

Live Healthy and Be Well!

“Turning a New Leaf”

By Stephen Jarrard, MD, FACS

The first of a new year marks a new beginning and a chance to start fresh. It is a perfect time to do things to improve your state of health and wellness – such as eating better, smart weight loss, more daily activity, or all the above! Much of our behavior is guided by habits we have developed over time. Although some of our bad habits may be persistent, they can be changed if we really try. By changing to more healthy versus unhealthy habits – we will all be able to live healthy and well, and research shows *longer*, too.

If you have grown accustomed to a non-active lifestyle, you may need to make yourself get involved to get out and do more. Once you get used to this, it will become more natural. A healthy lifestyle is not just all about activity, though – attitudes, diet, social times, family life, sleep, safety, and spirituality all play their roles, as well. Let’s briefly examine 7 ways to promote healthy habits in this New Year:

1. Manage stress in your life. The amount of tension in your day can affect temperament and blood pressure, age you faster, and decrease the effectiveness of your immune system. Learn to channel tension into healthy, active pursuits and thereby reduce stress. And while you’re at it – carrying an old grudge is a lot of work, learn to forgive and move on if someone has wronged you.
2. If you are heavier than you want – lose some weight in a healthy manner. This will benefit you in many ways. Starvation type diets, diet pills, and the latest TV and internet gimmicks are NOT the way to do this. Daily exercise, portion control at mealtime, and proper hydration can help. Eating “seconds” and junk food snacks can be a habit, even if you’re not really hungry. Use of salt can also become a habit – taste your food first then add if needed. Remember, there is no such thing as a successful diet, only healthy lifestyles!
3. Exercise regularly and often. Instead of sitting on the couch watching TV on a nice afternoon, go play golf, walk, run, do some steps at Tallulah Gorge, or even better, “go take a hike!” My friend Peter McIntosh, in this very magazine, suggests many beautiful places to visit in our area – try walking a trail or visit a waterfall soon – you’ll be glad you did and better off.
4. Adopt healthy food choices whenever possible. Aim for a diet high in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, olive oil, and include some meats other than red meat. These choices will not only be good for your heart and help you lose weight (in proper portions), but also lower the risk of developing diabetes, strengthen your immune system, and improve your skin, hair, and attitude!

5. Make good sleep a priority. A good night's sleep is very good medicine. It not only promotes health, but helps you have a more positive outlook, be friendlier, think sharper, and be more efficient in your work. If you are getting exercise and being active (see above), you should be able to sleep well at night. Avoid reliance on "sleeping pill" type medicines, as these can become habit forming and actually interfere with your ability to sleep over time.
6. Spend good quality time with friends and family. Many studies have shown that people who are more social live longer and have a better quality of life. Try to make friends that have healthy habits and a positive outlook, as it has also been shown that your friends as a "peer group" often have great influence on your own lifestyle choices. So, better to be involved with a group that likes to be active and do something fun outside!
7. Use safety gear and practice safe activities. This can range from always wearing your seatbelts when driving or riding, to wearing a properly fitted helmet when on a motorcycle or bicycle. Wear eye protection when using power tools, and wear ear protection when around loud noises such as power tools, lawn mowers, leaf blowers, etc. Be careful using ladders this time of the year to clean out those gutters. Always practice safe behavior with knives, while chopping wood, using chainsaws and with firearms -- assume every gun is loaded -- or at least treat it that way.

If you can begin to change your habits to be in line with a healthier lifestyle, you will live healthy, well, and longer with more quality along the way! Encourage those around you to do the same, and you will all feel better, look better, be stronger, think better, get more done, need less medicine, and stay younger longer!

We really do enjoy hearing from you with any questions, concerns, or ideas for future columns and/or health and wellness related issues for the *Georgia Mountain Laurel*. Please send an email to rabundoctor@gmail.com, or call us at 706-782-3572, and we will be sure to consider your input. This and previous articles can be now be found on the web at www.rabundoctor.com in an archived format. If you use Twitter, then follow us for health tips and wellness advice @rabundoctor. Until next month, live healthy and be well!