Lifestyle Management

Managing Your Lifestyle

In addition to what we eat, the habits we repeat on a regular basis can have a direct impact on our physical and mental health. A healthy lifestyle is a whole package of how we are caring for our mind and body. For instance, we can eat as healthy as possible and still be in poor health if we are not sleeping well or not managing our stress properly. The goal is to create a balanced, healthy lifestyle, while developing strong habits to help face stressors in life with resilience and confidence. Let's take a look at some of the ways we can put this into practice.

Why Sleep is so Important

Sleep is so important for our overall health because it allows your body to rest and repair itself. During sleep, blood pressure and heart rate drops, allowing your breathing to become regular and stable. Some ways in which sleep deprivation can affect your heart include keeping blood pressure raised for longer, increasing levels of stress hormones like cortisol and hormones that affect appetite, causing a greater risk for weight gain. **The American Heart Association recommends aiming for 7-9 hours of sleep per night for optimal cardiovascular health.** Some tips for sleep hygiene include:

- Try to develop a schedule where you go to bed and wake up around the same time every day
- Ditch the caffeine and stimulants like alcohol and nicotine at least 4-6 hours before bed
- Declutter your bedroom and set up a relaxing environment in whichever way feels good to you-maybe a lavender scented oil diffuser, Himalayan salt lamp, or a sound machine
- Turn off electronics at least 30-60 before winding down for bedtime
- Use blackout curtains and set a lower temperature at night time for better sleep
- Pay attention to when you eat and drink-don't go to bed feeling hungry or too full. Aim to stop eating at least 2 hours before going to sleep
- Use calming, sleep-inducing agents like Melatonin or a Magnesium supplement, gel, or lotion.

Stress Management Practices

Everybody deals with some degree of stress and how we manage it can impact the chance of developing serious health issues like heart disease. The body's response to stress could include physical ailments like muscle aches and pains, stomach issues, and back strain or affect our sleep patterns, mental health, and mood. Long periods of stress can also have direct effects on cardiovascular health by increasing blood pressure and cholesterol levels. Stress reduction can take many forms, but a good start is to begin identifying triggers and what stress symptoms look like for you in order to start asking yourself "What can I let go of?". Below are some tips for effective stress management.

- Build a support system-take part in social activities with friends and loved ones
- Practice weekly yoga sessions either in a studio or a free class online
- Begin journaling daily-this could be a simple journal of your thoughts or a daily gratitude journal
- Exercise regularly in whichever way you enjoy most
- Eat a balanced diet: focus on nutritionally dense foods, limit processed foods and added sugar

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- Deep breathing: Inhale for a count of five seconds, hold for two seconds, and exhale for a count of five seconds. This activates your parasympathetic nervous system to help you rest and digest
- Practice positive self-talk. Our bodies listen to how we talk to ourselves. Try redirecting negative thoughts to focus on what all there is to be thankful
- Give meditation a try-meditation can take many forms, You might develop a mantra you repeat in your mind as you take slow deep breaths. Or, you might take a few minutes to practice mindfulness, which involves being in the moment

Smoking Cessation

Smoking not only increases risk of lung disease, but also increases risk of developing heart disease, stroke, or oral cancer. Smoking has been classified as the single most preventable cause of premature death in the United States. According to the American Heart Association, eliminating smoking not only reduces the risk of heart disease, but also reduces the risk of repeat heart attacks and death by heart disease by 50%. Smoking cessation can help at any age, but the sooner someone quits, the greater the benefits. For example, cardiac function can improve within a day of quitting cigarettes, and the risk of heart attack can be reduced by 50% within a year. Here are some tips for smoking cessation.



- Think about why you want to quit-maybe a physical health concern or thinking about being around for a loved one
- Choose a low stress time to focus on quitting
- Join a smoking cessation program or support group- Call
- **1-800-QUIT-NOW** to connect in your state
- Ask for support from those you are closest to
- Start doing some form of physical activity daily to relieve stress from quitting.
- Ask your doctor about nicotine replacement products like gums, nasal sprays, or behavioral therapy resources
- Talk with friends who quit smoking about what worked for them.

Oral Hygiene

People with poor oral health have higher rates of cardiovascular problems such as heart attack and stroke than people with good oral hygiene. This is because the bacteria that affects the gum can also travel to blood vessels elsewhere in the body causing inflammation and damage. According to the American Heart Association, other cardiovascular conditions such as atherosclerosis have also been linked to inflammation caused by oral bacteria. People with chronic gum conditions such as gingivitis or advanced periodontal disease have the highest risk for heart disease caused by poor oral hygiene, especially if it remains undiagnosed and unmanaged. Some of the warning signs for gum disease include having red, swollen gums, gums that appear to pull away from the teeth, if your gums bleed while flossing or eating, you have loose teeth, or seeing pus or other signs of infection around the teeth and gums. **For good oral hygiene, the American Dental Association recommends brushing your teeth twice a day for two minutes with fluoride toothpaste.** Visit your dentist regularly for check-ups and cleanings to maintain good oral health. Other tips for oral hygiene include flossing daily and limiting intake of acidic or high sugar foods and drinks.

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