

People are living longer thanks to the high-tech advancements in medicine. Antibiotics, blood pressure medications and cholesterol lowering medications add years to our lives. Surgeries, from removing the appendix and gallbladder to heart and kidney transplants, extend our lives too. The achievements of modern medicine are truly incredible.

What is MORE INCREDIBLE, in my opinion, is that four low-tech lifestyle interventions have been proven to provide even greater health benefits than modern medications and surgeries!

What are these AMAZING, health promoting, lifestyle interventions?

1. Stop Smoking
2. Eat Vegetables and Fruit Every Day
3. Move Every Day
4. Maintain a Healthy Weight

How AMAZING are these interventions? VERY! According to recent research, if you follow these four lifestyle recommendations they can reduce your risk of the following illnesses by ASTONISHING amounts:

- Reduce Diabetes by 93%
- Reduce Heart Attacks by 81%
- Reduce Strokes by 50%
- Reduce Cancer by 36%

Smoking is the single largest cause of preventable disease in the world. Not only does smoking affect the smoker, second hand smoke impacts the health of family, friends, and coworkers. Quitting smoking is not easy, but it is worth it! Quitting starts with the simple act of thinking why one may want to quit; e.g., personal health reasons, financial concerns, and, for many, a desire to be healthier to more fully participate in the lives of loved ones. Once a meaningful reason is decided upon, there are resources that can help a person succeed. These include the following:

- Talk with your healthcare provider about options to support smoking cessation.
- 1 800 Quit Now, 1 800 784 8669
- Nicotine replacement patches and gum
- Medications
- Acupuncture
- Commit by informing friends and family of your intentions.
- Plan the quit date!
- Remember, not everyone is successful the first attempt at smoking cessation - the key is to have determination and persistence!

Eating Vegetables and Fruits is incredibly powerful in lowering the risk of several chronic diseases. This does not mean you need to become a vegetarian, just add colorful vegetables and fruit to your food choices each day. Vegetables and fruits are high in four vital nutrients: fiber, magnesium, potassium, and importantly, polyphenols. Fiber, magnesium, and potassium work wonders lowering cholesterol, blood pressure, and the risk of colon cancer while also improving the function of the gastrointestinal tract, i.e., reducing constipation.

The natural pigments that add beautiful colors to food and provide many health benefits are known as polyphenols. The red colored lycopene, found in tomatoes and watermelons, is known to decrease heart disease and cancer. Another healthful polyphenol is the yellow-green pigment lutein; lutein is found in green leafy vegetables and is known to reduce the risk of macular degeneration, a major cause of blindness in adults. Anthocyanidin, the blue pigment found in berries, has been shown to decrease blood pressure, lower inflammation, and improve brain health. Eating more servings of colorful vegetables and fruits daily, preferably a serving or two with each meal, will help reduce the risk of many chronic and debilitating diseases.

Moving Every Day has a big impact on health and longevity. Recent research indicates that activity is a key to good health. Importantly, this movement does not need to be high-level aerobic activity like running or jogging. Walking, dancing, gardening, chores around the house, these are all terrific examples of healthy activity. Pick activities that interest you and get moving for at least 30 minutes a day. The research tells us that it is just as effective to split up these activities throughout the day. In fact, staying active all day is best because sitting for prolonged periods, all by itself, has been shown to reduce health and longevity. If you have a sedentary job, or enjoy watching TV, get up every 60 minutes or so and move around for a few minutes to reduce the negative effects of being sedentary.

Maintaining a Healthy Body Weight throughout adulthood impacts our health positively by lowering blood pressure and cholesterol, reducing the risk of cancer, and protecting our joints. Medical research has shown that we do not need to be slim - we simply need not to become obese to enjoy these health benefits. Body mass index (BMI) is the measure doctors use to assess for healthy body weight. BMI is calculated by dividing weight in kilograms by height in meters squared. There are tools available online to simplify this calculation. A normal BMI is less than 25, 25-30 is considered overweight, and greater than 30 is considered obese. What the interventions require is that you have a BMI of less than 30, less than obese. For example, if you are 5'4" tall in order to have a BMI of less than 30 you need to weigh under 170 pounds and if you are 5'9" tall a weight of under 200 pounds will get you there - for most that is not too strict. It is important to note that weight loss of just 10 pounds can have measurable health benefits, particularly on blood pressure, blood sugar, and cholesterol levels. Aim for a

BMI of less than 30 but recognize that even modest improvements in weight are quite helpful!

While high-tech medicine has many incredible health benefits, current research tells us that low-tech lifestyle changes and nutritional medicine has the potential for even greater health benefits. Let's bring these wonderful health benefits to our lives by quitting smoking, eating vegetables, moving every day, and maintaining a healthy body weight. **In doing so, we will add years to our lives and life to our years!**