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How to stay Healthy

Now, more than ever, it is important to stay healthy. Due to rising healthcare costs, some people are not able to get the treatment they need, and prevention is the best protection against that problem.

Many people under the age of 30 are not as concerned about their health as are older people. This may be because physically they are resilient, and bounce back easily from unhealthy behavior. It is easier to develop good habits when one is young, and this will be appreciated later in life. But, one can begin even in old age and reap benefits.

It is important to be aware that when there are problems with physical health, the body is not the only area that must be examined. Other areas include the environment (Physical), the individual's feelings (Emotional), his or her thoughts (Mental) and the person's beliefs (Spiritual).

One should not be misled by the separation of health into four distinct categories. In reality, they cannot be separated because each affects the other. For example, if one were to take a 40 minute walk on the beach, it would be valuable physically. The walker may also be lifted out of a bad mood, which would be an emotional improvement. And since being away from distractions at work or home is conducive to self-reflection, the individual could also gain new insight into how to resolve a pending conflict. That fits into the mental and spiritual categories.

Physical

The following ten items are suggestions for strengthening physical health:

1. Spend some time in nature, sometimes away from the city;
2. Focus on your breathing periodically and be sure to inhale into the abdomen and exhale completely;
3. Remember that brisk walking is an invigorating exercise, and daily stretching is also beneficial;
4. Eat foods as whole, natural and fresh as possible;
5. Read labels and avoid eating foods with artificial preservatives, additives and coloring agents;
6. Consume fresh fruits and vegetables which are most nutritious, especially leafy greens;
7. Chew each bite of food several times to aid digestion;

8. Bear in mind that water is an excellent drink when one is thirsty;
9. Allow ample time to sleep and rest; and
10. For optimum comfort and protection, keep the body, hair, nails and teeth clean.

One should not underestimate the importance of numbers two and three. One of the best remedies for anxiety and tension is to take slow, deep breaths. Brisk walking is an exercise one can do for a lifetime. It has little risk of injury, can be done anywhere and requires no equipment. The alternating back-and-forth movements of the arms and legs produce a coordinated rhythm that stimulates brain development and is good for the nervous system.

When deciding which foods are healthiest, consider numbers four and five. For example, the necessary ingredients for bread are grains, yeast and oil. When the list of ingredients numbers more than eight, one has to ask if all the extra ingredients provide needed nutrients or are just fillers.

Also, the more processes the ingredients are put through, the more they are altered from their original state and the less nutrients they will provide. This is often true of grains. For example, whole wheat and brown rice are more nutritious than white flour – which is refined wheat – and white rice, which is missing some B vitamins needed for the brain and nervous system.

Freshness is important in produce because it is most nutritious immediately after being picked; Fruits and vegetables grown locally can be healthier because they did not travel many hours and miles to get to the grocery.

The body is approximately 70 percent water. When deciding what the best thirst quencher is, consider number eight. Why drink a mixture of caramel color, sugar and carbonated water which has no nutritional value and causes cavities?

Artificial sweeteners also have no nutritional value and are far from natural. Approximately half of those who ingest them experience an increase in appetite.

Items in number six can serve as refreshing snacks that give the body something it needs, and provide energy. These can be in the form of juice, and freshly-made juice has the most nutrition.

Emotional

Practicing the items in the following list can be beneficial for one's emotional health.

Release negative emotions such as anger, sadness, fear and guilt, and experience joy, happiness, pleasure and peace by:

1. Immersing in negative emotions until they dissipate (i.e. listening to a sad song if one is sad or writing or telling someone about feelings);
2. Apologizing to someone for treating them unkindly;
3. Refraining from self-comparison to others;
4. Doing something physical such as dancing, hiking, swimming or any favorite sport;
5. Singing, playing an instrument or listening to music;

6. Growing plants or flowers and keeping some inside;
7. Doing something creative such as drawing, writing poetry, cooking or making a bookcase;
8. Attending a movie, lecture, sporting event, comedy show or concert;
9. Reading a book, playing cards or board games, surfing the Internet; or
10. Playing with children or a pet.

There are many ways to enjoy oneself, and what works for one may not work for another. When one is bored or feeling depressed, it is important to be active. Experiment with different activities, finding those that work and, if they are not on this list, write them down for future reference.

Mental

One's thoughts and perceptions can either promote healing or illness, regardless of what one is experiencing. For example, suppose a man is driving to an important appointment but gets stuck in traffic because of an automobile accident. This is going to make him late. He could become irritated which may cause his heart rate to increase, his breath to become shallow and his muscles to tighten. This will not make the line of cars in front of him disappear.

Instead of being frustrated, he could imagine he is at the beach. Walking barefoot, feeling the wet sand between his toes and the warm sun on his skin, he hears sea gulls flying above and waves hitting the shore. He smells seaweed and salt water and gazes at a blue sky with a few puffy white clouds dancing by.

Even though each minute his car cannot move, he will be later for his appointment, his body responds as if he is on vacation. His muscles relax, his breathing slows down and deepens. Instead of arriving late and tense, he arrives calm.

It may take years of practice to reach this level of success, but each time one attempts visualization, it strengthens one's ability and even if one can only relax for a few seconds, that is better than not at all.

The following list contains suggestions to improve one's mental health:

1. Think about a respected quality which has been acquired;
2. Think about something funny;
3. Using the five senses – sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch – remember one of the most enjoyable times you ever experienced;
4. Think about the blessings for which you are thankful;
5. Think about things accomplished, instead of what has not yet been;
6. Imagine in great detail, a peaceful, relaxing place;
7. Forgive yourself and others for mistakes;
8. Look in the mirror and say, "I LOVE YOU!" and give yourself a big hug.
9. Create a self-image as strong, beautiful, wise and happy as can be; and
10. Keep a journal.

A journal is another name for a diary. It is writing that no one will read except the one who writes it. The writer does not have to be concerned with correct

spelling or grammar. He or she can write in it whenever convenient and say whatever is desired. A journal can become like a friend if done on a regular basis, such as once a week or more. If one has a problem but does not know why, or what to do about it, writing down all the details can help clear up confusion.

Journal-writing can be similar to meditation because it can help one understand oneself better and gain insight about what needs to be done for self-improvement.

Spiritual

Believing that life has a purpose and is not a random occurrence, helps some people cope with extremely difficult experiences. This includes having faith that each individual has a mission and part of the enjoyment of life is discovering what that is. Viewing problems as challenges for one's growth and development, rather than a string of bad luck, can relieve stress. These beliefs and the following practices help build spiritual health.

1. Daily scripture study;
2. Singing hymns or participating in other religious rituals;
3. Visiting the sick, elderly or bereaved;
4. Volunteer for community service;
5. Giving charity or helping people in need before they ask for it;
6. Making deep, honest communication with another person, with or without words;
7. Setting aside quiet time (with no interruptions) at approximately the same time every day for prayer and meditation;
8. Expressing gratitude through prayer or asking for forgiveness, expressing hopes and dreams, and asking to receive whatever one desires;
9. Using meditation to let go of thoughts, focus away from self, feel one's connection to all things, and be open to new insight; and
10. Attending a religious service or 12-step program that meets on a regular basis.

When one is making improvements for a healthier lifestyle, gradual changes have a higher success rate. Otherwise there can be a tendency to revert to old habits. The above lists contain many suggestions. They should not all be tried at once, but two or three may be chosen to start.

If one decides to improve his or her diet, it is helpful to avoid looking at the goal as "all or nothing." If the goal is to eat less fat, for example, and one has a choice between French fries and a baked potato, the obvious choice is the baked potato. That might not always be the choice of the health-conscious person, but it is the ideal. After one has improved one's diet, the desire to eat fatty foods will diminish.

When making changes, it is important that the new behavior becomes a habit much like brushing one's teeth. Once it becomes a habit, the person will feel

uneasy if he or she does not conform. At that point, it is no longer a struggle to practice the new behavior, and it does not require much thought.

When one is working toward a goal, one frequently does not see immediate results. In the case of health, it is important not to give up. A gardener who has just planted a rose bush weeds it, makes sure it has enough sun and water and keeps garden pests from bothering it. Day after day, week after week, she takes care of her plant but sees only buds. All of a sudden, one day she goes outside and the buds have blossomed into the most beautiful red roses.

The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step. The final step takes only a second. Appreciate all the little steps in between.

Jennie Cohen 1997

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