

# **Good Health with Confidence**

*By Charles H. Taylor, MD, Principal, Health Navigators, LLC, Atlanta, Georgia*

In an age where medical research and public health efforts have virtually eliminated diseases such as scarlet fever, tuberculosis, smallpox and the like, we find ourselves facing the reality of dying today from chronic diseases that we have brought on ourselves.

## **“People Don’t Decide Their Future -- They Decide Their Habits It’s Their Habits That Decide Their Future”**

More and more of today’s diseases are caused by stress, poor eating habits, inactivity and the use of tobacco products. I’m sorry to say that those suffering from society’s illnesses are, in fact, responsible for a great percentage of today’s skyrocketing health care costs. The good news is that these illnesses can be easily and inexpensively detected and corrected.

The responsibility for one’s health is almost entirely up to the individual. The facts are indisputable and the costs are in real dollars. Individuals with high blood pressure will be absent 17 percent more and have more than \$500 in additional health care costs each year than those with normal blood pressure. Add nearly a thousand dollars each year if you are a smoker. Whether you are employed or not, these inconveniences and added costs deprive you of the quality of life humans are entitled to.

Good health starts with the management of accurate health information. I recommend that everyone keep personal health records. In doing so, you will become more knowledgeable about your health, less dependent on the health care system and you will become a partner of your physician instead of a patient.

When creating a health history, include your family health history, a history of your laboratory and blood pressure tests, and your exercise and nutrition habits. Accept concept that your body is going through constant change. Most of the change is normal but extreme changes should be shared with your physician. My point is to prepare yourself so that you can help your physician to help you.

Studies have long shown that a physician is more likely to influence positive health direction than any resource you will encounter. Unfortunately, not all physicians offer advice about lifestyle. In fact, the CDC conducted a study of 29,272 office visits and found that 10% were offered advice about weight loss, 19% about exercise, 23% regarding diet and 41% about smoking cessation.

The traditional physical examination can create a valuable baseline of information from which to measure changes in your future. Unfortunately, much of the traditional physical evaluation procedures are now considered unnecessary or ineffective from medical significance and cost justification. An example is the “routine” chest x-ray. We now know that this should only be performed on smokers or individuals with symptoms like a chronic cough. The objective of the physical examination should be to screen for the prevalent causes of health problems, to educate and motivate individuals toward better health habits and to support long term health management goal setting.

I’d like you all to know that you can do more for your good health than your physician. But, it requires that you participate in your good health.

Physical activity (exercise) is very important for good health. Our parents “did” walk to school and the history of disease proves its value. The body was designed to be active.

We now know that an exercising person will submit as much as 43 percent fewer health care claims than a non-exerciser. We also know that regular physical activity improves overall health, self-esteem and reduces stress. Regular exercise means sustained physical activity for a minimum of 30 minutes each day.

Our grandparents had a big nutritional advantage over us as well. First of all, many of them planted, picked and prepared their own meals – it required calories to eat. Secondly, the foods were typically fresh. Third, there were “no” fast food restaurants. We ate more cancer and heart disease fighting vegetables, fruits and grains. The most simple nutrition plan is to eat 5 to 9 fruits, vegetables and whole grains each day.

**“Go confidently in the direction of your dreams!**

**Live the life you’ve imagined.”**

*-Thoreau*