

BALANCE



Seeking personal, family and work stability

A publication of Mutual of Omaha's Employee Assistance Program

Fitness for Life



For many people, leading a healthy lifestyle is akin to shoveling snow: it's labor-intensive; it's sometimes painful; and you'll need expensive shoes. Watch people huffing and puffing on a treadmill as they sop sweat off their brow only to be rewarded with a carrot stick and it's no wonder that you might be intimidated by the messages of a healthy lifestyle.

Contrary to most things people have been conditioned to believe about exercise, fitness and nutrition, you don't have to make major lifestyle changes to become healthier. Even small changes significantly can improve your quality of life.

The Road to Nutrition

Atkins. The South Beach Diet. Weight Watchers. The Zone. If followed closely, most diets help you lose weight – at least initially. However, only 5 percent of dieters are able to keep weight off for five years or more. What's the problem?

Maintaining a healthy weight requires a long-term commitment – an ongoing promise to eat a balanced diet, limit fat intake and consume only the amount of calories your body needs to function properly. While the amount of calories you need depends on your current size and weight goals, a diet of 1,000 to 1,500 calories per day, with no more than 30 grams of fat, will generally promote weight loss. To maintain your

current weight, a diet of 2,000 to 2,500 calories per day usually will do the trick.

Activity level also plays an important role in determining the amount of calories needed each day. Physical activity, such as loading freight, requires more calories than sitting at a desk. Similarly, engaging in creative, mental activity burns more calories than watching TV.

The Power of the Pyramid

The Food Guide Pyramid, developed by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), provides an outline of what to eat each day to ensure a healthy diet. Although not a rigid prescription, this general guide can help you identify and implement healthy eating habits. According to the USDA, Americans should:

- Eat a variety of foods to get the energy, protein, vitamins, minerals and fiber you need
- Balance your diet with physical activity – maintain or improve your weight to reduce the risks of chronic health problems associated with physical inactivity
- Eat plenty of grain products, fruits and vegetables which provide needed vitamins, minerals and complex carbohydrates
- Limit intake of fat, saturated fat and cholesterol to maintain a healthy weight and reduce the risk of heart disease and certain types of cancer
- Choose a diet moderate in sugars. A diet with lots of sugars has too many calories and too few nutrients for most people and can contribute to tooth decay
- Limit intake of salt and sodium to help reduce the risk of high blood pressure
- If you drink alcoholic beverages, do so in moderation

To Fry or Not to Fry

How food is prepared is just as important as the food itself. Fried foods generally contain more fat and calories than food that's grilled, baked or steamed. For example, take a look at the difference between baking and frying a medium potato.

	Baked Potato	French Fries
Calories	120	225
Fat	Trace	11 grams

Plan Ahead to Make Healthy Choices

The occasional fast food meal or fried chicken isn't bad; the key is to choose healthier options most often. Plan ahead. People who eat regular meals tend to get a more balanced, healthful diet.

Here are a few tips to make healthy choices easier:

- If you're usually rushed in the morning, plan your breakfast and pack your lunch the night before
- Keep healthy snacks on hand – good options include fresh, frozen or canned fruits and vegetables; low-fat cheese; frozen fruit juice bars; and nuts
- Remove temptations such as high-fat, high-sugar and high-calorie foods from the house
- Eat regularly (including breakfast). People who skip meals are more likely to overeat or make poor nutritional choices
- Try to eat at least half of your daily calories before the evening meal
- Buy healthy foods that are easy to prepare

Equally important is how much you eat. If you “super size” your meals on a regular basis, you will eventually develop a super-sized body. Remember to keep your portion size in check.

Get Up, Get Moving

A balanced diet is just one component of a healthy lifestyle. A moderate exercise program also is essential to achieve and maintain overall wellness.

Lifting weights. Running. Yoga. Pilates. Swimming. Aerobics. Walking. What works best? The answer is different for everyone. You may need a structured class with a trained instructor to get you moving. Others may prefer an exercise video in the privacy of their own living rooms.

Your physical condition and personal goals will impact the type and amount of exercise your body needs. While it's important to consult your physician before starting any exercise program, most experts recommend 20 to 30 minutes of moderate exercise five or more times a week.

That doesn't mean, however, you have to go to the gym each day to work out. Rather, you can incorporate activity into your normal routine. For example, pick up the leash and take your dog on three brisk 10-minute walks a day. It benefits both you and Fido. Other changes you can make to your daily routine include:

- Get off the bus or subway one stop early and walk the rest of the way
- Park as far away from the door as possible at work or the grocery store or shopping mall

RESOURCES

webmd.com

The President's Council on
Physical Fitness and Sports
www.fitness.gov

United States Department
of Agriculture
www.usda.gov

United States Department of
Health and Human Resources
www.hhs.gov

American Heart Association
www.americanheart.org

Federal Consumer
Information Services
www.pueblo.gsa.gov

For additional resources and assistance, see the Employee Assistance Program Web site at www.mutualofomaha.com/eap or call an Employee Assistance Program professional at 1-800-237-1439.

- Take the stairs instead of the elevator
- Take two or three short walking breaks at work each day
- Walk around the house while you talk on a cordless phone
- Walk and talk with a friend at lunch

Now What?

Even after you've done your homework and developed a healthy diet and exercise plan, it's important to take note of barriers that may prevent you from taking action. For example, does food play a greater role in your life than satisfying hunger? If you notice yourself reaching for a snack when you're lonely or bored, try to find alternative activities to occupy your time.

Also, remember that your company runs on the efficiency and productivity of its employees. Workers who are happy, healthy and take care of themselves are more likely to be productive and have fewer absences. In other words, what's good for you is good for your company.

Be a Student of Health

What's required to achieve a balanced diet for one person may be quite different for the next. This is especially true for people with chronic medical conditions such as diabetes or heart disease. Consult a licensed nutritionist to help determine a diet that's right for you.

It's important to explore as much information as possible to determine the best wellness program for you. Thousands of resources are available to learn more about diet and exercise, and the cumulative effects they can have on your life. Listed at the bottom of the page are a few popular Web sites to help get you started.

KID'S CORNER

Fitness and Kids

America is the land of plenty – especially when it comes to obesity in children. According to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, between 16-33 percent of children in the United States are obese (body weight at least 10 percent higher than recommended for age and height).

As a parent, you have to teach your children – from birth through adolescence – ways to choose a healthy lifestyle. Children watch and learn from their parents, so you need to be aware of the verbal and physical messages you send. It's hard to say “no” to an evening of TV and snacks if your child sees you do this. Look at your eating habits and adjust, and model healthy snacking. Also, model physical activity as part of your daily routine, and actively guide your children to do the same.

Marketing strategies now target our children as consumers. Think about all the messages bombarding children – TV, billboards, cereal boxes. This has made it harder to keep your children on a healthy life track. Parents need to actively guide children toward healthy food options and encourage active play. Be sure to educate kids about the variety of foods their bodies need to grow and be strong. Remember to catch your children being good – anytime they make a healthy choice, recognize and reinforce that action.