

Maintaining health while young is good investment

Jerry Smith of Hamilton pampers the pickup truck he purchased a short time ago with careful attention to maintenance and cleaning to ensure the vehicle lasts.

It's the same principle the 28-year-old St. Dominic, Hamilton, parishioner applies to his own body.

Though Mr. Smith has no history of cataclysmic health problems in his family tree, the Baltimore City firefighter believes his regimen of regular workouts at the gym coupled with the various recreational sports he participates in will keep his body healthy as he gets older.

"I have every intention of living a long, healthy life," he said. "I figure that I should keep my body in good shape now, so it lasts long into old age with few problems."

Mr. Smith's philosophy is a wise one, according to Dr. David Weisman, an internist at Good Samaritan Hospital, Baltimore.

"When the body is young, it has a lot of leeway," said Dr. Weisman, 37, of Timonium. "But cumulative effects catch up with you in your 50s and 60s. It's important to plan for your future in a medically healthy way."

Men in their 20s, 30s and 40s should be mindful of their weight, blood pressure and cholesterol as a preventative measure for good health in their 50s and beyond, he said.

With two-thirds of the U.S. population overweight or obese, medical professionals are beginning to see epidemics of heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure and stroke, Dr. Weisman said.

"The accumulative effects of making poor food choices and exercise habits can be catastrophic to your health after 50," he said, "and it's largely preventable if you take better care of yourself when you are younger."

He recommends that younger men maintain an ideal body weight for themselves through regular exercise, a healthy diet, no smoking and caution regarding the amount of alcohol consumed.

This doesn't mean they have to become a gym rat, Dr. Weisman said.

"Thirty minutes of moderate physical activity - like walking - four times a week will help out," he said. "Developing patterns like taking the stairs over the elevator and parking farther away from the store are good ways of keeping up that physical activity. Developing those habits early can't be overstated enough."

Younger men should also have routine prostate exams, give themselves routine testicular exams and report irregularities to their doctor, avoid sunburns, obtain flu vaccinations, wear seatbelts in the car and helmets when riding a bicycle, Dr. Weisman recommends.

"What generally kills men in their 20s and 30s are accidents," he said. "Men in those age groups tend to think they are indestructible."

American men have so many temptations, whether it's unhealthy foods or activities, it's easy to settle into a lifestyle that doesn't promote longevity, said Father James P. Kiesel, pastor of St. Dominic, Hamilton.

"You can overpower that temptation of more, whether it's food or liquor," Father Kiesel said. "Get exercise, go for an exam and you will be cooperating, with God's grace, to respect our bodies."