

12 Ways to Improve Your Family's Health

By: Dr. Oz

Oprah's resident MD, Mehmet Oz, shares his most effective tips for keeping your family healthy and happy.

Quench Cravings with Water

Thirst and hunger both originate in the hypothalamus and are sometimes hard to differentiate from each other. So offer your kids a glass of water before you give them a snack. If they don't like plain water, toss slices of fruit or vegetables into a carafe of filtered water for a healthier alternative to sugary beverages.



Scrub Up Like a Surgeon

Cold germs, the flu virus, and even bacteria that cause diarrhea are all commonly spread through hand-to-hand contact. Every time you enter your house, wash your hands -- including your wrists, the backs of your hands, and underneath your fingernails -- with soap for at least 15 to 20 seconds.

Eat More Meals Together

Studies have shown that kids who eat dinner with their families tend to eat less fried food, drink less soda, and consume more fruits and vegetables. Those kids also have a higher intake of vitamins and nutrients and a lower intake of saturated and trans fats. But even beyond these practical reasons, a regular family meal provides a way to keep the lines of communication open and strong.

Pick the Right Doctor

It's going to take a bit of detective work. You don't want to settle for the doctor your coworker sees, or the closest office, or the first name you find in the insurance company's directory. Instead, get recommendations for a primary care doctor for you, your husband, and your kids. Also check out ABMS.org, which lets you search board-certified physicians by name or medical specialty. And assuming you're not 25, you may want your doctor to be around your age or younger. That way you can have a physician for life, and that continuity is a big help in diagnosing and predicting problems as you age.

Stop Wearing Shoes Indoors

Your shoes don't just track dirt into the house, they also track in countless germs, as well as pesticides, smoke and toxins, dust mites, and allergens. One study from the University of Arizona found that the outsides of our shoes contain an average of 421,000 bacteria. So kick them off at the door.

Use a Humidifier

Dry air causes cracks in mucous membranes, which can lead to colds and throat infections, plus dry skin, cracked lips, and allergies.

Stretch

Flexibility will make daily activities -- such as bending over to tie your shoes or running to catch the bus -- easier and less tiring. Stretching also improves your circulation as well as your range of motion, which helps keep you balanced, preventing falls and other injuries as you age. Try this stretch as soon as you wake up: Stand with your feet three feet apart, hips directly over your ankles. Interlace your hands behind your back and straighten your arms. Inhale and draw your shoulder blades in toward each other, then exhale and bend forward at the pelvis. Allow your arms to move down toward your head. Hold for ten seconds, taking three to five deep breaths. To release, unclasp your hands and place them on your thighs, bend your knees slightly, and roll back up.

Upgrade Your Sunscreen

Look for a product that protects against both UVB rays (which cause sunburn) and UVA rays (which affect the skin on a deeper level and can cause cancer). The SPF number applies only to UVB protection, so check the list of ingredients for a UVA-blocking agent like avobenzone. If you're using a product (or applying one to your kids' faces) that doesn't have UVA blockers, your skin may be getting damaged even if you're not burning.

Teach Your Family to Give Back

Volunteering has been linked to increased life expectancy, greater life satisfaction, and reduced rates of depression. Check out ServiceNation.org or Serve.gov for opportunities across the country.

Check Your Air Quality

Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer in America, after cigarettes. This gas naturally wafts up from the ground and can get trapped inside your home, where it builds to dangerous levels. You can get a radon-testing kit for less than \$20 at RadonZone.com; the best time to test is winter, when our homes tend to be most tightly insulated. If your levels are elevated, contact your state's radon program (find it at epa.gov/radon/whereyoulive.html) and ask about ways to reduce your exposure.

Buy Smaller Plates

Studies show that if you dine from bigger plates and bowls, you'll automatically eat more. It's a mental thing: Americans tend to pile on more food until their plate looks full. Downgrade to a smaller set of dishes, and you'll eat less without even thinking about it.

Feed Your Dog Organic

Pets have high cancer rates (50 percent of dogs over the age of 10 will develop cancer), and one possible cause is the chemical compounds found in most processed pet foods. Filling Fido's bowl with organic food means you're not exposing him to dangerous additives.

As a reminder, always consult your doctor for medical advice and treatment before starting any program.

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