

Life Lessons From the Road

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A large part of my practice as a naturopathic physician is lifestyle medicine which consists of helping patients change or eliminate behaviors that are associated with disease or disability and teaching and encouraging behaviors that are associated with health. In celebration of our clinic's five year anniversary and as part of my own journey to health, I recently took a sabbatical. Many lifestyle interventions I teach my patients were personally confirmed for me during my travels.

1. Eat well and often

For many people, I find that blood sugar is better balanced and hunger managed by more frequent small meals that contain both protein and fat. During my travels, this was reinforced as hunger made my husband and I cranky and irritable. Regular meals resulted in better stamina and mood.

2. Walk

My husband and I hiked many miles exploring National Parks this summer - more than I would have planned if I'd thought about it in advance! Being physically active is a vital part of health and not just for weight loss, but for maintain proper function of the body. Our bodies are meant to be in motion and lack of motion can contribute to constipation, pain, depression, high blood pressure, stiffness and spinal and joint disorders. Walking is

one of the easiest ways to be active and is one of the habits documented among those people who live healthy and vital lives to and past age 100. And, as I learned, the gains accrue quickly - if you can only start with a short walk through your own garden, do that consistently and you'll be surprised how quickly you might be ready to head out on a longer walk.

3. Enjoy the sunshine

In the Pacific Northwest, it doesn't take a naturopath to tell you to enjoy the sun while it lasts, but the health benefits of sunshine include much more than Vitamin D. A recent study in Colorado found that even night owls become morning people when they are exposed to sunshine early in the morning. Sunshine is essential to establishing and maintaining our normal, healthy circadian rhythms which affect our stress response and hormonal balance and in turn contribute to our overall health. Even on overcast days in the Pacific NW, there is light coming through those clouds and we should be enjoying it when we can. When we can't, there are always full spectrum light bulbs to fill in the gaps.

4. Get out!

Even on overcast days, spending time in and with the natural world has an incredibly healing impact on human beings. Being in nature, even just sitting or standing without doing anything in particular, has been

associated with lower blood pressure, better stress response and less depression and is being studied to determine its effect on cellular processes in relation to cancer prevention. Taking those walks outside in a natural setting, gardening, picnicking or more active outdoor hobbies can all be great ways to be out in nature and can have surprisingly profound impacts on your health.

5. Healthy responses to stress

Cultivating a positive mental attitude doesn't necessarily mean smiling and pretending to be pleased about things that bother you, but may mean not dwelling on those things. During sabbatical, we were affected regularly by events beyond our control: bad weather, traffic, food poisoning. Instead of focusing on those items, we kept our purpose in mind and adjusted as we went. Stuck in traffic, stop and check out a local attraction. Bad weather, move on. We had to accept the things we couldn't change and make choices based on the most current set of circumstances. In interpersonal relationships, this also



meant not sweating the small stuff and having a large dose of forgiveness ready to dispense, both for ourselves and each other. These are techniques that you might not be used to hearing your physician talk about, but have a deep and lasting impact on your health in these stressful times.

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