

Discover Bible Studies

#18: The Secret of a Healthy Lifestyle

Contemporary researchers have taken pains to document a truth which the Bible first established: human beings are an integrated whole. What we often divide into the physical, mental, and spiritual parts of a person are really interrelated and inseparable. In other words, what affects the mind, affects the body. Our spiritual condition has an impact on our physical condition, and vice versa. We are a whole person.

For example, scientific researchers have found in controlled studies that happy, joyful laughter produces measurable changes in a person's immune system. You can actually help your body fight disease better by being happy! These studies show how closely the mind and body work together.

Thousands of years ago God's Word pointed out this vital connection between the mind and body which has only recently been accepted into medical theory:

"A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones." -Proverbs 17:22. (Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural texts in the DISCOVER guides are from the New International Version of the Bible [NIV].)

According to the apostle John, how closely related are the mind and body to our spiritual wellbeing?

"Dear friend, I pray that you may ENJOY GOOD HEALTH and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well." -3 John 2.

Our Creator wants us to "enjoy good health." The Word of God can serve as our fountain of health, as well as our fountain of eternal life.

Since physical and mental health and our spiritual well-being go hand-in-hand, Paul makes the following appeal:

"Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." -1 Corinthians 10:31.

The gospel includes both physical and spiritual restoration. A healthful lifestyle can help us be vibrant Christians.

Here are eight principles to follow if you really want to live a healthier and more productive life:

1. PURE AIR

Pure, fresh air is essential to good health. During the day and while sleeping at night, proper ventilation of our home and workplace insures that our blood will always distribute enough oxygen to every part of the body. Taking deep breaths during a morning walk is a great way to oxygenate your body.

The kind of air we breathe is obviously important. Be careful not to subject yourself to fumes, gases or air-borne bacteria from some hidden source. Smoking pollutes the air and is one of today's big killers. Scientific research has established a causal relationship between tobacco and lung cancer, emphysema, and heart disease. The body's addiction to the nicotine in cigarettes makes smoking one of the hardest habits to break. Smoking will kill 12 million people a year by the year 2020 if the present trend continues.

2. SUNLIGHT

"The benefits of sunlight are many:

"1. Fifteen to 30 minutes of daily exposure to sunlight in the early morning or late afternoon helps the body synthesize or make its own vitamin D, an essential nutrient/hormone in the skin. Vitamin D helps blood to produce calcium and phosphorus, which build and repair bone mass.

"2. Sunlight acts as a disinfectant and a killer of bacteria.

"3. The sun provides energy by which the plant kingdom can convert carbon dioxide and water into carbohydrates. . . . Without this process animals and humans would starve to death.

"4. Sunlight also helps a person adjust to night work and relieves depression related to dark days where winter occurs.

"A word of caution: Sunlight can also be harmful. Prolonged exposure can burn skin, increase the risk of skin cancer, speed up the aging process, damage the eyes, and cause cataracts." [All quotations in this Guide are from Look Up and Live: A Guide to Health, Adult Lessons, First Quarter 1993, (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association). Much of the material in this Guide that is not in quotes is condensed from this same publication.]

3. REST

The body must have rest in order to repair itself. We must have time for recreation and rest to relieve the tensions of work and family responsibilities. Without their required dosage of rest, people often experience anxiety, depression, and irritability. Such emotional stress can lead to illness, which will force us to take the rest our bodies were asking for all along. There's simply no substitute for a good night's sleep.

Recharging our spiritual batteries on a daily basis is also important to physical health. A Christian's daily time of meditation, Bible study, and prayer will heal the body as well as the soul. We also need a regular break from the work cycle, a weekly day of rest, and annual or semi-annual vacations.

4. **EXERCISE**

Exercise is vital to our health:

"1. Exercise helps to normalize blood pressure.

"2. Exercise allows more blood to reach all parts of the body, keeping the extremities warm.

"3. Exercise releases both physical and emotional tension, helping you to feel better about life. Exercise is usually the best cure for worry and stress.

"4. Exercise provides electrical energy to the brain and nerve cells. It promotes health by stimulating the immune system. When the body is kept in tone by proper exercise, the mind thinks more creatively and efficiently.

"5. It can help with your complexion and keep you trim.

"6. Exercise makes you more energetic, thus delaying both physical and emotional fatigue.

"7. It aids in the brain's production of a chemical that gives you a sense of well-being and increases your tolerance for pain."

If you have not been exercising, start slowly and increase gradually as you gain endurance. It may be wise to consult your physician before starting. Your goal should be to engage in any type of exercise that is comparable to walking one mile in 15 minutes four or more times a week.

5. **WATER**

Since water is essential to every cell in the body, we should drink plenty of it.

"1. By weight the body is about 70 percent water. . . .

"2. The body requires about two and one half quarts of water per day to perform all of its functions.

Some of these functions include blood circulation, waste removal, nutrient transport, and digestion. . .

"3. The average person has between 15 and 40 billion brain cells. Each one of those is 70 to 85 percent water. Sufficient water to supply these cells helps keep you mentally alert and helps prevent depression and irritability.

"4. It is not only the water you drink that is important. A cool or tepid daily bath or shower improves circulation, thus energizing the body and mind. A shower or bath can also soothe jangled nerves, which can cause illness by weakening the immune system. Bathing also removes impurities from the skin and can reduce fever."

6. PROPER DIET

At creation God instructed Adam and Eve to eat a diet of nuts, grains, and fruits (Genesis 1:29). After Adam and Eve sinned, vegetables were added to their diet (Genesis 3:18). After the flood, the Creator added "clean" flesh foods to the diet (Genesis 7:2-3, 9:1-6).

The flesh of animals contains both saturated fat and cholesterol, which increase the risk of high blood pressure, stroke, heart disease, cancer, obesity, diabetes, and other diseases. Today many physicians advise those who eat meat to consume only lean, well-cooked meat and fish and to do so sparingly.

Because people on a vegetarian diet are healthier and live longer, many experts in nutrition and health urge us to consider returning to humanity's original diet of nuts, grains, and fruits with vegetables added.

If you'd like to start a vegetarian menu, make sure you first understand how to provide a balanced diet without meat. Eat five or six servings a day of a variety of fruits, nuts, grains, legumes, and vegetables. Green and yellow vegetables, along with citrus fruits, are especially important. Use whole grain cereal flour, and use brown rice instead of white. Your intake of starches and complex carbohydrates should consist of six or more servings a day. Replace your intake of animal fats (butter, cream, lard, suet, etc.) with vegetable fats. The above diet is adequate without meat if you use dairy products.

Those who choose to eat meat as a part of their diet, should eat only the meats that the Bible indicates are "clean," or fit for humans to eat. When God gave people permission to eat meat after the flood (Genesis 7:2-3, Leviticus 11:47), He defined which of the flesh foods were clean, and which were unclean and not fit to eat.

Read in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 the list of birds, beasts, and fish God pronounced unfit for food. According to these chapters, clean animals must divide, or split, the hoof and also chew the cud. Clean fish must have both scales and fins. Scavenger birds are forbidden.

Among the unclean animals, swine are especially mentioned and condemned (Deuteronomy 14:8). A high percentage of human bodies autopsied are infected with trichinae. These tiny worms are transmitted to people who eat infected pork. Current scientific research increasingly reveals why God declared some flesh unclean. One

reason may be the danger of disease, such as the trichina worm in pork. Another reason may be the devastating effects of saturated fat on the human digestive system.

7. AVOID THINGS HARMFUL

What warnings does the Bible give about alcoholic beverages?

"Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler; whoever is led astray by them is not wise." - Proverbs 20:1.

"Nor thieves nor the greedy nor DRUNKARDS nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God." -I Corinthians 6:10.

Alcohol affects the following bodily systems:

"1. The immune system-Alcohol decreases the white cells' ability to fight disease, thus increasing the risk of pneumonia, tuberculosis, hepatitis, and several cancers.

"2. The endocrine system-Only two or three alcoholic drinks per day increase the risk of miscarriages, stillbirths, and premature births.

"3. The circulatory system-The use of alcohol increases the risk of coronary heart disease, reduces blood sugar, and elevates blood fats and blood pressure, thus increasing hypertension.

"4. The digestive system-Alcohol irritates the stomach, thereby causing gastric bleeding. .

Habitual use of alcohol raises the risk of fatty liver, hepatitis, and cirrhosis of the liver."

Alcohol is responsible for a large percentage of suicides, auto deaths, child abuse cases, and home violence.

8. TRUST IN DIVINE POWER

A person haunted by fear or guilt will find it hard to benefit fully from the health practices we've just described. But a person enjoying a positive faith in God will experience the ultimate source of wellbeing:

"Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits-who forgives all your sins and HEALS ALL YOUR DISEASES, who REDEEMS YOUR LIFE from the pit." -Psalm 103:2-4.

David Larson, a consultant to the National Institute of Mental Health in the United States, did extensive research on the relationship between religion and health. His study demonstrated a direct connection between a Christian commitment and health. He was surprised to learn: Those who attend church live longer than those who don't. Church-goers have a reduced incidence of heart attack, hardening of the arteries, high blood

pressure, and other diseases. Those who have faith in God live more productive lives because they are less likely to be depressed, to become alcoholics, to be jailed as repeat offenders, or to be trapped in an unhappy marriage. Trust in divine power is the keystone to genuine well-being and a healthy and happy life.

Approximately 50,000 Seventh-day Adventists were studied, primarily in California, over 30 years. Results showed that Adventist men live 8.9 years longer and women 7.5 years longer than the general population. Studies of Adventists in Holland, Norway, and Poland show similar results. Researchers attribute the longer life span of Adventists to their following some or all of the eight health principles outlined in this guide. Those who follow these principles not only have a longer life, but also a much better quality of life.

Applying the Bible's perspective to our lives does make a difference in all kinds of practical ways, offering convincing evidence that Christianity is the most practical, reasonable religion in all the world. It changes people-their thinking and their actions-and creates a new lifestyle.

Because of the close relationship between the mind, the body, and our spiritual life, Christians who live by the Word of God will want to follow the principles of a healthful lifestyle as they prepare for Jesus' second coming (1 John 3:1-3). Christ not only wants us to be ready to meet Him when He returns, He also wants to improve the quality of our present lives. We can cooperate with Him by following God's basic health principles.

Jesus promises to deliver us from every destructive habit through His "power at work within us" (Ephesians 3:20). If you are attempting to overcome some body-destroying habit such as using tobacco or drinking alcoholic beverages, your best resolutions to quit often turn to ropes of sand. But by tapping God's power that is "at work within" you, God can give you strength to overcome. The Word of God promises: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

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