

Commentary: Let's kick off Caribbean Wellness Day with specific steps to live longer

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September 13th 2008 is the first "Caribbean Wellness Day," in commemoration of the landmark summit by CARICOM Heads of Government in 2007. Their Port-of-Spain Declaration called on Ministries of Health to set up "comprehensive plans for the screening and management of chronic diseases and risk factors so that by 2012, 80% of people with NCDs would receive quality care and have access to preventive education based on regional guidelines."



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AFP PHOTO**

I join them in the observation of the second Saturday in September as "Caribbean Wellness Day," and urge action by all so that we can make the Caribbean an even healthier place to live and visit. I want to kick off this day by recommending a series of specific steps everyone in the Caribbean can, and should take, every day to add years to their lives.

You can participate in today's Caribbean Wellness Day and start the habit of doing these things every day, and live as much as 14 years longer. There are four basic steps everyone can take, especially those over 40 years of age who do not regularly exercise. How?

Don't smoke  
Take no more than 2 alcoholic drinks per day,  
Eat fruits and vegetables, and  
Exercise 30 minutes per day

Why are these important? Tobacco is the only product that kills, when used as directed. Tobacco will kill up to 50 percent of its regular users, so don't smoke. Check your blood pressure, because high blood pressure is the greatest risk factor for death in our CARICOM countries, and in the world. Exercise 30 minutes per day because moderate exercise cuts your risk of heart attack in half, and eat less salt and less fat. It's better not to add salt at the table, and to stick to fruits and vegetables as much as possible.

The Pan American Health Organization will work with countries to promote healthy living for prevention and control of chronic diseases. We ask everyone, from government to the medical community to media houses across the region to help promote physical activity, healthy eating and no tobacco, blood pressure and weight checks. The private sector can also participate, with restaurants serving tasty, nutritious fast foods, neighborhoods holding walks and competitions, schools distributing health education materials to students to bring home to their families, and churches urging their members to exercise.

Remember: Take a few steps to live longer! Your family and your community will thank you.