



Healthy Lifestyle

Lifestyle diseases include diabetes, heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, cancers, obesity, gout, and joint and mobility problems related to obesity. They are called 'lifestyle' diseases because it is known that a healthy lifestyle can **help to prevent** them and help to control them in people already affected.

Following a healthy lifestyle is not a guarantee that somebody will not develop these problems, but the chances are greatly reduced.

Lifestyle health issues

Research has shown that diet, exercise, smoking and drinking (key lifestyle issues for these diseases) have a crucial effect on health.

- ⚡ People who have poor diets have an increased risk of obesity, diabetes, heart disease, stroke and certain cancers.
- ⚡ People who get little or no exercise (physical activity) have an increased risk of high blood pressure, obesity, diabetes, heart disease, joint and mobility problems, and gout.
- ⚡ People who smoke have an increased risk of certain cancers, high blood pressure, heart disease and stroke.
- ⚡ People who drink too much alcohol have an increased risk of obesity, heart disease, diabetes and certain cancers.

Poor lifestyle habits also work in combination – for example, someone who smokes and is overweight has a much higher risk than an overweight person who does not smoke.

Here in the Pacific, levels of all these diseases are rising and resulting in high health, economic and social costs to our countries.



Lifestyle – not just diet

Diet cannot realistically be separated from lifestyle. For example, while losing excess weight is beneficial to health, it is not beneficial if you start smoking to distract yourself from eating. The good you will do by losing weight will be undone by the smoking. Factsheet number 16 highlights the main parts of a healthy diet, while other key aspects of a healthy Pacific lifestyle will be discussed in this factsheet.

Drink plenty of clean water.

It is important for everyone to drink plenty of fluids each day. The best drink is water, as long as it is clean and safe. Fresh drinking coconut, fresh fruit juice and milk are also good choices for some drinks. Sodas, fizzy drinks and juice drinks are not as good an idea as they are very high in sugar. Tea and coffee make the body produce more urine than usual, and losing that fluid makes you need to drink even more water. You should therefore make sure that even if you drink

a lot of tea or coffee, you also drink plenty of water.

You should have at least 6–8 cups of water per day. That is about 2 litres. Water really is the best drink.

Be active every day.

Walk more.

Keeping active reduces the risks of developing many diseases, such as heart disease and diabetes, and can also help in their treatment. Being active means doing things like walking, doing housework, gardening or fishing – every day if possible. Exercise (particularly more energetic activities like swimming, walking faster, traditional dancing and playing sports) can also help with losing weight. It is important to do some activity regularly.

Wash hands thoroughly and keep food safe.

In the Pacific we have high rates of food- and water-borne diseases like diarrhoea and worms. Following some basic hygiene guidelines can prevent many of these. Food needs to be covered at all times, and kept cool if it is not going to be eaten immediately. Food that is left open to flies, or kept in a warm place for too long, can spoil and cause sickness. Best-by and use-by dates must be observed. Keep foods cool if possible. Be careful reheating foods; make sure that they are really hot. Before eating anything or touching food, everyone should wash their hands. It is easy to pick up germs on your hands from touching doors, objects and animals. It is especially important to wash hands after visiting the toilet. Hands must be washed well – with soap if possible.

Avoid smoking, tobacco, drugs and betel nuts.

The use of tobacco and betel causes cancer. Chewing betel or tobacco causes mouth cancers

and also weakens teeth and gums. Tobacco use also increases the risk of heart disease. Breathing in smoke from other people's cigarettes and from being in smoky places is also harmful. Drugs cause a wide variety of damage to the body, and can kill.

Remember these are addictive and dangerous drugs, and it can be difficult for people to stop using them; they need support to help them to quit.

Avoid heavy drinking.

Alcohol, if used with care, is not unsafe. Having more than two to three drinks in one session/day (two for a woman and three for a man) causes long-term damage to the liver and increases the risk of heart disease. Alcohol abuse also causes many social problems in the islands. People who abuse alcohol need support in order to stop or reduce their drinking. Drinking is safe in moderation, but dangerous in excess.

A drink is one measure of spirit (like vodka or whisky) or one small can or bottle of beer.

Exclusively breastfeed babies for about the first six months. Continue some breastfeeding for at least two years.

Breastmilk is the best food for a baby. Ideally only breastmilk (not even extra water) should be given to a baby until it is six months old. After that, other foods need to be added, but breastmilk should continue until the baby is at least two years old, preferably five years. A mother needs the support of family and friends in order to help her to follow this advice.

Take time to relax, enjoy time with family and friends.

It is important to try and enjoy life. Stress is unhealthy and we need family and friends to help us to deal with life's problems.