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Spring 2012

Snuggle into the Safe Mid-Zone of Life's U-Curves

By James H. O'Keefe, M.D.

"If we could give every individual the right amount of nourishment and exercise, not too little and not too much, we would have found the safest way to health."

-Hippocrates, 430 BC

Talk about old news...2,500 years ago Hippocrates, the father of medicine, was teaching his students the fundamental importance of moderation in all things. It's the Goldilocks rule of biology: "not too hot, not too cold." Life tends to thrive best in average or moderate conditions—extremes are generally not conducive to health or longevity.

Your life is likely to be happier, healthier and longer if you remember that just because a little is good, more is not necessarily better; indeed oftentimes less is more. In the science of medicine, we call this phenomenon the U-shaped curve.

Take exercise for example. A recent study of 52,000 adults found that long-term runners had a 19 percent lower risk of death during the 15-year follow up period compared with non-runners. However, U-shaped mortality curves were apparent for running distance, speed, and frequency. Those who were running at speeds of six to seven miles per hour, and cumulative distances of one to 20 miles per week, with



Photo by Perry Ralph.

frequencies of two to five runs per week, had better long-term survival than runners logging higher and lower weekly mileage, faster and slower running paces, and more and less frequent runs.

It amazes me how often this truism—all things in moderation—turns out to be the best advice for people looking to follow an ideally healthy lifestyle. It's out there on the edges of that U-curve where the dangers lurk—so think of that middle zone on the bottom of the U as a safe platform upon which to build a nest that will keep you safe and healthy during your life.

A few examples of the ubiquitous U-curves in health and medicine:

Blood Pressure

Ideally, your top blood pressure number (the systolic reading) should usually run between 100 and 140. You probably know that high blood pressure can kill you and cause stroke, heart attack and heart failure. But blood pressure that's too low can make you feel light-headed, weak and tired, cause you to pass out, and rarely, can even cause heart attacks and strokes. The bottom blood pressure number (diastolic reading) is far less important than the top.

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U-Curve

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Blood sugar

Shoot for a fasting blood glucose between 75 and 100. A reading of 100 or higher is pre-diabetes, and above 125 is diabetes. Yet, blood sugar that's too low is also problematic, and will make you feel weak and confused, and may even predispose you to serious cardiac problems.

Exercise

Vigorous exercise is like a miracle for your health—and more is better up to about 60 minutes a day. Efforts beyond that might help you burn more calories or get in shape for ultra-endurance races, but it is a point of diminishing returns when it comes to your overall health and life expectancy. Some studies show you can even damage your heart by doing excessive amounts of strenuous exercise like marathons, and Ironman triathlons, especially if you make a habit of overdoing the exercise for many years or decades. Particularly after age 50, excessive and intense endurance exercise can inflict serious damage to your cardiovascular health. In contrast, a dip in the pool does wonders for an aging body. A new study from the *American Journal of Cardiology* found that swimming lowered blood pressure and made arteries more soft, supple and responsive. And if you have issues with sore joints and muscles, swimming is a great way to exercise vigorously without stressing your joints.



Weight

When it comes to the effect of your weight on your health and longevity, being too fat isn't good, but neither is being too thin. Shoot for a BMI of 18 to 25.

To calculate your exact BMI, visit the American Heart Association's Web site at www.heart.org. Type "BMI" in the search bar and select "Body Mass Index Calculator," or use this link: http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/GettingHealthy/WeightManagement/BodyMass-Index/Body-Mass-Index-BMI-Calculator_UCM_307849_Article.jsp#bmiswf. When you enter your height and weight into the calculator, it will tell you your BMI and explain what the number means. If you are very tall or very muscular, BMI can be erroneous.

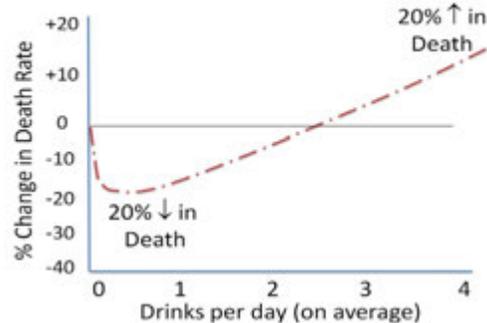
Sleep

Ideally, you should be sleeping seven to eight hours each 24-hour cycle. People who chronically sleep less than six and one-half hours nightly or more than nine hours generally aren't as healthy as the more moderate sleepers.

Alcohol

Hermann Smith-Johansson, a Norwegian-Canadian who was an avid cross-country skier until shortly before his death at age 103 said, "The secret to a long life is to stay busy, get plenty of exercise and don't drink too much. Then again, don't drink too little." Indeed, one drink a day will do everything from improve life expectancy, to lower risks for heart attack, diabetes, and dementia. However, at intakes of more than one drink daily for a woman or two drinks daily for a man, your risks increase for cancer, atrial fibrillation, heart failure, high blood pressure, and premature death (just to name a few). I have a friend who

Alcohol Intake for Women and Risk of Death



justifies his occasional binges by saying, "All things in moderation—including moderation." But in fact, binge drinking (five or more drinks in a day) is very dangerous, even if done only occasionally.

Stress

Unless you have lived your life in a beer commercial, you probably at some point have felt the corrosive effects of too much stress, which can take the fun out of life and destroy your health and well-being. While excessive stress, or distress, causes anxiety and depression, good stress (or eustress) can challenge us to overcome obstacles, learn something new, or exercise vigorously, and in the process grow stronger and more resilient and find fulfillment. Just as muscles and bones grow atrophied, weak and sickly when they are relieved of all physical demands, a human being thrives best when he or she has something to push against, goals to achieve, expectations to live up to, and causes for which to fight. Many people dream of retirement thinking that by avoiding all their work-related stress they will be happy, only to see their health and vitality diminish when they no longer have any work stress.

"Perhaps too much of anything is as bad as too little."

*Edna Ferber
(American writer, 1887-1968)*

Become a Health-nut

Nuts are good for you—really good for you as it turns out. On a daily basis you ought to be eating about a handful of nuts (ideally raw, unsalted nuts). Nuts are among nature's top sources of disease-fighting, anti-aging nutrients. These naturally tasty treats are high in fiber, anti-oxidants, healthy plant protein and beneficial fats.



A large study of women found that those who ate several servings of nuts weekly had an astounding 74 percent lower risk of cardiovascular disease, such as heart attack and stroke. Other studies show that regular consumption of nuts will lower your chances of developing Alzheimer's disease, diabetes, and breast cancer.

Walnuts are highest in the beneficial omega-3 fats, and pecans are loaded with anti-oxidants. Brazil nuts are the single best dietary source of selenium—a powerful mineral for warding off chronic diseases like diabetes. Almonds are especially high in fiber and calcium and have been shown to lower cholesterol and blood sugar. Pistachios are rich in anti-oxidants and raise your good or "HDL" cholesterol, while sunflower seeds help to lower bad cholesterol. Among the nuts, chestnuts are lowest in calories and fat, yet high in fiber. Cashews are rich in copper and zinc, but not quite as healthy as other nuts. Peanuts are actually a legume not a nut, so the health benefits of peanuts do not measure up to the "tree nuts" mentioned above. Still, lightly salted peanuts, as an occasional snack are okay. And, peanut butter dabbed on banana slices is a favorite item on the O'Keefe breakfast menu.

Nuts are high in calories, so if you have a weight issue you need to be careful about sticking to about one serving (approximately one quarter cup) of nuts per day. However studies show that people who eat two or more servings per week actually have lower rates of obesity than those who rarely eat nuts. A serving of nuts will increase satiety for hours, preventing cravings for junky snacks and thus may help to prevent overeating. Shoot for about one small handful of mixed nuts daily, preferably unsalted or lightly salted. If you are an athlete and burn lots of calories by exercising vigorously, nuts are a great way to increase your intake of healthy calories.

Lipitor on Sale—97 Percent Off!!

Lipitor is by far and away the leading selling drug in history. In fact, the cumulative sales of Lipitor are more than two times higher than the next leading selling drug of all time, and for good reason. Atorvastatin (the generic name of Lipitor) is very effective at lowering cholesterol, preventing heart attacks and strokes, and saving lives.

Lipitor went generic on Nov. 29, 2011; but remains expensive because only one drug maker, Ranbaxy, has exclusive marketing rights for the generic version—until May 2012. After that, it's open season on manufacturing atorvastatin, so by June 2012 several generic drug makers will be selling their own versions of Lipitor—and this means that its current price of \$125 a month will quickly plummet, probably down to about \$4 a month for atorvastatin in the coming months.

If you are taking simvastatin (the second most commonly prescribed drug in America) talk to your doctor about changing to atorvastatin—it's safer and more effective than simvastatin at lowering cholesterol and preventing heart attacks, strokes, bypass surgeries, stents, and deaths. Atorvastatin is also much less likely than simvastatin to cause serious muscle damage or interact dangerously with other drugs you may be taking.



The toxicity of statins is a widely prevalent, unfounded phobia in American culture. People often tell me that they can't take atorvastatin due to muscle and joint aches and weakness. I point out that if a person had cancer, and came to us saying, "I just can't tolerate this drug regimen. It makes me throw up and my hair is falling out," we would tell him or her to do their best to deal with the side effects because these drugs are lifesavers.

Heart disease remains the number one leading cause of death, (still far ahead of cancer) and statins are our best tool for halting plaque build-up, keeping your arteries soft and supple, preventing heart attacks and strokes, and saving lives. If you have, or are at high risk for heart disease, you need to work with your physician to find a way to tolerate a statin.

We have found that almost everyone can stay on a statin with no or minimal side effects by keeping their vitamin D levels in the normal ranges, and also by taking co-enzyme Q-10, a safe and natural over-the-counter supplement. Most people need at least 2,000 IU of vitamin D3 daily to get their vitamin D levels into the normal range. The dose of co-enzyme Q-10 for preventing muscle soreness and weakness while on a statin is 200 to 600 mg daily.

Heavy Metal! Minerals for a Strong Heart

By James H. O'Keefe, M.D. with Joan O'Keefe, R.D.

Magnesium:

The Wonder-Mineral

Magnesium is an essential mineral that supports healthy heart and brain function, lowers blood pressure and blood sugar, and contributes to the construction of strong bones. Unfortunately, the modern diet that is high in processed food is low in magnesium, leaving about two-thirds of American adults with blood levels of magnesium that are less than ideal.

Magnesium is an essential co-factor for many of the metabolic reactions that generate and burn energy, and thus it stands to reason that low magnesium blood levels are implicated in obesity and diabetes. New studies indicate that magnesium deficiency, among other adverse effects, causes premature aging at the genetic level, by accelerating shortening of the telomere (the caps at the end of your chromosomes that prevent the DNA from unraveling). Indeed, chronic magnesium deficiency increases the risk for age-related chronic degenerative and inflammatory conditions such as cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, osteoporosis, dementia and some cancers.

Conventional wisdom has suggested that the ideal ratio of mineral intake calls for two parts calcium for every one-part magnesium. However, our prehistoric hunter-gatherer ancestors ate a diet that had a calcium/magnesium ratio of approximately one-to-one, with a much higher intake of magnesium compared to modern diets. Moreover, magnesium promotes concurrent calcium absorption from a meal. In contrast, excess calcium

intake interferes with magnesium uptake.

An accumulating body of scientific evidence suggests that increasing intake of magnesium in the form of diet and/or supplements may provide a host of health benefits, including reduced risks for diabetes, osteoporosis, Alzheimer's disease and coronary heart disease. A study in the March 2011 issue of the journal *Diabetes, Obesity and Metabolism* reported that 345 mg of magnesium in the form of a pill supplement significantly lowered both blood sugar and blood pressure in a group of pre-diabetic individuals.

A person who is deficient in magnesium is much more likely to develop dangerous heart rhythms. A recent study found that among 14,000 people, low magnesium blood levels significantly increased risk of sudden cardiac arrest. Harvard researchers evaluating data from the Nurses' Health Study concluded that women with higher magnesium levels were about 50 percent less likely to have suffered sudden cardiac arrest during long-term follow-up.

Best Dietary Sources of Magnesium

The recommended daily allowance of magnesium is 320 mg for women and 420 mg for men. Because of the far-reaching and



significant health benefits associated with this mineral, I personally take a daily supplement of 400 mg of magnesium. I also eat a diet rich in magnesium. Top food sources of magnesium:

• Almonds or cashews	235 mg per 3 oz
• Spinach	160 mg per 1 cup, cooked
• King salmon	122 mg per 3 oz, cooked
• Halibut	100 mg per 3 oz, cooked
• Black beans	120 mg per 1 cup, cooked
• Egg whites	98 mg per 2 egg whites
• Skim or 1 percent milk	50 mg per 8 fluid oz

Other high-magnesium food sources include leafy green vegetables, beans, chicken and red meat.

Bottom line: Make sure your diet is loaded with foods that are high in magnesium, and you may even want to consider a daily supplement of 250 to 400 mg of magnesium.

Is Your Calcium Supplement Hardening Your Arteries Rather Than Your Bones?

As part of my duties as a cardiologist, I read thousands of Cardioscans, CT scans that screen for calcified plaques in the arteries supplying the heart. While looking at the images, I often point out to the residents and cardiology fellows how some people with “hardening of the arteries” due to extensive amounts of coronary atherosclerosis have more calcium in their coronary arteries than in the bones of their spine. When you are young and healthy you have soft, supple arteries and sturdy, strong bones. The development of soft bones and hard arteries is an ominous sign.

About two out of three Americans do not meet the Recommended Daily Allowance for calcium, which partly explains why osteoporosis or osteopenia (inadequate bone density) affects the majority of post-menopausal women and is increasingly common in men. For that reason, next to multivitamins, calcium pills are the most commonly consumed daily over-the-counter supplement. Unfortunately, recent studies suggest that calcium supplements might increase risk of heart attack in women, probably by accelerating calcified plaque build-up in your coronary arteries. On the

other hand, meeting your calcium requirement by getting it from your food and beverages appears to be perfectly safe, both for your bones and your heart.



Get Calcium from Dairy and Bones; Not Pills

The traditional focus in nutrition on supplementation of single isolated nutrients may be especially misguided in the case of calcium. A diet supplemented with calcium, as a mono-nutrient pill, is not ideal for promoting bone health and may instead accelerate arterial plaque calcification and increase cardiovascular risk.

A diet rich in plants such as leafy greens, colorful vegetables and fruits will make your system less acidic, which is conducive for strong bones. However, plants are relatively poor sources of calcium compared to animal sources. Non-fat or low-fat dairy products such as skim milk and Greek yogurt are excellent sources of calcium, but many adults do not tolerate dairy due to lactase deficiency or milk allergies.

Adult human hunter-gatherers for millennia acquired most of their calcium by consuming animal bones, where it is found in a matrix of bone-building nutrients including magnesium, phosphorus, protein, and osteocalcin. I know—eating bones during your meals is currently inconvenient and socially impolite, yet it may be a key to strong bones and soft supple arteries. Make stews using bones, letting them slow cook for hours. And if you like sardines, look for those with the skin and bones intact, packed in water with no added salt. Consuming plenty of high-quality protein like egg whites, whey protein, lean red meat and fish, when combined with adequate calcium and magnesium intake and regular strength training (like weight lifting), is a sure-fire recipe for strong, sturdy bones that will hold up for a century.

Bottom Line:

Lifelong, robust, resilient skeletal health is dependent upon: eating adequate amounts of calcium (about 1,000 to 1,200 mg daily) from a natural bioavailable source—non-fat or low-fat dairy, and cooked animal bones may be ideal. Avoid taking a calcium supplement. Additionally, it is important to maintain normal vitamin D levels from sun exposure and/or intake of oral vitamin D3 (work with your health care providers to keep your vitamin D levels about 30 to 50 mg/mL).

Cross-training exercise, including carrying and lifting weights, and a diet rich in natural whole foods such as vegetables, low-glycemic index fruits, nuts and generous amounts of fresh, lean animal protein will promote bone strength.

Additionally, keep in mind that abstinence from tobacco, and avoidance of excess intake of salt, grains, added sugar and alcohol are also important for optimal bone health.

Strength from Nature—May the Force be With You!

By James H. O’Keefe, M.D.

This year my family vacationed on a Caribbean island, where I spent at least an hour each day swimming and snorkeling in the crystal clear waters off the pristine white sand beaches. I love swimming in the ocean, especially when the water is clear enough to see the amazing underwater world teeming with diverse marine life. Part of the exhilaration I feel while swimming in the deep blue sea comes from an adrenaline rush induced by the realization that this is virtually the only time and place that I, as a modern human being, am immersed back in the natural food chain—and not at the top. And that “survival of the fittest” state of mind sharpens my senses, keeps me focused on the moment, and makes me feel alive.

For the first time in the history of humankind, most of the people on the planet live in urban rather than rural settings, where crowding and a 24/7 nonstop, frenetic pace in a man-made world typically lead to stress and anxiety. Richard Louv, author of the book, *The Nature Principle*, says, “Time spent in nature is one of the only real, consistent, inexpensive antidotes to the burnout we are feeling.” A growing body of evidence suggests that getting outdoors in Earth’s native environments can be a healing therapy that can improve both physical and mental health. In fact, a new field of medicine, dubbed ecotherapy or nature therapy, indicates that Mother Nature may turn out to be among the most powerful sources of healing and renewal. Time spent being physically active outdoors helps to lift depression, alleviates anxiety, reduces stress, and lowers blood pressure. In fact, if you want to improve your overall health



and well being, it is hard to beat getting out in nature, even if only for short periods of time, like 10 to 15 minutes, at least once during each day.

The Force Runs Strong in You

The Force, as depicted in the classic Star Wars movie series, is an energy field created by living beings that surrounds us and binds all life together. According to this legend, for those who learn to channel its power, the Force can enhance our natural physical and mental abilities, like strength and wisdom. Since the first time I saw that ground-breaking movie in 1977, I have been charmed by the idea that we can learn to feel the Force all around us. Yoda, while teaching the young Luke Skywalker to train his body as well as his mind, tells Luke, “a Jedi warrior’s strength flows from the Force.” Today we spend far too much time sitting in front of screens or behind windshields, which in Stars Wars’ lingo, has caused “a great disturbance in the Force.” Modern technology and

indoor sedentary lifestyles isolate us from our natural world. Strength, tranquility, serenity, wisdom, inspiration, healing and vigor can flow from the force that emanates from all living organisms. I personally can feel the benefits of connecting with other living beings, including plants and animals, and I also see their positive effects among my family, friends, and patients.

My mother, Leatrice, and her beloved dog companion, Henri, go outside for a walk four or five times a day, even when it means venturing out into the snowy and frigid cold North Dakota winter nights—something she would, at age 82, never even think of doing on her own. My patient and friend, George, is an avid gardener who finds that tending plants brings him a sense of contentment and accomplishment like nothing else does. Over the two decades during which I have cared for him, he has survived two cancers, a heart attack, open-heart surgery, and a major vascular surgery. Though he has always lived alone, each day he nurtures his gardens and houseplants with devotion and

love. Also, nearly every day George eats fresh and/or canned vegetables and fruits that he has grown and harvested himself. I believe it is the physical and emotional strength that he draws from his connectedness to his plants that has allowed him to repeatedly overcome long odds and triumph over threats to his life like lung cancer, lymphoma, heart disease and aortic aneurysm.

Immersion in nature stimulates our senses and resonates profoundly with something deep within our being. This stimulates creativity and intelligence, and energizes and rejuvenates us. Our natural world is filled with mysterious natural phe-

nomena and marvelous life forms, all of which we are connected to through an intricate web of life on Earth. Feel the wind moving over the land, and hear the soft rustling of the leaves in the trees. Enjoy the sensation of your skin soaking up warm spring sunshine, or the coolness of soft mist falling on your face. The patterns and connectedness of the natural world makes us realize that we belong here; that we are part of something much larger than each of us.

Being active outdoors in nature enlivens and relaxes us at the same time. The wonderment of looking across a lake or out at

an ocean can make our everyday anxieties seem much less daunting. Natural spaces are inherently less stressful because they provide native and rhythmic stimuli, such as the sounds of waves rolling onto a shoreline, or a babbling brook, or birds singing overhead and crickets chirping on the ground, or the sight of billowing clouds sailing peacefully across the sky. These sensations bring deep relaxation, calming the racing thoughts provoked by the overstimulation of our modern world. This can free up space for you to breathe deeply and think more clearly.

Green Therapy

Even if you are not up for epic adventures into the wilderness, make a habit of taking at least a few minutes to get outside for some nature therapy at least once or twice daily. There is virtually no weather that keeps me indoors; it's just a matter of dressing appropriately. And here in the middle of the USA, we get a wide variety of weather during four distinctly different seasons, which I find imbues life with a reassuring natural cyclical rhythm. Taking a brisk walk in a nearby park, or just along a tree-lined street can provide benefits, both immediate and long-term, to your health and happiness. Getting outside in any natural environment can be restorative, even if it is nothing more than small green space in the middle of an otherwise drab, bustling urban asphalt and concrete metropolis. The key is to move your body once you find a natural sanctuary. Green exercise—walking, running, biking, swimming, gardening, stretching, etc. in an outdoor natural setting, will boost your mood and self-esteem, and, over time, can dramatically improve your physical and mental health and well being.

Try to incorporate some outdoor nature time in almost every day. Here are a few suggestions:

1. Sometimes walk or bike to your destination; and try to make part of the trip through an area that has trees and grass along your route.
2. Visit a nearby park, or any green space, during breaks in your workday, over lunch hour for example, or during coffee breaks, or immediately after finishing work.
3. Plant a garden and nurture plants in your yard and inside your home.
4. Take vacations to naturally beautiful locations.
5. Take your dog outside for walks regularly.
6. Eat outside whenever you get the chance.
7. Sit or work by a window with a view of a natural setting whenever you get the opportunity.
8. Instead of always meeting indoors, occasionally go for an outdoor walk with a colleague or co-worker while you discuss an issue.
9. Make a point of appreciating and commenting upon natural splendor such as a gorgeous sunset, a majestic oak, a beautiful garden, or a brilliant moon.



Photo by Perry Ralph.

You're So Vain...and That's Okay!

By James H. O'Keefe, M.D.

Helena Rubinstein, in 1923, was famously quoted as saying, "There are no ugly women, only lazy ones." I know my grandmothers were operating under that truism when they were working hard to be beautiful 20-somethings in the roaring '20s. They probably followed the tried and true recipe for robust health and natural beauty: attention to detail in their personal hygiene and appearance, a diet of fresh, wholesome foods, an enthusiastic attitude, a physically active lifestyle, and plenty of rest. Yet, creating health and beauty within yourself is certainly much more achievable today, when we have the phenomenal advantages of modern science.

I am sometimes disappointed by how little progress some individuals make, even after we spell out exactly what they need to do in order to improve their cardiovascular health, or get their diabetes under control, or lower blood pressure naturally. On the other hand, many people will jump at a chance to look more attractive and appear younger, particularly if it's a passive intervention that doesn't require any effort on their part. For instance, liposuction is one of the most common surgical procedures done in America, yet it does nothing to improve health. By contrast, if you burn off belly fat the old-fashioned way (see page 18), you will not only feel and look better, but you will grow much healthier too.

You are going to have to get over the passive approach if you want to thrive to your full potential. So what can you do to look better, that just coincidentally happens to also confer longevity with vitality?



1 Get a "golden glow" from the inside out by consuming lots of plant-based pigments from natural, deeply-hued vegetables, fruits, and beverages. Forget the spray tans, and definitely avoid the tanning booths; getting color from your diet is one of the best ways to look vibrant and youthful, and grow healthier at the same time. Scientifically valid studies have consistently found that people perceive the skin-glow that comes from a high intake of plant-based pigments as a sign of health and vigor—even more so than a suntan. So for each meal, consume two or more colors, like carrots, tomatoes, red and orange bell peppers, darkly-colored berries including blueberries, blackberries, and drink low-sodium V8 juice and one glass of red wine daily.

2 Drink green tea (three or more cups of fresh-brewed) or take a tea supplement (pill). This is an easy trick to grow healthier, while at the same time burning off some belly fat.

3 Lift weights at least twice weekly, for 20 to 60 minutes per session. If we don't do strength training, we lose muscle and replace it with body fat starting about age 30. Keep a set of dumbbells at home, and do some lifting while watching TV.

4 Improve your posture. I try to frequently remind myself of this, and I must admit, I tend to nag my children about posture. I will whisper to Kathleen, my 16-year-old, "Stand up straight," while we are in church, or urge 12-year-old Caroline to, "Keep your shoulders back," as she is typing on a computer. And even though my kids accuse me of quoting imaginary scientific studies to validate my points, a growing consensus from a wide variety of health professionals backs me up on this issue: good posture matters a great deal—and may even promote health and longevity. Good posture influences not only how others perceive us, but also alters our own self-image. A study highlighted in the January 15, 2011 issue of the *Economist* magazine, found that practicing good posture sends a clear message of empowerment to your inner self and helps to give you a sense that you can control your own destiny. So when you hold your head up high, pull your shoulders back, and stand erect, you not only command the respect of others, but subconsciously, you may also improve your self-esteem and self-respect. And, an improved self-image often translates

into a more conscientious attitude about eating right, getting daily exercise, avoiding abuse of alcohol, drugs, and tobacco, and taking good care of yourself in general.

5 Consider using a whey protein supplement. This works great mixed into non-fat milk for a convenient source of high-quality protein at breakfast or anytime.

6 Get seven to eight hours of sleep each 24-hour cycle. The notion of “beauty sleep” now has science to back it up. Swedish researchers, publishing in the *British Medical Journal*, used rigorous testing to determine that “Sleep deprived people are perceived as less attractive, less healthy and more tired compared with when they are well rested.” Shocking discovery! One more reason to GET TO BED!

7 Keep your hormones, like thyroid hormone, testosterone, estrogen, leptin, cortisol and insulin in their

ideal ranges. This can entail many complex issues and you will almost certainly need to work with your health care providers on this one.

8 No added sugar! My wife Joan avoids sweets like the plague. Sugar, like smoking, causes inflammation, which among other things causes skin wrinkles. Joan has many clients who know exactly how much sugar they can eat, yet still maintain their weight in an ideal range. But even though a diet like that may not make them fat, it will promote facial wrinkles. Sugar and other easily digested carbs (like starches, breads, pasta, potatoes) cause spikes in sugar and triglycerides in the bloodstream, which in turn trigger inflammation—resulting in wrinkles, among other more potentially serious health issues.

9 Eat some healthy fats, preferably with each of your three daily meals. Extra virgin olive oil, avocados, raw or lightly salted nuts (not pea-

nuts), and oily fish (and/or fish oil) are the best sources of healthy fats. This is great for keeping your complexion youthful and your tummy flat.

10 Exercise daily for 30 to 60 minutes, but avoid exhaustive, extreme exercise like running marathons or ultra-marathons.

11 Sitting is the new smoking. By spending two or more hours a day sitting in front of a screen during your leisure time—principally viewing television—you will more than double your likelihood of heart attack or stroke. The implications from this study are clear: you and anyone you really care about should have a strict cutoff of two hours a day maximum of sitting in front of a screen during leisure time. Use some of that freed-up leisure time to invest in your romance and love life—safe sex is great for improving the quality of your life as well as your health!

Quotes

By James H. O’Keefe, M.D.

“A good laugh and a long sleep are the best cures in a doctor’s book.”

Irish Proverb

When one of my patients gives me the excuse that they are too busy to find time to exercise daily, I ask them, “What fits into your hectic, over-booked schedule better, exercising a half hour daily, or being dead or disabled 24 hours a day?”

James O’Keefe, M.D.

Dr. O’Keefe: “Darlene, have you gone through menopause yet?”

Darlene: “No, but I’m feel like I’m down to my last half-dozen eggs, and I’m sure they are scrambled by now.”

“The future ain’t what it used to be.”

Yogi Berra

“Your time is limited; so don’t waste it living someone else’s life. Don’t let the noise of others’ opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become.”

Steve Jobs

“You can do anything.... you just can’t do everything.”

Patrick Glynn

“I feel so miserable without you; it’s almost like having you here.”

Stephen Bishop

“Don’t fall for those weight loss ads.

There are only two sure-fire ways to lose 10 pounds in 48 hours: the flu or food poisoning.”

Jason Gay

“He who conceals his disease cannot expect to be cured.”

Ethiopian Proverb

Dr. O’Keefe: It’s been over two years since I last saw you. Hal, I know you are busy as an assistant funeral director, and I think it’s great you are still working at age 75, but with your heart history, it’s important that you be seen for an office visit at least once a year. “

Hal: “I suppose you’re right, I know that I would much rather be seen than be viewed.”

“From a scientific standpoint, the problem with relying on willpower is that its half-life is only two weeks and it is soluble in alcohol.”

James O’Keefe, M.D.

Graceful Longevity

By James H. O'Keefe, M.D., and Joan O'Keefe, R.D.

Don't Settle for Ordinary—Make Your Life Extraordinary!

Imagine being able to live for 100 years, and being mentally sharp, physically strong and vigorous for the entire century. You wouldn't die slowly, wasting away over years or decades from horrible chronic incurable illnesses. Instead, you would live about nine or 10 decades and then pass away rather quickly. Though this may seem like a pipe-dream, it can be possible if you follow a gentle discipline where you eat foods as close to their natural forms as possible, and like your ancient ancestors, exercise naturally, and relax deeply. You will also need to stay in close touch with your trusted doctors, and when necessary, employ the scientific marvels of cutting-edge, 21st century medicine.

Nutrition Revolution

We are on the verge of a revolution in health and medicine. Nutrition has been neglected, misrepresented and abused. The ideal diet is finally becoming clear, and its power in health and healing is astounding. It is simple, practical and sustainable for a lifetime. This diet, (see "My Healthy Plate" page 19) especially when used in combination with daily exercise, will ensure vibrant and resilient good health for a lifetime. Getting smart about what you eat is an essential step for a strong, lean, and resilient body, and a sharp, focused and cheerful mind. Embrace the nutrition revolution and you can thrive like never before.

About 80 percent of your body composition (its shape, size, percent body fat, etc.) is determined by what you eat and drink, and most of the diseases you have or are likely to get are avoidable with an ideal diet. Do you want to continue to struggle

with a snowballing mess of physical complaints, limitations and chronic diseases, along with a less than ideal body, and a low-energy lifestyle? You must reject the toxic standard American eating habits, and tune out all the noise about fad diets for weight loss, and instead choose to feed your body the diet for which it was designed. The message is clear: real food direct from nature is wholesome and healing medicine; while highly-processed and refined food is tasty but toxic poison. The choice is yours—the stakes could not be higher.

Striking Changes in the Causes of Disease and Death

Only two or three generations ago the principal agents of disease and death were microbes. Back when James' great-grandfather, Henry O'Keefe, M.D., was making house calls on a horse-drawn sleigh in rural North Dakota, life expectancy was only 45, and the three leading causes of death were pneumonia, tuberculosis, and infectious dysentery (diarrhea)...all infections. Today, non-communicable diseases like heart disease, cancer, and diabetes usually kill us; and now the agents of disease are mostly self-inflicted.

As Joan's wise 99-year-old mother, Kathleen, says about the common American health woes: "They do it to themselves." Without question, many of the agents of disease and premature aging today are disguised as tasty treats in our diet. Most people understand that their diet and lifestyle might be problematic, but are confused about exactly where to find the villains that are causing them to be fat or tired or

depressed or diabetic, or sick...or all of the above.

In order to flourish and maintain a youthful mind and body for a century you need to avoid the agents of disease and embrace the foods that confer well being. You may be surprised to discover the source of your health woes, and the natural cures. (Also see the article on the video by Dr. Wahls on page 13).

Importantly, this is a two-step cure: every day you have to consume the foods and beverages that bestow vitality, and do your best to avoid the agents of disease. Follow this plan and you will see amazing progress in virtually any health issue you may be struggling with today.

Agents of Disease: Excess Calories

We have patients who swear by the cookie diet. Others have lost weight eating mostly fatty meats, cheese and cream; yet others have shed excess pounds eating NO fat. Whether vegan or Atkins, low-carb or low-fat, or whatever...most diets work, for a while anyway. The reason why you can lose pounds on any diet is that, one way or another, they all cut down on calories, which is a good thing because excess calories consumed is the number one problem with the American diet.

Over the past 30 years the daily average calorie consumption in the U.S. has increased by about an average of 400 calories, or 18 percent; this is the main reason why today seven out of 10 of us is



overweight or obese. And most of those added calories come from increased consumption of processed foods containing ingredients such as wheat, corn and soybeans. Flour and cereal products account for about 40 percent of the total calorie increase; high-fructose corn syrup and other added sugars, typically in the form of sweetened drinks, are the other major source of new and extra calories. Sadly and tellingly, none of the large increase in calories during the past three decades has been due to fruits and vegetables—consumption of these has remained unchanged. The best way to dramatically improve the health and life expectancy of animals, and possibly humans (long-term studies are underway) is to cut back on daily calories by about 20 to 30 percent. You can count on this simple and potent strategy, “cut out excess calories,” to improve all of your cardiovascular risk factors like cholesterol, blood pressure, blood sugar, and waist size.

While you can lose weight by eating nothing but 1,200 calories of cheese cake a day, you will need to do more than cut calories to feel and see the full transformative power of optimal nutrition.

Grains (Especially Wheat) and Added Sugar

“Lose the wheat, lose the weight, and find your path back to health.” That’s the mantra of Dr. William Davis, cardiologist from Milwaukee and author of the brilliant best seller, *Wheat Belly*. We are a nation of wheat-aholics; if you are like the average American, you consume 133 pounds of wheat per year, equivalent to about a half a loaf of bread per day. Add to that, the almost half a pound of added sugar the average American

consumes each day, and you have a recipe for disaster. The origins of this widespread wheat and sugar addiction and the ensuing obesity contagion can be traced back to 30 years ago when the US Department of Agriculture began waging a propaganda campaign urging Americans to eat 6 to 11 servings of grain per day, and cut back on all fats. The result according to Dr. Davis is that today, if you are walking through a crowded international airport, the Americans can be easily identified by their characteristic wheat belly, or food-baby, or man-breasts, or love handles, or muffin-top. Call it death by food pyramid! Adding fuel to the fire is the fact that modern wheat has been genetically altered to be absorbed almost instantaneously after consumption, causing our blood sugar to spike, disturbing our hormones and causing cravings for more wheat and sugar. Wheat flour for many people is highly addictive because this roller coaster effect on blood sugar causes a vicious cycle of hunger and overeating, leading to inflammation, fatigue, obesity, depression and disease.

One of our patients tried to convince us that doughnuts should qualify as health foods because, after all, they are “hole” grain. But seriously, the notion that whole grains are good for us is an “urban myth.” Sure, whole wheat bread is better than white bread, but that’s like arguing that cocaine is better for you than methamphetamine—you will be much healthier if you avoid both! Either whole wheat bread or white bread will spike your blood sugar worse than two tablespoons of pure sugar or a candy bar. In reality you would be better off avoiding all foods containing ANY wheat. We believe that Dr. Davis is on target when he asserts that eliminating ALL wheat products will melt away excess belly fat, reduce inflammation



and improve your overall health and vitality. Indeed, a growing scientific consensus suggests that eliminating wheat may dramatically reduce the odds of developing diabetes, Alzheimer’s disease, heart attack, osteopenia (weak bones), arthritis pain, and many forms of cancer.

Take-home message: minimize intake of grains, especially anything and everything containing wheat, even whole grain wheat. Do not eat or drink anything with added sugar or high-fructose corn syrup. Instead make it a priority to eat your carbs in the form of lots of fresh or frozen vegetables and fruits. When you do eat grain, limit yourself to no more than two servings per day (one-half cup of cooked grains equals one serving). The best choices are pearled barley, wild rice, steel-cut oats, and quinoa.

Excess Salt

Sodium (AKA salt), when consumed in amounts above about 1,500 mg daily, will raise blood pressure, cause heart attacks and stroke, and is a known carcinogen, predisposing especially to cancers of the gastrointestinal tract, such as stomach and colon cancer. Just because you shun the salt shaker doesn’t mean you are good when it comes to sodium. More than 90 percent of the sodium in our diet comes from salt added to refined and processed foods—one more great reason to avoid the synthetic foods that are the standard fare today. As Jack

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Graceful Longevity

Continued from page 11

LaLanne used to say: “If man made it, don’t eat it!” Stick to foods and beverages as close to their natural forms as possible and you won’t have to worry about how much sodium you’re consuming.

Excess Saturated Fat, Trans Fats

Try to avoid fatty meats, and stick with lean choices. When choosing dairy, non-fat is ideal, one percent is acceptable too. Too much saturated fat, and almost any trans fats will raise your cholesterol and increase risks for diabetes, heart attack, stroke, and cardiovascular death.

Commonly Mistaken as Agents of Disease:

Fats

Good fats, like the omega-3 oil in fish, and the unsaturated fats in nuts, extra-virgin olive oil, and avocados, will help to keep you lean, youthful and healthy. On the other hand, some fats, like the trans fats found in French fries and high levels of saturated fats present in fatty meats, ice cream and butter, are among the worst things you can put in your mouth. So a low-fat diet isn’t ideal, but neither is a high-fat diet if the fat is nasty pro-inflammatory, processed trans fats and excessive amounts of saturated fats. So, eat a diet rich in good fats, and low in bad fats. For the record, about 30 to 35 percent of your calories should come from fats, but not more than seven percent of the calories should be saturated fats, and eat virtually no trans fats.

Omega-3 is Brain Food

Hot-off-the-press research involving participants in the famous Framingham Study found that fish truly is “brain food.” This study, published in the journal *Neurology*, evaluated how levels of omega-3 (the beneficial oils found in fish) affected both the size and function of the brain. People with higher levels of DHA, one form of omega-3, did not show as much brain shrinkage as those who had lower DHA levels. Even more importantly, low DHA levels were linked with poor memory, and reduced ability for abstract thinking and complex reasoning. In other words, low DHA levels accelerated brain aging and caused deterioration in thinking skills. Keep your brain plump, youthful and razor-sharp by feeding it at least 500 mg of DHA per day from fish and/or fish oil.

Animal Products

There is a lot of noise out there about diet. Dean Ornish will tell you being a vegan will cure heart disease. What he ignores is the fact that if you eat no animal foods, you are at risk for brittle and broken bones, depression, Parkinson’s disease, anemia and some cancers. Steve Jobs, the heart and soul of Apple, was a brilliant businessman who created products that continue to revolutionize our world for the better. But he was a strict vegan who sometimes ate nothing but apples and carrots for weeks at a time. He developed a rare type of pancreatic cancer that tragically ended his remarkable life in middle age. I have to believe that his eccentric diet, which was often woefully deficient in many essential nutrients, likely contributed to his cancer development at a relatively young age.



You are an omnivore—and you will be healthier in every way if you include animal foods in your diet on a daily basis. You just need to be very picky about the kinds of animal foods you eat. Excellent sources of high-quality protein are egg whites, whey protein, fish, seafood, low-fat poultry (skinless) and non-fat cottage cheese. When people say to James, “I’m surprised you eat red meat,” he replies, “I’m okay with red meat...as long as it’s very lean, and raw.” Well, maybe not raw, but certainly not over-done or fried. Burning, blackening, frying, and over-cooking animal-based food creates cancer-causing chemicals. Lean red meat, especially game meats like venison (deer), and elk, can be highly nutritious, and tend to be very low in saturated fat.

Admittedly, some of the most toxic foods in the American diet tend to be meat-based, like greasy cheeseburgers, fatty sausages, salty hot dogs, carcinogenic bacon strips, and chemical-laden deli-meats. But fresh, lean, medium-rare game meat, or grass-fed beef is highly nutritious, keeps you filled up for hours, helps you build muscle and rebuild tissue. Just be sure to keep your serving size to about the size and thickness of the palm of your hand. You should eat a modest serving of protein with each of your three daily meals—especially breakfast. Non-fat, unsweetened plain Greek yogurt with raw unsalted almonds or pecans or walnuts, mixed with wild blueberries and/or strawberries is a perfectly delicious way to get your morning started off right with plenty of high-quality protein, calcium, probiotics, fiber, anti-oxidants and potassium.

Dietary Cholesterol

Your blood cholesterol level is about two times as high as it was when you were born. In fact, you would be hard-pressed to find a wild animal on the planet with a cholesterol level anywhere near as high as the average modern human. And high cholesterol is one of the chief reasons most of us get clogged arteries as we age.

Yet many high-cholesterol foods such as shellfish, red meat, fish, eggs and poultry can be very nutritious and do not raise your blood cholesterol nearly as much as foods high in saturated fat like butter, cheese, and deep-fried foods. So just because a food is high in cholesterol doesn't mean it's bad for you; and conversely, many of the worst foods like white flour, sugar and trans fats have zero cholesterol.



Thrive by Preventing Sugar Spikes

- Eat a high-fiber diet, with one or more non-fattening vegetables with each meal.
- Keep serving sizes modest.
- Drink 64 ounces of water daily.
- Avoid all juices except low-sodium V8.
- Avoid processed foods (no food or drinks with more than two ingredients).
- No soda pop or other sweetened drinks.
- Have lean protein and healthy fats in moderate quantities with each of your three meals daily.
- Have two tablespoons of vinegar (as a salad dressing for example) with lunch and/or evening meal.
- Use cinnamon, about a half of teaspoon with a meal.
- Have just one, five to six-ounce glass of red wine with or before your evening meal.

The Oscars for Cardio-Wellness

Make it a point to watch these two short videos. They will touch your heart and change your life!

1 Google this: Terry Wahls, TED talk (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KLjgBLwH3Wc>).

This is a fascinating 15-minute presentation by Dr. Terry Wahls. She was disabled and dying from progressive multiple sclerosis (MS), despite being treated with all the latest chemotherapeutic regimens.

So Dr. Wahls took matters into her own hands and learned everything she could about diet. She began following a very strict hunter-gatherer, anti-inflammatory diet based in part upon papers we have published on these topics. She responded dramatically well to this natural and colorful diet.

Since her miraculous recovery, she has been testing the diet on other people with advanced MS. She recently presented her breathtaking results at a major neuroscience national meeting.

Her diet plan involves eating three cups per day of brightly colored fruits and vegetables, three cups of leafy greens, and three cups of sulfur-containing vegetables, like broccoli, cauliflower, kale, Brussels sprouts, onions, etc. Also, her diet includes seafood, oily fish like wild salmon, and trout, along with game meats and grass-fed beef. Below is a salad based upon her diet—we have been eating this daily around the O'Keefe household and it is our new "fave."



Flat Belly Salad:

Kale
Red, orange, green, and yellow peppers
Purple cabbage
Red onion
Cilantro
Dice up all the vegetables
Toss salad with extra-virgin olive oil and red wine vinegar

2 Your other assignment is to go to You Tube and watch **23 and 1/2 hours** (<http://youtu.be/aUalnS6HIGo>). This creative and mesmerizing eight-minute video by Dr. Mike Evans makes a compelling case for daily exercise as the single best thing we can do for our health. Just 30 minutes of walking per day lowers the risk of Alzheimer's by 50 percent, lessens arthritis pain by 47 percent, reduces chances of developing diabetes by 58 percent, lowers anxiety and depression by 48 percent, reduces risk of death by 23 percent and is the best therapy for reducing fatigue and improving quality of life. Dr. Mike concludes by asking, "Can you limit your sitting and sleeping to just 23 and 1/2 hours daily?"

The #1 Secret to Slow Aging and Prevent Disease

By James H. O’Keefe, M.D.

Hang with me for a moment as I explain a somewhat complex concept. If you can grasp this idea and deploy its strategies, it will revolutionize your life. You are probably oblivious to the most important factor determining the health of your diet. After a meal, the levels of glucose and triglycerides (fats) in your bloodstream fly under your conscious radar, and although they usually go undetected, these resulting spikes will eventually wreak havoc on your health and longevity.

Your system is a machine that will run smoothly and efficiently when you feed it the fuel for which it has been designed by nature. All of the energy necessary for you to move, to think, to grow, and to stay alive comes from your metabolic engine—which resides collectively within the mitochondria—the microscopic power generators, within each of your 100 trillion cells. Those little mitochondrial furnaces burn only two fuels—glucose and fatty acids, and the “smoke” that comes off from that metabolic fire needs to be tightly buffered and neutralized because otherwise it can cause big trouble. This metabolic smoke consists of free radicals or pro-oxidants that, if not neutralized, will cause you to “rust from the inside out,” leading to premature aging and disease.

Just like throwing too much wood and kindling on a fire all at once will make it burn out of control causing toxic amounts of smoke to billow through the air, the “metabolic smoke” from eating a high-calorie, fast food meal will billow through your cells and pollute your system.



A mitochondria.

After you gulp down a cheeseburger, large fries and a Coke, this massive slug of calories is digested almost immediately, leading to dramatic spikes in your blood sugar and fats. This fuel “floods your engine,” causing the metabolic fires to churn out massive amounts of smoke in the form of free radicals like super-oxide anions. These toxic molecules oxidize your DNA which leads to premature aging and cancer, and oxidize your blood cholesterol, which leads to inflammation and disease in your arteries, heart and brain. Additionally, these spikes in glucose trigger corresponding spikes in insulin, which directs your body to store a lot of those extra calories as belly fat; causing a downward spiral because excess abdominal fat churns out inflammation and leads to hormonal disruptions that predispose to even higher spikes in glucose and triglycerides after eating.

Contrast that to what happens after a meal consisting of steamed broccoli, a salad of spinach and tomatoes drizzled with extra-virgin olive oil and vinegar, a modest serving of lean protein (skinless chicken breast or baked fish for example), with water and/or tea for your beverage, and berries for desert. For starters, this straight-from-nature food is going to take much longer to eat than processed food because you are going to have to do a lot

more “food-processing” (chewing) yourself, and an even longer time to digest. The calories from this meal will trickle into your bloodstream never causing your blood glucose or blood triglycerides to rise above 100, and your metabolic engine will burn those calories cleanly as they arrive, rather than storing them in belly fat. Furthermore, all of those natural pigments from the colorful plants are ANTI-oxidants that will bind to and neutralize the oxidants (smoke) thrown off by your engine as it burns the glucose and fats from the meal.

In reality your body’s metabolism is mind-bogglingly complex and breathtakingly intelligent in its design and function, yet it can be simplified down to a practical take-home message: your machine will run best when you feed it only the natural fuel for which it’s designed. Fill the gas tank of your car with jet fuel and it will run poorly, and eventually this high-octane kerosene will ruin the engine. Eating modern, refined, processed, high-calorie foods will do the same to your body. I cannot overemphasize the fundamental and critical importance of this concept—if you want to stay youthful and healthy, you must avoid these post-meal spikes in glucose and fats. And the strategy to do that will sound familiar: eat only whole, natural foods (that contain no more than one or two ingredients), balance your calories consumed with calories burned each day, keep your waist size to half your height in inches, exercise daily, and get seven to eight hours of sleep each night. (*Also see page 13—Thrive by Preventing Sugar Spikes.*)

Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea

By James H. O'Keefe, M.D.

The fully loaded Boeing 767-400, with topped off fuel tanks and not a single empty seat, lumbered off the runway in Rome bound for Chicago. My wife Joan and I, on our way back home, settled in with 250 other passengers, for what we expected to be an uneventful, nine-hour flight. About three hours into the trans-Atlantic crossing, the pilot announced, in a tone that did not convey the confident reassurance that one comes to expect from an airliner captain, "We have a medical emergency. If there is a medical doctor on board, please report to the back of the plane."

Joan looked at me, raised her eyebrows and then glanced back over her shoulder. I quickly made my way to the back of the cabin to find a very pale, cold and clammy, middle-aged man in severe distress who looked as though he was about to lose consciousness. I had him lie down on the floor immediately, and found out that he was a Dutchman named Johan who felt somewhat unwell before boarding the plane.

As we ventured out across the wide ocean, he was now clutching his belly and complaining of "the worst pain in his life." I quickly examined him, and though I just barely touched his abdomen, he writhed in agony, pushing my hands away. His belly was as tight as a drum, and as I listened with a stethoscope, I heard no bowel sounds. Johan had an "acute abdomen," a potentially life-threatening emergency, often necessitating urgent surgery. Unfortunately for Johan, we were



thousands of miles away from the nearest hospital, and he was looking "shocky," with pulse of 110 and a blood pressure of only 70/40. I placed an intravenous line and administered fluids, but had no other therapies with which to treat him;

specifically the emergency medical kit contained no morphine or antibiotics. I did my best to comfort Johan, but both he and I understood the unspoken reality: we were "between the devil and deep blue sea."

I discussed our predicament with the captain over the phone. He explained we could circle back to Iceland or forge ahead to northeastern Canada, but either option was about three hours away. I told him wherever we landed, we would need an ambulance waiting, and a nearby hospital. A moment later, we heard the engines roar to full-throttle as the plane's nose tipped upward—climbing to a higher altitude to allow for faster speeds.

As we hurtled towards North America, Johan soldiered on, patiently and silently enduring the ordeal, as I knelt on the galley floor next to him. Though the intravenous fluids had stabilized his blood pressure, the bag was nearly empty now, his pain was worsening again as he developed shaking chills. After what felt like an eternity, we approached our destination: Goose Bay Airport. This remote airstrip on the rocky Labrador coastline is about 30 percent shorter than what is usually required for a 767 jet airliner. As we circled overhead, the captain dumped excess fuel

to make the landing safer. The plane pitched wildly as the captain fought the blustery Nor'easter winds howling off the Atlantic. We finally broke through a low cloud ceiling, and he set the plane down hard on the tarmac and slammed on the brakes. We off-loaded Johan by stretcher into a 1960s vintage model ambulance, and I gave report to a local paramedic who spoke in a strange, thick Scottish-sounding dialect that was barely recognizable as English. I laid one hand on Johan's shoulder, and with the other I gently squeezed his hand and told him that he was stable and that a physician was waiting for him just up the road at an emergency room.

He looked up at me as his eyes welled up and said, "Thank you doctor." I scampered up the stairs to the plane and stood there watching the ambulance pull away. After de-icing and re-fueling, the plane finally took off; I looked down to see the runway disappear from under our wings just a few seconds after we were airborne.

I heard from Johan a few days later—he had a large kidney stone blocking the flow from one kidney, resulting in so much pain and inflammation that it also caused a bowel obstruction. After a surgical procedure he was recovering well, and was expecting to be discharged from the hospital soon. The episode reminded me how grateful I am to be in a healing profession. The opportunity to make a positive difference for a person in trouble is by far the most rewarding part of my job. You might make a living from what you get, but I believe you make a life by what you give.

It's Not All About You

by James H. O'Keefe, M.D.

Danny is a delightful 80-year-old who still works as a courier and “office boy” for a large bank; he brags that he is their oldest full-time employee. He also volunteers as an usher for his church, where according to him, he is always “getting hit on” by more than a few of the smiling and attentive widows. Danny is not someone I would describe as a “poster child” for the Cardio-Wellness Clinic. Despite my efforts through the years to reform his diet, he remains obese and frequently indulges his cravings for sweets. Yet he remains remarkably healthy and enthusiastic, and I am sure that Danny’s volunteering has something to do with his hale and hearty good health.

Dr. Andrew Weil writes, “Doing good for others brings a very tangible reward in the form of benefits to physical and mental health.” A large study found that people who volunteer regularly are, amazingly, 10 times more likely to be in good health than those who don’t volunteer. Another scientific study reported that people over age 55 who volunteer for two or more organizations were 44 percent less likely to die than those who didn’t volunteer—a reduction in mortality as impressive as that conferred by exercising four times weekly, or kicking a cigarette habit for good.

Happiness is Overrated

An emerging scientific discipline called “positive psychology,” finds that happiness, as usually defined—experiencing pleasure or cheerful feelings—is not nearly as important to long-term mental well-being and physical health as is the type of fulfillment and satisfac-



tion that results from engaging in meaningful activity, like helping others, working on realizing your innate potential, or investing time and energy in a cause that inspires you. Psychology experts believe our modern American obsession with personal status and material things, and the emphasis on the relentless pursuit of happiness and immediate pleasure may be doing us more harm than good.

Not that fun and pleasure are bad things, indeed they bring one type of happiness, but not the kind of deep satisfaction that translates into a meaningful life. A deeper sense of contentment comes from making it a priority to live with a sense of purpose, while pursuing goals that bring meaning to their life. Dr. Ed Diener, an expert on positive psychology, advises: “Quit sitting around worrying about yourself and get focused on your goals”.

As my wife Joan often tells our children and me, “It’s not all about you.” Ironically, if you worry less about what makes you happy, you tend to become happier. You are unlikely to find happiness by looking within yourself; when you shift your attention from yourself to the wider world, you will become less

self-absorbed and stop ruminating. Get out there and immerse yourself in the life around you, and find a cause to which you might contribute some of your time and energy. Oliver Segovia recently wrote in the *Harvard Business Review*: “Happiness comes from the intersection of what you love, what you’re good at, and what the world needs. What problems are you helping to solve?” Troubles you might be inspired to invest some of your energy into are not hard to find, whether big problems like global climate change, social injustice, the obesity epidemic, education, and poverty, or more personal concerns like problems in your family, school, church or community. You will be more likely to be motivated by issues that you can relate to on a personal level. Try to become more aware to the problems faced by the less fortunate and marginalized people. Each of us has his or her own unique talents and life circumstances along our journey. Our day-to-day struggles can bring out the best in us and define who we are. Particularly when we go through tough times or see others struggling, we can find fulfillment by rolling up our sleeves, rising to the occasion and doing what we can to make a positive difference.

A Prescription for Happiness and Longevity

Andrew Weil M.D., in his superb and enlightened new book, *Spontaneous Happiness* writes that the average person believes that what he or she needs to be happy is more money, or a new car, or a new lover or something else that we yearn for but do not have. Dr. Weil says that the actual emo-

tional reward of getting and having things is usually much less than one imagined. Instead, his advice for emotional and physical well-being includes:

1 Remind yourself to feel grateful for all that you have and learn to express gratitude frequently to the people in your life. This single step is the best and easiest way to move your emotional set point toward greater happiness and positivity. Lately, before I drift off to sleep each night, I try to reflect upon a few of my many blessings.

2 Consider bringing an animal companion into your life. The emotional rewards of animal companionship are great.

3 Learn to be more compassionate and empathetic. Try putting others first more often, without neglecting your own needs. Helping others is one of the best ways to become happier and healthier yourself.

4 Practice forgiveness as a way of letting go of negative thoughts and emotions that may be preventing you from enjoying optimum health. Forgiving is especially healing for you, more than anyone else. Oscar Wilde advised, "Always forgive your enemies; nothing annoys them so much."

5 Laugh! Spend more time with folks you can laugh with, and people who are optimistic, positive and happy. And spend less time with those who are pessimistic, anxious, or depressed. Emotions are contagious.

6 Seek out places and times that provide silence. Silence refreshes the spirit, reduces anxiety, and makes it easier to be mindful.

Life isn't about waiting for the storms to pass; it's about learning to dance in the rain.

Steel, when tempered by fire, grows stronger. Bad weather makes good timber. Rough seas make tough and hardy sailors. During our lives, we all come through our own "fires" that can make us stronger, wiser, and more resilient. Joel Osteen says that we need to use the power of life's storms to take us to higher places. When



everything seems to be coming against you, remember that airplanes take off into the wind. An eagle calmly rides fierce winds to soar above the tempest. Turbulent winds from storms in our lives can take us to new levels of our destiny, especially if we stay flexible, resilient and optimistic in our thinking. I have countless patients who after discovering they had heart disease or even cardiovascular risk factors like diabetes or high blood pressure, responded to these threats by channeling their fear into motivation to eat right and exercise, and became stronger, more vigorous, and healthier than they had been in decades.

Ray Gabel, at age 24, came down with a viral illness that ravaged his heart and left him for dead. He survived long enough to get a heart transplant here at Saint Luke's Hospital on Valentine's Day 1991. Since then he has been a source of hope and encouragement to the transplant community, serving as the community education coordinator at the Midwest Transplant Network. Ray also is a team captain in the U.S. Transplant Games. Recently while I was on hospital rounds with a cardiology fellow, medical residents and medical students, we noticed a man in a hospital gown pacing around halls of the spacious new Mid America Heart Institute like a caged tiger. It was Ray, who just three days earlier had a re-transplant operation because the heart he received 21 years earlier had failed. Ray greeted me with a smile and a firm handshake. He was already as energetic and as enthusiastic as ever. Ray thinks of himself not as a patient, but as a recipient of a gift of life—now for the second time. He has used gratitude and the power of positive thinking to repeatedly beat lethal heart problems and take his life to a new level. Ray is a real-life example of triumph over adversity; he brings a message of hope and joy to people with broken and weakened hearts. Ray fights for a cause much bigger than himself, and that brings him strength and vitality. He has overcome storms in his life to become an inspiration to others who are struggling with life-threatening heart disease.

Burn off Belly Fat and Lower Your Blood Pressure

By James H. O'Keefe, M.D.

Blood pressure tends to track very closely with your weight. If you are carrying extra weight, especially belly fat, you can be pretty sure that as your weight and waist size come down towards ideal, your blood pressure will follow it down. Of course it works the other way too—when you gain weight your blood pressure will generally climb. The fact that 70 percent of Americans are overweight or obese is a major reason why nine out of 10 Americans eventually develop high blood pressure.

Measure your waist about one inch above your belly button. Ideal is less than half your height in inches.

Green Tea. Drinking at least three or four cups of tea, especially green tea, daily will bring down your blood pressure, and safely increase your metabolism to help you keep fat off your abdomen, particularly if you substitute tea for diet sodas and/or calorie-rich drinks like sweetened soft drinks and sugary sports drinks.

Exercise. Try this experiment; check your blood pressure when you are feeling tense or upset. Then go out for a 30-to 60-minute brisk exercise session. Re-check your blood pressure about 30 minutes after you cool down; it will almost certainly be substantially lower.

Meditation, prayer, relaxation breathing. Although prayer comforts many people, you can also lower your blood pressure by simply meditating quietly, especially if you take slow deep breaths, and focus on prolonging the exhalation phase (breathing out) longer. Relaxation breathing is easy to do: breathe in for the count of four, hold your

breath for the count of seven, and breathe out slowly for the count of eight. Even doing just four to eight cycles of this relaxation breathing will lower your blood pressure and reduce your sense of anxiety.

Sleep. When you are sleep deprived, your blood pressure is substantially higher. Shoot for at least seven to eight hours per night. If you have a hard time falling or staying asleep, take one 81 mg aspirin and 3 mg of Melatonin at bedtime. Getting enough sleep keeps your hormones in the ideal ranges, which makes it easier to have a narrow waist and nice low blood pressure.

Omega 3. Taking a purified fish oil supplement will lower blood pressure by about two points, which is just one of many important benefits you get from consuming at least



1,000 mg of EPA + DHA (the key omega-3 fats) each day. Omega-3 is also helpful for keeping the belly fat off your waistline.

Vitamin D. Most Americans are deficient in this crucially important nutrient. When you are low in vitamin D, your blood pressure goes up; and normalizing your vitamin D level—either with supplements or sunshine—will significantly lower your blood pressure. Most people need at least 2,000 IU per day of vitamin D. And 15 to 20 minutes of “sensible sun” without sunscreen is good for your attitude and your health.

Diet. The average American consumes 4,000 mg of sodium per day—almost 10 times as much as we need. Avoid processed food as much as possible; it's generally loaded with salt.

Reduce Your Risk of Cardiovascular Death by 90%!

Recently, the American Heart Association (AHA) published its 2020 Impact Goal: to lower cardiovascular deaths by 20 percent by encouraging individuals to strive towards normalizing seven cardiac risk factors. Specifically these goals are:

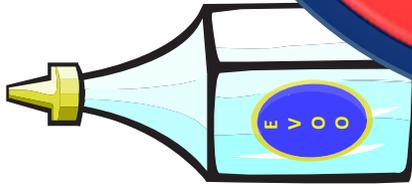
- Don't smoke.
- Achieve and maintain normal weight (BMI less than 25 kg/m²).
- Exercise at least 30 minutes most days of the week (or a total of 150 minutes per week).
- Eat fruits and vegetables with each of your three meals.
- Maintain a total cholesterol less than 200 mg/dL.
- Maintain a blood pressure less than 120/80.
- Achieve glucose levels less than 100 mg/dL.

Currently, only one percent of American adults meet all seven of these goals for sound cardiovascular health. If you can achieve even five or more of the goals (only 20 percent of people currently do), you will have an 80 percent lower risk of dying from any cause over the next decade and a 90 percent lower risk of dying from cardiovascular causes compared to someone who is meeting none of these goals.



Clip and Place on Your Refrigerator!

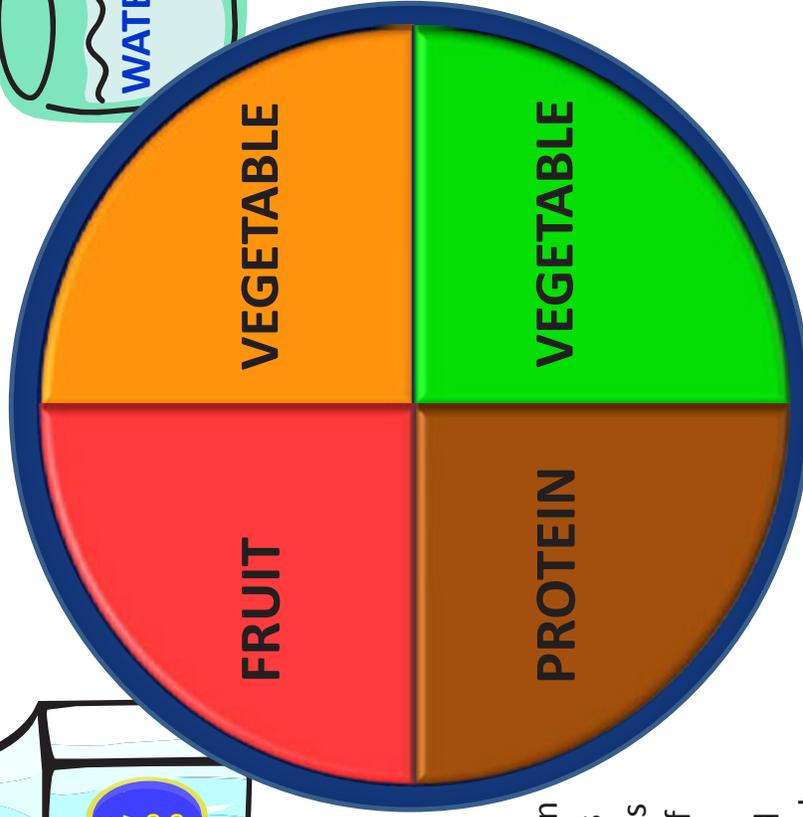
My Healthy Plate



Choose healthy oils like extra virgin olive oil for cooking and on salads. Limit butter and avoid trans fat.



Drink water, tea, or coffee (no cream or sugar). Use non-fat dairy, 1-2 servings daily. No juice except low sodium vegetable juice. Avoid sugary and artificially sweetened drinks.

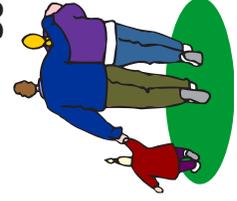


Eat lots of fruits of all colors.

Choose a healthy protein for each of your 3 meals daily. A protein serving is the size and thickness of the palm of your hand. Fish, poultry, beans, and nuts are great. Lean fresh red meat is ok up to 2 times per week. Avoid deli meats, bacon, sausage and other processed meats.

The more vegetables you eat the better you will look and feel – choose a wide variety, especially the green leafy types like spinach, kale and broccoli, and brightly colored ones like carrots and tomatoes.

Be active, at least 30 minutes daily





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Funds generously donated to Saint Luke's Foundation by grateful patients enable us to publish *From the Heart* and send it to more than 140,000 homes and offices. All materials are created by our physicians solely for the education of our patients and referring physicians.

James H. O'Keefe, Jr., M.D., Editor-in-Chief

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*We all need each other. We are here for you
at Saint Luke's Cardiovascular Consultants.*



From the Heart Online

If you enjoy the common-sense, cutting-edge advice in this **From the Heart** newsletter, be sure to check out Dr. James O'Keefe's blog: **From the Heart**, at <http://cardionutrition.wordpress.com>. There you will find new articles posted regularly, and information on the latest breakthroughs to keep your heart healthy and your brain sharp, and to help rejuvenate your life. Now more than ever, knowledge is power, especially when it comes to your health. There's a lot of noise out there—you can count on us to give you trusted and enlightened advice that will improve your longevity and quality of life.

If you want an electronic version of this **From the Heart** newsletter to save and read on your laptop or forward to your friends and family, visit: <http://www.saintlukeshealthsystem.org/saint-lukes-cardiovascular-consultants-newsletter>. Or you can request an electronic or paper copy by e-mailing us at ljwilson@saint-lukes.org; or calling 816-751-8480.

**Any names of patients used in this newsletter have been changed to protect the privacy of these individuals.*

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