



A WOMAN'S BODY: HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE

Your body comprises cells, tissues and organs that work in harmony and function as a whole. Groups of cells form tissue, and organs are made up of several tissue types. Organs that work in partnership form a system. The choices you make today – what you put inside or do with your body – has an impact on your current and future health.

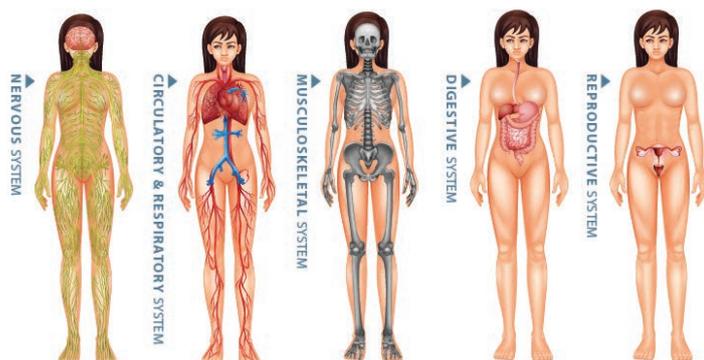
Lifestyle: the impact on health

What is lifestyle?

Lifestyle can be defined as a way in which you choose to live your life – from the things you eat and the activities you do, to the way you raise your children. Your lifestyle can affect you in different ways. Healthy living doesn't only refer to physical health but also relates to you as a whole person and includes your social and mental wellbeing.

Does lifestyle impact on health?

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines a healthy lifestyle as, 'A way of living that lowers the risk of being seriously ill or dying early'. According to the WHO, scientific studies have identified that certain behaviours can contribute to the development of non-communicable diseases and early death. Adopting a healthy lifestyle can improve your health and lower your risk for disease.



THE FEMALE BODY SYSTEMS

Habits of an unhealthy lifestyle

Unhealthy habits and health risk factors such as eating a poor diet, being overweight or obese, having high cholesterol or blood glucose levels, smoking, excessive drinking, substance abuse, lack of exercise, poor posture, chronic stress and risky sexual choices can have a serious impact a number of your body systems.

Nervous system

- › stress
- › depression
- › Alzheimer's disease
- › anxiety disorders

Circulatory and respiratory systems

- › heart disease
- › arteriosclerosis
- › chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- › stroke
- › high blood pressure
- › lung cancer
- › asthma
- › type 2 diabetes

Musculoskeletal system

- › backache, joint and muscular pain
- › osteoporosis
- › loss of muscle mass

Urinary (excretory) system

- › kidney disease (renal failure)

Digestive system

- › nutrient deficiencies (anaemia)
- › insulin resistance
- › constipation
- › gall bladder disease
- › liver cirrhosis
- › various cancers

Reproductive system

- › infertility
- › sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
- › cancer

Lifestyle changes: a step towards better health

Making changes for a healthy lifestyle can lower your risk for the diseases and disorders indicated in the infographic.



Improve your diet

Lower your risk for heart disease, stroke, some types of cancers, osteoporosis, high cholesterol, type 2 diabetes, and gallbladder disease

Eat a balanced diet including food from all the food groups. Increase portions of fruit and vegetables to five per day. Choose lean meat cuts. Limit fat, salt and sugar intake. Prepare foods by steaming, baking or boiling and avoid fried foods. Drink plenty of fresh water to stay hydrated. Check your BMI and strongly consider a weight loss programme if you need to lose weight. Divide your weight (in kilograms) by the square of your height (height multiplied height) to get the answer. For example: You are 1.8m and weight 83kg. $1.8 \times 1.8 = 3.24$. $83 \div 3.24 = 25.6$. Key: healthy - 18.5 and 24.9; overweight - 25 -29.9; over 30 - obese.



Get more sleep

Lower your risk for heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, stroke, mood disorders, digestive complaints, and early mortality

The average adult requires seven to nine hours of sleep per night. Without the right amount of sleep, you'll be less alert, lack concentration and be more likely to react emotionally to situations. Lack of sleep can impact on your ability to cope with stress. Practice good sleep hygiene and get more sleep for improved concentration, productivity and better mood.



Deal with stress

Lower your risk for high blood pressure, suppressed immune system, heart disease, stroke, infertility, anxiety and depression, premature ageing, headaches and gastrointestinal problems.

Stress is a very real part of modern life. Not all stress is bad, but negative stress over a prolonged period can take its toll on your heart. Breaks during your workday and periods of downtime away from work are important to cope with stress. Exercise, a hobby and spending time with those you love can help you to get a handle on stress. You may also need to evaluate your lifestyle and find better ways to manage your time. Meditation sessions and breathing techniques can help to combat stress and help you relax your

muscles. If you feel unable to cope, suffer with depression or abuse drugs, medication or alcohol, you must seek professional health.



Get more exercise

Lower your risk for loss of muscle mass, high blood pressure, heart disease, obesity, arthritis, some types of cancer, type 2 diabetes, depression and anxiety and digestive complaints.

A lack of exercise can have an impact on your physical and mental health. Adequate exercise can help you maintain a healthy weight, keep your muscles strong and your joints and ligaments flexible and healthy. Exercise is also known to boost mood and improve immune system functioning. Always see your doctor for a full check-up before you start any exercise programme. Even if you only commit to 20 to 30 minutes a day initially, you'll see the health benefits. Getting exercise means getting active – go to the gym, starting walk or take up a sport or active hobby like tennis, dancing or swimming.



Quit smoking

Lower your risk for coronary heart disease, lung diseases (emphysema and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), some types of cancers, stroke risk, headaches and infertility.

You can stop smoking! Research suggests that those who combine a good support system (friends and family), with personal willpower and a smoking cessation aid have the best chance of kicking the habit. If you are serious about your health, decide to quit today. See your doctor or healthcare practitioner for further advice.



Consume alcohol responsibly

Lower your risk for high blood pressure, heart failure, liver disease, personal injury, injury to others and decreased cognitive functioning.

Responsible alcohol consumption means finding a balance between enjoying an alcoholic beverage and lowering your risk for alcohol-related diseases and injuries. If you drink, do so in moderation. The Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa recommends one standard drink for women per day. Standard measurements are 340ml of beer, 125ml of wine or 25ml of spirits.



Get help for substance abuse

Lower your risk of organ damage, headaches, infertility, accidents (self and others), unsafe sexual practices, brain damage and death by overdose.

Abusing any type of drug – prescription, OTC or illicit drugs - can have serious consequences for your health. If you rely on drugs to cope or take more medication than your recommended dosage, reach out to a family member, your doctor or a drug rehabilitation clinic for help. The quicker you acknowledge your problem and seek treatment, the better for yourself, your family and your health.



Protect your sexual health

Lower your risk for contracting STIs, HIV/Aids and infertility.

Protect your sexual health by always practising safe sex. A number of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) can have a negative impact on a woman's fertility. It is also important to consider your working environment as some chemicals may also have an impact on fertility. If you are unsure, speak to your HR manager. Abusing drugs and alcohol can cause changes in the menstrual cycle which may affect your ability to conceive.

Resources:

<http://www.livestrong.com>, <http://www.healthline.com>, <http://webmd.com>
<http://www.humanillnesses.com>, [Heart & Stroke Foundation South Africa](http://www.Heart&StrokeFoundationSouthAfrica.org), <http://CANSA.org.za>