

Taking Charge of Your Health in the 21 st Century

By Howard Woodwind Morningstar, M.D.

We are so fortunate to be living in a time in which we enjoy the widest variety of healing resources and therapeutic choices, ranging from the most current high tech medical breakthroughs to a world of ancient healing wisdom. While medical science seems to be advancing at a breathtaking pace, we are also experiencing a renaissance of interest in natural medicines, as many people choose to take more responsibility for their own health. Together, these encouraging developments are a great boost to our prospects for healthy, vital living in the century ahead.

We feel healthy when our personal energy flows harmoniously with the earth's surrounding energy flow. When we lose this balance, mother nature sends us distressing messages in the form of disease symptoms. If we are perceptive and wise, these messages can help us recognize and correct the root causes of disease before we suffer permanent consequences. Our innate healing systems can then repair any damage, returning us to a new state of balance.

It's often tempting to reach for powerful drugs or other dramatic measures to relieve distressing symptoms of illness. But when we reach for quick and temporary fixes to suppress symptoms, we may later find ourselves facing more advanced and dangerous expressions of the original problem. It's better to uncover the causes of dis-ease early on, and then to make changes that will eliminate them permanently.

Start taking charge of your health by identifying your own personal health issues and their present and potential effects on your vitality and well being. Explore the causes of challenges to your health and learn which healing modalities are most helpful for you.

For example, if you often are anxious and have trouble sleeping, you might try eliminating caffeine and other excessive stimulants and stress from your life, while learning simple breathing or meditation techniques that help you relax. For another person, the same problem may be the result of hypoglycemia, caused by a hormonal imbalance that requires an entirely different approach. In either case, the symptom of anxiety serves as a message that can catalyze lasting healing changes.

It's estimated that *lifestyle choices contribute to 80% of all chronic illness and premature death* in the United States. So, it makes sense to choose wisely, and focus on maintaining a health promoting lifestyle.

For all of us, *a wholesome and nutritious diet is the cornerstone of good health.* As we transform our food's energy into our thoughts, actions and physical selves we literally "are what we eat".

It's best to *choose a variety of fresh foods that are locally produced and are fresh & in season,* including whole grains, fruits and vegetables. Emphasize vegetable protein sources, while minimizing foods that are fried or high in fats, especially saturated fats. Avoid chemically altered

or highly processed foods, such as those containing refined “white” flours and sugars.

Make dietary changes gradually, so they are more likely to become lasting beneficial habits. As you learn to pay attention to your body’s inner wisdom, you’ll learn to eat what’s best for you.

Since prehistoric times, humans have instinctively known the medicinal value of countless foods and herbs. You can find many simple yet powerful medicines in your garden, refrigerator and pantry. Because of millennia of co-evolution, plants often contain ideal chemical compounds that are pharmacologically “active”, yet have minimal side effects.

For example, *apples contain cancer inhibitors* such as chlorogenic acid, and are rich in antioxidants that protect cells from free radical damage. They produce active virus fighting and immune stimulating compounds that really do help “keep the doctor away”. And, like oats and other whole grains, apples are excellent tonics for the heart and circulation. Berries and other brightly colored foods are rich in protective antioxidants.

Beans and other legumes can help lower blood pressure, while improving the balance of harmful LDL and beneficial HDL cholesterol. This can prevent and even help reverse the artery clogging cholesterol plaques responsible for heart attacks and strokes. Soybeans are also rich in phytoestrogens, helpful for relieving symptoms of menopause, and may also reduce a woman’s risk of developing breast cancer.

For longevity, eat cabbage and its relatives, broccoli, cauliflower, brussels sprouts, kale and bok choy. All are rich in antioxidants and bioflavonoids that protect against cancer while helping the liver cleanse the blood of harmful toxins. These vegetables are great sources of immune boosting selenium and sulfur compounds, as well as folate, important for preventing heart disease and birth defects.

If you wish to explore herbal medicine, start with common herbs already familiar to you, such as ginger, garlic, parsley or chamomile. Growing and making your own herbal medicines is a unique way to bring nature’s healing energy into your life.

Strengthen your body with regular aerobic exercise, and nourish your spirit with prayer or meditative practices that are meaningful to you. Loving relationships and satisfying work that serves others are often extraordinary sources of healing. Be sure you’re sleeping well and managing life’s stresses effectively, since chronic unresolved stress can affect your well being at every level.

Finally, *be grateful for the abundance around us that continuously sustains us*. Appreciate the beauty of nature, a powerful healing presence that’s always there when we need it. There’s medicine in the song of wind blowing through trees, in the music of falling water, in the deep silence of a starlit sky. There’s medicine in the sweet fragrance of herbs blooming in meadows and woodlands, by riverbanks and in hedgerows, in our window boxes and gardens. The simplest medicines are often the most potent of all; fresh air, pure water, wholesome foods, the

touch of the divine, a friend's caress or kind word.

The act of taking charge of your health is often at the very heart of healing. Your intention to become responsible for your own health is the single most important step you can take, one from which all other changes will flow. As we learn how to see that which is healing all around us, we regain the balance in which true health is rooted, and we are healed **to our fullest potential**.

This overview is presented for educational purposes only. For advice regarding specific health conditions please consult a qualified health care professional.

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