

## Responsible Lifestyle: Implication to Health

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**Abstract:** Making conscious decision and assuming responsibility for improving one's health and fitness will result in good health and improved quality of life. The choices, great and small, that one makes influence and impact on one's health and wellness. Although certain diseases are predisposed by genetic factors, studies have shown that many illnesses are preventable (example, heart diseases, cancer, sexually transmitted diseases, stroke and diabetes). The preventive strategies include caution in what we eat and drinks, level of exposure to stress, patterns of sleep exercise, attitude to life/lifestyle and environment exposure.

**Key words:** lifestyle, health, responsible, diseases/illnesses.

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### I. Introduction

In the past focus on health had been based on germ theory but in recent times, multifactorial conditions have been implicated in the causes of diseases, lifestyle inclusive.

The lifestyle and habits of an individual strongly affect health maintenance, people with unhealthy lifestyle and habits are considered to have poor health (Craven and Hirnle, 2000). Emelugo, (2004) in an unpublished seminar presentation on "prudent heart living" stated that millions of Nigerians have living habits or lifestyles that are endangering their hearts at a comparatively early age. According to her, these lifestyles usually begin in childhood, some children begin early in life to overeat and develop a taste of foods high in lipids (cholesterol) and "empty calories" (that is foods with little nutritional value). Some also are not encouraged to get enough exercise and watching television may further limit physical activity.

Furthermore, she also stated that too many adult Nigerians are overweight, some lead sedentary lives. Many have cholesterol and other fatty substances in their blood and high blood pressure is common.

Sue, (2011), said "you are robbing, sabotaging and hurting yourself by not taking care of yourself and believing that your doctor is responsible for your health and your insurance plan will cover the cost of the problem." In addition he stated that diseases usually happen when our bodies and lifestyles are out of balance, and that various factors impact our health and well being. In essence, our health is clearly affected by how well we take care of ourselves (developing and imbibing responsible lifestyle cultures or behaviours). This fact was supported by the reports of, Abate and Chandalia (2001), who posited that "there is a higher prevalence of insulin-dependent diabetes mellitus and heart disease in Pakistan and unhealthy lifestyle has been implicated as being responsible".

Finally, people whose lifestyles conveniently incorporates adequate sleep and rest, exercise, good nutrition, avoidance of unhealthy practices such as promiscuity, having multiple sex partners, cigarettes smoking among others may more easily achieve good health and fewer illnesses.

### II. Objectives

This paper seeks to

- Define responsible lifestyle and health.
- Discuss the relationship between responsible lifestyle and good health.
- Outline factors that hinder responsible lifestyle and its implication to health.
- Discuss nurses' role in fostering positive behaviours and responsible lifestyles for good health.
- Recommend ways of adopting responsible lifestyle.

### III. Responsible Life Style And Health

Lifestyle is the way a person lives. It is guided by what an individual chooses to do, get involved in and decides on based on issues or activities that bother on his or her life and health.

Lifestyle behaviour involves numerous activities to maintain health and encourage longevity. These include; exercise, consumption of various food items, personal and environment hygiene practices, positive reproductive health behaviours, reduction of stress, undergoing screening exercise and regular medical check-ups, avoiding risk factors such as tobacco, alcohol consumption and substance abuse; environmental and occupational hazards among others.

A responsible lifestyle can be said to mean acknowledging, accepting and adopting lifestyle activities that promote health and encourage a happy productive life, (Sue, 2011). A responsible lifestyle put in another way is referred to as healthy lifestyle or positive personal behaviour. Health on the other hand is a state of the organism when it functions optimally without evidence of disease or illness.

#### **IV. Relationship Between Lifestyle And Health**

Health is a state that is closely associated with lifestyle. Sue (2011) quoting Brickly in his research on “Defy aging” stated that 30% of longevity and vitality is attributed to heredity, while 70% derives from attitudes and lifestyle, this statement corroborate the report of Kannel as cited by Qidwai, Salehen, Saleen, Andrades and Azam, (2003), which\_ stated that over two decades back, changes in lifestyle were reported to have led to a decline in mortality from cardiovascular disease in the developed world. There has also been substantial evidence in favour of lifestyle interventions leading to an improvement in health outcome.

Some responsible lifestyles that positively impact the health of the individual had been identified. They include exercise, consumption of various food items, personal and environmental hygiene, responsible reproductive health behaviour, regular medical check-up and health screening, avoiding risk factors such as tobacco and alcohol consumption, environmental and occupational hazard alert, stress reduction, sleep and relaxation among others.

##### **Exercise**

Regular physical activity enhances the quality of life for people of all ages and helps adults to maintain functional independence. Exercise tones the muscle and stimulates circulation; it also helps to prevent excessive weight and promotes general feeling of well-being.

A regular exercise programme promotes health by:

Decreasing cholesterol and lowering density lipoprotein levels

Decreasing body weight through enhanced caloric expenditure

Delaying degeneration changes such as osteoporosis

Improving flexibility and promoting overall muscle strength and endurance

Appropriate exercise programmes can have significant positive effects on a person’s performance capacity, appearance and general state of physical and emotional health. A specific exercise programme should be designed for individuals depending on their age, physical condition and any known cardiovascular or other risk factors.

##### **Consumption of various food items**

The need to eat healthily cannot be overemphasized; this involves the type of food items a person eats. Understanding the relationship between diet, health and disease is important in maintaining health. It is also necessary to appreciate the degree at which diets impacts on one’s ability to stay healthy. The association between consumption of sweet and diseases including dental caries is well known, (Gabris, Nyarasdy, Banoczy, 2002). Vesely (2002) and Colbert (2002) stated that most cases of essential hypertension are caused by lifestyle, obesity, excessive stress and nutritional deficiencies and that the association of high blood pressure and excessive salt intake are well known.

Good nutrition is the single most important factor in determining health status and longevity. When food is ingested, digested and absorbed, it is then metabolized into energy. These actions on the food produces by-products called free radicals which in turn discharge electrons and set them roaming free, causing damage in other body cells.

A healthy diet includes plenty of foods that are high in fibre, vitamins and minerals. Raw plant-source foods are loaded with fibre, it is the fibre that keeps the food moving rapidly through a very lengthy intestinal tract with many pockets, loops and bends (Malkmus,2006), they also provide anti oxidants for the body. A5 to 9 servings of fruits and vegetable every day will boost immune system as well as provide a good weapon (anti-oxide) against the free radicals. The role of fruits and vegetables in the prevention of cancers and heart disease are well known, Lindenaver, Rastegar, Van Goeler (2002).

Some food items rich in free radicals should be therefore avoided or taken in little quantities in order to eat responsibly and stay healthy. For example foods rich in fats should be avoided especially those that contain the most dangerous substances such as Low density lipoprotein (LDL). This includes butter, fried foods, red meat, Tozo, Akwu nro among others. Other foods that should be avoided or consumed in limited amount are excessive sugar which weakens the immune system and actually fuels the growth of cancer(which is fed by sugar), additives which may act as toxins in the food, devitalized foods such as flour, processed foods among others.( Emelogu 2004).

On the other hand, healthy foods such as fish and poultry should be encouraged. Consumption of fish and fish oils had shown favourable influence on the lipid metabolism. Other food items such as skimmed milk

products or low fat, whole grain, portable water consumption and others have also been found favourable to health. Brown (2014), reported that drinking water on an empty stomach in the morning results to healthy effects to the body by:

- purifying the colon and allowing for better absorption of nutrients in the system;
- Helping with weight loss, (drinking at least 16 oz. of water in the morning). This can boost metabolism by up to 24%.
- Hydrating the cells at a superior rate after hours of fasting (sleeping). The rush of hydration to the cells helps in production of blood and muscle cells.
- Ingesting high dosages of water to purge the system of toxins through the bowels and promote a glowing skin.
- Helping to flush and balance the lymphatic system which leads to increased immunity, helping to fight a variety of illnesses.

### **Personal and environmental hygiene**

Hygiene promotes cleanliness, keeps one healthy and prevents infection and illness. Pollution, lack of safe play and recreational areas, inadequate housing and unsanitary conditions leads to poor health maintenance and set the stage for illness.

Personal and environmental hygiene are healthy lifestyles essential for health maintenance. When appropriate care of the body through regular bath, hand washing among other hygiene activities is observed; the incidence of disease will be prevented or reduced to the barest minimum. Little, (2001), stated that hand washing is considered an essential component of a healthy lifestyle. More so, the skin is the first line of defense against certain microorganisms and infections entering the body. The maintenance of an intact and clean skin is therefore important in health maintenance and promotion. Perspiration interacts with bacteria on the skin to cause body odour which can be offensive and promote bacteria growth. Regular bathing at least twice a day removes excess oil, perspiration and bacteria from the skin surface.

In addition, bathing increases circulation and helps maintain muscle tone and joint mobility. It also provides relaxation and comfort as well as a sense of well-being. A warm or hot bath increases circulation by dilating blood vessels near the skin surface, allowing more blood to flow to the skin.

Personal and environmental hygiene are essential for health. The avoidance of environmental pollution such as fumes and noise from household generators, littering of garbage within and around living surroundings are healthy lifestyles that encourage healthy living.

### **Responsible reproductive health behaviours**

Positive sexual and reproductive health behaviours are essential tools to ward-off diseases and infections of the reproductive tract. These positive behaviours include but not limited to abstinence, being faithful to partner, use of condom where necessary, sex education among others. Ojjiyi and Dike (2001), reported that there was a statistical relationship between multiple sexual partners, coital frequency per week and the occurrence of genital human papilloma virus (HPV). It is therefore necessary that sexual partners openly discuss with each other about how to have safer sex, and to be honest with each other about history of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs),(Craven and Hirmler,2000). This will help prevent further spread of the disease as well as early treatment and prevention of complications.

### **Regular medical check-up and health screening**

The practice of this healthy life style involves undergoing a periodic health examination with regard to sex and age for which specific screening exercises are appropriate. For example, cervical screening tests like pap smear and prostate specific antigen (PSA), for sexually active females and males of 40 years old and above respectively. These tests help in the detection of health problems at an early stage so as to treat them early as well as identify those at risk of developing the disease. With this appropriate measures can be taken to prevent the occurrence and/or reduce overbearing disease burden on patients and families.

Young and middle age adults should participate in programmes that provide health screening such as those for cancer, high lipid (cholesterol), hypertension, diabetes, visual and hearing impairment which are necessary, preventive dental check-ups are considered part of healthy life style, (Kunitsuka,Yamatsu, Adachi, 2002).

### **Avoiding Risk Factors (Tobacco and Alcohol consumption)**

Alcohol interacts with smoke, increasing the risk of malignant tumours, possibly acting as a solvent for the carcinogenic products and increasing absorption of carcinogens (Kumar, Abba, & Nelson, 2006).

The habit of consuming tobacco and alcohol increases the chance of developing the cancers of the mouth, throat among others. A healthy lifestyle of avoiding or abstaining from such products encourages good

health. Smoking cessation is a positive step toward health. Craven & Hirnle, (2000); Bhurgri, Hassan, Zaidi, Rahim, Sankaranarayanan & Parkin, (2000), stated that tobacco chewing is common in South Asia; and these have been implicated in the causation of head and neck cancers as well as submucous fibrosis. Francis (2004), identified some immediate effects of alcohol on different parts of the body, in the brain, it interferes with brain activity affecting judgment, muscular co-ordination and sensory perception- depending on the number and amount of drinks taken. This can lead to exhibition of aggressive and irrational behaviour, depression and anxiety. In the stomach, small amounts of alcohol promote the flow of gastric juices decreases appetite and releases hydrochloric acid. High acidity can cause ulcers. For the reproductive system, sexual desire is provoked but performance is inhibited and reduced.

### **Environmental and occupational hazards**

Healthy life style at work place is practiced by observing safety rules to reduce or avoid contact with harmful substances at work. Habits of wearing personal protective equipments (PPE), such as seat belts, head and eye shield, hand gloves, masks, leg boots and others are ways of promoting health, safety and vitality.

### **Stress Reduction**

A basic assumption of all theories of natural health is that when the body is functioning properly; without excess stress, it has the capacity to heal itself. Studies have shown that 90% of pain experience is as a result of stress and worry, so rather than reach for pain-killer drugs, the best way to care for our body is to reduce stress and keep the body system functioning well. Colbert (2002), referred to stress as meaning the pressures of life and how one perceive, believe, react and cope with those pressures. All life begins and ends with cells. Cells create "tissues" which creates "organs" which creates "systems" which create the "BODY". The acronym "OWNER" can be used to describe the basic needs of the cell, meaning, O- Oxygen; W- Water; N- Nutrition; E- Energy/Exercise/Elimination; R-Rest,

Disease comes when these cellular needs are not met and the body is unable to function in its self-healing capacity. A less stressful life enhances health, and fosters a great sense of well being. The maintenance of a healthy life style also involves having a realistic perspective on stress, life and having the understanding that change in all aspects of life is inevitable, it is therefore a necessity to anticipate change, nurture and incorporate it into the maturing sense of well being, (Dale & Wayne, 2003).

### **Sleep and Relaxation**

Sleep and relaxation are healthy life styles that enable the body to stay health in order to be renewed and refreshed so as to be able to withstand pressures. Sleep exerts physiologic effects on both the nervous system and other body structures. Sleep in some ways restores normal levels of activity and normal balance among parts of the nervous system. Sleep is also necessary for protein synthesis, which allows repair processes to occur (Berman, Synder, Kozier & Erb, 2008), they further stated that the role of sleep in psychological well being is best noticed by the deterioration in mental functioning related to sleep loss. Persons with inadequate amount of sleep tend to become emotionally irritable, have poor concentration and experience difficulty making decision.

Relaxation also involves taking care of one's self and paying attention to the body's needs and feelings, it also involves engaging in activities that one finds enjoyable and relaxing. These helps to keep the mind and body primed to deal with situations that resilience, (Frank & Robinson-Bassey, 2010).

Colbert (2002), advised "Be sure your life has a healthy balance of work and play, difficult jobs and easy ones, tasks you enjoy and those you consider drudgery, all works and no play is unhealthy and will cause to feel stressed out. If you work very hard make sure take vacations and short getaways. Balance is a key factor in health and happiness.

## **V. Factors That Hinder Responsible Lifestyle**

Health is a practice and a process that requires willingness, patience and persistence, practicing wellness or healthy lifestyle will most likely include learning new life skills that address both the positive and negative aspects of life.

The reason why some people take care and others don't may have something to do with genetics or circumstances while some of it has to do with attitude, behaviour and the value attached to what happens to them. Factors such as ignorance, socio- economic status and cultural beliefs and values can hinder responsible life style.

### **Ignorance**

Ignorance can be expressed through lack of interest, excuse of being too busy to take care of oneself, being satisfied with the negative lifestyle since there is no immediate adverse effects observed or experienced or

the believe that they are too difficult to practice or maintain. Ironically, these attitudes will probably result to a greater negative impact and affect health and quality of life later. This could be likened to driving a car and not caring if there's gas in the tank or oil in the engine. It's a matter of time before it breaks down.

### **Economic Resources**

Poverty inversely correlates with healthy status; people in poverty have higher mortality and morbidity less than other groups of people, (Craven & Hirnle, 2000). In addition, poor people are more likely than others to die from preventable diseases,( Craven & Hirnle, 2000).

Economic play a large role in health maintenance and adopting the healthy life styles people who live in poverty may be unable to afford nutritious foods (4 to 5 fruits and vegetables servings per day) and adequate housing. They may not be able to afford medical check-ups regularly or screening but only when a serious illness develops.

Poverty may cause homelessness or may force people to live in overcrowded conditions with poor sanitation.

### **Culture, Values and Beliefs**

The culture in which a person was raised influences his or her beliefs and practices, including diet. A culture that places value on being fat and plumpy as an evidence of wealth and good care for women by their husband, will frown at suggestions or health counseling o weight reduction as a means of reducing the risk of heart diseases.

### **Social Factor**

Difficulty with roles and relationships can act as a stress which can compromise a person's respect for others and self-esteem; this can affect the individual negatively and may likely result to decreased coping skills, depressive symptoms and negative health behaviours (Craven and Hirnle, 2000).

### **Coping and stress intolerance**

Coping mechanisms people use to handle every day event may be a source of hindrance to developing or maintaining responsible or healthy life style, coping mechanisms such as denial and use of alcohol may lead to negative health behaviours and poor health.

## **VI. Responsible Lifestyle,Promotion And Maintenance: Implication For Nursing.**

Nurses need to be conversant with the areas needed for healthy life styles which include; healthy diet, physical fitness and activity, stress reduction and management, rest and sleep, proactive alcohol (substance abuse avoidance), healthy relationships, relaxation and leisure among others. These needs are integral part for which the cares are covered by the basic roles of nurses as caregiver, teacher, advocate, manager, counselor and researcher.

**Care giver:** In the course of care giving nurses are strong change agents to modify client's behaviour for health promotion. They also provide direct services that increase and maintain health of individuals, families, groups, and communities.

**Teaching:** client clinical teaching in the course of managing knowledge deficit lasts for a life time. Life-span teaching role of nurses for health behaviour learning are enormous. The creation of good nurses-client relationship that fosters learning is all duty of nurses.

**Advocate:** advocacy for responsible life style. The wealth of nurses' access to all persons, families and communities makes the nurses an opportune advocate for them. Nurses should and need to speak to individuals, families, institutional heads, public opinion leaders, and legislative to accept and (imbibe) health building activities and behaviours (and fund them if need be). The empowerment by expertise and experience that nurses have are assets that can be added to generate and foster healthful lifestyle in any context, national or otherwise.

**Counseling:** Nurses provide counseling service. Guided and informed decisions for any of the need essentials for responsible lifestyle can be taken by clients and the counseling is vital for reinforcing the learning of desired healthy behaviour.

Documentation of finding of assessment and entire course of practice is a vital data. Nurses need to be conversant with facts and figures from research findings be it personal or from others sources and utilize the information for discussion of the need for imbibing good health practices.

## **VII. Recommendations**

Unhealthy life style contributes significantly to the burden of diseases (Teiring, 2008). To this effects, Teiring also stated that, scarce medical resources that could alternatively be spent on interventions to prevent or

cure sufferings for which no one is to blame are spent on prevention or treatment of (the risk of) disease that could be avoided through individual lifestyle changes. Prevention they say is better than cure.

Approaches to influencing lifestyle should be directed towards changing the individual behaviours, changing some aspect of the community or changing the relationship between the individual and the community.

The placing of the entire responsibility for change on the individual is now understood to be an insufficient response that blames the victim rather than addressing the social circumstances that leads to harmful behaviour. Indeed, social and community responses can add resources to an individual's repertoire of strategies to cope with change and foster health (wellness).

Many approaches abound that could be used to encourage responsible lifestyle that promotes and maintain healthy lifestyle. They include:

**Educational:** Knowledge, they say is power, God affirmed this when He declared "my people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6). This method is used to produce knowledge and information in the hope that the person or community will subsequently modify their behaviour as a result of their own choice. Eze, Egwuatu and Johnson (2008) from their study suggested that awareness creation and local provision of services will improve knowledge and practice of cervical cancer screening. In other words, they are enabled to make informed decisions about their health.

**Empowerment:** this can be done through various ways such as using the educational approach that has earlier being explained, or provision of to jobs to economically empower the individual or community.

**Mass Media:** these are tools used to disseminate information either to create awareness, inform counsel, direct or appeal to people (and their conscience) on how to live and promote responsible lifestyle.

Electronic (television, radio and internet) and print (newspapers, journals, magazines, bill boards) can be used to reach large number of individuals, families, groups and community. It has been rightly observed that the awareness created about HIV/AIDs have succeeded at least to very large extent to put people at an alert and thus reduce lives lost because of the diseases.

**Social activities/programmes:** Social gatherings can also be used; cares of emotional crises, stress reduction, interpersonal relationship among individuals, groups, families, friends and communities are often presented at social gatherings like wedding, birthday, burial, etc active encouragement on cordial relationship and its health benefits are also discussed.

**Health policy:** Integral part of national health policy should be prevention of disease and disability with health promotion and healthy lifestyle as its strong components. Placing heavy tax on alcohol and tobacco as well as banning public smoke and employing stringent measures (prosecuting) against drunk driving.

In addition, free screening programmes should be made available to the people as per age and sex.

## VIII. Conclusion

Health they say is wealth. Unhealthy lifestyle has been greatly implicated in the cause of certain diseases especially the chronic diseases. Changes in lifestyle have been reported to have lead to a decline in mortality from some diseases conditions like cardiovascular disease. And there has also been substantial evidence in favour of life style intervention leading to a better health outcome. Therefore, once an individual realises that he or she is extensively responsible for his or her health and start to act on it, he or she has started the process of empowering himself or herself and creating a better life.

A proactive approach to health, then, includes prevention and education for the development of a truly preventive health plan, with a focus on staying healthy and maintaining a balanced lifestyle.

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