

Five Choices to Help You Stay Healthy

This is a summary of five major choices that you can make to help stay healthy. The main benefit of these lifestyle choices is that in the future you are less likely to develop heart disease, stroke, diabetes, liver problems, lung problems, and certain cancers.

What can I do to help stay healthy?

You should not smoke

If you smoke, stopping smoking is often the single most effective thing that you can do to reduce your risk of future illness. The risk to health falls rapidly as soon as you stop smoking (but takes a few years before the increased risk reduces completely). If you find it hard to stop smoking, then see your practice nurse for help. Medication may be advised to help you to stop.

Do some regular physical activity

Anything that gets you mildly out of breath and a little sweaty is fine - for example, jogging, heavy gardening, swimming, cycling, etc. A brisk walk each day is what many people do - and that is fine. However, it is thought that the more vigorous the activity, the better. To gain most benefit, you should do at least 30 minutes of physical activity on most days. Two shorter bursts are thought to be just as good - for example, two 15-minute bouts of activity at different times in a day.

Eat a healthy diet

Briefly, a healthy diet means:

- AT LEAST five portions, and ideally 7-9 portions, of a *variety* of fruit and vegetables per day.
- THE BULK OF MOST MEALS should be starch-based foods (such as cereals, wholegrain bread, potatoes, rice, pasta), plus fruit and vegetables.
- NOT MUCH fatty food, such as fatty meats, cheeses, full-cream milk, fried food, butter, etc. Use low-fat, monounsaturated or polyunsaturated spreads.
- INCLUDE 2-3 portions of fish per week, at least one of which should be 'oily' (such as herring, mackerel, sardines, kippers, pilchards, salmon, or *fresh* tuna).
- If you eat meat it is best to eat lean meat, or poultry such as chicken.
- If you do fry, choose a vegetable oil such as sunflower, rapeseed or olive.
- Try not to add salt to food, and limit foods which are salty.

Try to lose weight if you are overweight or obese

You don't need to get to a perfect weight. If you are overweight you can gain great health benefits by losing 5-10% of your weight. This is often about 5-10 kg. (10 kg is about one and a half stone.)

Don't drink too much alcohol

Men should drink no more than 21 units of alcohol per week, no more than four units in any one day, and have at least two alcohol-free days a week. Women should drink no more than 14 units of alcohol per week, no more than three units in any one day, and have at least two alcohol-free days a week. Pregnant women should not drink at all. One unit is in about half a pint of normal strength beer, or two thirds of a small glass of wine, or one small pub measure of spirits.

Do you want more detail?

See your practice nurse if you want further advice or help on any of the above. Also, there is a more detailed leaflet for each of the topics listed above. There is also another separate leaflet called [Preventing cardiovascular diseases](#), which is more detailed.

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