Dakota Wellness Program

DECEMBER 2026

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Join Sanford Health Plan Wellness team members for our monthly 15-minute wellness webinar.
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NORTH DAKOTA PUBLIC EMPLOYEES RETIREMENT SYSTEM

SANFORD HEALTH PLAN

Sleep well, live well: Make rest a priority

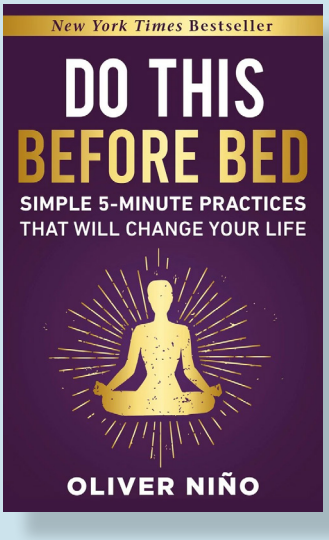
A good night's sleep does more than help you feel refreshed – it plays an important role in your overall health and well-being. Most adults need seven to nine hours of sleep each night, while children and teens need more depending on their age.

Quality sleep helps your brain function, improves mood and energy, strengthens your immune system and gives your body time to heal and repair cells, tissues and blood vessels. Over time, poor sleep may increase the risk of health concerns such as heart disease, high blood pressure, unhealthy blood sugar and cholesterol levels, obesity and depression. It can also affect memory, thinking and emotional well-being.

The good news? Small changes to your daily routine can help you sleep better. Try going to bed and waking up at the same time each day, even on weekends. Create a calming bedtime routine, dim the lights, limit screen time before bed and silence notifications to help your mind unwind. Keep your bedroom cool, quiet and comfortable and avoid large meals, caffeine and alcohol close to bedtime.

Remember, better sleep doesn't have to start with a complete lifestyle change. Begin with one small step, such as setting a consistent bedtime or putting your phone away before bed. Give yourself permission to slow down and recharge. Prioritizing sleep is an investment in your health, helping you feel better, think more clearly and make the most of each day.





Monthly book club

Do This Before Bed

by Oliver Niño

Published in 2025, *Do This Before Bed: Simple 5-Minute Practices That Will Change Your Life* encourages readers to rethink the time just before sleep as an opportunity to calm the mind, process emotions and prepare for the next day.

Niño, an energy healer and spiritual teacher, offers short practices that can be added to a nightly routine. These include breathwork, visualization, journaling, movement, intention-setting, affirmations and relaxation exercises. The book is organized around foundational bedtime practices and additional exercises designed for specific life situations and personal goals.

A key message is that creating a consistent nighttime ritual does not have to be complicated. Even five to ten minutes of intentional preparation can help people slow down, reflect on the day, release stress and focus on what matters to them.

Discussion questions

- **What is one habit you currently practice before bed and how does it affect the quality of your sleep?**
- **Which strategy from Do This Before Bed – such as journaling, deep breathing, stretching, visualization or setting intentions – would you be most willing to try? Why?**
- **What is one small change you can make to your evening routine this week to help you relax, sleep better and improve your overall well-being?**

Ask the expert

How can health literacy help me become a smarter healthcare consumer?

Health literacy is your ability to find, understand and use health information to make informed decisions. In today's world, we are surrounded by health claims – from social media posts and supplements to advertisements and online health products. Not everything you read or hear is accurate or right for you.

Being a smart healthcare consumer means asking questions, checking reliable sources and understanding the benefits, risks and costs before making a decision. Look for information from trusted organizations, health professionals and research-based sources. Be cautious of products that promise quick fixes or use phrases like "guaranteed," "miracle cure," or "clinically proven" without clear evidence.

Most importantly, talk with your healthcare provider before starting a new treatment, supplement or major lifestyle change. Good health literacy helps you move from simply consuming health information to confidently using it to support your well-being.



Stay Safe: Simple steps to prevent injuries

Injuries can happen anywhere, but many can be prevented with simple safety habits. Falls, car accidents and everyday mishaps are common causes of injury for people of all ages. Staying alert and taking a few precautions can make a big difference.

To prevent falls, keep walkways clear, use handrails on stairs, wear supportive shoes and make sure your home has good lighting. When driving, always wear a seat belt, follow speed limits, avoid distractions and never drive under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Children should use age- and size-appropriate car seats or booster seats.

At home and work, use equipment correctly and wear protective gear when needed. Pay attention to your surroundings and avoid rushing. Prevention starts with awareness. A few extra seconds of caution today can help protect you and your loved ones from serious injury tomorrow.

Respect starts with inclusion: Celebrating every ability

Respecting people with disabilities means recognizing that every person deserves dignity, kindness and equal opportunities. A disability does not define who someone is or what they can accomplish. People with disabilities have unique talents, interests, goals and abilities, just like everyone else.

One way to show respect is to focus on the person, not the disability. Use respectful language and never make assumptions about what someone can or cannot do. If you think someone needs help, ask first and allow them to explain what support they prefer.

Inclusion also means creating accessible workplaces, schools, public spaces and activities. Simple changes, such as providing captions, keeping walkways clear or offering accessible materials, can make a difference.

Most importantly, listen, include others and speak up against discrimination. When we treat everyone with dignity and respect, we create communities where all people can participate, contribute and thrive.

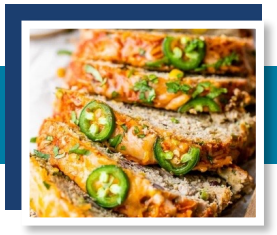
Preventive health

How winter weather and cold temperatures can affect your body

December is a great time to discuss how winter weather and cold temperatures can affect your body. Cold weather activity can increase the risk of developing frostbite or hypothermia. Heat is pulled away from the body through cold temperatures, rain, wind and even sweat. Heat can also be lost when standing on cold ground or when breathing. To protect vital organs, the body keeps the inner core warm and circulation to extremities slows increasing risk for frostbite. If core body temperature drops even just a few degrees, hypothermia will set in. Even if only mild hypothermia, the brain does not work as well, making thinking and moving difficult. Prevention is key!

- Dress in warm layers. Wear an inner layer to wick away sweat. A middle layer to insulate. An outer layer that repels the elements. Protect your hands, face, neck and feet.
- Stay hydrated and eat well. Food and fluids keep you warm and fuel your body.
- Watch for early warning signs: Red/cold skin, prickling and numbness, stinging and tingling, feeling cold and shivering.

Enchilada turkey meatloaf



If you love turkey meatloaf and enchiladas, you'll love this enchilada turkey meatloaf, a fun twist on the weeknight classic. Slow cooker method is also provided.

Ingredients:

1 1/2 pounds 93% ground turkey
1/2 cup quick oats, *check labels for gluten free
2 tablespoons mild enchilada sauce
1/2 cup chopped scallions
1/3 cup corn kernels, fresh or frozen
1/4 cup canned reduced-sodium black beans, rinsed and drained
1/4 cup chopped cilantro, plus more for garnish
4 ounce can mild chopped green chili, drained well
1 clove crushed garlic
1 large egg, beaten
1 1/2 teaspoons kosher salt
1 1/2 teaspoons ground cumin
1 teaspoon onion powder
For topping:
2/3 cup mild enchilada sauce
1/3 cup Mexican cheese blend
1 jalapeño sliced thin, optional

Instructions:

Preheat the oven to 350F. Line a sheet a pan with parchment paper. In a large bowl combine ground turkey, oats, 2 tablespoons enchilada sauce, scallions, corn, beans, green chiles, garlic, egg, salt, cumin and onion powder. Combine everything well using clean hands, then shape onto the sheet pan into an oval loaf flattened on top so you can add the sauce and cheese later. Bake 55 to 60 minutes, until cooked through. Remove from oven and top with the remaining enchilada sauce, cheese and jalapeño. Bake until the sauce is heated through and the cheese is melted, about 5 to 10 minutes. Garnish with cilantro if desired. To serve, transfer to a cutting board and slice into 12 slices. Serve with extra sauce if desired.

Slow cooker method: Cut parchment paper to about 15-inch x 9 1/2-inches to easily insert and remove the meatloaf from your slow cooker. Place the loaf onto the parchment paper vertically then holding the edges of the paper, carefully insert into an oval 5-6 quart slow cooker. Cover and cook on low 6 hours or high 3 hours. Pull the loaf out of the slow cooker with the parchment and set aside on a dish. Drain any liquid from the bottom of the slow cooker and wipe the insert clean with a paper towel. Transfer the loaf back into the slow cooker with the parchment, cover with enchilada sauce, cheese and jalapeño. Cover and cook low heat until the cheese is melted, for about 10 to 15 minutes.

Nutrition Facts: Serving: 2 slices | Calories per serving: 268 | Protein: 26g | Carbohydrates: 12g | Fat: 13g | Fiber: 2g

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The information in this newsletter should not be considered medical advice and is not a substitute for individual patient care and treatment decisions.

Monthly Observances

National safe toys and gifts month

Dec. 1 World AIDS day

Dec. 3 International day of persons with disabilities

Dec. 7-13 National influenza vaccination week

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