

7 More Ways to Stay Healthy

These Christian health experts offer even MORE tips for you to achieve maximum health.

As Christians, we tend to be clued in to the need to exercise our faith. We pray, we read our Bibles, we meditate on the Word, we go to church. In recent years, researchers have showed how important these activities are to developing and maintaining health. In fact, as the statistics quoted below show, a vibrant faith-life is one of the most important keys to a healthy existence.

But it's not the only one—and that truth is slowly beginning to dawn on believers as Christian medical professionals stress more and more vigorously the importance of caring for the body as well as the spirit and soul. The focus on physical fitness that has increased since the turn of the century is a trend that was inspired not by an ingenious marketing strategist but by God Himself. He wants us to live long, healthy lives so that we can change the world for Him.

If you've been nurturing your spiritual side but neglecting the physical, here are seven keys to getting and staying in top shape:

Live a Life of Faith

James P. Gills, M.D.

Clinical evidence and formal research studies published in a variety of medical journals prove the positive influence of religious faith on health and healing. This includes the beneficial effects of fellowship and worship attendance at a church, private religious activities such as daily devotional prayer, and intercessory prayer (individuals praying for the healing of other persons). So positive are these effects that

health practitioners are finding faith difficult to ignore.

On the other hand, statistics reported on give numerous negative indications for people who do not attend church or profess a faith in God:

1. Their average hospital stays are longer than hospital stays for believers
2. They are several times more likely to die after surgery
3. They have a 40 percent higher death rate from heart disease and cancer
4. They experience twice the number of strokes.

In one study published in the Journal of Gerontology, the authors sought to reveal an association between private religious activities (meditation, prayer or Bible study) and longer survival in certain groups. Establishing controls for demographics and health status, the researchers reported that among community-dwelling adults ages 64 to 101, "persons with no disability and little or no private religious activity ... were 63 percent more likely to die" over the six-year period of the study.

"Even after controlling for social support and health behaviors, investigators found that lack of private religious activity continued to predict a 47 percent greater risk of dying."

Another hospital study of cardiac patients, this one conducted in 1999 at St. Luke's Hospital of Kansas City, Missouri, found that a group of patients who received daily prayer by Christian volunteers had "shorter recovery times with fewer complications" than the patients who received no prayer. William Harris, Ph.D., who conducted the study, concluded that "prayer makes an effective adjunct to standard medical care."

Nurture Relationships

David B. Biebel, ., and Harold G. Koenig, M.D.

To be in a relationship with someone is one of the greatest gifts we are given in this world, and our relationships with other people are often key ingredients in our ability to live happier, healthier lives. Good relationships are good for you—physically, psychologically, socially and spiritually.

“There’s a good deal of research showing that people who have strong, enduring social support have better health outcomes,” said Frank Baker, Ph.D., vice president for behavioral research at the national office of the American Cancer Society in Atlanta. “Friends and relatives are important because they help you deal with the adversities of life; you’re likely to have better health and be happier.”

Emotional support from family and friends buffers stressful life events and reduces the risk of (and speeds recovery from) depression. When you’ve had a bad day, it always helps to have a friend to call for a heart-to-heart talk or to take you out to do something fun.

People with these kinds of strong relationships—including marriage, other family members and friends—live longer. In fact, they may even be more resistant to infection due to better immune system functioning. Social support is also associated with less cigarette smoking, less alcohol abuse, a healthier diet, more exercise and better sleep quality.

Social support also helps people recover from illness. Research on people with cardiovascular diseases suggests that close relationships help protect heart attack survivors against future cardiovascular problems.

British researcher Dr. Francis Creed and his colleagues focused on 583 men and women, all about age 60, all hospitalized with heart attacks. Each patient was asked about emotional issues, including what social support he had. The patients also took tests to determine whether they were anxious or depressed.

A year later, those who had a close personal confidant had 50 percent less risk of dying from heart disease than those without. In describing his findings, Creed explained, "It's the degree of intimacy of close relationships—not the number of social contacts—that appears to protect heart health."

Renew Your Mind

Janet Maccaro, Ph.D., .

When it comes to your health, your thoughts are key. Research studies show that anxious, fearful thoughts weaken the body and can lead to illness, while thoughts of love and other things that evoke positive emotions lead to health and healing. James Allen also makes this point in his book *As a Man Thinketh*:

"Disease and health are rooted in thought. Sickly thoughts will express themselves through a sickly body. ... The people who live in fear of disease are the people who get it. Anxiety quickly demoralizes the whole body and lays it open to the entrance of disease; while impure thoughts, even if not physically indulged, will soon affect the nervous system."

This is why the Bible tells us to "be anxious for nothing" (Phil. 4:6, NKJV) and to fix our thoughts on things that are true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent and worthy of praise (see Phil. 4:8). God's Word also says that we must be transformed by the renewing of our minds (see Rom. 12:2).

Most people are not very good at preventing their thoughts from taking a negative turn, especially if they are hurt emotionally or afraid. If you want to renew your mind, you must learn to consciously monitor your thoughts daily, "bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). In fact, when you are first trying to regain a state of health, you may need to monitor them minute by minute until you get control.

One way to avoid replaying old tapes of pain, self-doubt and anxiety is to go deep into the Word of God. Read and study your Bible and invest in inspirational tapes or praise and worship music. Memorize Scriptures that refute your negative thoughts and recite them when Satan brings the negative thoughts to mind.

Another way is to forgive everyone who has ever hurt you. Forgiveness is a primary key to restoring health and wholeness to both your body and your mind.

Laugh!

David B. Biebel, ., and Harold G. Koenig, M.D.

In 1979, Norman Cousins, then editor of the Saturday Review, published his book *Anatomy of an Illness as Perceived by the Patient*, which remained on the New York Times best-seller list for more than 40 weeks. The book describes the author's miraculous recovery from a normally incurable disease.

How did Cousins recover? He laughed. After taking himself off all prescriptions except intravenous vitamin C, he laughed his way back to health by watching episodes of *Candid Camera* provided by his friend Allen Funt, viewing old Marx Brothers films and having his nurse read to him from books of humor during the late night hours.

Laughter, as Cousins discovered, brings numerous positive physical effects to the human body. Here are just a few:

5. **Muscle relaxation.** When you are laughing, the muscles that are not participating in the laughter immediately relax. As soon as you finish laughing, the muscles that were participating in the laughter relax, too.
6. **Activation of the immune system and reduction of stress.** In a 1996 study researchers proved that after laughing a great deal, participants' immune systems kicked into overdrive for

at least 24 hours. In addition, there was a drastic reduction of at least four stress-causing hormones in their bodies.

7. **Pain reduction.** In one study published by the Journal of Holistic Nursing, patients were told one-liners before painful medication was administered and after surgery. The results suggested that those who were exposed to humor perceived less pain when compared with patients who did not receive a “dose” of humor as part of their therapy.
8. **Cardiorespiratory exercise.** Some physicians refer to laughter as “internal jogging” because it causes your heart rate to increase as it does when you exercise. Laughter also gives other parts of your body a good workout. It is great for your diaphragm as well as your abdominal, respiratory, facial, leg and back muscles. It massages organs, tones intestinal functioning and strengthens the muscles that hold the abdominal organs in place.

Lose Weight

Francisco Contreras, M.D.

Recent experiments with mice have proved that by drastically reducing the amount of calories we take in, while at the same time maintaining a high-quality level of nutrition, we can add significant years to our lives. As a matter of fact, if we would eat one-third the calories we normally eat, we could actually lengthen our lives by about 24 years. This method of losing weight and increasing longevity is called caloric restriction.

Eating a nutritious diet of 30 percent fewer calories can add 30 percent more time to your life span, in addition to supercharging your overall good health. That means that if you expect to live the average of 75 years, you can increase that amount to 97.5 years just by eating less—and you can live healthier, too!

Here are some of the benefits of caloric restriction:

9. Protection from the ravages of toxins and stress. It is not known exactly why eating less increases life span. Some experts believe that the process of converting calories to energy builds up toxins in the body, while others believe that dietary restriction reduces the levels of stress caused by oxidation.

There is little doubt that stress in any form takes a heavy toll. It seems that the body's labor of processing calories can exact a cost in years and vitality.

10. **Less free radical damage.** Eating fewer calories reduces the free radical damage in humans and animals. This overall reduction in cellular injury from free radicals drastically extends the life of mammals.

11. **Reduced DNA damage.** Calorie restriction also reduces DNA damage. Some researchers believe that taking in fewer calories has an impact on the rate of normal damage to a person's DNA, which in turn affects aging.

Don't drastically cut your own calories unless you are under the care of a doctor. However, you can probably afford to eat less food than you do.

I suggest that you get down to your ideal weight, or even slightly below it—because the first key for staying younger, feeling better and living longer at any age is to lose weight!

Balance the Body

Scott Hannen, D.C.

The body is a well-balanced, biomechanically efficient structure. If its balance is altered for any reason, it becomes mechanically disadvantaged, causing structures to shift to compensate for the imbalance. In other words, you get sick.

Perhaps the following analogy will help to clarify what happens when the body suffers imbalance. If the front end of your car gets out of alignment, what happens? It causes the

tire treads to wear unevenly.

Why? Because the misalignment causes uneven stress on the tires, producing uneven wear and tear.

The human body can be affected by misalignment in the same way. The body is a marvelous biomechanical structure that consists of levers (bones), pulleys and cables (tendons and ligaments), and cushions (joints, disks and cartilage), which, if maintained properly in balance, make for a "smooth ride." But when body parts are in constant motion and lose their mechanical advantage, the increased friction and pressure that results causes structures to break down, or degenerate, and the result is often severe pain.

Sadly, when people find themselves in a state of chronic pain, they generally seek symptomatic relief through various means such as pain medication, therapy and surgery rather than allowing a professional to determine the primary cause of their discomfort and correct it. In many cases, the answer is to restore the balance in the body by realigning the structures that have become compromised. A chiropractic physician does this by using his hands to manipulate the structure and restore the proper mobility.

Follow Your Unique Pathway to Healing

Reginald Cherry, M.D.

Throughout His life on earth, Jesus healed all manner of disease. However, He didn't heal everyone in the same way. At times He used a touch or a word to heal an infirm person instantly (see Luke 4:39-40; 6:10). At other times He used natural substances through which He caused His healing power to flow.

The most striking example of the latter method can be found in the Gospel of John, which relates the dramatic healing of a blind man:

“As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. ... He spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes. ‘Go,’ he told him, ‘wash in the Pool of Siloam.’ ... So the man went and washed, and came home seeing” (John 9:1, 6-7, NIV).

As this passage indicates, healing can take place instantaneously or as a process that occurs over time. In this case, Jesus touched the blind man’s eyes as He placed the mud solution on him, but the man was not immediately healed. His healing was complete when he followed Jesus’ instructions and washed his eyes in the Pool of Siloam.

First, the man received a touch from Jesus. Then he accepted the application of a natural substance onto the diseased part of his body. And finally, he obeyed Jesus’ unique instructions to him as an individual.

The blind man’s experience explains for us one of the greatest health secrets of the Bible, one that is often overlooked by well-meaning Christians: God has a unique pathway to healing for each person.

Let me state it another way: God heals different people in different ways. Some may attend a healing crusade and receive an instant miracle from the Lord. But more commonly, God will work through the natural substances that He has provided for us—namely, various foods, vitamins, minerals and even medications—to work out His healing plan.

Sometimes He uses a combination of natural and supernatural methods to effect a cure. The key lies in discovering God’s plan for your own life. God’s pathway to healing is available to each of us as we follow His ways and listen to His voice.