

Health Guides: Health is a State of Mind and Body

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It's important to take care of both your mind and body. It will pay off in many ways, including:

- Allowing you to take charge of your life and feel good about the choices you make.
- Gaining energy and feeling more fit.
- Improving your physical health.
- Gaining a positive outlook and finding more enjoyment in your life.
- Being a role model for your family and friends.

Any lifestyle change is a “work in progress.” Lasting changes take time. So, begin by setting small goals that are easy to add to your daily life and that you control. Wellness and fitness involve being aware and making healthy choices about diet, exercise, and staying positive. This is the most important investment you can make in your life. Strive for the best health you can have in all areas of your life by making mindful, healthy choices.

Path to improved health

Caring for your physical health through proper diet and nutrition

Whether meal preparation is for yourself or your family, focus on making smart, healthy meals. Tips for success include:

- **Make an effort to have more home-cooked meals.** This can help encourage healthy eating. Also, it promotes more family time.
- **Let your kids help plan what to eat.** Kids love to help make meals and snacks.
- **Keep healthy snacks on hand to help kids make good choices.** Have more fresh fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Have fewer chips and sweets.
- **Teach kids to eat when they're hungry, not when they're bored, sad, or angry.** Respect their ability to know when they feel full.
- **Breakfast helps jump start the day.** It provides fuel for an active lifestyle and gives you and your child the energy to think faster and more clearly.
- **Play "Put the Fork Down" at meals.** Put your forks down between bites and take turns sharing your day.
- **Balance.** Balance what you eat to meet your need for nutrition and enjoyment.
- **Variety.** Enjoy all foods from important food groups (fruits, vegetables, lean sources of protein, low-fat dairy, and whole grains).
- **Moderation.** Focus on feeling comfortable instead of being too full after you eat. Use moderation when choosing less nutritious foods.

A **food and activity journal** can help you understand your eating patterns. Also, it can help you find ways to make simple, healthy changes. Ask your family doctor about how to get started.

When unhealthy food choices lead to weight gain, some people turn to popular diets to achieve quick weight loss. Diets usually tell you what you should or should not eat. Instead, focus on understanding why you eat in the first place. Are you eating because you are hungry, bored, sad, or angry? Is there something else causing your urge to eat?

Also, don't restrict your foods. Try to balance between good and bad choices. Make good choices more often and limit the bad foods to small portions once in a while. For lasting dietary changes, there are some simple keys to eating healthy. Start by asking yourself if you are hungry. Hunger signals your body when it needs to be nourished. Let hunger tell you when you need to eat and how much to eat. Many people don't drink enough water and the brain can mistake thirst for hunger. So if you feel hungry, it can be a good idea to drink an 8 ounce glass of water first to see if you are really just thirsty.

True hunger signals:

- Hunger pangs, gnawing, growling, or rumbling in your stomach.
- Weakness or loss of energy.
- Slight headache or trouble concentrating.
- Irritability.

False hunger signals:

- thirst
- cravings
- emotions
- external cues (like mealtimes or social events)

Learn to listen to your hunger signals so you can determine when to eat and how much food is right for you. Make mindful decisions about eating by paying attention to how you feel. And don't use diet "rules" to restrict what, when, and how much you eat. Instead, learn to trust your body to tell you when it needs food. If you are truly hungry, ask yourself what it is that you want, what your body needs, what you have available (so you can make a healthy choice), and how much food you need.

Caring for your physical health through exercise

Being active also is important to a healthy lifestyle. And it's important in preventing serious problems like heart disease and diabetes. However, before you increase your activity level, talk to your doctor. Your weight is affected by the energy you take in (what you eat and drink) and the energy you use (physical activity). Every step counts. Studies have shown that every step you take helps you manage your weight and improve your overall health. You may want to track your steps with a step counter (pedometer) or an activity tracker. This can encourage you to increase your daily activity. The more steps you take per day, the better. One goal is to aim for at least 10,000 steps per day, and you should be trying to get in at least 150 minutes of exercise each week. Other tips for achieving an active lifestyle include:

- Limit screen time (TV, computer and video games). Suggest or consider other options like reading, board games, and playing outside.
- Enjoy the outdoors. Go to the park, ride bikes, swim, or enjoy a walk around the neighborhood.
- Participate in (or encourage your children to participate) in sports. This is a great way to build coordination, skills, and confidence.
- Plant a garden.
- Wash your car.
- Walk to the mailbox.
- Walk over to a neighbor's house to visit.
- Turn off the TV. Turn on some music and dance.
- Walk or bike to work, school, or in the community.
- Stretch at your desk.
- Take the stairs.
- Use lunchtimes to take a walk.
- Get up and move around your office.
- Take "active" vacations.
- Go hiking or biking.

Caring for your physical health through a positive attitude

Staying positive and motivated can help you live a healthy life. Also, it makes it easier to make healthy food decisions and to stay active. Tips for staying positive include:

- Choose to do something you enjoy. Many people prefer walking. You can walk outdoors, at home on a treadmill, alone, or with friends and family.

- Make it fun. Listen to music or audio books while you walk or jog. Watch TV or a video while you exercise.
- Keep it interesting. Try different activities like tennis, swimming, dancing, biking, team sports, or yoga.
- Write it down. Schedule time to be active just as you would for any other important appointment.
- Give yourself credit. Set short-term goals and plan rewards for yourself all along the way.
- Be flexible. Life will sometimes get in the way of your plans. Stay flexible and get back on track right away.
- Spend time with friends. Limit your exposure to friends who are negative.
- Get away from the office, school, or everyday life with day trips, mini vacations, or full vacations.
- Read an inspirational book.
- Volunteer. Helping others can improve your emotional outlook.

If you are a parent, help your family develop good emotional health. Parents are the most important role models. As parents, you set examples by being active, eating healthy, and living a balanced lifestyle. The following family tips can help:

- Commit to making healthy choices and involve your kids. Ask them what your family can do to make healthy changes in your lives.
- Take time out to have fun and connect with each other. Playtime for all ages is part of a healthy life.
- Have a positive attitude. Show your kids how great it feels to lead a healthy lifestyle.

Things to consider

Don't let stress get you down. We all feel stressed at times. How you react to stress will determine its effect on you. Take steps to prevent stress when you can and manage it when you can't.

Take care of you. It is important to be mindful of the choices you make for your personal health and wellbeing. Nothing is more important than taking care of you. Set aside time every day for yourself. Be active, enjoy hobbies, and share time with your family and friends.

Additionally:

- Strive for balance in both your personal and work life.
- Make time for important relationships in your life.
- Ask for help whenever you need support from others.
- Find ways to relieve stress, like physical activity and relaxation techniques.
- Be open-minded to try something new, like a hobby or activity.
- Don't let special events and holidays sabotage your healthy lifestyle. Remember to get back on track with a healthy diet if you splurge at Christmas or a wedding. Use the hotel gym if you travel. And enjoy the opportunity to meet new people when you can.

Questions to ask your doctor

- Is there an easy way to get back on track with diet after a holiday or vacation?
- Making healthy food choices when you travel internationally is difficult. Do you have tips?
- Can I reverse chronic diseases (such as diabetes) by committing to a healthy lifestyle?
- What if lifestyle changes don't improve my mood and emotional wellness?

Resources

[National Institutes of Health, MedlinePlus: Healthy Living](#)

[U.S. Department of Agriculture: Choose My Plate](#)