



## Lifestyle Medicine

# A Prescription for Good Health

By Robin Frank

Lifestyle changes such as eating right, exercising and getting more sleep can certainly improve one's health, but many times it is easier said than done. Lifestyle medicine programs can help by providing people with the information, support and tools they need to develop and maintain good lifestyle choices for lasting change.

"These programs use a coordinated team-based approach that integrates six 'pillars' of good health to treat, reverse and prevent chronic lifestyle-related diseases," explains Dr. Heidi Prather, director of the Lifestyle Medicine program at Hospital for Special Surgery (HSS), which has outpatient locations in Paramus and Saddle River. "Physicians, dietitians, physical therapists, exercise physiologists and a health coach partner with motivated individuals to help them make meaningful and long-lasting changes that will benefit all aspects of their health for years to come."

### SIX PILLARS OF LIFESTYLE MEDICINE

The six pillars include a healthy diet of whole foods that are plant predominant; physical activity; sleep health; stress management; avoidance of risky substances, such as tobacco, and reduced alcohol intake; and positive social connections and support, Dr. Prather explains.

Patients with orthopedic problems and co-existing health conditions have achieved positive results after participating in the HSS program, which it launched to help people better manage pain, improve movement and mobility and enhance their overall health. Some individuals have participated to lose weight or lower their hemoglobin A1C, a measure of blood sugar levels, so they could qualify for joint replacement surgery. Being in the best health possible before orthopedic surgery can also help people in their recovery and improve outcomes.

The concept of making lifestyle changes to improve common health conditions is not new, Dr. Prather notes. "Patient care guidelines for the initial treatment of the most common lifestyle-related chronic conditions—diabetes,

obesity, hypertension and heart disease—typically include lifestyle changes such as losing weight, eating a healthier diet and getting more exercise, rather than immediately starting treatment with medication," she explains. "What is new is the recognition of lifestyle medicine as a well-defined practice in today's health-care environment."

### MOTIVATION AND PARTICIPATION

An intensive lifestyle medicine program at HSS runs for three to five months and is geared toward highly motivated patients. "They are active participants in their care, which is very different from conventional medicine, where patients passively receive an intervention," Dr. Prather explains. "They learn about how their lifestyle affects their musculoskeletal health. They start with short-term goals, and once their health improves, they are able to move towards personal long-term goals."

"We're looking at the whole person and assessing all their needs to improve their health. It really is a life-changer," says Cara Suter, care coordinator and program facilitator. One of her roles is to

follow up with patients every few weeks to see how they are doing and answer any questions or concerns they may have.

Virtual group programming also helps patients achieve their goals. Every couple of weeks, Dr. Prather offers talks and facilitates group discussions on exercise, stress management, sleep and even happiness.

A lifestyle medicine program may be covered by insurance, but people are advised to check their specific plan to check co-payments, deductibles and fees that they may need to pay out of pocket.

### BENEFITS OF TREATMENT

Vincent Luppino, a physical therapist and representative of the Lifestyle Medicine program at HSS Paramus, has seen the benefits when treating individuals with chronic pain. "Usually, these patients have had multiple treatments including surgery, injections and other medications that may not have fully resolved their symptoms," he says. "I've seen time and again the importance of lifestyle medicine strategies, which include a well-rounded individualized physical therapy program, in pain management."

As a health care professional, Luppino has been motivated to develop good habits to enhance his own well-being. He has incorporated lifestyle medicine strategies into his life, using a fitness tracker, making sure he gets enough exercise and incorporating deep breathing into his daily routine, which has helped improve his sleep. For others, an individualized program with a plan of action and strong support may be the impetus they need to improve their current health and lower their risk of future disease.