

*The 8 Habits
of Healthy Living*

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'The art of living well and the art of dying well are one.' ~Epicurus

I did a little research today — I found the top causes of death, then created a spreadsheet for the controllable risk factors for each.

Some things can't be controlled (your age, family history of diseases, gender). But others can. And those things aren't a huge surprise — you already know not to smoke, drink too much, or eat crappily.

It's interesting, though, how all of the major diseases are caused by the same things: smoking, diet, exercise, alcohol and stress.

Below I'll list the top habits you can change, and a simple method for changing them.

The 8 Habits of Healthy Living

1. Stop smoking.

This is by far the most important habit, as it affects almost every single one of the leading causes of death. It's also the hardest of these habits to change. It's not at all impossible — success stories are everywhere!

2. Lose weight (if you're overweight).

This is not exactly a habit — the best habit to form to lose weight is to eat less. Or eat more of things that don't have a lot of calories, like fruits and veggies. Being overweight is just below smoking the worst risk factor for many diseases.

3. Exercise.

You don't need me to tell you to exercise, but listen to this: lack of exercise is a major risk factor for heart disease, stroke, colon & rectal cancers, diabetes, breast cancer, high blood pressure and high cholesterol. If you don't exercise, you're just asking to get a major disease. It's almost a magic pill: do a bit of exercise every day, and you get healthy. You don't need much — start with 5 minutes a day in the morning.

4. Drink only in moderation.

Heavy drinking is one of the worst risk factors for many diseases. That's more than 2 drinks of alcohol a day for men, and more than 1 drink for women. A glass of red wine is a good thing, but too many and you're greatly increasing your risk of disease.

5. Cut out red & processed meats.

Eating red meats, and processed meats like sausages, bacon, canned meats and so on, is a risk factor for colon/rectal cancer, stomach cancer, and high cholesterol, which in turn is a leading risk factor for coronary heart disease and stroke. While this won't sit well with many people, the overwhelming mass of research supports this. Many people recommend going vegetarian.

6. Eat fruits & veggies.

This is obvious, but it's amazing how few veggies most people eat. Eating fruits and veggies reduces your risk of several leading diseases, and it's one of the easiest habits to form. Eat a salad (without heavy dressings, bacon or other meats, croutons or cheese), add veggies to soups or veggie chili, cook up veggies as a healthy side dish with dinner or lunch. Eat fruits with breakfast and as snacks.

7. Reduce salt, and saturated/trans fats.

Salt and saturated or trans fats are in so many processed or prepared foods, and they increase risks of high blood pressure and high cholesterol, which increase risk for heart disease and stroke. Despite what the Weston Price Foundation and other people on the Internet tell you, saturated fat isn't healthy — read the sources. Note that this isn't a controversy in the medical community, but the "harmlessness" of saturated fats is perpetuated by the dairy and meat industries, and lay writers like Gary Taube. Cook your own healthy meals instead of eating out or eating prepared foods.

8. Reduce stress.

Stress is a risk factor for heart disease and high blood pressure, which is itself a risk factor for stroke. Simplify your workday so that you're not overly stressed, and exercise to relieve stress.

How to Form the Habits

This might seem like a lot to change, if you're not already doing these things, but let me tell you: all it takes is baby steps.

Don't try to change everything, and don't make it hard on yourself. It's actually very easy if you're patient and if you just start.

Here's how to change these habits:

Change only one habit at a time.

It doesn't matter which habit you choose. Just choose one. You'll want to do more than one, but don't.

Create positive habits you enjoy.

Read the last word again — if you enjoy it, the habit change will be easy. Replace smoking with positive habits you enjoy that fulfill the needs

that smoking now fulfills (stress reduction, social lubrication, boredom relief, etc.). Replace red meats with healthy foods you enjoy.

Start as small as possible.

Just do 5 minutes the first week, and try to be consistent as possible. Then do 10 minutes. Small change is by far the most effective method I've used for changing habits. Slow change lasts.

Make it social.

Find a partner or group to change the habit with you, so you're more likely to stick with it.

These work. I've done them many times, and every time I stick to these principles, I've changed a habit.

Healthy living isn't impossible, or even especially difficult. It's just slower to come by than most people care for.

This article is part of the Happiness Toolkit and is not found on the blog.

This information is given to you purely for free. All I ask is that if you know someone that can benefit from reading this, can you please send this to them, or let them know about [The Start of Happiness](#).

Additionally, you may want to share on [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#). The more people we have on this planet that are waking up excited each day and living a happy and fulfilling life, the better the world will be!

If you have any questions, feel free to email me directly at brendan@startofhappiness.com or simply leave a comment on The Start of Happiness.

Remember, you can change the WORLD, one smile at a time!

Cheers!

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "B. Baker".

Brendan