



FITNESS 7

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Today, the style in which you live probably has more effect on the quality and length of your life than anything medical doctors and other practitioners of the healing arts can do. Your health-related behavior throughout your life largely determines how much "wellness" you will enjoy and how long you will have to enjoy it.

The major causes of disability and death among adults are no longer the communicable disease. The noncommunicable, or chronic diseases—heart attacks, high blood pressure, diabetes, lung cancer, chronic bronchitis, emphysema, and cirrhosis of the liver—along with accidents—now account for 60 to 70 percent of adult death.

These diseases of modern life are usually linked to a person's life-style habits. Being overweight, smoking, abusing alcohol, misusing toxic chemicals, having faulty diet, exercise and sleeping habits, and ineffectively dealing with stress contribute to such health problems.

Most of us could improve our lives by substituting healthful living for some of our poor habits. Some major studies have shown that longer life and better health are related to a few simple but basic health habits. These include regular meals and weight control, regular sleep, moderate exercise, minimizing chemical contamination, no smoking, no alcohol (or only in moderation), and reduction of stress.

In short, health maintenance involves a good "life style." But it is not always easy to develop a good life style or change a bad one. We can take medication to control high blood pressure, but changing patterns of eating, sleeping, and physical activity and reducing excess weight or emotional stress are more difficult. Also, health maintenance must be a life-long process, not merely a temporary change of a few bad habits.

Fitness 7 is a series of programs designed to help you become more aware of your health status, risks, and needs and to encourage you to make commitments to improve your health behavior. A great deal of the success of these programs will depend on your motivation and your ability for self-discipline in making health maintenance a life-long process.

The goals of Fitness 7 are to provide you with accurate information that will assist you in making sound decisions about health and to suggest methods and specialized agencies that you can use if you decide to make a life-style change.

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NUTRITION AND WEIGHT

The programs will cover different aspects of health behavior. The first topic is *nutrition*.

A recent survey indicated that two-thirds of all American adults recognize that they would be healthier if they made some changes in their diets. It is becoming increasingly apparent that many of the major health problems in the United States are associated with eating too much food or eating too much of the wrong types of food. Research indicates that nutrition plays an important role in the development of many major health problems, especially certain types of heart diseases, hypertension, cancer, and diabetes. This program will highlight the role of the diet and some specific nutrients in the development of chronic diseases.

Related to nutrition is the topic of *weight*. At least three out of five adults are overweight. Obesity has many harmful effects on health. It increases blood cholesterol, blood pressure, and blood glucose levels. Excess weight shortens your life expectancy. However, people who lose weight, and keep it off, have practically the same life expectancy as "normal" people.

STRESS

The next program is on *stress*. Stress is a part of our daily life. Handled well, stress is a friend that strengthens you for the next encounter. Handled poorly, or allowed to get out of hand, stress becomes an enemy that can contribute to diseases like hypertension, ulcers, rheumatoid arthritis, and heart disease. The purpose of this program is to teach you ways to recognize and handle your stress more effectively.

EXERCISE

The third topic is *exercise*. Exercise is important in keeping fit and improving your overall sense of well-being. Being physically fit means feeling good, looking good, and functioning well physically. Exercise is one aspect of physical fitness. The exercises in this program are for cardiovascular fitness.

SLEEP

Sleep is the next topic. We all know that we function better and generally feel better when we get enough sleep. Refreshing sleep is a part of good health, well-being, and overall fitness. Sleep problems are discussed, including too much sleep.

ENVIRONMENT

Environmental factors which may adversely affect your health is another topic. Chemicals are an integral part of everyday life. Unfortunately, because some people have misused these chemicals and abused our environment, health problems may result. This program teaches you how to minimize contamination from toxic chemicals.

ALCOHOL

Alcohol is another topic. In a nationwide health maintenance survey, half the adults reported drinking beer, half drinking wine, and half drinking hard liquor of some kind. And, about a fifth of all adults surveyed admitted that they or someone in their family drinks too much.

TOBACCO

The final topic is *tobacco*. Cigarette smoking, the most harmful form of tobacco use, is our largest preventable cause of premature death, illness, and disability. In order to deal with this problem, nonsmokers as well as smokers need to understand the many aspects of cigarette smoking and must be willing to take a stand in combating this public health hazard.

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