

Jody Rhoades, MD
Pacific Medical Centers
Prevention: Tips to Maintain a Healthy Lifestyle

Prevention is a key component in reducing healthcare costs and lowering your risks for chronic illness. Even more importantly, by preventing illness and avoiding chronic diseases, you can maintain a healthy lifestyle and spend more time doing the things you love with family and friends. We all know the basics of prevention: lose weight, stop smoking, get your screenings, know your numbers, and eat a balanced diet. The trick is to absorb the basics into your daily life—and to start acting on them by taking small steps now.

The first step is easy. When you tackle a complex problem, you usually call in the pros. In the case of prevention, your primary care provider is your best source for understanding your current health status, setting goals and finding healthy, smart ways to move forward. In tracking your health history, your doctor might conduct a physical exam and order some lab work or screening tests. By working with your doctor, you can learn your numbers—such as blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar—and what they indicate for you. Ask your provider to help you design a preventive health plan with incremental goals and realistic steps.

The second step involves regularly visiting your doctor. In part, prevention means detecting issues early so they can be treated before they become full-blown crises. Regular visits help your provider track your progress, notice changes, update your treatment plan, apply the latest medical advances and listen to your concerns. You also will stay on track with screenings for diabetes, cancers and other concerns.

The third step includes taking small, healthy steps on your own initiative. Here are some easy diet and exercise tips to get you started:

Feel like eating right takes too much time? Focus on some “super-foods”! Here are three easy-to-add power ingredients:

- **Blueberries.** Packed with potassium, vitamin C, antioxidants and phytoflavonoids, these small blue gems can lower your chances of cancer and heart disease. Blueberries also fight inflammation, a key component of many chronic diseases. Eat them by the handful, or toss them on vanilla yogurt or whole-grain cereal. Frozen blueberries are great for smoothies; look in the freezer aisle. And now, you can eat local, fresh blueberries.
- **Walnuts.** A great source of omega-3 fatty acids, walnuts help reduce bone loss and protect your brain from Alzheimer's disease. Chop up a small bowl of these nuts, and have them ready to add to salads, cereals or apple sauce.
- **Broccoli.** Research has linked broccoli to a reduction in colon cancer, and it also helps build bones. A low level of potassium, another nutrient in broccoli, has been linked to an irregular heartbeat. Choose fresh, firm broccoli and steam it until it still has a little crunch. Or look for broccoli salads in the deli aisle.

The National Institutes of Health (www.NIH.gov) has a great deal of information about healthy eating. In particular, the site shares information about a great diet, the Mediterranean-style

diet. This diet has fewer meats and carbohydrates and more plant-based foods and monounsaturated (good) fat than a typical American diet. Many people who live in Italy, Spain and other countries in the Mediterranean region have eaten this way for centuries.

Can't quite fit three 60-minute sessions of heart-pounding exercise into your week? Ease up on yourself! The National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive & Kidney Disease recommends two and half hours a week of exercise—which averages out to about 20 minutes per day. For starters, you can pick up the pace on daily activities, such as gardening, walking the hills in your neighborhood or getting off the bus two stops early. Once you get started, consider adding more minutes. The American Heart Association promotes 30 minutes of aerobic exercise a day. To help you stick with it, make exercise social. Check out the great variety of today's fitness classes—tai chi, water aerobics, ballet barre workouts, swing dance and indoor biking, to name a few. You can find people that share your interest on www.MeetUp.com. It is easier to stick to a routine if you have others to do activities with.

Think being fit is expensive? You could empty your wallet on a fancy gym membership and jazzy exercise duds. But that's missing the point of exercise as a path to good health. Instead, look into your local community center or senior center for free dance demonstrations, table tennis or pick-up basketball. Wash your car the old-fashioned way, or clean your windows. It all counts! Be on the lookout for free "fun runs" or explore some new city parks with an exercise buddy.

Finally, always remember to consult your doctor before beginning a new health initiative. Your primary care physicians want to help you live your best, healthy life, so give them a call today.

Dr. Jody Rhoades is a board-certified Internist and has been in practice for 16 years. She received her medical degree and did her residency at the University of Kansas School of Medicine. Dr. Rhoades is the Medical Director of PacMed's Canyon Park clinic. For more information about Dr. Rhoades or to make an appointment with her, please visit www.PacMed.org or call 425.412.7200.