

Looking Out for Number One

Helping Teachers Stay Healthy

Good nutrition and exercise will help you maintain desirable weight, reduce your cholesterol level, and improve your health generally.

Faculty meetings can be thrilling. One day, about 40 of us were seated in a room that had once been a hospital solarium. The view was wonderful; we were all absorbed in the information being presented. Then, it happened . . . the sound of a locomotive coming toward us, the room shaking, the groans and rattles of an old building facing an earthquake once more.

Some of us were old hands at this; others were not. Several ducked under tables, others sat frozen, while a few just watched the frenzy and confusion. It was over in a minute. All was well. The meeting went on.

Later that evening, we learned of the destruction at the epicenter of the quake. People were hurt. Property was damaged or destroyed. Others were not as lucky as we. By way of television, we could witness the heroic efforts of police, firefighters, paramedics, and average citizens as they worked to rescue people and save lives. Those people, trained or untrained, made a difference to people who really needed help.

Although usually in less dramatic ways, teachers make a difference in people's lives. We have committed ourselves to serving the children and young adults in our care. But what about our own needs? Are we being selfish when we focus upon our own health?

A cardinal principle of disaster preparedness is to "save your own life first." Look out for number one. Experience has demonstrated that a living person can do more good than a dead one! This is worth remembering when considering our responsibilities as educators.

There are plenty of "natural disasters" awaiting us. Today, the leading causes of death among American adults aged 25 through 64 are cancer, heart disease, injuries, stroke, suicide, liver disease, chronic lung disease, homicide, HIV infection, and diabetes.¹ Non-communicable diseases attack some 19 million people

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each year worldwide. These diseases will cause 40 percent of all deaths internationally and approximately 75 percent of deaths in industrialized countries.² Heart disease alone kills more than 500,000 Americans each year³ and more than 14 million people worldwide.⁴

How can we look out for number one?

Find Out What Is Going on Inside

Many chronic illnesses have no obvious symptoms but can be identified early with testing. Approximately 50 million American adults have high blood pressure severe enough to be monitored or treated with drugs.⁵ These people are more likely to suffer coronary artery disease, peripheral vascular disease, stroke,

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kidney disease, and eye problems. Of the nearly 13 million Americans who have diabetes,⁶ about half remain undiagnosed.

Cancer of the testicles is the most common cancer in U.S. Caucasian men aged 20 to 34 years.⁷ Prostate cancer is the leading cancer in American men. It affects more than 200,000 of them each year, about 38,000 fatally.⁸

Women are susceptible to the same diseases as men. They must however, also contend with osteoporosis and cancers of the breast, cervix, and uterus. In the U.S., one in nine women will get breast cancer. Each year, more than 182,000 American women are told that they have breast cancer and 46,000 die from this disease.⁹ Some 15,000 American women will get cervical cancer this year, and for 4,600, it will be fatal.¹⁰

Osteoporosis causes approximately 1.3 million fractures in Americans each year. This condition causes spontaneous fractures in more than half of postmenopausal women.¹¹

Here are ways to protect yourself:

- Get regular physical exams every three to five years if you feel healthy—more often if you notice any changes in your health.
- Have your blood pressure checked at least every two years by a clinician, and check it periodically yourself.
- If you think you may have diabetes or have a family history of the disease, ask your doctor about being tested.
- Women: Perform monthly breast self-examination. Get a mammogram at recommended intervals.¹² Have a Pap test every two years to screen for cervical cancer, more often if you have had a previously abnormal test.
- Men: Testicular exam: Practice self-examination if you have a family history of related disorders or if your physician recommends it, and be sure to ask for this to be included in your routine physical examinations. If you are over 50 years of age, get a PSA (Prostate-Specific Antigen) test. Begin PSA testing by age 40 if you have had a vasectomy in the past 20 years or at age 40 years or older.¹³

Balance the Scales

More than one-fourth of adult Ameri-

cans, or some 32 million people, are overweight. Mortality rates increase at only 10 percent above one's ideal weight.¹⁴ Diabetes, hypertension, coronary artery disease, and certain cancers are associated with obesity. Good nutrition and exercise will help you maintain desirable weight, reduce your cholesterol level, and improve your health generally.

To ensure adequate nutrition and physical fitness, you should:

- Lose weight if overweight.
- Increase physical activity. Three to five days per week, engage in 20 to 60 minutes of continuous aerobic activity.¹⁵
- Eat a variety of foods, especially vegetables, fruits, and grains.
- Limit yourself to one helping of food during a meal.
- Limit between-meal snacking.
- Cut down on or skip desserts and foods high in sugar and calories.
- Choose a diet low in total fat (less than 30 percent of calories), saturated fat (less than 10 percent of calories), and cholesterol.
- Reduce salt intake to less than one teaspoon (2.3 grams of sodium) per day.
- Maintain adequate dietary potassium, calcium, and magnesium levels by eating a well-balanced diet with lots of fruits and vegetables.

Fight Communicable Diseases

According to the World Health Organization, communicable diseases account for 43 million illnesses and one million deaths per year worldwide.¹⁶ Although most adults were immunized against diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, measles, mumps, and rubella as children, many have let some important immunizations lapse. Also, older people are more susceptible to complications from influenza and pneumonia and should consider immunizations against these diseases.

Here is how to ensure protection against communicable diseases:

- Keep your tetanus/diphtheria immunization current. Adults should be immunized at least every 10 years.¹⁷
- If you are over 65 or have a chronic disease, get a flu shot.¹⁸
- If you handle blood or other body fluids, get a Hepatitis B immunization.
- Have your own family immunized,

and institute a policy requiring all children enrolling in your school to be immunized against diseases that are common in your area.

- When traveling, inquire about diseases specific to the region.
- Maintain proper sanitation, and boil or treat water that may contain disease-causing organisms or other impurities.

Limit Drug Use

As, we age, we become more dependent upon medications. The incidence of adverse drug reactions increases with age and number of drugs taken. Here are some suggestions for appropriate drug use:

- Take medications as prescribed (the right medication for the right person, at the right time, in the right

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amount, in the right way).

- Don't combine medications.
- Avoid self-medication. Don't take medicines prescribed for another person.
- Inform your physician and druggist about all medications (prescription and non-prescription) you are taking. Ask about potential side effects and adverse drug reactions.
- Use only one pharmacy for your medication needs.
- Throw away old medications.
- Women: If you are approaching menopause, ask your doctor about estrogen replacement therapy. Estrogen has been shown to decrease the risk of heart attack, and may reduce the risk of osteoporosis.

Take a Fresh Look—Dealing With Depression and Stress

Most of us know that stress can make life miserable. It can also be related to “anxiety, eating disorders, depression, gastrointestinal and cardiovascular illnesses and immune disorders, as well as suicide and other forms of aggression, substance abuse, and intentional and unintentional injuries.”¹⁹

Depression affects millions of people each year. Things that cause depression or make it worse may include a prior episode of depression, family history of depression, prior suicide attempts, childbirth, lack of social support, stressful life events, current substance abuse, and sexual abuse.²⁰

Here is how to protect your mental health:

- Change your perspective. Analyze the stressor to determine how you can better deal with it.
- Exercise to help you relax. Use stress-reducing techniques such as deep-breathing exercises.
- Find someone or a group of people who can act as a support system, then discuss with them what is bothering you.
 - Realize your limitations.
 - Meditate and pray about your problems.
 - Get involved with others in your community. Surround yourself with people.
 - Get a pet. People who have pets live longer and are happier.
 - Spend time with friends and loved

By caring for ourselves and modeling positive health behavior, we can be stronger, happier, and more effective educators and citizens.

ones.

- Take a vacation. Travel.
- Spend time doing hobbies that you enjoy.
- Seek medical attention for chronic depression. Breaking the cycle of depression is an important first step to recovery.

Check Your Environment

Job-related injuries disable millions of people every year. Improperly organized work stations in office settings can force you into awkward work positions and unhealthy habits that can also lead to injury and low-back pain.

Here are steps to take to protect yourself:

- Encourage your employer to set up a screening test if you have a high risk of injury.
- Ask your employer to have your desk or work station evaluated to make sure it is ergonomically correct, and that your chair gives you proper support. If your feet do not rest firmly on the floor, use a small footrest. A cushion or pillow can alleviate lower back pain from prolonged sitting.
- Change your posture frequently. Alternate standing or sitting, when possible.
- Beware of early symptoms such as muscle aches and localized fatigue or numbness that occur during work but subside during rest. These may indicate overuse of your neck, arms, and hands.

- Keep relaxed, with the wrist in a neutral position. Elbows should be kept at a 90 to 100 degree angle close to the body.
- Wear a back support when lifting heavy objects.

Respect Yourself

We call AIDS an epidemic, and rightly so, since more than 22 million people worldwide are infected with HIV.²¹ Other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), however, are even more common. In 1995, there were an estimated 333 million cases of curable STDs, worldwide.²² Of these, nearly 12 million occurred in Americans.²³ STDs include chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis, genital herpes, hepatitis B, chancroids, and cytomegalovirus.

Sexual health can be compromised by unintended pregnancy and complications of STDs, which include “pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), sterility, ectopic pregnancy, blindness, cancer associated with human papilloma virus, fetal and infant death, birth defects, and mental retardation” of offspring.²⁴

Here are some suggestions related to this area:

- Refrain from sexual intercourse outside a mutually monogamous married relationship.
- If you suspect that you have an STD, get tested. Ask your partner to be tested.
- Use rubber gloves and other precautions when dealing with blood.²⁵ Several organizations have published helpful guidelines.

Prevention

Just as schools develop disaster plans for earthquakes, tornados, floods, power failures, and hurricanes, protecting the health of their faculties and staff deserves a plan as well. Does your school have an employee health plan? Not just insurance, but a health plan. Here is how to plan for the health of yourself and your staff:

- Develop health policies.
- Establish a health committee. If you already have a safety committee, its sphere of responsibility could be expanded to include health issues.
- Organize a health week. Identify

health concerns of faculty, staff and students. Include health screening, immunizations, and information.

- Select a health emphasis for each month of the school year. (See Table 1.²⁶)
- Subscribe to publications that focus upon employee wellness such as *Worksite Health*.²⁷
- Make facilities and equipment available for employee use. Does your school have a track, playing field, gymnasium, and recreational equipment?
- Re-think cafeteria menus and services. Do they meet the needs of adults

as well as children?

- Evaluate work stations and classrooms. Does each person have a comfortable place to work and study?
- Plan for breaks. Schedule daily breathers as well as retreats and vacations.
- “Officially” reduce stress. Examine expectations. Do they add unnecessary stress to the work environment? Changes in policies, especially those fostering communication and conflict reduction/resolution, may reduce stress.
- Keep employee health records. Do

your records include fitness evaluations, screening results, and a personal health plan for each employee?

- Develop a confidential health referral system for faculty and staff members who have needs they would rather not discuss with their colleagues. Make sure the employees know where to go with physical, mental, social, and spiritual problems.
- Develop a list of volunteers (parents, grandparents, retirees, etc.) who will help lighten the load and provide needed breaks. This is especially impor-

TABLE 1
A school year of health themes for faculty and staff members.

Month	Theme	Resources
September	Cholesterol Awareness Men’s Health	Local Hospital American Cancer Society
October	Mental Health Fire Prevention	Mental Health Association National Fire Protection Association
November	Diabetes Awareness	American Diabetes Association
December	AIDS Awareness Safety	American Red Cross Local Health Department
January	Birth Defects Back Health	March of Dimes Occupational Health Department
February	Heart Health Medical Consumerism	American Heart Association Managed-care Plan, Health Maintenance Organization
March	Good Nutrition First Aid	Local Hospital Nutrition Department American Red Cross
April	Cancer Awareness Drug and Medication Awareness	American Cancer Society Hospital or Local Pharmacist
May	High Blood Pressure Fitness	American Red Cross President’s Council for Physical Fitness and Sports
June	Women’s Health Skin Cancer	American Cancer Society

TABLE 2

Health Area	Agency
Sexual Health	National AIDS Clearinghouse P.O. Box 6003 Rockville, MD 20849-6003 (800) 458-5231
Alcohol and Drug Abuse	National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information P.O. Box 2345 Rockville, MD 20849-2345 (800) 729-6686
Exercise and Fitness	President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports 701 Pennsylvania Avenue NE Suite 250 Washington, DC 20004 (202) 272-3421
Family Health	American Academy of Family Physicians 8880 Ward Parkway Kansas City, MO 64114 (816) 333-9700
Smoking	American Lung Association 1740 Broadway New York, NY 10019 (212) 315-8700
Diabetes	American Diabetes Association 1660 Duke Street Alexandria, VA 22314 (703) 540-1500
Cardiovascular Disease	American Heart Association 1740 Broadway New York, NY 10019
Mental Health	National Mental Health Association 1021 Prince Street Alexandria, VA 22314 (800) 969-6642
Nutrition	American Dietetics Association 216 W. Jackson Blvd. Suite 800 Chicago, IL 60606-6995 (312) 899-0040
Safety	National Safety Council 1121 Spring Lake Drive Itasca, IL 60143-3201 (708) 285-1121
Ergonomics	National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health 4676 Columbia Parkway Cincinnati, OH 45226 (800) 35-NIOSH
Immunizations	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 1600 Clifton Road NE Atlanta, GA 30333 (404) 639-3311
Prenatal Care	National Institutes of Health Division of Maternal, Infant, and Adolescent Health Parklawn Building Room 18-05 5600 Fishers Lane Rockville, MD 20857 (301) 443-2250

tant in one-teacher schools.

- Work with community organizations that address adult health issues. Invite representatives of these agencies to present programs for your staff and faculty.

Seventh-day Adventist teachers and staff are dedicated. Personal sacrifice, consistent giving of self, and commitment to the betterment and success of others are hallmarks of our calling. We are enabled and encouraged by Christ's example of service. By caring for ourselves and modeling positive health behavior, we can be stronger, happier, and more effective educators and citizens. ✍

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2. World Health Organization (WHO), Internet: http://www.who.org/programmes/nce/int_ncd.htm.
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15. American College of Sports Medicine, "The Recommended Quantity and Quality of Exercise for

Developing and Maintaining Cardiorespiratory and Muscular Fitness in Healthy Adults," *Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise*, 22:2 (April 1990), p. 265.

16. WHO, Internet: http://www.who.org/programmes/gpu/ten_home.htm.
17. *Healthy People 2000*, p. 535.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*, p. 214.
20. *Clinician's Handbook*, p. 177.
21. Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS Fact Sheet (Geneva: December 1996).
22. Estimated data for 1995, does not include AIDS or viral STDs (WHO, Internet: <http://www.who.org/programmes/asd/factsheet.htm>). The most common curable STDs are syphilis, gonorrhea, chlamydial infections, and trichomoniasis.
23. *Healthy People 2000*, p. 75.
24. *Ibid.*
25. The American School Health Association has produced a packet of materials on AIDS in the school setting, which includes information for school nurses on caring for HIV-infected children. To order *HIV Infection and the School Setting: A*

Guide for School Nursing Practice or the *Journal of School Health Topical Package on AIDS/HIV*, contact the American School Health Association, 7263 State Route 43, P.O. Box 708, Kent, OH 44240; telephone: (330) 678-1601; fax: 678-4526. In 1994, the North American Division of SDA produced code policy items called "AIDS and AIDS-Related Conditions in Students" and "AIDS and AIDS-Related Conditions in Employees," which are available from the NAD Office of Education, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) have produced guidelines for appropriate precautions relating to blood-borne infections.

26. Adapted from "1996 Health Promotion Theme Calendar," AWHP's *Worksite Health* (Winter 1996), pp. 24, 25.

27. *Worksite Health* is a quarterly journal that gives excellent ideas for health programs in the work setting. Subscriptions are available for \$60 per year from: AWHP's *Worksite Health*, 60 Revere Drive, Suite 500, Northbrook, IL 60062.

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