

5 Golden Rules To Live Longer

Key to slashing risk of early death.

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Obeying five golden rules is the key to a long and disease-free life, a study has found.

Regular exercise, sensible eating, maintaining a healthy weight, minimal alcohol consumption and no smoking are the simple steps that guarantee longevity. Ground-breaking research conducted over 35 years found those who make subtle lifestyle changes can reduce the risk of developing killer conditions by up to 70 per cent. Cases of cancer, heart attack, stroke, diabetes and dementia were slashed in those who seized control of their health.

It is the clearest sign yet that a clean-living lifestyle is the most effective way of avoiding an early grave. The advice might sound straightforward but health chiefs said the revolutionary report was a "salutary warning" to a nation beset by ill health.

Family doctor Ian Campbell said: "It is not just a wake-up call but a loud cannon across the bows for individuals and NHS decision makers.

"The principal components of a healthy, long life may seem obvious and should definitely be encouraged. But in an age of tech-nology and breathtaking medical advances we have lost sight of the much more obvious and simpler fact that a healthy, active lifestyle is more powerful than any drug in preventing ill health and increasing life expectancy."

In 1979, Cardiff University School of Medicine set out to examine the relationship between lifestyle choices and chronic disease. Some 2,500 men aged 45-59 in Caerphilly, South Wales, agreed to be monitored for life.

They were told sticking to a healthy regime would ward off a host of illnesses but only a handful managed to do so.

Last night came proof that those who followed the five simple steps were in the rudest of health.

Those who kept in fine fettle slashed the risk of developing diabetes by 70 per cent. Heart attack, stroke and dementia were reduced by 60 per cent, while instances of cancer fell by 40 per cent. Most tellingly, those who neglected to take responsibility for their health experienced no benefit at all.

A healthy lifestyle does not provide immunity from disease but the study found those who lead a healthier life can delay the onset of crippling conditions by years. Professor Peter Elwood, who led the research, said: "Thirty years ago only 30 men in our study followed all five of our recommended healthy steps.

“The men who, despite living healthily, developed a disease did so at a much older age than the men neglectful of their lifestyle.

“The development of heart dis-ease was delayed by up to six years and it was around an additional 12 years before dementia took its grip. It shows that following a healthy lifestyle staves off disease and premature death. We must wake up to the preventive power of living a healthy life.”

The volunteers gave researchers regular reports of their physical activity and diet. Their wives and families helped by completing a food questionnaire. They were told to walk two or more miles a day, cycle 10 or more miles or take regular “vigorous” exercise.

Every five years they were examined to identify their susceptibility to disease. Ray Grace, 80, who jogs two miles every day, said: “I’ll go on as long as I am able to.

“I’ve stuck pretty well to the healthy lifestyle laid down and met the researchers half a dozen times over the years. It has been invaluable for me and I’m pleased to have been part of it.”

Blood samples taken from the volunteers will now be used to investigate the impact of lifestyle on cognitive decline, prostate and bowel cancer. But doctors say most people have failed to wake up to the fact that we face a ticking timebomb caused by poor lifestyle choices. In England 53 per cent of men drink more than the recommended daily amount and barely half meet recommended scores for wellbeing.

Earlier this year, the National Obesity Forum said predictions that half the British population will be obese by 2050 underestimate the scale of the crisis.

Official estimates say obesity costs the NHS £5.1billion a year, while alcohol-related diseases cost £3.5billion. Treating smoking-related illnesses lands the health service with a £3billion annual bill - almost £60million a week.

The Department of Health said: “The results of this study won’t come as a surprise to anyone but it is a stark reminder that having a healthy lifestyle really can impact on a long, fulfilling life. Little changes like drinking less, quitting smoking and being more active can make a huge difference and it is never too late to start.”

Clare Walton, of the Alzheimer’s Society, said: “We have known for some time that what is good for your heart is also good for your head.” And Sarah Powell, chief executive of Sport Wales, said: “It’s clear we must make healthier life choices and halt the tide of inactivity if we are to become a healthier nation.”