

[IMAGE]

Six Steps to a Healthier You

By Drs. Ronald Klatz and Robert Goldman

Today, we know more than ever about how our bodies deteriorate over time and our vulnerability to diseases. Health practitioners are rapidly adapting this new knowledge to promote health and longevity. In fact, the concept of maximizing a person's health span - the number of years living in a vital, fit, and robust fashion - remains a founding and essential principle of anti-aging strategies. The "healthier you" is all about you at your physical, mental, and emotional best. Here are six steps you can take to help unleash better health, and in doing so, put yourself squarely on the path to achieving maximum health span.

Step 1. Beat the Leading Cause of Death

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States, responsible for 26 percent of all deaths.

Finding natural ways to reduce your risk of developing heart disease can give you the most years with the people you love.

Six Steps to a Healthier You - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark **Increased Vitamin D Levels May Reduce Cardiovascular Disease and Diabetes**

Previous studies have suggested a potential association between abnormal vitamin D levels and cardiometabolic disorders including heart disease, diabetes, and metabolic syndrome. Johanna Parker, from the University of Warwick (United Kingdom), and colleagues conducted a systematic literature review of studies examining vitamin D (specifically 25-hydroxy vitamin D [25OHD] as an indicator of vitamin D status) and cardiometabolic disorders. The team reviewed 28 studies involving a total of 99,745 subjects across a variety of ethnic groups and including both men and women.

The studies revealed a significant association between high levels of vitamin D and a decreased risk of developing cardiovascular disease (33 percent lower risk compared to people with low levels of vitamin D), type 2 diabetes (55 percent risk reduction) and metabolic syndrome (51 percent risk reduction). "High levels of vitamin D among middle-age and elderly populations are associated with a substantial decrease in cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and metabolic syndrome," said the researchers, who also noted: "If the relationship proves to be causal, interventions targeting vitamin D deficiency in adult populations could

potentially slow the current epidemics of cardiometabolic disorders."

Source: "Levels of Vitamin D and Cardiometabolic Disorder: Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis." *Maturitas*, March 2010.

Step 2. Slash Inflammation

While acute inflammation is an important way for the body to rid itself of infectious agents, chronic inflammation is often an unhealthy situation that is associated with heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, arthritis and a host of other age-related debilitating diseases.

Yoga lady - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark **Yoga Reduces Inflammation Implicated in Stress and Aging**

Janice Kiecolt-Glaser from Ohio State University and colleagues assembled a group of 50 women, average age 41 years, and divided them into two groups: "novices," who had either taken yoga classes or who practiced at home with yoga videos for no more than 6 to 12 sessions; and "experts," who had practiced yoga one or two times weekly for at least two years and at least twice weekly for the past year. The team asked each of the women to attend three study sessions held at the university, before which each participant completed questionnaires and psychological tests to gauge mood and anxiety levels.

During the study period, blood samples were taken several times, and participants were deliberately stressed by physical discomfort or mental challenges before performing the yoga session, walking on a treadmill set at a slow pace (.5 miles per hour), or watching boring videos (control group). After examining the blood samples, the researchers determined that women labeled as "novices" had levels of the pro-inflammatory cytokine IL-6 that were 41 percent higher than those labeled "experts." The research team concluded: "The ability to minimize inflammatory responses to stressful encounters influences the burden that stressors place on an individual. If yoga dampens or limits stress-related changes, then regular practice could have substantial health benefits."

Source: "Stress, Inflammation and Yoga Practice." *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 2010.

Step 3. Engage the Body

Physical activity promotes a lean physique, of course, but studies have now identified that regular exercise also has a direct causal role in how long we can live.

Physical Activity in Midlife Helps Retain Overall Health Later in Life

In that physical activity is associated with reduced risks of chronic diseases and premature death, Qi Sun, from Harvard School of Public Health, and colleagues explored whether physical activity is also associated with improved overall health among those who survive to older ages. Analyzing data from 13,535 participants in the Nurses' Health Study, whereby the women reported their physical activity levels in 1986 (average age then: 60 years), the team found that women who survived to age 70 or older (10-plus years after the study began) were engaged in higher levels of physical activity at the beginning of the study and were less likely to have chronic diseases, heart surgery or any physical, cognitive or mental impairments.

"These data provide evidence that higher levels of midlife physical activity are associated with exceptional health status among women who survive to older ages and corroborate the potential role of physical activity in improving overall health," stated the researchers.

Source: "Physical Activity at Midlife in Relation to Successful Survival in Women at Age 70 Years or Older." Arch Intern Med, 2010.

Step 4. Excite the Brain

Like your biceps, triceps, etc., the brain is a muscle and must be positively stimulated in order to maintain at optimum performance.

Challenging the Brain Improves Cognitive Function

A large nationwide study by Brandeis University (Massachusetts) suggests that mental exercises aid cognitive skills. Margie Lachman and colleagues conducted the Midlife in the United States study, which assessed 3,343 men and women, ages 32 to 84 years, 40 percent of whom had at least a four-year college degree. Evaluating how the participants performed in two cognitive areas, verbal memory and executive function, the team found that those with higher education engaged in cognitive activities more often and performed better on the memory tests.

However, some subjects with lower education performed just as well; the researchers found that intellectual activities undertaken regularly made a difference. Specifically, among individuals with low education, those who engaged in reading, writing, attending lectures, and doing word games or puzzles once a week or more had memory scores similar to people with more education. "For those with lower education, engaging frequently in cognitive activities showed significant compensatory benefits for episodic memory, which has

promise for reducing social disparities in cognitive aging," noted the researchers.

Source: "Frequent Cognitive Activity Compensates for Education Differences in Episodic Memory." Amer Jnl of Geriatric Psych, January 2010.

couples - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark **Step 5. Maintain Healthy Relationships**

As social creatures, humans respond positively to interactions with others, and this engagement is now confirmed to boost health and well-being as we age.

Strong, Functioning Relationships Benefit Overall Health

In a survey of more than 3,000 men and women, ages 57 to 85 years, Linda J. Waite, from the University of Chicago, and colleagues discovered that seniors who maintain strong and functioning sexual and intimate relationships generally have better health and well-being. Data collected from the National Social Life, Health, and Aging Project (NSHAP), designed to examine the relationship between sexual behavior, sexual problems, and health among older women and men, also found that older men are more likely than women to have a partner, more likely to be sexually active with that partner, and tend to have more positive attitudes toward sex. By exploring the link between sexuality, health, well-being, and other dimensions of the lives of older adults, NSHAP researchers aim to present an optimistic view of sex and aging and how it translates into improved health as we age.

Source: "Sexuality: Measures of Partnerships, Practices, Attitudes, and Problems in the National Social Life, Health, and Aging Study." J Gerontol B Psychol Sci Soc Sci, November 2009.

Step 6. Stay Well-Informed

As the Greek philosopher Diogenes stated: "The only good is knowledge, and the only evil ignorance." Given today's health care climate, we each must serve as our own health advocate. Staying well-informed may indeed be the best medicine.

Majority of American Adults Rely on Internet for Health Information

In that an estimated 74 percent of adults in the U.S. use the Internet, the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) collected data on the use of health information technologies (HIT), or applications of information processing via computers that access, retrieve, store, or share health care information. The survey found that:

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- From January through June 2009, 51 percent of adults ages 18 to 64 said they had used the Internet to look up health information during the past 12 months.
- Over 3 percent of adults ages 18-64 had used an online chat group to learn about health topics in the past 12 months.
- Women were more likely than men to look up health information on the Internet (58.0 percent versus 43.4 percent, respectively), and were also more likely to use online chat groups to learn about health topics (4.1 percent versus 2.5 percent).

According to Cohen, et al., "the Internet has the potential to improve consumer health by facilitating communication between providers and patients, and among providers ... the Internet may become increasingly important as a source of health information for consumers."

Source: "Health Information Technology Use Among Men and Women Aged 18-64: Early Release of Estimates From the National Health Interview Survey, January-June 2009." National Center for Health Statistics, February 2010.

Take the Next Step Toward Lifelong Health

Six steps to a healthier you - how many are you participating in on a regular basis? Keep in mind, of course, that these aren't the only six ways to maximize your health, but they're a great place to start. There's never a bad time to sit down and assess your current health and what you can do to improve it, especially when some simple behavior and lifestyle modifications can have a profound impact on your life span. Talk to your doctor for more information.

Ronald Klatz, MD, is the president of the American Academy of Anti-Aging (www.worldhealth.net), a nonprofit organization dedicated to the prevention, detection and treatment of aging-related disease.

Robert Goldman, MD, is the chairman of the American Academy of Anti-Aging (www.worldhealth.net), a nonprofit organization dedicated to the prevention, detection and treatment of aging-related disease.

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