

Basic health rules / Accepted by Grace, not Rules

Tammy: Most of us want a healthy lifestyle. We want to help our families to be healthy too, don't we?

Carol: I know I do! But sometimes I feel overwhelmed by all the advice for living a better life. You hear so many different ideas on the radio and TV. And what about all the advice from the doctor - and your aunty and your neighbor!

Tammy: Hello! I'm Tammy, and this is Women of Hope.

Carol: Hi, I'm Carol. It's good to be with you today. Sometimes I feel confused by all that advice. But it's good to stop sometimes and think about ways we *can* improve our everyday life for ourselves, *and* our families. So we asked our doctor, 'What are the *basic* rules we should follow to keep ourselves healthy?'

Tammy: She told us a lot of good things to share with you. We thought we'd talk today about some *general* rules about good food, exercise and keeping clean. You probably already know a lot of this, so see if you agree.

And as you listen, think of one area that could be made better and focus on that for a few weeks. Then once you've made that change, work on another area.

If there's one thing that really interests you, then I encourage you to make *those* changes to start with. It's better to *keep* working on *one or two* improvements rather than trying to make too many changes at once.

Here are a few ideas for you to think about.

Carol: First, let's think about good *nutrition* for our families. Around the world we women usually provide most of the meals for the household. That's a huge responsibility. And often we don't have much money to spend on high quality food. But usually we have *some* choices, so let's talk about making the *best* choices we can. Our bodies need a *range* of foods to keep them healthy. What do you think should be the *main* part of your diet? What's the staple food where you live...the main food you eat?

(Producers - suggest local staple food like rice, wheat, millet.)

Remember we need *energy* from the food we eat. For a healthy diet we need to get most of this energy from a group of foods called carbohydrates. These include rice, potatoes, grains (like wheat, oats, corn and barley), bread, noodles and pasta. So most of the food we eat should come from these basic ingredients.

Tammy: Fatty foods and sugar also give us energy, and they often taste good! But too much fat can be very bad for our heart and arteries. One change you could make is to use a little less oil or ghee when cooking. Or cook a couple more boiled meals during the week rather than fried meals. If vegetable oil is available it's a great alternative to animal fat such as ghee.

Carol: Our bodies also need a range of minerals and vitamins to keep us healthy. We only need these nutrients in small amounts but they are vitally important for us. They help our bodies fight infections...recover from illness...heal from injuries...and grow. They are the building blocks that help children's brains, eyesight and internal organs develop...their heart, liver, kidneys etc. One great way to get these tiny building blocks of life into our bodies is to eat more fruit and vegetables. Nutrition experts tell us to try to eat 5 portions of fruit or vegetables a day. One portion is about the amount a person can fit in the palm of their hand. Try to have lots of different *colors* of fruits and vegetables; that will give you a good range of nutrients...those vitamins and minerals.

Tammy: That might sound a lot, and I know sometimes it's hard to get fresh vegetables and fruit. But when you go shopping for fruit and vegetables get as many different types and colored ones as you can, and buy those that are in season.

Carol: And maybe when you're planting your vegetable garden think of planting a variety of vegetables.

Tammy: Do you eat red meat or poultry? These are a great source of iron, and protein, that we need to build and repair our bodies. Fish is even better! But you only need a small portion of these. If you are vegetarian, or meat is too expensive, you could eat eggs and pulses, such as beans, peas and lentils. These also contain high levels of protein and iron.

Carol: And we shouldn't forget dairy foods, like milk, cheese and yoghurt. They contain *calcium*, which helps to make our bones stronger. This is particularly important for children as their bones develop and grow.

Ok, so what did we say? We should aim to have a basic diet of starchy carbohydrate food for energy... a variety of fruits and vegetables of different colors... and a smaller amount of *protein* food from plants or animals.

Tammy: We didn't say much about the ones that most of us like - sugar and fat! And I guess you know why – they're not so good for us, so we should have them in small amounts.

Carol: Yes, they're occasional treats. We don't really need to add sugar at all because many foods already contain natural sugars, though we do need *some* fats or oils in our diet.

Tammy: How does your family eat? Are you spending your money wisely to get the best food value you can afford? Do you think there are changes you *could* make to eat better? Where could you start?

Carol: Here on Women of Hope we've been talking about basic rules for good health.

Exercise is another great way to stay healthy. Exercise helps us to be fit; it also helps our mental health. It helps reduce stress and anxiety; it lifts our mood and helps us sleep better. Much cheaper than taking pills!

Tammy: Our doctor said that exercise is anything that makes your lungs and heart work harder. By exercising our heart and lungs we make them stronger and protect ourselves from heart attacks and high blood pressure. Exercise helps prevent some serious conditions like diabetes and strokes, and even some cancers. And it helps strengthen our bones so that we are less likely to get broken bones (like a broken hip) and back pain in old age.

Carol: You know that you're exercising when you feel a bit out of breath and sweaty. We should try to exercise every day for about 30 minutes (or in 2 short bursts of 15

minutes). Of course, you might do that already, if you do physical work every day...like working in a garden.

Tammy: Many people say exercise is boring or they're too busy. So how could you make it fun? Maybe by dancing... playing sports... swimming... cycling... or running. You could walk briskly to work or do heavy gardening work. One great way to exercise is to play with children. They're always running and have so much energy. And they know how to make exercise fun! We should encourage our children to exercise each day because it helps their growth and development. It also helps them concentrate and learn better at school.

Carol: Some people think that exercise is bad for elderly people. This is not true. We should keep exercising as we get older. In fact it's *particularly* important for this stage of our life, though it may be easier to do in shorter bursts rather than for a long time. We're less likely to fall over and hurt ourselves if we exercise regularly.

Tammy: Did your parents always tell you to wash your hands? That's probably the most important way to avoid catching infectious diseases. ...And it's so simple! I learnt these rules: always wash my hands after using the toilet, before I prepare food and before I eat. And of course, when they are dirty. And I need to wash the whole of my hands – between my fingers and over the back of my hands as well.

Carol: Bacteria are those invisible germs that cause diseases. They just love raw meat and eggs so its very important to prepare these raw ingredients separately to other food. We need to cook them thoroughly to kill any bacteria. I try to keep my kitchen as clean as possible - I don't want to serve my family meals with bacteria in them, do you?

Tammy: Is your water safe? There are often bacteria in water so it's a good idea to boil water well and then let it cool down before drinking it. This is especially important to keep our children well.

Carol: I hope these tips have reminded you of simple ways to make your family life healthier. We can all improve: I could certainly eat more vegetables...

Tammy: ...and I could exercise more...

Carol: ...and we could probably all be more careful about cleanliness and hygiene. So let's all think of one thing we could change straight away to help us stay healthy. You *can* make a difference.

Tammy: Welcome back to Women of Hope. Those were some good rules to keep us healthy. But do rules help us to get right with God? Let me ask you: how do *you* think we can be sure that God will accept us? Do you think we must keep all God's laws, every single one, or he will reject us? Maybe you think we will be ok if we do more good things than bad things - as though God has scales to weigh the good and the bad. He puts all our good actions on one side and the bad on the other, and sees which side is heavier.

Carol: Or maybe you think God is so kind he doesn't really mind what we do, he will welcome us anyway. Or does God just pick out some people and reject the rest? It would be good for you to think about these questions while we listen to a song.

Carol: You're with Women of Hope. Lately, Fran's been telling us stories about the first Christians, or followers of Jesus Christ. She has another one for us today.

Fran: Today I want to tell you about a time when the early Christians had to think very hard about this question; 'How do we, who are sinful, become right with God, who is holy?' They didn't all agree on how to do this at first...they had different ideas.

Did you know that Jesus Christ, God's Son on earth, was Jewish? He was born in the land of Israel, in the Jewish community, and he fulfilled the promises that God had made to the people of Israel over many centuries. But he came to bring the *whole world* back to God, not just his own people.

God gave the people of Israel some symbols of their covenant, or agreement, with God; one of the most important was circumcision. Circumcision is a small operation on the foreskin of a baby boy. For Jews it was a sign of their special relationship with God, so it was very important to them. You need to know this, to understand what happened next.

After Jesus had gone back to heaven, his followers preached his message far and wide. At first all these followers were Jews, but soon many other people heard and believed in Jesus. They were called Gentiles

Now, here's the story from the Bible. (Acts 15)

Paul and Barnabas were preaching the message of Jesus to the Gentiles. They told these pagan Gentiles that all they had to do was believe in Jesus and accept him as their Master and Saviour. But some of the strict Jewish believers thought that God would only accept people who joined the Jewish religion and kept all the Jewish rituals and laws - especially circumcision!

So the leaders called a meeting in Jerusalem to talk about it. Paul and Barnabas travelled all the way from Antioch, in northern Syria, to attend. They gave a report, saying, 'God performed miracles through us, and many Gentiles have simply believed in Jesus and received the gift of God's Holy Spirit.' There was lots of discussion; it got quite heated!

Peter, one of the leaders, reminded them, 'We believed and were saved purely because the Lord Jesus was so kind to us, not because we deserved it. And it's the same for believers from other nations.'

Carol: Of course no-one could keep the law perfectly - the Jewish people failed many times. I certainly can't keep God's law perfectly, can you? So if it depends on keeping every single law, not *one* of us has a chance! We all need God's forgiveness; we can't earn our way to heaven.

Fran: That's just what Peter meant. Then James, another leader, spoke up. He quoted *God's* words from their holy book, saying, 'So all the rest of mankind will come to me, all the Gentiles whom I have called to be my own. So says the Lord, who made this known long ago.' You see, God always planned to call people of all nations.

Then James added, 'I don't think we should make trouble for the Gentiles who are turning to God. I suggest we write to them, telling them that they don't need to become Jews to be right with God. But we should ask them to be careful not to do things like

eating food that has been sacrificed to idols. They should avoid serving food that would offend Jewish Christians (blood, for example) and they should keep themselves from any wrong sexual behavior.'

They all agreed with this, so they wrote the letter and sent it with their warm greetings. Paul and Barnabas and some other messengers carried it back to the Gentile Christians in Antioch. When the believers there read it, they were filled with joy! The messengers from Jerusalem encouraged them and made them strong in their faith in Jesus.

That's the end of the story from God's word.

Tammy: Let's make sure we can remember this story. What did the strict Jewish Christians say? They said that the Gentiles must keep the Jewish rituals and laws and be circumcised, in order to be accepted by God. Did everyone agree? No, not at all. Do you remember what Peter said?

Carol: He said, 'We believed and were saved purely because the Lord Jesus was so kind to us, not because we deserved it, and it's the same for believers from other nations.'

Fran: So what did the leaders at Jerusalem decide to do? They decided to write a letter telling the Gentile believers that they were saved by God's kindness, not by keeping the law.

Tammy: I'm sure those Gentile Christians would have been so happy! Now they knew they were on the right path. All they needed to do was to believe in Jesus and make him their Lord and Master. Then God would begin to change them from the inside. They didn't need to study the old Jewish laws and worry about keeping them so that God would accept them. No, God accepted them when they trusted Jesus. Then, as they learned about Jesus and followed his ways, God's Holy Spirit inside them would show them how to change their lives to please God.

Carol: You might wonder why the leaders told them not to eat blood, or food sacrificed to idols, and to avoid sexual sins. Were these new things that they had to do for God to forgive them? I don't think so.

Fran: No, these things were not needed for God to forgive them; but it was good advice to help these believers to live clean, right lives and to live happily together. They came from different cultures and it would be easy for them to upset each other, wouldn't it? If they ate food associated with idols, others might think they still worshipped those worthless idols, and get confused. And if they ate food with blood in it, that would offend Jewish Christians who had been brought up not to do that. They were to think about how they could get on well together and help each other. They were not to just do anything they felt like.

Carol: And they probably needed to be reminded about God's standards for sex and marriage, because the pagan people around them had *very different* ideas. It's still good for us to think about how we affect other people by the way we live. Every culture has its own ideas, and we have to think about what will be helpful to those around us, as well as what will please God.

Fran: Sometimes I find people who still think they can be good enough to please God and be accepted, because they keep all the rules of their community. Are you like that?

Tammy: And sometimes I meet people who feel hopeless because they know they *can't* keep all the rules. Are you like *that*? What does God's word say?

Fran: Paul wrote to some Gentile Christians, 'Everyone has sinned, and is far away from God's saving presence. But by the free gift of God's grace they can all be put right with him through Christ Jesus, who sets them free' (Rom 3:23, GNB).

Carol: 'Everyone has sinned'- so none of us can be proud or think we're good enough.

Tammy: But remember what Peter said? 'We believed and were saved purely because the Lord Jesus was so kind to us, not because we deserved it, and it's the same for believers from other nations.'

All we need to do is accept this gift from God by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. That's really good news! You *can* be sure that God will accept you! You can have a new start in life as you begin to live to please him.

Carol: We need to go now. I hope you'll think about these things. If you have any questions, you can contact us....

Fran: Goodbye, my friend...

Tammy: Goodbye, and God bless you.

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