



MEDIA RELEASE

Minister for Health and Ageing

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Prescription for a healthy lifestyle

The Commonwealth Government has today launched a new preventative health program to encourage doctors to advise patients on how to change their lifestyles to improve their health.

The *Lifescrpts Resource Kit* launched today is designed to shift the emphasis in primary health care from management of disease and illness, toward disease prevention and health promotion. It provides a way to help GPs integrate lifestyle changes into their advice to patients, using the accepted format of a written 'prescription'.

However, rather than write a prescription for pills, doctors will be encouraged to discuss ways to make healthier, long term lifestyle changes, and write prescriptions for regular exercise and eating healthier foods.

Lifescrpts targets five lifestyle risk factors that are very common in Australia - smoking, poor nutrition, risky alcohol use, physical inactivity and being overweight. Together, these comprise the largest group of preventable risk factors for death and disease in Australia.

A person who has more than one of these risk factors has a much higher likelihood of developing chronic illness such as diabetes, stroke, mental illness, or heart disease.

Among patients visiting a general practice in 2002-03 more than half were overweight, more than a quarter drank 'at risk' levels, 17 per cent were daily smokers and two-thirds were not active enough.

There is strong evidence that positive lifestyle changes can significantly improve a patient's health. Just 30 minutes of moderate exercise most days of the week promotes good health and reduce the risk of chronic illness. Good advice from a doctor can help a person to change an unhealthy lifestyle.

The *Lifescrpts Resource Kit* will be distributed by Divisions of General Practice and includes a manual for practices, consumer and GP resources and a CD-Rom to teach doctors how to motivate their patients. The *Resource Kit* and the Lifestyle Prescription initiative are part of the Focus on Prevention Package introduced in the 2003-04 Budget.

Further information on the initiative including copies of the *Lifescrpts Resource Kit* is available at: <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/Publishing.nsf/Content/health-pubhlth-strateg-lifescrpts-index.htm>

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