

## Optimum Health

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Do you consider yourself to be in excellent health, or just fair? Are you able to perform all the physical activities you would like, or do you lack the strength and stamina you once enjoyed? Do you awaken refreshed and vibrant after a night's sleep?

The answers to these questions relate to an even more fundamental question: What is health? Are you healthy just because you don't have any pain or symptoms? According to the World Health Organization of the United Nations,

***“Health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity.”***

How many of us can say we have this level of health, and more importantly, how can we achieve this level of health?

The achievements of modern medicine are amazing. CAT scans and MRI's allow doctors to see inside the body, in many cases eliminating the need for exploratory surgery. Clot busting drugs, if administered within the first few hours, can dramatically reverse the damage from stroke and heart attack. Gene research is unlocking the secrets behind many genetic disorders such as cystic fibrosis, and one day we will be able to insert the correct DNA into the patient's cells. And yet even with all these advances, are we healthier than we were a century ago?

One hundred years ago, infections and contagious diseases were a constant threat to humanity. Before the 19th Century, only three out of ten infants survived beyond the age of 25. With the discovery of antibiotics, as well as enhanced public health measures, such as improved handling of sewage, safe drinking water supplies, and pasteurization of milk, childhood mortality rates have plummeted. However, while *overall* life expectancy has improved, life expectancy of adults has not changed dramatically in this century. In 1900, a 55 year old male could expect to live to age 72.

In 1976, a 55 year old male was expected to live to age 75.

As you can see, while more of us are reaching retirement age, we are not living much longer than our great-grandparents did. Instead of falling victim to infant and childhood infection as our forefathers did, we are dying from different diseases at a later point in life. Because conditions such as heart disease, high blood pressure, cancer, diabetes, stroke, arthritis, mental illness, obesity, and alcoholism are difficult or impossible to cure, they are sometimes referred to as chronic degenerative disease. While death from acute infectious disease plummeted, mortality from chronic degenerative disease has increased more than 250% since 1900. The superb accomplishments of modern medicine in managing infections and traumatic accidents have not carried over in curing these '*diseases of civilization*'.

What is behind this dramatic increase in chronic degenerative disease? In 1815, the average Englishman ate about 10 pounds of sugar per year. In 1985, the US consumption of sugar was about 133 pounds per person. Adult onset diabetes was once a rare disease. In 1850, Iceland was almost completely free of diabetes. When Iceland's diet became westernized in the 1930's and sugar and refined carbohydrate consumption rose significantly, diabetes became commonplace in the 1950's.

'Fast foods' now account for 30% of all food eaten away from home, and with young people the proportion is even higher. Our diet has shifted from fresh, whole foods to one in which 60-75% of our food has been extracted, refined, or processed. Consider what happens with the milling of whole wheat into white flour. This processing results in the nutritional loss of:

- 85% of the fiber
- 50% of the utilizable protein
- 50% of the linoleic acid (an essential fatty acid)
- 80% of the biotin
- 75% of the folic acid

- 82% of the vitamin B1
- 67% of the vitamin B2
- 80% of the vitamin B3
- 50% of the vitamin B5
- 83% of the vitamin B6
- 98% of the vitamin E
- 76% of the vitamin K
- 60% of the calcium
- 40% of the chromium
- 89% of the cobalt
- 68% of the copper
- 76% of the iron
- 85% of the magnesium
- 86% of the manganese
- 48% of the molybdenum
- 71% of the phosphorus
- 77% of the potassium
- 78% of the sodium
- 78% of the zinc

- cigarette smoking
- lack of exercise
- poor eating habits
- excessive alcohol intake
- abuse of drugs & medications
- prolonged stress
- negative mental attitude

Look at the common thread running through each of these causes - No drug or treatment can change these factors. Many people mistakenly believe that good health depends primarily on the intervention of a doctor. While we owe an enormous debt to modern medicine in treatment of infectious disease, trauma, and surgery, medicine's track record with chronic degenerative disease has been poor.

The cure and prevention of these diseases lies in what we can do for ourselves. There is a saying, "*Where are you going to live when your body wears out*". Diet, exercise, and lifestyle changes are not easy, but they are essential if you want to achieve optimum health.

Many other factors besides diet contribute to the epidemic of chronic degenerative disease. It is estimated that 50% of the deaths in the US can be traced directly to lifestyle factors:

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