

Who Else Wants Fewer Doctor Appointments?

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Visiting the doctor is rarely fun, and it's becoming more difficult these days. The Association of American Medical Colleges projects a shortage of about 30,000 primary-care physicians by 2025.

It may take more than an apple a day to keep the doctor away, but a healthy diet and other simple lifestyle changes can keep you out of the waiting room. ***Learn how to develop habits that will keep you fit and strong.***

Dietary Changes

Many experts blame the Standard American Diet (SAD) for high rates of obesity, diabetes, depression, and other serious conditions. Good nutrition can strengthen your immune system and lower your risk for many illnesses.

1. **Eat more produce.**Fruits and vegetables are nutrient dense and light in calories. They'll boost your immune system and help you stay hydrated. Plus, all that fiber can lower your risk of diabetes.
2. **Focus on whole foods.**Processed foods are usually loaded with excessive fat, sugar, and salt. ***Try eating foods in their natural state.***
3. **Limit alcohol.**Too many cocktails can damage your liver and other organs. Most experts recommend up to one drink a day for women and two for men.
4. **Manage your weight.**Carrying around too many pounds increases your risk of heart conditions, arthritis, and certain cancers. Stay slim by watching calories

and leading an active life.

Other Lifestyle Changes

Here are a few more changes to go along with your balanced diet. They'll have a major impact on your body and mind.

1. **Move around.**Physical activity strengthens your heart and muscles. Aim to exercise at least 3 days a week. Take the stairs instead of the elevator.
2. **Sit less.**Research suggests that the longer you sit, the poorer your health may be even if you exercise. If you have a desk job, try taking walking breaks every half hour. Cut back on your TV time.
3. **Do yoga.**While any form of exercise and relaxation can be beneficial, yoga seems especially powerful. ***A study at Massachusetts General Hospital recorded a whopping 43 percent reduction in healthcare use among patients who studied yoga for a year.***
4. **Deal with stress.**If yoga is not your cup of tea, there are other ways to keep tension from piling up. Book a massage or listen to gentle music.
5. **Be happy.**The more you're satisfied with your life, the less you'll need your doctor. ***On a scale of 1 to 6, a patient could expect an 11 percent decrease in doctor visits for each level of higher life satisfaction, according to one University of Michigan study.***
6. **Adopt a pet.**Holding your cat is good for mental and physical wellbeing. The CDC says pets help people lower their blood pressure, cholesterol, and triglyceride levels. They also provide an antidote to loneliness.

7. **Connect with others.** Speaking of loneliness, support from humans helps too.
Close social ties can help you catch fewer colds, and may even extend your life.

8. **Sleep well.** Adequate rest and sleep is vital to healing. Turn off the computer and TV in the evening and go to bed on time.

9. **Quit smoking.** Giving up tobacco may be the most important thing you can do for your health. It takes an average of 5 to 10 attempts to quit for good, so hang in there.

It's important to have a good relationship with your health care team and follow their recommendations when you're sick or injured. However, you and your doctor can enjoy spending more time apart as long as you're making decisions that increase your wellbeing.