

Live Healthy and Be Well!

“Does healthy behavior lead to longer life?”

--Stephen Jarrard, MD, FACS

“It’s better to burn out...than it is to rust.” –Neil Young

Inspiration for the column this month comes from my good friends Mark and Carol Holloway of Tiger. They are both well known to be very physically fit, and take great measures to promote wellness and healthy living in their own lives and their entire family. Mark emailed to ask if all this healthy eating, exercise, sacrifice, doing without, getting regular checkups, running, etc. would really pay off and help us live longer? If we have to do all this, which admittedly requires some discipline and sacrifice, it should at least pay off with a longer lifespan...right? So, this month, we will look at the results of practicing health and wellness and their effects on your life. Just remember that true health and wellness is not a diet, an exercise program, or doing without favorite foods for awhile, it represents a LIFESTYLE (style of life).

In this “Wheels” edition of the GML, I would use a similar analogy. If you have a vintage car that you take good care of, keep clean, use the right fuel and oil, do good preventive maintenance frequently (as needed), drive it often but are not overly hard on it, and have it serviced by a good mechanic from time to time – it will run well for a long time and provide you much satisfaction as well as being here for all the rest of us to enjoy. Your body is a machine which has been “wonderfully and fearfully made” according to the Bible. Treat it as such!

We all know of certain people or cases that can be used as exceptions to the general findings. Such as “...my granddaddy drank, smoke, dipped, and ate what he wanted, had a great life and lived to be 99 years old.” Or on the other hand, we may have heard about someone young and seemingly healthy who was very fit, disciplined, conscientious, ran marathons, taught Sunday School, and passed away tragically of a heart attack in their early 40’s. So, you must realize that the following statements speak in general terms about most people and the average trends in society, such as the average lifespan in the U.S. being 78.24 years (2010 census).

Health and wellness is more than just the absence of illness or disease, but true wellness speaks of health in our physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions. One may be fit and exercise, but have so many issues in their life that they are never really and truly “well.” We should all remind ourselves that there are three dimensions to health and wellness, and we must work to develop, maintain, and improve all these dimensions in order to be truly well and healthy.

Evidence based studies indicate that your longevity is based on two main factors – genetics and lifestyle choices. There are other minor factors, such as economic status, access to health care, and crime rates – but genetics and lifestyle are the two that seem to have the most influence. You can do very little about the genetic code handed down from your parents, and this seems to contribute about 25 to 30 percent toward your “lifespan.” However, your lifestyle choices, which you can change and control, seem to have the most dominant influence on the amount of days you will spend on this earth. This relates to Mark’s question, and this is the part of the

equation you can change. Some recent studies show that even modest physical activity can increase your lifespan by 4 or 5 years. Also, making healthy choices such as eating right to limit fat and cholesterol, stop smoking if you do, controlling your sugar if you have diabetes and your blood pressure if you have hypertension, being safe at work and play, and getting regular health checkups will also contribute to more years. And, these are only physical factors! Don't forget the roles of limiting and avoiding stress, staying on good terms with people, keeping a positive outlook, and maintaining a good balance in your spiritual life. These are wellness factors you CAN influence and possibly contribute to a longer lifespan.

And, what if you do all the above and are "called home" at a younger age than you wanted? Well, I submit that it was not in vain. If you keep yourself healthy and practice behaviors that lead to true wellness, you will have lived life to the fullest, been happier, enjoyed your life, felt better, and been able to contribute more to your family and community. It is certainly true that "It is not the amount of days in your life that matters, but the amount of life in your days!" So, keep at it. Don't give up. Remember that mental and spiritual health complements physical wellness, think young, be positive, and always hope for the best – and however many days you have, you will have had a good and healthy life!

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 Felichia at 706-782-3572, and we will be sure to consider your input. If you use Twitter, then follow us for health tips and wellness advice @rabundoctor. Congratulations and good luck to Jamie as she starts her RN program! Until next month, live healthy and be well!