

Remember those New Year's resolutions you made back in January? Are you someone who made a resolution that had to do with improving your health? If you are, your resolution may have been forgotten about. It's time for the excuses to melt away. It's time to rekindle those resolutions and get started on making a healthy lifestyle change.

## ***What does it mean to be healthy and well?***

Health is about being physically healthy and avoiding disease. Wellness is about more than being physically healthy and avoiding disease. Wellness is a lifelong practice of becoming aware of and making healthy lifestyle choices.

Living a life of health and wellness includes being physically, mentally, and socially healthy. Each of these areas can affect one another. For example, there is a strong connection between long-term stress and poor health.

## ***What steps can I take to live healthy and well?***

There are many ways you can take responsibility for the quality of your life.

The following tips can help improve your health and wellbeing:

### **Take care of your body**

- Keep fit through daily activity.

Getting regular physical activity can help you maintain a healthy body weight. It also provides you with many physical and mental benefits. You do not have to exercise all the time in order for it to be effective. A small amount of activity is better than no activity at all.

- Incorporate exercise into family activities.

Plan outings around physical activities. For example, canoeing, swimming, hiking, or skiing. How about taking along your bikes or roller blades on family trips? Or, break up long drives by hiking the nature trails. Try taking scenic walks that can be found along many routes.

- Start small.

Set realistic goals. For example, "I will walk briefly for 30 minutes for three days this week" may be a much more attainable goal than "I will run a marathon in two months."

## Eat healthy

- Eat a healthy and well-balanced diet.

Your diet can influence your mood, energy, stress level, and physical health. A well-balanced diet is eating the recommended amount of food from each of the major food groups. The amount you should eat depends on your age, sex, height, weight, and activity level. To find out the amount of each type of food that is best for you, check out [www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov) or ask your doctor for recommendations.

- Drink plenty of water.

Men should generally aim to drink 3 liters (13 cups) of water each day, while women should drink 2.2 liters (9 cups) each day.<sup>3</sup>

- Limit “bad” foods.

Try to minimize foods that are high in fat, sodium, sugar, and cholesterol.

## Manage stress effectively

- Refrain from using drugs and alcohol.

Using drugs and alcohol, including caffeine and nicotine, can add extra stress to your body. It can also lead to health problems.

- Get plenty of rest.

Sleep is very important for your working body and mind. It can help you cope better with stress. Many adults need about 7 to 8 hours of sleep each night. Some people need more and some less.

- Use good time management skills.

Being organized can free up more time in your day. It can also reduce the amount of stress in your life.

- Laugh!

Using humor is a great way to reduce stress. Learn how to make light of a situation.

- Relax.

When you're feeling stressed, it can be hard to relax. But, having some time to relax and unwind is important. It can help you recharge and be able to perform at your best.

- Think positively.

It can help you to deal with life's daily struggles. It gives a sense of relief when problems arise.

- Learn to say "no".

Be realistic about how much you can accomplish. You have to help yourself before you can help others. You can't give something you don't have to give.

- Leave work at work.

Avoid taking the stresses of your work home with you. Set limits on the amount of time you will spend working outside of your "normal" work hours.

## Nurture your relationships

- Make time for family and friends.

Good relationships can do great things for your emotional health. Head out for some one-on-one time with your partner. Try to make time to catch up with some friends.

- Learn to manage conflict.

Try to deal with conflict immediately. Try not to deny it or hope that it will go away.

- Take steps to beat loneliness.

Feeling lonely can happen to anyone. It doesn't matter how many friends or loved ones you have in your life. If you are often lonely, you may want to find and make new friends, rekindle old friendships, or learn to enjoy time on your own.

## Preventative health care

- Get regular exams and preventative health screenings.

Regular exams and screenings with your doctor and dentist can help to prevent or detect diseases. Schedule exams with your doctor annually or as often as your doctor recommends.

- Know your numbers.

Know your average blood pressure and your cholesterol levels. It can help detect a problem more easily if one should arise.

There are many other steps you can take to be the healthiest “you.” Talk to your doctor about ways that you can live healthy and well. They can provide you with the information and resources necessary to help get you on track.

## References:

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3. Institute of Medicine. (2004). *Dietary Reference Intakes: Water, Potassium, Sodium, Chloride and Sulfate*. Retrieved April 24, 2007 from the World Wide Web: <http://iom.edu/?id=24805>

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