

Conclusions about Holistic Health: A Synopsis

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HLTH 1050

Feb 23, 2018

## CONCLUSIONS ABOUT GOOD HEALTH

### Conclusion about good health

The words “holistic health” means different things to everyone. This word “holistic” gets thrown around a lot, so let us go back to our roots and see what it means. “Holistic” comes from the Greek word “holo” meaning “whole” and “istic” meaning “relating to” (Merriam-Webster n.d.) With this in mind, holistic health would mean “relating to the whole body.” Perhaps this sounds nice in theory, that we want to treat our body as a whole, but how can we actually do this? Bodies are very complex and masterfully designed! Well, if we go to our roots again, we can make things simpler. If we observe people groups that maintain good health and other geographic zones where people live to be centenarians, we find common threads even across vast geographic expanses.

In the United States (U.S) each person spends more on their health than comparable countries, yet we are 53<sup>rd</sup> on the life expectancy list, hovering at 78 to 79 years old. Compare this to people living in Mexico who spend much less on their health and have a life expectancy 10 years longer than the U.S. (Health System Tracker, Feb 13, 2018; Geoba.se. 2018). If we look even deeper, we see “blue zones.” “Blue zones” are geographic regions across the globe with increased numbers of centenarians, people living to 100 or over (Blue Zones, May 5, 2017).

These people not only live longer than the average person but live in bounteous health. One might conclude that having good health is not simply having nutritious food available, doctors, health insurance, and modern conveniences, for we in America and other countries have all this and more, yet we don't have our health. The U.S. has the sixth highest cancer rate in the world, with Denmark ranking first (Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, October 28, 2015). Denmark has the health care dream; free health care for every citizen all-expense paid by taxes. Denmark is considered a comparable country to the U.S. with health expenditures per capita (International

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Health Care System Profiles, 2015; Health System Tracker Feb 13, 2018) yet only 18.2% of people living in Denmark are over 65 (International Health Care System Profiles, 2015) and only 15% of Americans (Population Reference Bureau, Jan 2016)! So, if we are not lacking health care, money, medicine, doctors, all the modern conveniences, then what are we missing that the ‘blue zones’ and healthy people groups, have?

One common thread across the “blue zones” is the place in which elderly people are held in their family and society (Buettner, Sep 2009). You may be thinking this means family caring for invalid grandparents who are a burden upon the household and funds, but research shows that grandparents kept close to the family benefit the family unit with the “Grandmother effect”. Research suggests that grandmothers’ involvement in their children’s lives leads to greater reproductive success for their children and lower rates of mortality and disease for their grandchildren (Buettner, Sep 2009; Hawkes, March 11 2004). These elderly people wake up with a purpose, they are part of the family and social community and they are respected as a wealth of knowledge and wisdom (Buettner, Sep 2009). Grandparents who have a strong relationship and interact with their grandchildren on a regular basis have a lowered risk of Alzheimer’s and depression (Alzhimers.net, July 27, 2016) and live an estimated four to six years longer!

Next, these healthy people groups have a close friend network. In the age of social media we all think we have friends, but is this age of social media actually nourishing our need for close friendships and their health benefits? Or is social media hindering our health? Research is starting to show that since the increase in electric communication and social media, adolescents who spend more time on social media and less time in-person with friends are reporting higher levels of loneliness and depression. This is also thought to be stemming the increase in the rise of

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adolescent suicide since 2010 (Twenge, Joiner, Rogers, & Martin, Nov 14, 2017.) Other studies continue to expound upon the negative effects of social media on our health, showing that the use of an increased number of social media platforms leads not only to depression but also anxiety (Primack et al., April 2017) and perceived social isolation (Pimack et al., July 2017). Research is revealing that our increased screen time and social media is not filling the physical and emotional needs we have for a few close in-person friends. It is the quality of in-person friends that has been linked to healthier lifestyle, decreased incident of long lasting or recurring illnesses, increased happiness, and fewer deaths (Chopik, 2017).

There is no question that other cultures maintain a higher activity level than we do in the modernized world. The centenarians in the “blue zones” also were observed to have an active life style (Buettner, Sep 2009). There is innumerable evidence that physical activity prevents many chronic diseases and reduces risk of premature death (Warburton, Nicol, & Bredin, March 14 2006). As a personal trainer I would say physical activity needs to be a habit, part of life, and an activity you enjoy doing for a person to maintain an adequate amount of physical activity. It is very common for people to jump into exercise as a fad and then not maintain physical activity in the long run; this is also a common occurrence with diets also.

Diets come and go with the latest fad, but according to Dr. Westin Price’s research people groups that maintained good health and longevity did not “diet,” they ate real whole food as a life style (Schmid, 1997). Real meat is raised on grass not grain; real milk is raw, hole, unpasteurized, unhomogenized; real eggs are from chickens that are not being fed genetically modified (GMO) grains; real butter is not hydrogenated vegetable oil; real bread goes through fermentation when it is rising and does not have a giant list of conditioners and fillers; real fruit and vegetables are not altered by genetic engineering; the list goes on and on! We need to

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enhance nutrition and flavor, not alter it (Planck, 2006). If you look at processed foods, GMO foods, enriched foods, you see by just the title that it has been altered from its original state. I will not delve into any of the details about these alterations and their harm to the body, but there is plenty of research available to the public on the potential risk of these alterations, methods of growing, and processing that may have long term consequences to health, reproduction, and our ecosystem.

The last point I will make is that “blue zone” centenarians and less modernized cultures have time to relax, pray, or meditate (Buettner, Sep 2009). However, we live in a very fast-paced, stress inducing, society! The field of neurotheology is starting to research the effects of prayer, meditation, and religion, on the brain. Brain scans show that 12 minutes a day of prayer actually changes the brain over time. The part of the brain that is noticeably affected is the part that is associated with socialization, compassion, and sympathy (Leaf, Jun 1, 2015). This is a vast topic that we do not have time to expound upon, but the evidence is mounting that prayer and meditation effect and change our brains differently (Newberg, 2017).

So how can we, living in a less than perfect world, implement these findings into our lives? We may not all want to live into our hundreds, but I think I can say we all want to live the years we do have in holistic health...our whole being. Holistic health, as you have just read, is not all about eating well and exercising, we should implement these habits into our daily lives and we will reap benefit from them. But besides trying to eat organic, local foods, what about spending time with the elderly and treating them with respect as a needed part of society? What about assessing our time spent on social media and screen time? How about determining how many true friends we actually have. And lastly, how is our spirit? How much time do we let our mind and spirit find truth so that we can be set free.

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