

Splurge - Volume 3 Issue 5 (May 2008)

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SUMMER HEALTH TIPS: FUN IN THE SUN

Summer in Kansas, is filled with hot days, warm nights, barbeques and tons of outdoor activities. The summer months are perfect for toning up, getting more physically fit and connecting with friends. However, as we embrace all of our summer pursuits, it's helpful to keep in mind some of the finer points.

1. Hydrate, hydrate, hydrate!

As the days become warmer, and we become more active, keeping adequately hydrated becomes even more crucial. What constitutes adequate hydration? At least eight 12-oz glasses of water per day. Sodas, colas, and ice teas are all refreshing but do not count in this equation. Energy drinks and coffee are filled with caffeine – an infamous diuretic – which decrease the body's hydration levels. Finally, though the margaritas at your friends' garden party may be delicious, use good judgment. Alcohol strips the body of important electrolytes, and hydrating qualities. A good tip when drinking in the summer is to have a glass or two of water between each drink, and to try to keep the alcoholic beverages to a minimum.

Bonus: Drinking water has beautifying effects as well. Your skin feels softer, your hair is shinier, and your body is able to perform better when playing sports or even moving through your workday.

2. Make sure you don't OVER-do it!

Many of us spend the winter months in near-hibernation; awaiting the weather changes that allow us to make ourselves swimsuit-ready. But if you are not a regular exerciser, or have any history of heart problems or diabetes, check with your physician before embarking on any new exercise program, especially one that requires much outdoor activity. Most people must work up to a regular exercise routine, and a physician can help you find a plan that works for you. Every year people die from over-exertion in the heat. Don't aggravate a pre-existing condition: staying cool and hydrated during exercise is crucial.

3. Stretch those muscles!

Stretching before and after any sport, like tennis or baseball, can help reduce injury, and increase flexibility. According to many physicians, including the Mayo clinic, activities such as yoga are excellent for increasing strength and flexibility in a stress-reducing, safe, fun way. Increasingly, physicians are seeing benefit from yoga and meditative exercise in the form of stress-reduction. Swimming in the pool – the penultimate summer activity – is also a great place to work out with little stress on joints. Again, however, drinking water before, during and after exercise is a must in the heat.

3. The sun: friend or foe?

For years now, doctors have advocated reducing exposure to the sun. Researchers have found, however, that there are increased health benefits to limited exposure to the sun. Vitamin D is excellent, and there are increasingly safe ways to spend time in the sun without great risk to the skin. The skin is the body's largest organ, and must be treated with deliberate care. A sun burn is nothing to take lightly, and be sure to enlist a health professional's care if the burn is severe. Precautionary measures are certainly the best way to go: slather on the sunscreen (at least SPF 15), and make sure to reapply often when swimming or exercising. Often patients avoid sunscreen on a cloudy day, or when they won't be in the sun very long. Not only can you avoid life-threatening skin cancer by applying sunscreen daily, but, by applying lotion or makeup with sunscreen on your face, you can minimize wrinkles and signs of premature aging.

4. Take advantage of the ripeness!

The bounty of ripe summer vegetables and fruit is one of my favorite aspects of this time of year. Watermelon, strawberries, blueberries, tomatoes, fresh red bell peppers... *all* of these are high in antioxidants, providing excellent nutrition and extra protection for your heart. Don't just put those peaches in a pie – try a fresh fruit salad for dessert instead. Not only will you find it refreshing but you can whittle your waist down easily, just by eating what's in season.

5. Happiness: good for the heart!

Studies increasingly show that those who find happiness in their lives, find greater quality of life, greater longevity, and decreased cardiovascular risk. Why so many physiological benefits, not just psychological? The bottom line is that happy people smile more, relax more, and exercise their laughs and their bodies in a more balanced, healthy way. So, summer is the perfect time to work on your heart: incorporate more joy in life, make some new friends, and smile. Get to know the child within: spend time blowing bubbles, or helping a friend in need, or coaching the little league team.

Summer is an excellent time for new beginnings. Identify what makes your life better and make it a habit. As a physician, I love to see my patients use this time to pick up a new hobby, exercise a little more, and smile a lot: one of my greatest rewards!

Listen to Dr. Galichia's Radio Show – "Take Your Health to Heart" every Saturday from 11 AM to Noon on 1480 KQAM in Wichita. If you have any medically related questions, please call us during the LIVE broadcast at 1-800-TALK-997 or 1-800-825-5997. You can also e-mail your questions anytime to

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