

The ‘Ten Commandments’ for a Healthy and Enjoyable Life

Our health is arguably our most essential asset. It determines our level of relationship with our creator; how much we enjoy life; what work we do, and how successful we become. Unfortunately, we take our health for granted and hardly invest in it. We set up business appointments and honour them religiously, but our health can always wait.

There are several ‘commandments’ for a healthy life, but you are about to encounter the Ultimate Ten Commandments for a healthy and enjoyable life – and this will change your life forever.

Make a copy and stick it onto your refrigerator, office table, bedside, or any place where you can see, read, and ‘digest’ it daily.

Behold... Dr. Essel’s ‘Ten Commandments’ for a healthy and enjoyable life:

1. Be focused mentally on achieving good health

Good health is a life-long commitment. It is not only for a short period (“I will exercise and eat right till my wedding day”). We may go off course sometimes, but hey, everybody does... just get back in line. Don’t forget to reward yourself for meeting your realistic goals.

2. Get right with God and people

Good health is not merely the absence of disease, but also the physical, mental and social well being of an individual. Thus sayeth the wise men at the World Health Organization. Ever wondered why people who are God-fearing seem so content?

Do not bear grudges. You waste precious time (you could use this time to exercise to relieve stress); you waste precious sleep; and you actually injure your health.

There is very interesting data from recent research, for people with similar conditions (such as high blood pressure): it was found that after surgery (assuming all other factors remain the same), the prayerful one gets a better outcome. So, prayer does work!!!

3. Exercise appropriately and regularly

Exercise your mind and body regularly, and your heart, brain and all other organs will sing a melodious tune for over three-score and ten years. Read wide and often. Solve puzzles when you can – these exercise the brain and ward off forgetfulness, etc. Many are those who say, “My work involves standing all day, or carrying heavy weights, so I do not need exercise”.

To reap the full benefits of exercise, you need to tackle three areas:

- Aerobic exercise – such as walking, jogging, using a treadmill or bike etc. This is manna to the heart and lungs

- Strength training – use of weights or resistance. This is feared by many, but when done right, has tremendous gains.
- Flexibility training – also referred to as ‘stretching’. This increases the flexibility of our joints, and reduces our chances of injury.

Unless you have been advised by your doctor to avoid one or all of the above, you are doing yourself a great disservice by restricting your options. Exercise, the ‘Wonder Pill’, has so many proven benefits for us; it is essentially a ‘deadly sin’ to avoid it.

Some of the benefits of exercise include, but are not limited to:

- Preventing or controlling many chronic/lifestyle diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, high cholesterol, obesity, depression, osteoarthritis and osteoporosis.
- Improving our brain power and performance in all spheres of life
- Giving us the energy to do the things we love most
- Prolonging our life

So whatever your exercise excuse is: “too old”, “no time”, “too tired”... Start exercising today (get clearance from your doctor first), and you will never regret it.

4. Eat right

Who eats once a day and has his or her weight in check? I haven’t seen many. What about all those ‘diet plans’ to help you lose weight in a blink of an eye? They do not work!!! This is what we call ‘yo-yo dieting’; we may lose some weight on these magic potions, but we put more on in a flash, and it becomes even more difficult to take it off the next time round.

Let’s do ourselves a favour – food is the fuel that our bodies need to function well, and for optimum performance, we need to eat well balanced meals at least three times a day. What we need to watch is the quantity, contents and timing of our eating.

Breakfast is a must, to jump-start our metabolism, and, for kids to do well in school, they definitely need to break the long fast by 8.30am. Lunch between 12 noon and 2pm is ideal, and it would have been nice to have supper by 6.30pm, but our schedules make this almost impossible. Let’s strive for good timing, but on occasion, when we have no choice but to eat late, supper should be light – healthy cereals, soft rice and light soup, at the most.

In between our main meals, we may take a snack (a fruit is a wonderful option). Sometimes you may need supplements, especially if you exercise vigorously. However, for the average person, a good multivitamin may just be what the doctor recommended.

5. Drink adequate amounts of water

‘Drink deep or taste not the waters of the Pierian spring where shallow waters intoxicate the brain and drinking deep makes the mind sober again’. Fortunately for us, our bodies do not follow the ‘all or none’ law. Water is extremely important for the proper functioning of our body, and there are several sources of this water – food, beverages, etc.

Several factors determine how much water we need: physical activity, weather conditions, disease states, and so on, but on the average, two litres of water a day is adequate (about 8 glasses of water). There are minor differences in the needs of the sexes, but this is a good approximation.

How do we lose water? Through sweat, talking, urine and stools. Some of us hate the idea of drinking water and will only go near a glass when we feel thirsty. Thirst itself means we have deprived our body for too long. Drink frequently, and do not use thirst as the measure. The chances of a healthy person drinking much more than the body can tolerate are slim.

6. Get rest

‘...on the seventh day, he rested’. If the Almighty found it prudent to rest, how come mere mortals think we can keep going continuously and still perform well? Rest is good, but sleep is even better. Ever wondered why after a good night’s sleep, a difficult task appears so simple? Or why we virtually get out of bed with the answer to a puzzle? The pillow, ladies and gentlemen, is powerful, and our ancestors knew this.

Six to eight hours of sleep a day is great and refreshing, and it even makes us look good. Remember ‘beauty sleep’?

I need to let you in on this secret: exercise promotes sleep, so drop those pills. The best time to exercise is when you have difficulty sleeping: do your exercise four to six hours before bedtime, since this coincides with the dip in temperature caused by exercising.

Take a vacation each year, if it means just watching TV and strolling in your neighbourhood. No need to keep ‘selling your leave’.

7. Avoid smoking, and minimize alcohol

Very few things can be as addictive and harmful as cigarette smoking. If you smoke, make a conscious effort to stop today. Do not even go close to people who smoke: second-hand smoke is injurious to your health.

Telling people to minimize alcohol and not saying ‘no alcohol’ always gets me into trouble. If you have no self control, please avoid alcohol, lest ‘wine makes a

mockery out of you'. It can also be very harmful to your unborn baby, so beware, pregnant women.

8. Ensure environmental and personal hygiene

It is said that cleanliness is next to godliness, and you had better take that seriously. The mosquito still reigns, and diarrhoea from multiple causes still prevails. Washing our hands with soap and water will reduce the incidence of diarrhoea. Take a bath - it's important. And those pools of water will breed mosquitoes – get rid of them.

9. Get regular medical check ups

“I am so healthy, I have not been to hospital for over 20 years” is a statement out of ignorance. Discard it. Hospitals are not only for the sick. If your doctor will not allow you to suggest a check up, it may be time to fire him/her. No one cares more about your health than yourself – so take control.

You need to know your numbers – Blood sugar (for diabetes), Blood Pressure, Lipids (cholesterol)... Oh! and all males over 40 years, kindly check your prostate health. Maybe your PSA now, then rectal exam later?

Ladies, let's take charge of our breasts – a manual exam (monthly self-exam) and a mammogram (by age 40 or 30, if you are high risk for breast cancer). Cervical cancer can be stopped, but only if we catch it early enough – have a PAP smear.

Age 50 is a great time for both males and females to have a peek into their colons: it's time to arrest colon cancer.

One good tip – regular exercise decreases the risk of certain cancers, including breast and colon cancer.

10. If you are on medication, take it as prescribed

When you have an illness such as high blood pressure or diabetes, it does not mean you can't enjoy life to the fullest. Your healthcare professional may put you on medication. This is no time to skip the medicines – take them exactly as prescribed, and follow the other nine commandments. If you have problems with the medications, don't rely on the 'curbside consultants', but rather talk to your doctor or pharmacist immediately.

I hope that we will make an effort to apply these principles. Start TODAY, and make small changes as the days go by.

References:

1. Simple Ideas for healthy living – First Place 4 Health
2. Fitness Therapy. 3rd Edition by Dr. Karl Knopf
3. www.healthclubsgh.com