

Four Choices to Help you Stay Healthy

1. Do some regular physical activity
2. Don't drink too much alcohol
3. Eat a healthy diet
4. Don't smoke

1. Why exercise?

For some people even the thought of exercise can make them break out into a cold sweat, but exercise needn't mean having to put on skin tight lycra and go running up Box Hill.

Exercise makes your body stronger, fitter and more flexible. It protects your heart and bones, keeps your weight at an ideal level, helps reduce stress and makes you feel good. It also reduces the risk of a range of illnesses including diabetes, heart disease and stroke.

Simple steps

- *A few small changes to your everyday life can make a big difference:*
- *Get up to change the TV channel instead of using the remote control*
- *Use the stairs instead of the lift or escalator*
- *Get off the bus one stop earlier*
- *Walk to buy a paper rather than driving*

Ways to stay fit

Experts recommend that everybody exercises for at least 30 minutes, five days of the week. You'll know you're doing enough when you feel yourself breathing a little bit harder and faster, and your pulse will be faster than usual.

It doesn't have to be the gym either. Walking, cycling, swimming and running are all simple, accessible and convenient ways to get a daily dose of exercise. Working in the garden is an excellent alternative, but basically anything that makes you a bit breathless and sweaty is doing you some good.

It doesn't matter what you do or where you do it - activity on a regular basis is what's important. Pick something you enjoy: if it feels like a chore then you're not going to do it.

2. Alcohol

Having a drink is sociable, enjoyable and, in many societies, (especially ours!) part of the culture. Alcohol is also relaxing and eases inhibitions. A moderate amount may actually help to protect the heart and circulation.

However, one in four people drink too much and too often, commonly called binge drinking. If you regularly go over the top with your drinking then you'll end up damaging your body.

Drinking too much alcohol is also often responsible for accidents, poor work performance, relationship problems and crime. Whatever else you do with alcohol, never drink and drive.

How much is too much?

The recommended safe intake of alcohol for men is no more than three to four units a day, (21 units a week) for women it's a bit less at one or two units a day (14 a week). One unit is:

- half a pint of ordinary strength beer or lager
- a small glass of wine
- a single pub measure of spirits

So in practical terms that means a couple of pints of beer, or 3 small glasses of wine, for a man, 1 pint of beer or 2 small glasses of wine for a woman, every day (as a maximum).

Too much alcohol can cause...

- *high blood pressure, which contributes to strokes and heart attacks*
- *indigestion and stomach ulcers*
- *impotence*
- *weight loss and malnutrition*
- *depression*
- *nerve damage*
- *permanent memory loss*
- *an increased risk of some cancers*

Take care - a can of extra strong beer or lager is equal to two pints of ordinary strength beer or lager, which amounts to four units of alcohol. A generous glass of wine could equal two units, since the average wine glass is now often 175ml rather than the traditional 125ml. A home measure of spirit is usually more generous than a pub measure.

Do you have a drink problem?

If you answer 'yes' to two or more of these questions, you may have alcohol-related problems and should seek help and advice from your doctor or a specialist alcohol service:

- Have you ever felt you should cut down on your drinking?
- Have people annoyed you by criticising your drinking?
- Have you ever felt guilty about your drinking?
- Have you ever had a drink first thing in the morning to steady your nerves or to get rid of a hangover?

3. Eat a healthy, balanced diet and stay active

The key to a healthy balanced diet is not to ban or omit any foods or food groups but to balance what you eat by consuming a variety of foods from each food group in the right proportions for good health.

The five food groups on the eatwell plate are:

Fruit and vegetables

These should make up about a third of your daily diet and can be eaten as part of every meal, as well as being the first choice for a snack.

You should eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables each day. Research suggests this can help to protect against cancer, obesity and various chronic diseases such as heart disease. This is because of the unique package of nutrients and plant compounds they contain.

Bread, rice, potatoes and pasta

This food group should also make up about a third of your diet and contains the starchy carbohydrates that are the body's main source of energy.

When selecting products from this food group, choose unrefined carbohydrates over those that have been refined, as they will contain the whole of the grain. Wholegrain foods are rich in fibre and other nutrients that

have many health benefits and people who consume wholegrains seem to have a reduced risk of certain cancers, diabetes and coronary heart disease.

The final third of the eatwell plate is made up of three groups containing foods that need to be consumed in smaller proportions than the other two principal categories. These food groups also contain nutrients essential to our diet, so it's important not to leave them out altogether.

Milk and dairy foods

Some of these should be eaten in moderation because of their high saturated fat content, but they're an important source of calcium, which is essential for healthy bones and teeth. Choose low-fat or reduced-fat versions.

Meat, fish, eggs and beans

This food group includes both animal and plant sources of protein, which is a major functional and structural component of all cells. Protein provides the body with between 10 and 15 per cent of its dietary energy, and is needed for growth and repair.

How to eat a balanced diet

- Eat a variety of foods to obtain all of the essential nutrients
- Too much as well as too little can be bad for you – balance is required
- Everyone's plate will look slightly different as we all have different requirements depending on our body's shape and size, and our levels of activity.

4. Smoking

We've all been told not to smoke - the reasons why are simple:

- Smoking can kill you and those around you.
- Every five minutes a smoker dies from a smoking-related disease.
- Smoking doesn't make you big or hard; it causes impotence.

What you gain by quitting

- After 20 minutes - your blood pressure and pulse rate return to normal.
- After eight hours - oxygen levels in your blood return to normal.
- After 24 hours - carbon monoxide levels in your body fall and your lungs start to clear out mucus and other smoking debris.
- After 48 hours - there's no nicotine left in your body and your senses of taste and smell return.
- After 72 hours - breathing becomes easier as your bronchial tubes begin to relax and your energy levels increase.
- Two to 12 weeks later - circulation improves throughout the body, making walking and running a whole lot easier.
- Three to nine weeks later - coughs, wheezing and breathing problems get better as your lung function is increased by up to ten per cent.
- After five years - your risk of heart attack falls to about half that of a smoker.
- Ten years on - your risk of lung cancer falls to half that of a smoker and your risk of heart attack is the same as someone who has never smoked.

How to give up

- Tell yourself why you want to give up - for your own health, for the health of those around you and/or to save money.
- Set a date to stop smoking.
- Plan how to cope with cravings and withdrawal symptoms. Cravings usually last for about three minutes at a time. Find something to occupy your mind until the craving passes, such as listening to music, reading a book or running on the spot. Withdrawal symptoms such as irritability, mood swings and anxiety last three to four weeks. During this time nicotine replacement therapy, such as patches, gum, tablets, an inhalator or nasal spray, can be helpful.
- Plan how to keep your hands busy. If you miss having the cigarette in your hand then replace it with something else, such as a pocket puzzle.
- Get support from your family, friends and workmates. Let them know that you're trying to give up so they understand why you may be acting differently, and so they don't offer you cigarettes.

- Avoid temptation. If there are times and places where you would usually smoke then avoid them until you're confident that you won't be overcome by temptation. If you smoke after supper, distract yourself by doing the washing up or by going for a walk. If you always smoke down the pub then go somewhere else to meet with your friends.
- Treat yourself! Whatever you do, don't forget to reward yourself regularly for not smoking.