

HEALTH HORIZONS

NEWS FOR YOUR WELL-BEING



Prevention: It starts with you

U.S. Surgeon General
Richard H. Carmona, MD

Do you know the fastest-growing cause of illness and death in America today? The answer may surprise you. It is not smoking, drug abuse, or alcoholism, as terrible as those things are. It is being overweight or obese.

Nearly two out of three of all Americans are overweight or obese: that's a 50% increase from just a decade ago! Nearly 15% of our children and teenagers are overweight; and overweight children usually grow up to be overweight adults.

Being overweight and obese invites a host of health problems, including diabetes, certain types of cancer, stroke, and heart attack.

The cost of these illnesses is high. Personal costs include lost opportunities, disability, death and grieving for those who suffer with them and their families. The economic costs are also high – stretching into the hundreds of billions of dollars – for the businesses and government paying health insurance costs and who must compensate for the lost productivity of workers, managers, and executives not minding their own health.

If we would step back a moment we would realize the enormous burden -

and suffering – of most illnesses is largely preventable. As Surgeon General, America's doctor, my top priority can be summed up in one word: prevention.

Exercise. Eat right. Get plenty of sleep. And avoid alcohol and tobacco. This is the good health recipe used for generations. It's not exciting; it's not dramatic. But it has proven effective for preventing illness.

Small steps can bring big rewards. You don't have to run miles and miles to benefit from exercise; start with walking from a space at the back of the parking lot, washing the car, or playing with the kids. Encourage the kids to turn off the Play Station and head out to the playground.

You don't have to starve yourself to lose weight. Start by avoiding fast food once or twice a week. I'll be the first to say it won't be easy. Families live such busy lives now, and it is much easier when mom and dad come home from work exhausted simply to pop a TV dinner into the microwave or order a pizza than it is to prepare a healthy meal.

Besides, let's face it, sometimes a big order of french fries is much more appealing than say, a garden salad.

But the small choices we make today – every day – will last a lifetime. We can bring ourselves health or sickness by the choices we make. It's that simple.

For good ideas and simple steps you can take to become healthier, check out www.healthierus.gov.

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Nutrition and eye health

Johanna M. Seddon, MD

By the year 2030, an estimated 70 million Americans will be 65 or older, and for many, deteriorating eye health will be a serious concern. There is growing evidence that specific nutrients may help protect against the two leading causes of visual impairment and blindness in American adults: cataracts and age-related macular degeneration (AMD). Vitamins C and E and the carotenoids lutein and zeaxanthin have been linked in scientific studies to a reduced risk for AMD and, to a lesser extent, cataracts.

Cataracts

About 20 million Americans have cataracts, opacities in the lens of the eye that cause clouded vision or blindness. They are caused in part by oxidative damage to lens proteins from years of exposure to ultraviolet light. Cataract extractions are the most common surgical procedure performed in the U.S. and the most costly item on the Medicare budget. Epidemiologists estimate that if the progression of cataracts could be delayed by 10 years, the number of surgeries might be reduced by 45%.

Vitamins C and E, both powerful antioxidants, may play a role in protecting against the oxidative damage that caus-

es cataracts. The data are mixed. A number of observational studies have correlated higher levels of these vitamins with reduced risk of cataract, particularly in people who took supplements for more than ten years. However, of the two clinical trials that have been conducted on vitamins and cataracts, only one showed benefit.

Lutein and zeaxanthin may hold even more promise for AMD. These two yellow-colored nutrients are concentrated in an area of the retina called the macula lutea, so named because it literally means "yellow spot." The unique concentration of lutein and zeaxanthin in the retina suggests a specific role in the eye. In two large studies at Harvard,

THE COLORS OF GOOD HEALTH

A rainbow of pigments in plants may play beneficial roles in health. Good colors for eye health are dark green vegetables, such as spinach, kale, broccoli, peas and Brussels sprouts, and yellow and orange fruits and vegetables such as corn, orange juice, yellow summer squash, and orange peppers. They contain "lutein" and "zeaxanthin," both found in research studies to protect against age-related eye diseases.

Age-Related Macular Degeneration (AMD)

AMD, a loss of central vision due to breakdown of cells in the retina, affects about a quarter of Americans over 65. Prevention is extremely important because treatment options are quite limited. Recently the National Eye Institute (NEI) completed a clinical trial, the Age-Related Eye Disease Study (AREDS), that showed dietary supplements delayed the progression of advanced AMD. The investigators concluded that persons older than 55 years with intermediate to late vision loss due to AMD should consider taking a supplement such as that used in the trial (500 mg vitamin C, 400 IU vitamin E, 15 mg beta carotene, 80 mg zinc, 2 mg copper).

people with the highest dietary intakes of lutein and zeaxanthin (greater than 5.8 mg per day) had a significantly lower AMD risk compared to those with the lowest intakes (approximately 1.2 mg per day). The average diet in the U.S. contains less than 2.0 mg of lutein and zeaxanthin combined.

Obtaining the Needed Nutrients

Diets providing five to nine daily servings of fruits and vegetables that include lutein- and zeaxanthin-rich choices can provide close to the 6 mg level that research has found to be protective. It is also possible to get substantial amounts of vitamin C (about 250 mg) from a daily diet rich in fruits and vegetables, although it is much more difficult to reach potentially protective levels of vitamin E (typical diets in the U.S. contain only about 10.5 IU of vitamin E). Increased intake of fruits and vegetables has been promoted to the American public for a variety of health benefits. Maintaining eye health as we age adds one more good reason to meet this goal.

Dr. Seddon is a retina specialist and Director of the Epidemiology Unit at the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary, a teaching affiliate of the Harvard Medical School. She is nationally known for her research of eye diseases and has been a pioneer and lead investigator for several nutritional studies, including the recent NEI AREDS study.



Your annual health evaluation: It's time to expect more!

James M. Rippe, MD and
John G. Langdon, MD

The fast-paced executive lifestyle, filled with pressures, long hours, interruptions, and frequent travel, poses heightened risks to the health and well-being of key executives. Understanding this threat, companies and executives alike increasingly choose an annual executive health evaluation as a key tool for protecting their investment in leadership.

Clinics such as ours provide state of the art health evaluations for executives. But, regardless of your corporate stature, a thorough annual health check-up will improve your chances for a long and healthy life. What should a model annual executive health assessment contain? The best health evaluations deliver "high-touch" and "high-tech" state-of-the-art medicine and lifestyle consultation. Here is a good guide, based on what we do at Rippe Health Assessment, for what to expect and what to ask for from your own physician.

Your History

The best evaluation begins face-to-face. What the executive tells the physician in discussing health history, lifestyle, and risk-factor issues and what we discover in a hands-on physical examination and lab work tell us how to focus precision high-

tech screening for maximum benefit. In addition to emphasis on health history and risk factors for heart disease and cancer (the leading health risks for executives over age 30), we explore personal and family issues that might be creating stress or hindering performance.

To enhance total well-being and vitality, this assessment focuses on stress reduction, sources of emotional strength, and strategies for achieving maximum performance. Quantity and quality of sleep, friendships, family relationships and other restorative factors are also assessed.

Your Physical Exam

The physical examination should include vital signs, complete evaluation of the head, eyes, ears, nose and throat, heart and lungs, abdomen, full skin evaluation with the patient disrobed, thorough musculoskeletal examination, genital, and rectal examination. In addition, men require prostate and testicular examination and women breast and pelvic exam.

Complete blood and urine evaluations, including blood count, metabolic profiles and fasting lipid profile, provide baselines. In addition, we evaluate thyroid function, C-Reactive Protein (CRP) as an early indication of cardiac risk, and, in men, Prostate Specific Antigen (PSA) as a possible indicator of prostate cancer.

Among high-tech screening techniques, High-Speed Heart CT Scans on men over 40 and women over 45 provide a highly accurate assessment and early warn-

YOUR MEDICINE CABINET

Over half of all executives we see are taking prescription drugs and one or more supplements and/or vitamins – often with unintended side effects or interactions. A pharmacy assessment not only identifies potential problems but recommends the most effective options for individual patients.

ing signal of the presence of chronic atherosclerosis in the coronary arteries. For former or current smokers, a High-Speed Helical CT Scan of the lungs can detect lung cancer when it is still treatable. We recommend colonoscopies starting at 45, or earlier if a family history of colon cancer exists. And, computer-assisted digital mammography and bone density assessment are important for women.

A thorough exam also includes exercise treadmill testing, direct measurement of metabolic rate, body composition analysis, as well as hearing and visions tests.

Your Report

A comprehensive counseling session and complete report should round out the annual executive evaluation. Using high-touch and high-tech diagnostics, it is possible not only to detect diseases at their earliest stages, but also to develop specific, individualized plans to prevent disease. As needed, access should be provided to specialists for any specific or complex medical problems identified.

Business executives, managers, and other successful professionals achieve their positions by effectively analyzing and acting on data, not by being passive. It's time to think of your health assessment as a springboard to better health and higher performance. It's time to expect more!

YOUR LIFESTYLE:

NUTRITION, EXERCISE, AND WEIGHT MANAGEMENT

In the executive population we see at Rippe Health Assessment, over 70 percent of clients do not get enough regular exercise to achieve health benefits. A comprehensive physical activity/fitness assessment with a detailed plan of action addresses this need.

Too many physicians and patients ignore the importance of nutrition and weight management. Eight of the ten leading causes of death in the United States each year have a nutrition or alcohol component. Over 60 percent of the patients we see are overweight or obese. A detailed nutrition evaluation, including analysis of a three-day food record, is essential and informs a customized nutritional and weight management plan.

Dr. Rippe and Dr. Langdon are, respectively, Founder/Director and Medical Director, Rippe Health Assessment at Florida Hospital Celebration Health. For more information, see www.ripphealth.com.

Men – it might be your hormones

Winston K. Mebust, MD

For decades, women expected and tolerated menopause and its side effects. Hormone replacement therapy gave women a powerful tool to treat the symptoms of diminished estrogen levels. In recent years another question has arisen: Do aging men undergo a similar change as male hormone levels decline with age?

Commonly known as “male menopause” or andropause, hypogonadism has started making headlines around the world, though researchers are still trying to determine the mechanisms behind dwindling hormone levels and aging. More men than ever before are visiting the doctor with low energy levels and decreased libido. For some, abnormally low testosterone levels may be the cause.

Male hypogonadism – the condition in which the testes do not function at optimum levels – most often results from natural aging but may also be related to familial history, nutritional problems, or cancer. Besides diminished sex drive and energy,

THE AMERICAN UROLOGICAL ASSOCIATION (AUA)

strongly supports the need for more research on the causes and treatment of low testosterone. The AUA believes in informed patient decision-making and careful medical surveillance when treating hypogonadism. Men should talk to their urologist about their condition, its effects and ways of possible treatment. For more information see the AUA’s patient education web site, www.urologyhealth.org.

its side effects may be similar to those of menopause: changes in mood, irritability, breast tenderness, reduced muscle mass and strength, headaches, and loss of bone density (osteoporosis). It is important to remember that declining hormone levels are a natural part of the aging process and that not all men will have symptoms severe enough to warrant treatment.



Because women have a clear signal indicating menopause – that is, the end of menstrual cycles – declining hormone levels are easier to identify in women. Moreover, the condition in men can sometimes span decades, which also makes it more difficult to diagnose. If you are an aging male experiencing severe menopausa-like symptoms, it is important to visit your primary care physician who may refer you to a specialist familiar with the condition. With a simple blood test, a urologist or hormone specialist can evaluate if hormone levels are to blame for your symptoms or caused by another health condition.

Replacing testosterone is one way to combat the symptoms of hypogonadism. Clinical studies have shown that treatment can be successful for certain individuals. However, it is not to be entered into lightly, and not all men are candidates. Though the weight of current evidence does not suggest excessive risk of heart disease or prostate cancer, the fact is that the benefits and risks of long-term testosterone replacement therapy (TRT) have not been definitively established. Testosterone can fuel existing prostate tumors and exacerbate other conditions, so it is important to be thoroughly evaluated by a physician before beginning any type of hormone replacement.

Even after evaluation, it is important that patients make informed decisions about

their condition, its effects and ways of treatment. If TRT is prescribed, patients should be carefully supervised by their physicians, and should be seen regularly to evaluate overall health.

Dr. Mebust is president of the American Urological Association, a professional association with more than 15,000 members worldwide.

PROSTATE SCREENING: IS IT TIME TO START?

Approximately 30,000 men will die this year from prostate cancer, but many of those deaths might have been avoided with early diagnosis and treatment. The Prostate-Specific Antigen blood test is a simple diagnostic that can be easily performed as part of a yearly physical. Prior to the use of the PSA test, prostate tumors were found mostly in advanced – and less treatable – stages, and patients had far fewer options for treatment than they have today.

The American Urological Association believes that all men over 50 – and those over 45 at high risk, such as African-Americans and men with a family history of prostate cancer – should consider the test and discuss its benefits and limitations with their physicians.