

Good Health Habits Sneaking in Under the Radar

"Buck: Hey, I stopped smoking cigarettes.

Cindy Russell: Oh, good.

Buck: Isn't that something? I'm on to cigars now. I'm on to a five-year plan.

I eliminated cigarettes, then I go to cigars, then I go to pipes, then I go to chewing tobacco, then I'm on to that nicotine gum."

--from the movie "Uncle Buck"

Uncle Buck may have been on to something. A wellness movement afoot called "stealth health" advocates working toward a particular wellness goal or merely better self-care via small, positive steps. Many people ignore good health and general wellness until a problem arises.

Large-scale, permanent changes can be difficult to make in self-care. The "stealth health" approach may make improvement more palatable and increase the likelihood of success by starting small and building on good habits over time.

In the 1990s, Dr. Andrew Weil started the trend by promoting an eight-week program for increasing wellness in his book 8 Weeks to Optimum Health. Dr. Weil breaks down his week-by-week plan into bite-size pieces, suggesting improvements in the areas of diet, supplements (vitamins/minerals), exercise, mental/spiritual aspects and projects. Each step is built upon so by the time eight weeks have elapsed, the small, positive self-care steps hopefully become part of normal routine.

Here are a few suggestions from Dr. Weil's program:

- walk 10 minutes/day for five days this week (Week 1)
- eat broccoli this week (Week 1)
- buy flowers for your house for your enjoyment (Week 1)
- do not watch or read news for an entire day (Week 2)
- stop using an electric blanket, remove electric appliances from near your bed, buy a radiation shield for your computer screen (Week 3)
- replace one meal of animal protein with soy protein (Week 4)
- begin eating more garlic (Week 4)
- listen to music you find inspirational and uplifting (Week 5)
- eat broccoli at least twice this week (Week 6)
- contact someone from whom you have been estranged (Week 7)

Dr. David Katz is the director of the Yale-Griffin Prevention Research Center and co-author of Stealth Health: How to Sneak Age-Defying, Disease-Fighting Habits Into Your Life Without Really Trying. A smorgasbord of over 2,400 suggestions, anyone can find a couple of innovative ideas to incorporate into their daily habits for better physical and mental health. Dr. Katz also has an informative website full of articles that can be found here: http://www.yalegriffi nprc.org/health/preventive_medicifne_columns.php3.

Evelyn Tribolè's book Stealth Health: How to Sneak Nutrition Painlessly Into Your Diet outlines simple ideas for increasing good eating habits. Each chapter contains nutritional information along with recipes and a list of 20 quick ways to incorporate the principles discussed into your daily regimen.

In her book, Ms. Tribble discusses ways to increase fruits, vegetables, calcium, soy, fiber and iron in the diet, as well as trimming fat.

Some examples:

Adding Vegetables

- eating any vegetable is better than eating no vegetable at all (no, French fries don't count!)
- drink vegetable or tomato juice as a beverage—it counts as a vegetable
- add large chunks of vegetables on the grill when cooking meat
- try a new vegetable or vegetable recipe each week
- grate or chop a variety of vegetables to add to pizza, soups, salads or on top of baked potatoes

Adding Fruit

- the less processed, the better. Health benefits are in fiber and pulpy parts.
- if using canned fruit, buy it with natural juice instead of heavy syrup
- start dinner with a fruit bowl appetizer
- begin your day with 6 oz. low glycemic fruit such as berries to jumpstart your day with vitamins and energy without adding high sugar content and the inevitable sugar crash
- try a fresh fruit or pureed fruit topping on pancakes, toast, bagels, ice cream or frozen yogurt

Calcium Facts

- nondairy sources of calcium include greens, almonds, extra firm tofu, sardines and orange juice
- use nonfat plain yogurt instead of sour cream. Not only will you drastically reduce your intake of fat, but yogurt has almost twice the calcium.
- fat-free cream cheese has four times the calcium than regular cream cheese
- cook with evaporated skim milk. It has five times the calcium than cream.

Adding Soy

- adding soy to diets can help reduce high cholesterol levels and reduces risk of cancer and osteoporosis
- tofu has a neutral flavor. Add it as a partial substitute to ricotta or cream cheese in cheesecake, custards, lasagna or manicotti or substitute pureed tofu for mayonnaise.
- substitute unsweetened, unflavored soy milk for regular milk in a recipe
- make a smoothie with tofu, soy milk and frozen fruit
- top a salad with roasted soy nuts
- try one new soy recipe each week

Increasing Fiber

- optimum levels of between 25 and 35 grams of fiber each day contribute to decreased risk of heart disease, cancer and diabetes and increase good digestive processes
- the less processed, the better. Refining wheat causes a significant reduction in phytochemicals, nature's health-enhancing compound. Eat brown rice instead of white rice; whole grains instead of white flour products.

- enrich breakfast cereal by adding wheat germ, oat or wheat bran
- try alternative whole grains like quinoa, whole barley, millet or amaranth
- substitute 1/3 to 1/2 whole wheat flour in place of all-purpose flour when baking

Reducing Fat

- substitute unsweetened applesauce for fat in baking
- some fat is necessary in a balanced diet, so choose good fats such as olive or canola oil
- use highly flavored cheeses in smaller amounts such as sharp cheddar, feta, romano and parmesan
- replace oil in marinades with white grape juice or apple juice
- use cocoa powder in place of baking chocolate; substitute a lesser amount of mini chocolate chips in place of regular chips
- remove skin and visible fat from meats before cooking

The goal of “stealth health” is to make progress and improvement toward incorporating these small steps permanently into your daily routine and diet. Discovering new and healthful ways of living can be fun and exciting! The resulting benefit of more energy, stamina and just generally feeling better is worth making a small effort.

© 2005 Nancy A. Werner

Nancy A. Werner, a licensed attorney in Michigan and Illinois (retired), is affiliated with the State Bar of Michigan’s Lawyers and Judges Assistance Program, writes articles and speaks to a variety of groups. Nancy is available to speak to groups on holistic stress management/reduction and the benefits of meditation. She can be reached at 734-915-3744 or at nawlaw@btc-bci.com.