



HEALTHQUEST

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FOCUSING ON
MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES AND CONCERNS.

OPENING DOORS WITH 5 KEYS TO HIGH-LEVEL WELLNESS

High-level wellness is an uplifting lifestyle you can design to enjoy the highest degree of health possible. There are five keys that will unlock the doors to your goal, but no one key is enough. All five must be used together to reach your final destination - high-level wellness.

KEY NUMBER ONE:

TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR HEALTH

Key number one is the most important of the five. Unless you are prepared to take charge of your life, and actively pursue a health-enhancing lifestyle, the other four keys will be worthless.

It's no secret that many people neglect or give up to others, responsibility for their own well-being. They drift along, engaging in high-risk behaviours, and when something goes wrong, hope their doctor can put it right.

By taking responsibility for your health, and avoiding high-risk behaviours, you can minimize the risk of physical problems.

Two typical high-risk behaviours are smoking and alcohol use. The negative effects of both are well known. By refraining from high-risk behaviours like these, you'll not only feel more alive, but also increase your chances of living a longer life.

KEY NUMBER TWO:

BE AWARE OF NUTRITION

One of the most serious health problems in North America is over-consumption combined with under-nutrition. In fact, five of the ten leading causes of death have been identified as diet related. Obviously then, it pays to be aware of nutrition.

Being aware of nutrition simply means choosing food wisely, and maintaining a sensible diet pattern. Unfortunately, with many people, this is more the exception than the rule.

Why? Eating properly is usually a little extra trouble, may cost more, involves improved nutritional awareness, and usually takes additional time. But, as the saying goes, "You are what you eat." Surely no sensible person wants to be a collection of junk and otherwise unhealthy foods!

Here are a few tips to improve your nutrition:

- ▲ Make an effort to obtain natural foods. Fresh fruits and vegetables are far more nutritious than canned or frozen.
- ▲ Vary your diet. Try different foods of all types - fruits and vegetables, grains and cereals, dairy products and meats/poultry/fish.
- ▲ Avoid food additives. You can start by reading labels. Known and suspected carcinogenic elements are present in many foods as artificial colors, additives and preservatives.
- ▲ Cut back on your sugar consumption. Sugar is the king when it comes to empty calories. And empty calories are worse than no food at all because they take the place of calories that do provide nutritional value.
- ▲ Reduce your salt consumption. Most North Americans use two to three times as much salt per day as they need. And too much salt in the diet leads to high blood pressure and increased risk of heart attack, stroke and kidney disease.
- ▲ Reduce tea and coffee consumption. Both contain caffeine, which, in sufficient quantity, can cause heartburn, bleeding ulcers, and other related disorders.
- ▲ Prepare food to minimize fat and maximize vitamins. Bake or broil instead of frying. Trim fat from meat, and skin from chicken. Steam vegetables using only as much water as needed, and cook for as short a time as possible to preserve vitamins.

KEY NUMBER THREE:

PRACTICE STRESS MANAGEMENT

It has been scientifically proven that long-term stress, left unmanaged, is linked to many diseases. Migraine headaches, peptic ulcers, heart attack, hypertension, and emotional problems are a few of the most common.

In today's fast-paced world it is virtually impossible to avoid all stress; instead, we have to learn to cope with it. And the best way to cope with stress is to find some skill, activity or technique that helps you to relax.

Deep breathing, aerobic exercise, listening to music, gardening - all of these are used by people to get rid of stress and restore peace of mind. What works for one person may not work for another. The idea is to discover what works for you, then make it part of your daily regimen.

There's also one other important idea to keep in mind when you're coping with stress. Remember: Stress is not really outside you. It is

your evaluation of a situation. Therefore, you have the power to control and manage your own stress response.

Also, by anticipating stressful situations before they happen and planning your response, you can often substantially reduce the amount of physical and emotional stress you will have to face when, and if they arrive.

KEY NUMBER FOUR: FIT FITNESS INTO YOUR LIFE

It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of physical fitness. And yet, it has been estimated that approximately 45 percent of North Americans never exercise! No matter how much you practice self-responsibility, are sensitive to nutrition, and work at managing stress, you cannot be healthy if you are not physically fit.

The benefits of being physically fit are many. Here are just a few: lower or lowered heart rate, blood pressure, percentage of body fat, stress level, cholesterol and fats in the blood; reduced joint stiffness; and stronger muscles which better support the skeleton and thus improve circulation.

What activity is good for getting you into shape? Just about any that gets your heart pumping faster and lungs breathing deeper. Jogging and running, biking, swimming, tennis, hiking and brisk walking - you can probably name at least half a dozen more.

But don't think of improving your fitness as a crash program. Take it slow. Find an activity that you enjoy, one that is distracting. Soon you'll be so caught up, you'll forget you're really exercising.

Exercise is also a way of getting in touch with nature, yourself, and others. And, don't forget that a little activity goes a long way. Even just two or three 30-minute sessions per week will make a difference you can see and feel.

KEY NUMBER FIVE: BE SENSITIVE TO YOUR ENVIRONMENT

Your environment consists of three aspects - physical, social, and personal. To achieve a lifestyle of true well-being, you should become aware of how the physical and social parts of your environment affect you. As well, you should also deliberately structure your personal environment.

The air you breathe, city or town in which you live, your neighbourhood and home - these components of your physical and social environments influence both your bodily and emotional health.

It goes without saying that it is best to avoid areas in which carbon monoxide, lead or other chemical levels are high or where there is a constant din of traffic and industrial noise. And if you feel trapped in a "concrete jungle," remember, you have the power to change things. There are always alternatives.

Your office, home, and leisure places make up your personal environment. Shaping these spaces to enhance your well-being is what structuring your personal environment is all about.

One way to start is by making a list of what upsets you during the day, what distracts, interrupts or prevents you from doing something constructive in any of the other four dimensions of well-being we have discussed.

Next, deliberately go about altering your personal environment to eliminate the obstruction, so that you can add the new positive value to your daily routine. This way, you're running things, they're not running you.

You now possess the five keys to high-level wellness. Perhaps it would be a good idea just to restate them one more time:

- ▲ Take responsibility for your health
- ▲ Be aware of nutrition
- ▲ Practice stress management
- ▲ Fit fitness into your life
- ▲ Be sensitive to your environment

All in all, these are some of the steps to take to achieve high-level wellness. Now, take the next steps.

Are you ready to make that change? For any reason, has your doctor insisted that you quit a bad habit, start an exercise program, improve or change your diet or make any other changes in your life?

It is always a good idea to speak with a professional counsellor, who can help you to initiate your new lifestyle practices. The EAP counsellors can get you started with the right services in the proper order. Our counsellors will also be there to help you follow through on your commitment, by offering continued encouragement, and to answer questions that may arise along the way.

We congratulate you on making this very difficult decision on changing the way you live. We want to help you to succeed.

If you have any questions about this topic, or if you wish to discuss a personal situation you may be experiencing, we invite you to contact your EAP counsellors to arrange a telephone or in-person counselling session.

All contact between you and your counsellor is completely confidential.

English Service: 1-800-387-4765
French Service: 1-800-361-5676
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