Real Preventive Medicine:
The 5 Keys to Staying Healthy

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Preventing disease is all about achieving a healthy balance in your lifestyle and paying attention to your body.

What is called “Preventive Medicine” in America these days is really more appropriately termed early intervention and early diagnosis. Having immunization injections or taking tests such as mammograms, x-rays, prostate exams, and blood tests are not really preventive in nature. Rather, they are an attempt to detect diseases in an early state. What is promoted as cancer prevention—with the use of mammograms or prostate exams, sigmoidoscopes or colonoscopes—is really early cancer diagnosis. This is done in hopes that cancer can be aggressively attacked before it spreads and destroys the entire body. Cancer represents a state of toxicity and its reaction on cellular mechanisms in the body; it is a disease of our body and not separate from it, and represents some breakdown or misguidance of our intricate immune system. After it occurs, it clearly is difficult to treat without great measures. Preventing cancer (and cardiovascular diseases) is indeed a most important goal in preventive medicine.

Real preventive medicine—preventing acute and chronic diseases and in other words, Staying Healthy—results from the way we live. We are a culmination of our life experiences. Our health is a byproduct of our life: our genes and constitutional state, our upbringing and the habits we develop, our diets, our stresses and how we deal with them, our illnesses and how we treat them (whether we attempt to discover the underlying cause and change our lifestyle so that we no longer manifest disease patterns). All of this and more affects the level of health and vitality we experience.

The five keys to good health and disease prevention are:

1) DIET – what we eat and how, i.e. our intake habits.
2) EXERCISE – stretching and working our body regularly to keep it flexible and strong.
3) SLEEP – adequate rest and sleep (and dream time) for each of us is crucial to “recharging our batteries,” healing many problems, keeping our moods balanced and staying healthy.
4) STRESS MANAGEMENT – dealing with life’s ups and downs.
5) ATTITUDE – keeping a positive outlook so that we treat our self and others with the life-supporting respect and care we deserve.

DIETARY REFORM

Our lifestyle choices are the key to long-term health, quality of life, and vitality in our later years. The first level of dietary reform involves assessing potentially-toxic daily habits, such as the regular use of what I call our SNACCs: Sugar, Nicotine, Alcohol, Caffeine, and Chemicals. We need to clean these up or take breaks from them to re-assess our health potential and how we feel.

I believe that all of these substance abuses so common in modern-day cultures act as insidious poisons when used consistently over the years. The incidence of chronic, debilitating disease is steadily growing in our culture and these long-term habits are also prime contributors to this poor health in our aging years. I address each of these substances fully with ways to clear them in my book, The New Detox Diet: The How-to and When-To Guide for Cleansing the Body of Toxic Substances.

My nutritional message has been to turn back (or forward) to a Nature-based diet for greater vitality and health. We need to eat closer to the Earth’s food source—from the gardens, farmer’s markets, and orchards—and away from the boxed and canned foods and the refined and chemicalized cuisine. Focusing on fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains and legumes, nuts and seeds, and much less animal-based foods and refined/processed foods will greatly improve health, both in our immediate future and over the years.

YOUR EXERCISE PROGRAM

Your exercise program must be frequent (at least three to four times a week), consistent over the years and balanced,
which is very important. A balanced exercise program should include regular stretching for flexibility, weight work for building tone and strength, and aerobics for endurance and stamina. Exercising regularly commonly improves body function and health as well as attitude. It is one of our best stress managers, relaxers, and mood elevators. We should exercise realistically at our current level of physical strength and endurance so that we can progress consistently and avoid injury. If we are just beginning and not in great shape, we can start slowly and build as our stamina and strength improve. If we have been working out regularly and are already fit, then it is beneficial to periodically evaluate our state and progress, and then make appropriate changes to exercise at our full potential.

**BENEFITS OF SLEEP**

Sleep offers life’s balance for all of our activity, and that’s physical, mental and emotional activity, too. Like breathing fresh air, drinking good quality water, and eating a nourishing diet, our nightly quality sleep is crucial to our well-being. There are many stages of sleep important to our body’s recharging itself, and although we all do not regularly recollect our dreams, we need to sleep deeply enough to go into that theta wave, REM (rapid-eye-movement), dream sleep. If we are not sleeping well, applying the other principles of Preventive Medicine, such as eating well and avoiding stimulants, exercising regularly earlier in the day, and managing stress may all be helpful. And we don’t have to turn to medications for sleep because there are many natural remedies that can help, such as calcium and magnesium, L-tryptophan (back again), and many herbal relaxers.

**MANAGING STRESS**

Managing stress is a key element in minimizing health risk and enjoying life. Stresses are our body/mind responses to our personal experiences and we are individual in the issues to which we respond and react. There are so many illnesses and diseases that are generated or worsened by stress that it is imperative that each of us develop skills to deal with men-
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tal and physical demands and emotional challenges. Simple relaxation techniques, meditation, exercise, sports, outdoor activities, and especially internal disciplines like yoga or tai chi are all extremely valuable in dealing with both daily and long-term stress.

I believe that one of the greatest problems of modern day life is The Indigestion of Life. Most of us do not have enough personal time to digest and assimilate our daily experiences (work, relationships, and food) that we experience rapid-fire throughout our day-to-day existence. This leads to the implosion of energy and the potential explosion of emotions or bodily symptoms. These are our body's attempt to convey messages that we do not have time to receive and incorporate. Here again, it would helpful if we were to take time to quiet ourselves, to breathe and listen, to digest and assimilate, to experience and enjoy. Taking time to clear ourselves, to become current and ready for new creativity and life is a concept and an activity that can lead us to more optimum health.

POSITIVE ATTITUDE

Staying positive and motivated to experience life, unafraid to handle challenges or deal with uncomfortable emotions is also crucial to health. Lifestyle Medicine is the highest art of healing for each of us. As a doctor, I believe that the most important thing I can do is to encourage my patients and readers to make personal changes in their lifestyle in relation to the big five: diet, exercise, proper sleep, stress management, and attitude. If our lifestyle supports health, then we can influence our own health over the course of our entire lives.

Our personal health and well-being is up to each of us. We can begin by first assessing our health and lifestyle. What changes will provide us with more energy, greater clarity and vitality, and better overall health and longevity? We can create a plan to implement and experience a better quality of health with fewer sick days, fewer doctor's visits, and a more enjoyable and livable life.
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