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PRIORITIZING YOUR HEALTH: A HOW-TO GUIDE

Good health is like good housekeeping: When you keep up with the dusting, vacuuming and tidying up, you avoid a big mess and stay ahead of the clutter. Similarly, if you pay attention to your physical fitness, keep up with health screenings and make healthful choices, you maintain control of your personal wellbeing.

If you have ignored your physical condition lately, don't despair: becoming fit and healthy is not an insurmountable task. You simply need an understanding of what keeps the human body well, and a regular schedule for maintenance.

Begin with an appraisal of your current health and lifestyle. Your employer may offer a Health Risk Assessment, or HRA, which can be a valuable tool for you to personally manage your health. Through an interview with a health care professional or a survey that you complete by yourself online, the assessment gathers information about your lifestyle and family history and walks you through steps of creating a customized wellness strategy. Some online assessments offer

tools to help you stay organized, such as trackers to help you chart your blood pressure and cholesterol and keep tabs on your weight, diet and exercise. Many employers offer incentives, such as reduced insurance premiums or prizes, to encourage employee participation in health risk assessments.

Next, schedule a physical examination with a general practitioner, internist or family doctor. During the physical, your physician should ask about your health history, record your vital signs, discuss your diet and exercise habits and recommend appropriate health screenings, such as for high cholesterol, diabetes or cancer.

Screenings are an important part of preventative care. They help ensure that common, serious diseases and conditions are detected, and establish a baseline for comparison in the future. So plan to have the recommended screenings and make sure to follow up annually.

It's also important to self-screen, paying attention to changes in your body. Examine your freckles and moles, do monthly self-

breast exams, notice changes in your weight or bowel habits. Know which signs and symptoms merit medical attention, such as unexplained weight loss, shortness of breath or sudden headaches.

Talk with your doctor about a plan for immunizations against tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis, hepatitis A and B, measles, pneumonia, shingles and other preventable, but potentially fatal, diseases. Consider annual flu shots. Some employers offer complimentary or low-cost flu shots at work, so you won't have to use your sick time to go to the doctor or pay an insurance co-payment. Take advantage of this valuable health benefit.

Your health care routine should also include proper oral hygiene and dental visits to check for tooth decay, gum disease and cancers of the mouth. Poor oral health can create high levels of bacteria in the mouth that seep into pockets between teeth and gums, producing toxins that can journey to the arteries and heart valves, contributing to coronary artery disease. Proper brushing, flossing and professional cleanings will reduce the risk of heart attacks and stroke.

Your health care routine should also include eye examinations to check eye movement, peripheral vision, eye pressure and sharpness of your eyesight. Depending on the results of a baseline eye exam, your eye specialist will recommend a schedule



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for future exams. Wear sunglasses or a brimmed hat to protect your eyes from the sun.

Take a hard look at your personal lifestyle, including diet, exercise and rest. Aim to eat nutritious meals and snacks, and watch your portion sizes. Fill your plate with fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains and lean proteins. Avoid saturated fats, and read nutrition labels so you know what you are eating. Drink plenty of water.

Exercise is important preventive medicine. Research proves that exercising regularly helps prevent and treat more than 40 chronic diseases including diabetes, heart disease and hypertension. The Federal Physical Activity Guidelines recommend adults aim for 150 minutes a week of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity and two days a week of muscle strengthening activities. Brisk walking and light calisthenics are excellent choices. Consult a personal trainer, physical therapist or athletic coach for inspiration and guidance.

To boost your physical performance, get enough sleep. Adults should aim for about seven to eight hours of sleep

a night. Adequate sleep also bolsters mental concentration and strengthens the immune system to help fight off viruses and infections.

Avoid risky behaviors and kick habits that can harm your health, such as smoking, recreational drug use, excessive alcohol and too much caffeine. Always wear your seat belt any time you are in a car. Wear a helmet when you ski, bicycle or ride a motorcycle. Use sunscreen and resist indoor tanning beds or sunlamps, as there is no such thing as a 'healthy' tan.

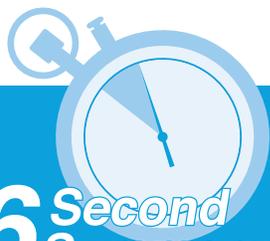
Take the safety of your residence into account, because most accidents happen at home. Keep walkways clear, change the batteries in your smoke detectors twice a year and use a carbon monoxide detector in your home. If you have young children in the house, install safety latches on cabinets and drawers containing medicine, cleaning supplies and knives, and bolt your bookcases to the walls.

Wash your hands frequently. As you touch people and objects throughout the day, you accumulate bacteria, viruses and microbes on your hands. You can infect yourself with those

germs by touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Not all germs will make you sick, but frequent hand washing is an easy way to prevent infection. Always wash your hands before preparing food, eating, inserting or removing contact lenses, treating wounds and after blowing your nose, changing a diaper and using the toilet. Use regular soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, and get your children into the same habit.

Don't overlook your psychological and emotional health. Make time to relieve stress and find personal balance. Focus on a hobby, join a sports team or social club or take classes in something you have always wanted to learn. Spend time with your family and use your vacation time. You'll get more done at work when you are well rested and content.

It's never too late to start taking better care of your health, and the benefits extend beyond your current physical well-being. People who take responsibility for their health and wellness are more productive, less likely to become injured or ill and more satisfied with their professional and personal lives.



6 Second Summary:

- ⌚ Start with a health risk assessment, physical and screenings.
- ⌚ Get immunized.
- ⌚ Take care of your teeth and eyes.
- ⌚ Eat nutritiously.
- ⌚ Exercise regularly.
- ⌚ Avoid risky behaviors.
- ⌚ Keep your home safe.
- ⌚ Wash your hands frequently.
- ⌚ Manage your stress.

RESOURCES

American Medical Association Family Medical Guide.
Publisher: Wiley; 4th edition, 2004.

Mayo Clinic Family Health Book,
Publisher: Oxmoor House; 4th edition, 2009.

www.exerciseismedicine.org/public.htm

www.health.gov/paguidelines/

www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle



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