



Lifestyle Changes

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We all do it, whether you want to admit it to yourself or not. That's right, we all do things that may not be good for our health!

Some overeat, some smoke, some drink to much too often, some refuse to wear a seat belt when driving, some fail to take their blood pressure medicine, some find "better" things to do besides study or exercise. The sad part is that many are not bothered by their not so good habits. Such behaviors reflect personal choices, habits, or possibly customs that are influenced by our social atmosphere. The good news: all of the above "choices" are modifiable lifestyle behaviors. With motivation and dedication you can easily put yourself on the fast track to better overall health for now, and later!

The first step is to determine and strengthen a safe social network. It's best to be around and confide in individuals who understand your goals, and aid in your success. Maybe sharing in your dedication will motivate them to live a healthier life as well.

Once you've achieved this task, you're ready to *gradually* change your lifestyle behaviors to better serve your health.

The main focuses for overall health, both physical and mental, are developing healthy eating habits, staying physically active, maintaining adequate sleep, and discovering a balance between relaxing leisure hobbies for stress management, and socially networking with family and friends.

Healthy Eating:

Work to lower overall fat, sodium, and sugar in your diet, while increasing fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. There are no "bad" foods, but all foods must be eaten in moderation. Start your day with a balanced breakfast, eat more often (5-6 times per day), but in smaller portion sizes.

Exercise:

Find a way to schedule exercise for 5-6 days of the week. Strive to maintain variety during the 30-60 minutes of recommended cardio training on all or most days of the week. Gradually work to add on 20 minutes or more of a weight program 2-3 of those days.

Sleep:

Although sleep proves necessary for repair and efficient function of the nervous system, most Americans still do not get enough sleep. The average American gets less than 6 hours of sleep a night when most adults need 7-8 hours to reap benefits. Too little sleep results in short tempers, irritability, inability to concentrate impaired memory, and poor physical performance.

Stress Management:

For starters, you can not totally eliminate stress from your life. It's when the stress becomes so overpowering and begins to deplete your health that necessary action must be taken to reduce it. The best ways to lower stress levels are to change your perception of that particular stressor. Actual events do not cause stress; it is instead caused by your reaction to them.

You may try exercise as a stress reliever, time management (a planner), speaking with a friend, or just doing something you enjoy, all of which aid in lowering stress levels.