4.8 Monitor Your Body

Regularly assess your physical and mental health.

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When you're not experiencing pain or other physical symptoms, it's easy to assume that your body is well. Even though you may feel fine, however, odds are that you may be functioning suboptimally in one or more ways. It's never been easier to measure potent biomarkers, either at home or by going to the lab. You can count your steps, check the quality of your sleep, and measure your calorie intake. These techniques can help you pinpoint the weaknesses in your health regime and determine what you need to change to reach your goals.

In a worst-case scenario, disease may be brewing beneath the surface. Unless you take proactive steps to investigate your health, you may be unaware of issues until they manifest at an advanced stage. Fortunately, personal fitness monitoring, especially combined with regular lab work and checkups with your doctor, can uncover latent conditions, enabling you to take action before they become serious.

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- Understand your body better and make informed choices.
- Discover issues before they become significant health problems.
- Gain a sense of control over your health.

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- The abundance of data can be overwhelming, and not all of it will be actionable.
- With work and home obligations, it may be hard to prioritize regular lab tests.

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At home, there are now numerous options for monitoring your health, many of them accessible through your phone or smartwatch. Some of the most common include tracking your heart rate, counting your steps, and measuring both the quantity and quality of your sleep.

These tools can be very useful for understanding and optimizing the functioning of your body. For example, if you discover that you aren't sleeping well, you can make changes to your sleep routine to encourage deeper rest. You may want to try wearing earplugs at night or changing your mattress. If you discover that you have a condition, such as sleep apnea, you can take steps to treat it. The variety of tools for health tracking is wide and constantly evolving, so it's best to do your own research online to discover what's currently available.

The next level of health monitoring involves visiting your doctor regularly—every three to six months. Depending on your age, stage of life, and general health indicators, your doctor may give you specific recommendations about staying healthy or improving your health, including getting lab work done. If your doctor doesn't request lab work, you should ask for it yourself.

Tests should include basic health markers such as your blood sugar and cholesterol count, vitamin

and mineral levels, and other traditional health markers. In addition, you should ask for tests related to:

- Sexually transmitted infections (STIs): Even if you are married or otherwise in a monogamous relationship, it's worth getting tested occasionally.
- Functional tests: These include a thorough look at your nutrient levels, your diet, and the impact of any environmental toxins.
- Genetic testing: If you have a genetic predisposition to a particular disease, it's a good idea to get as much warning as possible so that you can take steps to limit your risk.

Most lab work should be done on an annual basis. If you see indications that something may be wrong, however, it's a good idea to ask your doctor for more frequent tests. Together, home monitoring and lab tests can alert you to potential problems or suboptimal performance as early as possible, giving you a chance to respond and, if necessary, change direction or seek treatment.

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1. 23andMe genetic testing: https://23andme.com/
2. Genetic Genie: https://geneticgenie.org/
3. "Routine Medical Checkups Have Important Health Benefits": https://news.feinberg.northwestern.edu/2021/06/11/routine-medical-checkups-have-important-health-benefits/
4. "How Can We Self-Monitor Our Health?": https://nowpatient.com/blog/how-can-we-self-monitor-our-health