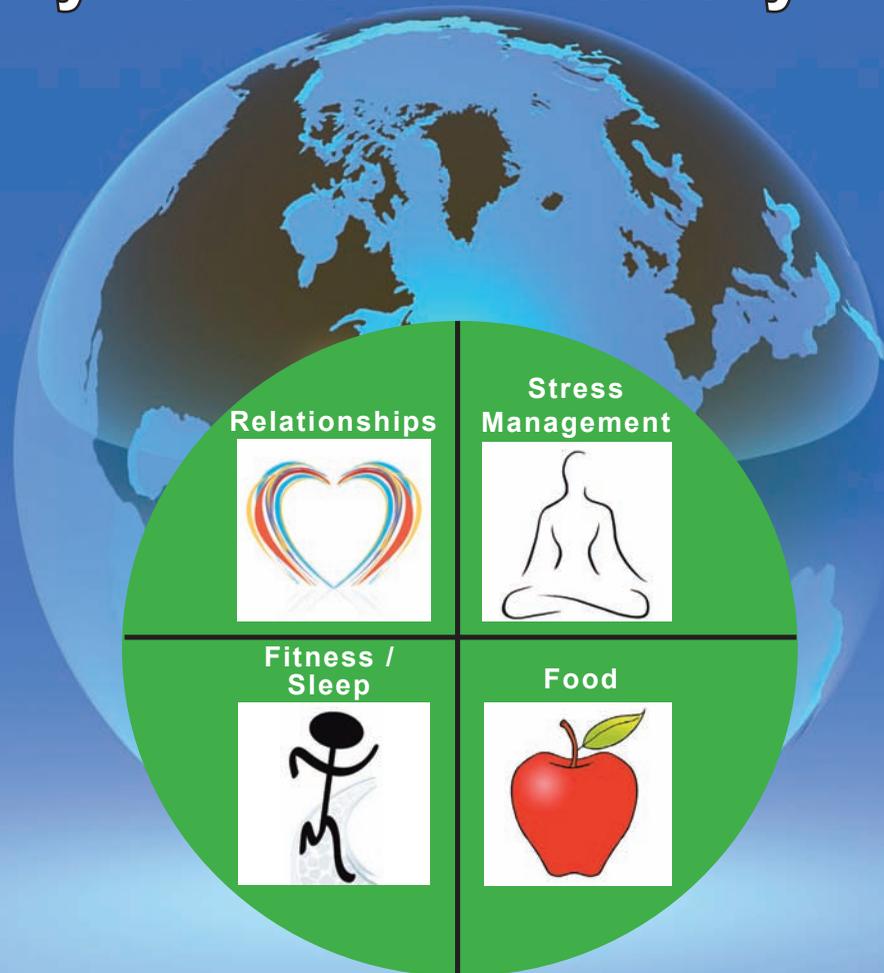


Healthy Habits in a Healthy Habitat



Fundamental Strategies to Achieve Optimal Health

What is Health? Is it more than the absence of disease? Once we know our health goals, we can begin to look more closely at what we have to do to get there. Epictetus said, "First say to yourself what you would be; and then do what you have to do." Or as the modern American philosopher, Yogi Berra said, "You have to be careful if you don't know where you're going because you might not get there."

Integrative medicine is relationship-based health care that is :

- Holistic in its view of health (physical, emotional, mental, spiritual and social)
- Comprehensive in its consideration of therapeutic options
- Systematic, including not only the individual, but also the family, community, culture and environment

- Patient and family-centered
- Emphasizes wellness, health promotion and disease/injury prevention
- Evidence-based, and
- Focused on the fundamentals.

Like pharmaceuticals, immunizations, surgery and other conventional therapies, lifestyle and complementary therapies are subsets of the therapeutic arsenal available to serve patients' health needs. However, a collection of disparate therapies does not constitute a true system of professional care any more than our current collection of physicians, insurers, hospitals, governments, non-profit groups, and for-profit pharmaceutical and device makers constitutes a national health care system.

A functional system requires a

shared vision; coordinated, sustainable strategies to move toward that vision; consequences for adherence to and deviations from strategically driven actions; data collection to monitor the process and outcomes; feedback; and timely, rational revisions to strategies, behaviors, monitoring systems and consequences.

This article focuses on the fundamentals of good health as illustrated in the diagram above. These fundamentals should be the primary focus of our collective health care funding and our policy as well as our personal lives. Professional health care is also important, but it is not a replacement for the fundamentals of healthy habitats and habits.

Healthy Habitats

Human beings, like every animal on the planet, require a healthy habitat

for optimal health. The absence of nourishing food, breathable air, and drinkable water spells doom. Global climate change threatens the health of current and future generations. Public policies that promote or permit mercury and dioxins in our fish; pharmaceuticals in our water; a proliferation of endocrine-disrupting or cancer-causing chemicals in our environment; bacterial or chemical contamination of our produce; lead in paint, gasoline or toys; noise; and vending machines dispensing unhealthy food and beverages in our schools are antithetical to good physical health. Lack of access to parks, recreation, safe neighborhoods, walking trails, side walks and bike paths also limit our individual freedom to choose healthy behaviors. Abundant evidence shows us that unhealthy social habitats—poverty; discrimination; poor quality schools; violence; child abuse; media that portray smoking, unsafe sexual practices and misuse of alcohol and other drugs; marketing unhealthy products and consumerism to children—impair our health. Social policies regarding agriculture, transportation, urban planning, foreign relations, education, energy, environment, and communications have profound impacts on health. Health should be an explicit outcome when weighing the costs and benefits of public policies even in these “non-health” related fields.

It is important for us to co-create social policies that make it easier to act wisely. We also need timely, relevant information and systems to make it easy to make good health decisions. Most health habits are established in childhood; promoting healthy habits between the ages of 10-24 has an especially high return on investment. Encourage your local health professional and hospital to go green – eliminating mercury and phthalates from medical equipment, going for non-toxic cleaning products, and implementing recycling programs and electronic (non-paper) health records.

On an individual level, we can choose lifestyles that include elements of healthy habitats—pure water, lots of time in natural settings, sunshine, nurturing music, uplifting aromas, clean and well-organized homes, offices and public buildings. Healthy habitats also include appropriate use of safety equipment

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(e.g., bike helmets), safe transportation and storage (e.g., keep cold food cold to discourage growth of pathogenic bacteria), and good hygiene (e.g., covering coughs and sneezes, washing hands).

Healthy Habits: Nutrition

Every computer user has heard the adage: Garbage in, garbage out. The same applies to our bodies. Good nutrition is a fundamental habit to achieve

good health. Nutrition includes when and what we eat and drink to achieve optimal levels of essential nutrients.

It also means avoiding unhealthy foods and taking in fewer toxins such as heavy metals, pesticides, and alcohol. The table below is a summary. >>>

Do	Avoid
Drink pure, filtered water	Carbonated or sweetened beverages; excessive alcohol, tobacco and other toxins
Eat fruits and veggies	Fast food
Eat whole grains	Processed foods and food or beverages containing high fructose corn syrup or lots of salt
Eat foods rich in protein, such as beans, nuts, fish, low fat dairy products and sustainably-raised meat	Fried foods, foods with trans fats, and foods containing saturated fats (whole milk, fatty meats)
Eat foods that contain omega three fatty acids, or olive oil	Food dyes and preservatives, pesticides and other chemical additives
Eat locally grown foods	Food imported from developing countries
Eat organic foods rich in essential micronutrients	Genetically modified foods

Healthy Habits: Exercise and Sleep

As with nutrition, excellent articles (many in this magazine) and books extol the health benefits of exercise and sleep. If exercise was a drug that could be patented, it would demand top dollar for its effectiveness in preventing and treating some of the most common illnesses (cancer, heart disease, depression, arthritis) and promoting a sense of well-being. Participating in team sports or even just going for a walk with a friend also promotes social health. Remember to use a variety of enjoyable strategies to promote strength, endurance, flexibility and balance. Aim for 60 minutes daily at least 5 days per week for optimal health benefits.

Modern Americans sleep 10% to 20% less than our ancestors. Sleep deficits impair our immune function and contribute to irritability, poor decision making and interpersonal conflicts. If you aren't getting at least 7 hours of sleep in 24 hour period, re-examine your priorities. Do you REALLY need to watch that TV show tonight? Here are some tips on getting a good night's sleep: optimize your sleeping environment and your routines during the day and the evening.

Sleeping environment

- Make sure your bed and bedding are comfortable
- Remove distractions. Get the TV out of the bedroom. Avoid watching or listening to upsetting, violent or scary materials within 2 hours of bedtime. Use the bed only for sleep and intimacy.
- Soothing sounds. Keep it quiet or listen to relaxing music or sounds from nature.
- Keep it dark and cool. Darkness promotes sleep and healthy levels of melatonin, an important hormone that regulates sleep and wakefulness. Cool room temperatures promote sleep and minimize interfering itchy sensations.
- Smell the roses, or better yet, lavender or chamomile.

Routines during the day

- Limit daytime naps to 45 minute maximum
- Use bright morning light to help set your biological clock. Avoid bright lights before bed.
- Exercise during the day; yoga or other slow, meditative exercises may be helpful in the afternoon or evening.
- Check with your doctor to make sure that no medical conditions (such as obstructive sleep apnea) are interfering with restful sleep. Make sure you can breathe easily at

night; congestion and obstructions to sleep reduce restful sleep. Review your medications (if any) to make sure they aren't the culprit.

Routines at night

- Make it routine. Head to bed at the same time daily.
- Take a warm bath or shower within an hour before bedtime to warm your body. Brush. Floss.
- Manage your stress constructively. Practice meditation, autogenic training, progressive muscle relaxation, guided imagery, prayer, counting your blessings, extending good will to others, or other relaxing stress management techniques. Read something soothing, reassuring or inspiring. Keep a journal. Write down things you appreciate or for which you are grateful.
- Consider eating a light snack containing a protein (such as seeds, nuts, low-fat milk, hard-boiled eggs) and a complex carbohydrate (such as a whole grain cracker or toast, slices of fruit or vegetables) within 2 hours before bed to make sure your brain has the amino acids, minerals and vitamins it needs to make melatonin. Do not eat a heavy meal; meals over 1000 calories interfere with sleep.

Healthy Habits: Manage Stress Constructively

Some stress is inevitable. "Into each life, some rain must fall." Excessive stress underlies nearly 70% of visits to doctors. Fortunately, there are many strategies that can help keep it manageable and that help promote hardiness or resilience. Physical strategies include exercise, sleep, deep breathing, and good nutrition. Emotional self-management techniques include intentionally generating positive emotions such as appreciation, compassion; building courage by facing progressively larger fears; engaging in deep belly laughs on a regular basis; and smiling until the world smiles back. Many kinds of meditation help reduce stress. Art and prayer both help us transcend our individual worries to connect with ideas or spirits larger than ourselves. Never underestimate the power of a good friend or the unconditional love of a pet to help someone feel better.

There are almost no side effects to the regular practice of stress management, but there are a lot of side benefits. For example, learning to practice a stress management technique to reduce migraine headaches can also reduce test anxiety and improve school performance. Furthermore, unlike medi-

<u>Physical</u>	<u>Emotional</u>	<u>Mental/Spiritual</u>	<u>Social</u>
<i>Exercise, Sleep</i>	<i>Appreciation</i>	<i>Meditation</i>	<i>Ask for help</i>
<i>Deep breathing</i>	<i>Affection or Compassion</i>	<i>Art – visual, music, dance, writing, etc.</i>	<i>Nurture a pet</i>
<i>Hot bath</i>	<i>Positive anticipation</i>	<i>Constructive distraction</i>	<i>Be kind to others</i>
<i>Nature</i>	<i>Journals and notes</i>	<i>Reframing thoughts</i>	<i>Spend time with others</i>
<i>Pleasant aromas and sounds</i>	<i>Courage practice</i>	<i>Biofeedback</i>	<i>Build community</i>
<i>Nutritious food and optimal supplements</i>	<i>Laughter</i>	<i>Prayer</i>	<i>Participate in a group, club or church</i>

cations, whose benefits typically end when someone stops taking it, the benefits of learning a skill endure for months and years after the initial training. The best results from stress management practices come from regular routine practice, not waiting until stress levels hit the roof.

Healthy Habits: Nurture Relationships Through Positive Communication

Our most important relationship is with ourselves. So how do we talk with ourselves in our own hearts and minds? Are we encouraging, supportive and hopeful or constantly critical? Befriend yourself! Wish yourself well. Learn to manage your mistakes constructively. If you've internalized a lot of negative talk, consider seeing a counselor or therapist to help you learn some new habits. Consider also rehearsing some positive thoughts or good wishes for yourself so they become automatic. Here are some of my favorites for extending compassion to myself:

1. May I live in safety and security.
2. May I be healthy, strong, comfortable and resilient.
3. May I experience peace, joy, and confidence.
4. May my daily life go easily today.

No man is an island. Social health is one of the 5 core components of overall good health. Good relationships rarely happen by chance. Build supportive, nurturing, enjoyable relationships intentionally. Here are 5 helpful tips for building positive relationships with others:

1. Extend good will to others mentally (e.g., using the above phrases); start with those whom you love, then expand to those toward whom you are neutral, and ultimately to those who annoy, irritate, disappoint or disgust you.
2. Reflect on others' kindness toward you and accept genuine offers of help
3. Practice intentional acts of kindness, compassion, and generosity.
4. When you disagree, connect with your deepest values and intentions to build relationships. Listen. Seek first to un-

derstand, then to be understood.

5. Care for pets and plants, neighbors, colleagues and family!

People who participate in church, community groups, sports, and clubs generally report better health than loners do. So join, participate, and encourage others to join with you!

Summary:

First focus on goals, then on strategies. The system we have is perfectly designed to achieve the results we are now experiencing. If we want different results, we need to change the system. Start by envisioning your health goals; then pick one or two strategies to promote health for yourself, your community or our planet. The most important step you can take is the first step. Start small, build on success, and ask for help when you need it. Remember, no therapy is a substitute for healthy habits in a healthy habit. Enjoy!

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