

Splurge - Volume 5 Issue 4 (April 2010)

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FIVE THINGS YOU CAN DO TO IMPROVE YOUR HEALTH

Every day patients ask me what they can do to improve their health. I work with them to solve problems, investigate symptoms and manage their heart health. We work together as a clinical team to help make our patients' lives more enjoyable, longer and more satisfying.

Though there are individual differences in what each patient brings, there are certain behaviors we can all benefit from, regardless of age or circumstance. Below are just a few to get started.

PUT DOWN THE SMOKES

More easily said than done for long-time smokers, I know, but the health risks are way too great to ignore this one. The incidence of cardiovascular disease, stroke, diabetes, early death, emphysema and an array of deadly cancers, vastly increases with smoking. Beyond that, smoking is addictive, expensive and quite soon, something you can't legally do in a bar in Wichita. There have been numerous studies over the years showing a dramatic change in life expectancy and overall health after long-time smokers quit. If you need help quitting (which most people do), please visit with your doctor about it or try a smoking cessation program. In future articles I will be speaking more about smoking, and ways to reduce or quit, just in time for the smoking ban.

GET THE FACTS

When it comes to your health, I believe in knowledge and action. Every person should have recent knowledge of their weight, blood pressure and cholesterol – including the LDL and HDL numbers. If we bring more consciousness to our bodies and our routines, we can see where we can improve or do better for our bodies. Many patients are unsure just what medications they take, or what interactions those medications may have with food, alcohol, or vitamins or other substances. This information is crucial to anyone wanting to track and protect his or her health. I advocate keeping a health journal, with the above numbers, nutritional intake and feeling experienced day by day.

GET MOVING

The statistics on obesity and sedentary lifestyles in this country are staggering. Even politicians and celebrities are weighing in on combating obesity in America. Overweight people, with poor nutrition, lacking regular exercise, tend to be significantly more prone to heart disease, stroke, diabetes, metabolic syndrome, lung disorders – even depression. Speak with your health care professional if you're starting an exercise program. If you're already exercising regularly, make sure to include strength training, flexibility exercises and cardio to keep your heart beating strongly. I always find it helps to have an exercise goal that's fun: a charity walk, a swim meet, a tennis tournament. Exercise can and should be fun. Moving your body raises serotonin levels too, which elevates mood and lowers anxiety.

DON'T WORRY, BE HAPPY

Again, easier said than done, especially when external influences seem to take over the day. In these moments, stress can overwhelm us to the extreme points of panic attack, heart rhythm problems and possible cardiac events. There are many studies on the detriments of chronic, long-term stress and the toll it can take on your body, heart and relationships. I advocate meditation, prayer, realizing that tomorrow is another day and things may look much different. In the moment you are feeling overwhelmed, take a moment to find a quiet place, close your eyes and take several slow deep breaths. When you open your eyes, smile. Take that smile to the next person you see and observe if your stress diminishes. In time, this practice helps. If your anxiety or depression symptoms seem out of your control, see a physician for help. The symptoms of stress can present in many ways, but many are quite manageable.

GET SOME SLEEP

Almost weekly it seems there's more research published about the benefits of regular sleep. Most studies now advocate between seven and eight hours for adults. For new parents, and those who work nights, or people like me who have to be on call many nights, that is a tall order. However, heart disease diminishes, energy rises and many people report feeling stress reduction. Sleep cycles are so important that if there are any significant changes in your sleep (can't sleep through the night, insomnia, sleeping too much and waking up fatigued, etc.), please be sure to let your doctor know right away, as this could be a symptom of something more serious.

Every day is the right day to start caring for your self and your body, and the more conscious we take care of our health, the longer and more satisfying our days, our relationships, our sex lives, our work – the closer we get to the joy of being alive.

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 **GalichiaRadio@Galichia.com**. We would love to hear from you!!!

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