

4 Lies We Tell Ourselves About Our Health

Most of us have lied to ourselves about health issues from time to time, usually to justify doing something that's not good for us.

Maybe you've rationalized having an extra glass of wine or piece of chocolate, for example, because "it's good for the heart," ignoring the "in moderation" part. Such white lies are a classic defense mechanism, says Dr. David Sack, chief executive of Promises Treatment Centers in Malibu, Calif. "It's a form of protection we use to shield ourselves from difficult situations and emotions or to promote an image of ourselves that we want to believe." As long as you keep things in perspective, some fibs won't hurt you. But when you convince yourself that a major lie about your health is true, whether it's that you're invulnerable or doomed, it can have serious consequences. Consider these false assumptions:

"I'll never get sick." Ignorance may feel like bliss, but it's also risky. "Some people don't want to know if a problem exists because they feel fine," Sack says, so they avoid checkups and tests, even when all medical advice says they shouldn't. "Others may not consider themselves old enough to need to worry about health problems, particularly if they eat right and exercise." Wrong. Just as there's no reason to fear making long-term plans because you may be laid low by illness, you also shouldn't become lackadaisical about your health just because you've never had a major problem. "As we age, there is an increased risk of health issues," Sack says. "While you should expect to be healthy and do all you can to maintain health, you also need to be realistic. Things like heart disease, diabetes, dementia and other conditions are possible, but you can nip a problem in the bud by doing everything possible to preserve your health." "I'll get what my mom had no matter what I do" A family history of heart trouble, cancer or diabetes should be a concern, but it's not a guarantee of disease and you shouldn't treat it as such. Patients who believe they can't avoid their family medical history often subconsciously allow themselves to fall into unhealthy habits, according to Dr. Mark Anderson, author of *Age to Perfection: How to Thrive to 100 Healthy, Happy, and Wise*. For example, thinking you're doomed to high blood pressure or diabetes just because "all the women in my family have it" could lead to overindulging in unhealthy foods because you've resigned yourself to getting the disease.

"Family history is only a small part of the picture," Anderson says. "Just because your father or brother died of a heart attack, it doesn't mean you will." For one thing, advancements in medical care have radically changed the prognoses for conditions seen as death sentences two generations ago. Instead of obsessing about your family history, focus on your current habits, diet and lifestyle. "Those almost always play a bigger role than genetics," Anderson says. "Do everything you can to protect yourself, including regular physicals and healthy living." "I don't need a physical. I feel fine." You might feel great, but have you considered that you could do even better? "I can't count how many people have told me how healthy they are," Anderson says. "Unfortunately, those are usually the ones who have hidden problems, such as vitamin deficiencies or hormone imbalances. Once these are corrected, the patient feels better than ever." Refusing to be proactive with regular exams could delay the diagnosis of health issues, like diabetes and heart disease. "The danger is not finding the problem soon enough to do something about it," Anderson says. "I tell patients all the time that if you have diabetes, cancer or heart disease, you still have it whether your doctor has told you about it yet or not."

"I have no time to exercise." Sorry, your doctor just doesn't buy it — and you know it's not true, too. We all have time to exercise, no matter how busy, tired or stressed out we are. You can sneak exercise into your workday, turn your daily walk into a workout, get fit at home or return to activities you once loved, like running, at any age. Falling prey to the lie that exercise can happen only in a gym or on a track will hold you back, Anderson says. "Exercise can be taking the stairs at work instead of the elevator, parking in the furthest stall at the grocery store or taking the dog for a walk." Equally troubling, when you tell yourself that you can't exercise, or don't need to because you have a healthy weight, you're missing out on the other crucial benefits fitness can provide, like balance, stamina, disease avoidance, and the potential warding off cognitive decline. Regular exercise also helps you maintain bone and muscle mass, which are critical to preventing future breaks. Find a Truth Teller

One of the best ways to avoid buying into unhealthy lies is to maintain a good relationship with a doctor who'll tell you the truth. "You need a medical team member you can trust," Sack says. If your doctor tends to call you out on your mistaken beliefs, all the better. Just make sure you're open to listening when they do try to set you straight. "Communicating with your physician or nurse practitioner about health concerns involves talking and listening," he says. "That will help you from buying into these fibs."