

Lifestyle Medicine: How to Prevent, Treat and Reverse Chronic Diseases

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Lifestyle Medicine is a branch of medicine that uses lifestyle adjustments as therapeutic interventions. These adjustments include a healthy eating plan, based on wholesome food and fresh produce, regular and customized physical activity, adequate sleep, stress management, avoidance of unhealthy substances (such as heavy drinking, smoking or use of drugs) and positive interpersonal relationships. All these interventions are used to prevent, treat or reverse the effects of chronic diseases, including cancer, heart disease, arthritis and diabetes [1]. Chronic diseases are the leading cause of death and disability in the US according to CDC [2].

It is estimated that 6 out of 10 adults suffer from a chronic disease and four in ten suffer from more than two [3]. More particularly, with regards to heart disease and stroke, it is estimated that around 867,000 Americans die of those two diseases per year. The cost of treatment is very high too, with an estimated \$214 billion per year [4]. According to the National Cancer Institute, more than 1.7 million people are diagnosed with cancer per year and more than 600,000 die from it. The cost of cancer care is expected to rise above \$170 billion by 2021 [5].

Regarding diabetes, it is estimated that 34.2 million Americans have the disease and another 88 million adults in the United States have prediabetes, which puts them at high risk of developing type 2 diabetes. Diabetes leads to severe complications, including heart disease, kidney failure, skin and eye disorders. In 2017, the total cost of diagnosed diabetes was around \$327 billion, according to the American Diabetes Association [6].

Obesity affects 19% of children and 42% of adults, significantly increasing the risk for chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease and some cancers [7].

Regarding arthritis, it affects 54.4 million adults in the United States, which means 1 in 4 adults are affected. It is a leading cause of work disability in the United States and one of the most common cause of chronic pain. The total cost of arthritis was round \$300 billion in 2013. Considering the high prevalence of chronic diseases, the high costs for health care and the poor quality of life resulting from the chronic diseases, it is of high importance to follow the recommendations of lifestyle medicine.

These include, firstly individualized and well monitored exercise prescriptions to ensure adequate activity levels. The second component of lifestyle medicine incorporates a balanced diet of fresh fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean meats, and low-fat dairy products. Overweight individuals should be advised to lose at least 5% to 7% of body weight. Stress management through guided meditation and cognitive therapy together with monitoring and ensuring good quality sleep patterns plays a major role in lifestyle medicine. Meanwhile, adequate care and proper guidance should be given in order people to stop the use of prohibited substances and control the consumption of alcohol and tobacco. Finally, sufficient encouragement should be available with clear advice and continuous counselling towards building and maintaining strong social bonds.

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