



# the CommonHealth Compass



## CommonHealth Still a Trailblazer After 30 years

Do you remember 1986? The year of Hailey's Comet, the Super Bowl Shuffle and gas that cost just \$0.89 a gallon? In that same year we first celebrated Martin Luther King Day as a national holiday, Top Gun was the top grossing movie and Oprah came to television.

While all of this was happening, the medical community was discussing research about how lifestyle affects health. New ideas about healthy living emerged, and individuals and employers were beginning to take notice. It was in these long ago days that the Commonwealth of Virginia first offered a comprehensive wellness program to employees. Thirty years later, CommonHealth continues to lead the way in employee wellness, striving to make Virginia's employees the healthiest in the nation.

Virginia was the first state in the country to offer employee wellness programs in a revolutionary culture change that put employee health at the center of its human resource management strategy. A pilot health promotion program for the Department of Highways and Transportation had achieved success in helping employees engage in their own health choices. The pilot paved the way for additional funding from the General Assembly for health promotion programs statewide. The College of William and Mary was the site of the first official CommonHealth program, which included medical screenings, fitness classes, weight control, stress management, healthy back programs, and numerous challenges and activities. Since then, CommonHealth has continued to engage employees to be champions of their own health, spurring more than 500 agency locations to sign on to the program.

CommonHealth programs cover diverse health and wellness subjects presented in a variety of formats – such as onsite programs and online materials - that make it easy to participate. All state employees may take part in the program, and are given the latest information about taking good care of themselves, their families and their communities. Unique campaigns are introduced several times a year on topics like heart healthy eating, incorporating fitness into your busy workday, and reducing stress. Employees have shared their experiences over the years about programs that help them stay fit and healthy, yet are also educational and fun.

Nine regional coordinators from the Department of Human Resource Management implement the CommonHealth program, helping to give employees across Virginia the resources to maintain or reach optimal health. Together the



CommonHealth coordinators have more than 200 years of expertise in healthcare and fitness. They specialize in making wellness information practical, accessible and fun, allowing employees to easily implement small changes that may have big health results.

Each agency participating in CommonHealth designates an agency coordinator who works with a regional coordinator to deliver wellness programs to employees. The program has more than 600 dedicated volunteers who serve as agency coordinators helping to implement CommonHealth programs.

If your agency is currently involved in CommonHealth programs, keep up the great work! If you are not active with CommonHealth, now is the time to get employees engaged and committed to maintaining healthier lifestyles.

Be a part of CommonHealth – and part of the next 30 years of working well!



# Winter Health and Safety Tips

Follow these tips to help you and your family stay safe and healthy this winter!

## Keep your kids safe and healthy.

Get involved with your kids' activities at home and at school to help ensure they are safe and healthy.

## Take steps to prevent the flu.

The single best way to protect against the flu is to get vaccinated each year in the fall. Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Wash your hands often. Stay home if you get sick.

## Get smart about antibiotics.

Antibiotics can cure bacterial infections, but not viral infections. The common cold and the flu are viral infections, so avoid using antibiotics if you have one of these. Using antibiotics when they are not needed causes some bacteria to become resistant to the antibiotic, and therefore stronger and harder to kill. See your doctor or nurse to find out if your illness is bacterial or viral.

## Test and replace batteries.

Check or replace carbon monoxide batteries twice a year when you change the time on your clocks each spring and fall. Replace smoke alarm alkaline batteries at least once a year. Test alarms every month to ensure they work properly.

## Keep food safe.

Food is center stage during the holidays. Be sure to keep it safe by following basic food safety steps. Clean hands and surfaces often. Separate foods to avoid cross-contamination. Cook to proper temperatures. Chill promptly.

## Be prepared for cold weather.

Exposure to cold temperatures can cause serious health problems. Infants and the elderly are particularly at risk, but anyone can be affected. Know how to prevent health problems and what to do if a cold-weather emergency arises. Remember that using space heaters and fireplaces can increase the risk of household fires and carbon monoxide poisoning.

## Don't drink and drive.

Alcohol use impairs skills needed to drive a car safely. It slows reaction time and impairs judgment and coordination. Alcohol-related motor vehicle crashes kill someone every 31 minutes and non-fatally injure someone every two minutes. Don't drink and drive, and don't let others drink and drive.

## Wash your hands.

Keeping hands clean is one of the most important steps you can take to avoid getting sick and spreading germs to others. It's best to wash your hands with soap and clean running water for 20 seconds. If that's not possible, use alcohol-based hand rubs.

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services/Centers for Disease Control and Prevention <http://www.cdc.gov/family/autumn/>

## Memories Through the Years ...



# Seven Tips for Healthy Dining Out

Eating at a restaurant doesn't have to sabotage your healthy diet. Use smart-eating strategies: Plan ahead, consider the menu and choose foods carefully.

## Preparation

**Have a plan.** Eat a light dinner if you ate a big lunch that day. Or, if you know ahead of time that you're going to a restaurant, plan to have lighter meals during the day. Knowing menu terms and cooking basics makes ordering easier, especially if you have special dietary needs.

## Choosing a Restaurant

**Think ahead.** Consider meal options at different restaurants and look for places with a wide range of menu items. Check online menus, if available, for nutrition information ahead of time.

## Ordering

**Be deliberate when ordering.** Balance your meal by including healthier selections from all the different food groups such as lean protein foods, low-fat dairy, fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Look for freshly made entrée salads that give you "balance in a bowl." For example, entrée salads with baked or grilled chicken, beans or seafood provide protein along with fiber and other nutrients. Ask for dressing on the side so you can control the portion size.

For sandwich toppings, go with veggie options including lettuce, tomato, avocado and onion; if using condiments, choose ketchup, mustard, relish or salsa.

Round out your meal by ordering healthy side dishes, such as a side salad, baked potato or fruit. Boost the nutritional value of your baked potato by topping it with vegetables, salsa or chili.

**Substitute.** Ask for a side salad with dressing on the side to replace fries in a combination meal. Many restaurants honor requests, so don't be afraid to be assertive, ask menu questions and make special requests to meet your nutritional needs.

**Control portions.** Many restaurants serve huge portions, sometimes enough for two or three people. Eat a smaller portion and bring leftovers home for another meal. Or, order an appetizer in place of an entrée and add a small soup or salad.

## Eating

**Eat slowly.** It takes about 20 minutes for your brain to get the message from your stomach that you are no longer hungry. Fast eaters often are overeaters, while slow eaters tend to eat less and are still satisfied.



## Eating Out with Kids

**Choose a restaurant that caters to children.** This will increase the likelihood that a restaurant has a healthy children's menu that includes smaller portion sizes and meals designed to provide ample nourishment for smaller bodies.

For new foods, offer a bite or two from your order. Otherwise, let kids order their familiar favorites when they eat out. Pick two or three suitable menu items and then let your child pick one. Substitute healthier sides in place of fries, such as carrots or apple slices, or share an order of fries, and order plain foods with sauce on the side.

Calcium is important at all ages, but especially for growing bones. To get more calcium, opt for plain or chocolate milk for a beverage, or add a slice of cheese to their sandwich. Choose dairy-based desserts such as yogurt or a smoothie.

Restaurants may be intimidating to people trying to stick to a healthy eating plan, but with preparation and confidence you can enjoy your restaurant meal without abandoning healthy eating.

**Source: Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, Reviewed by Taylor Wolfram, MS, RDN, LDN,**

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<http://www.eatright.org/resource/health/weight-loss/eating-out/eating-out>

# Call Her “Ms. CommonHealth”



**Mary Louise Gerdes** has been with the CommonHealth program since it began in 1986. When the College of William and Mary began offering CommonHealth as part of the benefits package to campus faculty and staff, Mary Louise helped create a successful and comprehensive program catered to employee health. Thanks to the seeds she planted at W&M 30 years ago, CommonHealth has evolved into a model program introduced to state agencies and local governments across Virginia.

Back in 1986, Mary Louise had a clear vision about her career and the impact that she could have on people’s lives: “Wellness is more than not being sick; it is an approach to health aimed at reducing the risk of serious illness. Individuals must understand that the way we live has a lot to do with our health.”

Taking that idea to heart, Mary Louise has dedicated her work life to helping state employees identify health risks, set personal goals to decrease health risks, and make changes for better health.

Regional Coordinators have found it a joy to work alongside Mary Louise. Her co-workers, who are more like family, and the coordinators at agency locations have some amazing memories and thoughts:

“At those staff meetings in Richmond, Mary Louise always led the way in creating new and exciting ways to engage employees in wellness.”

“Mary Louise met her husband at a CommonHealth biometric screening almost 30 years ago! The onsite health screenings have helped thousands of state employees avoid serious health problems.”

“Mary Louise has empowered many employees to find a type of exercise to fit their schedule, their abilities, and their lifestyle.”

“She has always been there with calm, patient words that encourage and guide others. Her background and experience truly provide perspective.”

Kudos, Ms. CommonHealth!

## MyPlate Snowman Scene



You’re never too old to play with your food! While the kids are home from school and family and friends gather together, find ways to make healthy foods fun and festive.

Get creative in the kitchen and find unique ways to make healthy foods the main attraction at your winter celebrations. Use cookie cutters to add a seasonal twist to your favorite foods! Follow the steps below to create a snowy scene using foods from all 5 food groups!

Before getting started, be sure to wash your hands.

### Ingredients

- 2 slices whole-grain bread
- peanut butter
- 1 banana
- a handful of raisins
- 5-6 pretzel sticks
- 2 slices low-fat cheese
- your favorite green veggie (we used a bell pepper)
- ½ cup air-popped popcorn (or light-colored cereal)

### Supplies

- butter knife
- cutting board
- snowman cookie cutter
- small snowflake cookie cutter
- plate (solid color works best)

### Directions

1. Make a peanut butter and banana sandwich. Then, cut out a snowman from the center.\*
2. Cut snowflakes from the cheese slices.\* (Tip: Don’t have a snowflake cookie cutter? Use a plain circle and create snowballs instead!)
3. Now let’s create the scene! Move your snowman to the plate and give him a face, hat, buttons, and arms. If it’s cold outside, he may need a scarf too.
4. Add a background by covering the ground in “snow” and planting “trees.”
5. Let it snow! Add cheese snowflakes or snowballs to complete the scene on your plate.
6. Have fun and make it your own. Try orange or yellow low-fat cheese to add stars or a sun to the sky. Plant extra trees, build a house, or make a snowman family!

*\*Note: Enjoy leftovers from the sandwich or snowflakes as a snack or refrigerate and save for later.*

Source: USDA / ChooseMyPlate, <https://www.choosemyplate.gov/seasonal-winter>



Visit CommonHealth Online!

[www.commonhealth.virginia.gov/tlc](http://www.commonhealth.virginia.gov/tlc)

Questions? E-mail us at [wellness@dhrm.virginia.gov](mailto:wellness@dhrm.virginia.gov).



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