

# MONTHLY NEWSLETTER



## PRESIDENTS MESSAGE

As we wrap up Halloween and head into the holidays, I'm reminded how our work as Nurse Practitioners blends a few "tricks" with many meaningful "treats." Thank you for showing up for our patients and for one another—sharing knowledge, lending a hand, and making a real impact across our community every day.

For our December newsletter, I'd love to feature your voices in a once-a-year Holiday Reflections Corner. Please send a 2–3 sentence reflection—what you're grateful for, what brings you joy this season, or a word of encouragement for fellow NPs—along with an optional photo by October 20th so we can include it. Wishing you warmth, connection, and maybe a little leftover candy!

—Rose Goehring, MSN, APRN, FNP-C, President, VANP

### UPCOMING EVENTS

**Nov 13 VANP Social  
(6:00 PM) @ Another  
Pour Decision**

**Jan 8th VANP Meeting  
(6:00PM) @ TBA**

**December Reflections  
Due OCTOBER 20<sup>TH</sup>**

**Scholarship Spring 2026  
deadline:  
January 31, 2026**

### Did You Know?

As of 2024, there are 32,313 active nurse practitioners practicing in Texas—a marked increase from 30,498 in 2023. Meanwhile, over 6 million Texans live in Primary Care Health Provider Shortage Areas, showing the need for expanded NP access to care. Read more here:

**[Texas NP Stats](#)**

## NP ROUNDTABLE

### Roundtable Topic: Respiratory Illness Surge – Preparing for Flu, COVID, and RSV Season

As we enter the colder months, our community faces a triple threat of respiratory illness: influenza, COVID-19, and RSV. Nurse Practitioners play a vital role in prevention, early recognition, and patient education. Discussion points for our roundtable include:

- Prevention strategies: vaccine updates, masking in high-risk populations, and hand hygiene reminders.
- Testing and treatment: best practices for distinguishing between viral syndromes and initiating timely therapies.
- High-risk groups: protecting infants, older adults, and immunocompromised patients.
- Clinic preparedness: triage protocols, access to rapid testing, and effective patient education materials.
- Community outreach: ways VANP members can support awareness and vaccination efforts locally.

Together, we'll share insights, resources, and real-world experiences to strengthen our response during peak season.



# CLINICAL CORNER

## FOOD AS MEDICINE: ARTIFICIAL SWEETENERS AND DEMENTIA RISK

A Brazilian study, published in *Stroke*, tracked over 12,000 seniors (average age 62) for five years. Daily sweetener users—mainly from diet sodas, gum, or low-calorie snacks—scored 15% worse on memory tests compared to non-users.

The strongest ties came from erythritol and xylitol, sugar alcohols often marketed as “natural.” These linger in the bloodstream, raising inflammation. Experts such as Dr. Lisa Yanek (Johns Hopkins) warn sweeteners may disrupt gut bacteria that regulate brain signals, possibly via the vagus nerve. For people with diabetes, the risk may be even greater: high blood sugar already damages neurons, and sweeteners could double dementia risk. Animal studies also show plaque buildup in brains exposed to aspartame, though translation to humans is still uncertain.

**Takeaway: If you're prone to cognitive issues, whole fruits are safer sources of sweetness.**

## REDUCING RISK: WHAT TO AVOID AND SAFER ALTERNATIVES

### **How to lower dementia risks linked to sweeteners:**

- Swap sweeteners for natural choices: fresh berries, bananas, or honey (if calories aren't a concern).
- Read labels carefully—erythritol and xylitol are common in “keto” snacks, gum, and protein bars.
- Choose whole foods: veggies, nuts, and dark chocolate can satisfy cravings.
- Stay hydrated—thirst often mimics sugar cravings.
- Exercise daily—a 30-minute walk improves gut health.
- Track sugars closely if diabetic; spikes worsen brain fog.

### **The Big Six to watch for:**

Aspartame, saccharin, acesulfame potassium, erythritol, sorbitol, and xylitol. Routine use may mimic 1.6 years of brain aging, with declines in memory, verbal fluency, and processing speed.

### **Products to limit:**

- Sodas/Energy drinks: Diet Coke, Pepsi Zero, Coke Zero, Sprite Zero, Red Bull Sugar Free, Monster Zero.
- Sports drinks: Gatorade Zero, Powerade Zero.
- Snacks: Orbit/Extra/Trident gum, Quest/Atkins bars, Russell Stover sugar-free candy.
- Dairy/alternatives: Yoplait Light, Chobani Zero, Silk Protein almond milk.

### **Safer picks:**

- Zevia sodas (stevia-based), Bubly sparkling water, Glee gum.
- Siggis yogurt (cane sugar only).
- Hu or Alter Eco chocolate (coconut sugar).
- Spindrift sparkling water, Three Trees almond milk, or simply water with lemon.

References: Silva et al. *Stroke*, 2024; Nature Metabolism, 2023; Dr. Yanek, *Alzheimer's & Dementia*

JOHN SHEFFEL, APRN, FNP-C



VictoriaAreaNursePractitioners.com



VANPcrossroads@gmail.com



# WELLNESS CORNER

## HEALTHY HOLIDAY EATING TIPS

The holidays often bring calorie-heavy meals, endless sweets, and disrupted routines. Here are three practical tips to share with patients (or use yourself!):

- Balance the plate – Fill half with vegetables or salad before adding starches and meats.
- Mindful portions – Encourage smaller servings first; seconds are always an option.
- Smart swaps – Sparkling water instead of soda, roasted veggies instead of creamy casseroles.

Tip for practice: Patients appreciate realistic strategies over strict diets. Reassure them that enjoying a favorite holiday treat in moderation is part of a healthy lifestyle.



### The Power of Sleep

**Good sleep isn't a luxury—it's medicine.**

**Just 7-9 hours a night can boost mood, sharpen focus, and strengthen immunity.**

## SELF-CARE FOR BUSY NPS

In the midst of patient care, charting, and family responsibilities, it's easy to put your own wellness last. Remember: self-care is not selfish—it's essential for sustaining your ability to care for others.

- Micro-breaks: Even 5 minutes of deep breathing between patients can reset your energy.
- Boundaries: Protect downtime by saying “no” when your plate is full.
- Connection: Spend time with people who recharge you, not drain you.
- 💡 Pro tip: Treat your own health habits like you would a patient's—set realistic goals and celebrate small wins.

Want to contribute?  
Email us!

