

A Tasty Winter

Written by **Sara Izzo**

Winter has come and so has the snow! This can make a person happy or sad depending on who you say it to. I may enjoy the warmth of spring or the coolness of fall, but nothing beats the comfort food that comes with the winter season. Desserts like cookies, cakes, and pies are always on display and often filled with things we regret eating. In our very 1st newsletter, I mentioned a chocolate substitute called carob. Used in many holiday treats, chocolate contains caffeine which can cause irritation for those with bladder incontinence. Carob, however, has the look and taste of chocolate, without the caffeine. In my own recipes, I have either replaced the chocolate powder entirely with carob or substituted it for half of the amount of chocolate called for.

This recipe is my favorite when making brownies. These delicious brownies are perfect for those who are looking to experiment with carob as a chocolate substitute because it requires both cocoa powder as well as a dark chocolate bar, and the carob can replace the cocoa powder. Another option is replacing half of the sugar requirements with a substitute sweetener to help keep the sugar rush and calories lower. A touch of decaffeinated espresso powder really brings the chocolate lovers' flavor to life. The type of dark chocolate will effect how good your brownies will come out, but you don't have to spend a lot of money for good chocolate. My first choice is dark sea salt chocolate found at Aldi grocery stores. Salty and sweet go hand in hand and this sea salt dark chocolate compliments this dessert like no other.

Ingredients:

- 10 tbsp. softened butter (plus some for greasing the pan)
- 4 oz. dark chocolate (my preference: 1 whole sea salt dark chocolate bar from Aldi)
- 6 tbsp. of carob powder (or regular cocoa powder)
- ½ tbsp. decaffeinated espresso powder (or regular espresso powder)
- 1 cup substitute sweetener (half sweetener, half sugar is ok too)
- ¼ cup brown sugar
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- 1 tsp. kosher salt
- 3 large eggs
- ½ cup all-purpose flour



Baking Instructions:

1. Pre-heat oven to 350°. Grease in 8x8 or 9x9 baking pan with butter and line with parchment paper, grease the parchment paper on top as well.
2. Break apart the dark chocolate bar into small pieces and place it in a heatproof bowl. Add decaffeinated espresso powder and 2 tbsp. of carob powder (saving the rest for later) and set the bowl aside.

3. In a small saucepan over medium heat, melt the butter until it simmers almost to a boil for about 4 to 5 minutes.
4. Immediately pour the hot butter over the chocolate, carob and espresso powder.
5. Let sit for 2 minutes, then whisk until smooth. Set aside.
6. In a large bowl, combine your sugar sweeteners (brown and white), vanilla extract, salt and eggs.
7. Beat with an electric hand mixer starting from low speed to high speed for 10 minutes.
8. Once mixed completely, add the chocolate espresso mix to your sugar and egg mixture and blend until it is smooth.
9. Add your flour and the remainder of carob powder to your chocolate mix and fold slowly with a rubber spatula or wooden spoon until the flour and carob have dissolved.
10. Pour into your lined baking pan.
11. Bake for 30-35 minutes. Test the brownies with a toothpick. If it comes out with a slight chunk on it, it is done, but if batter is still wet or runny, continue baking for another 5 minutes.

Carob chocolate bars are also available, so you can make this entirely with carob.

“To appreciate the beauty of a snowflake, it is necessary to stand out in the cold.” – Aristotle

Mentality of Exercise

Written by Dan McCoy, ACE-CPT

For most of us, starting and continuing a fitness program can be very hard. The thought of beginning a workout program can be challenging for many people, leaving them asking themselves, “How do I start?” or “Am I doing this right?” or “How will I know when I have reached my goal?” Whether you are having trouble getting started or staying motivated, below are a few ways to set and reach your goals.

S.M.A.R.T. Exercise Goals

If you’ve ever tried to start a fitness journey and you have failed, here are 2 acronyms that can help you stay on track to reaching your goals. Writing these down, whether it be in a journal, on a whiteboard, or keeping a log on your phone can help you commit to your program and goals.

The 1st acronym that will be important to your success in health and wellness is **S.M.A.R.T.** Here is a breakdown of the acronym and what it means:

- **Specific** – Is your goal clear and easy to understand? Making a goal as detailed and clear as possible will help long-term success. Simply saying “Get Stronger” is not specific enough to achieve your goal. How will you complete your goal? The more detailed, the better.

- **Measurable** – Can you track your goal? Tracking can be hard at first but it is an important part of your journey. Downloading an app or using a workout log will help to track your progress.
- **Attainable** – Is reaching this goal possible in your given time frame? People often underestimate the length of time it will take to reach a goal. Therefore, it is better to overestimate. This way, when you achieve your goal you will feel happy rather than feeling upset about not reaching it.
- **Realistic/Relevant** – Does your goal match your lifestyle right now? You want your health and wellness program to fit your lifestyle, not the other way around. The more realistic the goal, the better chance you will be able to keep your fitness program going.
- **Time** – What is the end date of your goal? No matter who you are, one of the overall goals to an exercise program is to be as healthy as you can be for as long as you can. After that, it can be very helpful in sticking to a program if you establish an end date to your goal. For example: “I want to bench press my bodyweight on a barbell bench press in 3 months.” This will give you a clear idea of what your goal is. You will declare your goal so you can keep yourself accountable.

F.I.T.T. Exercise Goals

After you’ve created a clear goal for yourself, you can begin to create the details of your program. An acronym to help you build the best program possible is called **F.I.T.T.** This stands for frequency, intensity, time, and type.

- **Frequency** – How often do you exercise? This can vary from 3 to 6 days per week. We want to aim for at least 150 minutes of medium intensity exercise or 75 minutes of extreme exercise per week.

Scientific studies have shown that your body responds best when involved in at least 3 days per week and up to 6 days per week of a mix of medium and extreme exercise. Less exercise than this may make you feel like you are starting over each time. More exercise than this may be considered overtraining, which means you are not allowing your body to recover properly and are at risk of health issues or injury.

- **Intensity** – How hard are you working during your exercise? Intensity can depend on many things including your energy level for that day. Whether you are on a strict program set up by yourself or by a certified trainer/coach, you want to push yourself as hard but as safely as you can. Intensity can mean increasing the sets, reps, rest time and/or weight of an exercise.
- **Time** – How long are you training each session? For most people, 60 to 75 minutes is plenty of time for a great workout as long as it is done correctly.

- **Type** – What kind of movement are you doing? For many people, this is the most fun part of a program to create. Type of exercise can be anything from bodybuilding, strength training, endurance training, or a combination of all of these. This is where your creativity can really take over. Be as creative as you want, but remember that getting the best results means staying consistent with a program.

Winter Workout Options

Pittsburgh has many different forms of exercise available to individuals of all abilities. Here is a list of some of the different forms of exercise Pittsburgh has to offer.

- Pittsburgh Steelwheelers (Wheelchair Basketball, Wheelchair Rugby)
- Pittsburgh Mighty Penguins (Sled Hockey)
- Hope Network (Basketball)
- Three Rivers Adaptive Sports

Winter Storm Tips

Written by **Monica Still, RN, BSN**

We mostly think of disasters as hurricanes, floods, tornadoes or earthquakes. A snowstorm, even a small one, can be a disaster if you lose heat, cannot get the help you need, or are snowbound. If the forecasts are correct, this year is going to be a polar coaster of snow and very cold weather.

The most important thing is to plan for the unexpected. Look at what you need to be ready for a snow storm and what you would need to do to have that available in the event of one. Make an emergency plan including an evacuation plan with your friends, family, and/or

caregivers. This is not a specific list and your needs may vary. Ask your local emergency services for help in making your plan if needed. Here are a few tips to help you make it through a potentially very rough winter:

- Keep at least 3 days worth of food and medicine on hand.
- Keep flashlights with fresh batteries nearby.
- Have a supply of extra blankets.
- Notify your local power company of any outages quickly and let them know that you need it back on as soon as possible.
- Notify your local emergency medical services if you need electricity for your medical devices.
- If you are a power wheelchair user, need a ventilator, CPAP, BIPAP or any other devices that need to be charged, make sure they are charged before this disaster happens so if the power goes out you have at least a few hours of use.
- Have a shovel, rock salt and/or sand handy.
- If you get home based community services through an agency, ask that agency what their disaster plan is and how they provide care during a snow or ice storm.
- If you have a personal care assistant that is not through an agency, make plans with them in advance on what to do in case of a disaster.
- Have a back up plan for care in case a caregiver is unable to make it to your home due to poor road conditions or closures.
- Keep your cell phone charged.
- Find out about local shelters that are open in case of an emergency and how a disabled person can access them.
- Have a battery operated radio with fresh batteries.

- If you have to go outside wear multiple layers of clothing including gloves. Be aware of areas of your body that go numb to make sure that you don't get injured.
- If you walk and have to go outside wear shoes with good traction.
- Replace cane tips if you use a cane.
- Keep in touch with your friends, family, neighbors, and anyone who can lend a hand.
- Consider getting groceries delivered by a service.
- If you have pets or a service animal don't forget to include them in your disaster plan.

Have a safe and healthy winter season!

Staying Warm and Well

Written by **Rachel Young, CRNP**

It is the time of the year when we are all spending more time indoors, but it is important that we remember a few things to stay healthy:

- **Exercise** - Make sure you are continuing to get some physical activity in and don't forget Dan's recommendation of at least 150 minutes of physical activity per week.
- **Sleep** - Remember to restore your body with good sleep. Take a moment and review good sleep hygiene habits.
- **Get Your Flu Shot** - Talk to your doctor if you have not gotten your flu shot yet. It is not too late!
- **Wash Your Hands** - Remember to practice good handwashing to prevent the spread of germs and illnesses.

Stay warm and well this winter!

Tools for Techies and Gadget Lovers

Written by **Darcie Ilg, PA-C**



There are over 1,500 dating apps available today. These apps allow users to pick and choose what information they wish to share about themselves. Naturally, users are quick to judge you based on this information. The app "**Glimmer**" is a social app designed to be accepting of users with different disabilities.



The creator's intent was to develop a real and honest online environment. He was inspired by his brother who has a cognitive disability. This app is different because it allows an easy way to add information to your profile that often is not advertised on other dating apps, such as a disability. However, sharing information about a disability is not mandatory. Users can decide whether they are seeking a friendship or romantic relationship and can choose to search within a variety of categories, including age, sex, and disability type.

Snow Angels

Snow covered sidewalks can be hazardous for everyone. Pittsburgh Snow Angels is a program that helps minimize the hardships of winter by pairing volunteers with elderly or disabled residents to help with snow removal. For more information, call **412-255-4773** or visit PittsburghPA.gov/SnowAngels.



Guidelines for the Care of People with Spina Bifida: What You Need to Know about Depression and Anxiety

Written by **Brad Dicianno, MD**

The winter can be a time when many people, including those with spina bifida, feel blue or anxious. Below are some recommendations and guidelines:

1. Tell your doctor if you have any feelings of depression or anxiety.
2. If your doctor uses a survey to ask you about your mood, answer the questions as completely as possible. These tools can help doctors understand what is going on.
3. Participate in activities in which you have face to face contact with other people, especially with friends and romantic partners.
4. Work towards your goals for work and school.

5. Eat well and participate in regular physical activity.
6. If you are already seeing a counselor or psychiatrist, be sure to follow up regularly.

MyUPMC Patient Portal

In order to serve you better and improve communication, we are asking that you join MyUPMC. MyUPMC is a free, secure online portal that allows you to communicate with our office, view test results, refill prescriptions, and manage your overall health. To sign up, go to MyUPMC.com and create an account. If you have any questions, please ask our front desk or give us a call at **412-232-8901**.

UPMC Financial Assistance Program

If you qualify for the UPMC Financial Assistance program, you may receive help with medical expenses such as reduced copays. The general financial aid program is available regardless of where you live. If you live in Pennsylvania, you may also qualify for additional refunds for medical expenses through our Adult Spina Bifida Clinic grant. Apply by going to UPMC.com/FinancialAssistance or ask someone in our office for an application. If you apply, please let us know so we can track your application and let you know if you are approved. We also ask that you save a copy of your medical receipts and expenses.

Contact Us

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