

Healthstyle: A Self-Test ¹

Linda B. Bobroff²

Everyone wants good health. But many of us do not know how to be as healthy as possible. Health experts describe *lifestyle* as one of the most important factors affecting our health. In fact, it is estimated that 5 of the 10 leading causes of death could be reduced through common-sense changes in lifestyle.

How to Get from Here to There

The first step in a healthier lifestyle is thinking about what we are doing now. This brief self-test, developed by the Public Health Service, will let you know how well you are doing to stay healthy.

The behaviors included in the test are recommended for most adult Americans. Some behaviors may not apply to people with certain chronic diseases or physical challenges or to pregnant women. Such people may need special advice from their doctor or other health care provider.

About Healthstyle: A Self-Test

There are six sections:

- Cigarette Smoking
- Alcohol and Drugs
- Eating Habits
- Exercise/Fitness
- Stress Control
- Safety

How to Use Healthstyle: A Self-Test

Complete one section at a time by circling the number under the answer that best describes your behavior. Then add the numbers you circled to get your score and write the score on the line provided at the end of each section.

When you are finished with all six sections, be sure to review the information under “Your Lifestyle Scores” and “What Your Scores Mean to You.” You will learn what your scores mean and will get tips for living a healthier lifestyle. And that is what this self-test is all about.

For more detailed information, contact your health care provider or a registered dietitian (RD). Call your local UF/IFAS Extension Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) agent to see if healthy lifestyles programs are available in your county. Written materials may be downloaded from the UF/IFAS Extension website at <http://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/>.

Your Lifestyle Scores

After you have figured your scores for each of the six sections, circle the number in each column that matches your score for that section of the test.

Remember: there is no total score for this self-test. Think about each section separately. You are identifying aspects of your lifestyle that you can improve in order to be healthier. So let’s see what your scores reveal.

1. This document is FCS8553, one of a series of the Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date March 1999. Revised June 2010, June 2015, and September 2018. Visit the EDIS website at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.

2. Linda B. Bobroff, Ph.D., RDN, professor, Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences; UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Opportunity Institution authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function with non-discrimination with respect to race, creed, color, religion, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, political opinions or affiliations. For more information on obtaining other UF/IFAS Extension publications, contact your county’s UF/IFAS Extension office.

U.S. Department of Agriculture, UF/IFAS Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A & M University Cooperative Extension Program, and Boards of County Commissioners Cooperating. Nick T. Place, dean for UF/IFAS Extension.

What Your Scores Mean to You (By Section)

Scores of 9 and 10

Excellent. Your answers show that you are aware of the importance of this area to your health. More importantly, you are putting your knowledge to work for you by practicing good health habits. As long as you continue to do so, this area should not pose a serious risk. It is likely that you are setting an example for the rest of your family and friends to follow. Since you got a very high test score on this part of the test, you may want to consider other areas where your scores indicate room for improvement.

Scores of 6 to 8

Your health practices in this area are good, but there is **room for improvement.** Look again at the items you answered with a “Sometimes” or “Almost Never.” What changes can you make to improve your score? Even a small change can help you achieve better health.

Scores of 3 to 5

Your health risks are showing. Would you like more information about the risks you are facing? Do you want to know why it is important for you to change these behaviors? Perhaps you need help in deciding how to make the changes you desire. In either case, help is available. You can start by contacting your health care provider, a registered dietitian, your local UF/IFAS Extension FCS agent, or one of the websites provided in the “You Can Start Right Now” section of this document.

Scores of 0 to 2

Obviously, you were concerned enough about your health to take this test. But your answers show that **you may be taking serious risks with your health.** Perhaps you were not aware of the risks and what to do about them. You can easily get the information and help you need to reduce your health risks and have a healthier lifestyle if you wish. Are you ready to take the next step?

You Can Start Right Now

The test you just completed included many suggestions to help you reduce your risk of disease and premature death. Here are some of the most significant ones.

Avoid Cigarettes

Cigarette smoking is the leading cause of preventable illness and early death in the US. It is especially risky for pregnant women and their unborn babies. People who stop smoking reduce their risk of getting heart disease and cancer. So if you are a cigarette smoker, think twice before lighting that next cigarette. For help with smoking cessation, see the CDC website at <https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/>. If you choose to continue smoking, try decreasing the number of cigarettes you smoke.

Follow Sensible Drinking Habits

Alcohol produces changes in mood and behavior. Heavy, regular use of alcohol can lead to cirrhosis of the liver, a serious chronic disease. Also, mixing drinking and driving is often the cause of fatal or crippling accidents, a leading cause of death. So, if you drink, do so only in moderation: no more than one drink per day for women and two drinks per day for men.

Use Care in Taking Medications

Today’s greater use of drugs—both legal and illegal—is one of our most serious health risks. Even some drugs prescribed by your doctor can be dangerous if taken improperly, when drinking alcohol, or before driving. Use prescription drugs as directed and discard outdated medications. Never share prescription medications with anyone, and keep all medications out of reach of children and teens.

Excessive or continued use of tranquilizers can cause physical and mental problems. Using or experimenting with illicit drugs including cocaine, heroin, inhalants, and club drugs such as Rohypnol, ketamine, Ecstasy (MDMA), GHB, LSD, and others may lead to a number of damaging effects or even death. (See <https://www.drugabuse.gov/drugs-abuse/club-drugs> for more information on club drugs.)

Eat Sensibly

Your eating habits are related to risk for high blood pressure, heart disease, obesity, diabetes, and some forms of cancer. Eat a wide variety of plant foods like whole-grain foods, dry beans (like black, red, pinto, and Great Northern beans), nuts, fruits, and vegetables every day. These foods contain a variety of nutrients as well as protective factors that may reduce your risk of chronic diseases. Also, eat an adequate amount of lean meats, fish, poultry, and fat-free or low-fat dairy foods for nutrients that they provide. Good eating habits mean limiting the amount of saturated fat and trans fat, cholesterol, added sugars, and salt in your diet.

For more information on healthy eating, see <http://www.ChooseMyPlate.gov>.

Exercise Regularly

Almost everyone can benefit from exercise—and there is some form of exercise almost everyone can do. (If you have any doubt, check first with your doctor.) Usually as little as 30 minutes of vigorous exercise a day, five times a week, will help you have a healthier heart, tone up sagging muscles, and promote restful sleep. Moderate exercise includes brisk walking, ballroom or line dancing, bicycling on level ground, or water aerobics. Think about how these changes can improve the way you feel. Physical activity guidelines are available at <http://www.health.gov/paguidelines/>.

Learning How to Handle Stress

Stress is a normal part of living. The causes of stress can be good (like a job promotion) or bad (like the death of a spouse). Properly handled, stress does not need to cause health problems. But unhealthy responses to stress—such as driving too fast, drinking too much, or prolonged anger or grief—can cause a variety of physical and mental problems.

Even on a very busy day, find a few minutes to slow down and relax. Talking over a problem with someone you trust can often help you find a solution that will work for you. Learn to distinguish between things that are “worth fighting about” and things that are less important. Get more information on stress and other health-related topics at <http://www.healthfinder.gov>.

Be Safety- and Health-Conscious

Think “safety first” at home, at work, at school, at play, and on the highway:

- Buckle seat belts and place young children in the proper type of child restraint seats for their age. Once children outgrow their forward facing car seats they should still sit in a booster seat in the back seat until they are big enough to have a seat belt fit properly, between eight and 12 years of age. All children under 13 should sit in the back seat. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has information on current laws and resources available related to seat belts, child restraint seats, and more, available at <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov>.
- Recent research indicates that distracted driving, like driving while texting, is similar to driving while intoxicated in the danger it poses.
- The benefits of a good night’s sleep include better mental and physical functioning during the day. Inadequate sleep

contributes to risk for obesity, and high blood pressure, so be sure to get adequate rest. For more information, see *In Brief: Your Guide to Healthy Sleep* at <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/sleep/healthysleepfs.pdf>.

Table 1. Self-Test Section 1: Cigarette Smoking

Cigarette Smoking	Almost Always	Sometimes	Almost Never
<i>If you are currently a non-smoker, enter a score of ten for this section and go to the next section on Alcohol and Drugs.</i>			
1. I avoid smoking cigarettes.	2	1	0
2. I smoke only low tar and nicotine cigarettes, or I smoke a pipe.	2	1	0
			Smoking Score _____

Table 2. Self-Test Section 2: Alcohol and Drugs

Alcohol and Drugs	Almost Always	Sometimes	Almost Never
1. I avoid drinking alcoholic beverages or I drink no more than 1 or 2 drinks a day.	4	1	0
2. I avoid using alcohol or other drugs (especially illegal drugs) as a way of handling stressful situations or problems.	2	1	0
3. I am careful to not drink alcohol when taking certain medicines (for example, medicine for sleeping, pain, colds, and allergies) or when pregnant.	2	1	0
4. I read and follow the label directions when using prescribed or over-the-counter drugs.	2	1	0
			Alcohol and Drugs Score _____

Table 3. Self-Test Section 3: Eating Habits

Eating Habits	Almost Always	Sometimes	Almost Never
1. I eat a variety of foods each day, such as fruits and vegetables; whole grain breads and cereals; lean meats; low-fat dairy products; dry peas and beans; nuts and seeds.	4	1	0
2. I limit the amount of saturated fat, trans fat, and cholesterol I eat from meats, eggs, butter, cream, shortenings, and organ meats such as liver.	2	1	0
3. I limit the amount of salt I eat by cooking with only small amounts, using few processed foods, and avoiding salty snacks.	2	1	0
4. I avoid eating too much added sugar from candy, sweet desserts, regular soft drinks, and other sweetened beverages.	2	1	0
			Eating Habits Score _____

Table 4. Self-Test Section 4: Exercise/Fitness

Exercise/Fitness	Almost Always	Sometimes	Almost Never
1. I do moderate to vigorous exercise 30 minutes a day at least five times a week (examples are jogging, swimming, brisk walking, bicycling, and zumba).	4	2	0
2. I do exercises that enhance my muscle tone for 15–30 minutes at least three times a week (examples are using weight machines or free weights, yoga, and calisthenics).	3	1	0
3. I use part of my leisure time participating in individual, family, or team activities that increase my level of fitness (such as gardening, dancing, bowling, golf, and baseball).	3	1	0
			Exercise/Fitness Score _____

Table 5. Self-Test Section 5: Stress Control

Stress Control	Almost Always	Sometimes	Almost Never
1. I have a job, go to school, or do other work that I enjoy.	2	1	0
2. I find it easy to relax and express my feelings freely.	2	1	0
3. I recognize early and prepare for events or situations likely to be stressful for me.	2	1	0
4. I have close friends, relatives, or others whom I can talk to about personal matters and call on for help when needed.	2	1	0
5. I participate in group activities (such as religious worship and community organizations) and/or have hobbies that I enjoy.	2	1	0
Stress Control Score _____			

Table 6. Self-Test Section 6: Safety and Health

Safety/Health	Almost Always	Sometimes	Almost Never
1. I wear a seat belt while driving or riding in a car.	2	1	0
2. I avoid driving while under the influence of alcohol or other drugs, or riding with someone else who is under the influence.	2	1	0
3. I obey traffic rules and avoid distractions like texting and talking on the phone when driving.	2	1	0
4. I am careful when using potentially harmful products or substances (such as household cleaners, poisons, and electrical devices).	2	1	0
5. I get at least seven hours of sleep a night.	2	1	0
Safety Score _____			

Table 7. Lifestyle Scores

Cigarette Smoking	Alcohol and Drugs	Eating Habits	Exercise and Fitness	Stress Control	Safety/Health
10	10	10	10	10	10
9	9	9	9	9	9
8	8	8	8	8	8
7	7	7	7	7	7
6	6	6	6	6	6
5	5	5	5	5	5
4	4	4	4	4	4
3	3	3	3	3	3
2	2	2	2	2	2
1	1	1	1	1	1
0	0	0	0	0	0