

Motivation for Healthy Living OVER AGE 50

■ A Men's Study ■

By: Louis S. Bezich

"It sounds like you're asking me why I want to be healthy" he said, brow furrowing. "I don't quite... understand." Steve had arrived at a southern New Jersey testing facility an hour before having passed a variety of screening questions and agreeing to be asked about his health behaviors. He was joined by eight other men of broad life experiences, but more importantly, all were over fifty.

The New Jersey men had been selected for exhibiting positive health behaviors as outlined by Dr. David Nash of Thomas Jefferson University. While many health services occur in the confines of hospitals and medical offices, experts have long understood that successful health outcomes are most significantly molded by behavior in the home, gym and grocery store. For Nash, that means a reasonable BMI (body mass index), regular exercise and consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables, abstinence from smoking, and the use of a seat belt. Steve and his colleagues were there to tell us what inspires them to live healthy and to screen questions for a national survey of 50+ men like him.

The premise was simple. If behavior is the most important influence on health outcomes, what can we learn about behavior, motivation and

Here's what the guys told us:

- **Fear over loss of physical and/or mental ability and independence are the top motivating factors for starting (70%) and maintaining (98%) a healthy lifestyle.**
- **Men's priorities play a major role in providing motivation to maintain a healthy lifestyle. 76% rate priorities as extremely or very motivating and 74% think about them once a day, a few times a week, or at least once a week.**
- **73% rate spending time with their wives and/or significant others as their number one life priority. Traveling is a distant second (52%) along with spending time with their children (47%) and hobbies (44%)**
- **The most important rated attributes for following a healthy lifestyle included: regular exercise (97%), getting enough sleep (85%), managing diet (81%), and regular check-ups (79%).**
- **Habits are a key to healthy living. 95% of men indicate that they have specific habits and rituals for maintaining a healthy lifestyle. 83% find them important.**
- **75% indicate that optimism is important for maintaining a healthy lifestyle.**

day-to-day rituals from those that practice a healthy lifestyle? By narrowing our research to the most health-challenged segment of our population, men over fifty, we would identify specific factors to form a road map of inspiration for men struggling with the adoption of healthy behaviors. Further, there was the prospect that these field-tested insights might serve other populations and offer insights for the people who love our 50+ guys, the physicians who treat them and the policy makers that influence their insurers.

So, if you're a guy over fifty looking for motivation to start living healthy, give some thought to your life's priorities. Before you start counting calories and tracking the miles you walk or run each week, really consider how you measure your quality time with your spouse or partner, travel, hobbies, children and grandchildren. How do you rate these experiences? Want to extend them for as long as possible?

1,000 men we surveyed tied their motivation for healthy living to an alignment of their values, motivations, behaviors and tactics. Steve understood that healthy living is a means to an end but that the end game is the enjoyment of his life's priorities. He was so far down this path that couldn't see why anyone wouldn't see the connection between healthy living and its benefits. We should all aspire to be in a place with Steve.

Your motivation is right there.

Louis S. Bezich is Senior Vice President-Strategic Alliances at Cooper University Health Care in Camden, NJ. He also serves as an adjunct professor in the Graduate Department of Public Policy and Administration at the Camden Campus of Rutgers University.

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