

A Balanced Lifestyle: The 5 Pillars Of Health

Are we supposed to start falling apart after we reach a certain age...at 45...at 50...or even at 75? The answer to that question is it depends – on our lifestyle mostly. What if you could live with vitality both physically and mentally well past 100? There are regions of the world where this is so. In Dr. Michael Brickey's book, *Defy Aging*, his research illuminated a startling fact: Only 30% of what impacts life expectancy and how well you age is determined by heredity. The largest influence, 70% determined by our attitudes and lifestyle.

Our lifestyle is clearly something we have influence over. How we handle stress, the quality of our sleep, how much we move vs. being sedentary, our diet, how much we drink and what we drink, whether we smoke, and our outlook on life; they all influence how healthy we are and how we age. Research suggests heart disease and cancer, the two top fatal diseases, are largely preventable with a healthy lifestyle.

Western medicine focuses much more on the physical body in its approach to health. An Eastern viewpoint suggests a more holistic balanced approach which includes the mind-body connection. The philosophy I have adopted is based on a balance in 5 key areas: a healthy body, mind, family, society, and finances. The belief is in order to live a meaningful and purpose-filled life, we are always striving for balance in all of these areas. If any one area is out of balance it affects all the others and creates stress that permeates everything. Happily, the opposite is also true. When one area improves, it influences the others in a positive way.

Here is a brief summary of each of the 5 pillars of health:

Body:

A basic assumption of all theories of natural health is that when the body is functioning as it was intended, without excess stress, it has the capacity to heal itself. The best way to care for our body is to reduce stress and keep the body's systems functioning optimally. Instead of treating symptoms, we must look for the underlying cause and address that, as naturally as possible.

At the core of biology and life are cells. The critical question is: What do cells need to stay healthy? Consider an acronym to describe the cell's basic needs: OWNER...Oxygen, Water, Nutrition, Energy/exercise/elimination, Rest. Disease comes when these basic cellular needs are not met and the body is unable to function in its self-healing capacity.

Mind:

As previously mentioned, many illnesses are stress-related and therefore preventable. Stress comes in many forms, but is fundamentally the result of the way we think and experience life. Our outlook on life is a significant factor in our well-being. Peace of mind is greatly enhanced when we are grounded in a spiritual life that brings perspective and meaning to the challenges of life. A positive attitude of gratitude reduces stress, while a negative attitude of worry and fear creates tension and dis-ease. This is at the heart of Brickey's research in *Defy Aging*, along with his finding that optimism and a positive attitude greatly diminish the incidence of depression and its devastating effects of impairing sleep, appetite, energy levels, the immune system and the capacity to enjoy life.

Just as the food we eat determines the health of our cells, what we feed our mind determines our mental well-being. We "carry our issues in our tissues," so the emotional baggage and the mental attitude we are carrying significantly affect the health of our body.

Family:

Family, the community within which we share our lives most intimately, is a support and "belonging" we all need as human beings. Brickey's research clearly reveals that engagement in vibrant, supportive relationships provides a proven boost to overall health and longevity.

While most people say that family is a top value in their lives, this priority does not always manifest itself in the reality of our lives. Family stress can come in the form of relationship tension leading to "dis-ease" of many kinds. Some people struggle with the desire for "family" and must look for others to fill that need for intimacy and a sense of belonging.

Society:

Natural law shows that we receive in life in the measure that we give. The importance of giving is one of the innate laws of human nature. We cannot have fulfilled lives if we are not contributing to the well-being of the world of which we are an integral part. Yet sometimes, when our lives are unbalanced, the stress of "survival" keeps us from giving to society in a way that gives depth and meaning to our lives, the kind of giving that creates an exchange of positive energy with the world around us.

Finances:

Finances are often the most stressful aspect of our lives. It influences just about everything. While we know money does not bring happiness, fear about financial security can be the source of much stress and an underlying cause of "dis-ease" which affects all areas of life. Often we fail to recognize the connection between financial stress and its impact on our health. When what you do for a living is aligned with your purpose and your values, you will flourish and experience harmony in all areas of your life.