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Four Cornerstones of Good Health

Today's subject is the four cornerstones of good health. Many people come into my office confused about the reliable components of healthy living. A phrase we naturopaths sometimes use to describe these people is "the worried well." These are people who are well, who display no symptoms of illness, but who don't understand what factors create good health, and who worry that they may not be doing it right.

If you fall into this category, I want to help you define what good health is. The World Health Organization defines health as "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being." Good health is not merely an absence of disease or infirmities. This definition includes a positive range of health well beyond the absence of sickness.

The issue of health and disease usually comes down to individual responsibility. In other words, given two alternatives, we have to choose the healthy over the less healthy one. If you want to be healthy make healthy choices.

Far too many of our health choices and practices are based on habit and marketing hype – and there is a lot of hype out there. Many of my patients are very confused about what vitamins are important or what the right diet is.

So the first step in achieving and maintaining health is taking personal responsibility. The second step is to take the actions that will achieve your health goals.

The four cornerstone of good health are:

1. A healthy lifestyle, which includes exercise, healthy habits, and sleep.
2. A health promoting diet
3. A sense of well-being created by a positive and cheerful attitude
4. Supplements

In this article I will give you a brief overview of these cornerstones. In my next column I'll go into more detail.

Your diet should provide excellent nutrition. It should consist of whole grains, lots of fresh fruits and vegetables, and moderate amounts of protein. Drink lots of non-caffienated liquid – six to eight glasses a day. Decrease your coffee and sugar intake and your consumption of processed foods.

Next – exercise. I can't help but get a chuckle when people tell me, "I'm glad I have a dog because it means I get out to walk." We will definitely walk our dogs – but what about walking ourselves? We are also animals and we need to get our heart rates up every other day to get an aerobic effect. There are many benefits to exercise. One of the obvious ones is that you just feel better.

Reduce your stress. We are a very stressed society. I have met very few people in my practice over the years who are satisfied with their lives. They are on the edge of pushing to do more all the time. Simplify your life. Do fewer things. Find enjoyment in everyday life. Take time to smell the roses – and recognize that you have control over your time and over what you do with your life. I notice that people say, “I don’t have time to exercise.” Some of those people are retired! You need to know that you do have control of your time.

Abdominal breathing can help reduce stress. Listening to relaxation tapes can also help. Check in with yourself daily and find out how you are doing. What about your emotional well-being? Are you happy with your life? List all those things that stand between you and your goal of being happy. Check them off as you overcome them. If you need to do counseling over family of origin issues or if you need help modifying your lifestyle, give yourself a gift and do that.

We all need a few supplements. I do think that our food has been modified and sometimes it travels great distances to arrive in our supermarkets so a few supplements are useful. Take a good multi-vitamin; add essential fatty acids like flax oil. If you are a woman over 40 take a calcium/magnesium supplement. Anti-oxidants help counteract pollution and are useful for everyone. Vitamin C and E are also useful. Add a yearly detoxification regime to optimize your health and extend your quantity and quality of life.

Sleep is also a very important part of a healthy regime. For some reason we have decided that less sleep is better. This is not necessarily true. Studies show that between eight and 10 hours of sleep is good. Many of us get seven hours or less – we are always pushing ourselves and feeling tired and wondering why. Patients have come in and told me that their immune systems are down. We try everything but it isn’t until we add the magic component of sleep that their immune systems strengthen and begin to fight off infections.

So this is an overview – stay tuned for more details.

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