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Follow golden rules of disease prevention

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The appearance of chronic diseases is not a phenomenon inevitably associated with aging, many studies indicate the vast majority of people who reach an advanced age while maintaining a good health owe it first and foremost to a healthy lifestyle.

The majority of us receive a priceless gift at birth: health. However, just as any wealth, there are different ways to take advantage of this "health capital." On one hand, we can make the most of it by adopting a healthy lifestyle, which increases our chances of living a long and healthy life.

On the other hand, we can "burn the candle at both ends" by adopting bad habits, such as smoking, not exercising and eating a poor diet, which are all factors that quickly squander this health capital and reduce life expectancy by triggering the premature appearance of several chronic diseases.

Healthy aging is therefore not a phenomenon due to chance, but rather to a process largely influenced by our habits. Adopting a healthy lifestyle is thus the best way to avoid the appearance of serious illnesses from prematurely interrupting the normal aging process, and thus manage to enjoy at maximum the wealth of human life.

Research conducted during the last decades have identified five major lifestyle aspects that significantly reduce the risk of developing several chronic diseases. The disease prevention potential of these five principles is just phenomenal: estimates that 90 per cent of type 2 diabetes cases, 82 per cent of cardiovascular diseases and 70 per cent of cancers could be prevented by adopting such a lifestyle, not to mention the latest research indicates these principles could even prevent many neurodegenerative diseases, such as Alzheimer disease.

This preventive approach could have an extraordinary impact on quality of life by delaying, for several years, the appearance of diseases associated with aging and by greatly increasing the quality of life of the years gained. If we add to this the incredible progress made by curative medicine, this prevention is no doubt the best way we have to achieve the full potential of human life.

Despite their simplicity, we estimate a mere five per cent of the population daily follows these five preventive medicine principles. Thus, statistics indicate that, in Canada, one person out of five still smokes, three people out of five don't eat enough plant products, three people out of five are overweight and almost three quarters of the population is physically inactive.

Since this lifestyle is completely opposite to the one required to prevent the appearance of chronic diseases, it is not surprising our society is badly hit by these diseases.

This strong incidence of chronic diseases is, however, not irreversible and it is possible to take daily concrete measures to improve our health. It's up to us to act and benefit from it.

The five golden rules of chronic disease prevention: Don't smoke (20% of Canadians do); maintain a healthy weight, with a body mass index (BMI) between 18 and 25 (66% of Canadians are overweight); eat an abundance of plant products – fruits and vegetables, whole grains, etc. (62% of Canadians don't eat the minimum five daily servings of fruits and vegetables); be physically active (70% of the population does less than 30 minutes of exercise per day); and limit the consumption of industrial products rich in sugar, fats, salt and refined flours.

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