

Top 6 Lifestyle Choices that Promote Health, Longevity and Prevent Death

Public Health Services

February is Heart Healthy Month. This is a great time to think about improving your “heart health.”

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the U.S. According to the American Heart Association, estimates for 2003 reveal that 71,300,000 Americans have one or more forms of cardiovascular disease (CVD). This includes 65 million people with high blood pressure, 13.2 million with coronary heart disease, 7.2 million developing an acute heart attack, and 5.5 million experiencing a stroke.

Promoting and practicing healthy lifestyle choices can reduce the risk of developing these chronic conditions and dying of a premature death. The old adage, “you are what you eat” is still true. What you choose to consume (eat or drink), how much you sleep, whether you smoke or not, and how active you choose to be can significantly impact both your health and longevity of life.

This article features six lifestyle behaviors that have the greatest influence on your health. These habits can be added as part of a daily lifestyle behavior that will improve your health and potentially add years to your life.

1) Get regular and adequate amounts of sleep.

A regular amount of sleep is important to give your body a chance to restore and regenerate itself, but to attend to all of the metabolic functions required by the body, such as regenerating old cells, getting rid of wastes and repairing cell damage. Eight hours of sleep is recommended.

2) Eat regular well-balanced meals, including breakfast.

A healthy balanced diet can help provide energy, lower risks for certain health conditions -- like heart disease, hypertension, diabetes and cancers -- while maintaining a normal weight. Recent studies have shown that if you are overweight, losing just 5 to 7 percent body weight can help improve the risk for heart disease. Starting the day with breakfast is smart as well.

3) Engage in regular physical activity.

Thirty minutes a day of regular physical activity contributes to health by reducing the heart rate, decreasing the risk for cardiovascular disease, and reducing the amount of bone loss that is associated with age and osteoporosis. You can break up the 30 minutes into three 10-minute sessions. To loose weight, physical activity should be performed five to six days a week.

4) Maintain a healthy body weight.

To lose a pound of fat in one week, you have to have to expend 3500 calories. This is done by decreasing the amount of calories you take in (input) and increasing the amount of calories you burn up (output) with physical activity. Know you BMI or Body Mass Index. Body mass index (BMI) is a measure of body fat based on height and weight that applies to both **adult** men and women. The BMI Categories are as follows:

- Underweight = <18.5
- Normal weight = 18.5-24.9
- Overweight = 25-29.9
- Obesity = BMI of 30 or greater

5) Not using tobacco products--smoking, chewing, snuff or others.

Chronic exposure to the nicotine in tobacco may accelerate coronary artery disease, as well as other health conditions such as peptic ulcer disease, esophageal reflux, hypertension, fetal illnesses, and even death. Smoking, direct consumption and second-hand, has been linked to various forms of cancer.

6) Using alcohol in moderation or not at all.

Moderate alcohol consumption (one drink for women, two for men) is associated with a lower risk or heart disease. Higher levels of alcohol can lead to health and behavioral problems, including an increased risk for high blood pressure, stroke, heart disease, some cancers, accidents, violence, suicide, and deaths. However, if you do not drink, do not start. And, of course, individuals should drink responsibly and should NEVER drink and drive.

By starting slow and making small steps, you can see great rewards over the long term to improve your health and add years to your life!