

WELLNESS: Habits That Lead to Health and Happiness

Patricia J. Sulak, MD

Introduction to a *new* column about healthy lifestyle issues that can help reduce the risk of disease.

The World Health Organization defines health as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.

Question: Is ANYONE out there in a “state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being”???

I sure am not, but I am dedicating the remainder of my career to pursuing habits that can help me and my patients get to a healthier state. When I was made an endowed professor in 2008, I decided on a new health care focus. Although eliminating monthly menstruation, managing the perimenopause, and addressing the problems of adolescent sexual activity had been areas of interest, I decided to pursue the major cause of health problems in America today: self-induced disease.

Despite countless lifesaving advances in medicine from improved diagnostic testing to miracle medications to surgical wonders, our waiting rooms are filled with patients who are not healthy, not happy, and even depressed, often with numerous self-inflicted medical conditions. Many are complicating their lives and harming their well-being with numerous unhealthy behaviors, including a sedentary lifestyle, dietary indiscretion, substance abuse, and self-induced stress.

These health risk behaviors can lead to cardiovascular disease, which is the #1 killer, and lung cancer, the #1 cancer killer.

And, the truth is, we as health care professionals are often not good examples of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle. It's a fact that most disease states can be improved, and sometimes even prevented, with a healthy lifestyle. If I am diagnosed with breast cancer tomorrow, I am going to be able to tackle it a lot better if I am physically, emotionally, and spiritually intact.

But, the problem is manifold.

Number 1: What is healthy? With the promotion of miracle supplements, weight-loss wonder programs, and even colonics, what is safe, no less healthy? We, and our patients, are bombarded with health promotions on TV, the Internet, and numerous printed venues promising quick, easy cures for anything that ails us.

Number 2: How do I institute healthy habits when I don't have the time or money? It seems that every minute of our day is occupied with obligations, because we've overextended ourselves. With the current economic climate, we have financial constraints as well.

Number 3: Even if we do make changes that foster health and happiness, how do we maintain them and avoid becoming dan-

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gerously diverted off the path? Health care professionals and patients need the facts on components of a healthy lifestyle that can improve the quality and quantity of their lives, and ways to sustain them.

What are some of these lifesaving habits? That will be the focus of our new column in *The Female Patient* entitled "WELLNESS: Habits That Lead to Health and Happiness," to be found in the Lifestyle and Health department.

In our first column, I will take on an important component of healthy living: Making Movement Mandatory (doesn't that sound better than exercise?!). With our technologically advanced society, we have become too sedentary, necessitating that we become creative in finding enjoyable ways to put healthy movement into our daily lives.

You don't have to go to the gym. I will discuss components of a healthy movement

program and the American Heart Association guidelines for reducing risk of chronic disease, preventing weight gain, and losing weight. In future columns, I will also discuss other important lifestyle issues, including critiquing our caloric consumption, addressing addictions, managing time and money, the power of forgiveness, and spiritual connection.

There are many reasons people make changes in their lives. Often, they are in physical or emotional pain, or want to avoid pain that can result from continued unhealthy habits. Sometimes, they just need correct information to inspire them to make changes. Hopefully this column will give you information and inspiration that will aid you and your patients toward a lifestyle that fosters a healthier/happier you.

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