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CONTENTS

Staying hydrated at elevation ........................................... 4

Wellness, Healing, and Acupuncture ............................... 6

How to make delicious, healthy snacks ............................ 8

Get everyday rewards from your spring garden .......... 10

Camping advice from a seasoned pro......................... 12

6 things your kids should know about surgery .............. 14

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Tips and myths related to hydration in a cold, dry climate at high altitude

By ANDEE NOVOTNY
For the Laramie Boomerang

“Stay hydrated” is 2020 slang for “I care about you, please remember to take care of yourself.”

Reminders to drink water are everywhere, but the specific requirements for optimal hydration are less pervasive.

The message is often simply to drink as much as possible. One common axiom goes, “If you’re thirsty, you’re already dehydrated.”

But thirst is actually a good indicator of when you should be drinking, explains Evan C. Johnson, assistant professor at the University of Wyoming with a Ph.D. in exercise kinesiology focused on the impact of hydration, physical activity and heat exposure.

“Our thirst mechanism is pretty well-tuned based on the maintenance of homeostasis overall in the body,” he said.

The mechanism relies on a hormone released from the brain when blood thickens.

“You are technically dehydrated when you’re thirsty, however, that amount of dehydration is not necessarily bad,” Johnson said.

The goal, he said, shouldn’t be to avoid thirst at all times, but to pay attention to the signals the body sends.

The standard daily water intake recommendation is 2.7 liters for women and 3.7 liters for men.

“That’s where you start and then to adjust from there,” Johnson said.

To determine more precise individual water intake needs, urine color is the best test. The target should be somewhere in the “straw yellow” range. If it gets darker, more water is needed.

• Altitude
Traveling to a higher elevation increases the risk of dehydration. Within the first two to five days, most people experience a negative reaction to the decrease in oxygen; this is known as altitude sickness. As the body works to correct this, it expels water more rapidly than usual through increased breathing and urination.

“You’re going to get an immediate hemoconcentration,” Johnson said. “Your blood is going to be concentrated in an effort to increase oxygen transport. When that happens, you lose body water.”

During this time, it is crucial to take in more fluids.

The Institute for Altitude Medicine at Telluride recommends up to one to one and a half additional liters of water per day to maintain adequate hydration during high elevation activity.

Fortunately, adaptation to elevation happens quickly, and people who live at high elevations do not experience negative effects due to the elevation at which they live.

Johnson said full adaptation takes about three weeks.

“You’ll start to slowly expand your blood volume overall,” he said. “You’ll start to produce more red blood cells.”

• Humidity
Johnson, who moved to Laramie five years ago, said he still has not adjusted to Wyoming’s low humidity.

“I lived in Washington, D.C., for a while,” he said. “In the summer there it’s hot and humid. You go outside, you start walking and you know, if it’s 80 degrees, you’re soaked immediately. Here, you’re not...because all that water is evaporating right off of you. When that water stays on your skin, it can help you
in those humid situations to not lose quite as much water.”

This, he said, is because when humidity is low, the gradient in vapor pressure between your skin, your mucus membranes and the air is big.

“When that gradient is really big, the water is going to move down its pressure gradient so it’s easier for that water to evaporate,” Johnson said.

According to the Wyoming Water Resources Data System, the state’s annual average relative humidity is low — around 10 to 30% during the warmer part of summer days, rising to 65-75% during summer nights. Variation between night and day humidity is less extreme during the winter, but air heated indoors can often fall well below 10%.

The Environmental Protection Agency recommends that houses be kept between 30-50% humidity.

Both high and low humidity can lead to dehydration.

However, while increased fluid intake can prevent dehydration, excessive hydration will not necessarily solve the other ill effects of low humidity, which can wreak havoc on the sinuses.

For this, Johnson said he uses a nasal saline spray.

WRDS recommends the use of a humidifier in the winter to curb the drying effects on the skin and respiratory system.

Colder temperatures may present an additional hazard when it comes to staying hydrated. One study published in the journal of Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise suggested that cold exposure reduced thirst by up to 40% at rest and during moderate-intensity exercise.

- It’s alright to drink coffee

Johnson said one of the most common misconceptions about hydration is the belief that coffee dehydrates more than it hydrates.

“Caffeine is not a diuretic in the amounts that we drink it,” he said.

Even as much as 500 milligrams of caffeine per day (about five cups of coffee) would not be enough to put someone at high risk for dehydration.

Drinking a cup of coffee is more hydrating than not drinking a cup of coffee. People should, however, limit their intake of sugar-sweetened beverages, he said.

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Have you ever considered the differences between wellness and healing? Let us say for a moment that healing is the restoration of balance from a diseased or damaged state. From that perspective we might think of repairing a broken bone or recovering from pneumonia as examples of healing. Next, we might define wellness as a state of health in mind, body and spirit. Healing then, is something that happens naturally in the body as a function of physiological and psychological processes, whereas wellness occurs through deliberate intention. The implication is that it is possible to be well, but not healed, or conversely to be healed, but not well.

Wellness is often marketed to us as diet, exercise, sleep and stress reduction and so on, but ultimately when you distill it all down, wellness revolves around our thoughts and actions, every minute of every day. Wellness is about how we habituate our choices. Choices are also things that we can prioritize. We all know that a healthy diet, the right amount of the right types of exercise, enough good sleep and the right amounts of positive stress (stresses that raise our endorphin levels) can do wonders for our well-being. But how often do we actually prioritize these things? Additionally, how do we know what is the right thing to do or the right thing to eat? There are fads everywhere, always some new health craze on offer. All of which brings us to what is right in front of us, right now.

We live in a world of immediacy. Cell phones, social media and the quick fix. The thing of it is though, neither the mind nor the body work that way. It generally takes us a while to get dis-eased and a while to get us back to health. Unfortunately, when we get sick, we want to be well again... immediately. It really doesn’t matter that it took us thirty years to clog up our arteries or that we were so stressed that we became hypertensive.

The odd thing is that we tend to run our minds and bodies without considering what we are doing until something makes us pay attention. We don’t often pay close attention to wellness until we get sick or something goes wrong. On the other hand, we make sure to put the right fuel in our cars and make sure we do regular oil changes, because we know what happens when we don’t. Curious. So what’s more important to you? Your life or your car?

From the perspective of Acupuncture and the allied modalities of Chinese Medicine, I see some people in my clinic who present with issues that took years to develop, and they want to give acupuncture “a try”. Of course, that is exactly what happens: They give acupuncture “a try”. A client might tell me after a couple of treatments that nothing has really changed and then quit, because “it’s not working.” When we take years to develop a condition, it takes a while to resolve it. In Chinese Medicine we talk about the root and the branches of a dis-ease. The branches are symptoms that we can remove; but if we don’t dig up the root, the branches will just grow back. Sometimes then, people come to clinic and their presentation is so complex that it takes a while just to remove the shrubbery before we can identify the root and eradicate it. What is really wonderful though, is when getting to and removing the root can be made easier by looking at lifestyle choices. From my perspective, this is truly collaborative healing... you and me working together to produce a desired outcome.

A lot of success stories in my clinic involve clients who want to make lifestyle changes along with getting the acupuncture treatments. Under these circumstances my clients can obtain the healing that goes along with the acupuncture and the wellness that goes along with making lifestyle choices that improve the quality of life. In short, these sorts of clients are committed to doing what it takes to raise the quality of their lives and to reduce the negative impacts of
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CHRIS DEWEY
LAC WY #004

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You did it again: made that resolution in January to lose weight. But that was Jan. 1 and you were younger, more naive back then. You’re ready to start eating fistfuls of French fries and you occasionally dream about chocolate cake dancing with ice cream.

You’re not alone. Although it would be easy to give up, quit all this exercise and finally binge something on Netflix with your hand deep in a bag of chips, you’ve worked too hard to quit now. Maybe you don’t realize it, but every day you continue to work toward your weight loss goal, the easier weight loss will become.

Sure, we all hit walls sometimes. But if you continue on this weight loss journey (yes, it’s a journey, even though it feels cliche to call it that), think about where you’ll be by the end of the year. Don’t want you want to look back in December and know that you kicked your resolution’s figurative butt?

We are here to help! We have found three perfect healthy snacks you can take on-the-go. Whether you’re heading out for a long day or work or you just need to stash some snacks in your car during a commute, these snacks will satisfy any cravings you’re having while also keeping you on track. Your body and your future self will thank you.

### Homemade banana chips

If you’re looking to eat something crunchy but don’t want to eat a ton of empty calories that are found in potato chips, try making your own banana chips. It will satisfy cravings for both your salty and sweet side as they’ll be brushed with lemon juice and topped with a sprinkle of kosher salt.

Since bananas are rich in fiber, iron and potassium, this tasty snack will help you stay fuller longer. One ounce of these chips equals around 150 calories, so you can snack away guilt-free.

For moms, this would be a perfect after-school snack for the youngsters. Try pairing it with hummus, guacamole or salsa for some additional healthy goodness.

If you’re looking for a sweeter chip, though, swap your ripe bananas for overripe ones and top them with cinnamon instead of salt.

**Ingredients:**
- Two ripe bananas
- Lemon juice
- Water
- Kosher salt

**Directions:**
- Preheat the oven to 250 degrees and line a baking sheet with parchment paper.
- Slice bananas into small, coin-sized rounds. Evenly space apart on the baking sheet.
- Combine lemon juice and water, three parts lemon juice and one part water. Brush banana slices with water and lemon juice mixture. Sprinkle with kosher salt.
- Bake banana chips for one-and-a-half to two hours, flipping midway through.
- Remove from oven and allow to cool. Chips will harden as the chips cool.

### Homemade yogurt bites

Admit it, you’ve been side-eyeing some ice cream while walking through the frozen food section at the grocery store. But one bowl will cost you quite a bit of calories.

That’s why we made these homemade Greek yogurt bites, which will have the sweetness and texture of ice cream, packed with plenty of fruit and it’s actually zero calories. Seriously? Seriously. They’re easily portable, but you might want to eat them quickly, because like ice cream, it’ll melt.

**Ingredients:**
- Greek yogurt
- Sliced bananas
- Mixture of your choice of fruits
- Honey or maple syrup
- Sprinkles of your choice

**Directions:**
- Mix Greek yogurt with your choice of fruit mix and drizzle with honey or maple syrup. Top with sprinkles of your choice. Serve immediately.
The best part about these yogurt bites is that you can really put anything you want in them, as long as you remember to keep it healthy. If you’re looking for some additional sweetness, pour in some honey into the yogurt.

**Ingredients:**
- Sliced fruit such as blueberries, strawberries or raspberries
- Greek yogurt
- Honey, optional

**Directions:**
- Grab an empty ice tray and place fruit in the bottom. (For best results, use a silicone ice tray.)
- Spoon Greek yogurt over fruit or other mix-ins.
- Place in freezer and freeze for two to three hours or until solid.

---

**Peanut butter and celery**

There’s a reason this one is so tried and true: it works. It gives you the crunch you’re looking for with fatty foods, plus the sweetness from the peanut butter (which has protein in it!). Like with the yogurt bites, you can jazz this up however you’d like, whether it’s by swapping the peanut butter for another type of nut butter like almond or adding raisins or chocolate chips to the peanut butter spread. It’s low-calorie, yet still filling and satisfying. Plus, you know you need more veggies in your diet and this is a good way to get a serving in easily.

This one is slightly messier compared to the other two snacks (who knew peanut butter gets everywhere?), but if you’re more nimble-fingered than the article writer, you should be okay. Maybe don’t wear white on the day you eat these.

**Ingredients:**
- Stalks of celery
- Peanut butter
- Optional: raisins or chocolate chips

**Directions:**
- Spread peanut butter into celery stalks. Enjoy!

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Wellness, Healing, and Acupuncture from 6

living in today’s society. There is a word we use a lot in Chinese Medicine: ‘Homeostasis’.

Homeostasis is about bringing things back into balance, finding a place of stable equilibrium. Life pushes us out of balance, that’s pretty much inevitable. But that doesn’t mean that we are out of choices. We can choose to find balance in mind, body and spirit, even in the midst of turmoil. Clients who visit me once a month for a ‘tune up’ report that they feel lighter, have less pain, have more energy, better digestion, sleep better…the list goes on.I think of it like getting an oil change every few thousand miles.

Regardless of how you present to clinic I really have only one major goal: I want to see you as little as possible, to use as few needles as possible and get the maximum result in the shortest period of time. What it also means is that I am going to be listening to you…a lot. My typical first visit and treatment with a client is about ninety minutes, because I want to make sure I have the fullest picture possible. The more I know about you as a whole person, the more likely I am to be seeing all the moving parts that are impacting your health and the more likely it becomes that we will get to the root of the issue.

So, the point is simple: Acupuncture isn’t about managing symptoms, it is involved in removing the cause of the symptoms wherever possible. Sometimes of course, the best approach is to integrate your care and use multiple modalities, for instance, I have clients who are seeing other health care professionals while also benefiting from the effects of the acupuncture treatments. Remember, the goal is enduring wellness. What would you like to do about achieving that goal?

Chris Dewey owns and operates Thirdpathway Acupuncture in Laramie. Chris is a licensed acupuncturist, graduate of the Academy of Oriental Medicine at Austin, a national board-certified diplomate in Oriental Medicine, and President of the Wyoming Acupuncture Society. You can contact Chris at 662.769.5522 or chris@thirdpathwayacupuncture.com.

For a list of licensed acupuncturists in your area, please visit the Wyoming Acupuncture Society website at: http://www.wyoas.org.

- and joints warm. People with arthritis know only too well the pain that can come from winter getting into the joints. Keep active, keep your energy moving with things like Taiji, which is a great form of moving meditation, but also get plenty of rest and really solid nutrition.

When it comes to a winter diet, eat things that keep you warm, but maybe eat less because the days are shorter, and we are not as active as in the summer. Vegetable casseroles and soups, especially rich in root veggies with added legumes for protein (mung beans, adzuki beans, lentils), as well as cooked whole grains are your friends during the winter. Garlic, ginger, cayenne pepper and curry can warm things up for you too. Lastly, miso soups are not only warming, but also a good source of beneficial bacteria.

Well, there you have it. Enjoy the holiday and remember: The closer you are to nature with your diet, the more vibrant will be your health. Eat, drink and be merry…but do it all with wisdom.

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Ellen Fike is a freelance writer living in Cheyenne. She can be reached at elfylucille@gmail.com. Follow her on Twitter at @EllenLFike.
SWEETWATER COUNTY — Lyneen Murphy is the organizer of the Green River Pond and Garden tour in Green River and Rock Springs and she offered gardening tips to help ensure yards and gardens survive the unforgiving climate of Sweetwater County.

Whether you are a weekend gardener or a garden junkie, the promise of warmer weather gets people begin thinking about digging in the dirt and colorful flowers to come. However, spring in our high desert climate is notoriously unpredictable. Shrubs can be crusty with snow, and a couple of weeks later temperatures can warm up your garden, causing it to show signs of life. Still, some cleanup tasks are sure things during the early months of the year.

Get a jump start on your garden this spring. Take a few steps to ensure that your garden will reward you with something beautiful every single day.

Any gardener in the area has to remember we are in Zone 4 before buying perennials. That means Wyoming gets long, warm days during the summer with high temps in the 80s and lots of snow and average cold temps of minus 10 to minus 20 Fahrenheit in the winter. This means we have a short growing season of about 113 days, so vegetable gardening in Zone 4 can be challenging. It is important to check all perennials to see if they are suited for Zone 4 plants. Also take note as to if your chosen perennial like sunny or shady areas. This information will help with a successful planting.

There is no harm in cleaning up fallen branches and debris that accumulated during the winter months. However, this is not the time to get excited about planting until the threat of frost is over. Instead, go out and focus on cutting plants back before the old growth gets tangled up in the new growth and take out any dead annual plants that have remained over winter.

**ANNUALS, PERENNIALS AND SHRUBS**

Annuals will not return, and any self-seeders will already have done their job. Remove burlap from trees and shrubs as the weather warms.

This is also a good time to look over your yard and see if it’s time to thin out crowded beds and do some transplanting. Where soil has thawed, dig up perennials, such as daylilies and hostas, to thin crowded beds; divide them, leaving at least three stems per clump; and transplant them to fill in sparse areas. If you did not prune back your perennials last fall, they’re most likely looking unsightly as spring sets in. Many perennials prefer to be left standing throughout the winter, for extra protection. If you did leave your perennials standing last fall, once you start to see new growth at the base of the plants, it’s safe to begin removing dead growth and prune them to the height of 4-5 inches.

Some shrubby plants that have woody stems such as lavender need to be cut back each spring. This is because these plants only bloom on new branches. These are pruned in the spring to limit winter damage and to encourage the plant to start sending out new flowering branches. If you left your ornamental grasses up for winter interest, you can cut them 2 to 3 inches of the ground. There is no need to wait for new growth.

They’ll come back up when they’re ready.

When it comes to roses and spring care, it depends on your climate. In areas where roses do go dormant, spring care should begin just as the leaf buds begin to plump up. Cut back winter-damaged rose canes to 1 inch below the blackened area. On climbers, keep younger green canes and remove older woody ones; neaten them up by bending the canes horizontally and tipping the buds downward. As for spring-blooming trees and shrubs, these plants set their flower buds in the summer or fall of last year. Pruning them in the spring, before they’ve bloomed,
would mean pruning off this year’s flowers. Learn about your blooming trees’ particular needs, and prune accordingly.

Perennials that should do well in our Zone 4 area include shasta daisies, daylilies, irises, roses, hostas, lilies, peonies, yarrow, aster, bleeding heart, bellflower, violets, lamb’s ears, hardy geraniums and Russian lavender.

**EVERGREENS**

Evergreens require little to no spring care other than some tidying up.

**SOIL CARE**

Spring is also the time to fertilize evergreens because they are actively growing at this time. Look for a well-balanced food labeled especially for evergreens.

Spring is a good time to fertilize evergreens because they are actively growing at this time. Look for a well-balanced food labeled especially for evergreens.

**LAWN CARE BY MONTH**

When it comes to spring and our lawns, there are a few steps gardeners can take to have a more vibrant and healthy lawn. For example, rake up debris and leaves left behind from winter. Other actions may vary based on the time of the year.

**April**

- Once growing season starts, mow grass 3 inches high. Leave clippings on lawn.
- Apply first dose of fertilizer.
- Treat for crabgrass with pre-emergent herbicide or eco-friendly corn gluten.

**May**

- Pull or spot-treat dandelions or treat whole lawn with post-emergent weed control.
- Fertilize six to eight weeks after first dose.

**June and July**

- Water if rainfall is below 1 inch a week.
- This is the time to treat for grubs.

**Late August/September**

- Fertilize and seed.
- Spread weed-and-feed over entire lawn. If you do not like using herbicides, you can use white vinegar instead.

**October and November**

- Rake leaves.
- Fertilize six to eight weeks after last feeding.
- At final cut, after a few frosts, mow 2 inches high.

**WEEDS**

Early spring is also a good time to take action against weeds with some proactive weeding. Damp soil makes it much easier to pull young weed seedlings. Do not try to compost weeds. They’ll come back to haunt you.
Like the rest of Wyoming, Carbon County boasts world-class camping and outdoor recreation opportunities. Within its boundaries, there are almost 20 respective campgrounds dotted throughout the high, tree-covered mountain ranges of Medicine Bow National Forest alone.

While forest roads are aplenty, with complementing rivers, streams and alpine lakes just as ubiquitous, the county receives hundreds of thousands of visitors each year. This helps make up for nearly an eighth of the state’s overall annual overnight visitors.

But when it comes to the otherwise harmless, once-in-a-lifetime vacation to the heart of the Rocky Mountains, there’s always a chance you might run into some harmful, unpredictable conditions. According to one former Rawlins-based federal helicopter firefighter, who’s requested to remain anonymous for this story, sometimes there’s no telling what could happen.

“Especially weather patterns, which are high-pressure and low-pressure systems,” he said. “They can dramatically affect the weather within hours.”

The lowest point in the county stands at 6,168 feet above sea level, whereas its highest point stretches to a whopping 11,125.33 feet. This means, said the wildland firefighter of 10 years, just because one geographic point is sunny at 65 degrees, doesn’t mean the next place 40 miles away won’t be so forgiving. This fact alone should behove any camper to stay proactive. So, the firefighter said, let friends and family know where you’re going to camp even before you load up the truck. In addition, commanding firefighter officers stress the importance of prelusive notification even when there’s “safety in numbers” on the trip.

“Half the time when we’re doing search and rescue for people,” the firefighter said, “they don’t tell anybody where they’re going.”

Regardless of circumstance, material-wise a camper must always be prepared to face the elements. Bringing some sort of shelter – e.g. camping trailers, tents – is a must. In fact, transportable personal quarters are at the forefront between life and death. Without them, anyone stuck in the high forest will likely be forced to forage for natural building materials.

If that’s the case, it’s also imperative to keep suitable sleeping bags and clothing capable of conforming to the almost fickle changes in Rocky Mountain climate. You need interchangeable clothing that’s both going to get you through a potential blizzard or perhaps a heatwave. Some of the most popular outdoor attire include revered, hardcore tech brands like Arc’teryx, The North Face and Columbia.

Had the infamous Donner Party been so lucky to sport these modern-day outdoor fashions, perhaps their tale would’ve been a bit different. Suffice to say, the group of Missouri pioneers was still without adequate supplies. Food, for example, ran dangerously low, resulting in cannibalism.

To avoid such tragedy, the wildland firefighter suggests bringing enough water and non-perishable foods to sustain the human body for at least 24-48 hours after your intended stay. According to various sources, the accepted average amount of daily intake for females is about 1,500 calories. Men, on the other hand, require a 2,200 daily-calorie intake.
For water, experts say a daily intake of 2 liters for a fully grown human will suffice.

It's also a good thing to know that a human can survive about three weeks without food and three to four days without water. But, the wildland firefighter said that truly shouldn't be the case, if you're careful.

Bringing items high in carbohydrates and salts are a good start.

“Preferably dehydrated food, if you can't get a fire,” he said.

Extra fuel, whether it be for starting fires or recreational vehicles, is always a plus. With match or lighter, as well as a game plan, an experienced camper can start a fire within minutes. After a quick forage through your surroundings, the universal rule of thumb is to start small.

“As far as getting a fire started, use fine, flashy fuels,” the firefighter said. “Start with dried-out leaves and grasses, then move to the dried woods, like twigs and branches. Then you finally start to use logs.”

And though it's considered safer to surround the campfire with small stones, that can prove fatal. In a life or death situation, said the firefighter, when you need to capture attention using a large fire, “it's actually beneficial to not have a ring around it.”

In addition to threats of inclement weather, there are times when wildlife can get, well, wild.

In response, it's best to keep your food locked up, if it's not already in the camper. If it isn't, sources say to store your food in a waterproof sack and string it from a tree branch at least 20 feet from the ground and five feet away from the tree trunk. Better do that, or else mother bear and her cubs will have a nice field day.

Or, more likely, a field night.

Finally, always keep a first-aid kit nearby. Take it from the seasoned firefighter, a person who's actually grown to loathe the sight of the outdoors, being he's spent years of his life away from a nice, clean bed.

“I would say almost two years I've spent in the woods,” he said... “I hate it with a passion.”

To plan for your next camping trip, visit https://travelwyoming.com/places-to-stay/campgrounds-rv-parks

...you even get into your car.

Don't leave the town you're in if the road closes. Roybal said room, board, food and enough amenities are available to keep you safe. Wait until the road opens. Don't risk it.

Let someone know what you're doing and where you're headed prior to hitting the road. This way, said Roybal, if they haven't heard back within a certain time, they'll know something may’ve gone wrong. Action can be taken quicker.

Make sure you're equipped. Before you head out on the road, Roybal said there better be extra clothes, flares, flashlights, towropes, jacks, fire starters, non-perishable food items, water and shovels in your trunk, or else things can get sticky.

Always keep a first-aid kit. Winter or not, said Roybal, you never know when you'll need it.

Carry materials conducive to better traction. Bags of kitty litter or sand are good bets, Neimark said. Shower these materials on the snow near the tires. You'll have a better shot at uprooting your vehicle from the sponge-like powder.

Carry some sort of tarp. Roybal said sometimes people might need to erect a makeshift shelter. It also comes in handy if you want to stay dry.

Always keep your fuel tank full. Neimark said not only will you be more comfortable knowing you have enough to make it to your destination, if you become stranded, you’ll have enough to keep the car running for your own warmth and safety. Oh yeah, and keep your exhaust pipe clear, and only run the car for short periods of time.

Then, turn on your hazard lights and remain clear of the road. Just because you're stuck doesn't mean traffic has stopped, said Neimark. This way, fellow motorists will have a better chance of seeing you, and a collision becomes less likely.

If you're stranded on the road, don't leave the car. Neimark said some stranded motorists think they can venture out in an effort to find help. survivability diminishes not just because it's cold but also because high winds cause low visibility. It's easier to get lost.

Finally, if you hadn't done so already, call 911. Although there might be dead spots, there's still a decent chance you can get ahold of dispatch and they can subsequently pinpoint your location. Meanwhile, know your surroundings and the name of the road you're stranded on. This could make the difference between life and death.

“Those are what really affect a lot of people,” Roybal said, “because they don't realize the exposure of their body, and the elements are a big concern.”
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6 things your kids need to know about Surgery

Having a child undergo a surgical procedure can be nerve-wracking – for both you and your child. Fortunately, pediatric surgeons and nurses know how to care for children and ease their fears about surgery. To help them understand the process, talk to them about surgery before the procedure. Be sure to use age-appropriate explanations and assure your child they are not being punished, they will be safe, and you will be there waiting for them after the surgery. Here are six topics you can discuss with your child prior to their surgery:

1. Bring Special Items – Children are encouraged to bring stuffed animals, favorite blankets, or other small toys with them to the surgery center. They can keep your child preoccupied during waiting times and having a familiar object nearby can provide a sense of comfort.

2. No Food – Before surgeries, patients cannot eat any food or drink; this includes pediatric patients. Your surgery center will give you specific instructions in the days leading up to the surgery, but you can explain to your child that they will not be allowed to eat anything the morning beforehand. After surgery, they can look forward to a special treat from the nurses such as a popsicle!

3. Anesthesia – The concept of anesthesia can be difficult for young children to understand. You can tell them that a special medicine will help them take a nap during surgery so that they won’t feel or hear anything. After the surgery, they will wake up. Avoid using language such as “put to sleep”, as some children associate this with what happens to old or sick pets.

4. Post-Op – After your child wakes up from surgery, they may feel a little groggy or nauseous. Assure them this is normal, and nurses can provide medicine to make them feel better. Once your child feels awake, they will be given a popsicle or other treat to enjoy. This can be an exciting reward to look forward to after the operation. If your child’s procedure took place at an ambulatory surgery center, they will be discharged to finish recovery at home.

5. Proximity – Assure your child that you will be present before the surgery and immediately after. During the surgery, they will be very safe with kind nurses and doctors! Parents are reunited with their children as soon as possible. You can let your child know that you will be at the surgery center the entire time during their procedure.

6. Encourage Questions! – It is normal for your child to have questions. Answer them in age-appropriate terms and encourage them to ask their surgeon questions.
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