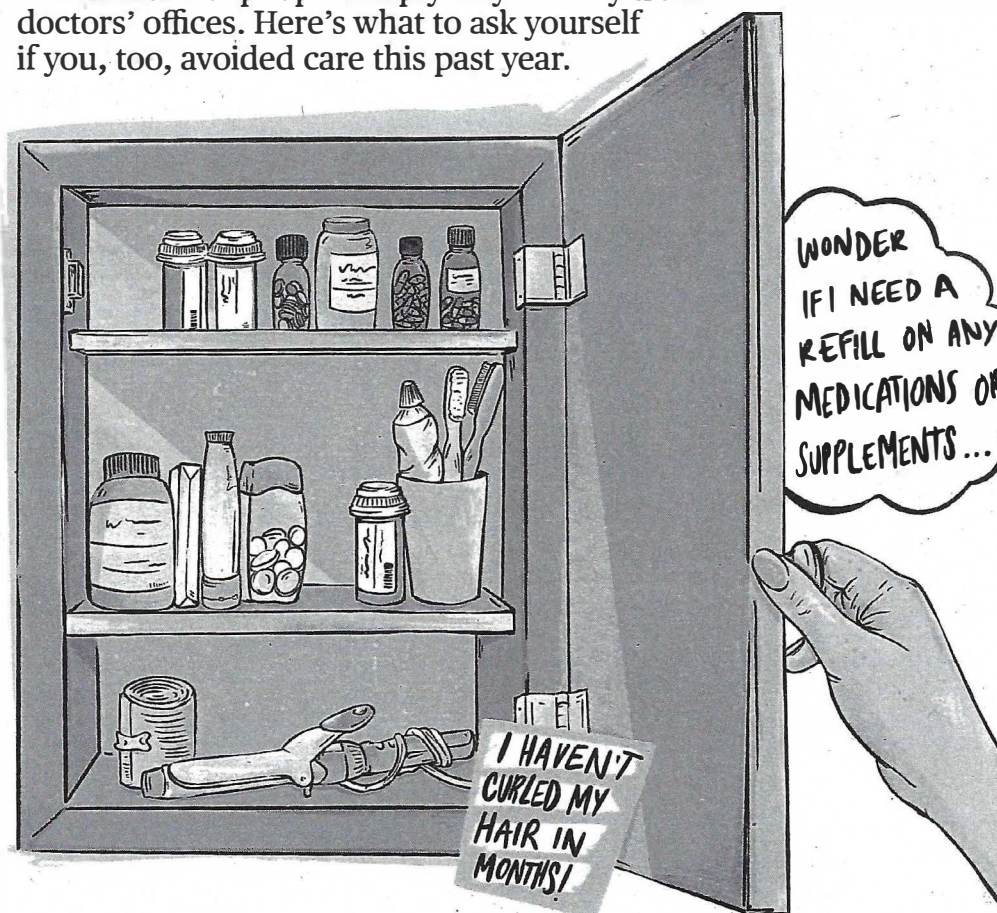


STEP SIX

CHECK IN ON YOUR HEALTH CHECKUPS

By mid-pandemic an estimated 41 percent of U.S. adults—about 105 million people—had forgone in-person medical care, be it routine or emergency, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Elective surgeries were mostly shut down, and millions of people simply stayed away from doctors' offices. Here's what to ask yourself if you, too, avoided care this past year.



THE KEY QUESTION

Am I taking my important daily medications? About 37 percent of primary care physicians reported that their patients who had chronic conditions were in “noticeably worse health resulting from the pandemic,” according to a November survey. That makes sense: During the early months of COVID, routine health

screenings dropped by more than half. One study found that renewal rates on a number of prescription drugs, particularly statins and arthritis medications, decreased significantly in the first few months of lockdown.

TEST YOURSELF

The medicine cabinet inventory
This is simple. Do you

have an ample supply of all the medicines and supplements your doctor wants you to take? And, more important, are you actually taking them? Generally speaking, if you maintained your regular medications throughout the pandemic and your conditions, like high blood pressure or type 2 diabetes, are well controlled, you should be fine. But if

you didn't, or you've put on weight and become more sedentary during the past year, you should reach out to your doctor about options.

THREE CATCH-UP MEDICAL VISITS TO SCHEDULE

► **Cancer screenings** A 2020 survey by the Epic Health Research Network revealed missed screenings nationwide totaling 285,000 for breast cancer, 95,000 for colon and 40,000 for cervical. These represent roughly a two-thirds drop overall for each in the first months of the pandemic. These numbers have rebounded, and now that vaccinations are becoming more widespread, it's time to call your doctor, especially if you're high risk.

► **Vision maintenance** If you already wear glasses or contacts and they haven't broken or gone missing, you probably haven't thought much about your eye doctor in the past year—like a lot of people. There were an estimated 44 percent fewer ophthalmology visits and procedures done from March to July 2020 than during the same months in 2019—one of the biggest dips for any medical subspecialty, according to an analysis by Strata Decision Technology. Schedule a comprehensive vision test for 2021.

► **Dentist** Dentists on the whole have done very well protecting their patients and themselves from COVID-19, with infection rates below 1 percent among dentists, according to the American Dental Association. ■

Mike Zimmerman is the author of more than a dozen books on health, fitness and nutrition.



DEPRESSION SCALE QUIZ

For the nine situations below, simply answer this question: **"Over the last two weeks, how often have I encountered or been bothered by this?"**

0 = Not at all | 1 = Several days | 2 = More than half the time | 3 = Nearly every day

- Little interest or pleasure in doing things
- Feeling down, depressed or hopeless
- Trouble falling or staying asleep, or sleeping too much
- Feeling tired or having little energy
- Poor appetite or overeating
- Feeling bad about yourself—or that you are a failure or have let yourself or your family down
- Trouble concentrating on things, such as reading the newspaper or watching television
- Moving or speaking so slowly that other people could have noticed? Or the opposite—being so fidgety or restless that you have been moving around a lot more than usual
- Thoughts that you would be better off dead or of hurting yourself in some way*

SCORING: Tally up the nine scores to see your level of depression risk. ➤ **5-9:** mild
➤ **10-14:** moderate ➤ **15-19:** moderately severe ➤ **20 or higher:** severe

TOTAL _____

days are "definitely worth discussing," Rosmarin says, "and might have more of a mental ideology to them."

➤ Are you still having fun (all things considered)?

An inability to feel pleasure is a warning sign and a classic symptom of major depression. 2020 sucked the joy out of many things, but if you or a loved one quits doing something—for a month or more—that was once cherished, you need to find out why.

➤ How do you judge your reaction to stress? "If I interpret my stress reaction

as, *Oh, I'm a weak person—something's wrong with me*, that's going to make life a heck of a lot worse," Rosmarin says.

➤ Why are you here?

"This is less religion and more about understanding that there's ultimate meaning," Rosmarin says. "For some, just the idea of having meaning and purpose helps them get through the most difficult times. Are there still dreams and hopes and wishes that you have yet to fulfill? How can you get there?"



STEP FIVE:

CHALLENGE YOUR FITNESS

While some folks were able to get outside, the pandemic stopped most of us in our tracks. A study of global fitness apps found that step counts dropped by 27 percent the first month after lockdown. Now's the time to reboot. "The 50-something body can decline quickly without exercise," says Robert Linkul, a trainer in Sacramento, California.

THE KEY QUESTION

Can I walk as far, lift as much or move as loosely as I could a year ago? If you spent the pandemic on your butt—or only, say, taking the occasional

walk—Linkul suggests checking your physical function in two key spots: shoulders and hips. "Sedentary lifestyles raise your risk of developing frozen shoulder," he says. "This

*If you are having suicidal thoughts, contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-8255.

AT-HOME TESTING TIP

If you use a home blood pressure monitor, next time measure both arms. A review of 24 studies in the journal *Hypertension* looked at blood pressure tests on 53,000 people. It found that those with systolic readings differing by 5 mm Hg or more between arms had higher rates of cardiovascular death, even in those who had no preexisting heart disease. If you notice a difference, talk to your doctor.

will happen from simply not putting your arms over your head. And most lower back pain and mobility issues can be traced to the hips."

TEST YOURSELF

Shoulder and hip check

First, stand with feet shoulder-width apart and arms at your sides. Raise your arms slowly until they are straight up overhead as high as you can reach. Hold them up for three seconds, then bring them back down. Repeat this two more times. What to look for: "A spotter can help look at your posture and alignment, which should be straight up and down. If you come up 10 percent or more short of your arms being fully vertical, you've got shoulder mobility issues."

For hips, try a basic test for everyday tasks—the "proper pickup." It is one of the most basic movements, but if you have hip and back issues, it reveals weaknesses. Stand straight with feet shoulder-width apart and an object like a towel or a pair of shoes on the floor in front of you. Keeping your back straight, squat and pick up the object and return to the starting position. This

will also tax your knees.

"I look to see if someone can squat deep enough to pick up things off the floor without rounding their back, which is pretty uncommon as we age over 50," he says. "The back rounding happens because the hips lack mobility." If you are capable of getting pretty low and comfortable with good form, Linkul suggests doing the same test with weight, such as a bucket of water.



SET THESE GOALS FOR YOURSELF

► 7,500 steps a day (about 3.75 miles)

"12,000 steps is better and just as realistic," Linkul says.

► **Resistance training twice a week** Here is a simple routine that will hit just about every muscle group. Perform three sets of five to 10 repetitions of each.

GOOD MORNINGS Stand with your hands at your sides, feet shoulder

width apart. Keeping your back and legs straight, bend at the waist until you feel a tug in your hamstrings. Return to start. The key is not to round your back. (Or try any exercise in which you bend at the hip.)

DUMBBELL ROWS Hold a dumbbell in your right hand. Stand next to a bench and place your left knee and lower leg on the bench while bending at the waist and placing your left palm on the bench for support. Keeping your back straight while bent over, pull the weight up to chest level, hold for a moment and lower the weight. Focus on engaging your back and shoulder, not your arms. (Or try any exercise in which you pull weight toward you.)

OVERHEAD PRESS Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart while holding light dumbbells at shoulder level. Lift the weights over your head as high as you can. Hold for a moment and return to starting position. (Or try any exercise in which you press a weight upward.)

LUNGES Stand with feet shoulder-width apart. Step forward and lower your body until your front and back knees are bent nearly

90 degrees—without your back knee touching the ground. Pause, then return to the starting position. Repeat but with a backward step. Do an equal number of lunges with each leg. (Or try any leg exercise in which you split your feet, with one forward and one back.)

FARMER'S CARRY Stand straight with a heavy weight in each hand (full buckets of water can sub in for dumbbells here). Keeping your arms and back straight, walk 20 paces, then return. Consider that one full set. (Or try any exercise in which you carry a heavy weight.)

Your Fast Rebuilding Plan

The two most important ingredients for resetting the human body

► **Start small** It doesn't take much work to generate measurable health benefits early on. A recent small study had participants interrupt a normally sedentary eight-hour period with four-second

bursts of high-intensity stationary cycling five times an hour over a workday (2 minutes 40 seconds of exercise total) and found that fat oxidation benefits lasted into the following day. This example is extreme,

but other research has shown that as little as 10 minutes a day of exercise has benefits.

► **Always value perfect form over the number of repetitions.** "Technique becomes more

vital the older we get, because if we get out of alignment, it can quickly cause major damage," Linkul says. A fitness pro who specializes in training an older clientele can help not just with great form but also with

understanding how much to expect from your body at your current fitness level—even if you only do a few sessions to learn the basics or to relearn them if you've been away from the gym for a year.