

Beacon of Light

October—December 2023 • Volume 6 • Issue 4

"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in the darkness but will have the light of life." John 8:12



Pastor's Corner

"Joy": A Watchword for Christmas

Together with peace, hope, and love, "joy" is one of the watchwords of the Christmas season. It's one of the characteristics that provides discernible evidence of the presence of the Lord in our midst. As such, it's one of those essential qualities we ought to be on the lookout for if the miracle and mystery of Christmas is to unfold, yet again, in our lives.

Perhaps pointing to a time when the messiah would show up on the scene, the prophets of old alluded to a kind of communal joy; a joy akin to what the community experienced when its numerical fortunes were enhanced; or a communal joy felt at the time of harvest, when the fruits of human labor and physical sacrifice were now able to be fully enjoyed. The prophet Isaiah, for example, in the same chapter which many believe looks forward several centuries to the birth of Christ, "**a son is given to us...named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace**" (Isaiah 9:6), makes an earlier reference to the "joy" the nation would one day experience: "**You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its 'joy'; they rejoice before you, as with 'joy' at the harvest.**" (Isaiah 9:3a,b)

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And if “joy” was to be found within Isaiah’s centuries earlier premonition of the messiah’s birth, “joy” also springs up in a multitude of places at the time of Jesus’ birth. Several months prior to Mary’s delivery, Elizabeth, Mary’s cousin, who, like Mary, is pregnant with child (John the Baptist), delights when her cousin Mary greets her and says, **“For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for ‘joy’.”** (Luke 1:44)

And when the Christ-child has finally arrived, “joy”, once again, breaks out in a variety of places. Shepherds **“keeping watch over their flock by night”** are greeted by an angel giving notice of his birth, **“Do not be afraid; for see I am bringing you good news of great ‘joy’ for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.”** (Luke 2:8-11) Wise men from the East, tracking the birth star of a king from afar, travel through Jerusalem and are told that prophecy would have them search further in Bethlehem. In traveling there, scripture, once again, calls to mind the “joy” associated with the presence of the One they have been diligently searching for. **“When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with ‘joy’. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they knelt down and paid him homage.”** (Mt. 2:10-11a)

In a world where violence and warfare are the order of the day; where democracy, individual rights, and personal freedoms are under assault both here and abroad; and where disinformation and misinformation are in constant competition with the truth, it would be easy to lose sight of the source of joy that is eternal in nature. And yet, this same source of eternal joy remains fully available and accessible to all whose hearts and minds remain open to receive it. It is the joy that comes with the understanding that we are no longer defenseless against the terror of the darkness around us, or alone in the arena where our daily battles are being waged. It is the joy that comes with the understanding that there is ultimate reward for faithfulness because the One we have been waiting for, has now arrived with power and with force to deliver us. It is for this reason, in this season of our Lord’s birth, that we can, together with all heaven and nature sing: **“Joy to the world, the Lord is come!** (BOH # 246)

May the full joy of the Lord be God’s special gift to you in this holy season and beyond!

Shalom,

Pastor Mark D. Venson



Inspirational Thoughts and Encouragement

Life Is About Relationships, Not Accomplishments

Source: Daily Hope

If you are a follower of Christ Jesus . . . all that matters is your faith that makes you love others.

GALATIANS 5:6 CEV



“No matter what I say, what I believe, and what I do, I’m bankrupt without love.”--1 Corinthians 13:3(MSG)

We learned yesterday that the Bible is very clear about what really matters in life: *“If you are a follower of Christ Jesus . . . all that matters is your faith that makes you love others”* (Galatians 5:6 CEV).

If you don’t live a life of love, then nothing you say will matter, nothing you know will matter, and nothing you believe will matter.

And, if you don’t live a life of love, then nothing you give will matter.

“If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn’t love others, I would have gained nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:3 NLT).

Love is not always the motivation for giving. Some people give just to get back, or out of guilt, or for control or prestige. You can give for a lot of reasons, but the Bible says if you’re not doing it out of love, then none of your giving counts.

Finally, if you don’t live a life of love, then nothing you accomplish will matter.

You can rack up an incredible list of personal achievements. You can get your picture on the cover of *Fortune* magazine. You can win the Nobel Peace Prize. You can have enormous accomplishments, be entrepreneur of the year, build a billion-dollar company, have incredibly great successes in your field of endeavor. But the Bible says it is not worth much if you don’t love.

The Bible says—*God says*—that life is about relationships, not accomplishments.

It’s as simple as this: You can have the eloquence of an orator, the knowledge of a genius, the faith of a miracle worker, the generosity of a philanthropist, or the achievements of a superstar, but if you don’t have love in your heart, then it is worth zero. It doesn’t count. The only thing that matters to God is this: Do you love him, and do you love other people?

One day you’re going to die and stand before God. When he evaluates your life, he’s not going to look at your bank account, your list of accomplishments, or your grades. He won’t care about all your sports trophies. He’s not going to look at your endorsements or your resume.

A Look at Ebenezer's 2023 Confirmation

"For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength." Philippians 4:13

On October 8, 2023, four youth, Robert Neal, Stephen Gbelee, Bella Randall, and Angelei Gibson decided to undertake a Christian journey pursuing knowledge about Jesus Christ, gaining a better understanding of God, and developing a better relationship with Him. For eight weeks, their families supported their efforts lovingly through prayer and encouragement. The confirmands sacrificed time and devoted their effort to grasp information. They discussed, explained, and questioned topics such as "What It Takes to be a Christian", "History of Methodism", The Importance of Sacraments- Baptism and Communion, Three Kinds of Grace, and the Significance of Prayer. They read scriptures and discussed how God's word influenced their thinking. The confirmands wrote letters to God and composed their own personal prayers expressing their love towards Him. They developed an understanding that God's given gifts are to be shared with others. God has given Stephen, Bella, Angelei, and Robert musical talents, creative writing skills, and athletic skills. In the future, they would like to share their gifts with the congregation.

On Saturday, December 9, 2023, a breakfast was held to express appreciation to their families for their love and support during this Christian journey. The teenagers recognize this commitment to follow Jesus Christ is significant and requires them to share love to others by word and actions. They designed Christmas baskets for the Sick and Shut-In and those who are 90+ years. On Sunday, December 17, 2023, the confirmands celebrated their confirmation with families, friends, and other fellow ministers of faith by hosting a reception after church service. Please continue to pray for them as their journey continues.

Meet Ebenezer's 2023 Confirmands—In Their Own Words

Stephlevan Gbelee

My name is Stephlevan Gbelee, known to many as Stephen. I was born on November 5, 2009 to Chinegirl Gbelee and James in Flomo. I consider myself a wonderful young man who is growing up in the eyes of the Lord and **I am** gifted in many ways.

On several Sundays at Ebenezer United Methodist Church, I participate in the service by singing songs, and praying for the congregation. This is where my love for music began. When I was eight years old, I joined the choir and band at my elementary school. I enjoy playing the trumpet. I love singing so much that once I turned twelve I auditioned for the Creative Performing Arts choir at Hyattsville Middle School. I became an active member continuing to define my passion for music.

When I get older, my wish is to attend college and study criminal justice, statistics, and psychology in hopes of becoming an FBI agent. Along my journey, God has always been by my side as a friend and mentor. Presently, I am fourteen years old and am in the eighth grade at Hyattsville Middle School. I attend Ebenezer Methodist Church, and I continue to follow the Lord's word. A message God shares is he will always love me, and I must also love myself.

Stephen Gbelee



Robert Neal

My name is Robert Neal, and I was born on April 30, 2009. My father is Robert Neal, Sr., and my mom is Teta Neal. I am fourteen years old– a freshman attending Charles Flowers High School. I play basketball and football, and my positions are small forward and shooting guard. My favorite foods are baked macaroni and cheese, and of course, delicious fried chicken. I love cleaning and cooking when I am not playing sports.

God has guided me in many ways, and one of them is getting good grades. He has blessed me with time and knowledge which enable me to excel in my classes. I am a honor student. Following His word and obeying the commandments will help me to have a successful future life. Also God guides my footsteps, and encourages me to show love and kindness to everyone.

God means everything to me. I know he's my Father and he keeps me in his arms protecting me from evil .When I get in trouble, I pray, and He guides my way. For I know he has the final word in order for me to get into heaven. I will continue to obey the scriptures as written in the Bible. I Love the Lord.”

Robert Neal



Angele Gibson

My name is Angelei Gibson. I prefer being called Angie. I was born on January 20, 2011..My parents are Raynika Gibson and Abayomi Jones. I am a seventh grader at Leckie Educational Campus in southeast Washington, DC. My mother and my grandmother inspire me to do well in school. My older sisters encourage me to always do my best. I enjoy creative writing, drawing, and singing. During my free time, I spend my time outdoors observing nature and animals, especially dogs. After graduating from high school, I plan to attend college and become a veterinarian.

I learned in my confirmation class that God will never give up on me. This lets me know God will never stop loving me, and He will always have faith and show grace. During class, I wrote a personal letter to God and also a special prayer which I will share at a later time with my family. I decided I will serve God by becoming an acolyte at Ebenezer United Methodist. I am excited to be baptized and confirmed this Sunday, December 17, 2023.

Angie Gibson



Bella Randall

My name is Bella Randall, eleven years old and in the sixth grade. I was born on March 20, 2012. My parents are Monique White and Victor Randall. I am the granddaughter of Shirley White, and the niece of Denise Lynch. They encourage me to “Always do My Best”, and I also love shopping with my Aunt Denise. She picks out “awesome” clothes. I love my family. We always spend time together.

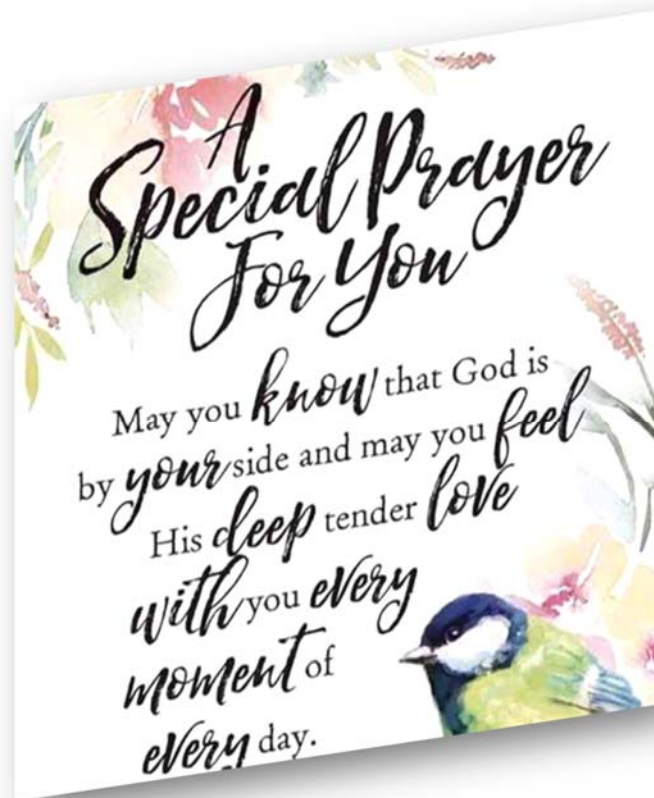
I attend Shabach Christian Academy in Glenarden, Maryland, where I participate in the choir. I enjoy singing a lot. During Christmas, my choir sang at the Bible Museum, and Prince George’s Community College.

I get closer to God by reading his word, praying, and resisting unkind things. God wants me to share his word with others. My favorite Bible verse is John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” I try to convince my friends in believing they can be whatever they want to be.

After graduating from college, I want to be a police officer to help others. I know our communities would be very unsafe without the police.

Bella Randall





**Tribute to The Family of Brother Vernon Bell
from the Chancel Choir**



There is an old saying that exemplifies Brother Vernon Bell. It reads:
“A candle loses nothing of its light by lighting another candle.”

Even though we do not always have time to express our appreciation to others, at times like these we will hopefully be reminded just how important it is.

As the only male member of the Chancel Choir for several years, Brother Bell was very important to all of us. We benefitted greatly from our brother’s kindness, his humor, and respect for all of us ladies. To make sure that we were all safe after rehearsals, he would not leave Ebenezer’s parking lot at night until we were all safely in our cars.

He took his spiritual training so seriously that he had an impact on those around him who heard his testimonies. We appreciated his honesty and fearless approach to being a member of Ebenezer and the Chancel Choir. He was unafraid to speak truth to power about the responsibilities that he learned from his dad, Lawrence Bell, and his mother, Amy Bell, about how to be a responsible member of this congregation.

He loved his cars!! They were clean to the bone, very much like Brother Bell in his appearance. He had a very good voice that he used to honor God in his rendition of the songs that we lifted up on Sunday. We will miss him dearly, and we pray that he is resting in the arms of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. His candle continues to burn brightly in the hearts and memories of all of us.

We extend our heartfelt condolences, love, and respect to his wife Jackie, his children, grandchildren, and the entire Bell family.

The Chancel Choir—Linda Porter, Director; Ellalene Barnaby; Joan Brown; Lillie Clark; Griselda Clemons; Christine Freeman; Joan Harris; Stephanie Hazel; Carolyn Jackson; Teta Neal; Gloria Pickett; Jocelyn Smit; and Carolyn Winbush



Keeping You Informed

What Are the Side Effects of COVID-19 Vaccines? What symptoms to expect after getting boosted with the latest vaccines

Source: Rachel Nania, AARP, Updated October 04, 2023

A new batch of COVID-19 vaccines is now available, and these latest shots — from Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, and Novavax — have been reformulated to better target some of the more recently circulating coronavirus variants.

The revised vaccines are somewhat different from the COVID-19 bivalent boosters introduced this time last year, which targeted omicron subvariants BA.4/BA.5 plus the original strain of the coronavirus. This year, the vaccines target just one virus strain: XBB.1.5, which is no longer the dominant variant but still continues to circulate in the U.S., along with many of its close relatives.

Health officials are recommending that everyone 6 months and older roll up their sleeves for the added dose of protection against the illness that has taken more than 1.1 million American lives. (People 12 and older can receive the Novavax vaccine.) The shots are especially important for older adults, who continue to be hospitalized for COVID-19 at rates that are much higher than younger groups.

“The COVID vaccine definitely should be taken by those at highest risk of complications from COVID, and that includes older people, people with weakened immune systems, very young children. These are the people that we are seeing have significant complications from COVID,” Mayo Clinic infectious disease expert Priya Sampathkumar, M.D., said in a news release.

Still, some people have questions about the new COVID vaccines, including possible side effects. Here’s what to expect if you go in for the jab.

No surprises from common side effects

According to the Food and Drug Administration, the common side effects that can accompany the updated shots are in line with the previous versions.

“So, if you had a sore arm before, if you had a little bit of achiness, maybe a little low-grade fever, you can expect that to happen again,” Kristin Englund, M.D., infectious disease specialist with Cleveland Clinic, said in a news release.

- **Moderna booster side effects:** Pain at the injection site was the most commonly reported side effect among people vaccinated with Moderna’s vaccine, according to data reviewed by a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) advisory panel. About 70 percent of people reported it, followed by fatigue, muscle aches, headache, joint pain, chills, nausea and vomiting, and fever.

Is it a booster?

Health experts aren’t calling this year’s vaccine a booster, like with previous versions. “I would liken it to the updated influenza vaccine that comes out each year. The influenza vaccine is updated each year as the strains that they protect against change year from year,” Sampathkumar said.

- **Pfizer booster side effects:** Pain at the injection site was also the most commonly reported reaction with Pfizer's vaccine, according to the company; up to 90 percent of people reported it. Other typical side effects included fatigue, headache, chills, muscle pain, joint pain and fever.
- **Novavax booster side effects:** The most common reactions reported in clinical trials testing the Novavax vaccine include headache, nausea or vomiting, muscle pain, joint pain, pain and tenderness at the injection site, fatigue, and general discomfort.

Alleviating side effects

The good news: If you've been vaccinated for COVID-19 — and millions of Americans have been — you likely already know what to expect and how your body may react.

"I think people also understand how to manage the side effects better in terms of drinking plenty of water prior to getting a vaccine, drinking plenty of water after you get the vaccine, taking it easy the next day," Robert Weber, administrator for pharmacy services at the Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center and assistant dean for medical center affairs at the Ohio State University College of Pharmacy, told AARP.

Taking an over-the-counter pain reliever afterward can help manage any discomfort, he added. Just know it's not advised to take these medicines ahead of time to try to prevent potential side effects. Applying a clean, cool, wet washcloth to the injection site can help to relieve pain or swelling on the arm where you got the shot, the CDC said.

Another tip: If your schedule allows, clear your calendar the day after your vaccine. "If you work during the week, you might want to get vaccinated on Friday or Saturday so that you don't have to work when you are not feeling great," said Kawsar Talaat, M.D., an associate professor in the Department of International Health at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. "Just know that one day of not feeling well from the vaccine is far better than several days of not feeling well with COVID," she added.

Not everyone experiences side effects after a COVID-19 vaccine; for most who do, symptoms tend to be mild to moderate and go away in a few days. That said, if your side effects are worrying or linger longer, it's important to call your doctor. Serious reactions are rare, the CDC said, but they can happen.

Anaphylaxis, a severe type of allergic reaction that can occur after any type of vaccination, has occurred at a rate of approximately 5 cases per 1 million COVID-19 vaccine doses administered, the CDC reports. Cases of myocarditis (inflammation of the heart muscle) and pericarditis (inflammation of the outer lining of the heart) have also been reported following COVID-19 vaccination, though mostly in younger age groups.

Vaccines are key to preventing severe illness

COVID-19 is still sending more than 2,700 Americans to the hospital each day, and experts say the new boosters can help prevent that number from swelling even more this winter.

Keep in mind that older adults have access to two other tools that can help them avoid illness this season: The annual influenza vaccine, which experts say you can get when you go in for your COVID-19 vaccine, and a new RSV vaccine, which protects against complications from respiratory syncytial virus — a common bug that hospitalizes as many as 160,000 people 65 and older each year.

“We also know that you can get more than one virus at the same time and that people who do get multiple viruses tend to be sicker. Again, anything you can do to prevent infection is good,” Talaat said.

Editor's Note: This story has been updated to include new information.



8 Ways To Avoid Social Media Burnout

Source: BLK & FIT

Many of us get all of our information from social media, from politics to trendy recipes to the latest dance craze.

It's convenient but sometimes, staying locked to our screens can affect us negatively and foster feelings of inadequacy, being overwhelmed, or sadness about the state of the world.

Here are ways to avoid social media burnout:

- **Set boundaries:** Allocate a time just for social media: It's easy to fall down the rabbit hole when scrolling on social media. Set a timer, if needed, to limit your screen time. This will help you maintain a healthy balance between your online and offline life.
- **Unfollow and Unfriend:** Take a critical look at your social media connections. Unfollow or unfriend accounts that consistently make you feel stressed, anxious, or unhappy. Your mental health should always take precedence over online relationships.
- **Curate Your Feed:** Customize your social media feed by following accounts that promote positivity, inspiration, and personal growth. Fill your feed with content that adds value to your life and makes you feel good.
- **Turn Off Notifications:** Constant notifications can be overwhelming and distracting. Turn off non-essential notifications or set specific times for checking them. This way, you'll regain control of your online experience.

- **Practice Mindful Scrolling:** When using social media, be mindful of your emotions and reactions to the content you encounter. Avoid comparing yourself to others and remember that what people post is often a curated version of their lives.
- **Get outside for at least 30 minutes per day:** Connecting with nature is an excellent way to rest the body and mind from social media. If you want to carry your phone for safety, mute the sound and take in the sights around you. Listen to the sights and sounds of nature.
- **Don't take social media to bed:** The negativity you might encounter can interfere with your sleep and overall mental health. Instead read a book, affirmations, or listen to relaxing music before bed.
- **Reflect and Evaluate:** Regularly evaluate the impact of social media on your life. Consider how it affects your mental and emotional health, productivity, and overall well-being. If necessary, make adjustments to your social media habits.



6 Stretches to Relieve Sciatic Nerve Pain

Source: WebMD: Written by Kristen Gasnick, PT, DPT | Reviewed by Sanjai Sinha, MD

Key Takeaways:

- Sciatica is a common form of nerve pain. It's caused by compression of the sciatic nerve, which runs from the lower back to the knee, where it splits into the tibial and common peroneal nerves.
- Sciatic nerve compression can result from lower back problems, like a herniated disc or injury to the hip or lower leg
- Stretching the hip and leg muscles — specifically the piriformis and hamstrings — can help limit sciatic nerve compression and pain.

As many as 40% of adults will experience sciatica in their lifetime. This common form of nerve pain is caused by compression of the sciatic nerve, which travels down the leg. People with sciatica often have pain that radiates from the lower back to the leg. Fortunately, simple at-home treatments, including light exercise, can help. Stretching certain muscle groups may reduce pressure on the sciatic nerve. This can ease pain and prevent a recurrence of symptoms.

Best Stretches For Sciatica

The best stretches for sciatica target specific muscles — like the hamstrings and piriformis — to relieve tension and improve flexibility. These muscles are often tight from sitting for long periods and can pinch the sciatic nerve.

1. Figure 4 Stretch

As the name suggests, this stretch mimics the number 4 with your legs. It lengthens your piriformis muscle. The piriformis is a small muscle in the back of the buttocks that rotates your hips.

- Lay on your back with your knees bent and feet flat.
- Lift your right leg up and place your right ankle on your left thigh to cross your leg.
- Use your hand to push your right knee away from you and rotate your hip outward. You should feel a stretch in the back of your hip.
- Clasp your hands behind your left thigh and pull it gently toward you. This will deepen the stretch.
- Hold this stretch for 30 seconds.
- Repeat 3 to 5 times on both sides.

2. Seated Piriformis Stretch

This seated stretch also targets your piriformis. Because you can perform this stretch in a chair, it is easier to incorporate into your daily routine and can be done almost anywhere.

- Sit upright in a chair with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor.
- Cross your right leg over your left, placing the outside of your right foot and ankle on your left thigh.
- Push your right knee down toward the floor to rotate your hip outward. You should feel a stretch in the back of your hip.
- To raise the intensity of the stretch, lean forward over your thighs.
- Hold this stretch for 30 seconds.
- Repeat 3 to 5 times on both sides.

3. Standing Hamstring Stretch

The hamstrings consist of three muscles. They run down the back of your thigh from your hip to your knee. Tight hamstrings can irritate the sciatic nerve, which travels along the length of the hamstring muscles.

- Stand in a staggered stance, with one foot crossed in front of the other.
- Straighten your front leg.
- Bend at the hips and slowly lean forward over your front thigh. Keep your knee extended.
- Hold this stretch for 30 seconds. Then, return to the starting position.
- Repeat on the other side by moving your back leg to the front position.
- Repeat 3 to 5 times on each side.

4. Pigeon Pose

Pigeon pose is a deep hip-opening yoga pose. It boosts flexibility in your piriformis and glute muscles.

- Start in a tabletop position on all fours.
- Bring your right knee forward while rotating your hip outward. Place the outside of your right knee and lower leg on the mat behind your right wrist. Your right knee should be close to your right hand and your right foot should be close to your left hand.
- Extend your left leg straight back behind you. Let the top of your left leg rest on the mat.
- To boost the intensity of this stretch, lean your body forward over your right leg.
- Hold this stretch for 30 seconds.
- Repeat 3 to 5 times on both sides.

5. Knee-To-Chest Stretch

This move helps improve flexibility and mobility in your hips and lower back.

- Lie on your back with your legs straight.
- Bring your right knee toward your chest.
- Clasp your hands behind your right thigh to pull your knee closer to your chest. This will deepen the stretch in your left thigh and lower back.
- Hold the stretch for 30 seconds.
- Repeat 3 to 5 times on both sides.

6. Sciatic Nerve Flossing

This exercise may have a funny name, but it can seriously benefit your sciatic nerve. It helps shorten and lengthen the sciatic nerve, which may relieve pain and tension.

- Sit tall in a chair with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor.
- Extend your right knee straight out in front of you.
- Point your right foot away from you as you bend your neck forward, moving your chin toward your chest. Keep your right knee extended throughout this movement.
- Point your right foot toward you while extending your neck back, moving your chin toward the ceiling.
- Move through these two positions 20 to 30 times in each direction.
- Repeat on both sides.

What Triggers Sciatic Nerve Pain?

First, let's take a closer look at the sciatic nerve. It starts at the bottom of the spinal cord and extends to the leg. As the largest nerve in your body, it helps control movement and feeling in your lower legs.

Sciatic nerve pain is triggered by irritation or compression of the sciatic nerve anywhere along its path from the lower back down to the knee. It can also cause pain and other symptoms — such as numbness or tingling — in the calf or foot.

In the lower back, multiple nerve roots exit the spinal cord to form the sciatic nerve. Bulging or herniated discs can compress these nerve roots. Spinal stenosis can also squeeze your sciatic nerve. It occurs when openings in the lower spine (where nerve roots exit the spinal cord) narrow.

From the lower back, the sciatic nerve travels down the back of the buttocks and thigh to the knee. Here, it splits into two branches: the tibial and common peroneal nerves. Tight hips or injury to nearby muscles — like the glute, piriformis, or hamstring — can also compress the sciatic nerve.

Pregnancy and less common causes — such as tumors or infections in or near the spine — may also trigger sciatica.

Are There Other Ways To Relieve Sciatic Nerve Pain?

Relieving sciatic nerve pain will depend on the underlying cause. Sciatic nerve pain that results from tight or injured leg muscles typically improves with rest and stretching.

If issues with your spine cause sciatica, core and low back exercises may ease your pain. Exercises that move your spine into extension, or backward bending, can help ease pressure from a bulging or herniated disc.

You might need more treatment if exercises don't help sciatica related to low back problems. Your healthcare provider may prescribe pain relievers or recommend a cortisone injection to limit spinal inflammation. Back surgery may be necessary for severe spinal stenosis or herniated discs. The procedure creates more space in your spine to relieve nerve compression.

The Bottom Line

Sciatica is triggered by compression or irritation of the sciatic nerve. This nerve — which travels from the lower back to the back of the leg — helps offer movement and feeling in the lower leg. Stretching muscles that surround the sciatic nerve, like the hamstrings, can help relieve sciatic nerve pain.

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All About Sugar Substitutes

Source: WebMD, Reviewed by Christine Mikstas, RD, LD

What's a Sugar Substitute?

A sugar substitute is an artificial (made in a lab) or natural (plant-based) substance that sweetens food and drink in place of sugar. Typically, sugar substitutes are hundreds of times sweeter than sugar and have few to no calories. They're a common sweetening choice for "diet" products such as sodas, sauces, baked goods, or sugar-free candies or gum.

Aspartame

Made from the amino acids aspartic acid and phenylalanine, it's a popular artificial sugar. It has calories, but because it's some 200 times sweeter than sugar, you use less. It's in soda, gum, yogurt, desserts, and medicines. Equal and NutraSweet are common brands. You can't bake with it, because it is not sweet after you heat it. People with the rare condition phenylketonuria (PKU) shouldn't eat it because their bodies can't process it.

Saccharin

This lab-made sweetener has been around since 1879. It's calorie-free, and can sometimes leave a bitter aftertaste. You can use it in baking. You'll find it in processed foods like baked goods, canned fruit, gum, and soft drinks. If you're pregnant, you may want to avoid it, because it can cross through the placenta to your growing baby.

Sucralose

This product is about 600 times sweeter than sugar. It's made in a lab by altering a sucrose (sugar) molecule, so you might hear it called a non-nutritive sweetener. Your body doesn't absorb it, so it doesn't give you any calories. One brand name for it is Splenda. Often sucralose is in sodas, juices, sauces, syrups, candy, and desserts. You can buy it in a bag and use it to bake.

Stevia

This natural sugar substitute gets its sweet taste from the extract of *Stevia rebaudiana* leaves. You'll often find it as liquid drops in the store, or as an ingredient in yogurts, baked goods, candy, and gum. You can use it as a sweetener in coffee or tea, or you can bake with it.

Monk Fruit

This sweetener is an extract from the Chinese monk fruit melon. The Chinese have used it for hundreds of years, but it's fairly new in the U.S. It's calorie-free and often mixed with other sugar substitutes. Monk fruit, or *lo han guo*, is in some juices, soft drinks, dairy products, condiments, and candies.

Sugar Alcohols

Sugar alcohols have features of both sugar and food alcohols (not the kind you find in drinks). They're carbohydrates that are either lab-made or come from certain fruits. Most have "-tol" at the end of their name, like erythritol, maltitol, sorbitol, and xylitol. You can find them in processed foods like gum, hard candies, ice cream, and pudding, as well as mouthwash and toothpaste.

Are They Safe?

The FDA has approved these artificial and natural sugar substitutes. The National Cancer Institute says there's no proof they cause cancer. But there are some risks, especially if you overdo it. They may change your gut bacteria and cause digestive problems. They're also linked to diseases such as type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure.

Are They Good for Weight Loss?

Yes, swapping out your sugar for a substitute might mean fewer calories in your food and drinks. But there's no strong proof that using them helps you lose weight.

Are They OK if You Have Diabetes?

Sugar substitutes can be a good option for satisfying your sweet tooth while keeping blood sugar levels under control. Keep your daily intake below the recommended level, and get your calories from whole, nutritious foods.



Apple Cider Vinegar Benefits: What the Science Says

Source: Good Rx-- Christina Palmer, MD; Patricia Pinto-Garcia, MD, MPH

Key takeaways:

- Apple cider vinegar might have some health benefits, such as improving blood sugar and cholesterol levels.
- But there are also some potential side effects of taking apple cider vinegar or using it topically, including weakening tooth enamel and skin irritation or burns.
- Beware of the grand claims around apple cider vinegar. There's no substantial evidence that it can cause significant weight loss or treat cancer, for example.

Apple cider vinegar seems to be everywhere these days — from drinks and dressings to gummies. But what is it, why are people buying it, and should you be consuming it?

Apple cider vinegar is a type of vinegar made from fermented apples. You may have heard that it can help with weight loss or even cure cancer. But beware: Most of these claims aren't backed by science. And there are some potential risks to ingesting apple cider vinegar and using it topically.

What are some of the reported health benefits of apple cider vinegar?

Though not necessarily based on sound science, there are many reported health benefits of apple cider vinegar, including:

- Improving digestion
- Helping with weight loss
- Lowering cholesterol
- Improving blood sugar and diabetes
- Improving acne and other skin conditions
- Treating fungal infections, like yeast infections

In addition to the above, there have been claims that apple cider vinegar can help cure cancer. But there is no evidence that it can prevent or treat any type of cancer. And there's very little scientific evidence to back the other claims relating to apple cider vinegar.

Is apple cider vinegar good for you?

In some cases, lab studies — meaning, those not involving humans or only a small number of people — have shown that apple cider vinegar has certain health benefits.

We don't fully understand why apple cider vinegar may provide health benefits. It might be related to its acidity or probiotic (healthy bacteria) content. And, according to some lab studies, it can also fight fungus and bacteria.

But the research has not translated into science-backed recommendations. In general, the science on apple cider vinegar is weak, as there is a lack of large, high-quality human studies. And, in some cases, ingesting apple cider vinegar may even be harmful.

What the science says about the alleged benefits of apple cider vinegar

There is some evidence that apple cider vinegar may help with blood sugar regulation or controlling appetite. But when it comes to outcomes like weight loss and improved digestion and skin health, the science isn't there. Here is a closer look.

Does apple cider vinegar help with digestion?

There are claims that apple cider vinegar can help with digestion issues, such as irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) or bloating. But the science does not back this up. In fact, some studies suggest that apple cider vinegar may actually cause gastrointestinal symptoms or worsen gastroparesis.

Does apple cider vinegar help with weight loss?

It's not clear if apple cider vinegar can really help people lose weight. In one small study, people who consumed apple cider vinegar with a meal felt more full afterward, which might help to control appetite.

And a small, randomized study showed some promising findings about weight loss and apple cider vinegar. Participants who took 30 mL of liquid apple cider vinegar every day for 12 weeks lost more fat around their abdominal organs and had improved cholesterol markers compared to those who didn't. It's not fully understood why, but it may have been related to feeling fuller and eating less.

But a larger review of multiple studies did not show that apple cider vinegar had clear weight loss benefits. So there isn't conclusive evidence that consuming apple cider vinegar can lead to weight loss, or that the possible benefits outweigh the risks. To draw any conclusions, bigger, well-designed human studies are needed.

Is apple cider vinegar good for people who have diabetes?

Taking apple cider vinegar might help with insulin and blood glucose (sugar) levels for people who have diabetes. There's some evidence, for example, that it may help improve insulin sensitivity after a meal and lower blood glucose levels.

A meta-analysis review showed that apple cider vinegar improved blood glucose levels and cholesterol in people with diabetes. But, again, larger, well-designed studies are

needed to better understand how much apple cider vinegar is helpful, how often to take it, and what the real risks and side effects are.

Is apple cider vinegar good for your skin?

You may have heard about people applying apple cider vinegar directly to their skin. Some people use apple cider vinegar for acne or eczema. Others use it for dandruff, warts, or even to treat body odor.

Here's the thinking behind this: Acid helps the skin maintain a healthy pH level, which helps control bacterial growth. Plus, it's been suggested that apple cider vinegar may have antimicrobial effects on the skin and act as a cleanser.

Unfortunately, there's no good evidence to support using apple cider vinegar to improve skin health. But there are studies showing that apple cider vinegar does *not* help with dermatitis *nor* improve the balance of bacteria on the skin. It's even been shown that apple cider vinegar can cause skin irritation.

Does apple cider vinegar help with a yeast infection?

Lab studies have shown that apple cider vinegar can fight fungus. But these findings do not necessarily translate into benefits for humans. There's no scientific evidence that apple cider vinegar is helpful — or even safe — for treating yeast infections in people.

And like elsewhere on the skin, apple cider vinegar can cause burning and irritation if applied directly to the vulva or vagina. It can also disrupt the normal pH and microbiome of the vagina, leading to yeast and other uncomfortable infections, like bacterial vaginosis.

Are there benefits of drinking apple cider vinegar with the mother?

The “mother” is the thick and gooey layer of bacteria and yeast that ferments apple juice and makes it into vinegar. Drinking apple cider vinegar with the mother means drinking this cloudy layer, which may include probiotics, or “good” bacteria.

Given the known health benefits of probiotics, some people choose to drink apple cider vinegar this way (versus filtered). But there's no evidence about the health benefits of the mother.

Is it safe to take apple cider vinegar every day?

There are many ways to add apple cider vinegar to your diet if you want to. And, in small amounts, it's probably pretty safe for most people. You can drink it mixed in water or tea, put it in salad dressings or smoothies, or chew apple cider vinegar gummies. Just don't drink it undiluted.

There's no guidance for how much apple cider vinegar is safe for people to consume, what it should be taken for, or the best way to take it. But there's some evidence that tablets and gummies may not be as effective as liquid vinegar. The gummies also often have added sugar. So they may cause more harm than good — especially if you're taking them to improve your blood glucose.

Apple cider vinegar side effects

As mentioned, consuming apple cider vinegar or using it topically has some potential downsides. For example, apple cider vinegar can:

- Burn or irritate the skin
- Damage tooth enamel
- Interact with some medications
- Irritate or burn the esophagus
- Cause nausea

If you have questions about the possible side effects of apple cider vinegar, talk to your healthcare provider. That way, you can make sure it's safe for you to take.

Who should not take apple cider vinegar?

Taking apple cider vinegar is not for everybody, and, in fact, there are some people who need to be especially careful. Be sure to talk with your healthcare provider about taking apple cider vinegar if you:

- Take any medications that could interact with apple cider vinegar, such as insulin or digoxin (Lanoxin)
- Have a chronic medical condition, such as gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), diabetes, or chronic kidney disease
- Have dental issues, such as tooth enamel loss
- Have low potassium levels
- Are pregnant or breastfeeding

The bottom line

Apple cider vinegar may have some health benefits, but the research isn't there to back up most of the claims floating around. There's some promising research showing it may have benefits for diabetes or high cholesterol. But be careful: It can also cause skin irritation and damage your tooth enamel. Small amounts in salad dressing or added to smoothies, for example, are probably safe.



The Colored Tags on Your Bread Actually Mean Something—Here's What You Need to Know

Source: EatingWell.com, Alice Knisley Matthias



Want to buy the freshest loaf of bread at the grocery store? Look at the colored plastic tags on the bag.

When lunchtime rolls around, you may head to the refrigerator to grab your favorite combination of meat and cheese to make a sandwich. Or you might whip up our quick and easy [3-Ingredient Creamy Rotisserie Chicken Salad](#). With thinly sliced tomatoes and crisp greens? Yum!

But all of these sandwiches need one key ingredient: a fresh loaf of bread. No amount of mustard or mashed avocado you spread on those slices can fix bread that's past its prime. So how do you know if you're getting the freshest loaf possible when you head to your grocery store bakery? Luckily there's an easy-to-find clue on the packaging that's key to deciphering a loaf's freshness—the plastic tag.

What Are the Plastic Tags on Bread Bags?

Picking up a loaf of bread from a grocery store's bakery is your best bet for getting something that's fresh. Typically, those loaves have been baked within a day or two of when they're for sale in the store. But to know exactly when it was baked, you want to take a look at the colored plastic tag or tie that closes the bag. Those pieces of plastic are called "bread clips" (aka bread tabs, bag clips, bread bag clips or bread buckles). The tag's color indicates when the loaf was stocked on the store's shelves.

What Do the Colors on Bread Tags Mean?

These color-coded tags indicate the date the bread was baked and packaged. It helps staff keep track of what was baked when, so they can rotate out older loaves as needed. Most grocery stores follow the schedule below:

- Monday – Blue
- Tuesday – Green
- Thursday – Red
- Friday – White
- Saturday – Yellow

Wondering where Wednesday and Sunday are? Most bread bakeries take a production break on those days.

How Can I Remember the Schedule of Color-Coded Bread Tags?

Now that you know that the color-coded tags actually mean something, how can you remember which color means which day? Luckily there is an easy way to remember the schedule. The colors correspond to weekdays in alphabetical order: Blue (Monday), Green (Tuesday), Red (Thursday), White (Friday), then Yellow (Saturday). For example, if it's Tuesday, you'll want to look for a loaf of bread with a blue or green tag.

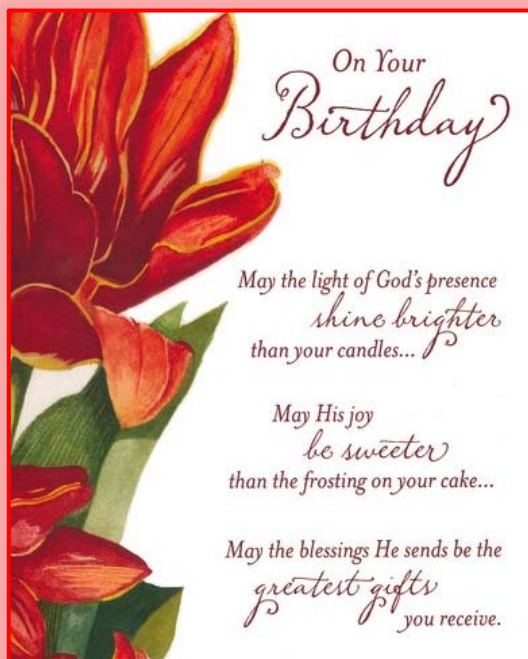
Now that you know how to find the freshest loaf of bread, you can focus on choosing ingredients to make the perfect sandwich. Check out [our most satisfying veggie sandwich recipes](#) for extra inspiration.



Birthdays

| October | |
|---------------------|----|
| Maria Eric-Williams | 1 |
| Pershail Young | 2 |
| Peggy Dearing | 2 |
| Rev. Evelyn Manson | 4 |
| Ellen Watkins | 13 |
| Marilyn Davis | 17 |
| Ellalene Barnaby | 18 |
| Jasmine Barber | 18 |
| Earleen Johnson | 20 |
| Cylestine A. Laury | 22 |
| Boyd Poole | 23 |
| Thomas Brown | 25 |
| Asha Douglas | 28 |
| Helen Jackson | 30 |


| November | |
|-------------------|----|
| Cynthia Clark | 3 |
| Charles Blackburn | 4 |
| Steven Gbelee | 5 |
| Kaleb Gray | 6 |
| Ina Fells | 8 |
| Anne Peterson | 13 |
| Emma Murdock | 13 |
| Larry Wilson | 13 |
| Tusani Jackson | 13 |
| Manson Riley | 14 |
| Ebenezer A. Davis | 14 |
| Janay McIntosh | 22 |
| Joshua Stokes | 24 |
| Phil Clark | 26 |
| Angelo Brown | 30 |




| December | |
|-------------------|----|
| David King | 3 |
| Olive Graves | 9 |
| Chinagirl Gbelee | 10 |
| Teta Neal | 11 |
| Ethel Barnard | 13 |
| Andrew Kamara | 15 |
| Pearl Stemley | 21 |
| Shirley White | 21 |
| Barbara Boone | 23 |
| Maxine Scott | 29 |
| Cleveland Jones | 30 |
| Franklin McIntosh | 31 |



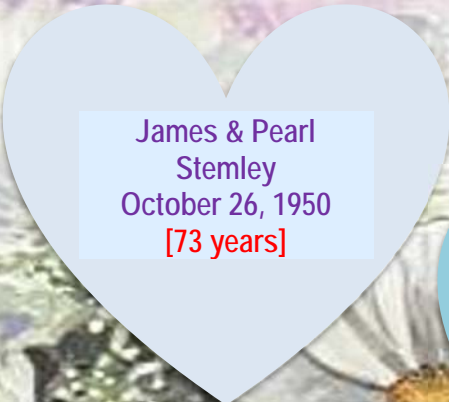
Wedding Anniversaries



*Blessings on Your
Wedding Anniversary*



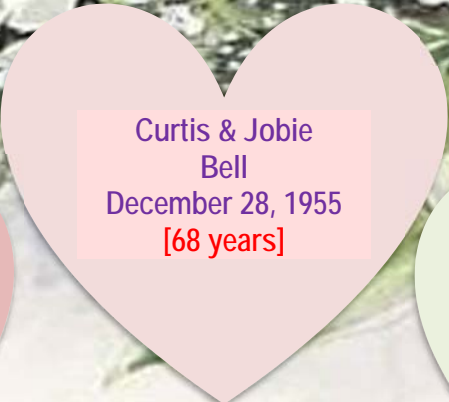
William & Winnifred
Butler
October 22, 1966
[57 years]




James & Pearl
Stemley
October 26, 1950
[73 years]




Phil & Cynthia
Clark
December 3, 1977
[46 years]



Curtis & Jobie
Bell
December 28, 1955
[68 years]



Aaron & Terri
Ware
November 2, 1985
[38 years]



Franklin & Barbara
McIntosh
December 24, 1988
[35 years]

From The Newsletter Editor

In Jesus

We not only find **peace**,
but we also find the **Prince of Peace**.
We not only find **righteousness**,
but we also find the **Righteous One**.
We not only find **counsel**,
but we also find the **Counselor**.
We not only find **wonders**,
but we also find the **Wonderful One**.
We not only find **spiritual food**,
but we also find the **Bread of Life**.
We not only find **provision**,
but we also find the **Shepherd** of our souls.
We not only find **salvation**,
but we also find the **Savior**.
We not only find the **Kingdom**,
but we also find the **King**.

—ROY LESSIN



This Christmas, let us not forget that it is not the Christmas wrappings nor the gifts that lie within, but our gift of love for others. Wishing you and your family a very Merry Christmas and a Happy 2024.

Sis. Ellalene Barnaby



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You are in the driver's seat of your life and can point your life down any road you want to travel. You can go as fast or as slow as you want .. And you can change the road you're on at any time.

Sometimes you gotta take your hand off the steering wheel and

let God drive.



When you put God first in everything you do. You'll be amazed at what happens in your life.

With Him in the driver's seat of your life, under His control you will never be out of control.