

Small Steps to Positive Lifestyle Choices



It's a big challenge to change lifestyle habits after 30 or 40 years. It's a sad truth that as we age, many of the chronic diseases we live with are a result of our lifestyle choices. But we can prevent or manage many of these chronic 'lifestyle diseases' by starting to make small changes toward a healthier lifestyle.

Chronic diseases affected by lifestyle choices include Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, problems with blood vessels that lead to stroke, arthritis, some cancers, Alzheimer Disease, and osteoporosis. Physical activity, healthy eating, and some simple changes in our lifestyle can play a big role in preventing or managing these diseases. Isn't that worth a try?

There are lots of ideas below to start you thinking. Pick just one and try it. Ask yourself if it is something you could do with just a little effort. If it is too big a change, it may be hard to stick with it.

Start with small, simple changes. Build these changes into your daily routine. If it doesn't work out, try something else from the list. After you have had success with one idea for a week or so, add another one from the list. If you start small and keep on going, your success will be a pleasant surprise.

Think about what you are adding to your lifestyle, instead of what you are losing. You are adding years to your life and life to your years. You are keeping your independence and good health.

Ideas for adding more physical activity to your lifestyle:

- Make physical activity a part of your daily routine.
- Start by doing more of what you are already doing.
- Walk whenever you can.
- Treat your feet. Get a good pair of shoes for walking.
- Start with short, 10-minute activity sessions. They all add up.
- Over time, build up to a total of at least 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity each week.

Ideas for adding more healthy eating to your lifestyle:

- If you like sweets, cut down bit by bit. This is easier than trying to cut them out completely right away.
- Eat whole grain bread instead of white bread.
- Drink water more often. Keep a glass of water with you when you are sitting down.
- Add just one more fruit or vegetable to your diet.
- Avoid large portions and second servings.
- Enjoy a variety of foods from each food group.
- Choose lower-fat dairy products and lean meats, fish, and poultry.
- Limit foods high in fat such as fried foods, chips, and pastries.
- Prepare foods with little or no fat, and reduce salt.
- Limit processed foods.

(These tips are from Active Aging Canada's resource, *Your Personal Passport to Healthy Living*.)