

Healthy Living Habits

9 TIPS TO FOLLOW

By Karl Gebhard, MD, MS

A long time ago in a land far, far away the philosopher, Desiderius Erasmus, once said “prevention is better than cure.” Those words of wisdom have helped society to lesson damages from natural and manmade disasters to using it in our everyday lives, such as car and home maintenance. Healthy living habits are like any other type of maintenance. The goal is to prevent a breakdown and extend the life of that object, whether it’s a car, boat, home, pet or more importantly, yourself. The following is a summary of your body’s maintenance manual:



1. Eat A Healthy Diet. What we eat and drink is one of the most powerful tools we have to combat illness and improve health. About half of all American adults have one or more preventable, diet-related chronic diseases, including cardiovascular disease and diabetes. Start by choosing nutrient-dense foods from all groups (vegetables, fruits, grains, dairy, proteins) and not just one or two of them. Each day limit calories from added sugars and saturated fats to less than 10% of total calories and reduce sodium to less than 2,300 milligrams. When shopping, a good rule to follow is to stick to the outer areas of a grocery store. As you move inwards, foods become more processed and include unhealthy additives.



2. Vitamin supplements can also be a helpful addition to diet. Vegetarians and vegans are at risk of vitamin B12 deficiency since this vitamin is found only in animal products. A B Complex vitamin supplement that includes B12, biotin, thiamine, niacin, pyridoxine (B6) etc. supports essential cellular functions, metabolism, production of energy, formation of neurotransmitters, as well as maintain healthy skin and hair. Another recommendation is take a supplement containing 800 IUs of vitamin D. This vitamin is necessary to maintain healthy bones and prevent osteoporosis. Daily vitamin C intake of at least 60 milligrams helps to enhance the immune system and is necessary for collagen production, wound healing, sustaining healthy mucus membranes and preventing gum decay.



3. Maintain A Healthy Weight. Being overweight or obese increases your risk for many health problems, including heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, diabetes and more. Having excessive abdominal fat also places you at greater jeopardy. Men with waist circumferences more than 40 inches and non-pregnant women with more than 35 inches are at risk, however, this screening tool is not diagnostic of the body fatness or health. Body Mass Index (BMI) is also helpful. BMI is calculated by your weight and height with a value between 18.5 and 24.9 is considered normal or healthy weight range. BMI calculators or chart can be found online or calculated at your doctor’s office.



4. Be Active Most Days. Physical activity can help you to maintain a healthy weight, but it can also lower your blood pressure, cholesterol and sugar



levels. Exercising also improves mood and reduces stress. Only thirty minutes a day, five days a week, of moderate exercise is recommended for adults. Children and adolescents should have an hour a day of physical activity. Living in sunny southern California is perfect for outdoor activities, just remember to apply sunscreen with SPF greater than 15, wear a hat and sunglasses.

5. Sleep. Poor sleep health is a problem that affects a third of American adults. Good quality sleep is necessary to support endocrine, metabolic and neurological functions and not getting enough shut-eye, increases our risks of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, depression and obesity. It is recommended that adults have 7-8 hours per night of quality sleep, i.e. feeling rested. Pediatric recommendations per 24 hours: teen 8-10 hours, school age 9-12 hours, preschool 10-13 hours, toddler 11-14 hours, infant 12-16 hours, newborn 14-17 hours.



6. Don’t Smoke. Cigarette smoking greatly increases your danger of developing of heart disease and cancer. Smoking causes reduced circulation and swelling of the arteries. If you do smoke, quit today! One year after you quit smoking, your risk for heart disease is cut in half! Your doctor can suggest ways to help you quit.



7. Limit Alcohol Use. Excessive alcohol use raises your blood pressure and can lead to health hazards including injuries, violence, mental health problems, memory problems, liver and heart diseases as well as many types of cancers. Men should have no more than two drinks per day and women only one.

8. Germ and Virus Precautions. Keeping your hands clean is one of the best ways to keep from getting sick and spreading illnesses. Washing with soap and water, using hand sanitizers, and disinfecting surfaces will kill germs and viruses in addition to minimizing allergy triggers. Immunizations are also important to prevent communicable diseases such as measles, whooping cough, hepatitis and influenza.



9. Health Check-Up. Though it may seem unnecessary to see a doctor unless you are sick or experiencing symptoms, it’s a good idea to get a yearly preventive health exam. Regular check-ups and screenings help to identify risk factors for common chronic diseases, detect disease that show no apparent symptoms, discuss preventative behaviors, update clinical data and enhance the relationship between you and your doctor. Healthcare.gov is a resource to find information about recommended tests and screenings for every age and gender.

Practicing healthy living habits, just like good car maintenance will make the difference between being the proud owner of a good looking, long lasting, reliable machine, and saying goodbye to a rusty, faded-paint jalopy that fell apart or broke down long before it was designed to. The secret is following your body’s maintenance manual and adding to Erasmus’ philosophy written by Benjamin Franklin “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. It’s more prudent to head off a disaster beforehand than to deal with it after it occurs.”

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