Healthy Lifestyle Recommendations

Our lifestyle today has radically changed over the last 20 years. Household chores are less physical than in our parents day, thanks to all those labour-saving devices, and we often take the car instead of walking. Along with our demand for takeaways and processed food, our modern lifestyle is leading to an epidemic of obesity and inactivity. If we carry on in this way, cardiovascular disease, diabetes and cancer will reach epidemic proportions. Therefore, it is up to us as individuals to take responsibility for our health by taking a stand and seeking a healthier way to live. The recommendations below will hopefully encourage you to take the right steps to achieve that.

Do Not Smoke

Smokers have twice the risk of heart attacks as non-smokers. As few as five cigarettes a day increases overall risk of cardiovascular disease. Smokers also have a much higher risk of most types of cancer. Therefore, if you are a smoker, you should try to give up. There are various methods available which can help you stop smoking and information should be available at your GP surgery, health centre or from Pulse Health Screening.

Limit Alcohol

Ideally, men should drink no more than 21 units of alcohol a week (maximum of 3 units a day) and women 14 units a week (maximum of 2 units a day). A unit is equal to a ½ pint of beer, small glass of wine or a pub measure of spirits. Red wine has been found to be beneficial to health due to certain substances within red grapes called bio-flavanoids and anti-oxidants.

Increase Exercise

Exercise is crucial in the prevention of heart disease, diabetes, cancer and obesity. Those with a sedentary lifestyle have double the risk of cardiovascular symptoms. Everyone should exercise for at least 30 minutes, 3 - 5 times a week, doing activities which raise heart rate such as a brisk walk, swimming, sports activities, aerobic exercises, jogging or cycling. If you are over 35 and have not exercised for a while, it is advisable to consult your GP and then increase the amount of exercise you do, gradually.

Control Your Weight

Being overweight puts extra strain on your heart as it has to work harder to pump the blood all the way around your body. Therefore, it is important to control your weight to reduce your risk of cardiovascular disease plus other serious conditions such as diabetes. There is also a higher incidence of cancer in people who are overweight. If you have a lot of weight to lose, you should avoid faddy diets which exclude major food groups. Instead, concentrate on eating smaller portions of more healthy foods (see below). This should be coupled with an exercise programme.

Eat a Healthy Diet

For optimum health there are a number of foods you should include in your daily diet as well as foods you should avoid, wherever possible.

Fruit and Vegetables: Ideally you should be aiming for at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables every day. However, studies are showing that 8 - 10 portions are needed for optimum health. Fruit should be eaten between meals because the digestion of fruit may interfere with the
digestion of other foods. Vegetables and fruit have a protective effect against cancer, heart disease, and many digestive disorders. They are also a good source of fibre. Try to include some raw foods such as salads in your diet, as very often vitamins, and the enzymes essential for proper digestion, are lost with cooking. Steaming vegetables is the most nutritious way of cooking and NEVER cook foods in a microwave. Microwaves cause extensive damage to foods, reducing nutrient value. They also cause changes in the blood by increasing “bad” cholesterol and reducing red cells which are the vital oxygen-carriers in the blood.

Raw nuts (excluding peanuts) and seeds contain a good supply of nutrients which are beneficial to health.

Meat: Although it is not necessary to eat meat every day, it is important to include it in your diet because it contains haem iron, necessary to replenish your iron stores. It is also a good source of L-arginine and vitamin B12, both essential for health. If you are a vegetarian or vegan, you need to find an alternative source of vitamin B12.

Fish: It is wise to eat fish at least once a week. Oily fish such as herring, mackerel, tuna, salmon and sardines provide a good source of Omega 3 essential fatty acids which may protect you from a number of cancers, heart disease, joint problems and Alzheimer’s. Omega 3 may also be obtained from fish oil supplements.

Dairy Products: A small amount of dairy products is usually fine, although some people may have an intolerance to the lactose in milk. Do not replace butter with margarine. Most margarine contains hydrogenated or processed fat which is detrimental to the cardiovascular system. Organic sources of dairy products are best as they should not contain traces of anti-biotics or synthetic hormones which may increase the risk of breast cancer in women or prostate cancer in men. It is not strictly true that dairy products are a good source of calcium. They certainly contain it but the proteins in the milk actually prevent the absorption of calcium by the body. The best sources of calcium are nuts (Brazil), seeds (sesame), eggs, broccoli, kale and greens.

Processed Foods: Avoid processed foods including takeaways and ready-meals as much as possible. These have far fewer nutrients than freshly prepared foods and often contain artificial additives which may damage health. White foods, such as white bread, white rice, and white pasta should be replaced with wholemeal versions to prevent a sudden surge of sugar into the bloodstream. When this happens, the pancreas has to produce insulin to balance the blood sugar and this can lead to diabetes and damage to the cardiovascular system in the long-term.

Sugar and salt should also be kept to a minimum. Sugar is highly processed and by the time we buy it, there are very few nutrients remaining. It has been found that sugar can damage the walls of blood vessels. Instead of seeking artificial sweeteners, which are even more hazardous to health, you should aim to cut down and eventually eliminate processed sugar from your diet. Salt, too should be reduced, as some people seem to be salt-sensitive, resulting in raised blood pressure. Ordinary table salt is of poor quality so it is preferable to use rock salt or sea salt whenever you need to add it to your meal. Pulse Health Screening recommends Himalayan Rock Salt which is rich in minerals.

Vitamin and Mineral Supplements: In an ideal world our food should provide us with sufficient vitamins and minerals to sustain our bodies. Unfortunately, that is no longer the case due to intensive farming practices, the use of pesticides, and crops picked before they are ripe then stored or transported for long periods of time. If you wish to maintain good health for as long as possible, it is wise to take a multi-vitamin and mineral supplement every day, preferably in liquid form. Supplementation is especially important if you are restricting your food intake whilst on a diet or increasing your exercise. It is also wise to take a probiotic supplement containing billions of “good” bacteria to aid the absorption of nutrients and reduce the numbers of harmful bacteria and yeasts. Supermarkets and health food shops supply a large range of supplements but not all supplements are beneficial and some may pass right through you without being absorbed. For information or advice about high quality supplements contact Pulse Health Screening.
Drink Sufficient Fluids

**Water:** Ideally, you should aim to drink 8 glasses/2 litres of water a day. If you have problems drinking water, then diluting fruit juice is one way of making it more palatable, although not ideal. However, like most things, if you drink it often enough it becomes an “acquired” taste. Sufficient fluids allow your body to remove toxins. If you are dehydrated, water is drained away from some cells and sent to the vital organs. This can lead to tiredness, lack of concentration, gastro-intestinal problems and blood vessel damage. Fresh, filtered water is better than water straight from the tap but remember to change the filters regularly to prevent bacteria, nitrate, and metal build up. Mineral water is also good, preferably “still” water from glass bottles to avoid contamination from the chemicals that leach from plastic bottles. One method to purify water is via a reverse osmosis filtration unit which can be fitted under the sink. A water distiller also provides pure water but the downside to both these methods is that the water can be acidic and can deplete some minerals in the body. A water ionizer, which also acts as a filter but produces oxygenated, alkaline water, may be preferable but is slightly more expensive. For details about a water ionizer, contact Pulse Health Screening.

**Tea and Coffee:** Some decaffeinated versions are actually less healthy than caffeinated tea or coffee. This is due to the chemicals used to remove the caffeine. As tea and coffee are dehydrating, it is wise to have a glass of water with each cup, to compensate. It would also be wise to drink no more than two cups a day.

**Fizzy Drinks:** Fizzy drinks contain high levels of sodium, and acids such as phosphoric acid which can leach calcium from your bones, putting you at risk of osteoporosis later in life. Although regular versions contain sugar, the unsweetened versions (and some regular versions, too) contain artificial sweeteners such as aspartame and saccharin. Both of these have been implicated as a cause of some cancers, and aspartame has also been found to be responsible for seizures and other neurological problems. Another negative effect of aspartame, found in many sugar-free foods and beverages, is that it is an appetite stimulant which makes you want to eat more!

Avoid Toxins in Toiletries and Cleaning Products

You may be shocked to discover that many of the products you use daily for personal hygiene contain a toxic cocktail of chemicals that have been found to cause organ damage and cancer. Ingredients such as sodium lauryl sulphate, propylene glycol, sodium fluoride, triclosan, and talc, to name just a few, can all be found in our toiletries, yet studies have shown them to be toxic or carcinogenic. Every time you use a product containing harmful ingredients, your body has to detoxify the chemicals. This uses up energy and causes the formation of free radicals which damage cells and compromise your immune system.

Some household cleaners such as washing powders, fabric conditioners and washing up liquids also contain toxins. Air fresheners, too, have been found to contain harmful ingredients and should never be used in the home, especially if you have children or are pregnant.

It would therefore be wise to avoid products containing potentially harmful ingredients and change over to the toxin-free versions which are becoming more readily available.

For details about safe alternatives, contact Pulse Health Screening.

For more information about healthy living, or to find out about the other services offered by Pulse Health Screening, see the contact details below.

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