



ADVENTISTS & HEALTHY LIVING



“I have come that they may have
life, and that they may have it
more abundantly.”

John 10:10 (NKJV)



WHY DOES THE ADVENTIST CHURCH PROMOTE HEALTHY LIVING?

Adventists have a long tradition of promoting healthy living. Their desire is to follow Christ's example of ministering to people's health needs by teaching healthy-living classes, and by providing health and medical services through doctors' clinics, hospitals, and health centers worldwide.

Many groups refer to Adventists as an example of the benefits of healthy living. In a *Newsweek* article, "11 Habits to Live to 100," author Deborah Kotz lists the key principles of achieving a healthy, long life,¹ and one of the recommendations is "Live like a Seventh-day Adventist." Kotz writes:

"Seventh-day Adventists have an average life expectancy of 89, about a decade longer than the average American. One of the basic tenets of the religion is that it's important to cherish the body that's on loan from God, which means no smoking, alcohol abuse, or overindulging in sweets. Followers typically get plenty of exercise, are vegetarian, and make family and community a focus."

Another widely distributed magazine, *National Geographic* also cited Adventists as an example of healthy living. In an article about the Blue Zones—the areas in the world where people live measurably longer—Loma Linda, California, a Seventh-day Adventist community, is identified as one of these longevity hot spots. Author Dan Buettner visited Loma Linda, studying the people and their lifestyles, and in his *National Geographic* book, *The Blue Zones*, he states of Loma Linda residents: "Study results have shown that, as a group, they currently lead the U.S. in longest life expectancy."²

A healthy, long life isn't just about *quantity* of years, it's also about *quality* of years. "The point of aspiring to wellness is not simply to live longer, but to serve God more effectively," says Scott LeMert, senior pastor of the Sunnyside Seventh-day Adventist Church in Portland, Oregon.³ It's also an issue of quality of life: who wants to live a long time if they are sick and miserable the last 20 or 30 years of their life?



THE KEYS TO A LONG, HEALTHY LIFE

So what do Seventh-day Adventists teach about healthy living? Here are some of the key principles:

1. God dwells within us, and we are His temple.

It is a privilege to keep this temple body in good health so God can better work in and through us and so we can become all that God wants us to be. As 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 says, “Don’t you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? ... You must honor God with your body” (NLT).

2. We are free to choose.

Healthy-living principles, though encouraged for all, are not mandated, but are an individual’s choice. God does not work by force, but rather by invitation and personal choice (“For we are each responsible for our own conduct.” Galatians 6:5, NLT) Healthy living does not make you holier, but rather healthier. Being healthy, of course, has many advantages and enables individuals to be

able to better serve others and to develop their own spiritual and physical goals. Along with choice comes personal responsibility for our own health. The biblical teaching “Whatever a man sows he will also reap” (Galatians 6:7, HCSB) is well illustrated by the choices and consequences people experience with their health.

3. Nutrition matters.

Whole, unrefined, plant-based foods make up a large part of a healthful diet. Yes, some Adventists do eat meat, but if they do, it tends to be sparingly and infrequently, and they eat more fruits, vegetables, nuts, and whole grains. Most also consume some milk products and eggs, but they tend to use these items moderately as well.

The principle of eating healthy foods is best explained in this statement written by one of the early leaders of the Adventist Church, Ellen White: “Grains, fruits, nuts, and vegetables constitute the diet chosen for us by our Creator (Genesis 1:29).

"You will show me
the path of life."
Psalms 16:11 (NKJV)



“Therefore, whether you eat or
drink, or whatever you do,
do all to the glory of God.”

1 Corinthians 10:31 (NKJV)



These foods, prepared in as simple and natural a manner as possible, are the most healthful and nourishing.”⁴ In 1 Corinthians 10:31 (NLT), Paul offers a broad perspective: “So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.” These simple statements have been guiding principles for more than 150 years among Adventists.

More specifically, Adventists encourage the following principles for healthy eating:

- Eat a wide variety of fruits and vegetables, preferably fresh or frozen. A vegetarian diet is recommended but is each member’s personal choice. Those who choose to eat meat follow the biblical guidelines of clean meats (i.e., fish with scales, poultry, beef, lamb). Most Adventists also incorporate into their meals a variety of meat alternates, such as veggie burgers, nut loaf, tofu, and other plant protein foods available through health food stores, Adventist Book Centers, and community markets. An increasing number of Adventists follow a vegan diet that is entirely plant-based. A plant-based diet is not only healthy for an individual, but is now also recognized as healthier for our planet.
- Choose primarily whole-grain breads and cereals instead of white bread, white rice, and foods made from refined grains. Examples of whole-grain foods include steel cut oats, granola, whole-wheat bread, brown rice, whole-grain pasta, and quinoa.
- Eat legumes often, including lentils, beans, split peas, soy, tofu, and hummus.
- Include nuts and seeds frequently (typically daily) in the diet. Walnuts, almonds, sunflower seeds, flax meal, peanuts, almond butter, and peanut butter are a few of the many options.
- Eat a healthful breakfast every day, and keep evening meals moderate in calories.
- Use dairy foods (whole milk, cheese, ice cream, butter) moderately. Many individuals opt for soy milk (preferably fortified with calcium and B12).
- Limit sugar, soft drinks, and sweets. Enjoy nature’s sweets, such as berries, pineapple, peaches, tangerines, and dates. Instead of sugar-sweetened drinks, choose pure fruit juices, such as grape juice, orange juice, or sparkling cider.
- Limit salt and high-sodium foods. While this may be a new concept for many, it’s an increasingly popular one for those interested in optimum nutrition.

4. We were meant to move.

Being physically active is an important part of health and can include a variety of activities, such as brisk walking, biking, swimming, jogging, active sports, strength training, and gardening and yard work. Also, instead of sitting for prolonged amounts of time, take frequent breaks to walk or stretch. The following statement on physical activity has given guidance to the church for more than 100 years: “When the weather will permit, all who can possibly do so ought to walk in the open air every day, summer and winter.”⁵ While this concept has been recommended for all members, it is has become more valued and adopted with time.

5. Tobacco, alcohol, and recreational drugs harm health.

Adventists feel it is a Christian duty to avoid those things that clearly destroy health (such as smoking) or things that adversely influence the mind or cloud judgment (such as drugs or alcohol). High caffeine use is also discouraged, as it can be addictive and damaging to health. For example, instead of using caffeinated energy drinks as a stimulant, a healthier option is a good night’s sleep or a healthy meal.

6. Moderation is key.

Moderation involves avoiding things that are harmful and being sensible in things that are good. In other words, don’t overdo it or go to extremes. Work a healthy amount of hours, but don’t be a workaholic. Take time for recreation, but don’t spend all your time playing. Eat good foods, but in healthy portions. Be active, but don’t overdo it. Don’t sit too much, don’t watch too much TV, and don’t spend too much time playing computer games. Moderation keeps life in balance.

7. Wellness requires rest.

To be productive and to enjoy good physical and mental health, everyone needs periods of rest and relaxation, as well as an adequate amount of sleep (at least seven to eight hours each night for adults, and more for children). A life of rest also involves taking at least one day off a week to rest and recuperate. Adventists believe in celebrating a 24-hour Sabbath every week, in which you set aside normal work duties and devote a restful day to family activities, worship, and time in the beautiful natural world God has given everyone to enjoy.



"When the weather will permit, all who can possibly do so ought to walk in the open air every day, summer and winter."

Counsels on Health, 52

“Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.”

3 John 1:2 (NKJV)



8. A healthy environment is a key ingredient for good health.

Some of the best ways to prevent disease are simple: wash your hands, keep your body and clothes clean, keep kitchen and food preparation areas clean and free of germs, and maintain a clean, sanitary living area. Also, it is essential to have uncontaminated drinking water and proper sanitation and disposal of waste. Adventists emphasize water as the best beverage option, rather than sugar-sweetened drinks. Sunshine is also beneficial to health, but take it in moderate doses to avoid skin cancer. Helping keep our environment clean and unpolluted, including the air we breathe, is an essential component of good health for all.

9. Health involves the whole person.

Adventists believe that physical, mental, social, and spiritual dimensions of life must all work together in a balanced way to achieve optimum health. Thus, it is important to develop healthy habits not just for your body, but also for your mind and spirit. Whole-person health includes habits such as limiting stress, developing good coping strategies, being

hopeful and optimistic, spending time in prayer and meditation, volunteering in the community, developing good relationships, strengthening family life, showing compassion, and demonstrating love and forgiveness.

10. Regular medical care helps protect health.

Even when it seems you've done everything right, it's still possible to break an arm, get an infection, or develop a chronic health problem. Getting regular medical care, including exams and preventive checks, is an important aspect of healthy living. This also includes regular dental checkups and teeth cleanings, along with daily brushing and flossing.

Of course, not all Adventists reach all of these high objectives, but most are committed to living a healthy life. They also strive to encourage and support others on this journey, maintaining a non-judgmental attitude that allows individuals to choose, learn, and adopt healthier living practices as God leads them.



WHAT THE RESEARCH REVEALS

Because most Adventists choose a healthier lifestyle than the general public, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) has funded research on the health habits of Adventists. Additionally, Loma Linda University is currently conducting Adventist Health Study-2, a second large health study of Adventists funded by NIH, which includes more than 90,000 members throughout North America.

Earlier studies have found that Adventists as a group have less heart disease, lower rates of many cancers, and live significantly longer than the general population. The first Adventist Health Study revealed a number of significant findings:

- Adventist women lived on average 4.4 years longer, and Adventist men 7.3 years longer, than their non-Adventist neighbors.
- Researchers found five lifestyle behaviors among Adventists that increased longevity by up to 10 years: not smoking, eating a plant-based diet, eating nuts most days of the week,

getting regular physical activity, and maintaining a healthy body weight.⁶

Adventist Health Study-2 has already observed additional health advantages of a primarily plant-based diet⁷. Compared to non-vegetarians, Adventist vegetarians have:

- Less obesity (they weighed on average about 30 pounds less than non-vegetarians).
- Less diabetes (about a 55 percent lower rate).
- Less hypertension (a 42 percent lower rate).
- Lower cholesterol levels (about a 55 percent lower rate).
- Less cancer (about half the rate for colon cancer).
- Less heart disease (a 30-50 percent lower rate for heart attacks).
- Lower total mortality (a 12 percent lower risk of death from any cause based on the latest research).

“The Lord will give strength to
His people; The Lord will bless
His people with peace.”

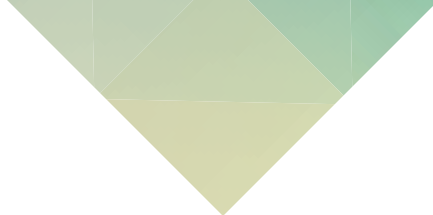
Psalms 29:11 (NKJV)





"I will praise You, for
I am fearfully and wonderfully
made; Marvelous are Your works,
And that my soul knows very well."

Psalms 139:14 (NKJV)



A report on the longevity of Adventists in the Archives of Internal Medicine stated that only about 20 percent of American men reach 85 years of age or older⁶. In Japan, the country with the best longevity in the world, this jumps to 23.6 percent. But, among Adventists as a whole, 41 percent reach age 85, and nearly half of vegetarian men reach age 85. The National Geographic study of the Blue Zones found that there were 10 times as many people living to be 100 in Loma Linda, California (a community made up of largely Adventists) as in the rest of the nation.⁸

These studies highlight many of the health advantages of living the Adventist lifestyle, which has been taught within the church for more than 150 years. When these ideas were first promoted in the church, the germ theory was still not widely known, people seldom bathed, aspirin was unavailable, and there weren't X-rays, antibiotics, pasteurization, or immunizations. Yet, these Adventist health teachings have stood the test of time, are in harmony with current evidence-based health research, and have produced a people with clear health and longevity advantages.

Now you know what Adventists teach about healthy living and why they encourage a healthy lifestyle. If you are interested in a long, healthy life, you, too, can benefit from these simple yet profound principles of healthy living. As 3 John 1:2 (NIV) says, “Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you.”

References:

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3. Nancy Haught, The Oregonian, May 08, 2012
4. Ellen White, Counsels on Diet and Foods p.296
5. Ellen White, Counsels on Health, p. 52
6. Gary Frazer, et al. Archives of Internal Medicine 161:1645-1652
7. Gary Frazer, Adventist Health Study 2, 6th International Conference of Vegetarian Nutrition, Feb. 24, 2013
8. Dan Buettner, National Geographic Society, The Blue Zones



SUMMARY

1. Take good care of your body temple—God dwells within you.
2. Healthy living is a choice—encouraged, but not mandated.
3. Eat healthy meals, emphasizing whole, plant-based foods (fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, and legumes), and limit highly refined foods and foods high in saturated fat and cholesterol.
4. Be physically active every day, when possible.
5. Avoid smoking, alcohol, recreational drugs, and other harmful substances.
6. Practice moderation in work, play, screen time, and eating.
7. Get adequate sleep (seven to eight hours a night for adults, and more for children and youth), and take off work at least one day a week to rest and strengthen family and spiritual ties.
8. Get adequate sunshine, clean water, and pure air; and commit to good sanitation and preserving a healthy environment.
9. Embrace wholistic living: engage in healthy relationships, have a hopeful outlook on life, balance stress with relaxation, be grateful and optimistic, practice prayer and meditation, give time in unselfish service, and show love and forgiveness in daily life.
10. Get regular medical and dental care, including preventive exams.

“Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.”

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (NKJV)





"I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants might live. That you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice, that you may cling to Him, for He is your LIFE and the length of your days."

Deuteronomy 30:19-20 (NKJV)



GENERAL CONFERENCE

Adventist
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