

Tip of the month

Are hearing aids bought online as good as the pricier models sold by audiologists?

It's natural to want to avoid the markup on hearing aids—117 percent on average, according to Consumer Reports' last investigation. But savings could be offset by what you lose in service. You need a hearing test and help in choosing the right device, and such expertise isn't always available if you aren't working with an audiologist or a specialized hearing-aid shop. (Some discounters, such as Costco, provide assistance.) Alternatively, find an audiologist who "unbundles" services, offering testing, advice, and fittings without insisting that you purchase the hearing aid from him or her.

Smile smarts

Q Is it safe to use tooth-whitening mouthwash every day?

A Hydrogen-peroxide levels in those products are too low to harm gums or oral tissue. But many rinses and whitening products may increase tooth sensitivity. And those with alcohol can cause mouth dryness or irritation, says Gigi Meinecke, D.M.D., a clinical instructor at the University of Maryland School of Dentistry. Also, mouthwash alone has only modest whitening results: In a recent 45-day study, researchers found "some degree of whitening" after dunking

yellowed teeth in whitening mouthwashes twice a day for 1 minute, then rinsing with water. If a product irritates your mouth, try whitening strips and a whitening fluoride toothpaste instead.

Easing into yoga

Q How can a beginner with stiff joints find the right yoga class?

A Look for an instructor trained in "Prime of Life Yoga" (samata.com) or "Therapeutic Yoga for Seniors" (yoga4seniors.com), which have classes for students older than 40. The teachers are trained to work with newbies who

may have physical limitations. Classes described as "gentle," "beginner," or "Iyengar" (a style emphasizing posture and careful alignment) are also good bets. Tell your instructor about your joint problems. She can adapt poses to give you optimal flexibility without injury.

Late-onset asthma

Q It is possible for someone to develop asthma as an adult?

A Yes. In one University of Wisconsin study of more than 14,000 asthmatic and nonasthmatic adults, about half of those with asthma said symptoms began in adulthood. Triggers include smoking, inhaling lung-irritating substances, chronic sinus inflammation, and age-related weakening of the muscles that govern breathing. Other factors that raise risk are stress, obesity, use of certain drugs, including aspirin and other over-the-counter painkillers, beta-blockers, and ACE inhibitors (which can tighten airways in some people), and being female (asthma is 20 percent more common in women older than 35 than in men the same age). Older adults may also overlook or misinterpret asthma symptoms such as coughing, wheezing, or chest tightness.

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