Ask POZ – January/February 2020

Are vaccines safe?; What is the healthiest diet?; How often should I get my cholesterol checked?

January 6, 2020 By Lucinda K. Porter RN

Are vaccines safe?

In addition to being generally safe, vaccines prevent serious, sometimes deadly, diseases. However, vaccines are not the right option for everyone.

Before being vaccinated, you should be given written information, including questions to determine whether the vaccine you are considering is safe for you. People who are allergic to eggs (some vaccines may have small amounts of egg protein in them) or have had an allergic reaction to prior vaccines should be immunized under specific medical protocols.

The same applies to people who have a compromised immune system, such as people living with HIV or those undergoing chemotherapy. No one with a history of Guillain-Barré syndrome (a severe skin reaction) within six weeks of a previous immunization should be vaccinated.

Each vaccine has its own checklist; if you meet the basic criteria, you should be safe. After receiving the shot, you may “feel like you’re coming down with something.” This is a normal reaction, usually meaning that your body is building an immune response. It is also normal to feel sore at the site where you received the shot.

Istock

What is the healthiest diet?

Despite spending billions of dollars investigating this question, experts don’t agree on what is the healthiest diet. The issue is further complicated by our own individual requirements, such as the need to monitor salt or fat intake, the need to gain or lose weight and so on. Religious, moral and cultural traditions also influence our diets.

However, experts do agree on a few fundamentals. No one thinks added sugar is healthy, especially in excess. The same is true for consuming processed foods and overeating. Most experts recommend keeping sodium on the low side.

To explore healthy diet options, visit Oldways Preservation Trust, an organization that applies the principles of the Mediterranean diet to other traditional diets, including African, Asian, Latin American, vegetarian and vegan.

Visit oldwayspt.org for more information.

Istock

How often should I get my cholesterol checked?

The American Heart Association recommends that all adults 20 or older have their cholesterol checked every four to six years.

However, more frequent screening is recommended for people with certain risk factors. These include:

- a family history of heart disease or high blood cholesterol;
- diabetes;
- older age;
- being male;
- being overweight; and
- a high cholesterol result on a previous test.

February is American Heart Month. Visit heart.org for more information on cholesterol and other risk factors for heart disease.

Ask POZ is an ongoing section on POZ.com dedicated to answering general wellness questions. Go to poz.com/ask to read more answers, and email ask@poz.com to submit your questions!

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.