Hold the Shaker

According to a study published in the journal *European Heart*, people who habitually add extra salt to meals may not live as long as those who rarely add salt. The study found that adding salt could reduce life expectancy by 2.3 years for men and 1.5 years for women compared with those who don’t add extra salt. Researchers found that in addition to lower life expectancy, the “always salt” group had a 28% increased risk of dying prematurely.

The study, involving 501,379 participants, adjusted for factors such as age, sex, race, body mass index, smoking status, alcohol intake, physical activity, diet, and medical conditions such as diabetes, cancer, and heart and blood vessel diseases. Participants were followed for an average of nine years, and premature death was defined as dying before age 75.

Although sodium is essential for overall health, eating too much is associated with developing high blood pressure, and hypertension is one of the main risk factors for stroke and heart disease. The average American consumes about 3,400 milligrams (mg) of sodium per day – nearly 50% more than the recommended amount of 2,300 mg per day.

The obvious recommendation is to cut back on sodium by not automatically adding salt before tasting your food. You can also reduce your sodium intake by limiting consumption of packaged and prepared foods such as deli meats, pizza, tacos, and chips – foods that according to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration make up 70% of sodium sources in the American diet.

You can counter the effects of sodium in your system by eating more fruits and vegetables that contain potassium (e.g., citrus fruits, bananas, tomatoes, spinach, and broccoli). Potassium helps relieve tension in the blood vessel walls which also can lower blood pressure.

Source: Everyday Health
Ways to Maintain or Lessen Your Winter Weight

Trying to lose or even maintain your weight during the winter months can be a challenge. You can add small steps to your everyday routines to help you maintain or even lose weight without having to resort to extreme measures. Incorporating some or all of the following morning routines can help you tip the scales in your favor.

**Eat a high-protein breakfast.** The protein will make you feel full and can help decrease your mid-morning cravings for snacks.

**Drink plenty of water.** Staying hydrated can help reduce snacking because many people confuse hunger pains with the body’s signal that it needs water. Drinking plenty of water during meals also has been shown to decrease the number of daily calories consumed.

**Plan for exercise time.** Exercise can increase your calorie-burning metabolism. Exercise can also help you maintain and increase lean body mass, which also helps increase the number of calories you burn each day.

**Prepare meals at home.** A study of 40,554 people found that meal planning was associated with a lower risk of obesity. Another study found that those who ate home-cooked meals at least five times per week were 28% less likely to be overweight than those who only ate home-cooked meals three times or less per week.

**Sleep longer.** Go to bed earlier to squeeze in some extra sleep. Several studies have found that sleep deprivation may be associated with an increased appetite and increased cravings for high-carb, high-calorie foods. In one small study, participants consumed an average of 559 more calories the day after getting just four hours of sleep, compared to when they had a full eight hours.

**Track eating and exercise.** Keeping a food journal to track what you eat and how often you exercise can be an effective way to lose weight and keep yourself accountable. One study showed that participants who regularly tracked their diet and exercise lost more weight than those who did not.

Money Management

When running errands, don’t stop to buy drinks or snacks – they quickly add up in the expense column of your budget (plus they add extra calories to your diet). Take a water container with you and if you think you’ll need a snack, take along a small container of peanuts or a piece of fruit.

Move More and Sit Less

A study involving more than 100,000 participants in 21 countries found that people who sat for six to eight hours a day had a 12-13% increased risk for early death and heart disease, and those who sat for more than eight hours had a 20% increased risk. Furthermore, those who sat the most AND were also the least active had up to a 50% higher risk of premature death.

The study – which followed participants for an average of 11 years – found that a combination of sitting and inactivity accounted for 8.8% of all deaths which is almost on pace with the 10.6% of all deaths attributed to smoking.

The good news is that being active for part of the day can affect the outcome. Sitting less and moving more reduces the chances of early death and heart disease, allowing you more years of service to others. Make time in your day to move – or at least stand part of the time instead of sitting – and make it a goal to move your body throughout the day.

Source: *Journal of the American Medical Association Cardiology* 2022
Food for Thought

String cheese is a convenient snack full of beneficial nutrients. Depending upon the brand, one individual stick of cheese (28 grams) typically has 80-90 calories, 6-9 grams of protein, and 12-20% of the Daily Value for calcium. Eating low-calorie foods that are high in protein can help fill you up, decrease overall calorie intake, and aid weight loss.

Source: healthline.com

Be Mindful of How Often You Raise a Glass

Consumption of seven or more cans of beer per week or six large glasses of wine is associated with higher iron levels in the brain, according to a study in the PLOS Medicine journal. Iron accumulation in the brain has been linked with Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s and is a potential factor for alcohol-related cognitive decline.

The research involved 20,965 participants who reported their own alcohol consumption. Their brains were scanned using magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), and 7,000 also had an MRI of their liver to assess iron levels. All participants completed a series of simple tests to assess cognitive and motor function.

The researchers found that alcohol consumption above seven cans of beer or six large glasses of wine per week was associated with higher levels of iron in the brain regions associated with motor control, eye movement, learning and understanding, emotions and more.

This is the largest study to date of moderate alcohol consumption and iron accumulation.

Source: Public Library of Science Medicine

Walk for Your Brain

Approximately 4,000 steps per day is all it takes to reduce your dementia risk by 25%. Walk 10,000 steps per day and you can cut the risk of dementia in half. That’s the finding of a study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association Neurology.

Researchers looked at nearly three-years’ worth of walking data (2013-2015) of 78,000 adults who were required to always wear an accelerometer on their wrist. The device detects frequency and intensity of movement. The participants at that time showed no signs of dementia.

In 2021, researchers looked back in on those same participants using medical and death records and saw the pattern of reduced dementia risk in those who took more steps. They also discovered that a faster walking pace reduced the risk even more – those who walked at a pace of 112 steps per minute for 30 minutes experienced a 68% decrease in risk.

Source: jamanetwork.com

Say Thanks for Good Health

As Christians, we have much to be thankful for. Turns out, not only do we directly benefit from all of God’s many blessings (forgiveness of sins, eternal life, food and shelter – just to name a few), we also benefit indirectly. Research shows that consciously focusing and acknowledging those blessings can reduce stress and improve our physical and mental health.

In a small study, researchers had one group of participants write about things they were grateful for that had occurred during the week. A second group was asked to write about their daily frustrations or things that annoyed them, and finally a third group was asked to journal events that had affected them (with no emphasis on them being positive or negative). After 10 weeks, those who wrote about being thankful were more optimistic and felt better about their lives. Surprisingly, those who expressed gratitude also exercised more and had fewer doctor visits than those who focused on what irritated them.

Source: Harvard Health
“This” Is Never Forever

If I’ve learned anything after living 60 years on this earth it’s the certainty in the statement: “This, too, shall pass.” Unfortunately, living that mantra peacefully doesn’t always happen. Few people can remain calm during life’s “this” moments to take a step back and see the bigger picture.

For example, it’s difficult to imagine that as a new parent caught up in the frenzy of constant diaper changes and feedings, that “this” will pass and one day your child will use the bathroom and feed himself. It’s hard at the time to see beyond the endless trips back and forth to school and sporting events that one day your calendar will be void of your children’s activities. When a friend or family member takes a major stumble and is burdened with legal or financial issues, the end of “this” may seem non-existent. And for those times of caring for a loved one — perhaps through a lingering illness and eventual death — it may appear as though you’ll never get used to “this” new normal without your loved one around. In all of life's events, you may wonder will “this” ever pass?

Time is the great equalizer, and the ripples created from the splash of a life event eventually dwindle to calm waters. The effect of the “this” situation still forms the makeup of who you are – remnants will be with you for a long time – but the episode no longer requires your constant attention. Time marches on. Circumstances will change, and what was normal will become something new or at least different. With the eventual passing of each life event, you learn something by having passed through it.

The more important takeaway from life lessons is knowing that it’s not just about holding on for dear life hoping the moment passes. Instead, it’s recalling the outcomes of past events: once the unsettledness had passed and you began breathing again you started seeing the big or small blessings that eventually emerged through God’s guidance. You may not have noticed them while caught up in the moment, but by looking back you recognized how God was with you holding you up and helping you through whatever “this” it was. Remembering His promise to be with you always – and then acknowledging His authority during past “this” moments – you are more equipped to tackle the current and future challenges.

Whatever you may be passing through, take comfort that God’s got “this.” Be at peace knowing that “In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”