



LIVING LIFE TO THE FULLEST:

building healthy habits

From hip and knee replacements to high blood pressure, there are always things you can change in your day-to-day life that can help alleviate your ailments or even help them disappear altogether.

However, the only way to determine just how much lifestyle changes will help your condition (or prevent conditions you may be predisposed to) is to speak with your doctor.

Take lifestyle changes seriously, especially if you are at risk for heart disease, stroke, diabetes, or cancer. If you have a chronic disease, work with your doctor to devise a plan to manage it.

There are certain behavioral changes for specific conditions, and doing some research on your own in addition to speaking with your doctor is a good way to come up with a lifestyle change plan. There's hard evidence to suggest that small changes can help. For example, studies have conclusively shown that changes in lifestyle can reduce blood pressure substantially. And there are many other medical conditions that can be helped or avoided without drastically altering your life.

While each medical condition likely has its own specific lifestyle changes that can help, there are some general guidelines you can benefit from. Adding these healthy habits with any lifestyle changes your doctor recommends can help.

- » **EAT WHOLE GRAINS.** They reduce the risk of heart disease, several cancers, and inflammatory diseases such as asthma. It ranks among our tips for a longer life. Studies have shown that breakfast cereal can be a good way to get grains.
- » **CONSIDER VITAMIN D.** It's especially important if you're older than 60, when the body has a hard time converting enough vitamin D from sunlight. Studies show that vitamin D not only strengthens bones but also boosts immunity and protects against several diseases. In an analysis published in September 2007, older adults who took a vitamin D supplement (400 to 800 international units daily) had lower death rates from all causes.
- » **LIMIT TIME IN THE SUN.** And use enough sunscreen, which may help reduce the risk of life-threatening skin cancers. Choose a product labeled waterproof or water resistant, with an SPF of at least 30.
- » **EAT COLORFUL PRODUCE.** Rich, varied colors are best. They indicate that you're getting a range of phytochemicals, which may help fight disease.
- » **EXERCISE.** Burning more calories (and working the heart and lungs more) can reduce the risk of heart disease and certain cancers, lengthen your life, and improve the quality of life as you age. When it comes to tips for a longer life, anything that gets your heart rate up counts. Walk, climb stairs, throw a Frisbee with Fido—as long as it adds up to about 30 minutes most days of the week.
- » **GET ENOUGH SLEEP.** For most people, that's 7 to 8 hours a night. This is a staple among tips for a longer life. If you don't snooze, you lose: You're at higher risk of hypertension, type 2 diabetes, high cholesterol, obesity, impaired concentration, and accidents, not to mention malaise. Newer research suggests that sleeping enough may also boost memory.
- » **DON'T SMOKE.** And try to stay away from people who do. Evidence strongly suggests that secondhand smoke can shorten your life.

- » **EAT FAT (BUT THE RIGHT KIND).** Mono- and polyunsaturated fats in nuts, seeds, vegetable oils, and fish protect the heart and help manage weight by keeping you full.

The omega-3 fatty acids found in abundance in many fish are linked to lower rates of heart disease and possibly a lower risk of Alzheimer's. Healthy people looking for tips for a longer life should aim for two small servings a week of low-mercury species, which include salmon, sardines, trout, and whitefish. If you have heart disease, ask your doctor about taking fish-oil pills. Plant sources of fat might offer other health benefits through phytochemicals (think polyphenols in olive oil and sterols in nuts).

- » **CHILL OUT.** Within the research into tips for a longer life, lots of evidence ties excess stress and hostility to hypertension, coronary artery disease, reduced immunity, and increased risk of heart attack and stroke. Measured breathing, meditation, and mindfulness exercises (involving nonjudgmental awareness of the present moment) can induce physiologic changes that reverse your body's stress response. Job stress can be especially insidious; find out whether your company offers an on-site stress-management program (many do).

