

I want to promote good health for my young generation | Commentary

Orlando Sentinel

By [ANABELLA MUNOZ](#) |
July 23, 2023 at 5:30 a.m.

Our youth generation has always heard the saying “an apple a day keeps the doctor away,” which suggests that eating healthy will keep you in good health, but what if I told you eating healthy is not the only factor to maintain a healthy lifestyle?

In fact, instead of just one factor there are six: physical activity, stress management, healthy eating, avoiding substance abuse, building healthy relationships, and sleeping well. These are the six pillars of lifestyle medicine, an area that has recently gained a lot of attention as a result of the underlying health and behavioral issues faced by the youth generation of Americans.

Not only does my generation face an obesity crisis, but we also face a mental health crisis. American teens are continuously under mental stress as a result of social media usage. According to the Pew Research Center, approximately 70% of teens see anxiety and depression as a major problem among their peers and another 51% and 45% see drug addiction and drinking alcohol as prominent issues.

As a freshman at Montverde Academy, I saw my peers at my school and other Central Florida high schools struggling with these disorders that our generation is struggling with. This was when I decided to act by establishing the nation’s first high school Lifestyle Medicine Club with a mission to not only influence American youth but all generations in adopting the pillars of lifestyle medicine.

To establish the Lifestyle Medicine Club, I first had to surround myself with key mentors such as Dr. Sharon Wasserstrom from the UCF College of Medicine; Leonie Dupuis, who founded the UCF College of Medicine Lifestyle Medicine Interest Group; and Dr. Elizabeth Frates, Assistant Clinical Professor at Harvard University Medical School, who generously gifted the club a copy of “The Lifestyle Medicine Teen Handbook.” This pioneering work led me to become the co-author of The Inauguration of the First High School Lifestyle Medicine Club article which was published in the American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine to outline the steps in creating a Lifestyle Medicine Club and inspire other students in the nation to create one of their own.

In club meetings, students would discuss the importance of each pillar and then brainstorm ideas as a club on how to create an activity to incorporate the community.

For example, when we focused on the healthful eating pillar, we discussed protein sources, saturated fats and cholesterol, then created a healthy bake sale by selling healthy treats such as chocolate-covered strawberries or oatmeal and raisin cookies.

For stress management, the club watched a Deepak Chopra meditation video and learned about the impacts of stress on the body. We promoted a “Paint your Stress Away” activity where students were invited to the campus courtyard to join other students in painting. The club members discussed the importance of healthy relationships, and then interviewed a series of students on camera asking them to choose between truth or dare. Students who chose truth would have to say someone that they love and those who chose dare would have to call someone that they love. This video was posted on Montverde Academy’s TV broadcasting YouTube page to showcase the importance of healthy relationships by reminding loved ones that they are loved.

We plan to expand in the coming school year with a Lifestyle Medicine Week at participating schools. To promote healthful eating, we are hoping to incorporate the dining hall staff into making a healthy plant-based meal. For physical activity, we are hoping to have a color run to promote exercise in a fun way.

As the founder of the first Lifestyle Medicine Club in the U.S., I hope we can continue to spread knowledge on how to live a healthy lifestyle and that there is so much more to better your health than just eating healthy. If you are high schooler interested in joining the Lifestyle Medicine Club activities, you can reach me at: [lifestyle.medicineclub](#) on Instagram

Anabella Munoz | Anabella Munoz, a senior at Montverde Academy, is the founder and leader of the first high school lifestyle medicine club in the United States.