



YOU NEED TO TAKE CARE OF YOUR OWN HEALTH

By Jim Warren, Lifelong Fitness Alliance board member



The word crisis is bandied about indiscriminately in today's world. But we maintain that there is a real crisis which is gradually destroying the ability of our nation to function well. I'm speaking of the lack of personal responsibility in taking care of one's health.

We spend an astoundingly large percentage of our gross national product on health care and yet our national wellness is not even up to the standards of some of the less developed countries. There are a number of problem areas.

One is a medical system, which is much too reliant on prescribing a pill for a symptom and not getting to the real cause of the problem. We've gotten away from the old concept of food and movement for wellness. It's a simple concept.

It simply means that we are a product of the foods we eat and the type of movement we do during the day. Lifelong Fitness Alliance has the mission of helping to make a shift in our national consciousness. There is a tremendous amount of information available to everyone in all types of media touting the benefits of good nutrition and exercise. What's lacking is the motivation for people to engage in these healthy activities.

Given optimal nutrition, the upper limit of life span is now estimated as 120 years. With increasing interest in the aging process, numerous studies are investigating the effects of nutrition and physical activity on longevity. It has become clear that changes in your lifestyle may slow the aging process within the limits set by your genetic profile.

Since chronic diseases are the major cause of death, you may live a healthier and longer life by limiting foods that increase disease risk (such as foods high in saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol and sodium), while increasing nutrient-rich foods that decrease disease risk.

Research shows that changes in eating habits can benefit health, even if made in older adulthood. A balanced diet includes a variety of nutrient-dense foods and adequate fluids, with plenty of brightly colored vegetables and fruits, lean protein sources and healthy fats. Healthful diets can be planned with inexpensive foods such as canned and frozen fruits and vegetables, beans, whole grain breads and cereals and low-fat dairy products. Specific foods that have received attention for their health-promoting properties include:

- * Berries - The antioxidants in blueberries, blackberries, raspberries and strawberries may promote cardiovascular and brain health by reducing oxidative damage and inflammation.

- * Nuts - Unsalted nuts such as almonds and walnuts contain healthy monounsaturated fats or omega-3 fatty acids which may improve blood lipids and cardiovascular health.
- * Whole grains - These fiber-rich foods may protect against cancer and stabilize blood glucose and insulin levels.
- * Garlic - The antioxidant properties of crushed garlic may protect against chronic diseases and aging.
- * Tomatoes - Tomatoes and especially canned tomato products contain lycopene, another antioxidant that reduces cancer risk.

Animal studies have shown that animals live longer and have fewer chronic diseases when their diets are restricted in calories. Researchers believe that a calorie-restricted diet helps to prevent oxidative damage that may lead to chronic diseases. In humans, moderate calorie restriction is beneficial for weight loss, which is associated with favorable changes in body fat, blood pressure, blood lipids and glucose tolerance. A recent study showed that almost all centenarians are lean. So a healthful diet may be one of the best medicines for a longer and healthier life!

There are 1,440 minutes in every day. Thirty of them should be scheduled for physical activity! Regular exercise is a critical part of staying healthy. I know, you don't have time but the fact of the matter is, if you do exercise you will have more energy and be able to accomplish more in less time. Possibly that 30 minutes means you gain 60 minutes by being more productive. Besides, people who are active live longer and feel better.

Exercise can help you maintain a healthy weight, delay or prevent diabetes, some cancers and heart problems. You need at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity at least five days per week. Some examples are walking briskly, mowing the lawn, dancing, swimming or bicycling. Stretching and weight training can also strengthen your body and improve your fitness level. Great, but how do you accomplish all this?

The key is to find the right exercise for you. If it's fun, you are more likely to stay motivated. Our approach is to provide ambassadors who will lead you in fitness and nutrition activities that will be fun and rewarding.

The Ambassadors of Lifelong Fitness are attempting to engage people that are interested in joining small walking groups and from that beginning, to actually get people to be conscious of their exercise habits and their nutritional requirements as well.



Right now in the U.S, two out of every three people are either overweight or obese. That's two thirds of our work force and it is a known fact that being overweight increases the odds of diabetes and heart disease.

This means that our health care costs are running over 100 billion a year just from being overweight. This is a problem that can be solved. There is no lack of information with regard to the benefits of exercise and proper nutrition. The puzzle is how do we get people to adopt healthy life styles.

All of these diseases can be prevented or reduced through an easy lifestyle change. Most people don't realize just how much their behavior impacts their health. Again and again, we're shown that people overestimate how active they are. The truth is that most people are not active enough.

In order to overcome the problem of too much information and not enough action, Lifelong Fitness Alliance has established a grassroots network of people we call Fitness Ambassadors. Our Ambassadors provide information and opportunities to people in their communities to get moving and stay fit. We believe that peer encouragement is the strongest catalyst for people to engage in increased physical activity.

Fitness Ambassadors can choose to work either with an existing organization or organize their own weekly activities. Being a world-class athlete is certainly not a prerequisite for being a Lifelong Fitness Ambassador. Fitness Ambassadors are everyday people simply passionate about helping people stay as fit and well as possible.

In collaboration with AARP, we have developed a ten-week pedometer based, Ambassador led walking program called "Stepping Strong." This walking program encourages individuals and communities to "step up" their physical activity and implement life-style changes for optimal health and wellness.

Each walking group has an Ambassador who acts as the liaison between Lifelong Fitness Alliance and their own group of walkers. We offer a pedometer and charts to track your goals and progress. Also included in the program are nutritional information, accountability, support and recipes. Throughout the 10 week program there is information given that covers all aspects of healthy living. Please contact us if you would like to join a local walking group in your community.

If becoming a Fitness Ambassador sounds like something you would like to do in your community, please visit our website at lifelongfitnessalliance.org or call **650.361.8282** for more details.

Mission/History of Lifelong Fitness Alliance

- To advocate lifelong wellness and bridge the gap between awareness and action by providing information and opportunities for health and fitness.
- To teach people the benefits of physical activity and to provide opportunities for communities to be educated about and to participate in activities that contribute to wellness and to show that misuse and disuse of the body and mind are more the cause of disability than chronological age alone. We exist to spread the joys of fitness and wellness.

For many years, the Stanford University Medical Center conducted research on health promotion and disease prevention. Several researchers focused on the effects of exercise, particularly among older people, on health. One researcher, Dr. Peter Wood of the Stanford Center for Research in Disease Prevention (SCRDP) recruited a group of regular runners to serve as subjects in his experiments. In one classic study, Wood, Haskell, Klein et al., established that regular running was "associated with significant increases in high density lipoprotein cholesterol (HDL) levels ('good cholesterol')."

Inspired by these results, Fifty-Plus Lifelong Fitness (renamed Lifelong Fitness Alliance) was formed in 1979 by a group of the participants in the Stanford research to help provide subjects for continued research at Stanford and to encourage older adults to run regularly. Dr. Peter Wood was one of the founders of the group and was elected to be its first president. The Lifelong Fitness Alliance grew steadily over the next 20 years, mostly by word of mouth as well as articles about the organization that appeared in running magazines and other publications.

In 1990, the Lifelong Fitness Alliance's board of directors voted to expand the focus of the organization from just promoting running to promoting all aspects of fitness. This broadened the appeal of the organization and helped grow its membership.

The organization that started at Stanford University as an outgrowth of medical research on the value of exercise for older persons now has approximately 1,000 members across the United States. Lifelong Fitness Alliance provides education and opportunities for wellness and fitness activities for adults.