Stay Healthy: Practice Prevention

Medical advances and technology can detect diseases earlier than ever before and save lives, but making prevention a part of your everyday life is just as important.

"Practicing prevention can lower your risk for developing the most deadly chronic diseases: heart disease, diabetes, and cancer," says Tricia Trinité, MSPH, APRN, director of prevention dissemination and implementation for the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. "There's nothing mysterious about taking preventive action; it's really just a matter of making healthy choices on a daily basis."

Eat Nutritiously
Eating healthy foods in the right amounts can help you live a longer, healthier life.

Many illnesses and conditions—such as heart disease, obesity, high blood pressure, and diabetes—can be prevented or controlled by eating a healthy low-calorie and low-fat diet that includes at least five servings of fruits and vegetables every day, says Ms. Trinité.

Other dietary recommendations include eating more fiber and lean protein, such as chicken and fish, and less sodium, red meat, and sugar.

For specific information on how to improve your diet, ask your doctor and visit the National Cancer Institute's website, the American Heart Association's website, or the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Dietary Guidelines for Americans website.

Maintain a Healthy Weight
Being overweight increases your risk for heart disease, diabetes, cancer, and high blood pressure. To stay at a healthy weight, you need to balance the number of calories you eat with the number you burn off in physical activity. You can reach a healthy weight and stay there by eating right and being physically active.

Exercise Most Days
Physical activity can help prevent heart disease, obesity, high blood pressure, diabetes, some cancers, and mental health problems, such as depression.

QUICK TIP!

Do you want to kickstart your daily routine by adding healthy habits? You can start improving your overall health today with a variety of easy but impactful habits.

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"All kinds of physical activity, whether it's moderate or vigorous, will help you stay healthy," say Ms. Trinité. "It's a good idea to aim for at least moderate activity, such as brisk walking, bike riding, housecleaning, or playing with your children for 30 to 60 minutes most days of the week. Generally, the more active you are, the better you'll feel today and the healthier you'll become tomorrow."

If you've been sedentary, smoke, or have a chronic health condition, ask your health care provider how you should get started with an exercise program.

Stop Smoking
More than 440,000 Americans die each year from smoking and smoking-related causes. Smoking causes illnesses such as cancer, heart and lung disease, stroke, and problems during pregnancy.

"Quitting is hard, and most people try several times before they quit for good," says Ms. Trinité. "But when you're ready to quit, ask your doctor for advice on the best way for you."

Take Medicines Correctly
Always be sure you know important information about a medicine before you take it. This will help you get the full benefit of the drug. It also will help you avoid taking too much or too little, which can be dangerous.

Each prescription medication comes with an information sheet. Be sure to carefully read this sheet. If you have questions or aren't clear about anything on the sheet, check with your health care provider, nurse, or pharmacist.

Get Your Shots
You can prevent several serious diseases by getting immunized. Check with your health care provider to be sure you've had immunization for measles-mumps-rubella, tetanus-diphtheria, whooping cough, and influenza. If you are at risk for hepatitis A, B, or C, you should be immunized against them. People older than 65 should be immunized against pneumococcal pneumonia. Because of a resurgence of whooping cough (pertussis) in adults, a booster shot (in combination with diphtheria and tetanus) is now available for teens and adults.

Get Checked and Screened
Checkups and screening tests help find diseases or health problems early, when they're easier to treat and cure.

"Your doctor can help you decide which health screenings you should get and how often," says Ms. Trinité.

If you have a chronic condition, follow your health care provider's recommendations for regular checkups and screening exams; they are more important if you have a chronic condition.

Ask your health care provider if your screenings are up-to-date for blood pressure; cholesterol; diabetes; osteoporosis; and skin, breast, colorectal, cervical and prostate cancers. You can find a list of the recommended screening tests on the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force's website.

Healthy adults should also see a dentist once or twice a year and an eye doctor every one to three years. Adults with dental disease or chronic conditions, or those at high risk for specific diseases, should get more frequent exams as recommended by their provider.

For the best preventive care, you also should talk with your provider openly regarding your health concerns.