Here’s A Healthy Habit

Start your day with water. Drinking a glass of water in the morning sets the tone for rehydrating your body for the rest of the day. (If you’re a coffee person, drink your water first to offset the dehydrating effects of coffee).

Knowing that about 60% of your body and 73% of your brain consists of water, getting hydrated in the morning can be good for your brain – it boosts your alertness and can provide a pick-me-up for your low energy level. Water (and being hydrated) also helps you eat healthier. Water takes up room in your stomach to make you feel full so you eat less when you sit down to breakfast, and when not adequately hydrated throughout the day, you can mistake thirst for hunger, which can lead to eating more.

Make Time to Move

Research provides compelling reasons to sit less and move our bodies more:

- A 2015 British study found that men and women who exercised for at least 150 minutes per week – the standard recommendation in Britain and the United States – reduced their risk of premature death by at least 25% compared to people who exercised less often.
- A 2019 study published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention concluded that more than 8% of all deaths in the United States were attributed to “inadequate levels of activity.”
- A 2020 examination of the lifestyles and death risks of about 44,000 adults in the United States and Europe concluded that the most sedentary men and women in the study (who sat most of the day), were as much as 260% more likely to die prematurely compared to the active people who exercised for at least 30 minutes most days.

As Christians, we’re mindful of the stewardship of our bodies not because we’re trying to cheat death, but because by being as well as we can be – while still dealing with the illnesses and diseases of a sinful world – allows us to better serve our families, our neighbors and our ministries.

If you’re a member of the Concordia Health Plan and could use some motivation to walk and move more, start participating in the Vitality program. Through Vitality, you can take advantage of a $100 discount promotion to purchase a Fitbit and track your movement. As you walk or run, you’ll earn points that can be redeemed for gift cards. You can find out more about Vitality and the other wellness programs at ConcordiaPlans.org by clicking on the “Caring for You” box and then clicking on “Physical Wellness.”
Caring for Your Mental & Emotional Health

Approximately 95% of adults say that caring for mental health is important to overall health, yet only 26% actually make mental health a priority. Mental health professionals believe that emotional/mental health isn’t a priority for three main reasons:

The “mental health” label (stigma). Mental health isn’t discussed as openly as physical health. We are more willing to share with others our plantar fasciitis concerns than to say we have anxiety or depression. Part of the reason is how others may react. With physical ailments, advice is often given such as “I can recommend a podiatrist who healed my plantar fasciitis.” With mental health, comments may not be as helpful: “Everyone gets anxious. Just don’t worry so much.” “How can you be depressed – you’ve got a great life.” Many people also mistakenly believe that an emotional condition is a sign of weakness and that you should be able to control it without help.

The physical/emotional connection. Investing in your mental health can boost your physical health. For example, studies show that depression can cause headaches, fatigue, digestive problems, and directly affect the immune system making it easier to get sick. Physical health problems can significantly increase your risk of developing mental health problems: nearly one in three people with a long-term physical health condition also has a mental health concern, most often depression or anxiety.

Not knowing how to get started. The first step is acknowledging that something doesn’t seem right – you’re not yourself. The second step is making mental health a priority through self-care or getting help from a mental health expert.

Self-care

One form of self-care is to foster your relationships with family members and friends – those you feel comfortable being with; who make you feel valued; who take your concerns seriously. Studies point to a strong association between good mental and physical health and supportive social relationships. Another form of self-care is practicing self-awareness: recognizing situations that can trigger changes in your emotions, but also identifying what activities help you to calm your emotions and relieve stress.

Mental Health Experts

You may want to talk to a professional who can assess what you’re going through and help with appropriate care. Don’t wait until your symptoms are overwhelming. Talk to a counselor if you are experiencing symptoms that have lasted two weeks or more, such as:

- Difficulty sleeping.
- Appetite changes that result in unwanted weight changes.
- Difficulty concentrating.
- Loss of interest in things you usually find enjoyable.
- Inability to perform usual daily functions and responsibilities.

Church workers can talk to counselors through Concordia Plans’ Employee Assistance Program (EAP). You can visit in-person with a counselor for six free sessions per topic, or have unlimited telephonic counseling. For more information and details on how to access the EAP, go to ConcordiaPlans.org, click on the “Caring for you” box and then click on “Mental Health.”

Source: Aetna, National Alliance on Mental Illness, and National Institute of Mental Health

Food for Thought

Like most fruits and vegetables, cantaloupe is a “good for you” food. One cup of fresh melon provides 6% of your daily serving of fiber with zero fat and no cholesterol. Cantaloupe is mostly water (almost as much as watermelon) so it helps keep you hydrated and has electrolytes to help balance your body fluid.

Cantaloupe provides 100% of the daily vitamin C recommendation, all of your daily need for vitamin A (which helps keep your eyes, skin, bones, and immune system healthy) and about 12% of your recommended daily potassium (important for your heart, muscles, and blood pressure).

The best way to pick a cantaloupe is by smell. The fruit should have a sweet, slightly musky scent. A good cantaloupe feels heavy for its size, has a rind that resembles raised netting, and has a stem end that pushes in slightly when pressed with your thumb.

Source: WebMD and Real Simple
Mind Your Muscles

Many adults are mindful about regularly exercising their heart (aerobic exercise), but unfortunately, only 40% of adults regularly engage in muscle-strengthening activities (resistance exercise). While each type of exercise provides health benefits, studies show that combining both has a greater impact on health than either of the two performed separately.

After age 30, you begin to lose as much as 3 to 5% of your muscle mass per decade depending on your fitness level. We need our muscles — particularly as we age — to perform even simple activities such as getting out of bed, standing up from chairs, getting dressed, climbing stairs or carrying groceries. More importantly, loss of muscle mass is one of the primary reasons for falls. One in every three adults ages 65 and older falls each year. Those falls lead to more than 800,000 hospitalizations a year — and falls are the number one cause of accidental death in adults 65 and older. People with stronger muscles are less likely to fall and, when they do take a tumble, are less likely to sustain a serious injury.

Resistance exercises can help reverse the loss of muscle mass as you age. Try to commit to two days each week of building up the strength in your leg muscles, core, and arms. You can build those muscles through:

- Lifting free weights.
- Pulling or pushing resistance bands.
- Doing body weight exercises, such as pushups and squats.

Strength training can also help your brain: An analysis of 18 studies, published in the European Review of Aging and Physical Activity, found that resistance training was linked to improvements in processing speed and memory functions.

Source: American Journal of Preventive Medicine and Harvard Health Publishing

Did You Know

Several studies have found that walking reduces arthritis-related joint pain. In fact, walking five to six miles a week can even prevent arthritis from forming in the first place. Walking protects the joints — especially the knees and hips, which are most susceptible to osteoarthritis — by lubricating them and strengthening the muscles that support them.

Source: Harvard Health Publishing

Don’t Get Sabotaged with Snacks

With so many snack options available, it’s easy to talk ourselves into buying what we think are healthier options when in reality they are not. Be snack-savvy by knowing what you’re consuming before purchasing these snacks:

**Dark chocolate chips:** Dark chocolate (at least 70% cocoa) can have health benefits, but it’s too easy to overeat loose snacks out of a bag. One study published in the journal Appetite showed that people consume on average 41% more calories with open bag snacking versus single-serve portions.

**Sweetened nuts:** Honey roasted peanuts are coated with syrup increasing the sugar content to about 2 grams per ounce. The American Heart Association recommends that women limit their added sugar consumption to no more than 24 grams per day and men to no more than 36 grams per day.

**Veggie straws:** Made with pulverized potato flour, potato starch, oil and salt, they aren’t much different than regular potato chips when it comes to calories, fat, and carbohydrates. The slight benefit with real potato chips is that you typically get 1 gram of fiber in a one-ounce (15 chip) serving.

Source: Eating Well and Eat This, Not That

Money Management

Consider using two banks for your financial needs: one for your savings (emergency) account and one for your checking. If your accounts are at the same bank, it’s too easy to transfer funds from one to the other when you are tempted to purchase something you feel you want, but really can’t afford.

Within your savings account, see if your bank has “special savings” accounts so that you can categorize your savings goals in different categories: emergency fund, car fund, vacation fund, etc. The idea is to not touch your emergency savings, but let your intermediate savings grow to reach whatever short-term goals you have in mind.
Hitting Your Pause Button

If you enjoy streaming TV shows, you have come to appreciate an important function on your remote or laptop: the pause button. It’s handy when you get a phone call or when you need to take a break. Wouldn’t it be convenient to have a pause button in life? In the middle of a stressful or anxious situation we could hit pause, the world around us would freeze, and we could take a few moments to catch our breath and think about what to say or do next before bringing everything back into motion.

Thank God we do have some built-in pauses in life. When God separated light from dark he gave us a natural time to sleep at the end of the day. God designed our bodies to use that pause time to recharge so we could be ready for the next day. It’s up to us to take that pause – to be purposeful and give our bodies that much needed rest. The same is true when we’re in the midst of a stressful stretch of responsibilities and commitments. We need to pause and give our body and mind a brief break so we don’t become overwhelmed. One key element for engaging in those periodic respites is to be preventive: taking a break before getting to the point of being completed exhausted. The longer we put off taking a short breather, the more time we may need to recharge and recover. The other key factor is knowing the type of pause that works for us.

We all need our spiritual well-being pauses – recharging through reading and hearing God’s word on a regular basis. That gives us strength for the day and hope for tomorrow – but what additional earthly pause button do you use to help calm your mind and your emotions? Maybe it’s reading, writing, golfing, doing puzzles or simply going for a walk outside to get some fresh air. Maybe it’s an intense workout, solving brain teasers, taking a few minutes to get lost in a favorite TV show or video game, or talking on the phone with family or friends. Perhaps it’s simply looking at photos of your grandkids and replaying in your mind your time with them.

Whether you’ve recognized it or not, there is some task or activity that can prompt a pause – a mental refresh that momentarily clears your mind of the “to-do’s” on your list and brings down your blood pressure. I pray you discover the pause button that works for you and are able to activate it when you’re feeling the need to catch your breath before resuming life’s motion.