

The Basics of Healthy Living

1st June 2020

Some aspects of health are beyond your control because of genetics and environmental factors, but your diet and lifestyle have a big effect on your health. Preventive care experts agree that the following can help ward off disease.

Eat a healthy diet. Conditions such as heart disease, obesity, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, stroke, and gallbladder disease can be controlled or prevented by eating well. Eat a balanced diet, including lots of fruit, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat dairy products. It should be low in saturated fat, trans-fat, cholesterol, salt, and added sugars, with most fats coming from sources such as fish, nuts, and vegetable oils.

If you have a chronic health condition, talk to your doctor about an appropriate dietary plan that may benefit your health.

Stay physically active. Regular exercise will help you achieve good health and prevent a number of health issues including heart disease, obesity, high blood pressure, diabetes, arthritis, and osteoporosis. It also can improve your psychological well-being while enabling you to maintain a healthy weight, reduce stress, sleep better, and feel better overall. Aim to get 20 to 30 minutes of aerobic exercise on most days of the week, through activities such as brisk walking, jogging, swimming, cycling, tennis, or any other physical activity that you enjoy. Ideally, you should also incorporate strength training (to build muscle) twice a week and do stretching exercises to improve flexibility.

If it's difficult to find a 30-minute block of time in your day, try short bursts of exercise instead. Three 10-minute sessions may give you the same benefits as one 30-minute session.

Maintain a healthy weight. Being overweight increases your risk of heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, osteoarthritis, and breathing problems. Use a BMI (body mass index) calculator to find the ideal weight for your height and age.

Get enough sleep. Most people need at least 7 to 9 hours of sleep to function at their best. Keep your bedroom quiet, dark, and comfortable, and set aside enough time to get the rest you need. Keep your television and computer out of your bedroom to avoid "gearing up" before you fall asleep. Turn off your mobile phone at bedtime, or use the "do not disturb"

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mode if you use your phone as an alarm clock.

Don't smoke or use other tobacco products. Smoking causes illnesses such as cancer, heart and lung disease, stroke, and problems with pregnancy. There are many resources that can help you stop using tobacco products, including your assistance programme.

Don't drink alcohol excessively. Alcohol abuse can cause liver disease, heart problems, and several kinds of cancer, as well as lead to accidents, depression, and problems with friends, family, and work.

Don't take drugs. Using illegal drug or abusing prescription drugs such as pain killers and opioids can lead to mental and physical health problems, which could include hepatitis B, hepatitis C, and HIV. Seek treatment immediately if you have a drug problem. You can call the assistance programme for help.

Limit sun exposure. Overexposure to ultraviolet radiation can cause sunburn and skin cancers. You can lower your risk of skin cancer by limiting the time you spend in the sun, especially between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.; wearing sunglasses and clothing that protects against the sun, including a wide-brimmed hat; and using sunscreen. Sunglasses also protect against macular degeneration, age-related vision loss.

Choose a GP before you get ill. This way you can find someone you're comfortable with, develop a relationship, and get care that takes into account your lifelong health history. Research shows that adults who regularly visit the same doctor get better preventive medicine.

If you are over 40 make sure you benefit from an NHS Health Check. This is designed to pickup on the early signs of common conditions and help you lower your risk.

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