

Seven Keys to Optimum Health and Healthy Aging

Tom Hendrickson, D.C.

Medical research has shown that our lifestyle choices have a profound affect on our health. Heart disease and diabetes, for example, can be reversed for most people when changes are made in diet and exercise habits. If diet and exercise were a pill, it would be considered a “miracle drug” because of the vast amount of health benefits received.

Achieving improvements in health usually requires giving up certain habits and introducing new ones. The seven keys to good health that I’ve outlined below seem simple enough, but are often not easy to do, especially in the beginning. Remember that once new habits have been introduced and you start feeling better, they become much easier to maintain. I encourage you to do the best you can and to trust that as you apply these principles of self-care, that your body will respond with greater health and well being.

1. **Eat a “whole foods” diet** including lots of fresh, organic fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, beans, nuts and seeds. Limit red meat, sugar, and refined carbohydrates, such as cookies and pastries. The foundation of a healthy body begins with your diet.
 - a. Eat breakfast every day. Steal cut oatmeal is a favorite of mine.
 - b. Buy organic foods whenever possible to avoid pesticides and herbicides and to increase nutrient content.
2. **Exercise** regularly, such as a 20-30 minute vigorous walk every day. Exercise helps reduce the risk of developing heart disease, helps maintain healthy muscles and bones, promotes normal colon health, and improves psychological health. Yoga, tai chi, and Qigong are forms of exercise that calm the mind as well as strengthen the body. They are part of my daily morning practice and are extremely beneficial. If you sit most of the day, set a goal to step away from your desk for a few minutes every hour.
3. **Drink pure water.** I recommend using a water-filter (like the Multipure brand) and filling up a water bottle rather than buying water in plastic bottles. In addition to hydrating and cleansing the body, water helps “puts out the fire of inflammation”, keeps the joints lubricated, and promotes cellular health.
4. **Take high-quality supplements** every day. It is now well recognized that we all need supplements. The Journal of the American Medical Association in the June 19th 2002 issue recommended that all adults take a multivitamin and this has been the recommendation ever since. The two authors reviewed over 150 scientific studies to arrive at this conclusion. I carry the Shaklee line of supplements because of their purity quality, and efficacy. See my handout on “Why I take supplements” to read more about what I take and why.
5. **Stay connected** to family and friends. Emotional and psychological health is a key to physical health. Feelings of depression and anxiety can depress immune function and lead to chronic diseases.
6. **Quiet the mind.** Take a few moments each day to sit quietly. Meditation and prayer are two ways to quiet the mind and are an important part of my daily practice.
7. **Manage stress through conscious breathing.** Spend a minute or two each day, or several times a day, to slowly and consciously breathe into your belly. Control the breath in the beginning of your practice, so that the inhale is about 5 seconds long, and the exhale is also about 5 seconds. Pause after the exhale and repeat these slow belly breaths for a couple of minutes. Conscious breathing lowers blood pressure, calms the nervous system and has many other health benefits.