

Health by Mail

Real Simple's panel of experts picks **the newsletters with the wisest medical advice**

WHEN IT COMES to health information, the news changes faster than you can say “contraindication.” What was once deemed good turns out to be problematic (think vitamin E supplements and hormone-replacement therapy), and what was thought to be bad may be just fine (caffeine and saccharin).

Instead of trying to decipher the daily changes, consider subscribing to a medical newsletter. The best of these publications call on the greatest minds in medicine to interpret and synthesize the latest research. In other words, you'll know what the news about, say, the revised dietary guidelines means to you.

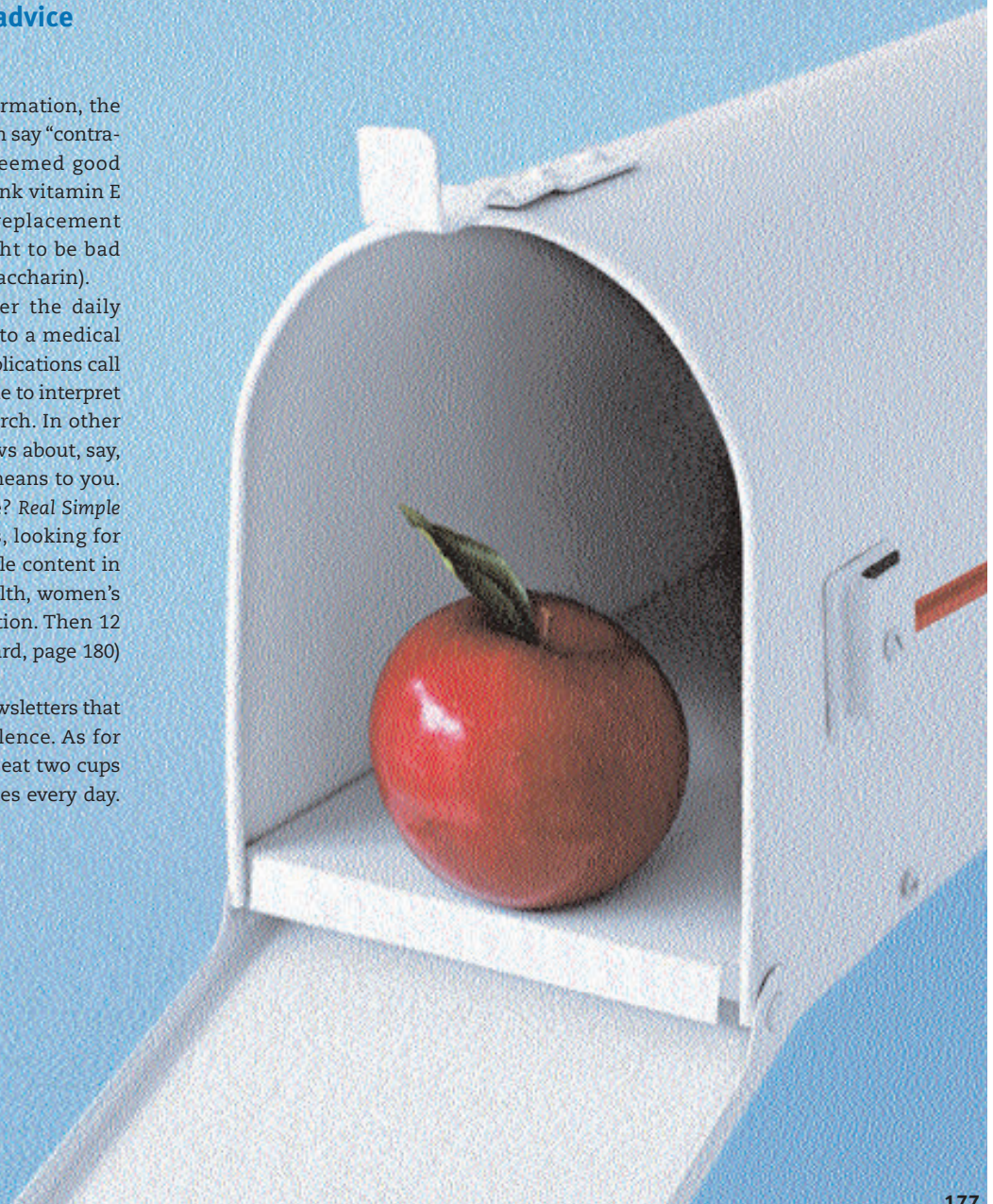
But which should you choose? *Real Simple* sorted through dozens of titles, looking for publications with smart, readable content in the following areas: general health, women's health, men's health, and nutrition. Then 12 medical experts (see Review Board, page 180) selected the finalists.

The upshot? Eight monthly newsletters that met our experts' code of excellence. As for those dietary guidelines: Aim to eat two cups of fruit and 2½ cups of vegetables every day.

WRITTEN BY **LISA ANN SMITH**
PHOTOGRAPH BY **ANDREW MCCAUL**

“Medicinal discovery, It moves in mighty leaps, It leapt straight past the common cold And gave it us for keeps.”

Pam Ayres,
“Oh No I Got a Cold”



The Favorites

What makes a newsletter great? According to the review board (see following page), it should be accurate, authoritative, objective, comprehensive, timely, and practical. The publications below meet these stringent criteria. Whether you want to break bad habits, cultivate good ones, or just be better informed, you'll find helpful advice in their pages each month.

General



CONSUMER REPORTS ON HEALTH

Published since 1989 by the Consumers Union, a nonprofit organization. **TO SUBSCRIBE:** \$24 a year (12 issues), 800-234-2188 or www.consumerreportsonhealth.org.

On Health delivers the kind of smart, thorough advice that readers of *Consumer Reports* (its sister publication) have come to expect. **“Outstanding in all respects”** is how Stephen Barrett, M.D., describes it. Each issue covers six or seven topics, including an in-depth report on a newsy subject like the Food and Drug Administration drug-approval and -monitoring process or an investigation into which health products and services—from pedometers to smoke alarms—are worth paying for. **Subscribers also have free access to the newsletter’s website, which has an archive of past articles and an A-to-Z listing of diseases and conditions.**



HEALTH NEWS

Published since 1994, currently by the Belvoir Media Group, an independent publisher. **TO SUBSCRIBE:** \$39 a year (12 issues), www.healthnewswebsite.com.

Health News is one of the **longest (15 pages) and most comprehensive newsletters** that *Real Simple* reviewed. The publication’s mission is to use major medical journals as sources for stories and provide readers with practical ways to apply the findings to their own lives. Which means **you’ll learn about recent studies** on, for example, the latest cancer treatments and whether they’re worth trying. The publication’s editor, Holly G. Atkinson, a medical doctor, reviews all the articles and serves as *Health News*’s medical adviser. Many articles include a Doctor’s Perspective section, in which a specialist weighs in on a specific topic.

Women



HARVARD WOMEN’S HEALTH WATCH

Published since 1993 by Harvard Health Publications, a division of Harvard Medical School. **TO SUBSCRIBE:** \$32 a year (12 issues), www.health.harvard.edu/subinfo.

Harvard’s standards of excellence are evident in every page of *Women’s Health Watch*. Each issue covers a range of topics, from the benefits of talk therapy to gallstones (women are twice as likely to be plagued by them as men). **Members of the esteemed 23-person advisory panel of Harvard Women’s Health Watch are affiliated with Harvard Medical School and review all published articles.** In each issue, a Q. & A. with Celeste Robb-Nicholson, M.D., the editor in chief, provides quick half-page answers to questions you would ask your own physician, like “Are mercury levels in fish-oil supplements harmful?” (They’re not.)



MAYO CLINIC WOMEN’S HEALTHSOURCE

Published since 1997 by the Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research. **TO SUBSCRIBE:** \$27 a year (12 issues), 800-876-8633 or www.mayoclinic.com.

“Elegant and sophisticated” is how Suzanne Trupin, M.D., describes this sleek and colorful newsletter. While it doesn’t provide the depth of *Harvard Women’s Health Watch* (articles tend to be just one or two pages long), it offers helpful graphics that illuminate story points. An article on how to prevent choking, for example, pictured a woman demonstrating the proper way to dislodge a blockage by yourself if no one is around to do the Heimlich maneuver. ***HealthSource* delves into hard-core medical issues, like breast cancer treatments, as well as more prosaic subjects, like how to make your home safer and whether Teflon pans cause cancer (they don’t).**

Special Interest

There are numerous niche newsletters focusing on everything from arthritis to psoriasis. Here are six monthlies that our experts recommend.

AGING HEALTH
The Johns Hopkins Medical Letter: Health After 50, published by Medletter Associates. **TO SUBSCRIBE:** \$28 a year, 386-447-6313 or www.hopkinsafter50.com.

ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE
Dr. Andrew Weil’s Self Healing, published by Thorne Communications. **TO SUBSCRIBE:** \$18 a year, 800-523-3296.

CHILDREN
Pediatrics for Parents, published by Pediatrics for Parents. **TO SUBSCRIBE:** \$20 a year, www.pedsforparents.com.

FITNESS
Weill Medical College of Cornell University: Food & Fitness Advisor, published by the Belvoir Media Group. **TO SUBSCRIBE:** \$29 a year, 800-829-2505.

HEART AND DIABETES
Heart Care Health Monitor and *Diabetes Health Monitor*, both published by Data Centrum Communications. Free at doctors’ offices, or you can view them online at www.healthmonitor.com.

Men



THE CLEVELAND CLINIC MEN'S HEALTH ADVISOR

Published since 1999 by the Belvoir Media Group. **TO SUBSCRIBE:** \$29 a year (12 issues), 800-829-2542 or www.menshealthadvisor.com.

Men's Health Advisor covers about four main topics in each issue. Richey Neuman, M.D., found the publication, which relies on a board of advisers from the Cleveland Clinic, "excellent." Some articles are pegged to news events, like the addition of trans-fatty acids to nutrition labels, while others address evergreen health issues, like how to maintain muscle mass as you age. **Every major article features a What You Can Do section** with four to six bulleted suggestions for, say, recovering from hip-replacement surgery or preventing skin cancer. A news-brief section summarizes recent studies, newly approved drugs, and other medical advances.

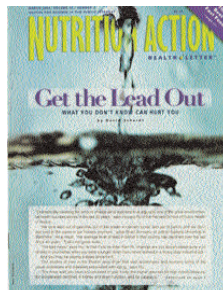


HARVARD MEN'S HEALTH WATCH

Published since 1996 by Harvard Health Publications, a division of Harvard Medical School. **TO SUBSCRIBE:** \$32 a year (12 issues), www.health.harvard.edu/subinfo.

Once again, Harvard has created a newsletter that's "thorough, current, practical, and well-written," says Neuman. On average, each issue covers two to three topics in depth, but **the editors don't shy away from devoting almost an entire issue to one topic**, such as erectile dysfunction. That six-page story covered causes and treatments, including a comparison of the benefits and drawbacks of Viagra, Levitra, and Cialis. All 16 members of the newsletter's editorial board are affiliated with Harvard Medical School.

Nutrition



NUTRITION ACTION HEALTHLETTER

Published since 1974 by the Center for Science in the Public Interest, a consumer-advocacy organization. **TO SUBSCRIBE:** \$24 a year (10 issues), www.cspinet.org.

Don't let the cartoonish graphics deceive you. Month after month, ***Nutrition Action Healthletter (NAH)* delivers hard-edged stories on health and nutrition.** It's serious about its mission: advocating for better food and more honest nutritional labeling. Recent stories covered the dangers of lead in drinking water and debunked claims that certain herbs boost libido. **Each issue has a detailed section that compares and rates types of food.** One month it might analyze the nutritional value of various cheeses; another it might report on the health and caloric content of fast-food offerings (*NAH* gave a nod to Burger King's BK Veggie Burger, which has 16 grams of fat and no trans fats).



TUFTS UNIVERSITY HEALTH & NUTRITION LETTER

Published since 1982 by Tufts Media, at Tufts University. **TO SUBSCRIBE:** \$28 a year (12 issues), www.healthletter.tufts.edu.

Health & Nutrition Letter is more academic and less opinionated than *NAH*, combining "sound scientific evidence and a commonsense approach" to nutrition and wellness, according to George Blackburn, M.D. Each issue covers 8 to 12 topics, from the association of red meat with colorectal cancer to the possibility that aspirin may protect against breast cancer. **Noteworthy features include a healthy recipe** (recent offerings: asparagus strata and mixed-berry cobbler), book reviews, and the Did You Know feature, which runs along the bottoms of pages, providing random nutrition facts. Did you know, for example, that diet soda may erode tooth enamel?

Review Board

- **Aba Barden-Maja, M.D.**, clinical assistant professor of medicine, University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine.
- **Stephen Barrett, M.D.**, vice president of the National Council Against Health Fraud and creator of www.quackwatch.org.
- **George Blackburn, M.D.**, associate director of the division of nutrition, Harvard Medical School.
- **Erica Brownfield, M.D.**, assistant professor, Emory University School of Medicine, Atlanta.
- **Katherine T. Chen, M.D.**, assistant professor of obstetrics, gynecology, and epidemiology, Columbia University.
- **James L. Early, M.D.**, director of clinical preventive medicine, University of Kansas School of Medicine, Wichita.
- **David Feldman, M.D.**, director of heart failure and cardiac transplantation, Ohio State University Medical Center, Columbus.
- **David R. Goldmann, M.D.**, editor in chief of *Physicians' Information and Education Resource* at the American College of Physicians, Philadelphia.
- **Laura Kosseim, M.D.**, assistant professor, University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine.
- **Richey Neuman, M.D.**, assistant professor of medicine, University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine.
- **Vicki Rackner, M.D.**, clinical instructor, University of Washington School of Medicine, Seattle.
- **Suzanne Trupin, M.D.**, clinical professor of obstetrics and gynecology, University of Illinois College of Medicine, Urbana-Champaign.