

There are many reasons for getting regular checkups. Here are the Top 5

By Dr. Mike Sofronski

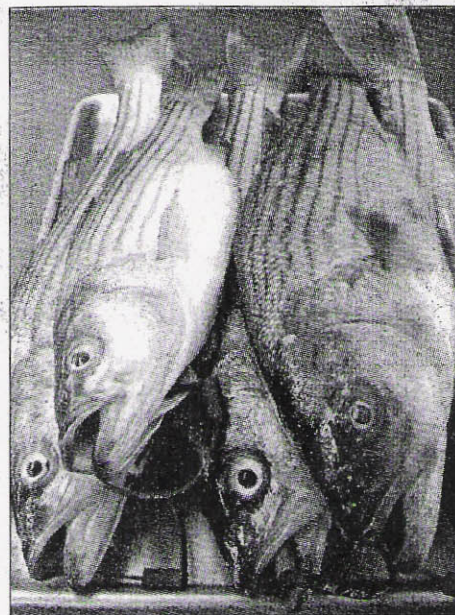
Regular physician visits are essential to optimize your health and self-esteem. Start now by getting a full physical examination and health check by your family physician. Here are my Top 5 reasons for regular doctor visits:

OBESITY. Obesity is an epidemic in the United States. It increases your risk of developing major medical problems including diabetes, hypertension, coronary artery disease, elevated cholesterol, sleep apnea and reflux to name a few. Obesity also increases your chance of developing cancer and is associated with a reduction of your life expectancy by 10 years or more. Your family physician can help with a nutritional program, or direct you to an expert. When you see your doctor, ask for help with your weight.

HYPERTENSION. High blood pressure increases your risk of serious health problems including coronary artery disease and stroke. Controlling blood pressure is very important and often involves medication, diet modification

and weight loss. Nonmedical techniques for reducing your blood pressure include lowering the salt in your diet, decreasing your weight, limiting alcohol consumption, increasing exercise and eating more whole grain products, fruits and vegetables. Typically, dietary and lifestyle modifications are initiated first, but medication may be required if your hypertension is severe. Your family physician is an expert in treating this problem.

CANCER. The National Cancer Institute estimates that as much as 80 percent of cancers are preventable. Thirty percent of cancers are due to tobacco and 35 percent are due to dietary factors. For example, foods rich in fat and oils increase your risk of colon, rectum, breast and prostate cancer. Some foods help protect against cancer including dietary fiber, vitamins and minerals. More importantly, your primary care physician will direct you to the appropriate screening tests at the appropriate times. Avoiding the doctor does not make a problem go away. In fact, a simple



Times Photo by Brice Stump

Lean protein, including fish, chicken and pork, feeds your body's muscles without adding fat to your diet.

screening test may save your life by identifying a problem before it becomes a threat to your life.

HEART DISEASE. Heart disease can be

significantly reduced by controlling three factors — cholesterol, smoking and blood pressure. Clearly, medicine's best strategy is to institute such steps while the patient is still healthy. Your primary care physician can help you to identify risk factors for coronary artery disease and institute appropriate, preemptive measures. Don't wait for a wake-up call. It's much easier to modify your lifestyle before a serious heart attack.

DIABETES. In diabetes, the cells of the body cannot get the sugar they need. It is due to an inadequate supply of insulin, the hormone which ushers sugar into the cells of the body. The more fat there is in the diet, the harder time insulin has in getting sugar into the cell. Minimizing fat intake and reducing body fat help insulin do its job much better. Regular exercise has also been shown to increase insulin levels.

A common theme to prevent disease is managing your diet. Start by decreasing your fat intake, particularly saturated fats and trans fatty acids. These fats are the ones that are closely associated with major health problems.

Avoiding sugar and refined flour products will give you better control of your blood sugar. The high blood sugars caused by these products cause you to need more insulin. You also get reactive low blood sugars when your body

attempts to mount an insulin response. This makes you hungry or fatigued. Slow burning carbohydrates like whole wheat breads, grains and pasta, brown rice, oatmeal and sweet potatoes, are much better at keeping your blood sugars at a steady level.

Lean protein will allow your body to build muscle when exercise is added. If you don't eat protein, you can't gain muscle. This is true even if you exercise regularly. Atkins type protein is high in fat and not recommended for a healthy lifestyle. The fats in these protein sources also predispose you to developing cancer, heart disease, diabetes and hypertension. Try chicken, fish, lean meat or pork, vegetable protein and egg whites. The healthy, lean proteins will feed your muscle. Each pound of muscle you gain allows you to burn an additional 50 calories every day. If you gain 5 pounds of muscle and lose 5 pounds of fat, the scale may read the same, but your clothes will fit you better and you'll burn off more calories at rest.

When you go to your primary care physician, ask for help with your nutritional regimen. Many programs are offered in our community. Programs may be directed by your physician or another health care professional. When patients take an active role in their health, the results are much more dramatic.