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GWU's Dr. Jeff Hartman Offers Healthy Living Tips for 2013

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Office of University Communications

January 11, 2013

Don't Give Up on the "New You" in 2013!

By: Dr. Jeffrey Hartman, Gardner-Webb University

The New Year typically brings New Year's resolutions about taking better care of our body and health. Most of us have heard at some point that we need to diet and exercise our way to health. In addition, we have heard the benefits of a healthy lifestyle: lowered risk of all causes of mortality (heart disease, certain cancers, diabetes, hypertension, depression, and anxiety, to name a few). The paradox is, in spite of, or because of the prevalence of this information, we continue to neglect our bodies and risk our health as we put off until tomorrow the healthy lifestyle choices that result in a higher quality of life.

Chances are, you have either already slipped up on that New Year's resolution, or, more likely, abandoned it all together. What started off with good intentions and considerable gusto for the new you in the New Year, has just as quickly, albeit much more quietly, been abandoned for the comforts of the old you. While the New Year is a great time to make healthy lifestyle changes, so is today.

While living a healthy lifestyle is not always easy in today's era of supersized marketing and technological innovation, we do tend to take our relatively simple healthy lifestyle choices and complicate them by placing the all-or-nothing principle typically associated with the New Year's resolution. So, instead of demanding unrealistic changes on an arbitrary date of the calendar, begin today by making smart decisions with small lifestyle changes that can be maintained and built upon, resulting in major cumulative change over the lifespan. Incorporating some or all of these six steps into your daily routine promises to lead to a healthier you in 2013 and beyond.

Move more. It is recommended that people get 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity in addition to their normal activities of daily living. This number is roughly equated with 10,000 steps each day. Ten thousand is a big number, but by tackling 10,000 steps a day, you can take 10 minutes here or 20 minutes there to walk a little further. Park furthest away from the grocery store. Take the stairs instead of the escalator. Walk after a meal in place of watching that TV show you were never that interested in. Every step counts!

Eat more vegetables and fruit. Make half your plate vegetables and fruits and strive to consume a minimum of five servings of vegetables and fruits daily. Add some fresh fruit to your breakfast bowl of cereal or veggies to your omelet. Cut up some veggies and prepackage your own snack bags for work or at the house. Double the amount of vegetables or fruit in recipes. You do not need to become a vegetarian to enjoy healthy benefits of consuming more vegetables and fruits in your diet.

Drink more water. Your body needs water to carry out vital bodily functions, even if you are not an athlete or someone who exercises a lot. Staying hydrated is one of the most important things you can do to keep your body functioning properly. Carry a BPA free water container with you everywhere you go, and skip the sodas and sugary fruit drinks with all their excess calories. Do not wait until you are thirsty to drink, but make it a habit to consume some water at regular intervals throughout the day.

Sleep more. Our bodies need sleep to rejuvenate itself. We use sleep to repair and rebuild muscle and bone, regulate hormones, consolidate memories, even manage our body weight. Experts recommend that adults get between 7-9 hours of sleep every night, and research shows that Americans are chronically tired. Simple steps to get you a better night's sleep are to adopt a bedtime *and* wake time, and stick to them, including on the weekends. Use the bed for sleep, not watching TV or reading. Avoid exercising or snacking right before bed, and minimize or eliminate your consumption of liquids in the hours immediately before bedtime.

Wash your hands more. Quite possibly the simplest step to adopt that will have the greatest impact on your overall health, as well as those you come into contact with. Wash your hands more frequently and for longer durations, being sure not to ignore your fingernails and washing down to your wrists. A good rule of thumb is to wash with warm water and soap for 30 seconds (about the time it takes to whistle the Happy Birthday song, twice).

Laugh more. Laughter has been linked with lower blood pressure, reduced stress, improved alertness, memory, and learning, as well as a reduction in colds. Of all the healthy lifestyle steps provided, laughter is the one we all can use a little more of in our lives.

Dr. Jeffrey Hartman is associate professor of Physical Education, Wellness, and Sports Studies at Gardner-Webb University. Hartman is the founder of the Purposeful Running (PR) group at Gardner-Webb, which encourages participants to pursue healthy lifestyles through running.