



# **Volunteer Leader Training Guide**

## **Six Ways to Improve Your Health**

Lisa Washburn, DrPH, Assistant Professor - Health

### **Introduction**

Researchers have identified several key behaviors practiced by people who have good health and long lives. This lesson will discuss six key lifestyle behaviors that can help you improve your health and quality of life. Some might be surprising!

### **Target Audience**

- EHC leaders and members
- Adult audiences

### **Objectives**

- Participants will increase knowledge of behaviors that promote good health.
- Participants will plan to adopt at least one new behavior to improve health.

### **Handouts**

- Handout 1: **Six Ways to Improve Your Health** (short version)
- Handout 2: **Six Ways to Improve Your Health** (longer version – contains most information from this leader training guide)
- Activity 1: **Which Is Most Important?**

### **Suggestions for Teaching**

- Review the lesson guide and handouts.
- Make copies of handouts and activity.
- Make copies of the evaluation.

A PowerPoint presentation is available for presenting this lesson. Information from the slides and slide notes is included in this guide.

### **Additional References**

- Arkansas Tobacco Quitline: 1-800-QUIT-NOW
- [www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov)

*Discuss the following.*

Many behaviors can contribute to improved health or help to maintain your health status. Improving your health does not have to be complicated. Researchers have identified six key behaviors that help people live longer.

(**Note to Leader:** Engage participants by asking them to share behaviors they have adopted in an effort to improve or maintain their health. Allow a few minutes for participants to share. To start the discussion, be ready to share a few behaviors or habits of your own.)

## **Six Key Healthy Behaviors**

These six healthy behaviors are known to positively influence health.

- Don't smoke.
- Eat a healthy diet.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Exercise regularly.
- Drink alcohol in moderation.
- Get adequate sleep.

### **Activity 1**

**Note to Leader:** Distribute Activity 1: **Which Is Most Important?** Ask participants: If you had to put them in order of importance, which would you say is most important for good health? Which would you put second most important, third most important, etc.? Which would be least important? We will take a few minutes to choose where to rank each factor from 1 through 6.

We hear more about certain behaviors than others. We know that being at a healthy weight, eating right, and regular exercise are important. If you smoke you should quit. You might say that being at a healthy weight is most important, because it relates to a few of the other factors. The truth is that these factors have a cumulative effect on health. One factor does not outrank the others. Researchers say it is important to have a combination of these behaviors. A person may have one health factor, like a healthy weight, but if he or she smokes, does not exercise, has a poor diet, drinks too much and does not get enough sleep, overall health may suffer. On the other hand, an overweight person practicing several of the other behaviors may experience increased wellness, despite carrying a few extra pounds. We will talk today about how many of the six factors you need to experience the greatest impact on health.

## **Stop Smoking**

Tobacco is the most preventable cause of death in the U.S. One-third of all cancer deaths are related to smoking cigarettes. Smoking is a risk factor for lung cancer and is associated with other types of cancer. It also increases the risk of heart disease and chronic lung disease.

According to the Surgeon General, quitting smoking is the single most important step a smoker can take to improve the length and quality of his or her life. As soon as you quit, your body begins to repair the damage caused by smoking. It is best to quit early in life, but even someone who quits later in life will improve health.

According to a recent study, quitting smoking can show health benefits in as little as a few weeks. This study showed that college students who smoked and did not have chronic respiratory illness coughed less and had fewer respiratory symptoms within weeks of quitting smoking. This means that quitting will benefit your health in days, not decades. Quitting will also improve your finances. Cigarettes are expensive. If a pack costs \$5, smoking one pack per day adds up to \$1,825 each year.

Quitting is the best gift you can give yourself and your loved ones. One of the most important calls a tobacco user can make is to the Arkansas Tobacco Quitline at 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669). It is confidential, and it is free. Customized, motivational e-mails will be sent throughout the quitting process.

## **Eat a Healthy Diet**

Researchers say having a healthy diet is another key to living longer. MyPlate is the eating pattern recommended for most Americans. MyPlate replaced the Food Guide Pyramid. MyPlate is a simple symbol or picture that you can use to guide your healthy eating habits.

There are three main ideas behind the MyPlate graphic.

### **1. Balancing Calories**

The first concept in MyPlate is to balance calories by eating less. One way to do this is to control portion sizes.

- Enjoy your food, but eat less.
- Avoid oversized portions.

### **2. Foods to Increase**

The second concept in MyPlate is to increase certain types of foods in the diet.

- Make half your plate fruits and vegetables.
- Make at least half your grains whole grains.
- Switch to fat-free or low-fat (1 percent) milk.

### **3. Foods to Reduce**

The third concept is to reduce certain types of food.

- Choose foods with lower sodium.
- Drink water instead of sugary drinks.

Compare sodium in foods like soup, bread, and frozen meals – and choose the foods with lower numbers.

## Reach and Maintain a Healthy Weight

It is well established that carrying extra weight has a negative effect on health.

Carrying extra weight increases risks of:

- Type 2 diabetes
- Hypertension
- Heart disease and stroke
- Some types of cancer
- Sleep apnea
- Osteoarthritis

Even if you have not been diagnosed with these conditions, you likely know that extra weight affects how you feel or your sense of well-being. We often think of the increased chronic disease and cancer rate that comes with being overweight, but carrying extra weight also increases risk of sleep apnea and osteoarthritis.

The good news is that you do not have to lose a ton of weight to see health benefits. Studies show that a small decrease in weight can help reduce risk of chronic diseases like diabetes. If you have already been diagnosed with diabetes, losing as little as 5 percent of your body weight can help you manage blood sugar levels.

For example, a person weighing 200 pounds will see health benefits from losing as little as 10 pounds (5 percent of 200 pounds). Losing more weight to reach the healthy BMI range offers additional health benefits. The main point is that losing just a little is helpful and a good jump-start if your goal is to lose more.

### Exercise

- 150 minutes a week of moderate-intensity aerobic activity
- Strength training at least 2x per week
- Balance exercises for senior adults

The minimum exercise recommendation for adults is 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity each week. If you exercise vigorously, 75 minutes weekly is required. You can break the exercise requirement down into chunks as small as 10 minutes. As long as the cumulative amount over the week adds up to 150 minutes, you are in good shape (no pun intended!).

In addition to exercises that increase your heart rate (aerobic), you also should try to strength train at least twice a week, performing strengthening exercises for each major muscle group. These exercises might involve dumbbells, ankle weights, stretch tubes or resistance bands, or even your own body weight. Exercises like squats, lunges, and push-ups are examples of moves using your own body weight for resistance. Strength training is often referred to as resistance training.

Balance exercises are important for older adults. These exercises help to prevent falls and the broken bones and disability that often result from falls. Examples of balance exercises are walking heel-to-toe and standing on one leg.

## Don't Drink Too Much

Drinking too much increases your risk for certain cancers and other health problems. It increases risks for liver, esophagus, throat, and larynx cancer. Cirrhosis, immune system problems, and brain damage may also result.

Moderate alcohol use, for most adults, has been linked to some positive health outcomes. Moderate use is defined as up to two drinks per day for men and one drink per day for women. A standard drink is 12 ounces of beer or wine coolers, 5 ounces of wine, or 1.5 ounces of liquor.

## Sleep

Sleep affects your health in a big way. Some evidence suggests people eat more when they are sleep deprived, meaning that not getting enough sleep can lead to weight gain. Most adults need seven to eight hours a night for the best amount of sleep, although some people may need as few as five hours or as many as ten hours of sleep each day.

Sleeping too much has been linked to negative health effects, like depression and heart disease. Multiple studies have found that people who sleep nine or more hours a night have significantly higher death rates than people sleeping seven to eight hours a night. No specific reason for this correlation has been determined.

Too few hours of sleep can weaken the immune system and cause memory problems and depression.

## Conclusion

Six ways to improve your health:

- Don't smoke.
- Eat a healthy diet.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Exercise regularly.
- Drink alcohol in moderation.
- Get adequate sleep.

There is strong evidence that practicing a combination of these six healthy behaviors lengthens life. One study found a 66 percent reduction in all-cause mortality (death from all causes) among people who practiced four or more of the behaviors, while another study found reduced risk with three factors. The main point is this: the more healthy behaviors you practice, the better your health. The combined effect of these healthy behaviors is stronger than practicing one or two alone.

(**Note to Leader:** Wrap up by asking participants to share which of the six behaviors they are most likely to make a priority for improving health.)

## Evaluation

Pass out the evaluation and ask participants to complete.