



HEALTHY LIFESTYLE HABITS FOR LIVING LONGER

Spanish explorer Juan Ponce de León sailed to Florida in 1513 in search of the "Fountain of Youth." Of course he never found the mythical fountain. But the hope for a way to regain one's youth has endured for 500 years. Scientists picked up where de León left off and identified specific factors that influence how long you will live.

Harvard University recently published the findings of a study on early mortality involving over 50,000 people. All participants were in good health at the start of the study. During the 18-year study, 4,893 people died. The researchers compared lifestyles, diet, and other health practices of those who died versus those who didn't. And they identified the most important predictors of early death and what practices protected against early death. Here is what they found.

Factors that increased mortality included:

- **Personal history of diabetes.** This was the risk factor linked with the greatest increase in mortality. Diabetes increased risk of death by 2.5 times over those without diabetes.
- **High blood pressure (140/90 or higher)** was another strong predictor, increasing risk of early death by about 40 to 50 percent. People who lived the longest had blood pressures less than 120/80.
- **Smoking**, of course, was a strong predictor. This increased the risk of early death by about 50 percent. Heavy smokers doubled their risk of early death.
- **Dietary cholesterol** increased risk. Researchers did not check blood cholesterol, but they did monitor how much cholesterol people consumed. Those who ate about 300 mg of cholesterol daily (the average intake) compared to those who ate only about 100

mg of cholesterol daily, had a 34-percent increased risk of early mortality. Cholesterol is found only in animal foods (meat, eggs, cheese, butter, etc.). There is no cholesterol in plant foods.

- **Being overweight at age 18** was a strong predictor of mortality, even stronger than weight gained later in life. Those who were heavy at age 18 were 23-percent more likely to die early.
- **Eating foods with a high glycemic load** (white bread, white rice, soft drinks, French fries, refined grains, and sweets) causes the blood sugar to rise quickly. This increased early death by 22 percent. And it shows the need to eat less refined foods and more whole foods with a low glycemic index like whole grains, legumes, and most fresh fruits and vegetables.
- **A family history of early heart disease** (before age 60 in parents or siblings).

Factors that decreased the risk of early mortality included:

- **Eating cereal fiber** including whole wheat bread, oatmeal, brown rice, etc. For every 4 grams or more of cereal fiber eaten daily, the risk of death dropped by 16 percent. If you are not eating primarily whole grains, this is an easy way to increase your chances of a longer, healthier life. Aim for at least 3 to 4 servings of whole grains daily.
- **Eating nuts.** Eating just two or more servings of nuts a week dropped the risk of early death by 14 percent. Nuts are especially protective to the heart and brain, and also protects against diabetes. For best health, eat an ounce of nuts most days. It's easy and it's very effective.



- **Including polyunsaturated fats** in your diet. For every 3 percent increase in energy (calories) from polyunsaturated fats, the risk of early death dropped by 15 percent. But since fat is high in calories, use all refined fats moderately. The best approach is to limit all solid and animal fats and replace them with vegetable oils or foods that are high in polyunsaturated fats. Using a little olive oil, for example, is good for your heart and brain. Healthy fats include soy, sunflower, olive, canola, and corn oils. Foods high in healthy fats include walnuts (the highest), almonds, and hazelnuts, avocado, flax meal, sunflower seeds, and soy foods (edamame, tofu, and soy milk).
- **Getting regular physical activity**, at least 30 minutes of moderate activity, such as walking, five or more days each week (150+ minutes a week). Exercise is a strong, independent predictor of health and longevity. It also helps improve many other risk factors such as maintaining a healthy weight, lowering blood pressure and blood sugar levels, and helping prevent diabetes.

These 12 risk factors all exert an independent effect on health and mortality. But when taken together, they have a profound effect on your health. In the study, those who did not follow the good health practices above were:

- 6 times more likely to die early from cancer
- 12 times more likely to die early from any cause, and
- 24 times more likely to die early from cardiovascular disease.

As you can see, these are large differences in survival. Everyone has a choice. Listed above are 12 ways you can improve your chances of staying healthy and alive longer. The sooner you adopt those principles, the better your health will be in future years.



STEPS TO PREVENT IRRITABLE BOWEL SYNDROME

Irritable Bowel Syndrome, or IBS, is a common disorder of the large intestine. Ten to 15 percent of people suffer from this condition.

IBS can cause digestive system discomfort, cramping, bloating, abdominal pain, diarrhea, and constipation. With IBS, there are changes in the appearance and texture of bowel movements. While it is quite common, its cause is still not fully understood.

IBS often follows an infection in the large intestine. It also seems to be linked to abnormal function of the nerves in the gut. And it is more likely to affect women than men. While IBS can cause considerable discomfort, it's good to know that it does not cause long-term harm to the bowel. There is no known cure for IBS, but there are things you can do to prevent a flare-up.

Here is a list of recommendations:

- Maintain a healthy digestive system. The best way to do this is to eat regular meals. You should also avoid foods that irritate the bowel such as hot peppers and other very spicy foods, coffee and other caffeinated beverages, and alcohol.
- Avoid a large intake of artificial sweetener.
- Don't eat late at night.
- Limit your intake of fatty foods. (They are hard to digest.)
- Take probiotics periodically.
- Eat a high-fiber diet to help maintain a healthy gut.
- Get regular exercise. Physical activity such as walking or jogging stimulates muscle contraction in the stomach. This helps keep the gut working well.
- Avoid milk products. Lactose intolerance is often associated with IBS. Sometimes yogurt and cheeses are tolerated well. That's because these dairy products have little or no lactose. (It is changed in the fermenting process.)
- Avoid cabbage, brussels sprouts, and beans, but only if they bother you. If certain beans cause a problem, you can minimize their gas-

forming tendency by choosing canned beans. Canned beans have been pressure cooked and this helps. If needed, take Beano® at meal time to help you digest the beans better and prevent gas.

- Reduce your stress level. Stress can play a major role in causing an IBS flare-up. Learn how to adapt to life's problems without letting them get you upset. If you let minor things stress you out, you'll pay for it in the gut. Stress and strong emotions can stimulate colon spasms in people with IBS. Learn relaxation techniques, and practice them daily.
- Do mindfulness training. Focus your attention on the present and your surroundings. Avoid worrying about past problems or future concerns that may never occur.
- Get adequate sleep. If you need further help, ask your doctor for guidance. There are medications that can relieve some of the symptoms of erratic bowel movements and IBS.

SLEEP CAN IMPROVE HEART HEALTH

Getting sufficient sleep helps protect against heart disease and stroke.

Recent research shows that people who get less than six hours of sleep daily are twice as likely to have a heart attack or stroke. They are also 60 percent more likely to develop congestive heart failure compared to those who get seven to eight hours of sleep.

It's an important finding, because heart disease and stroke are among the leading causes of death. Heart disease and stroke combined claim the lives of about 730,000 people each year.



The results of the study are based on data from more than 3,000 people over the age of 45 who participated in the U.S. Health and Nutrition Examination Survey. The findings are important. They remind healthcare professionals to look for warning signs that could lead to heart disease or stroke when a patient has insomnia or trouble sleeping.

Researchers found that inadequate sleep is linked to:

- Glucose intolerance resulting in higher blood sugar levels and risk of diabetes
- Hyperactivation of the sympathetic nervous system resulting in higher stress hormones.
- An increase in heart rate and blood pressure.
- An increase in inflammatory markers indicating higher inflammation.
- An increased risk of obesity.

All of the above are linked to a higher risk of heart disease and stroke. If you want to maintain a healthy heart be sure to get seven to eight hours of sleep daily.

You can also protect your heart by doing 30 to 60 minutes of exercise daily. Eating healthy meals high in fiber, and low in saturated fat and cholesterol also promotes heart health.

VEGETABLES MAY HELP PREVENT PANCREATITIS

Eating vegetables is a long-time recommendation for good health. They help lower the risk of obesity, high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, and cancer. Now researchers believe that vegetables can also lower the risk of developing pancreatitis. Pancreatitis occurs when the pancreas becomes inflamed. In the United States, about 178,000 people a year seek medical treatment for pancreatitis.

If you can prevent pancreatitis from ever occurring, that is always the best course. Researchers studied this problem in a group of 80,000 healthy people for 11 years. They found that people who ate the most vegetables (four servings a day or more) lowered their risk of developing pancreatitis by 44 percent compared to people who seldom ate vegetables (less than one serving daily).

The pancreas is an important gland located behind the stomach. It produces the hormones, insulin and glucagon, critical for turning carbohydrates into energy. It also produces enzymes that help you digest and absorb food.

With pancreatitis, sometimes the enzymes become activated and begin to digest the pancreas itself. Treatment can be very painful and usually requires hospitalization. If it's not caught early, it can turn into

a life-threatening illness. And that's one reason the findings of this study are so important. It appears that eating adequate amounts of vegetables significantly reduces the risk for pancreatitis.

Some of the vegetables found to help prevent pancreatitis include spinach, broccoli, leafy greens, peas, tomatoes, cauliflower, and carrots. Other vegetables are also rich in nutrients and have health benefits as well. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends that people eat at least four to five servings of vegetables daily for best health. That would be at least two to three cups of vegetables daily. **Other factors that can lower your risk of pancreatitis:** Keep your triglycerides in a healthy range (less than 150 mg/dL).



Dear Friends,

Perhaps you have been trying to improve your lifestyle, but you realize that your efforts to change the habits that may impair your health have been fruitless. Have you considered that the power to change may need to come from without rather than within? Regardless of the changes that need to be made, achieving good health may best be accomplished by "trusting" that the changes can be made. Lasting change can only come when you realize how ineffective your own efforts have been.

When we feel we cannot change our unhealthy habits, then trust that God can! Hand over control and trust in His power to give you the strength to make the right decisions. The result? Jesus said, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." (John 10:10).

Wishing you abundant health and joy in your daily life,

Your Health Benefits Team



Chef's Corner



SHEPHERD'S VEGETABLE PIE

3 cups vegetable broth
 1 onion, chopped
 1 stalk celery, sliced
 1 green bell pepper, chopped
 ½ teaspoon minced bottled fresh garlic
 ½ teaspoon sage leaves
 ½ teaspoon marjoram
 1 tablespoon soy sauce
 1 carrot, thinly sliced
 1 ½ cups sliced fresh mushrooms
 1 ½ cups cauliflower florets
 1 cup thinly sliced cabbage
 1 cup green beans, cut in
 1 inch pieces
 2 tablespoons cornstarch mixed in 1/3 cup cold water
 3 cups mashed potatoes
 paprika to garnish

Place ½ cup of the broth in a large pot with the onion, celery, bell pepper and garlic. Cook, stirring occasionally, for about 4 minutes. Stir in sage, marjoram and soy sauce. Add the remaining vegetable broth and the carrot, mushrooms, cauliflower, cabbage and green beans. Bring to a boil, cover, reduce heat and cook for 20 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add the cornstarch mixture and stir until thickened. Transfer to a casserole dish. Cover vegetable mixture with mashed potatoes and sprinkle with paprika.

Bake in 350 degree oven for 30 minutes until potatoes are slightly browned.

Hint: Thin the mashed potatoes with a little soy milk or vegetable broth if they are too stiff to spread.

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