

Take home points for optimizing your health and well being

Your health and well-being is primarily up to you. Your lifestyle has tremendous impact on how healthy, or sick, you are now and will be in the future. Many people mistakenly think that their genetics, circumstances, and luck dictate their long-term health. However, for the vast majority of us, that is simply not the case. Your health is shaped largely by your lifestyle and this IS something you can control. This handout is designed to provide some brief, practical, and straightforward information to help optimize your health.

1. Exercise

The health benefits of exercise are indisputable. Regular exercise decreases all-cause mortality, reduces risk of cardiovascular disease and many types of cancer, and improves mental/psychological health, sleep, and overall well being.

- Goal: exercise 5-6 days/wk (ideally at least 45-60 minutes/day)
- Aerobic exercise should be the foundation of exercise (walk, run, bike, swim etc). This will improve cardiovascular health and longevity.
- Augment aerobic exercise with resistance work at least twice/wk (wt train, push ups, sit ups, pilates, etc). This will improve and maintain function, maintain bone and muscle strength.
- Focus on moderate intensity workload, though it is ok (and good) for most adults to do vigorous exercise some of the time.

Bottom line: *You can expect regular exercise to improve the quality and quantity of your life (i.e., you'll feel better, have less acute and chronic illnesses, and you'll live longer).*

2. Diet

Trust your intuition on this one - what you put into your body really does matter. However, despite the barrage of information on diets, dieting, and food in the media, healthy eating is actually not complicated.

- Eat more fruits and vegetables.
- Eat less fat, salt, simple sugars, starches, and processed foods (if you don't know where in nature a food product comes from, e.g. a 'twinkie', don't eat it).
- When you eat matters. Breakfast is a really important meal – try to make sure you get some quality protein and complex carbohydrates (fruit/vegetables) at breakfast. Avoid late night eating.
- Drink plenty of water (60-70 oz/day as baseline for most adults with another 8 oz for every 15-30 minutes of exercise)
- If weight control is an issue, work on portion control, smaller/more frequent meals, and avoid empty calories (sweet drinks, condiments, rich foods, alcohol, etc). Calories do matter. To lose weight, calories in must be less than calories out.

Bottom line: *The foundation of your diet should be based out of the garden. The more fruits and vegetables you eat, the better. Avoid processed foods, refined sugars, saturated fats, salt, and simple starches.*

3. Sleep

Adequate, quality sleep is important to overall health. Unfortunately, difficulty sleeping or not sleeping enough are common problems.

- Sleep requirements are highly variable, but most people do best with 7-8 hrs/day.
- If you have a hard time falling or staying asleep, work on 'sleep hygiene' (try to go to bed at the same time each night, avoiding caffeine/eating in the evening, avoid naps, avoid TV/reading in bed, sleep in a cool, dark place, etc).
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Bottom line: *Try to get a minimum of 6 hrs/sleep per night. Ideally, sleep between 7-8 hrs/night.*

4. Spiritual and relationship health

People who consider themselves spiritually invested live longer, are generally healthier, and are often happier. Furthermore, people who are married, have close friendships, are committed and involved with social groups/organizations also tend to live longer, have less chronic illnesses, and generally perform better on most common markers of health and wellness. This makes intuitive sense. When we are settled and comfortable with family, faith, and friendships, life is generally more peaceful, less stressful, and overall, more enjoyable.

- Key relationships in your life, such as those with significant others, close friends and family, and your faith, are very important for your health.

- Spend time and energy on growing and preserving healthy relationships.
- Investing time, energy, and resources in other people and other groups (charities, volunteer work, coaching, helping neighbors, etc) can improve self-esteem, wellness, and healthy behavior. Often, when people focus on others, they will in turn, take better care of themselves.

Bottom line: *Commit to the relationships that matter most to you. You can expect that investing yourself in these relationships, and spirituality, will pay dividends in your short and long-term health.*

5. Smoking

If you smoke for any extended period of time in your life, you will pay the price. Smoking will kill or maim you one way or another.

- Cigarette smoking is incredibly addictive. However, there are more resources, and social and societal pressures, than ever before to help you quit.
- In order for most people to quit, complete commitment is required.
- It is best to set a quit date to stop smoking entirely.
- Quitting is easier if done with the support of family and friends.
- Some medications are quite helpful in facilitating smoking cessation.

Bottom line: *Don't smoke. If you do smoke, find a way quit.*

6. Alcohol

Alcohol, and it's impact on the health of individuals and populations, is difficult to quantify and remains controversial. Clearly, alcohol can be devastating in the short-term and in the long-term. On the other hand, there is evidence that alcohol consumption, *in true moderation*, potentially has health benefits.

- Red wine, in moderation, appears to have reasonable health benefits, particularly on cardiovascular risk reduction and particularly in men older than 45. "Moderation" = 2 or less/day for men and 1 or less/day in women.
- Based on the medical data available, the "ideal" amount of alcohol to consume is roughly ½ to 1 drink/day (5 oz glass of wine, 12 oz beer, or 1 mixed drink).
- Alcohol in excess will wreak havoc on you (and often many others in your life). It is VERY easy for many people to drink to excess. Be very careful with alcohol consumption.
- If you do not enjoy drinking alcohol, it is NOT worthwhile to drink it for potential health benefits.

Bottom line: *Alcohol (especially red wine) consumption in small amounts may have some health benefits. Any alcohol in excess is dangerous and can be devastating to your health, as well as damaging to others around you.*

7. Work

Americans, taken as a whole, do not have good work-life balance. For some people, work and associated stresses (lack of time outside of work, financial stress, toxic work environment, unfulfilling employment, etc) have a negative impact on health. Awareness of this issue, and attention to maintaining some balance, does make a difference. If you are fortunate enough to be able to pursue a career that involves more than just a means to pay your bills and support your family, make that pursuit a priority.

- Many Americans have difficulty maintaining 'work-life' balance.
- Feeling overworked and stressed due to work hours, expectations, relationships, and other factors can be a primary, or secondary contributor, to insomnia, anxiety, depression, obesity, and a variety of other maladies.
- When people are stressed, they are often inefficient and not performing at their potential.
- Maintaining perspective and balance regarding employment situation is something that requires deliberate attention and concerted effort.
- Exercise is a great way to provide a diversion from work, help focus attention, improve efficiency and reduce stress.

Bottom line: *If you love your job, you are very fortunate. If you do not love your job, make the most of your situation. Make a conscious effort to establish/maintain work-life balance.*