

LIFESTYLE MEDICINE

WHAT IS LIFESTYLE MEDICINE?

Lifestyle Medicine (LM) is a therapeutic intervention based on evidence to offer alterations in a person's living patterns to promote better health. It is suitable both for people suffering from chronic health conditions and those who are healthy.

Lifestyle medicine is a relatively new area of medicine which recognises and uses a better lifestyle to prevent, treat and sometimes reverse a lot of chronic health conditions which are very common in modern societies such as diabetes, cardiac issues, some cancers etc.

Lifestyle medicine is evidence based and has the strong backing of science. It is practiced alongside conventional western medicine and empowers the patients to take charge of their own health by being in the driving seat whereas the physician merely guides and helps the patient. The six pillars of lifestyle medicine are discussed below.



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The Six Pillars of Lifestyle Medicine

THE SIX PILLARS OF LIFESTYLE MEDICINE?



1. Adoption of a nutrient-dense whole food plant-predominant diet

There is overwhelming evidence that the body can obtain all required nutrients from plant-based foods. Modern ultra-processed foods are devoid of healthy nutrients like fibre. Harmful preservatives are often added to preserve food shelf life and make them hyper-palatable. Foods of animal origin are much more demanding of resources on the planet and offer no additional benefits. It is best to make small, incremental changes by incorporating vegetables, fruit, whole grains, beans and lentils, and some nuts and seeds in the diet.

2. Incorporating Exercise and Movement

Modern conveniences for transport and home appliances ensure there is minimal opportunity to expend energy and move daily. Thus we need to schedule regular exercise into our daily lives to obtain sufficient movement. Ideally, humans should get at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity and at least 30 minutes of strength training twice a week. There is a faulty belief that exercise should be all or nothing. One can incorporate some active movement into their day- park your car further away and walk to your destination, or use the stairs instead of an elevator or escalator.





3. Restorative Sleep

Sleep is a much-underestimated lifestyle pillar. The stresses of modern-day living impact our ability to sleep. However, the lack of sleep makes us function inefficiently. We are discovering that the quality and quantity of sleep is a major health factor, especially as we age. Insufficient sleep increases the risk of many lifestyle disorders, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, stroke, obesity, depression and also cognitive decline and Alzheimer's disease. Simple changes like reducing coffee, alcohol, 'blue' light exposure from our smartphones, television and above all, a regular sleep time can improve our quality of sleep and overall health.

4. Avoiding Substance Abuse

Addictive substances like cigarettes, drugs and alcohol have some of the worst impacts on the human lifestyle. Alcohol consumption has become a significant health issue, with most of us often underestimating the amount of alcohol we drink. Societal acceptance of alcohol consumption makes it difficult to accept it as harmful. Acceptance of our excesses is often the first step in reducing our dependence on these habits.





5. Meditation & Stress Management

Mindfulness, meditation, and stress management are intimidating words to busy lives. But learning to take a deep breath, allowing the mind to be present, will enable us to relax. Interestingly practices like yoga, meditation and tai chi enable us to be more productive and focussed on our tasks throughout the day. In our pursuit of more, we lose our ability to look after ourselves. There is good evidence to say that we do better for everyone when we look after ourselves.

6. Healthy Social Relationships

Healthy social relationships can boost overall health in significant ways. Adults having rich social lives are more likely to live longer than their peers with fewer connections. Loneliness is a scourge of modern-day living and has a massive negative impact on health. Friends offer companionship, increasing one's sense of belonging, purpose increasing personal happiness, which promotes feelings of self-worth and coping with trauma and avoid unhealthy lifestyle habits. Strong social support reduces many health problems like depression and high blood pressure. It is easier for individuals to adopt healthier lifestyle choices together with our group of friends.

