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10-Week Jump-Start Wellness Plan

For the next ten weeks, Dr. Christiana will guide patients through a unique and highly effective approach to getting - and staying - healthy. Achieving optimal health is an ongoing process and there are no "quick-fixes." The key to this innovative approach is focusing on one aspect of wellness each week. By completing "bite-sized" challenges, patients will gradually learn to take control of their well-being. Read on for a brief outline of the plan. And, ask Dr. Christiana for additional details and resources.

Week One: Start With the Spine

Challenge: Schedule an appointment for a chiropractic checkup.

Doctors of chiropractic believe that the spine is the foundation of health. Unfortunately, even many so-called "holistic" health strategists often overlook this vital key to wellness. That's why Dr. Christiana encourages those on the Jump-Start Wellness Plan to begin with a chiropractic checkup.

Chiropractors focus on detecting and correcting dysfunctional regions in the spine called vertebral subluxations - a condition that occurs when motion is restricted or spinal bones (vertebrae) are out of alignment. Vertebral subluxations are associated with a myriad of health issues such as headache, back pain, neck pain, ear infection and carpal tunnel syndrome. Chiropractors eliminate vertebral subluxations with gentle maneuvers called chiropractic adjustments. Scientific studies show that chiropractic adjustments effectively correct and prevent vertebral subluxations - and the conditions associated with them.

Resources: Ask at the front desk for back issues of Optimal Health University™ on specific spinal health topics that spark your interest.

Week Two: Stamp Out Stress

Challenge: Reconsider your schedule and adopt a stress-reduction regime.

Emotional stress - the hallmark of today's society - is linked with a myriad of ailments including vertebral subluxation, heart disease, stroke, cancer, infertility, headache, depression and insomnia.

This week, start stamping out stress by re-evaluating your daily schedule. Get creative. Free up some time by organizing a school carpool with similarly harried parents. Consider swapping babysitting time with a neighbor or hiring a local teenager to take over some household chores. Next, make a list of three obligations you can cancel or delegate to others this week. For many, learning to turn down requests is difficult. Here are a few tips to help you say "no:"

Wait 24 hours before responding to a substantial request for your time.

Repeat to yourself over and over again, "It's OK to say 'no' to stress-inducing commitments that will interfere with my well-being." Refuse to give in when pushy persuaders become crusaders for your time.

Create a "saying no script" you are comfortable with. Explain that you are focusing on boosting your level of health and that means carving out additional time for yourself to prevent stress.

Use the "broken record" technique with those who pester you repeatedly. This means responding to each attempt to change your mind with an identical script.

After you've carved out more time in your routine, investigate stress-reduction techniques and choose one to practice for at least 15 minutes, three times a week. Techniques to consider include yoga, meditation, breathing exercises, tai chi, biofeedback, writing in a journal or engaging in a hobby or craft you enjoy.

Resources: If you need help choosing a stress-reduction technique, ask your chiropractor for advice. Doctors of chiropractic can help you choose the right technique for your lifestyle and provide referrals for related courses in the community. The Moms Network (www.momsnetwork.com) and the AtHome Dad Network (www.athomedad.com) provide winning time-management suggestions for stay-at-home parents. For more information on saying "no" effectively, check out *Conversationally Speaking* by Alan Garner (Lowell House) or *How to Say No Without Feeling Guilty* by Patti Breitman (Doubleday).

Week Three: Dump the Drugs

Challenge: Reconsider your use of unnecessary medication and reliance on drugs.

Do you pop over-the-counter painkillers on a regular basis to alleviate afternoon tension headaches? Do you run to the medicine cabinet after working out in search of relief from muscle soreness? Does your morning routine include guzzling several cups of coffee?

Symptoms such as headache, back pain, muscle soreness, fatigue and restlessness are messages from your body screaming that something is amiss. If you're relying on drugs to cover up symptoms, you're ignoring your own inner wisdom, disrespecting your body and sabotaging your health goals.

Never discontinue the use of prescription medication without consulting the doctor who prescribed it. However, you may choose to clean your cabinets of over-the-counter painkillers and commit to addressing the cause of your health ailments - rather than merely masking symptoms. You may also want to consider all-natural alternatives such as nutritional supplements. Ask your chiropractor to assist you in this endeavor.

In addition to taking a hard look at your use of medication, consider any reliance on nicotine, caffeine, alcohol or "recreational" drugs.

Resources: If you need help breaking a substance addiction, ask your chiropractor for a referral to treatment programs in the community. For information on the misuse of antibiotic drugs, check out *Beyond Antibiotics* by Michael A. Schmidt (North Atlantic Books).

Week Four: Make Friends With the Sandman

Challenge: Adjust your schedule to accommodate adequate sleep time.

Sleep debt has reached epidemic proportions in today's society, with its destructive effects frequently downplayed or ignored. The frightening truth is that a lack of sleep is nothing to snore at. Even modest sleep deprivation is linked with an increased risk of headache (Cephalgia 1990;10:157-60). In addition, missing sleep can produce fluctuations in blood sugar levels that mimic that of diabetics (Lancet 1999;354:1435-9). Sleep debt is also associated with decreased mental function and an increased likelihood of psychological disorders such as depression and anxiety. And, if that isn't enough to convince you to head for your pillow, consider this: Forgoing sufficient snoozes may hasten the aging process.

"We found that the metabolic and endocrine changes resulting from significant sleep debt mimic many of the hallmarks of aging," explains researcher Eve Van Cauter, Ph.D. "We suspect that chronic sleep loss may not only hasten the onset but could also increase the severity of age-related ailments such as diabetes, hypertension, obesity and memory loss (Lancet 1999;354:1435-9).

How much sleep is enough? Although each individual has a unique "body clock," most people function best with at least eight to nine hours of sleep during a 24-hour period. For some, it's best to sleep only at night. Others' circadian rhythms dictate dividing sleep between nighttime and a daily nap. The key is to listen to your body. Notice what sleep patterns leave you most rested and alert; then, work to schedule your day accordingly. At the very least, commit to hitting the hay a half-hour earlier each night this week.

Resources: For a comprehensive overview of the significance of sleep read *Power Sleep* by Dr. James B. Maas (Harper Perennial). On line, surf over to <http://www.sleepnetcom/> or <http://www.sleepfoundation.org/>.

Week Five: Develop A Winning Nutritional Strategy

Challenge: Rid your cabinets of junk foods and identify five destructive nutritional habits to tackle.

Start this week by ridding your cabinets and refrigerator of junk foods, high-fat products and sugarladen items: and don't replace them during your next grocery trip! Instead, stock up on whole foods avoiding quick foods, frozen foods and processed foods. If you only have access to nutritious items, you're more likely to adopt healthy eating patterns.

Next, take a minute to identify five destructive nutritional behaviors you struggle with. After documenting each one, brainstorm a healthy alternative to each habit. For example, if your lunch break often involves swinging by McDonald's@ drive-through, consider packing a fresh green salad topped with grilled chicken or tofu chunks. Or, if you skip meals often, block out mealtimes at regular intervals. After you have identified the habits you wish to change and what alternatives to replace them with, commit to trying out these new approaches for one week. The boost in energy you experience may persuade you to keep up some - or all - of them for good!

Resources: Dr. Andrew Weil's *Eating Well for Optimum Health* (Knopf) is a fantastic resource for anyone seeking to learn the truth about nutrition. Also, watch for nutrition-focused Optimal Health University™ handouts each month.

Week Six: Get Excited About Exercise!

Challenge: Custom-tailor an exercise program to fit your needs.

Adhering to a regular exercise program is a daunting challenge. The secret to overcoming this challenge is creating momentum. Once you start reaping the rewards of exercise - such as increased energy and reduced risk of disease staying motivated will become second nature.

Close your eyes and spend a few minutes visualizing what you will look and feel like when you reach your fitness goal. Imagine fitting into that pair of jeans hanging in the back of your closet - or playing soccer with your children without getting winded. Next, write a paragraph depicting the life you visualized.

Keep this sheet in your wallet or purse and review it whenever you feel like skipping a workout.

Following are a few winning tips from Dr. Christiana to help you get and stay - in shape:

1. Keep regular chiropractic appointments. Nothing interferes with a workout program faster than an injury. Fortunately, visiting Dr. Christiana can help you prevent injuries by keeping your spine in optimal alignment and providing all-natural remedies for muscle soreness.

2. Set your schedule in stone. The key to sticking to a workout regimen is to incorporate it into your schedule. Reorganize each day so that workout time is available and vow to honor this commitment. Most experts agree that aerobic exercise should be practiced for at least 30 minutes, five to seven days a week. In addition, it's important to engage in resistance training, such as weightlifting or calisthenics, for at least 30 minutes twice a week. And, don't forget to stretch for at least 10 minutes following each workout.

3. Adopt the 10-minute rule. Commit to participating in - your scheduled activity for at least 10 minutes, even on days when you

don't "feel" like working out. If you remain too tired or worn out after 10 minutes, then - and only then - abandon your workout. However, the simple act of getting started will usually propel you to keep going.

4. Focus on fun. A common mistake made by would-be exercisers is choosing an activity that they don't enjoy. This is a sure-fire way to court failure. Why torture yourself? Get creative. If jogging isn't for you, consider tennis, hiking or rollerblading. How about enrolling in a salsa dance class or taking up surfing?

5. Use the buddy system. To stay motivated, forge an alliance with a workout buddy. Choose a friend or neighbor with a similar schedule, fitness level and workout goals. Forming a workout group with several other individuals is another option. For example, walking clubs are an extremely effective strategy to keep those new to exercise hitting the pavement.

6. Start slowly. Too much exercise too soon can provoke muscle soreness and discourage would-be athletes. So, focus on the long-term and start slowly.

7. Mix it up. Top athletes know that cross-training can catapult an individual to the heights of fitness. If the prospect of engaging in the same form of exercise every day makes you yawn, shake it up. Choose several types of activities and schedule one a day.

Resources: If you have trouble sticking to a workout regime, read *When Working Out Isn't Working Out* by Michael Gerrish (St. Martin's Griffin).

Week Seven: Embrace Nature

Challenge: Connect with nature.

The chiropractic philosophy of health teaches that - like all of nature - human beings harbor a powerful sense of inner wisdom which channels us toward optimal health.

Unfortunately, the trappings of today's fast-paced society isolate us from our bodies' inner wisdom. How many times have you ignored signs of stress or fatigue because your schedule could not spare a minute of down-time?

Because medication and surgery also mask the attempts of our bodies' inner wisdom to communicate with us, doctors of chiropractic feel that they should only be used when absolutely necessary.

This week, remind yourself that you are a natural being by surrounding yourself with nature. Take a weekend hike with your family or watch a sunset. If you live in the city, visit a park or arboretum. Unearth your green thumb by tending a garden or houseplant. Adopting and caring for a pet is another fun way to connect with nature.

Resources: Contact your community's open space district for a list of hikes in the area.

Week Eight: Focus on Financial Health

Challenge: Update your household budget.

Financial problems may hurt more than your pocketbook. Research reveals that financial health has a profound impact on physical wellbeing.

Money woes are linked to an increased risk of depression, anxiety and other physical disorders. Scientists recently took a look at this wallet-health connection in a study of 1,036 Ohio residents. They found members of households with high credit-card debt - relative to their income - are more likely to suffer from physical impairment and emotional stress, compared with people who keep their "plastic" spending in check (Sac Sci Med 2000;50:517-29).

This week, schedule a few hours to review your household budget. If you have a home computer, investigate your bank's on-line services and consider purchasing one of the many quality, time-saving money management programs such as Quicken@ or Microsoft Money@. It may also be helpful to schedule weekly or monthly budget-planning meetings with your spouse or family. If you feel overwhelmed, consider visiting a professional financial advisor.

Resources: *The 9 Steps to Financial Freedom* by Suze Orman (Crown) outlines a renowned program for getting and keeping financial control. *Rich Dad, Poor Dad* by Robert T. Kiyosaki (Tech press) and *Ordinary People, Extraordinary Wealth* by Ric Edelman (Harper Resource) provide more powerful insights on money management. If you're one of the millions struggling with credit card debt, read *Your Money or Your Life* by Joseph R. Dominguez (Viking) and check out the Debt Counselors of America's Web site at www.dca.org.

Week Nine: Show Some Spirit

Challenge: Connect with your spiritual side.

For centuries, "modern" medicine dismissed the role of spirituality in health care as mere hocus-pocus. But in recent years, an onslaught of scientific evidence has confirmed that spirituality significantly impacts quality of life. Research shows that those who engage regularly in spiritual pursuits enjoy longer lives, reduced blood pressure and a lowered likelihood of disease.

There are a number of ways to connect with your spiritual side. Options include prayer, learning to meditate, enrolling in a yoga or t'ai chi class, keeping a journal, volunteering for a local charitable organization, reading sacred texts, or attending worship services.

Resources: Don't know where to start looking for volunteer opportunities? Check out Volunteers of America at www.voa.org.

Challenge: Focus on the positive this week.

Did you know that a grumpy attitude may not only result in lost friendships but also in lost years from your life? One recent study, which tracked 839 subjects for three decades, found that pessimists were 19 percent more likely to die early, compared with optimists (Mayo Clin Proc 2000;75: 140-3). Another study followed 99 Harvard University graduates from ages 30 to 60. As evidenced by results of physical examinations, pessimists were more likely to suffer poor health in middleage, compared with optimists (J Pers Soc Psychol 1988;55:23- 7). Other research indicates that optimists are more likely than pessimists to recover from cancer (Psychol Aging 1996;11:304).

This week, make a conscious effort to focus on the positive. To uncover the silver lining, start by surrounding yourself with optimistic friends and avoiding "toxic" acquaintances who drag you down. Next, identify those instances that trigger pessimistic thoughts. Correct this destructive habit by acknowledging any positive aspects of "negative" situations. For instance, rather than harping on the negative circumstances of a rainy day - such as increased road traffic - focus on positive factors, such as the tranquil sounds and smells of rain, the decreased risk of drought, or the beautiful flowers that will develop as a result. Psychologists call this strategy reframing. And, experts report that consistent reframing can metamorphose a pessimist into an optimist.

**Our purpose is to educate and adjust families toward optimal health
with natural chiropractic care.**