

Lifestyle: the Bedrock of Good Health

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A good lifestyle is the bedrock of good health. Tibb has long maintained this, and its Lifestyle Factors are one of the main pillars of its healthcare philosophy. In this article the nature of lifestyle will be explained, the Tibb Lifestyle Factors outlined, and their roles in health and disease explored.

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Overview

Is lifestyle modification the medicine of the future? Will making sensible changes to the way we live and behave be the most effective way of dealing with the tsunami of chronic disorders which threaten present-day society? Tibb has long thought so, and many in the healthcare arena are rapidly coming round to this idea. For acute pain, life threatening disorders and emergency treatment, conventional/Western medicine, with its medicinal drugs and

Chronic diseases are on the rise world-wide, and taking hold at an ever younger age. We are losing many good years from our lives and a large amount of life from the years that remain.

surgery, has no peer. However, for people with chronic, recurring or stubborn disorders, the long-term use of Western drugs has not been an unqualified success. The problems of side effects, the diminishing benefits of antibiotics, and the failure to come up with drugs for the successful treatment of diseases such as Alzheimer’s have forced us to look at alternative ways of dealing with these. The rapidly escalating cost of hi-

tech drug therapies has added impetus to this search, as has the alarming increase of some chronic disorders such as obesity and diabetes. We can see now that logical and reasonable changes to a patient’s lifestyle are more likely to be met with success. In fact, many healthcare professionals think that clinics and hospitals which do not provide lifestyle counselling for their patients when needed are doomed to both economic and clinical failure.

The rise and rise of the lifestyle diseases

‘Lifestyle’ broadly describes the activities, behaviours and habits that a person chooses for his or her daily life.

The striking changes to people’s diet and behaviour in recent times in most developed, and many developing, countries has had a huge impact on general health. The burden of disease has migrated in less than a century from those due to infections, infestations and malnutrition, to those resulting from a different, but not necessarily beneficial, lifestyle. A rapid and widespread change in diet has happened, as we eat much more red meat, dairy products, processed and sugar-laden foods, out-of-season produce, and exotic foods. Moreover, these are marketed very temptingly, and available virtually everywhere. Add into the mix our increasingly sedentary behaviour, due to labour saving domestic machines, increased car use, TV viewing, social media obsession and less commitment to active sport. The undoubted improvements to our overall quality of life have come at a steep price: a real, substantial and evident leap in diabetes, obesity, heart disease, certain dementias and cancers, lung disease, osteoporosis – and many others.

Tibb's view of lifestyle

The concept of the Lifestyle Factors fits nicely into the overall Tibb model of health and disease. Health is viewed as the situation when there is balance or harmony between (a) the person's immediate living environment; (b) the

Good health occurs when there is harmony between:

- **The person's lifestyle and habits**
- **The living environment**
- **The person's genetic make-up**

person's temperament, and (c) his or her general behaviour and habits, or *lifestyle*. Alas, there is precious little that can be done alone to change the person's immediate living environment – it is a matter of decisions at the community or national levels. Similarly, there is not much that can be done about a person's temperament, and genetic make-up. *However, there is a great deal that can be done to improve a person's daily lifestyle and behaviour pattern.*

Tibb adopted the term 'Lifestyle Factors' many years ago. It embraces a number of specific features. The major ones affect every individual, whereas a second group affects individuals depending on their personal circumstances. These

The major Tibb Lifestyle Factors

- **Environment, air and breathing**
- **The food and drink we consume**
- **Our physical activity and rest habits**
- **Our sleep quality and wakefulness**
- **The state of our mind and emotions**
- **Efficiency of our waste and toxin excretion**

factors strongly influence whether we are perfectly healthy, or chronically ill. In other words, the Lifestyle Factors are the elements of daily living, *under our own control*, which directly influence our state of health.

Tibb firmly believes that a healthy lifestyle is the bedrock upon which the treatment of many chronic disorders, especially as we get older, is erected. It accepts that disease is the outcome of

disharmony brought into the body, often by a faulty lifestyle. This disharmony, if persistent, overcomes the valiant efforts of Physis, our inner doctor, to restore harmony, or homeostasis. This eventually leads to the signs and symptoms typical of the disease.

Tibb sees a lot more value latent in lifestyle changes. This view is based on centuries of experience, observation and

The other Tibb Lifestyle Factors

- **Personal habits**
- **Exposure to pathogens**
- **Occupation**
- **Geographical conditions**
- **Background radiation**
- **Physical age**
- **Gender**

intuition. For example, Tibb attaches great importance to the quality of our sleep, the value of resting, the resolution of emotional problems, better excretion of waste products, and the way we breathe.

A number of other factors can influence our state of health. These include personal habits, the person's occupation, or lack of it, working conditions, social situation, economic status and educational level. Tibb has identified these other Lifestyle Factors (see *box*). Their contribution to our state of health

or disease is dependent to a large extent on the person concerned.

The Tibb Lifestyle Factors

Much recent research confirms the age-old wisdom contained in the Tibb Six Lifestyle Factors, as summarized below:

① *Environment, air and breathing*

- Poor quality, toxin-laden air underpins the rise in allergies and inflammatory disorders.
- Breathing exercises combined with meditation are very effective in relieving mental and physical stress.
- Controlled breathing supports a person experiencing strong emotions such as anxiety, anger and grief.

② *Food and drink*

- Moving to a good, regular diet is the first choice for people wishing to improve their overall health.
- Hypertension, diabetes type 2 and coronary heart disease respond very well to changes in food intake.
- Irritable bowel syndrome, indigestion and constipation can be largely eliminated by changes in diet and eating habits.
- Gout can generally be prevented over time by increased fluid intake and changing the temperament of food taken routinely to suit the person affected.
- Acne responds well to changing the diet to include more natural foods and fluids, and avoidance of food additives.

③ *Physical activity*

- A review of 300 studies shows that exercise is better than drugs in the treatment of early diabetes, stroke, and heart problems.
- Light to moderate physical exercise has been shown to deal with many of the symptoms of ageing.
- In children, regular exercise improves academic achievement and raises their grades.
- Exercise is one of the “golden tickets” to preventing disease and slowing the aging process.

④ *Sleep*

- Sleep allows Physis to clear the body and mind of the day’s general clutter.
- The risk of diseases of the heart and blood circulation is reduced by proper sleeping patterns.
- There may be protection against the development and progress of some forms of cancer.
- A person’s vulnerability to infection is markedly reduced by good sleep patterns.
- Psychological performance is enhanced by good quality sleep.

⑤ *Emotional state*

- Hypertension, depression and other chronic disorders can be brought on by long-term emotional stress.
- Quality of life improves, and physical pain reduces, when emotional stresses are relieved.
- Raised blood pressure, inflammatory disorders, lower immune system activity and increased tumour growth have been linked to emotional stress.

⑥ *Elimination of waste and toxins*

- Dead cells and waste products accumulating in the brain from general wear-and-tear may encourage the development of nervous ailments such as Parkinson’s disease and Alzheimer’s. Reasonable changes in lifestyle may be an effective way to prevent these.
- Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is thought to be the result of a hectic and unbalanced lifestyle, especially in young adulthood. Changing this by reducing stress, eating better food, in a better way, is likely to benefit those with this common disorder.

Benefits of lifestyle changes

Until quite recently the potential of lifestyle changes in the health scenario was not really appreciated. This in spite of the fact that poor diet, lack of physical activity, emotional turmoil, toxin accumulation and habits such as smoking and drinking make the person more vulnerable to many chronic diseases. These include heart and circulation disorders, several cancers, diabetes, probably dementia and Parkinson's, and osteoporosis. However, more and more research confirms the powerful beneficial effect that changes in a person's breathing technique, food intake, sleep hygiene and personal habits can bring about. The evidence is indisputable that thinking of lifestyle modification as a potent form of medicine is an attitude which can reap a rich harvest. It, for example, outperforms pharmacotherapy in the prevention of cancer and osteoporosis, and the reversal of diabetes, hypertension and lipid disorders.

A poor lifestyle certainly leads, sooner or later, to a premature death.

The benefits of lifestyle changes are many: they are available to all, easy and inexpensive to apply, can be achieved by virtually everyone, are well tolerated when undertaken properly, do not need continuous expert guidance, and safe for people of all ages. Lifestyle advice requires no prescription, there is no problem with missed doses, no need for hi-tech investigations, and is under personal control. More and more evidence is emerging showing that modifying lifestyle can show impressive, sometimes amazing, ability to reverse chronic, persistent or recurring diseases. What's more, if adopted earlier enough lifestyle changes can delay the onset of diseases, or prevent them from forming in the first place.

Remember:

- ***The journey to good health is a marathon, not a sprint. The goal is to feel better for the long haul, not for just a few weeks.***
- ***The disorder probably took many months if not years to become full blown, so it is not going to vanish overnight. There is no quick fix.***
- ***With lifestyle changes, start low, go slow. Give each change in lifestyle a week at least before thinking of another change.***
- ***Don't try to make all lifestyle changes at once. This will cause greater disharmony in the body, and confuse Physis. The temptation to stop will grow.***

Medicinal drugs versus lifestyle changes

Western medicine stands unchallenged when dealing with severe pain, serious trauma, and emergencies. Patients are, understandably, unwilling to forego the marvels of diagnosis, medicine, hi-tech therapies and surgery for which Western medicine is pre-eminent. However, patients are increasingly reluctant to take medicinal drugs, especially over the long term. They are often aware of the intimidating side effects.

Health is not just a medical matter. It involves active commitment to self-improvement. It places some responsibility on the person's shoulders. The person is empowered in his or her health.

They may have no symptoms from their disorder (hypertension, pre-diabetes, heart disease, lipid problems) and wonder if there is any real need for so much medication. More often than not, patients would no doubt welcome information on simple lifestyle changes instead of reliance on more and more drugs.

Western medicine, albeit rather grudgingly, now accepts the need to modify a person's lifestyle, certainly for chronic, recurring or refractory disorders. The failure to do so is painfully obvious, as a cursory snapshot of the community

reveals. However, when it does refer to lifestyle changes it usually limits them to eating better, and less, to getting more exercise, and giving up bad habits, especially drink, cigarettes, and street drugs.

The Tibb Lifestyle Factors offer a feasible, inexpensive, and targeted approach to optimum health. Reasonable and realistic changes in diet, encouraging greater physical activity, acting to avoid toxins, and better sleep hygiene, for example, are known to improve people's overall health, and extend life expectancy. If applied properly, the Tibb Lifestyle Factors offer a powerful route to maintaining good health and supporting recovery from illness. They can also be incorporated into Western medical practice, in a healing paradigm termed Integrative Medicine – the promotion of healthy behaviour and lifestyles by combining the best of Tibb natural healthcare and Western medicine.

Discussion

The fall in diseases brought about by infection and malnutrition has been partly countered by an alarming rise in chronic diseases of lifestyle. The changes in personal behaviour and habits over the past few decades – changes to diet, toxin exposure, more sedentary life, reduced sleep – have contributed to an increased burden of cancers, hypertension, heart and lipid problems, and many others. In addition, there is a virtual epidemic of obesity and its accomplice type 2 diabetes.

People who ate well, exercised routinely, avoided tobacco, and controlled their weight have a lower probability of developing a major chronic disease.

This abysmal situation seriously threatens the economic fabric of the country, cancelling any socio-economic improvements made over the last few decades. Not only that, but any national healthcare system brought in could be quickly overwhelmed by patients chronically ill from diseases of lifestyle. In fact, many health commentators reckon that any

healthcare system which does not accept the need for serious lifestyle modification where needed is doomed to rapid collapse.

Many well-documented scientific studies have shown that simple changes to a person's lifestyle can prevent or treat a wide range of common chronic and acute ailments. Knowing what we know now, a better, longer and healthier lifestyle should beckon. We could "add years to life, and life to our years".

Most lifestyle changes advised are non-discriminatory; they can be carried out in both young and old, in rich or poor, of all ethnic groups and in every community. Simple changes, such as eating wisely and well, keeping physically active, enjoying sound sleep, and breathing good clean air, can play an enormous role in reaching and maintaining good health. If these are boosted by keeping mentally fit, maintaining a healthy weight, keeping the gut in good working order, not smoking at all, and avoiding substance abuse, then optimum health should follow.

Further reading

Benefits of lifestyle changes: <<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19667296>>

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