myHealth CONNECTIONS
PROMOTING HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

ignites Wellness Wednesdays

SEPTEMBER, 2025 WEEK 2

FALL INTO MOTION: Your Muscles and Your Immune System Are Connected

We often think of exercise as a way to stay fit or manage weight, but its benefits go far beyond what we can see. Physical activity plays a key role in keeping both your muscles and your immune system strong — two things that matter even more during the cooler months when colds, flus and other seasonal illnesses tend to rise.

Musculoskeletal (MSK) health refers to the condition of your bones, muscles, joints and connective tissues. These systems help you move, lift, bend, and go about your day with strength and balance. When one part is weak or injured, such as lower back pain from sitting too long or muscle tightness from inactivity, it can affect everything from your posture to your energy levels.

The immune system, which protects your body from illness, works best when supported by regular movement, quality sleep and good nutrition. That's why small daily actions can make a big difference.

How Exercise Supports Muscles and Immunity

Exercise helps decrease the chances of developing heart disease and other illnesses. Let's find out how.

❶ Reduces inflammation

Low-grade, chronic inflammation contributes to both joint pain and reduced immune function. Regular movement helps control inflammation and improves circulation so oxygen and nutrients can reach your muscles more easily.

❷ Strengthens your core and posture

Back pain is one of the most common MSK complaints. Core-strengthening exercises like walking, swimming, yoga or

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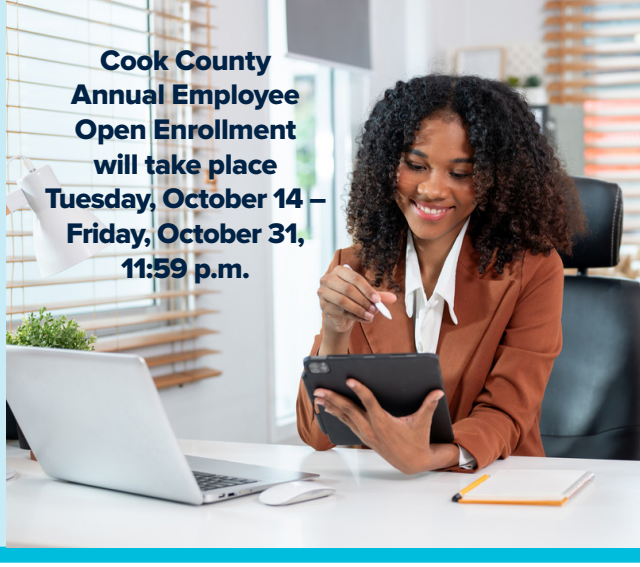
CLICK OR TAP! **We've highlighted some resources you may want to look into further. Simply click or tap the icon or its hyperlink to access these select materials!**

PLAN WITH PURPOSE : ENROLL WITH CONFIDENCE

OPEN ENROLLMENT 2026

Open Enrollment Pro Tip: Attend one of the Open Enrollment Roadshows to get answers to your questions. Your Cook County Risk Management Benefits team, along with trusted benefits partners, will be on-site to assist you.

Open Enrollment Roadshow Dates:
Sept. 30 – Criminal Courts Building, 2nd Floor Cafeteria: 10 am – 3 pm
Oct. 2 – Stroger Hospital, Lower-Level Cafeteria: 10 am – 3 pm
Oct 7. – Juvenile Temporary Detention Center, Auditorium: 10 am – 3 pm
Oct 9. – Cook County Building, 7th Floor: 10 am – 3 pm



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light bodyweight workouts can help support your spine and reduce the risk of strain or injury.

❸ Activates immune cells

Exercise boosts the production and activity of immune cells that fight infection. Moderate physical activity, like brisk walking for 30 minutes most days, has been shown to improve immune response and reduce sick days.

❹ Improves mood and stress regulation

Physical activity helps regulate hormones, improve sleep and lower stress, all of which support immune resilience. Chronic stress can wear down your defenses, while movement helps reset the balance.

Simple Ways to Move More this Fall

You don't need a gym membership to support your MSK health or strengthen your immunity, although having one is great, too! The key is consistency and variety. Here are some easy ways to get moving this season:

- Take a brisk walk after meals to support digestion and circulation
- Stretch in the morning to loosen tight muscles and prepare your body for the day
- Use fall chores to your advantage: raking leaves, planting bulbs, or sweeping are all functional movements
- Try bodyweight exercises at home, such as squats, wall push-ups, or seated leg lifts
- Explore new movement options like a dance video, yoga class, or local hike on one of **Cook County's many trails**

If you have chronic pain or mobility concerns, check with your provider before starting a new routine. Many exercises can be adapted to fit your body's needs and abilities.

Stay Ahead of the Season

As temperatures drop and the holidays approach, it's easy to fall into more sedentary routines. But staying active, even in small ways, can keep your immune system in top shape and your joints limber and pain-free.

Other fall wellness tips to protect both your MSK and immune health:

- Drink plenty of water, especially during cooler months when it's easy to forget
- Eat a balanced diet with seasonal produce, lean protein, and healthy fats
- Prioritize sleep and aim for a consistent bedtime
- Take movement breaks during long work hours or travel
- Dress in layers to keep muscles warm and reduce the risk of stiffness

Remember that **BCBSIL Resources** CLICK OR TAP! are here to help you find:

- Virtual fitness classes
- Preventive health screenings
- Physical therapy options
- Personalized care plans for pain management or immune support

Log into your member portal or reach out to your care coordinator for more information on services available to you.

Preventing back pain and staying healthy this fall doesn't require major changes, just regular movement, awareness and support. Whether you're walking the dog, stretching before bed or doing weekend yard work, you're helping your muscles stay strong and your immune system stay ready.

Your body will thank you later.

SOURCES: *Medline*, *Nieman, et. al.*, *Frontiers*

Pass this article on—help coworkers and maintain good physical health!