

## Making Healthy Choices: Recommendations for Healthy Living

There are choices to be made every day, some more important than others. However, every choice we make affects our lives, and sometimes the lives of others, in some way. By making smart decisions, we can **choose** to lead healthier lifestyles.

*Try these 10 tips to help make those “difficult” choices a bit easier:*

### 1. Eat a sensible diet

A healthy diet that includes more fresh foods and fiber (fruits and vegetables) and fewer fatty foods (sweets, fast food, chips, and other fried foods) can improve your health by leaps and bounds.<sup>1</sup> Visit [www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov) to check out the United States Department of Agriculture’s revised food pyramid for serving suggestions.

### 2. Engage in physical activity

Speaking of leaps and bounds, get moving. Physical activity, at any level, is beneficial to your overall health and can help ward off life-threatening diseases like heart attack and stroke. Make taking a walk part of your daily routine, take the stairs instead of the elevator, go swimming, or even dance.<sup>1</sup>

### 3. Quit smoking

Tobacco use is the single most preventable cause of death and disease in the United States. The list of why smoking is bad for you is a long one and includes chronic lung disease, coronary heart disease, stroke, and different types of cancers. Just read the label.<sup>2</sup>

### 4. Reduce stress

Stress is hard to define because it means different things to different people; however, it is clear that most stress is a negative feeling rather than a positive feeling. We all have different levels of stress in our lives; the key is to find out how best to reduce the amount of stressful situations we experience or learn how to cope with them better. Some people exercise to relieve stress, while some just go sit in the grass, read, or play with their pets.<sup>3</sup>

### 5. Stay hydrated

Our bodies need fluids. Water makes up about 55% to 75% of our bodies. We lose about 2 to 4 cups of water every day just by breathing! In addition to tap and bottled water, the foods we eat and the beverages we drink can provide a large portion of what we need on a daily basis. Fluids can come from juice, lemonade, iced tea, milk, soups, lettuce, cucumbers, oranges and other fresh fruits, and should be consumed throughout the day.<sup>4</sup>

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**6. Sleep**

Did you realize that sleep boosts your immune system? Helps you look better? And increases your concentration? If you have trouble sleeping, try going to bed at the same time every night so that it becomes routine. Abstain from alcohol, caffeine, and cigarettes for at least 3 hours before bed. Try a warm drink to help soothe and relax you. It is not recommended that you count sheep as this will actually stimulate your brain!<sup>5</sup>

**7. Avoid excessive alcohol consumption**

Alcohol is a central nervous system depressant. Excessive drinking of alcohol can lead to cancer, liver disease, and alcoholism. Again, think in terms of moderation. Based on current dietary guidelines, moderate drinking for women is defined as an average of 1 drink or less per day. Moderate drinking for men is defined as an average of 2 drinks per day.<sup>6</sup>

**8. Buckle up**

Seat belts save over 10,000 lives in America every year and are the most effective means of reducing fatalities and serious injuries in traffic accidents. If you ride a bicycle, wearing a helmet reduces the risk of head injury by 85%. And remember, NEVER drink alcohol and drive any vehicle!<sup>2</sup>

**9. Wash your hands regularly**

Hand washing is one of the best steps you can take to stay healthy by stopping the spread of germs. One study of school children found that those who washed their hands four times a day had fewer sick days due to respiratory illness and upset stomach.<sup>2</sup>

**10. Think positively**

Researchers have found that the health benefits of thinking positively include decreased stress, a stronger immune system, a reduced risk of coronary artery disease, and living longer!<sup>7</sup>

***If you have difficulties dealing with some of these issues on your own, please know that resources are available through your healthcare provider. Referrals can be made to the appropriate professionals who can provide additional support and guidance when situations are difficult to overcome.***

## References

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