

Tips for Living a Healthier Life

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Healthy diet, exercise, regular checkups, and avoiding stress and tobacco can lead to a healthier life

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The amount of discussion these days about the best ways to be healthy can often feel more overwhelming than helpful, but some experts say it may be wise to focus on a few key areas.

In an interview with dailyRx News, David Winter, MD, chief clinical officer, president and chairman of the board of Baylor Health Care System's HealthTexas Provider Network, described his top tips for living a healthier life and warding off chronic health problems.

Kick the Habit

"Number one, most important — don't smoke, don't use tobacco in any form," Dr. Winter said.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), smoking causes damage to almost every organ in the body and can lead to

many diseases, including cancer, lung problems and heart disease.

"Quitting smoking lowers your risk for smoking-related diseases and can add years to your life," according to the CDC.

Eat a Healthy Diet

Though a lot of fad diets come and go, Dr. Winter stressed that moderation is key when it comes to food.

"Eat reasonably," Dr. Winter said. "Not a lot of high fat, not a lot of high sugar."

Dr. Winter also suggested avoiding high levels of cholesterol and recommended focusing on fruits, vegetables and whole grains instead.

Get Moving

Exercise is a healthy habit, for sure, but too much of a good thing may be unhealthy in this case. Too much exercise can cause wear and tear on the body, Dr. Winter said, but too little can lead to other problems. Moderation is key, he said.

"Three to five times a week of moderate exercise is ideal," Dr. Winter said.

The CDC recommends a mix of moderate- and vigorous-intensity aerobic activity (like walking or swimming) and muscle-strengthening activities (like strength training) for a total of two hours and 30 minutes a week.

"The good news is that you can spread your activity out during the week, so you don't have to do it all at once," according to the CDC. "It's about what works best for you, as long as you're doing physical activity at a moderate or vigorous effort for at least 10 minutes at a time."

Manage Your Weight

Dr. Winter's tips to eat reasonably and exercise moderately are key in the next tip: maintain an ideal weight.

"Keep your weight ideal," Dr. Winter said. "Not way too thin, and not way too overweight. We see a lot more obesity in this country than underweight, but both of them cause problems."

Body mass index (BMI) is one common method of measuring ideal weight. BMI is a measure of body fat based on height and weight. A health care professional can measure it, or you can estimate it with an online BMI calculator.

According to the CDC, a BMI of between 18.5 and 24.9 is considered within the healthy weight range, with lower or higher scores representing underweight and overweight ranges.

Keep Checking Up

Talking to your doctor regularly about your health, potential screenings and family history is a great way to live healthier, Dr. Winter said.

"I would say check in with your doctor periodically," Dr. Winter said. "Take your family history, let the doctor check you for blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar levels — those things can be treated and prevent diseases."

Dr. Winter added, "See what's in your family that needs to be identified and watched for. See what screening tests are more appropriate for you."

The CDC notes that common screenings include those for breast, cervical and prostate cancer.

"Regular health exams and tests can help find problems before they start," according to the CDC. "They also can help find problems early, when your chances for treatment and cure are better."

Take a Breather from Stress

The final tip Dr. Winter listed as key to good health is managing stress — a factor he said can contribute to all kinds of health problems.

"In this country in particular, people seem to get on that treadmill and stay on it," Dr. Winter said. "Stress can lead to more heart attacks, more strokes, even more cancer, certainly migraine headaches and ulcer disease."

Dr. Winter said ways to manage stress can vary from person to person. Some people may find that activities like conversations with good friends, reading, playing golf or watching movies are good methods.

Whatever hobby helps you relax, take time for it and "Get off that treadmill and turn it down a little bit," Dr. Winter said.