

The “Secret” Key to a Healthy, Long Life

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The best advice is usually information that has been touted for centuries. It seems as if every month new medical recommendations are broadcasted regarding what supplements to take, which antioxidant foods to eat, and which vaccinations to have or not have. Throughout history, health issues have been of foremost concern and thoughts on best practices have been shared by physicians and other intelligentsia. Benjamin Franklin is a good example of an impactful non-physician health advocate. Everyone knows his quotes: “An apple a day keeps the doctor away” and “An ounce of prevention is worth more than a pound of cure” and “Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise.” Mr. Franklin was a great supporter of the individual taking an active role in maintaining their own health.

The key to having a healthy, long life is relatively straightforward—take care of yourself. Eat healthy foods, get good sleep and exercise. The most important of all three is *exercise*. In fact, if one focuses only on exercise, the other two will be incorporated into one’s lifestyle automatically. Studies have shown that regular exercise improves sleep habits and motivates people to make smarter diet choices.

The average life expectancy of Americans is increasing; however, a lower quality of life is prevalent due to chronic illnesses. It’s not hard to find 85 year olds in the community. Some octogenarians are living very active lives, while others are quite sedentary with debilitating, chronic pain. The common denominator amongst the healthy people is almost universally that their activity level has remained significantly elevated throughout their lives, compared to their age-range peers. Many chronic pain problems can be prevented or minimized by making lifestyle changes earlier in life.

We should all plan for good physical health in the same way that we plan for our financial health. We put money aside for financial security in the form of retirement plans, investments, savings accounts, etc. The same planning and discipline should be applied to our physical health by maintaining a regular exercise program. The best example is people who are in their 60s, 70s, and 80s and above remaining active—swimming, running, biking and walking. Most of them aren’t athletes who have been exercising for years; it is something that they now choose to do in order to improve their chances of a healthy and active older age. They are making it a priority to fund their “health bank.”

It’s never too late to start investing in your physical health and strengthening your body. The really good news is that even small bursts of exercise can improve your health. Studies have shown that people who live in two story homes have better cardiovascular health and live longer than those who don’t. The energy it takes to climb a flight of stairs exercises the heart enough to keep it fit, if done on a regular basis.

A good fitness plan doesn’t have to be a burden and should be something that you actually look forward to. Start with small goals and build on them. If you don’t currently have an exercise routine, start with 15-20 minutes a day, twice a week, doing something you enjoy. It can be as simple as taking a walk, but be sure to quicken the pace or include hills. Maximum benefit occurs when you increase your heart rate or your breathing rate. Work towards a long term goal of exercise 30 minutes a day, five days a week. If you can find a friend to exercise with or share your milestones with, you’ll be even more motivated to succeed.

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