

LIVING LONGER AND HEALTHIER

Simple as they seem, these suggestions require accepting and reviewing and following – if you desire to maintain optimum health and stay at your highest level of physical fitness, mental alertness and creativity.

GET ENOUGH SLEEP

Get the right amount of sleep (average 8 hours for men, 7 for women) each night. Use the bedroom for sleep and intimacy only. Avoid taking business or private worries to bed with you. Avoid getting caught up in suspenseful reading or television while relaxing in bed. If you toss and turn on occasion and can't get to sleep, go to another room and do something productive.

EAT HEALTHY MEALS AT REGULAR TIMES

Don't skip breakfast. Failing to eat because "you don't have time" or ill-advised reduction of calories per day can lead to poor health. If you get hungry between meals, don't resort to fatty, salty or refined-sugar snacks. Instead, eat fruit, raw vegetables or whole grain snacks. Regular meals keep the metabolic and digestive systems functioning at their most efficient levels.

EXERCISE REGULARLY

Exercise 20 to 30 minutes at least three days a week for good cardiovascular fitness. Low to moderate intensity exercise will help you stay fit and healthy. Exercises should include a warm-up and cool-down period. Stretching is very important and improves flexibility and prevents injuries. Exercise that you enjoy is most likely to be successful and continued.

CONTROL YOUR WEIGHT

Even small amounts of excessive weight can shorten your life. Extreme obesity is associated with many physical and mental disorders. If you need to reduce, do so. If your weight is ideal, work to keep it that way.

DRINK ALCOHOL MODERATELY OR NOT AT ALL

Alcohol abuse can cause serious diseases, reduce your life span and make your life miserable. Moderate consumption can be defined as drinking no more than two drinks daily. A drink is defined as one beer, a 6-ounce glass of wine, or one ounce of hard liquor.

DON'T SMOKE

Smoking damages the human body and shortens life. Cigarette smoking is a risk factor for many illnesses, particularly lung cancer, chronic lung disease, hardening of the arteries, heart attack, and damage to unborn children of pregnant women who smoke. Anyone who smokes is at greater risk of problems with anesthesia during surgery. Avoid secondhand smoke.

DON'T ABUSE DRUGS

Evidence is mounting about the cumulative ill effects of drug abuse. Common sense dictates avoiding them if you want to stay mentally and physically healthy.

STAY INVOLVED

Communicate and visit with friends and family frequently. Take the initiative. Don't wait for them to call. Stay active through work, recreation, church and community activities.

MEDICAL HELP

Get regular medical and dental checkups. Adults should have full physical exams every three years till age 40, every two years from ages 40 to 50 and yearly after age 50. See a doctor or dentist when you detect a problem. Don't put it off. Wear a medical identification bracelet or neck tag if you have a chronic disorder, have known allergies to medications, or if you take medications that emergency personnel would need to know about.

SAFETY

Use seat belts when you drive or ride in any vehicle. Practice good safety measures at home to avoid accidents such as falls, and to prevent fires. Check your fire alarms and replace the batteries regularly. Avoid overexposure to sun and cold. Wear sunscreen to help minimize your sun exposure.

EAT SMART-MIXED UP ABOUT NUTRITION?

10 most important research findings*

If a mountain of nutritional advice has gotten you down, don't give up. Half of all premature deaths are due to lifestyle choices, including what we eat. Here are the 10 most important things you can do to improve your diet, boost your health and live longer, based on overwhelming research by top scientists.

- **Use olive oil.** People who eat lots of olive oil have better cholesterol and blood pressure; have less heart disease, cancer and arthritis; and live longest! New research even finds that diets rich in olive oil help prevent wrinkles. Best: extra virgin.
- **Eat whole grains.** To reduce your odds of heart disease, cancer, diabetes, obesity and premature death, eat whole grains. Examples: oatmeal, shredded wheat, whole grain bread, brown rice, popcorn, bulgur wheat. Unlike refined grains, whole grains deliver loads of fiber, antioxidants, anti-cancer agents, cholesterol reducers and clot blockers, plus essential minerals.
- **Eat fatty fish.** It's not just any fish, but specifically fatty fish (fresh or canned salmon, tuna, sardines, mackerel), that boosts health. Only these high-fat fish have lots of omega-3 oils that keep arteries clear, hearts in rhythm, and the brain and joints functioning well. In new research, eating fatty fish once a week slashed fatal heart attack risk 44%.
- **Eat nuts.** A daily ounce of tree nuts (pecans, walnuts, almonds) or peanuts can cut your risk of heart disease up to 50%. A new study shows that a very high-fiber vegetable-grain diet, including 2.3 ounces of nuts daily, lowered bad LDL cholesterol 30% in a week! The diet worked as well as "statin" drugs such as Lipitor and Mevacor. Eating nuts also increases longevity, according to other research.
- **Drink tea.** Real brewed tea (from bags or loose tea) has amazing power to help discourage stroke, heart attack, cancer and neurological damage. Black and green teas are about equal in overall antioxidant protection. But green tea possesses EGCG, a unique anti-cancer agent and brain cell protector. To extract the most antioxidants, brew tea five minutes. Instant, bottled and herbal teas don't work; they lack antioxidants.
- **Eat more fruits and vegetables.** Plant foods are the best antidote for virtually all chronic ailments: high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, cancer, arthritis, stroke, wrinkles, obesity, age-related mental decline. Example:
 - In new research, a daily cup of blueberries improved reaction time in a test group. Fruits and vegetables are rich cocktails of vitamins, minerals, fiber and antioxidants. Best bets are berries, citrus fruits and deeply colored greens. Eat at least five servings a day.
 - **Eat good carbohydrates.** Bad carbs spike blood sugar and insulin; good ones ("low glycemic index" foods) do not. Low insulin is a secret to longevity, research shows. Eating good carbs (dried beans, lentils, peanuts, yogurt, oatmeal, cherries, prunes) can help prevent colon cancer, heart disease, diabetes, weight gain and poor memory.
 - **Restrict meat, animal fat, trans fats and sodium.** All can wreck your body. Red meat, especially fried (as in bacon), is linked to colon cancer. Saturated fat in whole milk, butter, cheese, sausage, steak and poultry clogs arteries; so do the trans fatty acids in many margarines, processed snacks and baked goods such as doughnuts ("partially hydrogenated" on the label indicates trans fats). Excess salt can shorten your life and bring on heart disease even if your blood pressure is good.
 - **Eat less.** "Cutting portion sizes in half would do more to improve Americans' health than anything," one expert quipped. Compelling research shows obesity is a major cause of disease and premature death. Processing more calories accelerates aging, cancer, heart disease, diabetes and Alzheimer's disease. Drastically trimming calories is the only reliable way known to increase the life span of animals.
 - **Take a multivitamin-mineral supplement.** A lack of micronutrients – such as folic acid, niacin, zinc and vitamins B12, B6, C and E – damages DNA the same way radiation and chemicals do, setting the stage for cancer. Correcting even minor deficiencies can boost immunity, curb chronic diseases and perhaps prolong life.

*Jean Carper is the author of *Eat Smart and Your Miracle Brain*