



6 Habits to Improve Your Health & Reduce Health Risks

Dr. Catherine Collings leads the Lifestyle Medicine program at El Camino Health and is also the president of the American College of Lifestyle Medicine. Review Dr. Collings' expert tips for protecting or even improving your health with these critical lifestyle habits.

Given the right conditions, the body has a remarkable ability to defend against illness and heal. Simple lifestyle changes can greatly reduce your risk of a serious outcome should you contract COVID-19 — and the same is true for lifestyle diseases! By committing to positive changes in your everyday life, you can boost your foundational health, foster healing and strengthen your immune system — helping you survive and thrive during and after any infection.

Focus on these “lifestyle pillars” to help protect you and your family through the pandemic, flu season and beyond:



1 Exercise 20 or more minutes per day.

Just 20 minutes a day of moderate exercise boosts your immune system for the 12 hours that follow. During the pandemic, moderate exercise that allows you to speak in short sentences is preferable to a more intense workout. Work your way up to 150 minutes a week of heart rate boosting exercise, then add in resistance exercises twice a week using weights or a band. El Camino Health currently offers virtual “Exercise as Medicine” classes that can help you get started — see below for more information.



2 Eat the colors of the rainbow.

Pack your plate with a variety of brightly hued vegetables and fruits. Plant foods contain bioactive compounds and polyphenols that regulate the inflammatory cascade to reduce inflammation and boost immunity. Tap into “Plant Power” and learn how to make delicious, “planticious” meals by registering for one of our upcoming Food as Medicine or Culinary Medicine classes. Plus, work with one of our Lifestyle Medicine Physicians to develop your own personalized health program — see below for more information.



3 Get 7-9 hours of sleep per day.

Honor the vital, restorative power of sleep. Turn off your TV and computer screens at least one hour before bed. And keep in mind, the more you exercise, the more tired you will be when you go to bed — improving your sleep quality.



4 Foster social connection.

Pandemic or no pandemic, it's essential to stay in touch with friends and family. Oxytocin — our love and connection hormone — can be life-saving, both physically and emotionally. Zoom, call, text or take a masked, socially distanced walk. Just make sure you stay connected with the people who know you best and love you most.



5 Control your stress.

Recognize the difference between thriving stress and depleting stress. Thriving stress is the kind of stress that keeps you excited about life — things like competing for a promotion, finishing a creative project in time to meet a deadline or mountain biking down an unfamiliar hill. Depleting stress is the kind of stress that comes with worry and fear about the future. Sleep, exercise, social support and good nutrition can all help reduce chronic, depleting stress. Consider relaxation techniques such as yoga, tai-chi, meditation or even a nice long bubble bath.

6 Assess substance use.

Are you using alcohol or other substances for stress reduction? How does that fit into your life? Is it really helping? If your habits don't feel healthy, now is a good time to ask for help.

Ready to get your own personalized health program?

A Lifestyle Medicine Physician can help you develop a personalized program to prevent, manage or even eliminate chronic lifestyle-related conditions. To get an assessment from one of our Lifestyle Medicine experts, call **650-962-4392** or visit elcaminohealth.org/lifestylemedicine to learn more.

Interested in learning more about food and exercise as medicine?

[Click here](#) to register for an upcoming class, or visit elcaminohealth.org and click the events button.

A primary care physician (PCP) is your partner for better healthcare management — and for those with underlying health issues, a Lifestyle Medicine Physician could be the perfect PCP to choose during Open Enrollment.

Call [408-933-9319](tel:408-933-9319) to find an El Camino Health physician* who's right for you.

*El Camino Medical Associates (ECMA) and the San Jose Medical Group (SJMG) are affiliated with El Camino Health and Silicon Valley Medical Development