

O health ! health ! the blessing of the rich! the riches
of the poor! who can buy thee at too dear a rate,
since there is no enjoying this world without thee?

– *BEN JOHNSON, VOLPONE II*

HOW HEALTHY ARE WE ?

Nirankar S. Agarwal, Ph.D.

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Happiness is indeed the one thing which is openly or indirectly the universal pursuit of our human nature, - happiness or its suggestion or some counterfeit of it, some pleasure, some enjoyment, some satisfaction of the mind, the will, the passions of the body. Pain is an experience our nature has to accept when it must, involuntarily as a necessity, an unavoidable incident of universal Nature, or voluntarily as a means to what we seek after, but not a thing desired for its own sake, – except when it is so sought in perversity or with an ardour of enthusiasm in suffering for some touch of fierce pleasure it brings or the intense strength it engenders.

– Sri Aurobindo¹

Is happiness your goal too?

What do we all wish from life? Surely everyone will say, happiness. Happiness from sensual pleasures, or from a job well done, or from a well performed duty, or the feeling of self-worth from an act of charity, compassion or justice, or from the waves of bliss from an intimate contact with the soul in meditation; under whichever guise, happiness is typically the goal of any human endeavour.

Thousands of years ago, as narrated in the great Indian epic *Mahabharata*, the wise king Yudhishtira, upholder of truth and justice, in answer to the query: what is the best of all gains?, replied, ‘The best of all gains is health’.² For the pursuit of happiness in all its multitudinous facets is truly possible only for one who is healthy.

For instance, if one were afflicted, say, with diabetes, one could not eat or do what one wished, no matter how much money one had. Actually, having more money will perhaps exacerbate the feeling of resentment and frustration, for one could afford to live lavishly and could not. Or, suppose one

goes to the mountains. The breathtaking panorama of rugged snowcapped & lofty peaks, the green undulating meadows, the crystal-clear tumbling waters of the rivers, all the fantastic scenery one literally sees with a jaundiced eye for one is suffering from shortness of breath due to emphysema or asthma. If you are healthy and young, there is almost no end to your optimism. You feel that you can do anything you put your mind and energy in to.

It is in this context that joy and happiness is a mirage unless one is healthy, that Yudhishtira's answer, 'the best of all gains is health', seems most apposite.

How healthy are we today?

"Unless we do better, two thirds of all Americans now living will suffer or die from cancer, heart disease or stroke. I expect you to do something about it" lamented American President Lyndon B. Johnson on April 17, 1964.³ Statistics for 1990 & 1992 show that, of 2,163,830 deaths in the USA, 930,477 died of heart disease & stroke, and cancer claimed another 520,000 lives. Despite herculean inputs of expertise and resources over a quarter century, the morbidity of 1,450,477 from these chronic diseases made up an uncanny two thirds of all deaths,⁴ as had been apprehensively anticipated by President Johnson.

Unites States is one of the most advanced and wealthy nations in the world. In terms of health, however, Baker⁵ quoting 1992 Government figures states that at any given time as much as half of the United States population is afflicted by at least one chronic ailment. Cardiovascular disease will eventually torment 80% of the population during their lifetime. Cancer claims 23% of all deaths. Almost 20% are discomposd by arthritis, and 50% are distressed with chronic digestive disorders. Over 95% are tormented by bad teeth, 20% are vexed with hearing loss, and 60% are burdened with defective vision.

Numerous people suffer from allergies, skin disease, mental illness & suicidal tendencies, migraines, insomnia, asthma & emphysema, and the list goes on...

Despite improvement in diet and hygiene over the past decades, developing countries are perhaps even worse off. For instance, though health statistics for India are somewhat perfunctory, the trend is eminently clear. Dr. Anil Gombar, cardiologist, states that fully 20% of Indians are afflicted with high blood pressure (hypertension), a disease which is responsible for heart attacks, coronary artery & kidney disease and stroke.⁶ The proportion is considerably higher in the cities, for instance fully 40% of Delhiites are reported to be hypertensive.⁷ What is even worse is the prevalence of hypertension in students: in a survey of 750 students of an upmarket school in Delhi, 10% were found to be suffering from hypertension!⁸

Excess weight and obesity are associated with numerous disorders, from cardiac ailments to respiratory, kidney, muscular and hormonal disorders, depression, low self-esteem and adjustment problems. A recent survey by the prestigious All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), New Delhi, revealed that 40% of school-age students in Delhi were overweight and 27% obese.⁹ Of course, US of A has been the leader in overweight and obesity for decades. According to the 2017-2018 National Center of Health Statistics, 73.6% of adults aged 20 and older were overweight; and of these, a whopping 42.5% were obese. Obesity figures among American children are also truly alarming: 21.2% in the age group 12-19, 20.3% in the age group 6-11 and, 13.4% among children 2-5 years old.¹⁰

‘Asthma and allergy related disorders are acquiring epidemic proportions in India and the world over. Their prevalence and severity are disproportionately higher amongst children’, laments the Council of Scientific & Industrial

Research.¹¹ Dr. Naseem Khan of Faridabad Medical Centre says that 40 million Indians are afflicted by asthma, and 10% of school-going children in Delhi are its victim.¹² Global estimate for asthma in 2016 was 339 million and, it was estimated that 417,918 people had died from it.¹³

As many as one third of Delhi residents suffer from allergies.¹⁴ The World Allergy Organization (WAO) estimate of allergy prevalence in the world varies from 10-40% depending on the country with 150 million Europeans suffering from chronic allergy and, 20% of U.K. population affected by allergic disorder(s).¹⁵

Defective vision at an early age affects 35-50%^{8,16} school children and majority of Indians suffer from dental problems according to Dr. Hari Prakash, chief of dental medicine at AIIMS.¹⁷ Receding hairline and prematurely grey hair, widespread hearing disorder, alarmingly higher incidence of bone fractures and joint pain, and ever increasing cases of that most dreaded of afflictions, cancer are also rampant worldwide.

It is therefore unfortunate that young people suffused with the exuberance of transient vitality pay scant attention to their bodies and often actively though unintentionally undertake to wreck this foremost of all blessings.

What has caused a deteriorating health scenario?

Numerous factors impinge on health in today's global village. If science and technology have improved the lot of common man, they have been instrumental in creating a plethora of problems as well. It is a matter of millennial experience that the innate human system adapts and changes slowly. But in a mere hundred years, technology has drastically altered our way of life: from diet, apparel, cosmetics, and exercise, to ambient air, noise, chemical pollution, to fashion, the reach of mass media, role models, inordinate emphasis on monetary acquisi-

tion, medical paradigms, and so on. No less a radical change has taken place in the very stuff of the mind-set.

Sedentary lifestyle and insufficient exercise

In this era of modern technology, more and more physical work is being consigned to the machine. But a concomitant decrease of nutrients for the body has conversely been met by a steadily richer diet. With little time left from work, societal pressures and entertainment, it takes sustained willpower to allocate top priority to exercise for health. The result is obese or otherwise sick individuals who show and feel the wear and tear sooner than they ought to.

Many young people are captivated by the glamour of sports aired on TV and spend inordinate amounts of time on team games like cricket, football, basketball, baseball, hockey, volleyball, etc. Have you noticed that only a fraction of the team gets anything like a workout in these games? Most just watch and get to play for a few minutes, and yet would unhesitatingly tell you as to how much time they spend in sports. ‘Oh I play at school for an hour’, many youngsters would say. Invited to accompany for a brisk walk, many can’t handle even a couple of kilometres.

Increasing consumption of processed foods and beverages

Standard American Diet (SAD) is making dramatic inroads in to global markets especially in the developing countries now that it already holds unhampered sway in the West. Unsuspecting populace in developing countries is gradually being inundated by a plethora of processed foods containing added chemicals as flavours, colours & preservatives with questionable nutritional value, and with beverages that have no food value except copious amounts of sugar, sugar substitutes and chemi-

cal. Even the US Congressional Committee on Nutrition has acknowledged that SAD is predominantly responsible for six of the ten top chronic diseases in the United States.¹⁸ And the Surgeon General's 1988 Report attributed a staggering 35% of all cancer deaths in the USA to diet.¹⁹ Blissfully unaware of the sad consequences in human suffering from SAD, consumption of processed food is skyrocketing in rest of the world,



often with encouragement from the governments. (See '*in public interest*' [italics added] ad in *The Times of India*, November 22, 2001, and another in Hindi promoting processed foods!)

The cult of softness

Articles in the media quoting experts often advise you to coddle your body. 'Pat your skin & hair dry' lest the skin gets coarse or the hair break, say some

‘knowledgable’ experts. Soft towels are promoted by the marketplace implying that coarseness roughens your skin. Don’t go out in the sunlight without tinted glasses, say others, for you may damage your eyes, or ruin your skin. Parents advise their children to ride or drive rather than walk. Increasing usage of warm to hot water for washing, bathing and cleaning even in tropical climes to avoid the barest discomfort is becoming much too frequent. Ever soft foods are developed that melt in the mouth. Ironically, tough physique and image are more often portrayed in promoting things that are now proven to be injurious to our health, such as tobacco, or alcohol.

Faulty role models

Everyone has idols – persons one admires, respects or adores. In some measure we all imitate our idols. During childhood our parents, teachers, peers, and characters from myths and legends usually serve this function. “Our children see ... and learn to imitate ... for man is an imitative animal. This quality is the germ of all education in him. From his cradle to his grave he is learning to do what he sees others do,” perceptively wrote Thomas Jefferson.²⁰

In the modern era, our idols are mostly foisted on us by the media – TV, cinema, radio, magazines, newspapers, billboards, and now the Internet. Models, TV and film stars, athletes & sportspersons, powerful politicians, affluent corporate executives, royalty, and wealthy individuals are most often portrayed as glamorous icons to follow and imitate.

Due to the fast pace of life, few can critically evaluate the benefits or harm from an unprecedented number of goods and services in the marketplace. In case of children and adolescents this blind imitation could be quite sickening. Children being naturally susceptible, wreck their health, commit acts of violence, and are otherwise led in to unsavoury paths by these

role models who for pecuniary gain relentlessly exploit their popularity and promote any product even when it is injurious to the body and mind.

The allopathic mind-set

And then there is the allopathic paradigm of defeatism.

The much trumpeted triumphs of the allopathic system of medicine over the past decades have generated a mind-set of outside intervention for maintenance of health and the curbing of disease. If you are even a little sick, take pills or injections or other aids. Little if anything is seemingly taught in medical schools about prevention. As Dr. Stuart Berger MD, referring to his time in the medical school, says, “we learned how to use scalpels, deadly drugs, and radiation beams to destroy cancer, but not how the right food and lifestyle could help prevent it in the first place.”²¹

How can you remain healthy? Proper nutrition, say majority of even the alternate health professionals. If your hair are becoming prematurely gray or shedding at an alarming rate, you are advised to take such and such supplements and increase your consumption of specific foods. If your vision keeps deteriorating, you should use prescription lenses and consume particular foods to improve your eyesight. Similarly for teeth & gums, and skin, and bones. Numerous books emphasize that sound health is a matter of unadulterated unprocessed organic foods and food supplements.

No doubt, good nutrition is an undeniable asset, but this overwhelming emphasis on diet does propagate the tenet of allopathic medical paradigm – for any disorder take a pill. It engenders an attitude of passive acceptance of outside intervention and makes you ever dependent on external resources.

Media propagates the defeatist medical paradigm

If your parents had a debilitating condition such as diabetes, or heart disease, then you are repeatedly told that you have a significantly higher probability of suffering from that malady. Much less emphasis is placed on the proven fact that mere presence of a faulty gene by itself is not sufficient to engender disease. For, not all of the approximately 30,000 genes found in a human genome are expressed in an individual's lifetime. Environment and lifestyle factors play a significant, sometimes a decisive, role in their expression. Which means that with foreknowledge and appropriate lifestyle the propensity of disease from heredity may be nipped in the bud. Unfortunately there is inadequate emphasis on prevention in the contemporary medical paradigm, for truly, medical science today deals with *unhealth-care* and not with healthcare. The overwhelming stress on genes as the cause of disease has further fostered an attitude of resignation and passive acceptance. How often does one hear the refrain, "Oh, it runs in the family", thereby downplaying our own contribution to the malady. As if the genes for a particular disease in question had manifested in one's family-tree from all eternity!

A good example of the defeatist mind-set is defective vision. As soon as lens maladjustment is detected, corrective spectacles are clapped on to the individual. Almost all articles and ads in the mass media promote specs, contact lenses, laser surgery, or research fads of the day. A few mainstream professionals might be aware of alternate procedures to regain normal vision but they hesitate to go against the established creed. Besides, most of these alternate procedures are simple & inexpensive, and almost certainly will not generate lucrative revenues that all the technological goods and processes do for the media, medical industry or the influential advertisement

industry. Alternate paradigms typically also require active participation of the individual, something which is subtly, universally, and perhaps unintentionally discouraged by vested interests.

Buy, buy and buy

Purchase creams, moisturizers, sun screens for your skin. Buy all problem solving shampoos and conditioners for your hair. Buy toothpastes, whiteners, toothbrushes, mouthwash for your teeth. Formulas, medicines, and tonics for digestion, and laxatives for constipation. Buy for great looks! All solutions including cult of softness, food supplements, external intervention of one kind or another require you to buy products and services. Consume more energy by driving even when the distance is walkable; use hot water even when you are better off with normal. Gradually inculcated is an attitude that everything can be bought so why make an effort. All you need to do is spend more money to purchase numerous goods and services.

This consumer mentality, so widespread and prevalent today, did not emerge by chance. A concerted effort by business gained momentum in the 1950s and 1960s to “stimulate’ consumer buying, by creating wants in people that they still didn’t realize existed”. A few pioneer cosmetic firms even went so far as to laying out a quarter of their income on promotion and advertisement alone. No wonder, one ad executive exulted, “what makes this country [USA] great is the creation of wants and desires, the creation of dissatisfaction ...”²²

Monetary success is supreme

When one is young, the vitality (life-force) is still plentiful and this exuberance makes one believe that one is healthy. ‘Only the sick man knows his body’ said Oswald Spengler. That is,

one becomes aware of the body only when something goes wrong with it. The overwhelming stress of society on acquisition of wealth for its own sake pushes the awareness for health even farther in the background. One drives oneself relentlessly to fulfil demands of study or the job in order to amass utmost pecuniary gain. If that involves giving up sleep, or leaves insufficient time for the care of the body, so be it, we are tacitly encouraged to believe. More and newer gadgets, and programmes produced by entertainment industry consume inordinate amounts of precious time. Besides being temptingly packaged, one hears the constant refrain that one has to keep up with the new and exciting things that are happening around us. It often escapes our attention that they all involve spending money on our part?

Wealth and Health

In 1992 the USA spent an astonishing 854 billion dollars, more than twice the gross national product of India (1992 GNP, 312 billion \$) on healthcare alone, amounting to a whopping 3,287 dollars per person, the highest per capita expenditure in the world. And yet the Americans ranked 10th in worldwide health statistics. The high costs of healthcare in the United States, which keep escalating at four times the rate of inflation according to the US Government's Department of Commerce²³, are due to an overwhelming dependence on the allopathic system of medicine. For a majority of people in the world an outlay of even one tenth of this amount per capita on healthcare is entirely beyond their means. But people with meagre monetary resources do not necessarily have to be less healthy as the health statistics demonstrate. Actually it is generally observed that once the basic *needs* are satisfied, affluence may even engender sickness rather than health, for it requires greater discipline to not indulge in harmful products

& activities; and one permits even dubious outside interventions because one can afford them.

GNP goes up with Damage Repair

Today we place inordinate emphasis on damage-repair instead of prevention. One wonders if expending exorbitant resources to correct disorders after the fact is due in part at least to the fact that they contribute to a higher Gross National Product by increasing demand for goods & services all around. A burgeoning economy even at the expense of human suffering seemingly may be the name of the game today. Prevention always gets second shrift. Despite all our knowledge about the relationship of nutrition to disease, how our society actually functions: World Watch magazine reported that National Institutes of Health of USA spent \$1 million in a year to promote fruits & vegetables, whereas McDonalds alone budgeted \$800 million dollars to promote its fast foods. If people were to remain healthy, what will happen to the colossal health industry and numerous lucrative jobs it generates. Modern medical systems are quite unlike the one in ancient China where doctors got paid in direct proportion to the health of the community – most, when their wards became least sick. Today, we get subtly moulded to remain sanguine until ailments manifest.

Inertia of the Body and Mind

If your body is getting along fine, which is normally the case when one is young, then if you want to do something for healthy longevity, one part will say ‘do it’ but almost simultaneously another will advise you “hey! you are healthy, there is nothing wrong with you. You are far away from old age. Why can’t you do it later?” And one succumbs to this seemingly logical rationale, for the inertia of body and the mind requires more than a thought or suggestion to overcome their lethargy.

Shortage of Time

Increasingly one feels short of time. There is always too much to do. Work and commute consume ever more time. One needs time for play, to watch TV, interact with family & friends, read, gossip or talk, drive to work or for pleasure, go on vacation, etc., etc.

And time passes by. One day – regrettably soon enough – the realization dawns that middle age has arrived. The body begins to show signs of wear & tear in absence of adequate maintenance. The mind is set in its own groove. At this point there may still be hope but few can make the sustained effort and will-power required to slow down the onset of old age and repair the damage done to the system during decades of neglect.

For sustained health, prevention is the key

Prevention is the focus of this portal ‘Preventive Healthcare & Relief.’ Herein you may find doable tips for taking care of your body systems from young age onwards and, even simple routines and inexpensive ways to relieve many conditions afflicting the body. Numerous books on healing, even alternate systems of healing, are available in the burgeoning market on health. But why let the body deteriorate in the first place? Why not avoid suffering which even healing entails?

Health and good estate of body are above all good.

– Bible, *Ecclesiasticus 30:15*

Aspiration

विश्वं पुष्टं ग्रामे अस्मिन्ननातुरम् ।।

– *Yajurveda* 16:48

In this village [global village],
may all sentient beings be robust and healthy

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