

[IMAGE]

The Nine Best Health Steps To Take

By Marlene Merritt, DOM, LAc, ACN

Remember the last time you had to do something complicated, like assemble a piece of furniture, or get your PC to stop freezing up? There's often a lot of cursing and frustration because the directions were unclear and it's with excessive amounts of effort that you finally finish the job. Can you imagine what it's like for people who want to be healthy? Faced with conflicting information from the media (eggs are good, no, eggs are bad, no, eggs are good!), medical doctors who don't support them or give them misinformation, an environment that seems to conspire against health — there are lots of reasons to not be healthy.

But what if you were able to give your patients a clear and concise list of where to start, or what they could do to refine their current actions? For example, lots of people know they should exercise, but what if you helped them reduce the time they exercise, yet made it more efficient? In writing this list (and surveying other practitioners to do so), I'm well aware that some readers might have different suggestions, but in my experience, I find that the majority of people who take on these few items create a very solid health foundation that protects them in many ways from future illnesses. So without further ado, here are the best actions to take:

1. Reduce your carbs/eliminate sugar

Nine Steps To Better Health - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark By far, this is the most important step to take, as our sugar and carb intake is the root cause of most major diseases we now see: cancer, heart disease, hypertension, Alzheimer's, stroke, anxiety, depression...the list goes on and on. Most people have used up their lifetime of "carb points" by overeating pancakes, french fries, bread and soda, and now healthy options like whole grains are problematic as well. The average American eats 150 pounds of sugar a year — it's this sugar that has done the most damage. Even if we halved the amount of sugar consumed to 75 pounds, that's still nearly 20 times the amount they ate in the year 1700 (which was 4 pounds a year). I often tell people that if they knew what I knew about how damaging sugar was, it would scare the daylights out of them. If you want to know more about the damaging effects of carbohydrate intake, take a look at my explanation on Youtube: www.youtube.com/merrittwellness. Clinically, we find that this means approximately 60-80 grams of carbs per day, (not including green vegetables because no one got diabetes

from eating too many carrots!) or at whatever point that there aren't any sugar/carb cravings.

2. Remove processed oils from your diet

If you squeeze an olive, you get oil out of it, but you might have noticed that if you squeeze corn, you don't get anything like that. That right there should make you nervous, never mind the damage that comes when trying to make oils from substances not naturally oily: vegetable (which vegetable, exactly, is in this oil?), corn, safflower, soy, rapeseed (which makes canola). To make them, they have to be heated far beyond their tolerance, creating a rancidity that you would notice if they weren't deodorized as well. These polyunsaturated oils contribute directly to creating plaques in the arteries. Saturated fat, on the other hand, does not, despite what you might have heard. Read my article "Big, Fat Lies" in *Acupuncture Today* and start to educate yourself on what good fats are. A quick hint: good fats include saturated fats like coconut oil and butter don't go rancid (you'll notice you can leave them out on the counter), and here's a fascinating fact for you: lard is actually in the same classification as olive oil, as a monounsaturated fat.

3. Eat as organically, and as minimally processed as possible.

"Processed" means how much was it "messed with" to get it into the state you're seeing it. For example, low-fat anything is processed. Cereal is one of the most processed "foods" that exists (the flaked and shaped kind). Those processed oils that have been blended to become a butter alternative (filled with the oils that I just described above). Meat from corn-fed cows, and raised in feed lots. Most things in the middle aisles of most grocery stores — crackers, things in boxes, bags and cans... have you seen the ingredient list of a loaf of bread recently? Never mind fast food, frozen dinners, take-out pizza, Egg-beaters, or GMO foods.

So what are examples of "real" foods? Organic or grass-fed meat. Full-fat dairy. The whole egg. Real butter. Organic produce. Anything from the farmers market. Boxes that have ingredients on them that you would have in your own house. Something you made yourself or a decent local restaurant made for you (yes, some national chains might make real food, but the bigger they get, the more processed their ingredients). When you start reading ingredient lists, you will start to notice exactly how shockingly processed much of our food is.

A good question to ask is, "Would your great grandmother have eaten this? Or recognized it?"

4. Make your exercise effective and efficient.

I'll just come right out and say it: basic cardio is very nearly a waste of time, at least for people thinking it helps weight loss. Spending an hour on the treadmill might help your circulation, and I'm a huge proponent of exercise for many reasons, but most people are not getting healthier because your body gets used to doing the same thing, day in day out. Yes, it's better than nothing, but what if you could spend less time at it and get better results? Research is showing that combining some cardio with intervals (short bursts of intensity) gets you much better cardiovascular results, speeds up your metabolism for hours, teaches your body to burn fat, and slows aging. Add in lifting some heavy things, like doing some weight training, and you will increase your muscle mass as you age, increase your bone density, and burn more calories at rest. If you want to know more, visit www.marksdailyapple.com. This kind of exercise can be incorporated regardless of age or prior experience. An 80-year old could do some walking, add in 4 reps of speed walking for 15 seconds apiece, do some lunges, and be home in 20 minutes. Yoga and Pilates are a wonderful addition to this.

5. Eat at home/learn how to cook.

This does not mean you need to go to culinary school, but trying one new recipe a week would be phenomenal. Obesity is linked to a frequency of eating out; cooking at home promotes better nutrition and better family dynamics. It's very easy to fall in the trap of "convenience" foods, but again and again, it's been shown that making your own food is key to losing weight and increasing nutrition, for yourself and your family. Maybe you begin with trying to bring your lunch to work twice a week and look up a couple of recipes to try for dinner. Just start somewhere.

6. Get some added nutrition.

This could be taking fish oil, vitamin D, or trace minerals. Lots of people hear this as "take a vitamin" but if you read my article on "The Dangerous Hype of Antioxidants," you'll know I'm convinced that again, messing with nature to make a synthetic vitamin (because for some reason we think we know better?) only causes problems, which is exactly what the research keeps showing. But I also think that, without added supplementation, it's very difficult to get enough nutrition into our systems as our foods nowadays are very deficient. Not having enough nutrition means we can't heal ourselves. I wrote about this in "Your Patients Are Malnourished...And So Are You." We only use food concentrates in our practice because we believe in food and not in synthetics. Email me if you want details.

7. Deal with your stress and get some balance.

According to the AMA, stress is the root cause of 85% of hospital admissions. According to Scott Adams, the creator of Dilbert, there are three areas to life — relationships, money, and health — and most people are only doing well in two of those areas. Imbalance causes stress, and however you deal with it — through counseling, meditation, acupuncture, paying off your debt, etc. — make sure you have enough time off, don't watch the news too often, and learn how to not overthink.

8. Don't go too long without eating or skip meals.

All the research shows that one of the things that people who live to 100 have in common is, they eat breakfast. Not eating, especially if you have blood sugar problems (and most people do) makes your brain function poorly and has you craving carbs and sugar. Skipping meals, especially breakfast, stresses your adrenals, and most people don't have good adrenal health. It doesn't have to be much — a boiled egg, a piece of cheese, a scoop of almond butter. Just eat something with a little protein and fat to take the stress of your body.

9. Get your sleep handled.

Sleep is when your body heals itself, and since you spend a third of your life sleeping, getting good sleep is vital. Is your mattress too old? Your pillow too hot? (get new ones). Night sweats? (Chinese herbs are great for that!) Your spouse snores? (Consider sleeping separately) You wake up? (often related to adrenals and blood sugar). You can't fall asleep? (try meditation before sleeping). It cannot be stressed enough that the TV does not belong in the bedroom, nor does reading something backlit that stimulates the eyes. Cover up other sources of light. Get a clock that doesn't show it's time when it's dark. Make sure you have basic good sleep habits and you might be surprised with what happens.

Being healthy is actually learning and knowing enough about specifics, like why processed oils are bad for us, but some of it is also bringing common sense back to our lives. A blunt look at some of our habits and lifestyle might help — maybe we can stop living in denial and start working on adding some of these health measures, if not for ourselves, than for our children. Where else will we, and they, learn to be healthy?

Marlene Merritt, DOM, LAc, is a licensed acupuncturist and runs a wellness center in Austin, Texas. She specializes in Oriental medicine and nutritional protocols.

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