

## What is holistic health?

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Holistic is the new buzzword in health. Many health practitioners offer 'Holistic health care'. There are even veterinarians offering holistic pet care. But what does holistic health care really mean? Many feel that health care measures are holistic if they are preventive in nature. Others would argue that holistic refers to 'natural' remedies. And a few might equate anything unorthodox or not within the allopathic medical repertoire as being holistic. Obviously, the meaning of holistic health depends upon whom you ask.

While the phrase 'holistic health' is comparatively recent, the concepts underlying holistic health go back at least 2,500 years. Hippocrates, the father of medicine, stressed '*vis medicatrix naturae*' or the healing power of nature. His approach was to utilize therapy to facilitate the self healing efforts of the body. The opposing school of thought felt the physician should actively intervene to conquer disease. This philosophical debate continued over the centuries, with neither side predominating until the scientific revolution of the 19th century.

The discoveries by Louis Pasteur and Robert Koch of pathogenic organisms ushered in a new era in medical science. However, even during Pasteur's time there were scientists who cautioned the germ theory must be put in its proper context. Claude Bernard, a noted physiologist stated, "*Illnesses hover constantly about us, their seeds blown by the wind, but they do not set in the terrain unless the terrain is ready to receive them.*" Pasteur and Bernard debated this point over the years, however on his deathbed, Pasteur is reported to have said, "*Bernard is right. The germ is nothing; the terrain all.*" While the holistic point of view acknowledges the role of germs in disease, the primary focus is placed upon the resistance of the host.

Holistic health stresses that each person is a unique individual and exists on many levels of being. Traditionally these areas have been subdivided, with the physician treating the body, the mind assigned to the psychologist or psychiatrist, and the spirit belonging within the

sphere of the clergy. Modern medicine has continued the separation even farther, with one doctor treating your gastrointestinal tract, another treating your kidneys, and a third treating your heart, and so on. While this degree of specialization has definite advantages in the treatment of disease, it is not supportive of treatment of the whole person.

The holistic health perspective acknowledges that these divisions are artificial and frequently counterproductive to attaining optimum health. In holistic health, no standard or prescribed treatment can be appropriate for all individuals, or even all individuals with the same 'disease'. The treatment must be individualized for each person, and the person must be actively involved in the construction and implementation of a program unique for their special needs. If the individual merely wants to be a passive recipient of a 'cure' and is not willing to accept responsibility for their health, they would probably be better served to stay within the traditional sick care system.

Psychologist Lawrence LeShan wrote a fascinating book, *The Mechanic and the Gardener*. Anyone interested in holistic health should read this book. Dr. LeShan points out that people often look at health in a very mechanistic fashion. They take their body to the physician and in effect say, "*It's a little slow starting in the morning, fix it.*" If the goal is not reached, they may seek another mechanic saying, "*The last Doc couldn't get the job done, you fix it.*" A different way of looking at health is how a gardener might tend a sick plant. The gardener will assess environmental and nutritional factors, such as soil pH, type of fertilizer, too much or too little water, lighting conditions, etc. The gardener does not attempt to *fix* the plant. Rather, they seek to optimize conditions that will allow the plant to grow toward a greater measure of health.

Like the gardener, holistic health care endeavors to stimulate the natural restorative processes inherent in the body. If the therapy circumvents these healing processes to combat the disease directly, it is a mechanistic therapy. This is not to

say individuals should not seek orthodox medical treatment. If the health impairment is severe, emergency medical measures may be essential. Often, the individual may find it beneficial to add orthodox medical therapy to their total health program. However, it is not with the attitude, "*Here is my body, fix it.*"

So, is chiropractic treatment holistic? There is a remarkable similarity between D.D. Palmer's concept of '*innate intelligence*' and the Hippocratic concept of '*vis medicatrix naturae*'. Without doubt, chiropractic adjustments are a powerful means of mobilizing the body's inherent healing capacity. However, chiropractic treatment is only a part of what one must do to attain optimum health.

A health restoration program may include many other diverse therapies, such as diet modification, vitamin supplementation, herbal remedies, exercise therapies (aerobics, tai chi, yoga), massage, acupuncture, colon irrigation, meditation, prayer, psychological counseling, homeopathic medicine, etc. The list is as varied and individual as the person seeking health

renewal. The health care field is so large and diverse, it is unlikely that any one practitioner will be expert in all areas. Rather, the holistic health specialist is a resource person who can offer suggestions for health enhancement and possesses the technical expertise to monitor the effectiveness of the program that has been jointly agreed upon.

While the body-mind-soul concept has its limitations, it can be worthwhile in guiding a self-appraisal of health. For example, individuals might ask, "*In what areas might I strengthen the body's ability to achieve robust physical health?*" or "*Are my emotional relationships allowing me to grow into optimal health?*" or "*Are my daily activities providing a meaningful outlet for the inner spiritual self?*" The individual in consultation with the holistic health adviser should attempt to identify as many areas as possible where positive changes toward health can be made. Optimizing function simultaneously on multiple and diverse levels of being offers the greatest chance for recovery from disease and the maintenance of vibrant health.

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