



Lifestyle Medicine

By Kalpana (Rose) M. Kumar, M.D.

Spring is in the air and we are all looking forward to being outdoors, leaving our hibernated indoor bodies and getting back in shape again. Many of my patients are on a 6 month-on/6 month-off exercise regimen. They lose sight of the importance of exercise during the cold winter months and eat more comfort foods. The majority of them put on at least 10 extra pounds that they spend the summer trying to lose. The result is they have difficulty taking weight off and, by fall, are frustrated with the impending winter and the threat of weight gain.

This kind of lifestyle is unhealthy. And, it doesn't work for most. Living a healthy lifestyle that includes a plant based, organic diet, with 5 to 6 days a week of aerobic exercise 52 weeks of the year, is necessary for all to stay healthy and lean. In fact, numerous studies have shown that having a lifestyle that includes such choices prevents, and even reverses heart disease, cancer, and slows down aging. In randomized controlled trials, it has been shown that lifestyle changes reverse, slow, and stop the progression of severe coronary artery disease, type 2 diabetes, and early stage prostate cancer. My patients feel better, more vital and less tired when they adopt these changes in lifestyle. Their health care costs decrease, and overall life-happiness improves significantly.

Telomeres are the caps at the end of each strand of DNA that protect our chromosomes, like the plastic tips at the end of shoelaces. Their length is shortened as we age. When we age more rapidly, they are shortened faster. Dean Ornish, et al, published a study in *Lancet Oncology*, September 2013 that an anti-inflammatory diet with exercise, stress management, and social support increased telomere length. The implications of this on slowing down the aging process are huge.

This wisdom is common sense. We have seen over decades that people in cultures that consume a Mediterranean diet and get regular exercise with community support live longer, and age more slowly. Now we know why.

Given our mass disillusionment with the traditional medical model that supports symptom management once diseases have manifested, we all need to return to common sense wisdom and engage 'Lifestyle Medicine' as our main approach to health. It is known that 86 % of the 3 trillion dollars (and rising) spent yearly in the U.S. on health care for chronic diseases is entirely preventable.

As a practicing internist, I encourage my patients to adopt a healthy lifestyle for a few months and see the difference they feel. 100% of them feel better and no one, so far, has reverted back to their unhealthy habits after experiencing the increase in vitality that accompanies healthier choices.

I encourage all of you to try this as well.

We need to normalize Lifestyle Medicine as mainstream for chronic diseases. This is the only way we can change our personal and collective health and significantly reduce our health care costs.

We will also be a much happier and healthier society.

©April, 2015 Kalpana (Rose) M. Kumar M.D., CEO and Medical Director, The Ommani Center for Integrative Medicine, Pewaukee, WI. www.ommanicenter.com Author of 2nd Edition - *Becoming Real: Reclaiming Your Health in Midlife* 2014, Medial Press.