

Get Back to the Basics for Better Health

By: Dr. Brandon Crouch

If you are like many people you may be overwhelmed by the amount of information and products out there on health. There are books, machines, DVDs, rollers, pulleys, games, gadgets, and gear all promising to get you in the best health of your life. I'm sure some of these do work; however, if you are serious about getting healthy why not start with the basics!

If I could ask you one question it would be, "Do you know one thing you could change and do every day that would improve your health?" I'm just taking a wild guess but I'm sure your answer would be "Yes." I would also venture to bet that it is one of the "basics." These simple basic lifestyle changes are easy to implement and can make a profound effect on your health.

Drink plenty of water. I would say this is one of the areas that many people could make a change. One of the questions I ask my patients is, "how is your water intake?" Usually the reply I get is, "Does tea and coffee count?" Yes tea and coffee add to your fluid intake, however, they are also classified as diuretics, which means they pull water out of your cells and set your body up for increased dehydration.

When it comes to water there is no great substitute. Water makes up over 60% of your body and is involved in every system of your body. If you take away the water, your body can not function the way it should. Water flushes toxins out of vital organs, carries nutrients to your cells and provides a moist environment for ear, nose and throat tissues.¹

A good goal for anyone should be drinking approximately ½ your body weight in ounces of water per day. For example, if you weigh 100lbs. then you need to drink approximately 50 ounces of water per day. Keep in mind that if you're exercising, pregnant, or have other health challenges you should consult with a dietician or your doctor for water recommendations specific for you.

Modify your diet. Regardless of how many times you may have heard it in the past it is true that what you put in your body is what you will get out of it. Many people are fearful of the word "diet" when in fact we are all on a diet. The foods you eat on a regular basis are your diet. The hard truth is that dietary factors are associated with 5 of the top 10 leading causes of death such as coronary heart disease, atherosclerosis, and cancer.²

The key to eating a healthy diet is eating more fresh foods, like vegetables and fruit along with a good source of fiber. A good rule of thumb is to spend most of your time shopping around the edge of the grocery store versus inside the aisles. Eating fast food and junk food means you're eating more processed foods that have little nutritional value. If you're unsure of a good diet consult with a dietician or your doctor.

Get daily “bouts” of exercise. It doesn't matter how old or young you may be, regular exercise should be on your to do list. I say get “bouts” of exercise because any is better than none, however, ideally I recommend at least 30 minutes of daily exercise. The problem most of us run into is that we don't plan for it. Yes, here's a good place for the old adage, “if we fail to plan we plan to fail.” Everything in your day is planned. If you don't schedule in a time to exercise you probably won't stick to it.

The next step is finding something you enjoy to do. Most people don't exercise because it can be difficult or boring. The key is to make it fun and exciting! Grab a friend and shoot some basketball, ride a bicycle, swim in the pool, play tennis, or just walk. The key to exercise is just to get moving!

Regular exercise has shown to help strengthen your cardiovascular and respiratory systems, strengthen bones and muscles, help you lose inches around your waist, help manage diabetes, reduce stress and tension, decrease your risk for cancers, and in the end help you to get a better night of rest. Remember to stay well hydrated by drinking plenty of water when you exercise. If you have health challenges then I would consult your doctor as to what exercises would be best for you.³

Find time every day to stretch. Have you ever seen a cat or dog when they first get up from a nap? What is the first thing they do when they get up? You got it... stretch! It is instinctive for them and for a good reason. As most of us get older we don't stay as active as we once did in our youth. This in turn causes our muscles and ligaments to shorten, which sets us up to get hurt and injure ourselves. This is why we are more prone to injury as we get older.

The remedy is to stretch throughout the day! First, start before you ever get out of bed. (Remember the cats and dogs! This is what they do!) After sleeping 6 – 8 hours your muscles become cold and shorten. Performing very easy and light stretches for your low back and legs will help you get up to a good start. A few minutes will do the trick. Continue this throughout your day finding a few minutes here and there to stretch the muscles that are under more strain. If you're at a computer all day, be sure to stretch your neck, shoulders, arms, and wrists more often. If you're on your feet all day be sure stretch your legs and your lower back. Ideally, warming up the muscles before you stretch is best. It will help to keep you from straining or giving you a “pulled” muscle. Walking in place is a great way to do this.

The benefits for stretching are more than just preventing injury. It will help to increase your circulation, improve your range of motion, increase flexibility, improve your posture, and relieve stress. A few keys to remember are to breathe regularly while stretching, hold each stretch for 20 – 60 seconds, and lastly only stretch until you feel slight tension and no pain. Stretching will keep your muscles loose and more importantly your body prepared for what the day has in store.⁴

Rest for Success! This is where it all comes together. At the end of the day we all need a good quality night of rest. I used to know a man who said he could do well on just one or two hours a night. Where this may be true in the short run, in time the lack of sleep and rest for the body will set you up a breakdown. What would happen if you were to run your car everyday for hours on end only giving it a few hours here and there to rest? Yep, you and your mechanic will become very close friends. The same is true for your body.

Research has shown that inadequate sleep after 17-19 hours of being awake has performance abilities to that similar of Blood Alcohol Concentration (alcohol intoxication levels) of .05%. After longer periods without sleep performance was equivalent to BAC levels of .1%. In other words, poor sleep habits, is no better for your performance and awareness than that of alcohol intoxication.⁵

Truth is that your body does its healing and recovery while you are resting. Six to Eight hours a night on a good supportive mattress will allow you to prepare for whatever the next day holds.

Of course these simple basic steps are all things we have heard from our parents or doctors at some time, however, the only one who can make a change is you. You have to be the one to say, I'm tired of letting my body go. I know I can't continue this way. Today is the day I'm going to change and you can start right now. If you only changed these few lifestyle habits, you will be on your way to a new healthier you.

About the Author:

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Sources:

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