**Maggie McKay (Host):** With a new year right around the corner, it's time for new, better choices when it comes to our health. So today, we'll find out more on a study that guides us to a healthier lifestyle with Dr. David Drozek, DO, Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine. Welcome to Memorial Health Radio with Memorial Health System, Ohio. I'm Maggie McKay. Welcome, Dr. Drozek. I can't wait to talk more about getting on the right track for the new year and the 10 healthy tips to help us get on that road. So, it's great to have you here. Can you just tell us a little bit about this EPIC study and what EPIC stands for?

**David Drozek, DO:** The EPIC study stands for the European Perspective Investigation into Cancer and Nutrition. The study was originally designed to look at cancer risk based on lifestyle practices, but expanded out as they looked at other factors as well that influence chronic lifestyle-related diseases.

**Host:** And so, what did it find about the risk of cancer for people who lived healthy lifestyles?

**David Drozek, DO:** Yeah. For people who followed the four lifestyle healthy practices in the EPIC study, there was 36% less risk of developing cancer. But beyond that, there was 93% less risk of diabetes, 81% less risk of heart attacks, 50% less risk of stroke and 80% less risk of major chronic disease and an increased life expectancy of about 14 years.

**Host:** Wow. If that doesn't get us on the right track, I don't know what does. So, what are EPIC's four healthy practices?

**David Drozek, DO:** The four practices they identified were never smoking; having a body mass index, or BMI, of less than 30; physical activity on an average of 30 minutes a day; and eating a healthy diet high in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low in meat.

**Host:** Dr. Drozek, at Memorial Health, they have something called Fresh Start. What are these classes?

**David Drozek, DO:** Yes. These are community classes that focus on healthy lifestyle practices. We have derived the contents from the recommendations of the American College of Lifestyle Medicine that focuses on the six pillars of healthy living. These are a plant-predominant diet, physical activity, stress management, control of unhealthy substances, meaningful relationships, and restorative sleep.

**Host:** Let's break it down into the 10 healthy lifestyle choices. I mean, it sounds a little daunting when you talk about them all together. But when you really look at it separately, I think it's doable. So, let's see what they say about eating more plants, because everybody is talking about that for the last few years.

**David Drozek, DO:** Right. The evidence is mounting that eating a plant-predominant diet based on plant-based whole foods is a healthy choice that has lots of benefits for us. So in our classes, we encourage people to start out by eating 5:1, five servings of fruits and vegetables, two servings of whole grains, and a cup of legumes that's beans, peas, and lentils a day. Of course, you can go well beyond that. But to get some benefits, that's a good place to start.

**Host:** Can you get them in like a shake? You know, a lot of people make smoothies.

**David Drozek, DO:** Yeah. Smoothies are a good way to do it because they have the fiber in them. Juicing, we tend to discourage, because juicing pulls out the fiber and lots of the nutritional value that comes with it.

**Host:** And the EPIC study also advised cutting down on meat. This is hard for a lot of people. What do they mean? Like, how much meat should you eat, let's say, a week?

**David Drozek, DO:** Well, from other studies like the Adventist Health Study, we see the maximum health benefits are for the people who don't eat meat at all. So, we try to encourage people to at least decrease it enough that they can find some risk reduction, some benefit in their health that they're looking for. We tend to negotiate that with them. We can use some numbers like 2-2-2, encouraging them to move to maybe two servings of fish a week, two servings of poultry a month, and two servings of red or processed meat a year. If that's too stringent, then we work on it some other way. But again, the best approach overall is to go completely plant-based.

**Host:** Wow, two servings of red or processed meat a year. That's very little. I mean, I'm not a meat eater, but that really sounds like wow.

**David Drozek, DO:** That's a stretch for some people, yes.

**Host:** Yes, a stretch. That's what I was looking for. What about going vegan or vegetarian or pescatarian?

**David Drozek, DO:** Sure, that's even better yet. But we want to point out that a vegan diet can be very unhealthy. It can actually be worse than eating those animal products if it's high in things like donuts and french fries.

**Host:** True. Okay. One we all know about, and I swear it's at the top of every list you ever look at around New Year's, one thing that we can all do, and no excuses, exercise. And it's so crucial. Tell us why.

**David Drozek, DO:** Yes. Physical activity is important. There have been many studies coming out recently showing that just increasing your motion of any type is really beneficial and decreasing that sedentary time. So, we encourage people to work toward 30 minutes a day of moderate physical activity. Or if they want to get more vigorous in their activity, it could be 15 minutes a day. Or another way to do it is maybe to count your steps. If you can walk and have a step counter, which are built into many of our devices that we wear or carry in our pocket. So if they can work toward 10,000 steps a day, there'll be some significant benefit for them.

**Host:** And also, like you said, it boosts your mood and decreases depression. And it has so many benefits.

**David Drozek, DO:** Yes, we could have a whole podcast on the benefits of physical activity for sure.

**Host:** You know, I never believed that it was so important to get sleep until I got a little older. And you mentioned earlier, get restorative sleep. What is that?

**David Drozek, DO:** Yeah. Restorative sleep, not just being in bed, but a good rule of thumb for measuring how good your sleep was is to ask two questions. One is, do you feel refreshed when you wake up? And the second is, do you need a nap before noon? If you can wake up in the morning feeling refreshed and you don't need a nap before noon, then you're probably getting sufficient restorative sleep. However, if you can't do either of those, you need that pot of coffee to keep you going, then maybe you're not getting enough good sleep at night.

**Host:** I was really surprised and concerned when I read that lack of sleep increases risk of a lot of common diseases, like what?

**David Drozek, DO:** Diabetes; hypertension, which can lead to strokes; cancer, anxiety, depression, and many others.

**Host:** My goodness. Wow. I had no idea. Okay. Alcohol. Is a little okay or should we avoid it altogether?

**David Drozek, DO:** Recognizing our culture, I know, again, sort of like meat, it's not likely that people are going to give it up altogether? However, I do like to let people know it's an addictive carcinogenic substance. And if people are going to use it, they should never use it as a medication. Don't drink alone, don't drink to relax, don't drink when you're sad. Save it for those occasional celebrations and that's not every day.

**Host:** Carcinogenic, alcohol? How so?

**David Drozek, DO:** The underlying mechanism for cancer-causing effects of alcohol has to do with the inflammation that it causes.

**Host:** Wow.

**David Drozek, DO:** The link with certain cancers, for example, breast cancer in particular, there's no lower safe limit. So, any consumption of alcohol can measurably increase the risk of breast cancer.

**Host:** This is very eye opening, boy. Learning a lot already. Dr. Drozek, so many people start their day with caffeine. It's such a part of our culture, but what is it doing to our health?

**David Drozek, DO:** For most people, a cup or two of coffee or other caffeinated beverage in the morning might be just fine. However, some people suffer with anxiety, they don't sleep well, they have heartburn, stomach pain, other things related to the caffeine. And if that's an issue, then probably it's best to avoid the caffeine altogether.

**Host:** What about cooking at home versus eating out? I think we all know the answer to which is better. But why is it so beneficial to eat your meals and cook them at home?

**David Drozek, DO:** Studies have shown that when we eat the meals we cook at home, it decreases the risk of diabetes and heart disease. That's because we tend to make healthier choices when we're looking directly at them. But when we go to the fast food restaurants or the restaurants in general, they're trying to make food that really appeals to that innate craving we have for salt, sugar, and fat. So, they add a lot of things in there that just aren't to our benefit.

**Host:** Right. And what about processed foods? Should we cut those out altogether? What does that really mean? Because I read it and I think, "Okay, what does processed include?"

**David Drozek, DO:** Well, the processed foods in particular have high levels of salt, sugars, and fats and oils. That's done with a purpose because, as I mentioned, we crave those naturally because our ancestors had those in short supply. So when we could get them, we were designed to go ahead and take those in. But the food industry in general knows that we thrive on those, and they've added those to the foods to make us eat all the more. Then, we get the negative effects of the high salt in the diet, leading to hypertension and other issues. The fats and oils and excess sugar all lead to not only extra calories, but other problems as well.

**Host:** My husband always says sugar is the devil, because it's my one vice. I kind of agree with him. But if you had to choose out of those four, what do you think is the most harmful?

**David Drozek, DO:** The fats and oils probably are the worst because they're more concentrated in calories. We hear a lot about carbs, which includes sugar, but the carbs for one gram, which is about a thimbleful, is only 4 calories. While the calories in the same amount of fats and oils, one thimbleful, one gram, is 9. It's more than double the calories in the fats and oils than in the sugar.

**Host:** So when it comes to stress, we need to have a little more fun, and engage with friends. And how do we do that when we're working all day and in traffic on the way there and the way home? Then, you get home and you have to make dinner.

**David Drozek, DO:** Well, it needs to be programmed into our life as something that's important. We need to recognize the need to de-stress, to relax. And we all have things we enjoy doing. It can be watching a funny movie that makes us laugh And or it can be taking a walk or even taking a nap. Different things for different people, but the underlying factor is to help you disengage from that thinking process, from remembering those things that are causing that stress reaction in you.

**Host:** And how important are relationships?

**David Drozek, DO:** All the studies are showing more and more that relationships are very key. All other factors equal, lack of relationship, lack of friends greatly increases the risk of death, heart attacks, strokes, diabetes, cancer, and other diseases.

**Host:** Wow. So, let's say you move to a new city, you don't know anybody, it would be a good idea to join a club, right? Do something like that, get around people?

**David Drozek, DO:** Yes, exactly. Look for something. Look for a group or people that are like-minded that do things that you enjoy doing and get connected.

**Host:** All right. You mentioned it in the beginning, but of course, you knew we'd have to talk about smoking and tobacco and I guess pipes and maybe vaping as well.

**David Drozek, DO:** Right. Any use of tobacco is not to your benefit, so it's best to get rid of that tobacco altogether.

**Host:** Is there anything we didn't cover, Dr. Drozek, that you'd like to add in closing?

**David Drozek, DO:** Oh, there's a lot more we could cover, but we don't have the time. So, I think that kind of summarizes it pretty succinctly in a handful of points that I think by themselves are all doable, but yes, they're daunting when you look at them overall at once. But that's the benefit of our classes is that we have 10 weekly classes and we cover some of these each class.

**Host:** Right. And if people want to find out more, they can go to freshstart.mhsystem.org. Thank you so much for your time.

**David Drozek, DO:** Thank you. It's been a pleasure.

**Host:** Thank you so much for your time and breaking down this important study that everyone can benefit from. Again, that's Dr. David Drozek. And if you want to find out more, like we said, you can go to mhsystem.org and get connected with one of our providers. And also, freshstart.mhsystem.org.

If you found this podcast helpful, please share it on your social channels, and remember to subscribe, rate, and review this podcast, and check out our entire Memorial Health System podcast library for topics of interest to you. Thanks for listening. I'm Maggie McKay. That wraps up this episode of Memorial Health Radio with Memorial Health System, Ohio.

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