

Healthy Living 2011

Do Not Smoke. Smoking is a well-known cause of lung diseases including lung cancer and COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, also known as emphysema or chronic bronchitis). Smoking has also been linked to other diseases including heart disease, cervical cancer, throat cancer, kidney cancer and colon cancer. In women who are pregnant, smoking can cause low-birth weight infants. Children with asthma have more frequent and severe asthma attacks when exposed to tobacco smoke. In addition, smoking contributes to signs of premature aging including fine lines and wrinkles of the skin and tooth yellowing. Quitting tobacco is difficult, but many North Carolinians successfully quit each year. Your physician can help by providing education, prescription medication, or referrals for free telephone or internet counseling that can help you quit smoking.

Maintain a Healthy Weight. Body Mass Index (BMI) is a good indicator of a healthy body weight. BMI is calculated as weight in kilograms divided by height in meters squared. There are BMI calculators available for free on the internet, including one at <http://www.wfubmc.edu> and at <http://www.nhlbisupport.com/bmi/> that will perform the math for you after you enter your height and weight. In general, a BMI between 18 and 24.9 is normal. BMI between 25 and 29.9 is considered overweight and BMI of greater than 30 is obese. It is important to remember that BMI calculation is not intended for women who are pregnant or lactating (nursing an infant), as these women have different nutritional and metabolic requirements. Achieving and maintaining a healthy weight (BMI <30) is important for a number of reasons. Those who are at or near normal BMI have lower rates of hypertension (high blood pressure), diabetes, stroke, heart disease, breast cancer, colon cancer, and uterine cancer than patients who are obese. Weight loss is not easy and most successful long-term weight loss occurs over months to years. The underlying theme in all successful weight loss strategies is increased physical activity and decreased calorie intake from smaller portion size. Fortunately, there are incremental benefits along the way to achieving a healthy weight. Weight loss of 5-10% can improve blood pressure or blood sugar control sufficiently to reduce the number of daily prescription medications required for chronic medical conditions. And the loss of even 10-20 lbs tends to improve mobility and ease of breathing during daily activities and decrease joint and low back pain.

Exercise. The benefits of regular exercise are both physical and psychological. Aim for 150 minutes of exercise per week, which averages out to 30 minutes per day on 5 days of the week. Regular exercise helps in weight management, improves mood and sense of well-being and improves balance and flexibility. Exercise also reduces blood pressure, risk of stroke, risk of diabetes and of some cancers. Exercise need not be a complicated or expensive endeavor. A brisk walk in the neighborhood or riding a stationary bike is sufficient. Others may prefer the camaraderie of a sports league or an organized exercise class. The goal is to raise the heart rate, engage the muscles, and improve circulation while enjoying the activity.