

Taking Charge OF YOUR HEALTH



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Taking Charge

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what is good health?

Good health is more than just having a body free of disease or disability. Good health is a *state of complete physical, mental and social well-being*. Natural good health is when the body performs all its normal function without difficulty or external assistance from chemical or medical devices. So people with disabilities or a long-term illness can still enjoy a sense of *well-being* and *quality of life* even though they may be limited in their activities.

The *Discovery* Health Booklets are designed to assist *you* in making more *informed choices* about your body and the care that you give it.

The information in these booklets is scientific and correct at the time of publication.

why learn about health?

We influence our health by how we live, work, and interact with others and our environment. So your choice of behaviour will either enhance or risk your health. The choice is yours - take charge and positively influence your health.

who is responsible for your health?

You are. Good health is a choice we all have and it depends on the choices we make. Although we cannot choose our genes or control unfortunate life experiences, we can make choices that reduce our risks and make the most of our circumstances. This in turn gives us control over our sense of well-being and quality of life.

Many think that it is the doctor's job to '*fix you up*' when you get sick and don't think of preventing that sickness in the first place with some simple strategies. When you provide your body with the things it needs to do its work properly; given the right environment, treatment and fuel, your body will naturally move towards good health. Good health is achieved when *prevention* of 'ill health' is a *goal* of yours.

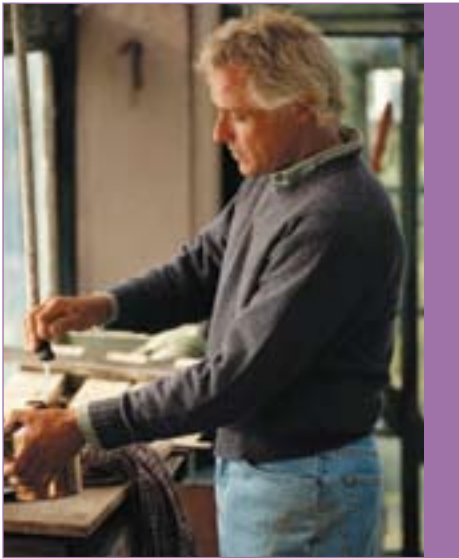
Seeing a medical practitioner when you are sick is increasingly important for early detection of serious illnesses and conditions. However there needs to be a greater emphasis on prevention of lifestyle diseases. These diseases often occur as a consequence of a lifestyle that is damaging to health.

The risk of being affected by heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, lung cancer, mature onset diabetes and respiratory (lung) diseases can be lessened by making healthy lifestyle choices¹.

taking charge of your health

information: The first step in taking charge of your health is to be informed about how your body functions (physiology) and what it needs to keep functioning efficiently. Once informed, you can make the right choices about your health.

motivation: Changes won't occur if you are not motivated to change behaviour that may prevent good health. So how



do you get motivated about giving up something that you enjoy but is not good for you?

inspiration: We all need *something to aim for* to keep us motivated. Think about the following goals to get yourself motivated;

- ◆ more energy to do more things you enjoy such as travelling, sports etc.
- ◆ losing weight and feeling better about yourself
- ◆ living longer independently
- ◆ a sense of well-being and feeling in control of your life

commitment: Often commitment to change is brought about by our frustration with a situation, or anger at past experiences that could have been prevented. Commitment to change provides a turning point when you bring the full force of your resolve to a particular situation.

sense of control: Most of us like to be in control of our lives, not controlled by others or by our circumstances. When you are successful in making changes in your life you are clearly demonstrating to yourself that you are in control¹.

how can I achieve good health?

Good health is actually quite simple. The remainder of this booklet will cover eight basic areas to maintain good health.

1. nutrition

Nutrition is simply the *study of what foods can help our bodies to function at their best*. The food we eat is one of the most important aspects of health as it *directly impacts* on the way we *feel* and *perform*. It provides the fuel for the body to run on. Energy from good food is the body's number one necessity. When you choose food lacking in essential nutrients your body will become deficient. An example of this is an iron deficiency. This is where a person feels "washed out" and tired because the body needs iron to carry oxygen around the body and a lack of iron means the oxygen isn't carried around the body very well¹.

So if nutrition is so important, what is a nutritious food? Nutritious foods contain lots of essential nutrients (these are substances that the body must get from food because the body is unable to make it itself or make enough of it). Essential nutrients include vitamins, minerals (such as iron and calcium), carbohydrates, some protein, fats and water. All food contains nutrients, but some foods contain more nutrients than others. It's important to choose the most nutritious food possible so that your body gets all the nutrients it needs to function properly. Nutrition and healthy eating habits are covered in more detail in booklets 2 and 3.

2. exercise

You need to be physically fit to be able to meet the demands and stresses of day to day life. Many people think of *fitness* as being an ability to run a marathon but it actually is *someone who is able to do all the things they have to each day and still have energy left for family, relationships and feeling a sense of well-being* rather than constant fatigue.

Exercise has many other benefits such as controlling your weight, managing stress, boosting your immune system and reducing the risk of heart disease, cancer and perhaps even premature death.

Because the lifestyle of most Australians and New Zealanders does not involve a lot of physical activity, the need to include regular exercise is important. Older people generally do less activity than those who work or go to school so it's even more important for them to have a regular exercise program. How to begin an enjoyable exercise program that will benefit your health is covered in booklet 4.

3. water

Your body is about 60% water. You can live up to 50 days without food, but only a few days without water. Water is vital to life itself - and yet we often ignore the importance of water for our body's health¹.

Many people use their thirst as a guide to how much water they should drink, but thirst is the body's first sign of dehydration. We all lose water each day through urine, faeces, sweat and evaporation in our lungs. Adults need to drink about 6-8 glasses of water every day and even more in hot weather or during exercise. Water is vital for kidney function, regulating body temperature and body fluids. So drink up - water is kilojoule free!

4. sunlight

Australians and New Zealanders can take for granted the abundance of sunlight that we enjoy. Some countries in the Northern Hemisphere only enjoy sunlight for a few months of the year. Research in those countries has revealed how important sunlight is for people to feel happy and well. Depression and low morale is common during the long winter months of the Northern Hemisphere.

Sunlight is not only important for our feeling of well-being, but it also assists with providing our bodies with vitamin D which is an essential nutrient that our bodies can make in the skin from exposure to sunlight. Vitamin D is needed for the absorption and use of calcium for strong bones and teeth as well as for a healthy immune

and nervous system, control of body hormones and cell growth¹.

However, too much sunlight can be damaging especially in Australia and New Zealand where skin cancer rates are high. Being 'sun safe' is very important so don't forget the 15+ or 30+ sunscreen and hat.



5. total balance

When we talk about balance, we do *not* mean 'everything in moderation'. What we mean by balance is a proper combination of the *good* things that promote health - delete the destructive ones totally!! Balance is about a *lifestyle* that increases quality of life and a sense of well-being. All the health issues studied in these health booklets express the importance of a balanced lifestyle.

6. air

The air we breathe is also critical to our health. Air pollution can cause illness and death if pollutants become concentrated for a period of several days or weeks. Increased amounts of carbon monoxide and air-borne acids and decreased amounts of oxygen all put excess strain on people suffering from congestive heart failure and chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases, such as chronic bronchitis or emphysema, as well as on the very young and elderly. Hence the warnings on the news when the smog levels are very high¹.

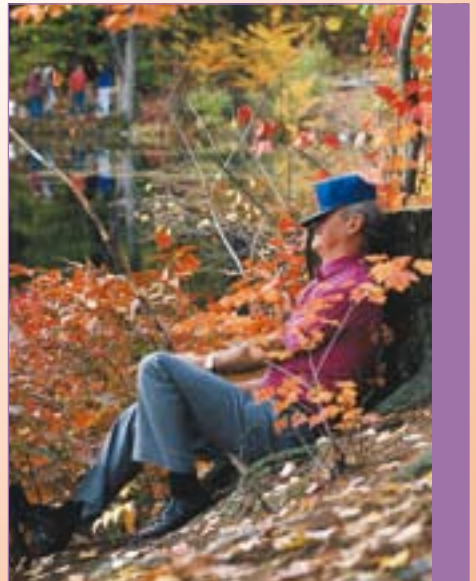
Not all air pollution is caused by human activity - forest fires, pollen bloom and dust storms also add their load of pollutants to the atmosphere. Yet there is a growing global awareness that we must do what we can to protect our environment.

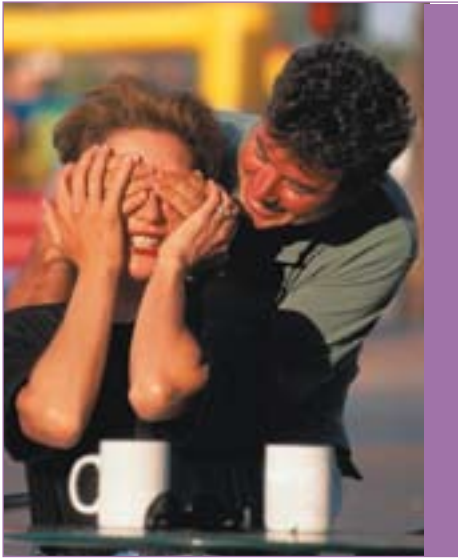
7. rest

Relaxation, recreation and sleep are vital to healthful living. With the rapid pace and pressures of life, it is essential to find some time each day for relaxation, so the tensions that build up in our muscles can be released.

Rest should include some active recreation. Getting away for a day in the bush, or a walk along a beach can refresh us and help us to cope better.

Hugh McKay, a sociologist in Australia and author of 'Reinventing Australia', recommends that ideally an individual should devote some time each week to purposeful reflection and relaxation². The activities that are done in this regular time period should provide opportunities for reflective detachment from the reality of life. These kinds





8. trusted relationships

A *sense of purpose* and *belonging* are important for you to feel good about your life. You may wonder what a sense of purpose and belonging have to do with quality of life. A life filled with depression, loneliness and anger is hardly a description of a high quality of life. This is especially so if people find themselves in difficult circumstances, such as grief or loss, betrayal of a partner, serious illness or even death.

The spiritual dimension of health includes our values and philosophy of life which give us a sense of purpose and belonging. To enjoy spiritual health is to possess that capacity for love, compassion, forgiveness, peace and fulfilment. Trust in a power outside of oneself and trust in those around us are also vital aspects of good health. The golden rule of loving our neighbour as ourselves is basic to a sense of self-esteem and self worth.

We all need to find a balance between meeting our own needs and the needs and demands of others. Feelings of cynicism, anger, bitterness, fear, anxiety and pessimism are often felt by people who are overcommitted to the needs of others and their work, with no energy left for themselves. You need time alone to cater for your own needs so that you feel refreshed and ready to serve others and meet their needs.

more...

of activities include religious worship, meditation, walking, music-making and spending time with family pets².

The need to sleep has an awesome power over us. If we go too long without it, we can't stay awake to even save our lives - as shown by car accidents when people fall asleep at the wheel. Most people don't get enough sleep, and studies show the average person needs between 6-8 hours sleep per night¹. How often have you gone to bed feeling depressed and cranky and woken up after a good sleep feeling a lot better about life?

look forward... to booklet 2 which covers eating smart for optimal health.

review

Enjoy a quick revision of this booklet by completing the review sheet. Return the review sheet to the *Discovery* Centre closest to you.

references

1. Insel PM., Roth WT. 1996 "Core Concepts in Health". Mayfield Publishing Company; California.
2. MacKay H. 1993 "Reinventing Australia: The mind & mood of Australia in the 90's". Harper Collins, Sydney.

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