Tips to Living a Healthier Lifestyle

Our body is our temple, and we need to take care of it. Think of your body as your physical shell to take you through life. If you repeatedly abuse it, your shell will wear out quickly. Life is beautiful and you do not want to bog yourself down with unnecessary health problems. Today, your vital organs may be working well, but they may not be tomorrow. Do not take your health for granted. Take proper care of your body. Good health is not just about healthy eating and exercise — it is also about having a positive attitude, a positive self-image, and a healthy lifestyle.

**Drink more water.** Most of us do not drink enough water every day. Water is essential for our bodies to function. Do you know over 60% of our body is made up of water? Water is needed to carry out body functions, remove waste, and carry nutrients and oxygen around our body. Since we lose water daily through urine, bowel movements, perspiration, and breathing, we need to replenish our water intake.

Furthermore, drinking water helps in losing weight. A Health.com study carried out among overweight or obese people showed that water drinkers lose 4.5 more pounds than a control group! The researchers believe that it is because drinking more water helps fill your stomach, making you less hungry and less likely to overeat.

The amount of water we need is dependent on various factors such as humidity, your physical activity, and your weight, but generally, we need 2.7-3.7 liters of water intake per day. Since food intake contributes about 20% of our fluid intake, that means we need to drink about 2.0-3.0 liters of water or about 8-10 glasses. One way to tell if you are hydrated — your urine should be slightly yellow. If it is not, and more like dark yellow or even orange, you are not getting enough water! Other signs include dry lips, dry mouth, and little urination. Feeling thirst is a sign that your body is dehydrated.

**Get enough sleep.** When you do not rest well, you may compensate by eating more. Usually, it is junk food or excessive caffeine. Get enough rest and you will not need to binge to stay alert and stimulated. Also, lack of sleep causes premature aging and decreases your body’s ability to heal and recover from injury.

**Meditate.** Meditation quietens your mind and calms your soul. If you do not know how to meditate, a simple Google search can lead you to more resources that you will ever need. Start simple with a 2–5-minute meditation and increase from there.

**Exercise.** Movement is life. Research has shown that exercising daily brings tremendous benefits to our health, including an increase in lifespan, lowering of risk of diseases, higher bone density, and weight loss. Increase the activity in your life. Choose walking over transport for close distances. Climb the stairs instead of taking the lift. Join an aerobics class or a dance class.

**Pick activities that you enjoy.** When you enjoy an activity or sport, you naturally want to do it. Exercise does not have to about suffering and pushing yourself; it should be about being healthy and having fun at the same time. Adding variation in your exercises will keep them interesting. What exercises do you like and how can you include them in your routine?

**Work out different parts of your body**. Do not just do cardio (like jogging). Give your body a proper workout. The easiest way is to engage your entire body is to participate in sports/organized activities since they work out different muscle groups. Popular activities where you can get a good body workout are kayaking, hiking, swimming, basketball, tennis, pickleball, badminton, yoga, and frisbee.

**Eat fruits.** Fruits have a load of vitamins and minerals. Do you know that oranges offer more health benefits than vitamin C pills? As much as possible, consume your vitamins and minerals through your diet rather than through pills or juice. Eat a variety of fruits every morning and they energize you. Couple your fruit with Greek yogurt, cottage cheese or a small amount of oatmeal for a wholesome breakfast.

**Eat vegetables.** Vegetables are the source of many nutrients and minerals like folate, vitamin K, folate, vitamin A, manganese, and potassium, not to mention dietary fiber which is important for good gut health. There are two types of vegetables: Starchy vegetables like potato, sweet potato, yam, and pumpkin; and non-starchy vegetables like kale, arugula, spinach, broccoli, brussels sprouts, long beans, tomato, cucumber, and mushroom. Some vegetables are slightly starchy and hence fall in the middle: Corn, peas, carrot, artichoke, beetroot, cauliflower, and beans (technically legumes). All vegetables are important and enrich our diet. You want to have a variety of vegetable intake to strengthen your immune system.

**Pick different-colored fruits and vegetables**. Always consume a wide variety of fruits and vegetables of different colors. Firstly, fruits and vegetables with different colors represent different antioxidant content, which removes free radicals that damage our cells and fights inflammation in our body. Secondly, when we eat a large diversity of fruits/vegetables, it creates a wide variety of good bacteria in our gut, which creates a strong defense line between us and the environment, improves our immune system, and strengthens our long-term health.

Eat fruits/vegetables of different colors. Eat the rainbow!

If you have existing gut problems, be careful about eating excessive amounts of fiber and seeds/nuts as it may cause digestion and constipation issues.

**Cut down on processed food.** Processed food is not good because (a) most of the nutritional value is lost in the creation of these foods, and (b) the added preservatives are bad for our health. Many processed foods contain a high amount of salt which leads to higher blood pressure and heart disease. In general, the more ingredients a food has on the label (ending with ‘ite’ or ‘ate’), the more processed it is. Go for less processed food such as a baked potato over chips, fresh fruit over canned fruit, and intact grains over white bread. Try this…Do not eat any packaged products with more than five ingredients on the label! And avoid hydrogenated oils at all costs.

**Choose intact grains over refined grains.** Intact grains contain all the essential parts of the grain seed; in other words, they contain 100% of the original kernel, which includes the bran, germ, and endosperm. Because these layers are intact, the grain contains a richer nutritional profile of antioxidants, vitamins, and minerals than refined grains (which are grains stripped of the bran and germ layers through processing). Go for intact grains like steel cut oats, barley, brown rice, quinoa, buckwheat, millet. Refined grains include white rice, white flour, most types of bread, white pasta, quick oats, and cereals. The more processing a grain has been through, the more refined it is. If you are just starting out, there is no need to 100% ban refined grains — moderation is the key. Transition to a more intact-grains-based diet by swapping refined grains with intact grains for 1-2 meals a week and increasing it from there.

**Love yourself.** Self-love is a crucial part of living a healthy life. When you have a negative self-image, it naturally weighs down on your mental outlook and health. How much do you love yourself on a scale of 1-10? Why? How can you love yourself more starting today?

**Walk barefoot.** There are many benefits of barefoot walking. There are tremendous benefits to connecting with the earth. “Grounding” is an experience which can help to bring your physical and mental wellness into alignment. When grounding try to walk on natural surfaces such as grass, sand, dirt, unsealed concrete, etc.

**Purge negative people from your life.** Positive mental health is part of a healthy life. You do not need toxic people in your life. If you feel that a friend is overly critical or negative, let him/her go. Create distance from negative people and surround yourself with people who make you feel positive and productive.

**Purge negativity from yourself.** You do not need negativity from yourself either. Listen to the thoughts that come up and get rid of your negative thoughts. One great way to remove your negativity is to brain dump when you feel frustrated. When you are feeling negative, write out your deepest thoughts and concerns. The simple exercise of getting it out might just be enough to let the thoughts go. Do not keep these thoughts pent up inside you — it is not healthy.

**Avoid trigger foods.** Trigger foods are the foods that make you go berserk and binge after you eat them. Everyone’s trigger foods are different, but generally trigger foods are candy, chocolate, chips, cookies, or anything with a high level of refined sugar, salt, or flour. These foods cause a blood sugar imbalance, hence triggering one to eat more. What are your trigger foods? Identify them and remove them from your diet and do not bring them into your home or work environments.

**Breathe.** Deeply. Oxygen is vital for life. You may know how to breathe, but are you breathing properly? Most of us are not breathing properly — we take shallow breaths and breathe to 1/3 of our lung capacity. Athletes are taught proper breathing techniques to get their best performance. A full breath is one where your lungs are fully filled, your abdomen expands, and there’s minimum movement in your shoulders.

**Improve your posture.** Having a good posture improves your breathing and makes you look smarter and more attractive. Try pulling your shoulders back so that they align over your hips. Your head should follow, and your ears should align over your shoulders.

**Address emotional eating issues.** Do you eat when you feel stressed, bored, or frustrated? Emotional eating is eating to fill an emotion rather than real hunger. However, emotional eating will never make you feel happy because you are trying to fill a void that has nothing to do with food. Food does not give you love or happiness; it is just food. Get to the root of the issue and address it.

**Eat small meals.** Choose several small meals over huge meals as it evens out your energy distribution. It is also better for your stomach as it will not over-stretch from digesting a huge volume of food at one go. In general, eat when you feel hungry and stop when you are full. You do not need to wait until official mealtimes before you start eating. Listen to your body and what it tells you. Try packing up half of restaurant meals as a second meal. Many times, restaurants serve huge portions and include much more food than what is needed in one meal.

**Stop eating when you feel full.** Many of us rely on external cues to tell when we are full, such as whether everyone has finished eating or whether your plate is empty. These are irrelevant: you should look at internal cues, such as whether your stomach feels full and how you feel. Do not eat just because there’s food on the plate. Stop eating when you feel about 3/4 full — if you eat till you are totally full, you will likely feel bloated. Listen to your gut and learn when it is time to stop! Try putting smaller servings on your plate when eating at home.

**Live a life of purpose.** Blue Zones are regions of the world where people live the longest and healthiest lives. There are nine shared characteristics of these regions (many of which are in this list), and one important characteristic is to have a purpose. The Okinawans call it ikigai and the Nicoyans call it plan de vida. Are you living a life of meaning? Are you living in line with your purpose each day?

**Cut down on deep-fried food.** Deep-fried food contains acrylamide, a potentially cancer-causing chemical. According to a BBC report, an ordinary bag of chips may contain up to 500 times more of the substance than the top level allowed in drinking water by the World Health Organization (WHO)! Go for food prepared using healthier methods instead, such as grilling, steaming, stir-fry, or even raw food. Reduce your intake of fast food, fries, doughnuts, chips, and deep-fried food.

**Cut down on sugary food/drinks.** Sugary food consists of your candy bars, pastries, chocolate, cookies, cakes, and jelly donuts. Not only do they not fill you, but they trigger you to eat more due to the sugar rush. Eating occasionally is okay, but not daily. Go for healthy snacks instead. Sugary drinks are unfortunately sold everywhere today, namely in the form of soda and sweet drinks. These drinks are unhealthy and cause weight gain. Go for plain water, green tea, or vegetable juices instead!

**Reduce your alcohol consumption.** Alcohol is a diuretic, which means it drains water from your body. Not only that, but alcohol is repeatedly proven to have negative effects on our body and health — impacting the proper functioning of our brain, liver, lungs, and other major organs. If you drink alcohol regularly, it might be time to cut it out, or at the very least, reduce your consumption.

**Go organic (where possible).** Organic food is food produced without synthetic inputs such as pesticides and chemical fertilizers; that does not contain genetically modified organisms; and that is not processed using irradiation, industrial solvents, or chemical food additives. The organic movement is slowly catching on with more stores offering organic options. While organic food tends to cost more, would you rather save some money and feed your body with pesticides or pay a few extra dollars for a cleaner, healthier body? Try to use organic skincare products as well as your skin absorbs these products.

**Beware of vegetable oils.** This includes all refined oils such as canola oil, rapeseed oil, soybean oil, palm oil and sunflower oil. Despite the whole “heart healthy” branding surrounding vegetable oils, oil is not a natural food. It is an extremely processed food stripped of all the nutrients/fiber/protein/etc. of the original food. Many commercial oils are high in omega-6 polyunsaturated fat which is inflammatory. In fact, the current prevalent use of vegetable oils was practically non-existent before the 1900s, and it was from a strong marketing push in the 1910s that vegetable oil began to be used in a widespread manner. Today, corporations use vegetable oils in food because (a) they are cheap and (b) they lengthen the shelf life of food, but they are not healthy in any way and create a lot of toxicity to the body.

The best way to cut down on vegetable oils (because oil is everywhere) is to (a) prepare your own meals, and (b) be conscious of menu options when you are out.

**Prepare your meals.** When you prepare your meals, you control what goes into them rather than choosing between sub-standard options in a restaurant. Get quality kitchen equipment — it will be your best investment ever. Having the right tools can make cooking enjoyable. Also, meal prepping is a great way to be prepared and plan for healthy meals on the go.

**Learn to say no.** Do not eat just because you are out with friends or because other people offer you food. Simply say no and say you are not hungry if you do not feel like eating.

**Bring a water bottle when you go out.** That way, you can drink whenever you want. It saves you money and you do not need to resort to bad alternatives like soda. Having water on hand can also prevent dehydration and can sate hunger when you do not have healthy options available.

**Eat what you need.** It is better to eat less and in line with your energy needs, rather than eat excessively and work off excess calorie intake through exercise. When you eat excessively, you strain your digestive system by making it digest more food than you need, and when you exercise excessively, you strain your body.

**Stop smoking.** Smoking is detrimental to health, severely increases the risk of lung cancer, kidney cancer, esophageal cancer (of our gullet), heart attack, and more. Smoking “lite” cigarettes do not decrease health risks either. If you are a smoker, quit not just for yourself, but for your family and friends. If you do not smoke, stay that way, and do not start.

**Avoid passive smoking.** Second-hand smoking (breathing in air from smokers) causes many of the same long-term diseases as direct smoking. Did you know? According to the CDC, there is no risk-free level of passive smoking; even brief exposure can be harmful to health. Get away from smokers and avoid cigarette smoke where you can.

**Have healthy snacks.** If you are hungry at work, eat healthy snacks like fruits, vegetables, nuts, and yogurts. These are nutritional and do not give you that sugar rush. Have them readily available so that you can get a munch and stop when you have your fill. Stay away from cookies and candy bars.

**Get regular checkups.** Some diseases do not show symptoms until it is too late. Get regular blood tests for blood sugar, vitamins, and minerals, along with urine tests. More elaborate tests like mammograms (for women) and PAP smear (for women) should be done at the recommended intervals. If the test results are not optimal, that means that you can quickly take corrective action. If they are great, that is fantastic, and you can have a peace of mind!

**Supplement your diet as needed.** Even when we eat healthily, there will be times when we lack certain vitamins/minerals because of many man-made processes have permanently altered our food supply chain. Common nutrient deficiencies are iron, vitamin B12, vitamin D (for those who live in places with winter), calcium, and magnesium.

**Consume prebiotic foods.** Prebiotics are important for gut bacteria to flourish. Think of them as fertilizer for your gut microbiome. Research increasingly shows a link between our gut flora and overall health. Where possible, always choose prebiotic food over a prebiotic supplement. Prebiotic foods include raw onion, raw leek, raw garlic, potato starch, and unripe bananas.

**Fermented Food.** As you consume prebiotics, include fermented foods which are a great source of probiotics. Fermented foods include sauerkraut, kefir, kimchi, kombucha, pickles, and kombucha.

**Experiment.** The best way to know what works for you is to experiment. Rather than subscribe to one diet, try different foods, and see how your body reacts. Most importantly, research and tweak your diet based on what you learn.

**Get out more often.** If you have a 9-5 job, chances are you spend much of your time holed up in the office and not a lot of time going out and having fun. During weekends, you are probably busy with work or running errands. Make a point to go out with your friends at least once a week. Get some sun. Go out and have a change of environment. It will be great for your body and soul!

**Practice good dental hygiene.** Good dental hygiene can make you a lot more desirable and it is linked to better health. Brush your teeth twice a day, rinse your mouth after each meal, and floss after each meal if possible. Use a fluoride-free toothpaste to protect your gum health.

**Hang out with healthy people.** You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with, so the more time you spend around healthy people, the better it is. Dine with people who are health conscious and get workout buddies. It makes healthy living more fun!

Tips taken and amended from: https://personalexcellence.co/blog/healthy-living

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