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What Is Health?

Health is a very ill defined term. In the western countries many people see health as a black and white concept. You are healthy unless you have a disease. Many people go to a doctor with some conditions that the doctor will send away saying, “You look healthy to me”.

It may be more useful to look at health as a grayscale of 1 to 100. 1 being almost dead and 100 being incredibly healthy. In this way a person can always be motivated to get healthier. As a person progresses down the scale to ill health that's when they start to have diseases that a doctor can identify like heart disease, cancer, osteoporosis, etc. These conditions could have been prevented had the person looked at health in the way of getting healthier way before they got sick.

So, that begs the question of what exactly is health?

According to the Ayurveda system, health can be seen from several different layers. At the core is spiritual health, defined as living a life in harmony with your true purpose in life. It can also be defined as a life in service to God or some cause greater than yourself. Another aspect to spiritual health is to lead a life that does not cause harm to other living beings. This is why in Ayurveda, a vegetarian diet is recommended for spiritual life. Spiritual health is more important than physical health, but is also the basis of all other forms of health such as emotional and mental health.

The next layer of health is your mental and emotional health. The Bach flower remedies were introduced because Dr. Bach recognized this level of importance. He believed that mental and emotional health imbalances usually lead to physical diseases. Nature, in her wisdom, has given people natural remedies that help restore health.

Chinese and Indian medicine also recognize the importance of this layer for optimum health. In Chinese Medicine, for example, someone who gets angry a lot can easily get liver problems. Too much sadness affects the function of the heart, etc. Herbs, acupuncture, exercise and lifestyle changes will help bring a person back into balance.

The last layer of health is physical health. If a person is spiritually and emotionally healthy then physical health is a lot easier to come by. This is the level where exercise, etc. plays a bit part. There are many people in the Western world who just emphasize this level of health. Bodybuilders, joggers, etc. sometimes suddenly get cancer or drop dead from a heart attack and people wonder, why? It's not a mystery. It's usually because they have been out of balance on the deepest layers of health.

So, which activities can I engage in, in order to stay healthy?

On a spiritual level of health, activities such as meditation, prayer and humility help one to understand

their true purpose in life as well as generally get them more in touch with deeper aspects of themselves.

Following practices of ahimsa (non violence), also enhance a person's spiritual health. Taking a caring, rather than a judgemental attitude toward all living entities will also enhance a person's spiritual health.

Another aspect of spiritual health is service. It is the nature of the human being to serve someone other than themselves, putting spiritual service, of some sort, as a major component in health.

On a mental and emotional level there are many practices that can be beneficial. Meditation again plays a role here, with calming the mind and getting rid of anxiety. Massage plays a big role in also promoting a deep sense of relaxation and in getting rid of stored up stress and old emotions.

Walking in a peaceful place like the beach or in the forest allows the mind time to digest the many thoughts that overwhelm it during normal day to day activities. Listening to peaceful music and having peaceful colors around will also help.

As mentioned earlier, flower essences can play a big role in helping bring people back to balance on an emotional and mental level. In Ayurveda, eating food more of a sattvic (goodness) nature will help calm the mind. Sattvic foods are vegetarian and are fresh and preferably organically grown.

Ayurveda recommends avoiding strongly stimulating herbs such as garlic, onions, and chilies, except in cases of disease such as a cold or flu, where these herbs are very useful. Otherwise, overuse will cause too raja (passion) in the mind.

For mental and emotional health, it's also important to know one's limits and not push our minds and bodies too hard for too long. Proper rest is important as is not overworking or neglecting one's family relationships.

From a physical health point of view, exercise, stretching, nutrition and massage are the basis of good physical health. Obviously, other activities like not smoking, taking drugs or alcohol, etc. and not having too toxic an environment are also very important as well.

Exercise in general stimulates blood and lymph flow that keeps the circulation going. A person should combine strength building exercises with flexibility exercises. One of the best and most ancient forms of exercise is yoga. Yoga involves stretching and opening up the body as well as stimulating blood and nerve supply throughout the body. Yoga benefits a person's health on a physical, mental and emotional level and can be adapted to suit all ages and levels of fitness. Chi Kung is an ancient Chinese practice similar to Yoga that is also very good for health. As a side note, the literal translation of "yoga" means "to link up with God".

Nutrition is one of the most important factors involved in the overall health of the body. Nutrition is a vast subject and filled with many conflicting philosophies. However, in most ancient and current opinion, the basis of a good diet is a vegan diet of whole, unprocessed foods that are organically grown. The specifics of what diet is best for you may be best approached by learning your Ayurvedic constitution and then making your diet support your constitution. So, what foods may be helpful for one person may actually aggravate another person. This is why some people may diet for a long time but have no success.

Lastly, getting a massage on a regular basis is one of the other best things a person can do to stay healthy or to increase their level of health. Deep tissue massage and/or acupressure are some of the best forms of

massage that get in and unblock the blockages in the flow of chi in the body as well as get deep seated muscle tension out of the body.

Aloha and namaste!