

Components of a Healthy Lifestyle

Founders House of Hope

18025 Pioneer Blvd.
Artesia, CA 900701
(562) 860-3351

What Is a Healthy Lifestyle?

People have different ways of describing a healthy lifestyle. But for most, it means living life in a way that helps the person to be both physically and emotionally healthy. Many things go into creating a healthy lifestyle, including:

- Positive Relationships
- Appropriate Exercise
- Proper Nutrition
- Adequate rest

Wellness involves both choice and action. The choices you make each day, and the actions you take on those choices, can lead to a healthier lifestyle. Making positive choices in the areas of physical fitness, stress, work, relationships, medication, and nutrition - and then acting on those choices - promotes a sense of accomplishment and well-being. There are other benefits from these choices, as well. Making a life-long commitment to a healthy lifestyle can reduce the effects of chronic mental illness, give you more energy, increase your self-esteem and confidence, and help you minimize symptoms of schizophrenia or your chances for relapse. In this section, we will help you identify your wellness needs and provide specific tips on how to improve your overall well-being through diet, exercise, and a responsible approach to substance use.

Health Problems Associated With a Poor Diet

The typical American diet can cause significant health problems, since it is high in fat, salt, and sugar and is apt to be low in fiber and vital nutrients. Even though most of us have healthy food options available, we tend to make poor food choices. Poor dietary habits, in combination with lack of exercise and high stress, have been connected to such health problems as obesity, coronary heart disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes. Choosing a Healthy Diet: Dietary Guidelines for Americans The Dietary Guidelines for Americans were established by the Federal government to help people choose foods that will meet their nutritional requirements, promote health, support active lives, and reduce the risk of chronic disease. These Guidelines are meant to be simple and sensible suggestions for people trying to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

Guideline #1: Eat a Variety of Foods. Guideline #2: Balance the Food You Eat With Physical Activity to Maintain or Improve Your Weight. Guideline #3: Choose a Diet With Plenty of Fruits, Vegetables, and Grain Products Help reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke.

Guideline #4: Choose a Diet Low in Fat, Saturated Fat, and Cholesterol

Guideline #5: Choose a Diet with Moderate Sugars Foods. Guideline #6: Choose a Diet with Moderate Salt and Sodium.

Guideline #7: Avoid Alcohol.

The Role of Water in Good Nutrition

The importance of water in the diet cannot be overestimated. Healthy lifestyles that include exercise and a high fiber diet require plenty of water intake. Experts suggest eight 8-ounce glasses of water daily. For anyone participating in a regular exercise program, 9-13 glasses of water are recommended.

Dealing with Weight Gain Which Might Be Caused by Your Medications Some of the medicines you are taking for your mental illness may increase your appetite. There are things you can do, however, to decrease your desire to eat.

Here are some helpful hints on controlling hunger:

- Take a walk when you feel hungry.
- Drink a glass of water or other sugar-free beverage.
- Eat a rice cake or a half cup of raw vegetables.
- Chew sugar-free gum or suck on sugar-free mints.

Know the difference between "mouth hunger" (the urge to use food to soothe feelings of boredom, nervousness, anger, sadness, or stress) and "stomach hunger" (your body's way of telling you it really does need food).

Many patients who gain weight while taking medications for mental illness do so because they had been homeless or jobless due to their illness and simply eat more as they get better. With medication, they may be able to work and buy regular meals (including fast food), and they may live in a residence where meals are provided.

A study was done recently on a program to control weight gain in 32 patients with schizophrenia or schizoaffective disorder. These patients had taken medications for at least one year and lived in an adult care facility for formerly homeless persons with serious mental illness.

The program consisted of health services (medical and psychiatric), nutrition care (a low-calorie diet and nutritional education), and supportive care. In general, as symptoms of schizophrenia improved, the patients paid more attention to their health and care. Their weight gain decreased as the result of the program, and this change occurred regardless of what medications were being taken.

The study concluded that a patient's diet appears to be a primary cause of weight gain, with the medication playing a much less important role. The study also suggested that mental health professionals should actively suggest diet and other lifestyle changes whenever they prescribe medications which could cause the patient to gain weight.

Patients in the study took their medications 100% of the time, since they were being supervised. Thus, they got the full benefits of their medications, and as their symptoms decreased, their desire to care for themselves increased.

These patients proved to be very responsive to suggestions and activities regarding weight, blood sugar levels, and cholesterol levels. And as the patients began to see the program's benefits, they participated more actively and successfully.

Overall, the study strongly suggests that if patients follow their total treatment plan and develop healthy eating habits, medications should not cause any serious weight gain.

Exercise

Although food and proper eating habits are essential to life, food alone cannot make you truly healthy. Exercise is also fundamental in maintaining a healthy body and an active lifestyle.

Exercise can help you mentally as well as physically. Psychological benefits such as a greater sense of well being, increased self-esteem, and decreased anxiety or depression have all been linked to exercise.

Benefits increase dramatically when exercise becomes a lifelong commitment. Experts continue to remind us that the many health benefits offered by exercise should cause us to make it a lifetime priority.

Regular exercise helps to:

- Prevent heart disease (aerobic)
- Normalize blood pressure (aerobic)

- Regulate blood sugar
- Prevent bone mineral loss
- Support body structure
- Promote weight loss
- Promote flexibility

If you are over 40, unaccustomed to exercise, or have medical problems, be sure to see your doctor before undertaking an exercise program. Some of the medical problems that may require your doctor's OK before beginning an exercise program include:

- History of heart disease (heart attack, cardiac arrest, valve disease, congestive heart failure, myocarditis, or any other heart disease treated by a doctor)
- History of chest pain diagnosed as angina
- Any unknown cardiac dysrhythmia (abnormal heartbeats) or conduction defects
- History of stroke
- Use of medications for the heart or blood vessels during the last 3 months

Tips for Getting Started If you haven't been exercising, it's important not to start off too fast or too hard. If you overdo it, you are likely to end up feeling discouraged or causing strain, pain, or injury to yourself. Keep the following points in mind as you get started with your exercise program:

- Talk to your doctor before beginning a new program
- Begin gradually
- Give yourself a one-month trial period
- Expect some initial discomfort
- Try to focus on the process of exercise (rather than competing with others or yourself)
- Remember to warm up before you exercise, and cool down afterward
- Coordinate your eating and exercise (avoid exercising less than 90 minutes before a meal, and don't eat until 1 hour after exercising)
- Don't exercise when you feel sick
- Exercise with a friend

Resources to Help You Get Started

There are many resources in most communities, ranging in cost from free to expensive. The key is to know how and where to look for these resources. Resources in your community could include the following: Parks and Recreation Centers: These sometimes offer free or low-cost options for exercise (walking trails, softball fields, basketball courts, tennis courts, swimming pools, etc.) Places of Worship: Many churches or other places of worship have facilities, as well as organized teams that play throughout the year. This can be a great way to begin exercising as well as socializing. The YMCA: Though not free, most YMCAs have wonderful facilities and trained professionals to assist you with your exercise program. And the "Y" is also another great way to meet people with similar exercise goals.

When to Stop Exercising

If you experience any of the following symptoms during exercise- STOP and REST, and call your doctor if your symptoms persist:

- Dizziness or lightheadedness
- Abnormal heart rhythm
- Pain in the chest under the breastbone, and/or down the arm
- Pain in the knees, feet, or ankles

Keeping Up Your Motivation

Many times, we begin an exercise program and then gradually abandon it as time goes on. One thing is certain - in order to reap the full benefits of exercise, you need to continue exercising for a lifetime. If you stop exercising, much of the fitness you have gained will be lost within 2 weeks.

One way to increase your general level of exercise is to use routine activities in addition to your planned program. Routine activities are things like yard work, doing the laundry, and cleaning the house. Some suggestions for easily increasing your activity level through your daily routine include:

- Get off the bus several blocks from home and walk the rest of the way.
- Take the stairs instead of elevators and escalators.
- Find a mailbox 10 minutes away from your home or work and walk there to mail letters.
- Sit instead of lying down. Stand instead of sitting. Move in place instead of standing still.
- What are 3 things you could do to incorporate exercise into your daily schedule?

Sobriety Addictive disorders involving substance abuse have provided one of the most daunting challenges to healthcare professionals since organized medicine began. These disorders become an even greater challenge when psychiatric disorders are also present. Finally - after years of debate and a few questionable approaches - a successful partnership between psychiatric treatment and substance abuse treatment has at last been developed within the past 10-15 years. While medication-based treatments for addiction have been tried (and continue to be studied), most experts now appear to agree that the 12-step Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA) approach remains one of the best interventions. Since the early 1990s, the "double trouble" concept and "double trouble" groups based on the AA/NA model have begun to flourish. For persons with both a primary psychiatric disease and a substance abuse disorder, the "double trouble" model incorporates psychotropic medication into the substance abuse recovery process. In particular, the "double trouble" model recognizes the need for anti-psychotic medication and mood stabilizers that are non-addictive, as opposed to the barbiturates and benzodiazapines which can complicate the substance abuse recovery process. These two medication groups need to be used with great care when there is an addictive disorder present. Almost every community around the world now has a local chapter of the AA/NA 12-step program. Getting in touch with one of these groups is a good place to start on your journey to recovery. In addition, a good psychiatric consultation can help clear up the various symptoms and disease states that may be getting in the way of your recovery and reintegration process. To contact AA/NA, look in your local phone book or contact a local religious organization.

