



# healing words

BY MARK W. McCLURE, MD, MEDICAL EDITOR

## add luster to your golden years

**T**he silent onslaught of chronic illness robs years of life from millions of Americans. Although individuals often equate aging with declining health, fortunately this equation doesn't necessarily hold true. With proper health habits, individuals can enjoy vitality into the golden years. This is because each organ system in the body is endowed with ample capacity called organ reserve, the spare capacity inherent within any organ. Although sufficient in most cases to last a lifetime, this reserve, however, is not endless. Destructive lifestyle choices deplete this reserve and lead to the emergence of disease and premature aging. On the other hand, good health habits such as those listed in the following paragraphs can lead to improved quality of life.

Perhaps the most fundamental requirement for maintenance of good health is proper nutrition. Three key elements of proper nutrition are a well balanced diet, supplemental vitamins and adequate water consumption. A diet rich in complex carbohydrates, whole grains, fruits, vegetables and legumes provides a good balance of nutrients. It should be noted, however, that most commercial produce is tainted with chemicals and pesticides. Organic produce that is free of these contaminants is preferable.

Even a well balanced diet, however, is unable to provide the recommended amount of vitamins, minerals, and trace elements. This is because most foodstuffs have been grown in soil depleted of these nutrients. Therefore, it is necessary to supplement even a healthy diet with additional amounts of these nutrients in order to achieve optimal health. In addition, adequate water intake is crucial. Water, which makes up 70 percent of the human body, is involved in nearly every bodily process. To function properly, the body needs at least eight 8-ounce glasses of quality water daily. Insufficient water consumption adversely affects digestion, circulation and excretion of waste.

A second and equally fundamental component of a wellness program is regular exercise. The good news is that a person doesn't have to run a daily marathon to contribute positively to his health. Experts report that brisk walking for at least 30 minutes three or more days a week is enough to make a significant difference. Other regular forms of exercise will also suffice. It's important to choose an enjoyable form of exercise. The benefits of regular exercise include decreased blood pressure, lowered blood sugar, and diminished stress levels. But please note that it's best to check with your physician before undertaking an exercise program.

The third sure-fire way to prevent health problems and encourage longevity is to shun addictive behaviors such as smoking, drinking alcohol, and consuming caffeine. All three of these habits increase serum cholesterol and the chance of developing osteoporosis. Smoking causes lung cancer, the leading cause of cancer deaths in Americans. Smoking also causes premature aging of the skin and accelerated hardening of the arteries. Alcohol kills brain cells, poisons the liver and contributes to obesity. Caffeine, a legalized and socially acceptable drug, causes dependence in many individuals. Caffeine is found in chocolate, soft drinks, green and black teas, and coffee. Coffee is a common cause of headaches, heart palpitations, anxiety, and insomnia. Caffeine irritates the stomach and bladder. Furthermore, it jolts the adrenal glands and keeps the body under constant stress. Those wishing to remain healthy would do well to avoid consuming caffeine, alcohol, and smoking.

The fourth critical key to attaining longevity is the reduction of stress. Elevated stress levels are directly responsible for over 40 percent of all illnesses affecting Americans, according to expert estimates. Yet simple measures to combat and significantly decrease stress are readily available. Simple measures such as yoga, meditation, and breathing exercises have been shown to effectively reduce stress levels. These three techniques are easy to learn and put into practice. Inexpensive audiotapes and books on these techniques are readily available in any bookstore. In addition, another helpful practice is a "news fast." Simply turn off the car radio and television and stop reading the newspaper. The amount of disturbing and anxiety-producing impacts eliminated in this way is significant.

Fifth and finally, right speech and positive thoughts are important determinants of good health. What we say aloud springs directly from what we think, while what we think is influenced by basic lifestyle choices we make—the music, entertainment, friends, work and home environments we choose. All these have effects upon our inner thoughts. Positive choices in each of these areas promote health.

It should be clear then that the best way to ensure a lifetime of good health is to provide proper nutrition, avoid addictive substances, exercise regularly, reduce stress, and practice right thinking and speech. These lifestyle choices promote health and vitality into the golden years—a reward well worth the effort. **llh**

---

Dr. McClure, founder of Landmark Urology and Complementary Medicine in Raleigh, is this publication's medical editor. Visit him on the web at [www.urolmd.com](http://www.urolmd.com), or contact his office at (919) 571-4399.