

[IMAGE]

Five Ways To Improve Your Health This Spring

By Julie T. Chen, MD

When it comes to health, we can always make an extra effort in either getting healthier or maintaining our health. So, if you wanted to improve upon your health, what are some easy ways to do so...but more importantly, which areas are the most important to focus on this spring? Let's start with a few simple steps.

1. Lower your sugar intake: First things first, if you have any elevation in your blood sugar level, or a.k.a. blood glucose level, then you need to address that ASAP. The reason is because excess sugar floating in your blood stream is one of the most damaging factors to a human body. Excess glucose levels in the blood lead to many diseases because of its inflammatory effects on our body. If you are concerned, ask your doctor to check a fasting blood glucose level as well as a Hemoglobin A1c level. With these two labs, you'll get a first look to see if your blood sugar level is alright or if you need to do damage control. If you leave this situation unchecked and allow this pro-inflammatory factor to persist in your body, you may be putting yourself at risk for diseases like diabetes, strokes, heart disease, degenerative neurological diseases, autoimmune diseases and even cancer, just to name a few. So definitely, ask your doctor for an evaluation if you haven't already done so.

2. Keep your body weight within normal range: Many diseases are linked to the fact that you are at higher risk for them if your body weight and fat percentage are above normal. I agree that we do not all fit into one body size mold and that's alright. But if you are measured at above the normal range, unfortunately the studies suggest potential worsening of risk factors for many diseases. So, while you may not be sure if your weight and body fat percentage is in the healthy range or not, your doctor would know if you go in for a check-up and ask him or her whether you need to be concerned about your weight. Since I haven't met you myself, I will leave that determination up to your doctor. But the main take away point here is to ask your physician about this issue so you know where to go in your plan for your diet and exercise regimen.

spring - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark **3. Make time to exercise daily:** Yes, I said daily...but no, I don't mean it has to be on a treadmill or elliptical machine. I just mean that you need to make an effort to move every day, whether it's walking stairs at work or walking around with your dog or your spouse before or after work. The fact is that as long as you move daily, your body will always be healthier than if you

didn't. So, get that idea out of your head that "exercise" has to be in tight spandex and running on a stationary machine. Exercise just means that you should move your body every day and I don't mean just your feet when you're driving or your fingers when you are working on your computer. You need to get up and walk or run or bike or dance or yes, basically move your entire body as much as you can during the day. Ultimately, our bodies are made for moving and studies show that those who exercise are generally healthier and have less health issues. Oh, by the way, did I mention that it's a great stress-reliever? Yup, you should definitely start taking those stairs so you can feel less stressed at work.

4. Make sleep a priority: Sleep is the time when our body heals. Our hectic schedules these days and the less than optimized foods we consume put our bodies through a lot of stress. So, if you don't make time to sleep, how do you expect your body to heal? So, don't just pencil in your time to sleep, make it a priority. If you get enough sleep, you will be more efficient at getting your work and to-do list done the next day. So, don't just set your alarm to get up in the morning. You should set an alarm to signal the time when you should be going to bed so that you can put away your computer or turn off your TV...it's about time you made sleep the sacred time that it should be.

5. Make sure that your meals at least 40-50% vegetables: Vegetables are Mother Nature's medicine for us. Within vegetables, you can find all sorts of vitamins and minerals. Many herbs that used to be incorporated into cooking all the time are now being used in capsule form for medicinal purposes. So, if your meals are about 40-50% vegetables, you are essentially healing your body through your foods without even having to try too hard. If you are not a big fan of vegetables, you should try out other vegetables you've never tried before. I can't tell you how many times I hear from patients in my clinic of integrative medicine in San Jose CA that they had no idea that they would like brussel sprouts or zucchini or squash or kale, just to name a few. So, this Spring, be adventurous...don't just hike in Mother Nature's backyard, you should eat some of your great vegetable creations as well.

To me, these are the most important factors to work on in regards to your health. The reason for that is because if you worked on all these and were able to achieve your goals, simply by focusing on these factors, many of your other issues like your cholesterol or allergies or gut issues may also improve. These are, in my opinion, some of the fundamental factors that affect our health. If you can get yourself squared away on these top 5 issues, your body will surely thank you.

Dr. Julie T. Chen is board-certified in internal medicine and fellowship-trained and board-certified in integrative medicine. She has her own medical practice in San Jose, Calif. She is the medical director of corporation wellness at several Silicon Valley-based corporations, is on several medical expert panels of Web sites and nonprofit organizations, is a recurring monthly columnist for several national magazines, and has been featured in radio, newspaper, and magazine interviews. She incorporates various healing modalities into her practice including, but is not limited to, medical acupuncture, Chinese scalp acupuncture, clinical hypnotherapy, strain-counterstrain osteopathic manipulations, and biofeedback. To learn more, visit www.makinghealthyez.com.

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