

The power to achieve health is in your own hands!

By Claire Riendeau, N.D.

Many people mistakenly believe they can live recklessly, and when they become sick, that someone will find a “cure” for what ails them. Unfortunately, there is no cure for a lifetime of poor choices. In most cases, poor lifestyle behaviors are the underlying causes of illness and disease. In fact, poor diet, little sleep, lack of exercise and mountains of stress from work, school and home contribute to illness and disease more than any other single factor. Fortunately you have the power to control your own health. Implementing changes in your lifestyle behaviors now can prevent illness and disease in the years to come.

Eating the Right Foods

When it comes to eating the right foods, it is difficult for even the most well-educated person to make sense of the many different opinions presented by doctors, nutritionists, fitness experts, magazine articles, etc. Each week the media reports on the beneficial aspects of certain foods, and the harmful effects of others. However, we do know a few things that apply to everyone: 1) proper blood sugar control is absolutely required for the maintenance of appropriate body fat levels, good cognitive function and a healthy immune system, and 2) you must determine what specific foods are harmful and which ones are well-tolerated and health promoting for your unique body chemistry.

Blood sugar control means maintaining a steady blood sugar level by eating at the right times and consuming the right amount of protein, carbohydrates, and fat with each meal and snack. When blood sugar is low, you will go into a predominantly catabolic state, breaking down muscle, organ and bone tissue in order to keep the body going. At the same time your immune system may become compromised.

Eat smart: pay attention to the glycemic index of foods, pH value of foods, choose proteins, carbohydrates and fats wisely, and eat organic foods. Some basic rules include: eat 80% alkaline and 20% acid forming foods, eat 80% raw and 20% cooked foods, and eat until you are 80% full, allowing room for digestion.

Foods that are problematic for many people include gliadin and gluten containing grains (wheat, barley, rye, oats, rice, corn, etc) as well as dairy and soy. There are saliva tests available to determine whether these foods are incompatible with your body chemistry. This “intolerance” (not “allergy”) alone can be the difference between health and dis-ease, including cancers. A great reference on this topic is “Dangerous Grains: Why Gluten Cereal Grains May Be Hazardous to Your Health”, by James Braly M.D.

Get enough sleep

Your immune system functions optimally when you get adequate sleep. That is because as you sleep, physical repair takes place between 10 pm and 2 am. Your immune system patrols your body, eliminating cancer cells, bacterias, viruses, and other harmful agents. Then from about 2 am to 6 am, you enter a stage of psychic regeneration, during which time the brain releases chemicals that enhance your immune system. Mental and emotional events are processed and your mind is refreshed for the day ahead. Seven to eight hours of sleep is required to accomplish these tasks. Without sufficient sleep, your immune system is hard-pressed to keep up with its repair work.

Exercise Regularly

Recent research shows that lack of exercise shortens a person’s life expectancy more than regular smoking does. This sobering news helps put in perspective the necessity for sufficient exercise. As the saying goes: “Use it, or lose it”.

Emotional and Mental Stress

Both stimulate the sympathetic nervous system, creating a fight-or-flight response. Chronic overstimulation can lead to suppressed immunity and adrenal exhaustion. This is common for many of us today who lead very busy and hectic lives. Although often times there is not a way to get away from all of the significant sources of stress in our lives, we can control the way we respond to it. One helpful way to switch from a sympathetic response to a parasympathetic response is deep breathing exercises. "Conscious Breathing" by Gay Hendricks, PhD covers this in great detail. A yoga class will also do wonders on mind, body and spirit.

Remember that maintaining good health does not have to be tedious. It doesn't mean eating boring meals or spending endless hours in an unpleasant gym. Good health is exciting, and it can be achieved by each of us, one simple step at a time.

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