



Back to Basics: Diet and Exercise

Caregivers should do a better job of caring for themselves. That's the message of Debbie Mandel, wellness consultant and author of *Changing Habits: The Caregivers' Total Workout*.

"It goes far beyond 'you are what you eat,' but that's a great place to start," she says. "People need to target the whole body—you can't cut yourself off at the neck."

"Every pharmacy and hospital, it seems, is understaffed," Ms. Mandel says, "so the people who are managing good health for other people are cutting corners in their own lives. They don't get good nutrition, they can't exercise regularly, and their stress levels are through the roof."

For healthcare professionals, healthful eating, exercise, and stress management—or, too often, lack of good practices in those vital areas—so often go back to the basics. "Every pharmacy and hospital, it seems, is understaffed," Ms. Mandel says, "so the people who are managing good health for other people are cutting corners in their own

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Ms. Mandel not only teaches healthcare workers the basics of wellness, she also helps them fine-tune their diet and exercise habits. For instance, to meet intellectual challenges, she recommends eating some protein at the beginning of a meal (a low-fat string cheese will do), then having some complex carbohydrates. She also coaches clients to eat more frequently, snacking on such nutritious foods as raw almonds and raisins, and to drink more water. "Most of my obese clients skip breakfast," she says, "when they actually should be doing the opposite."

The United States Department of Agriculture defines a healthy diet as one that emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and

fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products; includes lean meats, poultry, fish, beans, eggs, and nuts; and is low in saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, sodium, and added sugars.

Within those broad parameters, everyone should be able to devise an eating plan that he or she can relish, with plenty of customization. Information on healthy eating is everywhere, including hundreds of magazines and literally millions of Websites—and some of the advice is timeless.

Yogurt is a good example. For more than a century, we've known that the probiotics, or live bacteria, used to ferment dairy products and make yogurt, are a natural boost for the

Keeping Fit on the Road

Don't lose sight of your fitness goals when you are traveling. Doing so can only make you feel physically bad and emotionally disappointed in yourself. Instead, follow these easy tips for staying healthy on the go:

- You can always exercise. Every hotel has a staircase and corridors for walking—but why not go outdoors and explore? Check if there are parks or trails nearby or go explore the neighborhood for an hour. Many destinations offer maps of self-guided walking tours, or you can easily devise your own.
- Be sure to bring comfortable walking shoes, socks, and a lightweight outfit for exercise.
- Carry exercise bands (rubber bands used for resistance training) in your suitcase.
- Don't skip meals when you travel; it's too easy to become famished and pig out at dinner! Carry nutrition bars for those times when you don't want to stop for a meal.
- Drink plenty of bottled water whenever you travel. One eight-ounce glass per hour in flight is a good standard.
- On long flights, get up for a few minutes every hour or so. Stand on your toes, roll back on your heels—exercise the lower-body muscles a bit. Continue these motions in your seat.
- Limit alcohol and caffeine intake whenever you fly to avoid becoming dehydrated.
- In a new time zone, get some sunshine and try to stay awake the first day until bedtime, without napping.
- Enjoy the local cuisine—taste everything you like, but fill up on healthier foods, such as cooked vegetables and brown rice.

immune system. Loaded with calcium and protein, yogurt is practically a flawless food; and if you don't care for the taste, simply add fresh fruit or sugar-free jam, and *voilà!* A healthy sweet snack is born.

Exercising Your Options

But as Ms. Mandel tells us, diet alone won't make us healthy. Every health professional can recite the benefits of regular exercise—weight control, lower anxiety levels, better concentration, higher self-esteem, balance, chronic pain management, to name only a few—and, as Ms. Mandel tells us, any effort towards exercise pays off.

"I can see the change in people immediately after they've exercised," she says. "Endorphins have been released, and they feel empowered. They're happier—and for stressed-out caretakers, it's important they understand that if you exercise your large muscle groups during the day, especially with compound movements (those involving more than one muscle group, such as lunges and curls in one fluid movement), you will sleep better at night. That alone motivates some of my clients."

When 17,000 American Council on Exercise (ACE)-certified

Re-invigorate at the Office

Listed below are some of the exercises that stress-management expert Debbie Mandel recommends for medical personnel. Remember to inhale deeply when you begin an activity, then exhale on exertion. Perform each exercise—approximately three sets of 10—every other day.

Chair squats: Sit in a chair and fold your arms in a genie position. Then stand up and sit down. The trick is to push off your heels and curl your toes so that you don't use them. (Although it is much simpler than traditional squats—which require you to bend at the knees and to drop as low as you can—she says physicians were groaning when performing this exercise.)

Wall push-ups: Lean against a wall, then push off. You can target different parts of your body based on how close your hands are as they rest against the wall. For example, a relatively strenuous exercise involves working your triceps by placing your hands close together. (Be sure to hold in your abdomen to support your back.)

fitness professionals were asked to name the one exercise they couldn't live without, the runaway winner was the multi-purpose squat. That one movement strengthens every major muscle below the waist—gluteals, hamstrings, quadriceps, and calves. The respondents' list of top choices includes:

- Squats
- Running
- Abdominal exercises
- Lunges
- Walking
- Push-ups
- Yoga

Today we know that one of the most dangerous forms of excess weight is belly fat. Older women, fortunately, have one advantage in trimming abdominal flab, even if they are genetically predisposed to acquiring it: resistance training (weight training). A University of Alabama study of men and women aged 61 to 77 years showed that after 25 weeks of resistance training three times a week, both men and women improved their strength equally and lost about 4.4 pounds of total body fat; but the women lost theirs from their abdomens.

Calf raises: Lean with your back against the wall. Stand on your toes, then let your feet fall flat on the floor.

Medicine ball: Start off using a three-gram or six-pound weight ball. Place it on the floor. Keep your back straight and squat down, lift up the ball, bring it to your chest, stand up, and raise your arms as if you are putting this ball high up on an imaginary shelf. She says this activity builds strength because you're using a weighted ball. Another activity: sit on a chair and place the ball between your legs. Squeeze your thighs, pushing in, against the ball. You can perform this same activity with the ball between the palms of your hands.

If you're having an extremely difficult day, consider performing these movements several times. She recommends that you exercise according to the intensity of your stress. If you're feeling very stressed, a minute or two of chair squats may not be enough. Add walking for 30 minutes or another stress-reducing exercise to create a customized workout.