

THE Wellness Minute

Wellness Series: 3.4
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Forever Young

What Lifestyle Habits Have Been Shown to Increase Life Span?

Most of us like to think of ourselves as young: young in heart at least, if not actually young in years. But is it possible to stay "forever young" in terms of health and wellness? Here are two key tips. They may seem obvious, but the power is in actually implementing these tips consistently over time.

Tip #1: Eat less. Each person has his or her own caloric balancing point beyond which extra food will be retained as fat. If your average daily calorie consumption is right around this critical value, all the energy in the food you eat will be used to support your physical functioning. But extra calories will not be burned up and this unused energy will be stored as fat. Over time, increasing fat stores frequently lead to chronic disease such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and cancer. So with respect to long-term health, it's a very good idea to avoid overeating. Of course, we want to have fun, too, but that's what a "free food day" is for. If you eat within your caloric range on six days of the week, the seventh can be a "free day" when you can eat whatever you want. Such a system works very well for ongoing optimal weight management (which, of course, means ongoing health and well-being, contributing to our notion of "forever young").

Tip #2: Exercise more. Did you ever see a gymnast, competitive swimmer, or



professional dancer who didn't look absolutely terrific? These young men and women are in such good shape owing to the high volume of exercise they do every week. Do you know an older adult who was on a high school or college gymnastics team or was a professional dancer long ago? Isn't that person still really healthy and fit? Such long-term fitness results from a lifelong habit of exercise. The very good news is that even if you haven't exercised in many, many years, you can still derive benefit for years to come from starting to exercise, right now.

You get fit by doing the work. Not all at once of course, but gradually, steadily, building up strength and endurance, starting right where you are. The secret is to begin. And after not too long a time, you'll find that your new habit of exercise is providing all kinds of surprising benefits, including deeper, more restful sleep and increased energy and exuberance. Not to mention weight loss and a slimmer waistline. These two tips, eating less and exercising more, have been known for decades.

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