavy cream (if a vegan version is preferred, the heavy cream can be substituted with an additional cup of coconut cream)
8 ounces baby spinach

Instructions:

If adding chicken, chop into small pieces and sauté it in avocado oil until cooked through. Shred and set aside. Heat oil or butter in large pot on medium heat. Add the onion, leeks, celery, garlic and cook for 5 minutes. Chop artichokes into small pieces. Add to vegetable mixture. Cook for 5 minutes. Add broth, lemon juice, salt, pepper and stir. Bring to a boil and reduce heat to medium. Simmer for about 15 minutes. Turn heat on low and stir in heavy cream, coconut cream and spinach. Heat for 3–5 minutes. Puree the soup and pour back into the pot. Add the cooked chicken (or leave it out for a vegan soup) and bring to a simmer until heated through.

This delicious and healthy soup can be served with sour cream, finely grated parmesan cheese, or cilantro.

Monthly Observances

Women's Eye Health and Safety Month

Alcohol Awareness Month

Stress Awareness Month

Financial Literacy Month

Cancer Prevention and Early Detection Month

April 2: World Autism Awareness Day

April 7: World Health Day

April 6-12: National Public Health Week

April 22: Earth Day

April 24-30: World Immunization Week

April 28: World Day for Safety and Health at Work

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