

May 1998

We are happy to release the Yerba Buena Acupuncture Health Workbook, A Practical Guide to Health. The ideas, suggestions, and exercises in this book represent our cumulative experience with clients. These are the exercises and recommendations we often give our clients and constitute our basic view on health and healing.

This book may not seem like your typical “practical guide.” There are many books on the market discussing the mechanics of health in terms of nutrition, supplements, physical exercise, etc. These are generally thought of as “practical guides.” Because we see the mind as the primary source of healthy living we have concentrated our efforts on creating practical exercises to develop healthy habits in the arena of the mind. We believe that true health is the state of finding one’s true calling in life and learning the lessons offered us along the path. The purpose of this book is to help remind us of ways by which we can allow our spirits to shine.

The views expressed in this book are our own, yet they are based on transmissions from various traditions. We are grateful to our teachers of philosophical traditions, Buddhist, Jewish, and Taoist and to our medical mentors of the Japanese as well as Chinese traditions. We are especially grateful to our clients who teach us how to look at life’s mysteries, how to accept that the unusual is commonly the norm in medicine, how to reflect on our own lives, and most significantly, time and time again you have taught us humility.

May all beings be free of suffering,

Avi Magidoff and P. Jordan Smith

A note on Chinese medical terminology:

Many of the Chinese terms used in this book also have common western use. In some cases, the two represent the same understanding, and in some there is no match. For example, in the West we have an organ named the spleen and that same name is used to identify an organ which the Chinese call the Spleen. The Chinese Spleen is an organ of the digestive system producing Blood and also transforms and transports Fluids (perhaps akin to the lymph system). The Western spleen has nothing to do with digestion. To distinguish the Chinese organs and terms from the standard western ones, we capitalized the term whenever we refer to the Chinese rather than the Western understanding of it. Thus you will find familiar words such as Blood, Phlegm, Dampness, Wind, etc., capitalized mid-sentence. This should alert you that we are referring to something that might not correspond to the standard Western cultural use of those terms.

What is Health?



Can We Afford To Take Our Health For Granted?

We all aspire to be healthy, yet we tend to either take health for granted or wish that we could. When was the last time you stopped to think of what health really means to you, how important it is, what you need to do in order to achieve optimal health? Where do you stand in the spectrum of health, and where do you want to be? We mostly assume health has something to do with being free of pain and disease, with some idealized state of our body (often associated with youth and vigor), something we do not want to deal with or worry about. This is not a useful model of health.

We are the third generation raised on processed foods. We live in non-natural environments. We breathe air that is highly polluted both chemically and electromagnetically. We constantly need to adjust to the ever-changing demands of the Global Village economy where today's news becomes ancient history by tomorrow. This induces much stress and anxiety. In this environment we cannot possibly expect to take our health for granted. That would be akin to driving a car across the Sahara desert without ever checking the oil.

If we want to be healthy we need to examine what health means to us and how we are going to become healthy. Wishful thinking, idealized states, and indulgence will not get us health. Changes in lifestyle, discipline and some sacrifice might.

Happiness and Physical Well-being

The Webster dictionary defines health as “a condition of being sound in body, mind, or spirit; esp. freedom from physical disease or pain” and as a “flourishing condition.” But what exactly is a flourishing condition? And is it possible to have pain and still be healthy?

Some very gravely ill people radiate an energy that is quite incredible. They seem to be better adjusted, happier, and full of purpose, more so than many people we would define as “healthy”. At the same time we know of young people who seem to have strong bodies, yet they are sunk in depression, addictions, fatigue, etc. It would be hard to describe them as healthy.

More than anything, health is dependent on a frame of mind, on an attitude that promotes happiness and acceptance. It is a mental, emotional and spiritual state that allows us to create goals in our lives and to pursue them. Seen from this perspective, the dying cancer patient can still be spiritually healthy. If a person can be happy and find meaning in life, then even though his or her body is deteriorating, that person has something we must acknowledge is strongly connected to health.

In some people whose body is barely functioning we may see the soul truly shines. It is as if the weakening of the body has given freedom to the spirit/soul, and the light of the soul flickers as the body reaches its limit. It is tragic that we reach such full devastation before we wake up to the full meaning of life. Can our spirit/soul shine while maintaining a strong physical body? Can our light shine throughout the duration of our lifetime? We believe it can, and the purpose of this book is to explore how we might achieve that state.

Mind/spirit Medicine

Throughout history there has been much emphasis on seeing the root of disease as a spiritual problem. Our own generation also has faith in spiritual healing. We no longer talk of demonic possessions, or the wrath of the Gods. Rather, we might describe hip pain as caused by a psychological state of being unable to move forward in life, or back pain as related to worrying about finances. It can be useful to note the correlation between emotional and physical states, but it is often not constructive to assign a cause-and-affect relationship to them. Though not all pain is emotional in origin, all pain can be mediated through the power of the mind. This is because pain is a perception, and perceptions are in the field of the mind.

Much of this book is dedicated to the idea of training our minds in order to achieve and sustain health. Any action we take for the sake of health be it changing our diet, exercising, or meditating, must involve our mind and our will.

Defining Health

If we were to try and define health in one word we would use the word “flow”. Our health is related to our ability to keep flowing, open, unobstructed, both in our bodies and in our minds. We can define health as the ability to maintain an openness, the ability to cultivate spaciousness, and to always move toward new possibilities, even in times of great pain and suffering. In this sense, health can be seen as the ability to keep the flow of life, and to transform our pain and suffering, rather than to dwell in them.

It is this idea of smooth flow that is the basis of acupuncture and all other forms of Oriental medicine. For the Chinese, to be healthy is to flow, like a river. When the river flows at a good pace, the water is clear. When the flow slows down, the water gets murky, and if there is a blockage, the river becomes a swamp.

This idea of flow determines our health both emotionally and physically. The key to health is to prevent emotional and physical constipation.

The Emotional Flow

Emotionally, our hearts should always stay open. This means to acknowledge our feelings as transient and do not allow them to “invade our hearts”, to not allow any feeling to become so dominant that we can no longer experience the rest of life.

Anxiety, obsession, stress, fear, anger, doubt and guilt all tend to congest us. When we are caught in those feelings we tend to forget the possibilities of other, more pleasant, feelings. Our bodies react with sleeping, digestive, and circulatory problems, a response to the emotional blockage. Physically, these negative emotions create a sympathetic dominance response which, when over-activated, is a cause of many modern age diseases.

When we let these negative emotions take hold of us, the emotional flow becomes obstructed. It is natural to experience these emotions, but the moment they take hold rather than flow in and out, we are caught in an emotional state, and we lose the freedom to experience the full range of life.

The Physical Flow

The physical flow is maintained by keeping open our bowels, our breathing, and our joints.

The Chinese talk of the “bowels” as not just the large intestine, but also as the stomach, gall bladder, small intestine, urinary bladder, and an organ they call the Triple Burner, which can be thought of as the totality of the metabolic process, and also as the lymphatic system. Keeping the bowels open means keeping the assimilation and elimination processes unobstructed so as to prevent accumulation of metabolic and toxic byproducts. We can accomplish this by eating more vegetables, especially root vegetables, and less processed, starchy, fatty foods.

Keeping the breath open means breathing deeply, evenly, and consciously. The food we eat can only be converted into useful energy if it is combusted, a process that requires air. Every cell of our body requires taking oxygen and eliminating carbon dioxide. This is a process that involves the lungs and the nose. The more fully we breathe the better the circulation of oxygen and the elimination of toxins. Keeping the nasal passages clear is important because the air we breathe passes through the nasal cavities.

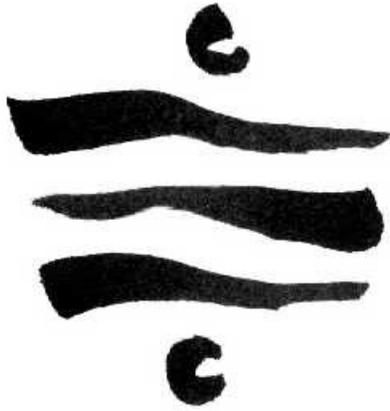
Keeping the joints open refers to all the joints, ensuring appropriate circulation through mild exercise and stretching. Blockage and stiffness of the major joints (shoulders and hips) can cause circulatory problems in the abdomen, affecting the organs and creating pathologies, and has also been linked to high blood pressure.

Stress: A Major Cause of Disease

Our stress response is the response of the nervous system that is designed for “fight or flight”. It is intended for encounters with dinosaurs or other predators. The adrenaline rush allows us to run really fast. In emergencies it allows us to have greater strength, like mothers who can inexplicably lift the car that crushed their baby. The problem is that when we are emotionally stressed we do not have a physical outlet, we are neither fighting nor fleeing. As a result of the adrenal overload, insulin is secreted, glycogen (sugar reserves) is used, lactic acid is produced, and the pituitary and thyroid gland are activated. We move into a state of emergency every moment we feel stressed. These physical reactions produce metabolic byproducts that become toxic. The lymph system is then called upon to remove the metabolites. As the metabolites are swept away we get various responses such as sweating, nausea, aches, headaches, diarrhea, etc. With prolonged stress, the metabolic byproducts cannot be removed fast enough, and the body terrain gets “swampy” and various degenerative processes start to take root.

Many people find strenuous exercise to be helpful with coping with stress. The exercise allows for the sympathetic (fight or flight) response to be resolved. However, it does not take care of our feelings. And so we get into a cycle of stress and exercise as a coping mechanism. We need to develop a strategy of calming our feelings, of nourishing our souls with what is wonderful in the world (like the sunset, the blue sky, the trees, the smile of a friend, whatever is precious to you). We need to be reminded of other feelings, so that the stressful feelings become less dominant, and the physiological response can be prevented.





Health Requires Discipline

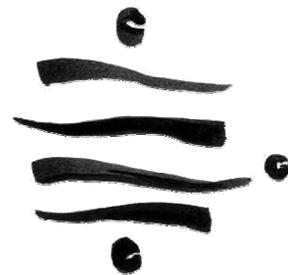
Achieving and maintaining health is a disciplined practice. Discipline, because we need to train ourselves to think in new ways, to let go of old indulgences, to learn to enjoy new things. It is not always easy, at times it may be very challenging. At such times the discipline we acquire will help guide us. It is a practice, because we need to do it routinely.

There are no set guidelines that are guaranteed to work. Ultimately you are the judge of what methods work for you. You are the laboratory of your own life. Ultimately, you must try out any health advice before you know whether it is helpful for your particular circumstances or not.

That is also the good news: there is always more that we can discover about ourselves, about our health, about where we are going and how to get there. It is to try and help you in this exciting journey that we compiled the Yerba Buena Guidelines for Health. Keep in mind that they are merely guidelines, ultimately you must judge their efficacy in your life. We would love to hear from you and learn from your experiences.



The Chinese View of Health and Disease



From the Chinese perspective health is the free flow of energy (Qi). Once there is a blockage in the flow, disease ensues. Chinese medicine offers various models that explain the process of disease. Being a philosophically based medicine, Chinese medicine first defines health and the proper role of human life. Based on that one can then define disease.

Yin Yang

The very first concept of Chinese thought is that of Yin Yang. It is a concept found in all Chinese thought not just medical understanding. It is about the ever-flowing process of life, the going through cycles, and the ever-changing flow that ultimately is of one nature, of one source. Yang is the aspect of life that is moving, active, bright, and light, while Yin represents rest, darkness, hidden. Life always oscillates between the two. Everything contains within it various degrees of Yin Yang and is always in flux and changing between these two opposites. Yin and Yang complement each other, one cannot be without the other: from the depth of the night, day breaks; at the height of summer, the days begin to shorten, announcing the inevitability of winter. Generally our life is about being Yang, being active, moving towards the light (after all, it is much more fun to go out dancing than to sleep all day), but that must be balanced by Yin: rest, calmness, relaxation.

Following the Way, Living in Harmony

We find a description of health and the human condition in the very first chapter of the Yellow Emperor's Internal Classic (Huang Di Nei Jing – Su Wen) which is the most authoritative classical text on Chinese medicine. The Emperor asks why the ancient sages had lived long lives without a decline in their activity in old age. The answer given is that they “followed the Way”. They lived in harmony, balanced rest and activity, ate and drank in moderation. The consequences of indulging in emotions, food, drink and over-activity are then described as the decline we see with age. The sages are said to have been “content with their food, satisfied with their clothing, happy with their possessions, felt no jealousy, they were no longer subject to cravings and desires that tire the eye, or to excesses and perversities that lead the heart astray.” Living one's life in accordance with the Tao (the Way) allows one to reach immortality, not through the physical body, but through spiritual growth.

Obviously, these sages are seen as an ideal. Yet, already in the Chinese classics it is recognized that most people do not live in complete harmony with nature, or in accordance with what is best for them. Our shortcomings should not stop us from aspiring to a more harmonious way of life; we can simply acknowledge them, eliminate them when possible, accept them when not, and move on to the best of our abilities.

The Meridians

Another description of the flow of human life can be gleaned by looking at the channels of acupuncture. The location of the channels and their role, and the roles ascribed to their corresponding organs, show us what human life's energies are like.

As life starts with the first breath and is sustained by breath, the first channel described is the Lung channel. The lungs take in the world in the form of air and let go of it. This is a natural and instinctive process. The Lung channel moves down before it goes up and out as a statement of our ability to “grasp life”. It ends in the thumb, again the way by which we grasp things. However, grasping must be accompanied by letting go. We must allow things to come and go. To remind us of that, the Lung is paired with the Large Intestine, a main organ of elimination, of letting go.

The Stomach channel moves through all the openings in the face: nose, eyes, mouth, ears, and then goes to the brain. (It then goes down to the stomach and down the leg.) This is to emphasize the notion that life is about interacting with the world and bringing it to our consciousness. Much like we do with the food we digest, we take in our experiences and make them a part of us.

The Heart and Pericardium channels show us the importance of expression through creativity. The Heart channel has very few points, and most of them are concentrated around the wrist, the wrist being the metaphor for calligraphy, or artistic or academic expression and communication. Another branch goes up to the tongue and the eye. With the tongue we speak and eat, while the eyes see the world and express our feelings. This connection emphasizes the importance of being open to the world and maintaining an open heart.

The Kidneys are considered to store our innermost energies, those inherited from our ancestors, somewhat akin to our concept of inherited DNA. Much like a DNA chain, the Kidney channel curls and winds, making loops, going back over itself. Starting at the sole of the foot, its every manifestation is a statement of secrecy, innermost activity which must be guarded and preserved. This is the true self, the person that we know we really are. Regardless of any of our actions, games, failures, there is always a core that is the true self. That core is represented in the form of the spiral of the Kidney channel.

The Liver is the organ which acts both to store the blood, meaning our nourishment, and is responsible for smooth flow of energy (from the Western perspective the liver is also a very vascular organ, and stores glycogen, our sugar reserves). The one emotion that immediately and without fail congests and blocks our flow is anger, and anger is associated with the Liver. The Liver channel climbs up the leg, faster than any other channel – it is the channel of action, of initiation. It controls the two areas where most people have the most blockages: the genitals and the diaphragm (representing the heart). For the ancient Chinese the Liver channel represents where blockages are most likely to occur, and the emotion most likely to cause them.

We see from the description of the channels that the Chinese clearly see our life’s purpose as interacting with the world, making contact, exploring, but without excessive attachment, always allowing things to come and go. Always remembering one’s own core, not as separate but as part of the vast ocean of life ever flowing (Kidneys are associated with the Water element). A strong reminder of what obstructs the flow of life is stated in the channel system also. For the Chinese it is no use to talk about how things should be without acknowledging what messes things up, what our obstacles are.



Excess and Deficiency, Hot and Cold

Chinese medical understanding is very different than standard Western allopathic medicine. Two of its distinguishing marks are its concept of deficiency and excess, and its concept of disease progression. Modern medicine tends to see disease in terms of something that needs to be cut out, poisoned off, radiated, fought against in some way or another. The Western doctor tends to see disease and assume something needs to be eliminated. The Chinese doctor analyzes disease in terms of the person's strength. Is the disease taking root because of some weakness in the person (a deficiency), or is there some excess of some kind? Even in cases of excess, it is assumed that some deficiency has allowed the excess to prevail. Thus the ultimate goal for the Chinese doctor is not to cut out the disease, but to strengthen the person so that the disease will not occur again. (The concept of deficiency, does not normally register in Western medicine as one affecting the whole person, except in cases where the patient is in an extreme condition and it becomes obvious that they cannot sustain a suggested procedure.)

Chinese dietetics is a vast field. What we can learn from its principles is that cold foods can damage the digestive system. Cold foods are considered raw foods as well as those that have a cold temperature. The Chinese see the digestive system as an oven, and if we eat cold foods in excess, the "oven" begins to cool down. Unlike our kitchen oven, our digestive oven has no power supply besides what we eat. If what we eat demands more energy than it can supply, we end up weakening the digestive system. Americans tend to drink ice cold drinks and eat lots of raw salads. It is better to drink warm water (or tea) and to steam vegetables slightly (though not to the point of losing all nutritional and taste value). Ginger and fennel are both warming digestive spices that can aid in restoring the "digestive fire". Note that hot and spicy food such as curries and chilies are too hot in the Chinese sense. They disperse the Qi and deplete our energy.

Pathology

All Chinese medical thought is based on observing, analyzing, and anticipating the progression of the disease. The Chinese physician wants to not only treat the current stage of the disease, but to understand how it has developed and what the next stage might be. Thus various schools of thought have risen looking at what happens when a specific factor "invades" the body.

The Chinese concept of etiology and pathology consists of external climatic factors, the emotions, diet, exhaustion, injuries and insect bites, and blockages. The excess of any particular emotion blocks the Heart, that is, it does not allow us to experience life fully. Each emotion affects the flow of Qi (life force energy) in a particular way, but they all cause a dysfunction in the flow, and thus disrupt the life process.

Most unusual to the western mind is the concept of the climatic factors as causes of disease. On the physical level we can see that cold contracts and thus causes blockages and pain. Heat involves signs of redness, fever, rashes and bleeding. Dampness causes heaviness, while dryness is a depletion of fluids. Symptoms that are characterized by wind, are those which move around and are not constant, just like wind in nature. But on a deeper level, these factors can be seen as more than metaphors for our symptoms; they can be metaphors for what is wrong in our lives.

Wind is synonymous with change. Wind is said to be the "spearhead of all disease". This means that our inability to change, the inability to let go of the past and of expectations, makes us stiff and unwilling to adjust. Our inability to adjust to our circumstances creates disharmony between

us and the world we live in, and thus creates disease. In the West we have the myth of Lot's wife who looked back at the fires that were consuming Sodom and turned into a salt statue. When we cannot let go of the past, we look back so fondly at what we believe was a safe and comfortable place. (Sodom was hedonistic and must have seemed attractive.) We may even shed salty tears (there are many types of tears, and those of sadness have a high salt content), we begin to lose our ability to move forward, we get the syndrome of "hardening of the attitudes". Unsurprisingly this is a common syndrome in people with high cholesterol and arteriosclerosis.

Cold slows us down, it prevents us from living life fully, from moving forward with zest and enthusiasm. Cold is the antithesis of Yang, the force of life. The character for cold (*Han*) consists of the pictograms for person, a dividing line, a field, and tears, meaning that cold separates the person from their field of work, and that this separation from our life task results in tears. The first school of systematic classification of disease had assumed cold to be the primary cause of disease.

Heat is thought of as accelerating the body, speeding up the process of life. When we are anxious to move forward and we move too fast, we develop heat signs. This is very common in today's fast paced culture. We feel that we need to be more active, to accomplish more, to compete more successfully; we are always engaged. The problem is that this excess Yang activity will eventually deplete the Yin. In modern terms it translates to getting many colds, depleting our immune system, depleting our adrenals, weakening our livers, and developing all sorts of inflammatory conditions, including many autoimmune diseases. The best remedy for Heat is to slow life down, to "preserve the Yin" as the Chinese would say.

Dampness also slows us down, but in a different way than cold. In a damp condition it is as if we cannot connect fully, as if there were a veil between two parts that need to connect – this is phlegm. Doubt and hesitation create this condition. In our daily lives we are faced with so many decisions we need to make and we are often left with great doubt, about our careers, our goals, our friendships, etc. Doubt is having two voices in us, so that we cannot take a full step forward and we are being pulled back at the same time. We hear doubt constantly either from the outside world or internally. Doubt activates the sympathetic chain: the adrenals, pituitary, and thyroid, it pumps insulin, depletes glycogen and produces lactic acid. These reactions produce metabolic toxic products. The lymph system is then activated to clear the toxins out. This is when we get cold-like symptoms: sweating, nausea, aches, and we experience anxiety, worry and fear. With constant doubt, expectations, and denial, we keep accumulating toxic byproducts, eventually creating a "swamp". The swamp is Dampness. Eventually this swampy, unclear, situation will become a named disease, perhaps a cancer. To overcome Dampness we need to learn to be in the moment, to let go of doubt and expectation, to recognize that fear is not about the here-and-now, but an anticipation of the future which has not yet come.

Organ Diagnosis

Nowadays the most common diagnostic method is evaluating the state of the organs. The Chinese concept of the organ does not always match the western understanding. For example, the Western spleen is not connected to digestion, while the Chinese Spleen is the chief organ of digestion. Each organ is responsible for various life functions and the flow of Qi (energy life-force). The practitioner evaluates the state of energy (Qi) and Blood (similar to its Western counterpart, Blood is considered a nourishing form of energy as well as a substance), the direction of flow, excess and deficiencies, and the presence of a climatic factor in the organ's sphere of influence.

Thus from the Chinese perspective one might be diagnosed as having Lung Qi Deficiency, Liver Qi Stagnation, or Dampness in the Spleen. There are numerous patterns of such kind, and any given person may have one or more of them in combination.

Two of the most common diagnosis are Liver Qi Congestion and Blood Deficiency. This is because we live in highly stressful environments which prevent the free flow of Qi and end up in a congestion, and the fast pace of our lives is considered to “burn up” the Blood, resulting in a Blood Deficiency. At the risk of greatly over-simplifying we can say that these might be seen as nervous disorders, and adrenal exhaustion in Western terms.

The Chinese view of health is complex in that it looks at the full process of human life, not at just at the symptoms that bother one at this particular moment. Any symptom can usually be seen as a link in a chain of events, not as an independent factor. Yet, this view is also very basic and simple, but like most basic and simple truths, its practice takes strength, courage, and patience.



Nutrition



No field is as controversial as the field of nutrition. Forty, and even 30, years ago the issue of nutrition was quite simple. We had the four major food groups and that was how we looked at nutrition. Those days are long gone. Our understanding of nutrition has changed dramatically. Today the issue is not of major food groups, but of micro-nutrients, vitamins, minerals, etc. The problem is that the more we discover, the more complex the subject gets. We find that while substance A is really great for us, it also happens to leach out substance B which is crucial in producing enzyme C without which we cannot utilize D, etc., etc. No two nutritionists will ever agree completely on what the perfect diet is for a given person. There are plenty of biases here. Yet we are what we eat, and we are concerned. What should we do?

We have all heard friends tell us how wonderful their latest diet was, how they lost weight and felt energetic, slept beautifully, and transformed their lives. Yet, when we tried the exact same diet, we might have felt lethargic and depressed, perhaps even got sick. The point is that we each have a unique biochemistry; we are basically the same, yet different. We each metabolize nutrients slightly differently, we need slightly different proportions and combinations of different nutrients, require some while rejecting others. Some people seem to thrive on high protein diets, while others seem to need diets high in complex carbohydrates (and this is just one “simple” issue). Take as much advice as you possibly can, but beware that your own body may not be the body-type that the particular advice was meant for. When it comes to your diet, do not rely on other people’s dogmas except as possible guidelines. Ultimately it is you who has to decide what is the best diet for you.

Nutrition is one of the most important and basic factors on the road to health. Unfortunately it is the hardest lifestyle change to implement. We use food not only for bodily nourishment but for emotional as well as social comfort. When you decide on the changes you want to make, be reasonable. Remember that there will still be birthday parties, dinners out with friends, frustrating afternoons at work, and lonely evenings. Do not assume you can overcome all temptations. Moderation is by far preferred to “cutting it all out”. Studies show that 97% of people who loose weight on weight loss programs gain back the weight within 5 years. This is partially because it is impossible to be always “perfect”; we need to find the middle way. Coffee may be bad for you, but an occasional cup of coffee (less than once a day is occasional) is probably healthier than spending a lifetime in frustration.

Three Principles for Good Nutrition

Since there are as many nutritional opinions as there are nutritionists, before we give you any nutritional advice we believe it is important that you understand what our position is. Our nutritional recommendations are based on the idea that we need to keep our bowels open, to increase foods that nourish the blood, and to reduce consumption of phlegm producing and allergenic foods. We believe that in keeping to these three principles most people can enhance their health many fold. Let us take a closer look at these three principles.

Keeping the Bowels Open

A visit to the vitamin section of Rainbow, Real Food or Whole Foods, will quickly confirm how obsessed we have become in keeping gut clarity: from acidophilus to grape seed extract, one can hardly keep track of the latest trends. We want to keep our bowels open in order to prevent metabolic waste accumulations that become toxic and cause disease. Constipation is often linked to other health problems ranging from low back pain to asthma. Bloating and gas are signs of malabsorption, often a result of insufficient pancreatic enzymes to break down oils. Malabsorption and leaky gut syndrome are considered to be the root cause of many autoimmune and mysterious diseases. This is where large molecules are passing the lining of the small intestine and invoke an immune system response. Because of the great danger posed by malabsorption, many clinicians have come to emphasize anti-parasitical treatments.

We do not believe that all gut syndromes are caused by parasites. We do, however, believe that our diets must allow for gut integrity. In conventional terms this means less fat (which digests slowly) and more fiber. You want to consume foods that are readily available for absorption. This means either slightly cooking food rather than consuming it raw, or juicing it. When eating raw foods, add ginger or fennel to it. Foods like wheat and dairy are phlegm producing (as well as highly allergenic) and thus create bowel obstructions (though they may not cause constipation, the phlegm does stick to the intestinal walls, hindering absorption). Meat products have a slow intestinal transit time and thus create obstructions. Pesticides and hormones, beside being carcinogenic, are substances that are not easily digested: they can create intestinal obstructions, promote leaky gut, and overload the liver detoxifying function.

Nourishing the Blood

Nourishing the Blood is a Chinese concept. Generally it can mean “eat foods that have nutritional value”. But more specifically, the Chinese see the Blood as a nourishing substance which gets burnt (or dried up) in our extremely fast lifestyles. As we saw before, the most common problems we see start out as “Blood deficiency” and “Congestion of the Liver”.

Dark leafy greens both nourish the blood and decongest the Liver. Dark leafy greens include kale, chard, spinach, collard greens, mustard greens, as well broccoli (though it is not a leaf). Lettuce is not a dark leafy green! For the purpose of decongesting the liver and detoxifying, dandelion greens are considered to be the best. Root vegetables both nourish the blood and lightly promote peristalsis, thus they help keep the bowels open. These include leaks, carrots, beets, onions, turnips, parsnips, kohlrabi, etc. We like to recommend chlorophyll as a nutritional supplement on a regular basis. Chlorophyll is basically plant blood and is a very good blood nourisher.

Avoiding Phlegm Producing and Allergenic Foods

Eliminating phlegm producing and allergenic foods is an extension and a more particular form of keeping the bowels open. The most common phlegm producing and allergenic foods are dairy products and wheat. Dairy, because milk is basically “cow snot” which means it is phlegm, and wheat because of its gluten content which tends to stick in the gut and create obstructions. Milk is a wonderful food for babies who need that concentrated food, but it is not suitable for many adults. Citrus products can also be phlegm producing and some people need to minimize their intake.

From the above principles we can see that the better diet is one that is low in fat, plant based diet. It is low in fat and cholesterol, and high in anti-oxidants and fiber. And, of course, we want to avoid, eliminate, or reduce (drastically!) sugar, wheat, coffee, processed foods, animal products (meat, dairy, eggs). The better diet is one which consists primarily of fruits, vegetables, grains, and legumes. It does not have to be boring (and when it gets too boring, cheat a little; but do not cheat all the time!).

The American Diet

So what's wrong with the average American diet? The average American diet consists of 40% fat. (Bay Area average consumption is possibly about half that, but still too high). Dr. Dean Ornish recommends a 10% fat diet. The excess fat obstructs the intestines, creates weight problems (which lead to many other problems), and clogs the arteries. Our next problem is the consumption of sugar. Because we eat so much non-nutritional and heavy foods, we tend to feel heavy and lethargic. To get a quick pick-me-up we go for caffeine and sugar (those afternoon sodas, coffees, and snacks). These give us a temporary energy boost, but then the crash comes, and a vicious cycle has been created. The consumption of readily available sugar creates quick bouts of both hyper- and hypo-glycemia that affect all other systems of our body (see discussion on sugar metabolism). And finally, because of our consumption of food laced with toxic pesticides, hormones, and antibiotics, we over-tax our livers, promote leaky guts, and start a whole chain of immune responses that can end in serious degenerative diseases.

These habits have been deeply engrained in us from a very early age. Think of the type of meals that were served at your school lunchroom. It is no wonder that kids want their coke and Snickers bar after lunch. Without sugar and caffeine they don't feel energetic enough to play baseball. And we carry these habits with us to our work places, except that as adults we compound the problem with alcohol and even more sugar as psychological "protectors" against anger, loneliness, boredom, etc.

Sugar Metabolism

Sugar is the basic energy unit for all body cells. Ultimately our energy needs are based on simple glucose. While we require glucose for every single function, the body has a complicated feedback mechanism to ensure correct blood sugar levels. This mechanism involves the brain, the pancreas, the liver, the adrenals and the thyroid. Because every cell requires sugar as energy, every system in our body is dependent on sugar levels. Too much sugar in the blood (hyperglycemia) basically makes the blood too thick and sluggish, it promotes secretion of insulin and can result in symptoms such as fatigue, thirst, hunger, blurry vision, shortness of breath, nausea. Over the long-term one may get dry mouth and skin, excessive urination, weight loss, atherosclerosis, and coma. Too low a level of blood glucose (hypoglycemia) means our energy needs are not being met, liver glycogen is broken down, and we get symptoms such as fatigue, weakness, nervousness, sweating, hunger, dizziness, confusion, headaches, tremors and fainting.

Too much readily available sugar will result in temporary hyperglycemia. Insulin will be released, the glucose in the blood will be metabolized faster by the body cells (creating a faster rate of metabolic waste production), and unless there is new consumption of sugar, the body now becomes hypoglycemic (low on sugar). The result of eating too much sugar is that we always move between hyper- and hypo-glycemia. Long term, these "erratic" swings will eventually confuse our adrenal, liver, pancreas axis and affect the autonomic nervous system.

Readily available sugars are simple carbohydrates and plain sugar. Complex carbohydrates do not produce glucose as fast: there is a buffering effect created by their fiber content. Protein also converts to glucose if there is no other energy source, and acts to stabilize sugar levels. We want to avoid simple sugars and eat complex carbohydrates as well as some protein. Some people seem to balance their sugar levels better on a high protein diet, while others do it better with complex carbohydrates (the preferred method). (Those who do better with protein can try a higher fiber content, and if that does not work try vegetable based protein.)

How do we identify complex carbohydrates? Those are carbohydrates (grains mostly) which will not turn sweet when you chew on them. When you chew simple carbohydrates and masticate them well, the saliva in our mouth breaks down the carbohydrate chains and you can rather rapidly feel a sweet taste in your mouth. Complex carbohydrates will give you only a tinge of sweetness.

It is extremely important to correct a sugar imbalance. It can be the main contributing factor to fatigue, depression, mood swings, immune problems, and allergies. It is our belief that most people suffer from a sugar imbalance due to bad dietary habits. Before addressing any other problem, the sugar imbalance must be addressed. There are techniques for balancing sugar metabolism using acupuncture and other modalities; however, the bottom line correction needs to be done through your own diet. While still in the correction phase you will be asked to go on a very strict diet, once your body no longer reacts as badly to sugar, you can begin to enjoy some simple carbohydrates as long as they are buffered with other foods (in other words do not have sugar on an empty stomach).

The notion of natural sugar and white sugar is a misleading concept. What matters is the availability and concentration of sugar. Plain white sugar is nothing but sugar, it contains no fiber, no protein, nothing that might slow sugar absorption, so you get a big bang of high blood glucose. Fruit is fine because of its high fiber content, and because it contains other carbohydrates as well. We therefore do not advise people to abstain from fruit or natural fruit juices as long as no extra sugar was added.

The Protein Controversy

We have been brought up to believe that we must eat protein or else disaster will strike. In fact, most people's true protein needs could be satisfied with a baked potato daily. The problem with a high protein diet is that proteins are chains of amino acids that need to be broken into single amino acids that are then transmuted into other amino acids that are needed by the body at the time. This means that nitrogen and other waste products are produced in large quantities as a result of a high protein diet. These metabolic waste products cannot always be eliminated fast enough and start to create blockages (Phlegm in the Chinese terminology). Animal based protein is especially rich and produces more metabolic waste and thus contributes to disease. The only advantage that animal protein has is that it is "complete" (that is you are getting all 10 essential amino acids in one variety of food). Soy is missing two essential amino acids and thus is not considered "complete". However, eating tofu with rice "completes" the protein while avoiding over-taxation through excess waste. (It is also important to note that it is no longer believed that one must eat "complete" protein in one meal, but that the balance needs to be completed during the full day.)

It is best to derive protein from plants. We especially recommend edamame. This is green soybean. The advantage of edamame is that it is a green live, unprocessed food. Beside protein it contains phyto-steroids which seem to prevent and help menopausal symptoms. (You can get fresh edamame at Rainbow, Real Food, and Whole Foods, or frozen in grocery stores in Japan town.)

Eating protein for breakfast helps counter fatigue in the afternoon. We recommend eating your protein at breakfast and at lunch, rather than at night.

What about Fat and Low Fat Meat?

We certainly do need some fat in our diet. Dean Ornish suggest a 10% fat content in our diet which is about a ¼ of the average American consumption rate (the government health recommendation stands at 30% which is far too high – even for a “realistic compromise”). We do need some essential fatty acids for the production of hormones, and for brain functioning. It is probably best to get our fat from nuts and seeds (which supply protein and some fiber) rather than animal products such as lard, butter, or meat and cheese. We strongly recommend flaxseed oil (a teaspoon a day) which has a pleasant nutty flavor. Flaxseed oil is not a cooking oil, and must be consumed cold and be kept in the refrigerator as it easily goes rancid.

Though some meats are considered lean, meat, including poultry, in most places is laced with antibiotics and growth hormones. Even if you do get organic meat, you are still getting the toxic metabolites that are released when an animal encounters the fear of slaughter. Animal products (including dairy and eggs) have a slower intestinal transit time, and are much more complex foods which, biochemically, require greater breakdown producing far more waste products which then circulate in our system. Animal products, fat content aside, are simply not clean for our system.

What is Wrong with Milk?

Milk and dairy products are perhaps the most dangerous foods for adults. There is no species other than the human species that drinks another species milk, or that drinks milk past a certain age. We use milk and dairy as “comfort foods”: a nice, rich food. However, milk and dairy products are high in fat and cholesterol, and low in iron. Milk consumption is associated with insulin-dependent diabetes, ovarian cancers, and cataracts. Milk is highly allergenic (it is basically phlegm) and toxic (it contains antibiotics and hormones). Any one with allergies or a digestive problem should eliminate dairy entirely, at least for a while. Many people believe that they must have milk in order to get calcium. This is a misguided myth. Non-dairy sources of calcium are numerous and include dark leafy greens, sprouts, seaweed, legumes, grains, and nuts. Vitamin-D (which is added to our milk), is naturally produced by our body when exposed to the sun.

Raw versus Cooked Foods

If you have seen an acupuncturist, you have probably heard the advice to avoid raw foods and cold drinks. The Chinese see the digestive system as an oven. The power supply of this oven is the food that is digested; there is no outside utility company to supply extra energy to our digestive system. When we eat raw foods, we are making it harder on our system to digest the food. This is why the Chinese prefer cooked foods to raw foods. Too many raw salads can weaken the digestive system and can result in malabsorption. Furthermore, raw foods carry a higher risk of contamination. Even in this country, people have gotten hepatitis-A and parasites

from raw salads. This risk is minimized when stir frying vegetables on a high flame for a short time.

On the other hand, over-cooking results in the destruction of enzymes in the food. If we quickly stir-fry or steam vegetables, they will not lose their nutritional value. Juicing is a compromise between raw and cooked foods. The juice is raw, thus enzymatic, but it has plenty of surface space, thus easily digested. Juice-only diets are not recommended, except for detoxification purposes.

Water

Water constitutes 70% of our body. We also use water as our cleansing and flushing mechanism. Clearly we need to replenish our water constantly. Many people are borderline dehydrated, but do not realize it even if they suffer from dryness, or constipation. Daily consumption of 2-3 quarts of water (8-12 cups) is recommended. This amount refers to water, not any liquid. You would not flush your toilet with coke or coffee, why would you do it to your body? The water you drink should be either spring water or purified. This is especially important for people with compromised immune systems.

The Role of Supplements

Current nutritional theories hold micro-nutrients in higher esteem than vitamins and minerals. This is a result of recognizing that it is still not within our reach to understand the full wonder of the human body. We understand some functions of a particular molecule, but then we miss the larger picture: what that molecule needs in order to be best utilized, what processes it interferes with, etc. Micro-nutrients are complete organisms, such as algae, plants, mushrooms, etc. As such they have an innate intelligent balance that we are unable to fully analyze and imitate. Our recommendations are to avoid a dependency on supplements if at all possible. It is best to get our nutritional needs from whole foods and a variety of foods. Vitamins and minerals can create excesses and deficiencies as well as dependencies within our bodies. Many of the micro-nutrients that are on the market are sold as energy boosters. These boosters pump up our adrenal system and thus with long-term use they can contribute to one of the underlying causes of ill health; adrenal over-use. The Chinese view of supplements is that they are too Yang with no Yin to substantiate the Yang – thus they are unbalanced.

Every so often we get a client who loves taking vitamins and whose problem seems to be resolved with our “mineral treatment”, a combination of acupuncture points designed for people with mineral imbalances. This is not to say that supplements cannot be useful. There are certainly times when we want to boost our immune response with vitamin C, help detoxification through use of anti-oxidants, clear inflammation with vitamin A, or simply get a tonic boost. We recommend that you use supplements for no more than 3 weeks out of every 4, preferably rotating your supplements, using one group one week, another the next. This system of alternation acts as insurance against adverse side effects and eliminates the possibility of our body getting so used to supplements that it stops utilizing food. There are certainly cases where the use of supplements needs to be prolonged (3 months to no more than a year) for specific purposes. But daily use simply so as to feel that we are doing something to be healthy can actually result in damage. (We hold the same view even on the use of Chinese herbals such as ginseng based products.)

We tend to recommend chlorophyll and flaxseed oil to many of our clients. Although used as a supplement they are true food substances: these are simply pressed into liquid, rather than selective chemical extracts.

The Yerba Buena Dietary Recommendations:

These are very general recommendations for maintaining health. If you have a particular issue you may need much more specific guidelines.

- Eat a variety of foods to ensure a supply of all of mother nature's bounty.
- Eat primarily low fat, plant-based foods: fruits, vegetables, grains, legumes.
- Increase consumption of dark leafy greens and root vegetables in your diet.
- Eat simple foods, organic foods whenever possible, with the least amount of processing.
- Include protein in your breakfast (don't skip breakfast!) and reduce protein intake at night.
- Cook your food. Reduce raw salads and avoid ice cold drinks.
- Eat regularly. Develop a schedule for eating. Prepare both your food and yourself. Enjoy your food by eating slowly and consciously. Use meals as an opportunity to come back to your own center. How food is eaten can be as important as what is eaten.
- Use mild spices such as basil, oregano, sage, marjoram. These aid digestion. Hot spices such as curries disperse the Qi (energy life-force).
- Use carrot juice instead of coffee or soda for an afternoon pick-me-up.
- Avoid, eliminate, or reduce oils and fats, especially cooking oils. Use flaxseed oil for essential fatty acid intake.
- Avoid, eliminate, or reduce sugar, coffee, alcohol, meats, dairy products, and eggs
- Avoid, eliminate, or reduce wheat products. If you have allergies, this may be crucial, and elimination rather than reduction might be necessary for a time period.

note: "reduce" is an option that will allow you some flexibility.

Remember:

- There is no ideal diet. You need to experiment to find what works best for you.
- We eat to live, not the other way around!

It may seem like there is nothing out there to eat, but a trip to the bulk and vegetable sections at a health food store such as Rainbow, Real Food, or Whole Foods, will reveal a large variety of legumes, seaweeds, grains, and vegetables, that you may have never even imagined existed.



Detoxification



Had we led a healthy lifestyle and ate reasonable foods, there would be little or no need for detoxification. Maintenance and prevention are always better than intervention. However, any person who is at any stage of a chronic degenerative condition is in need of detoxification on some level. Chronic degenerative conditions range in scale from “simple” allergies to cancer. Naturally the level of detoxification required varies depending on the severity of the problem. We have included this chapter on detoxification in spite of the fact that a detoxification program must be tailored individually to each person. This is because the concept of detoxification is a popular one that raises many questions, and because by investigating detoxification one can learn more about preventive measures. This detoxification program does not involve any harsh procedures (unless you over-use procedures such as coffee enemas and hot baths). It is not geared to any particular substance, and is thus is not a complete solution for people with heavy mineral toxicity, etc.

Stop Intoxication

It may sound obvious, nonetheless it is worth noting that one cannot detoxify if one continues to ingest toxins. If you continue to consume sugar, wheat, fats, etc., any of the steps you take toward detoxification will ultimately fail. Some people feel that they are detoxifying only alcohol or nicotine, and thus can still eat other poisons. This is not true. You do not need a detoxification program in order to get over an addiction, though a detoxification program can be useful, and some elements of this program are included in our advice on handling cravings and addictions. Every time you introduce a toxin, you are countering the detoxifying process that you have worked so hard to accomplish.

Restrictions on the Diet

- Water – non-chlorinated, non-fluoridated water only
- No oils except flaxseed oil (keep refrigerated)
- No dairy – if you must have dairy, use low fat, low sodium cottage cheese
- No meat
- No spices
- No tropical fruits
- No citrus fruits, no strawberries, no cherries
- No sugar
- No alcohol
- No cigarettes
- No coffee – you may have green tea (black tea is fine at end phase)
- No nightshades – potatoes and mushrooms are okay
- No cucumbers
- No processed foods

you can use ginger to pull out fluoride in the water

Cottage cheese (low sodium) – only for those who stay on this program for many months

General Notes:

Ginger pulls out fluoride in water. However, spring, distilled, or purified water is best for drinking and cooking purposes.

Throughout all phases take vitamin B-complex supplements, acidophilus, and flaxseed oil. Also drink mung bean and bean sprout water (that is water in which the beans had been soaking).

Use only organic fruits and vegetables.

Take enzymes between meals (they are not used as digestive aids). The dosage is 200X to 300X 2-3 times daily. Take those with acidophilus. Pancreatic enzymes are animal derived. You may use chlorophyll drinks instead of enzyme supplements.

Practice some form of breathing exercises – Qi Gong, Yoga, etc. to increase the lungs detoxification rate.

The Detoxification Program:

We recommend this regiment for 3-5 weeks. For people with more serious conditions, there is a 10-week stronger detoxification phase of that follows (during which no grains are used unless sprouted and a greater quantity of juice is consumed). Then a follow-up year where foods are slowly being reintroduced. Using this “quicker” model, you might want to try the last week on the stricter version (no unsprouted grains).

- Give up smoking, alcohol, sugar, coffee, etc. (see list above).
- Avoid chlorinated/fluoridated water – use spring or distilled water, or ginger in your water.
- Avoid all animal products: meat (including chicken), fish, dairy, eggs.
- Eat lots of dark green and root vegetables. Especially dandelion greens and bitter melon.
- The best fruits for detoxification are apples (red not green), pears, and red grapes.
- Do not eat citrus fruit or tropical fruits.
- Drink at least 3 cups (8 oz. cups) of freshly squeezed juice choose from carrots, apples, snowpeas, dandelion, parsley.
- Eat plenty of seaweed and/or kelp (up to ½ lb. when wet).
- Take vitamin B complex, vitamin C (1,000 mg twice daily), and vitamin E (400 IU twice daily)
- Take acidophilus
- Take pancreatic enzymes between meals (you can substitute with chlorophyll drinks)
- Wheatgrass juice for chlorophyll (aside from its use as an enzyme)
- 1 table spoon of flaxseed oil once a day
- ½ an hour before meals drink ginger tea (you can add peppermint and fennel – steep for 5 minutes)
- Use coffee enemas once a day for three days straight, then take a break for three days, then starting another 3 day of enemas, etc. Use 2-3 cups of black coffee (you can add chlorophyll and acidophilus). Use a bulb (as in a douche) rather than an enema bag. Hold the coffee in for 10 minutes if possible, and let go

- Take a sea salt bath every day for three days (same days as the enemas). Add 1-2 lbs. of sea salt to a very hot bath (as hot as you can take – 100-105°) and soak for about 30 minutes. End with a short cold shower.
- Practice breathing exercises and meditation. Tai Chi, Qi Gong, or yoga are all excellent.

This regimen demonstrates the principle of keeping the bowels open by avoiding sticky foods, and its high fiber content. It allows for easy digestion by ensuring lots of enzymatic action. The raw foods that are consumed are enzymatic but they are taken in the form of juice which is easier to digest and also nourishes the blood.

The enemas and baths are methods of encouraging toxins out of the body. Dandelion greens, parsley and Wheatgrass are all excellent detoxifiers. Carrots and apples nourish the blood while still keeping the bowels open.



Exercise



Exercise is important for our breathing capacities and for enhancing circulation. Aerobic exercise is the desired type of exercise as it allows the lungs to work at full capacity and expand their capacity, at the same time it puts greater requirement on the heart and its vascular system so as to build new blood vessels. Besides its oxygenation and circulatory benefits, aerobic exercise also allows us to release stress. Our adrenal-sympathetic stress mechanism was originally designed for us to either run really fast or engage in some physical fight. This was extremely useful in those eras when we had predators that could eat us and when we lived by our physical instincts. However, in today's environment we still use the same stress activation mechanisms with all its biochemical changes and waste products, but we have no avenue for release. After all, it is unlikely that we would run away from our boss for 3 miles, or that we would go for a wrestling match with a bank teller who is unable to get us the information we need. Exercise allows for the release of the chemical byproducts of stress. This is the reason why so many people use the gym as their stress handling mechanism.

While lifting weights (i.e., non-aerobic exercise) will do the job on the stress reduction front, it is not useful as a pulmonary-cardiac tonic. Aerobic exercise is. In Chinese medical understanding it is said that heavy weight lifting damages the Kidneys, which means it stresses the bones, and can create a deep seated weakness (one sees this with super-heavy weight lifters with sexual dysfunction). There is nothing natural in lifting many pounds of weights in order to get beautiful muscles. If you really enjoy weight lifting, be sure to do it in moderation (preferably “strength-training” style), and always combine it with an aerobic workout and stretching.

We believe that the best form of exercise is that which you enjoy, be it social, solitary, a sport, or a meditation. Ultimately, you will not persist in an activity unless you enjoy it. Of course, some discipline is required. You may feel too lazy to start your exercise program on any given day, but most days you should feel quite happy that you went through with it, both physically and mentally.

Aerobic exercise for about 30 minutes 3 times a week is appropriate, if you still keep some activity on the other days. It is recommended that you exercise at about 75% of your maximum heart rate for 15 to 20 minutes. Never exceed 85% of your maximal heart rate. Maximum heart rate is determined by subtracting your age from 220. For example, for a 40-year-old person the maximum heart rate is 180 ($220 - 40 = 180$) and the exercise rate is 135 (75% of 180). Thus our 40-year-old person should exercise for about 15 to 20 minutes so that their heart rate is at 125 to 145 beats per minute (70-80%), and ensuring it does not exceed 153 (85% of 180).

Be sure to warm up before plunging into your cardiovascular routine. Activate the joints and the muscles, stretch, and then start your activity slowly, building up speed and increasing the heart rate gradually.

From a cardiovascular point of view it makes no difference what form of exercise you do, swimming, running, stairmaster, rowing, etc. However, from the perspective of exercising the fullest range of muscles, and avoiding injuries, some exercise forms are better than others. By far the best is swimming. This is because it is a non-weight-bearing form of exercise that minimizes muscular strain and injury possibilities. Swimming uses the fullest range of body

parts. Breaststroke in particular opens up all the major joints (important for circulatory enhancement and blood pressure control). Unfortunately San Francisco is not blessed with an abundance of good swimming pools, however, they do exist even in the downtown area.

If you cannot incorporate swimming into your exercise routine, try to at least rotate your routine during the week. If you only run (and not on cement, we hope), not only are you only developing your leg muscles without addressing other large muscle groups, but you are more likely to develop hip, knee, and ankle problems because of the uneven stress. The gyms are full of all sorts of fascinating cardiovascular machines that can help you work out your lats, pecs, abdominals, as well as hamstrings and quads while getting your heart to pump. Most group sports (basketball, volleyball, etc.) also use a wider variety of muscles even though running is often emphasized. Beware of the one-sided overuse and twisting involved in tennis and golf.

Stretching is an important part of your exercise program. Many injuries can occur because of lack of warm up which includes activating the joints and muscles, or because of lack of stretching after the exercise period is over. After your muscles have been under stress, it is important to release any contractions and to elongate them. Otherwise you may develop a cramp from overstrained muscles.

During the days that you do not engage in aerobic activity, do some slow and easy stretching for 10-15 minutes. When stretching you want to breathe deeply, evenly, and slowly. Hold each pose for at least 20 seconds. Do not overstrain. Allow your weight and your breath to do the stretching for you, releasing tension on each breath, stretching just a bit more on the out breath. Do not bounce a stretch. Stretching shapes the body, activates the muscles, and lightly activates the circulation. Basically it should be a nice self-massage.

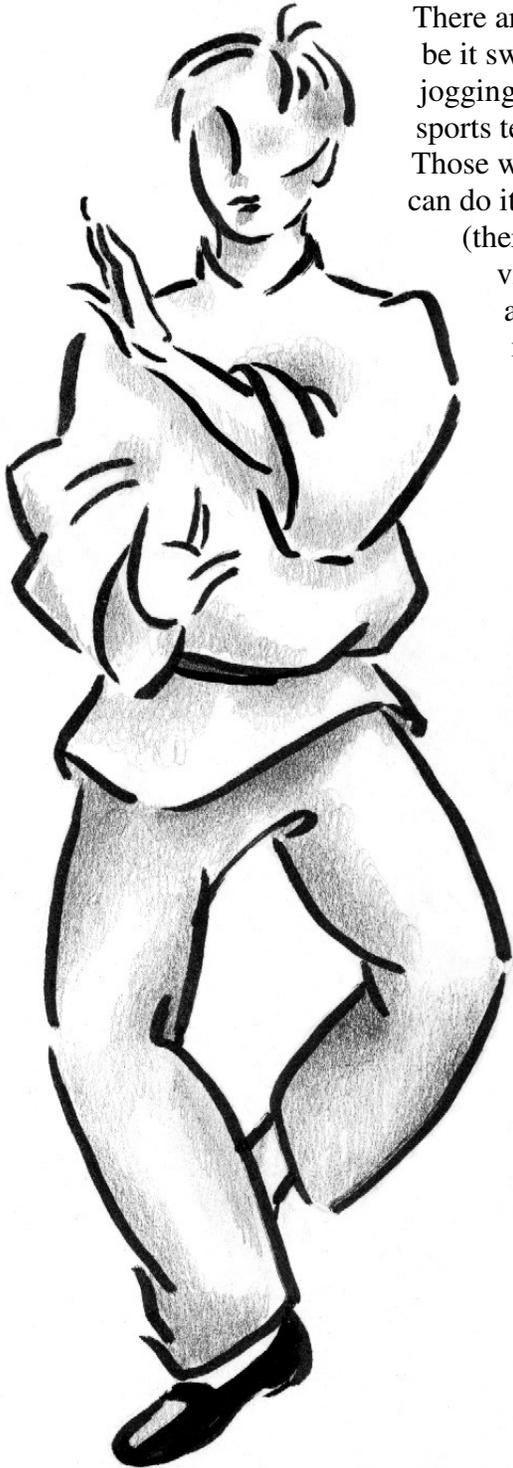
Upon embarking on an exercise program you may find the following to be helpful in easing your way in: a high potency multiple vitamin and mineral supplement for the first 4 weeks (after 4 weeks do not take the supplements on a continuous bases), massage (have as much as you like, and keep it way past 4 weeks if possible). If you have a family with heart disease history, take hawthorn berries (which aide and open cardiac circulation).

Do take every opportunity you can to walk. Not only will you save gasoline, avoid traffic congestion and irate Muni drivers, you will be benefiting your body as well.

Yoga and Tai Chi are excellent forms of exercise. There are various forms of both disciplines ranging from very mild to rather strenuous aerobic exercise. However, both systems work on a totally different principle than the Western concept of exercising at a certain heart rate so as to train the heart and lungs and increase their capacities. Yoga and Tai Chi are designed in such a way that without increasing heart rate (in fact lowering it) one can still develop the circulatory system through proper breathing. In these systems the internal organs are gently massaged, the muscles activated, and the joints opened, resulting in enhanced cardio-pulmonary health. The San Francisco Bay Area is blessed with many wonderful teachers of both disciplines who offer a wide variety of styles. These are wonderful practices that are meditative in nature and beautifully enhance body and mind.



The opportunities for exercise are out there. There are so many choices you can make, be it swimming, using gym equipment, jogging or biking to work, joining a sports team, yoga, Tai Chi, etc. Those who wish to exercise at home can do it in their living rooms (there are yoga and Tai Chi videos). The opportunities are there, all it takes is motivation. And again, whatever form of exercise you choose make sure you enjoy it.



The Air We Breathe



Our first independent action in the world is to breathe. We breathe constantly at every moment, from the moment we are born to the moment we die. It is largely this movement of bringing the world in and out of the body that defines life. Our breath is a means of exchange with the world, we take in air, oxygen for our body, and we let out waste products. The lungs are a major detoxification organ. The depth of our breath, the quality of the air, the rhythm of our breathing, all have tremendous influence on the workings of our body and mind.

Diaphragmatic and Abdominal Breathing

Many people breathe in the chest only. To enjoy the full benefits of the breath, we want to breathe fully using the diaphragm and allowing the abdomen to rise and fall. Restricting our breath to the chest cavity constricts our physical and emotional lives. Diaphragmatic breathing massages all the organs, allows the Qi (energy life-force) to flow smoothly, and calms and evens our emotions.

To practice diaphragmatic breathing, lie on your back, make sure you are comfortable and close your eyes. Place your attention on your abdomen. To help you pay attention to your abdomen, place the palm of one hand just below the navel. Release any tensions and expectations. As you breathe in allow your abdomen to rise, as you breathe out allow your abdomen to fall. Make sure you are allowing, not forcing, your abdomen to rise and fall. It is natural for the abdomen to expand when we breathe in because the diaphragm is pulled down to allow for the expansion of the lungs and chest. The abdomen falls naturally with the out-breath. Pay your whole attention to the abdomen. Allow your exhalation to be longer than your inhalation. You will feel a fair amount of motion in the abdomen. The abdomen not only rises but also expands: this is a very comforting and calming rhythmic motion. Once you get the hang of the rise and fall of the abdomen you can remove your hand from below the navel. Practicing this way, reminding our bodies of the full, expansive, method of breathing is extremely useful and should be practiced every day. You can do it upon waking, take 5 minutes in the middle of the day, and also as you fall asleep. A body scan (described in the chapter on meditation) can then be added to further release tensions and increase awareness of our whole body.

You can also practice diaphragmatic breathing standing up and sitting down. In fact we should be breathing fully, using our diaphragm and relaxing our abdomens, at all times. Every so often, place your hand lightly just below your navel (the center of your palm should be about three finger breadths below the navel, which means your thumb will be touching the navel) and remind yourself to breathe fully, deeply, and evenly. You can start diaphragmatic breathing by breathing in through the nose and breathing out through the mouth. This increases the clearing of stress-produced chemicals from the body and induces relaxation. Then go back to breathing through your nose.

Practicing abdominal breathing, at least once a day for 10 to 15 minutes will prove immensely valuable. You will feel calmer, less fatigued, and ready to encounter life's challenges.

Breathing to Refresh Ourselves

We all need a breath of fresh air. Whenever you are stressed, come back to your breathing. Slow, deep, rhythmic breathing calms our emotions and gives us the feeling of space we lack when we are stressed out. When we feel stressed we tend to hyperventilate which results in light-headedness, chest oppression. This induces its own form of panic and is exactly the opposite of what we want which is to calm our feeling and find some spaciousness.

Hyperventilating only makes us want to vent our feelings indiscriminately. A few deep and conscious breaths can bring us back to a more stable place emotionally as well as physically.

Ensuring the Air We Breathe is Fresh:

We also need to make sure that the air we breathe is fresh. In buildings with circulated air the incidents of headaches are greater. A closed office environment, with no open windows, not only supplies us with stale air, but it is often full of harmful electromagnetic radiation from the myriad of electronic and communication devices used.

Not all indoor environments are equipped with full spectrum lights. You need to go out and breathe. If at all possible, take a break every hour or two and take a short walk outdoors. Even though a walk on Mount Tam would be better, a five minute break in the fresh air is still rejuvenating. We consider staying in the office during lunch hour to be hazardous to your health.

At home you want to ensure that you use full spectrum lighting and reduce electromagnetic radiation. Computers, cellular phones and even an electric clock-radio by the bedside should be avoided as much as possible as they stimulate the sympathetic nervous system, making you “hyper” and exhausting the adrenals. Extremely low frequencies can affect the immune system and confuse it. Ionizers, Ozone emitters and other instruments to help clear your home environment can be obtained from Environmental Protective Equipment, at 805-898-7019, P.O. Box 30771, Santa Barbara, CA 93105.



Meditation



You may ask yourself what has meditation got to do with health. Traditionally, meditation is seen as a spiritual discipline geared toward finding internal truth, while health is considered to be a matter of the physical body. But in viewing health on the continuum of body-mind-spirit, meditation becomes not a foreign element, but the very path to health. Meditation helps us to cultivate a state of mind described as Big Mind, where we can see beyond our pain and arrive at acceptance and happiness.

In meditation we let go of all doing, of all thoughts, all worries. We enter a place of calmness and serenity. By shedding the various forms and manifestations of our busy lives we can find our true selves. Meditation affords us an opportunity to become calm, and thus the ability to look deeply and gain a new unobstructed perspective on our lives. Our meditation experience may not lead us to full bliss each and every time, but cumulatively it affords us more spaciousness and happiness.

There are many techniques of meditation. There are many books on meditation techniques as well as many sitting groups throughout the Bay Area. We encourage you to search out the method that best suits you. Ultimately meditation must be experienced, not read or talked about. An intellectual understanding of the experience is nice but it is not the experience.

To start your meditation, find a comfortable sitting posture with your back self-supported, relaxed and straight. A crossed-legged position sitting on a cushion is most common because it allows an open and wide base, with the spine creating a vertical axis, inferring a strong connection between heaven and earth. Westerners often find this posture too demanding and prefer using a chair. The chair is also more common in Western spiritual traditions. In either posture, allow your back to be straight, and your neck and shoulders to be relaxed. Either close your eyes or direct your gaze downwards about three feet away (some traditions practice gazing straight out). This way you already direct your focus inwards (some yogis call this “gazing at your heart”). Your arms can rest on your knees or in your lap. Allow a half smile to form on your lips. This posture seems easy. If you were to sit this way while talking to a friend or watching television you would have no problem, but when we “empty” our minds, the mind seems to want to grasp at something and pain and discomfort do arise.

Start by paying attention to your breath. You may want to start out with a few deeper breaths, then allow your breath to come to its normal course, using diaphragmatic breathing. Simply pay attention to your breath, the exchange of air through the nose, the rise and fall of the abdomen and torso. Know and identify your inbreath. Know and identify your outbreath. Note the coming and going of the breath. Observe how the inbreath turns into an outbreath, and the outbreath in turn leads into the inbreath. Keep your awareness on the breath. When various thoughts come, note them but do not engage in them (“do not invite them for tea”). The most experienced meditators have various thoughts come and go. The important thing is that the thoughts come and go, that they do not stay, that we do not begin to obsess and analyze.

To help you keep your focus on the breath you might want to softly and internally say “in” on the inbreath, and “out” on the outbreath.

Within a few minutes you are likely to feel calm and serene. Keep your awareness on the breath. Note the inbreath and outbreath and their interplay. Note that your breathing has become slower and deeper. Do not force your breath to become slower or deeper, simply observe it becoming slower and deeper. Enjoy this state of calmness. Thoughts will come. Allow them to go. If your posture feels uncomfortable, move your legs. Simply do it with full awareness, even coordinating it with your breath. Keep sitting for about 15-20 minutes. At the beginning you may want to sit for 10 minutes and build up to more.

This form of meditation, concentrating on the breath, emphasizes stopping. The Buddhists talk of stopping and insight as the two components of meditation. But first we must stop: stop the mind from racing, stop engaging in our daily activities, stop playing the millions of games we play without even knowing it. We stop so that we can allow something deeper to be discovered and to emerge. This is already great insight. It is a place where we have arrived. We have arrived at our true home, a place of great spaciousness. During these moments of sitting we are no longer bothered by our anxieties and pains, we are not obsessing about the past or worried about the future. We are simply sitting in the here and now, in full awareness and enjoyment of the present moment. This is a great gift. Now we have shed our “little self”. We have arrived at the place where we have let go of everything and we are connected to the source of our life, our breath. From here compassion, equanimity and non-attachment flow. This is the greatest gift meditation has to offer our health and us.

There are many other meditation techniques. In meditation we focus our attention (“meditate”) on one thing to the exclusion, or rather the letting go, of other thoughts so as to relax our minds and allow us to discover the mind’s greater depths. Most techniques utilize the breath as the attention point. The most common other technique is visualization, where you might visualize healing light, the light of God, of the Buddha, of compassion, etc., and take refuge in this light and space. Other common techniques are the use of mantras and chanting which open up the various energy centers of the body (chakras) and awaken the soul. All these techniques aim at reaching an ecstatic state. Ecstasy does not mean having a good old time, but shedding the boundaries of the self, connecting and becoming one with something bigger than the self as we commonly understand it.

At times, during meditation, we reach great depths of stillness. We wish we could take that sweet transcendent feeling and tuck it under the cushion, so we can take it out for our next sitting. At other times we will experience only thoughts and more thoughts. This stream of thoughts also serves us well. In the silence we can see what our thoughts are. Often we have many thoughts that pull us in many different directions without even noticing them. When thoughts arise in meditation we get a chance to observe and note them, and that can lead to great insight on our emotional life.

Meditation and imaging are two different techniques, each utilizing a different set of brain wavelengths. In imagery we communicate strongly with our inner world, while in meditation we become more one with the world. Many meditation masters warn against slipping into daydreaming, which may seem like imagery, during meditation. Both techniques are valuable but are best practiced separately. When meditating, do only meditation, and when imaging do only imagery.



Sitting meditation allows us to develop qualities of space and light. We can experience the space and the light within us while sitting in meditation. Now we need to take it a step further. We can take that feeling into our every day life. This is the practice of mindfulness. To help us maintain a spacious mind throughout the day, we need to remind ourselves of the possibility, by practicing conscious breathing. Here are some practices that can help us to bring the meditation to our daily lives.

The Body Scan

This meditation can be done anywhere. It is easiest done lying down on the back with the eyes closed. Start by paying all your attention to your breath, following the breath, thinking “breathing in, I know I am breathing in, breathing out I know I am breathing out.” After several breaths, start to pay attention to the rise and fall of the abdomen. “Breathing in my abdomen is rising, breathing out my abdomen is falling.” Following the rise and fall of the abdomen for several breaths.

Now, pay all your attention to your head, allowing the head to sink and be supported by the floor. Breathing in I send all my attention to my head, breathing out I release all the tension in my head. Breathe this way for several breaths. Now, focus on your neck and shoulders. “Breathing in, I send all my attention and love to my neck and shoulders, breathing out I release all the tension in my neck and shoulders, allowing them to open and widen.” Do this for several breaths.

Keep going down the body: the arms – from the shoulders to the tips of the fingers, the heart, the lungs, the liver, the kidneys, the intestines, the hips, the legs from the thighs to the tips of the toes. Pay attention to the area, send your love and intention to it, and release all tension on the outbreath (the release is mostly a thought process, but there may be a physical release and movement).

When you have finished scanning the body, note the whole body, allowing your whole body to sink into the floor, to be supported by the earth. Allow the whole body to lengthen and widen. Come back to your breath, the rise and fall of the abdomen. Slowly open your eyes. Roll over to one side, push with your arms so as to curl to a sitting position, and slowly get up.

You can go through the whole process in 5 minutes, although you might enjoy taking 10 minutes to do so. You can also do it sitting comfortably in a chair. This is a wonderful way to release tensions in our bodies and minds. It is a like taking a refreshing nap. You may want to practice this exercise every day after lunch. You will feel awake, refreshed, and relaxed afterwards.

Walking Meditation

This meditation can also be done anywhere. If you are alone and indoors, simply walk very slowly, taking one step with your inbreath, and one on your outbreath. Stepping on the left foot on the inbreath, paying your full attention to your breath and feet. As the breath turns into an outbreath, step on your right foot, paying full attention to your breath and body. As the outbreath turns into an inbreath, step again on your left foot, and so on. Just a few steps, while paying full attention to your breath, are enough to bring you back to your true self, to that wonderful feeling of space and light. You can, of course, do this for longer, perhaps 5 or 10 minutes. At first, your steps might be hesitant, but soon you will become accustomed to the slowness of walking meditation and feel comfortable taking very small, slow, and deliberate steps. Although this

form of walking meditation is best suited for the office or home, you can practice it in public places such as when waiting in line in the supermarket or at the bank, taking very small steps, almost stepping in place, coming back to your breath.

When walking outdoors, you can take several steps (perhaps two or three) on the inbreath, and several on the outbreath. Again, pay all your attention to your breath, release all tensions in your body, and enjoy your walking. This form of walking meditation is faster so it does not look too strange, and can be done outdoors, in the garden, the park, and even for a short distance on your way to work. (You would be surprised at what you might discover when you drop out of the hustle bustle of the street.)

Eating Meditation

This meditation starts with the way you prepare your food, set the table, and sit down to eat. Do each part slowly, paying attention to the breath as you perform each task. Do it as if you have all the time in the world. Once you are sitting down, take note of your food. Take a few moments to contemplate your food, where it comes from, how much work has gone into its preparation. Contemplate how the broccoli has thrived thanks to the soil, the sun, and the rain. This allows us a more complete connection with our food. We see the connectedness of everything in this world, how we are all dependent on the sun, the clouds, the earth. Our food becomes a complete universe, not just a piece of bread being chewed, but worlds of sunshine, rain storms, season changes, fields of wheat, flour mills, bakeries, etc.

When you start eating, eat slowly, enjoying each mouthful. You may want to name the food before you put it in your mouth. This allows you to recognize the food, rather than to just gobble it down. Chew slowly and consciously, all the while remembering to breathe. You are eating your meal as if you have all the time in the world, as if every piece of food is the whole universe. This induces calmness and relaxation. All too often we eat and pay no attention. This is an opportunity to eat in full awareness.

Many people say this method of eating is not only a meditation practice, but also allows them to loose weight, as by eating slowly and consciously they can recognize satiation and they eat only what they need, and then they do not over-eat.

These forms of meditation help bring our awareness back to our breath, back to our non-congested nature, to a place of space and light. We need to try and practice coming back to our breath as often as we possibly can. We can simply stop for a moment and pay attention to our breath.

Telephone meditation is one of the best practices for people with busy schedules. Whenever the phone rings, simply breathe in and out three times, and only then pick up the phone. If your breath is very slow, you may need to breathe in and out only two times so as to not have the call go over to your voice mail (though you may prefer to do that). The main thing is to stop everything you are doing, stop the thinking, the talking, take your hands off the keyboard, and simply breathe. You will find this also improves your telephone conversations. Many of us get very tense when the phone rings. We are already engaged in something else and we see the upcoming conversation as a possible nuisance. Telephone meditation allows us to use this possible annoyance as an opportunity to create more space for ourselves, to release tensions, and to come back to our full breathing.

Throughout our daily activities, we can stop for a moment, breathe and smile, and continue what we are doing while breathing consciously. The quality of what we do is greatly transformed this way, without losing any time. Suddenly we find that there is a feeling of space and ease in what we do. We no longer feel congested and pressured. We can wash dishes, cook, fold clothes, have conversations, type, and even think while we breathe.



Further reading on meditation practice in this style:

Thich Nhat Hanh: *The Blooming of the Lotus*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1993
A book with many guided meditations for use during sitting meditation

Thich Nhat Hanh: *The Miracle of Mindfulness*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1975
A manual on meditation, especially for everyday activity

Thich Nhat Hanh: *Peace is Every Step*, Bantman Books, NY, 1991
A guide to mindfulness in daily life

Thich Nhat Hanh: *Being Peace*, Parallax Press, Berkeley, 1987
on finding and practicing peace within

These books are available in most bookstores, or can be purchased from Parallax Press at 510-525-0101

Imagery



Imaging is a technique for exploring our inner world. The inner world is the world of all possibilities, with no limitations. The concepts of time and space no longer restrict us in this world (in an image one can be in one place one moment and instantaneously in another with no regard to distances). Anything that we can imagine, we have the potential to become. If we cannot imagine certain things, we have excluded them from the world of possibilities. We all have things we do not wish to be true and we refuse to allow ourselves to even imagine them.

During imagery we allow the image to unfold in its own way, in its own order. This is the subconscious communicating through free-association. We can analyze the image later, but not while it is happening. If we analyze the image while it is happening, the image is no longer happening and our rational mind has taken over. The type of imaging work we do is quick, full of movement, and leads toward light and space (essential elements in healing). It is not hypnotic in nature, nor is it meditative. Go through the image, keep it moving and end it within 30 to 60 seconds (or less). Any longer, and the rational mind will take over. This is very different than other imagery techniques, or meditative visualizations, where you go into an image for long periods. The key in this technique is movement.

It is best to do imagery in the morning upon waking, before eating or drinking anything. If you need to urinate, do so before starting the image (you want to feel comfortable while imaging). The process takes no longer than a minute per image. Do either one or three images in a sitting.

To engage in imagery, sit in a straight-backed chair, allowing your back to be straight and to rest on the back of the chair. Your feet are parallel, resting on the floor. Your arms are resting on the armrests, palms down (or on your lap, palms down, if the chair has no armrest). Do not cross your hands or feet. This is the position of the Egyptian Pharaohs: you are literally sitting on the throne of your own inner world. Close your eyes. Breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth, making the exhalations slightly longer than the inhalations, quieting the mind. Set the intention for the imaging exercise you are about to do and breathe out three times; that is start with an out-breath, breathe in, then out, in again, and out (there are only two inbreaths). This facilitates quieting, relaxation, and concentration. Now start the imagery.

In the imaging process we turn all our senses inwards: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, all turn inwards toward the mind (which is an internal sense organ). Most people find it easier to see things, but some find it easier to hear, smell, taste, or touch in an image, making the image more alive. Though the instructions we give are mostly visual, use all your senses to experience the situation. When you notice you are analyzing the image, stop analyzing, breathe out once, and continue with the image in as pure a manner as possible. If your rationalizing persists, stop the image altogether, and start again.

When the image is over, breathe out deeply once, and slowly open your eyes. Now you can analyze the imagery. You may now want to reinforce some of what you learned by drawing it, writing it, or giving it some expression (especially through behavioral changes). The purpose of the image is to bring the treasures of our inner world, our subconscious, to our “real lives”. Try to not just nod your head and say “this is interesting”; try to implement the message. You may not be ready to make all the changes you want (or are being indicated by the image). Do what

you can and reinforce the image work by creating something tangible (like a drawing) that manifests the image in the “real world”. Repeat the image every day for 21 days. After which you can take a break for a week, and then resume for another 3-week period.

Create your imagery exercises by seeing the problem you want to resolve and then seeing yourself resolving it. Then see yourself being nourished by the sun, reinforcing your resolution. When you see yourself in your problem it may look nothing like it looks in “real life”. For example, if you want to look into a situation with a friend, you might see yourself with the friend, you might see yourself in the desert, you might see your friend in chains, you might see the two of you surrounded by wolves, etc. The possibilities are endless, because our imagination (which represents our inner world) is unlimited. You may be surprised or even shocked by what you see. Note the feeling, but do not try to analyze what the image means (in other words do not say to yourself “Wow, that’s the problem, my friend is on another plane, I remember how aloof he was...”). Once seeing the situation, make more of it by involving your other senses. What do you see, hear, smell, taste, touch, feel during this situation? For most people, this will come naturally once the stage has been set.

Once the situation has been created/imagined, move on to resolve it. Notice what you (in the image) do not like, where there are constrictions, darkness, etc. Use whatever tools you need to resolve the situation. Remember this is imagery, you have all the tools you need: you merely need to image them. For example, if you and your friend have encountered a pack of wolves, you can talk to the wolves asking them what they want, you can embrace them, you can wear big frightening masks and chase them away, you can cross a river which they cannot swim in, you can shine a light at the wolves transforming them to people. Use your imagination! Now that the situation has found some sense of resolution, see that resolution nourishing you. For example, you and your friend walking on the beach together with a wolf beside you, or you walking alone in the garden, knowing you are happy being on your own right now, etc.

Remember to keep the image moving. Once you see and sense the scene, move on, do not wait anywhere forever no matter how pleasant it may be. Hanging out in some beautiful meadow for a long time is a valid form of relaxation, but it is not conducive for searching the inner world for messages.

The example we used is highly simplistic and suggestive. It is important to understand that there are no good or bad resolutions in an image. You may really want to stay friends, but the image may indicate otherwise. You might be a very peaceful person, yet you might find yourself using violent tools in an image. Once the image is over you can analyze it and decide what it means and what the message is. However, during the image, allow it to unfold using its own logic.

A very common use of imaging is to look at pain. In this type of imagery you imagine the part of your body that is in pain (it can be a metaphorical part). You walk into the body part using any opening you choose (skin pores, for instance, are an opening) and see what is wrong. You can further ask to whom this pain belongs, or to what this pain belongs. Then clear the blockages using golden tools for gold is the color of healing and transformation, clearing away any debris. Then surround the body part with blue or white light, the colors of healing and purity, allowing the light to penetrate every cell of the body, and see the body radiating the healing light from within it. It is useful to know the anatomy and physiology of the body part you are imaging. What you see in that body part can be anything, from what we might consider to be rational (torn tissue) to the fantastic (witches, clowns, dark caves, stars, etc.).

Here are some examples of “generic” imaging exercises that you can use both as practice and for the resolution of specific issue.

Taking Refuge in Space and Light

Breathe out three times. See yourself in a room. There is a box of balloons in the middle of the room. Pick a balloon of a color you like. Hold it by the string. Walk over to the window. Open the window and let the balloon go up, with you following it holding on to the string. Drift in space until you come to a place you really like, tug on the balloon string and land there. Notice the time of day, the light, the temperature. Breathe out once, and slowly open your eyes.

Most people land in a place that is spacious and light. This is a place for you to take refuge in and which facilitates healing for you. If this is a place you are familiar with in your life, you may wish to spend more time there.

The Seaside

Breathe out three times. See yourself on the beach by the seashore. Hear the sounds of the sea, smell the smells, feel the air on your skin. Notice your clothes. Walk in the sand, and come to a stop. Take off your clothes. Look at your clothes and the content of your bag (if any) and note any items you wish to keep with you. Go towards the water. Mix some sand with water and rub it onto your body, as if using a pumice stone. Rub different parts of your body with the sand. Stand up and dive into the water, allow yourself to be fully immersed in the water. If you wish you may take some more sand from the bottom of the sea and rub it against your body. Dive in the water one last time. Come out of the water and walk to a rock. There is a new set of clothes waiting for you by the rock. Dry yourself, and put on your new clothes. Walk in the sun noticing your new clothes and your hair. Breathe out, and slowly open your eyes.

This is a purification exercise (every culture has a purification exercise that involves water). It is a wonderful exercise to begin the day with, letting go of all our attachments, becoming more pure.

The Clock

Breathe out three times. See a clock. Notice what kind of clock it is. Now notice that something is wrong with the clock. Figure out what is wrong with the clock and fix it (remember – this is an image, you can obtain whatever tools you need). Breathe out and open your eyes.

You can make the correlation that whatever is wrong with the clock is a metaphor for what is wrong with your life. Whatever you do to fix it represents what you need to do in order to fix your life.

The Mask – Finding the Inner Self

1. Breathe out three times. See yourself in a room. You realize there is a mask on your face. Take off the mask that is on your face. Keep peeling off the masks on your face until there are no more masks and you are in your purest form, that which is in the image of God. Breathe out and open your eyes.
2. Breathe out three times. See, feel and know your innermost self, the indestructible self. Find the place in your body where the innermost self resides, and go there, merging with your innermost self. Breathe out and slowly open your eyes.



Pain

1. Breathe out three times. Locate a place of pain in your body. Breathe out once. See if there is another, perhaps a secret, pain and note where it is in your body.
2. Breathe out three times. You are in a natural environment (a meadow, a beach, etc.). Allow the sun to penetrate and nourish the place in you that is most in the image of God. Breathe out once. See and feel the parts of your body that are holding on to pain. From that part of you that is most in the image of God, direct the light to each part that is holding on to pain and cure it. If you need more light, you can connect your Inner Light to the light of the sun, fortifying your light. Breathe out and open your eyes.
3. Breathe out three times. See yourself in your pain. Breathe out, and see yourself walking out of your pain. Look back at the pain. Breathe out and open your eyes.

It is common for us to fuel our pain by the fact that we do not walk away from it.

These exercises, as well as the innermost self exercises are not meant to be sequential. Each is an imagery exercise that can be done on its own.

Many people seem somewhat reluctant to begin an imagery routine. Inevitably almost all of them find it to be a wonderful experience. After all what can be more exciting, more nourishing, than to communicate with our inner world? Imaging allows us direct contact with our inner world. In a minute or less of imaging you might gain insight and conviction that could otherwise take a long time to uncover.

The purpose of imaging is to bring back a message from our inner world. Most of us are not well connected with our inner worlds: it is too vast for most of us to feel comfortable in. It is then up to us as to how we use that information. But know that the inner world is always available to you, it can never be destroyed or tainted. It is a place where you reign supreme.

This method of imaging is the one advocated by Collette Aboulker-Muscat. Gerald Epstein's book *Healing Visualizations*, Bantman, 1989, expands of this method. Much of the imagery presented here is the work of Rabbi Gedaliah Fleer.



Stress Management



The human stress response is geared toward handling serious physical stressors such as exposure to the elements, danger from predators, etc. Evolutionarily this has made sense for many millennia. In today's world, when we speak of stress we rarely refer to physical stress, rather we usually refer to psychological stress. Yet the physiological response is the same. Our response to stress is an adrenal-sympathetic response chain starting with the adrenal glands secreting epinephrine and norepinephrine and resulting in increased heart rate and blood pressure, increased breathing rate, sweating, increased insulin secretion and the breakdown of liver glycogen, reduced digestive secretions, and reduced blood flow in the organs. We go into a state of emergency. When faced with a predator this is exactly the response we want, as it allows us to run as fast as we can, or fight for our life. In facing emotional stress these reactions only make us more upset.

This chain of reactions produces many toxic metabolic waste products. As a result, the lymph system is activated in order to clear those out. It is normal to get various symptoms such as fever, headache, nausea, diarrhea, after a stressful incident. (This accounts for the high incidents of colds and flus in the Olympics, where young, healthy people are under tremendous pressure.) When we are continuously under stress, even if the stress is relatively mild, we are unable to flush the toxicity out of our body fast enough and we develop a swampy terrain in our body. This can be the beginning of chronic degenerative diseases and may end up as cancer.

Decision making, doubt, fear, anxiety, anticipation, expectations, are all sources of stress. Mostly they cause a minor stress response, but these feelings can often be repetitive and even constant, creating a prolonged stress response that is not given a chance to clear out of our system. Our nervous system then adjusts, we are constantly in sympathetic mode and our adrenals are under constant pressure. The result is that we exhaust our adrenals and confuse our nervous system, becoming "sympathetic dominant," leading to further deterioration and disease.

The Chinese see stress as disrupting the flow of Qi (energy life-force). Stress is seen as primarily affecting the Liver and resulting in Liver Qi Congestion, one of the most common Chinese medical diagnosis.

Stress Management vs. Stress Avoidance

We know that stress is bad for us. We also know that for the most part we cannot avoid all the stressful situations in our lives. We have to learn to manage stress. It is clear that, more often than not, it is our reaction that is the problem, not the stimulus. Other people may not react to the same stimuli in the same stressful manner. This is why we talk of stress management rather than stress avoidance. However, there are times when we have done our best to manage a stressful situation and still we are unable to handle it. At this point we may need to look into ways to avoid the stress all together. This is not a strategy we can employ too often, as that would prevent us from living life fully. The preferred method is to learn to manage stress.

Aerobic exercise affords us an opportunity to clear the metabolic waste products created by stress. It can also often take our minds off the stressing factor. Nutritional support such as vitamin B6, vitamin C, zinc, magnesium, pantothenic acid, and potassium, all support the adrenal glands and can help us cope with stress. These are coping mechanisms.

If we want more than just coping mechanisms we need to look into how we handle our emotions. We need to find ways through which we can encounter stressful factors and react with less stress. The key to this is space. Providing more space for our feelings and our selves is the key to stress management.

The Spaciousness of Breathing

The best way to handle stress is to stop the stress response before it starts, or when it is in its infancy. We can do that by coming back to our breath. When you feel stressed, or even when you anticipate a stressful situation, stop everything for a moment and breathe in and out deeply, slowly, and consciously. Breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth for the first few breaths. This allows for more rapid clearing of toxins and calms the adrenals. Feel your abdomen rising and falling. You might want to place your hand just below the navel so as to feel your breath deep down in the abdomen.

Coming back to the breath, and breathing deeply in the abdomen calms us and settles us. We use the metaphor of a tree in a storm. The leaves and branches sway violently in the wind. If we only look at the branches we think that the tree is about to fall down. But then, when we look at the trunk of the tree we see that it is not moved by the storm. Anchoring the breath below the navel is like descending from the branches of the tree down to the tree trunk and taking refuge from our emotional storm. We then feel less oppressed by the situation. Our negative feelings do not invade us as easily and we feel there is space for other, more positive, feelings (such as understanding the other person's dilemma, seeing our frustration as a result of overwork, etc.)

We need to learn to take time to cultivate spaciousness in our lives so that at the moment of stress we can go back to our breath. If we wait for the storm to come before we practice conscious breathing, we probably won't succeed. We need to constantly practice coming back to our breathing. We need to take every opportunity we can to take the time and see the positive things around us. This is where meditation can be our salvation. Formal sitting meditation is very useful, but we also need to bring the practice to our daily life. Practicing a body scan and relaxation once a day is a great help for people with stressful schedules. Stopping and breathing each time the phone rings reinforces our ability to calm ourselves.

The Spaciousness of Nature, the Spaciousness of Calm Activities

We can also nourish ourselves by going out to nature. Walking on the earth, on natural soil, is extremely calming. We walk out in nature often to remind ourselves that there is more to life than schedules, obligations, congestive relationships, etc. Taking time off is important. Many people do not take enough time off and end up working during weekends, or they fill their days off with chores. Having one day a week with no obligations, a day that is devoted simply to nourishing ourselves, is crucial in teaching us that there is refuge from stress. Most world religions mandate one day a week for contemplation, for cultivation of the inner self, for connecting with something other than mundane chores.

Each day we can have a cup of tea with mindfulness, alone or with a friend. Enjoying a cup of tea slowly and calmly nourishes us and reinforces calmness. We can then find that calmness when we most need it, when we are encountering stress.

Many people do not recognize their stress until they are already fully gripped by it. By then it is much harder to calm ourselves. By cultivating calmness throughout the day we can begin to notice stress when it first arises, or even before the situation has developed. We then have a better chance to exercise conscious breathing and stop the stress response. Some of us have become blind when it comes to identifying stress.

We might have even chosen recreational activities that create more stress, rather than relaxation, in our lives. We are so used to the notion of being constantly challenged that we opt for a challenge even as a hobby. Even gardening, which seems like a perfect hobby, can turn into a stress factor, if one is worried about getting the absolutely best seeds at the exact time, entering the pumpkins in a competition, wanting to ensure the tomatoes are red so we can give them to our neighbors, etc. If we can create stress in gardening, an activity which involves the outdoors, seasonal changes and growth, how much more so when it comes to competitive sports? As soon as ambition, schedules, the need for achievement, or expectations arise, we are probably entering a stressful situation. Even if we absolutely love this activity, we need to reevaluate our participation and find ways to shed the stressful elements.

Imagery for Stress

The following images can help you identify your stress weak points, and reinforce the ability to handle stress.

Breathe out three times. See yourself in a stressful situation. Breathe out once. Now see the stress lifting away in gray smoke. See yourself now without the stress. Surround yourself with white light, allow the light to permeate every cell in your body. Let the light now emanate from your chest or any other part of your body. Breathe out and slowly open your eyes.

Breathe out three times. See the word “curse” inscribed before you. See the “s” as a snake enveloped in red flames. Let the snake slither away, and see what is left. Surround what is left by white light, and put it anywhere in your body where it is needed. Know that the doubt and stress are gone. Breathe out and slowly open your eyes.

Much of our stress is caused by us being annoyed at another person, feeling unheard, and through mutual misunderstanding of each other’s motivations. The following image can help.

Breathe out three times. See yourself face to face with the person who is upsetting you. Enter his or her body through any opening you choose (skin pores are an opening). Travel up to his or her heart, and see through their eyes. See yourself standing across from your adversary, seeing through his or her eyes and heart. Come out the way you came in. Breathe out once. Now allow your adversary to enter your body. Guide him or her to your heart and eyes. Allow him or her to see themselves through your heart and eyes. Allow your adversary to leave the way he or she came in. From your heart ask a question of your adversary’s heart and listen to the answer. Breathe out and slowly open your eyes.

Managing stress is not always easy. It takes practice. It also takes courage and the willingness to be vulnerable. Managing stress is a matter of continuously creating more space in our lives. It is about handling our emotions, staying in the present moment without obsessing about the past or the future. We will look further into that in the next chapter.

Living in the Present Moment



Anxiety, worries, fear, sadness, and many other feelings tend to have their roots in forgetting to live the moment that is right here and now. When we are worried or anxious about something it is usually because we are thinking of what happened in the past or how we should handle it in the future. We are not worried about something that is happening right here and now. We tend to obsess about how we should have handled matters in the past, or how we will encounter them in the future.

Meanwhile, we are missing the most important time of our lives: the present moment. The past is already gone, we cannot change it by rehashing how stupid we think we, or others, might have been. The future has not yet arrived, we cannot tell what it will bring. Our anxieties and fears may not come true. We have no way of knowing what will really happen. Even in the midst of great depression, anxiety, or panic, we can come back to the present moment and find that we are alive, breathing, and that we are capable of happiness. For just this moment we can let go of our fears, anxieties, anger. And at this very moment we can feel rather peaceful and spacious. And then we can do it again and again at each moment.

This is not escapism. Living fully in the present moment does not mean that we stop saving money for the kids' college fund, or that we never evaluate our actions and try to improve ourselves. Living in the present moment is simply acknowledging that we cannot control the future, nor change the past. We simply let go of the obsessive qualities of our feelings. We recognize that we made a mistake, or that we need to do something in an attempt to make us happy in the future, and we do whatever we think needs to be done about it. All we have done is to let go of the emotional baggage.

Mindful Breathing

Living in the present moment means knowing what is happening right here and now. We do this with the help of mindful breathing. Mindful breathing calms our mind and takes the edge off the obsessive nature of our thoughts. We can then see that life is still all around us and that we can connect to it: we can breathe, we can walk on the earth, we can enjoy the sky and the sun, we can connect with people, animals, landscapes, etc.

“Dwelling in the present moment, I know it is a wonderful moment” is a famous mantra favored by Vietnamese Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh. To live fully in the moment is to have the capacity to see that it is a wonderful moment.

In moments of great suffering and under extreme and adverse circumstances, we can still come back to the present moment. Sometimes our whole world seems to be crumbling around us, and yet, we are alive. In some grave situations this may seem wrong. Perhaps we would have preferred to have died. But the fact is that we are alive, and as long as we are breathing we have the capacity to see something, even if very remote, that is wonderful. We are always able to change our inner world, to adjust our understanding of the situation. We can always choose to live fully in the present moment.

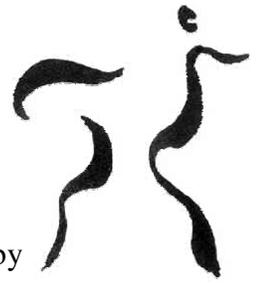
As we practice meditation, imagery, calming our body and mind, we learn to live each moment as is, connecting to the present moment in the deepest way.

You might be thinking “this is very nice, but what happens when you have a real problem and it is right here and now?”

People have maintained their dignity and capacity for life in the worst and most despairing of circumstances: forced labor camps, long wars and devastation, etc. Perhaps we think of these people as saints. We believe we would not be able to be that way. But we need not take the big challenges yet. These challenges are not ours at this moment. We need to handle our own despair, our own running away from the present moment. When we manage the smaller scale challenges, we find ourselves able to live fully in the present moment in the face of greater challenges. We can cultivate in us the ability to remain calm, serene, content, and hopeful, by doing it one step at a time, moment by moment.



Handling Our Feelings



In the previous chapters we have already learned the techniques of calming our feelings by allowing our feelings more space through the use of conscious breathing. Being caught by an excess of negative feelings is like being in the midst of a storm. We want to get away from the ruffled-up branches and come down to the trunk of the tree where it is still calm and clear. We do this by recognizing our emotional state, and mindfully breathing and paying our full attention to the rise and fall of the abdomen.

It is important to understand that all feelings, even so-called negative feelings, have their purpose and reason. As long as such feelings do not “invade the heart”, they are not necessarily damaging, though they may be unpleasant. The concept of a feeling “invading the heart” means that it has become all consuming. At that point we lose the ability to experience other emotions. We are in a “narrow place” – we see everything in life through the prism (or prison) of the particular emotion that has taken over us. When a feeling becomes too strong and begins to consume us, this is when it adversely affects and blocks the circulation of Qi (energy life-force) and causes disease. Naturally it is best to handle the emotion before it gets to the damaging state. The best way to do that is to allow our feelings to flow and watch out for any over-floods.

What are Emotions

Each feeling has its useful aspects as well as its damaging aspects. The Chinese characters for the feelings express this idea very well. A feeling can very easily turn from being natural and useful to being pathological. That is why we want to check upon our feelings by being aware of them, even when there is no storm. We can simply note that we have a certain feeling and then we can look further as to its roots and causes, and decide on a course of action.

Emotions are an extremely important part of life. The Chinese character *Qing*, which stands for emotion, is a representation of the greenery of life inside the heart. In other words emotions are the deep power and the richness of life itself.

Oppression, the character *You*, is represented by the pictogram of one who is walking around carrying the troubles of his head and heart. Clearly an undesirable state, as it prevents us from walking around open to new experiences and new possibilities.

Anger, *Nu*, represents the feeling in the heart of a woman who has a hand over her, in other words, the feeling of a slave woman. Anger makes the Qi rise. Many of us fail to see that anger has to do with our need to equalize power. When another person puts us down we feel angry, and our anger makes us feel like we are rising above them (indignant anger). Thus we can look at our need to be as important as another as a key to understanding our anger.

Fear, *Kong Ju*, is the beating of the heart of a watchful bird. Fear sinks the Qi. It is naturally useful to be watchful to a point. Once our heart is beating too strongly though, fear has taken over, it has become pathological. We have sunk too low, becoming smaller and smaller in face of our fear. Thus when looking at fear we want to recognize what truly needs to be watched over.

Two characters represent sadness. At first sadness is considered *Ai*, which is the crying of the mouth when one is dressed as a mourner. It is natural for one to cry and grieve a loss. When this becomes prolonged and pathological it is called *Bei*, a strong all-consuming sadness. The character here is the sign for negating the heart. Sadness is the mourning of something we had and lost (or perhaps never had but lost the hope to have). When we are too caught up in the past, we are negating life. We can no longer create new possibilities in our lives. In some religious traditions prolonged sadness is forbidden on the same grounds as murder – as it is the murder of oneself.

Balancing our Emotions

Recognizing the emotion and naming it reduces the power of the storm. When we are very angry we become anger and nothing else can enter our minds. The same is true with other emotions such as fear, jealousy, anxiety, etc. By recognizing and naming the feeling, we restore the field of the rest of the mind. It allows the mind with its vast possibilities to become apparent and name the feeling. Now that the feeling has been recognized and acknowledged, the field of the mind has been restored. We can now create new possibilities, not just the ones supporting our negative emotion.

Through conscious breathing, the named feeling can be calmed. It is now easier to let go of the past and the future and come back to the present moment. Our breathing allows us to embrace the feeling and to give it spaciousness. We can now remind ourselves that the quality and intensity of all feelings are transitory in nature, and that this storm too shall pass. We can start to see how our feeling is linked with us being caught in the past or worried about the future. We can take refuge in the present moment and allow ourselves some space away from the pain.

When we keep nursing our feelings with conscious breathing, walking meditation, relaxing, and nourishing other feelings that are positive, the negative feeling can lose its grip on us. We can start to see its root causes and address those. This is a process that might take minutes, if we are lucky, or it may take days or even weeks. It is important to trust the process. We can trust the process if we can enjoy it, and surely it is far more enjoyable to be aware of our breath than to be caught in a storm of negative emotion. This way, we get positive reinforcement that allows us to keep going and face the next strong wave of emotion.

You can visualize the idea of giving space to a strong emotion and dissolving it using the following imagery:

Breathe out three times. See your emotion raging. Breathe out once. Surround the emotion with a white light. Let the emotion dissolve into the light and become part of it. Now dive into the light yourself, and feel the space and light around you. Breathe out and open your eyes.

Expressing our Emotions

Suppressing our emotions is not a good idea. It may seem like we have managed to move on and cope, but internally we are carrying the pain of the unresolved storm in a dormant form that might erupt at another time. We might not express our feelings because we believe they are inappropriate, or that revealing our feelings will make us vulnerable.

Our feelings are never inappropriate, though the way we express them might be. Revealing our feelings will always make us vulnerable, but most people react with kindness when exposed with

honest vulnerability. Many of us need to learn to express our feelings. We want to do that without rage, without fear of being judged, using “I feel” statements, and avoiding judgements or placing blame. You might want to say “I feel angry and I don’t know exactly why yet”. (We often think we know exactly who angered us, but later we admit that it was our own circumstance that contributed to our anger. It is safe to assume that while we are angry we do not know the full causes of our anger.)

Sometimes expressing a feeling is the best way to handle it: it gives the feeling some space, it is no longer confined within us. Once expression takes place, come back and look into the feeling and its root causes. Sometimes, however, we are not able to express our feelings to others. This may be because we are not yet able to express ourselves, or perhaps because we do not feel we will get the support we yearn for.

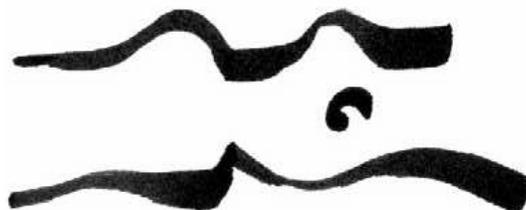
Self-expression and Prayer

The flow in a well can easily become stagnant. The flow in the vast ocean, however, never does. To create motion in the well so that it would spring into a stream and onto a river and to the sea, is to connect the well to the ever-flowing ocean. This flow is how the Chinese describe the flow of the meridians. When we find ourselves in an emotional well, we can express the emotion in such a way so that it springs forth, becomes a stream of emotions, then a river that flows to the sea, connecting us to the vast ever-flowing ocean of humanity and the world.

There are times when our pain is so great that we no longer seek the support of others. When we are on the edge of our emotional abyss, self-expression is what lets us come out. No matter whether we are atheists, agnostics, or observers of religion, we have all found ourselves praying when in tremendous despair. Prayer is a form of self-expression that allows us to calm our feelings and feel supported, even when those feelings lack definition.

There are times when all we can do is to scream a silent scream. At other times we are moved to scream audibly. Then there are times when we sing. At first a melody without words comes out, and then a few words might come, disconnected, meaningless. At other times, we are moved to sing with coherent words. And when we have poured our soul and understood our yearnings more clearly, this is when we use words, such as in journaling.

All of these forms of expression allow us to open our hearts, to pour out our soul, to connect with something larger than ourselves, and to know that we are being heard. We are being heard by our own inner world, by whatever we feel sustains life: this can be God, the goddess, Buddha, or any life-sustaining energy that we connect to. By allowing the pain to pour out, we reaffirm our connection to our Source, and the Source listens to us, supports us, gives us the spaciousness and connectedness we so desperately need. Whether we pray, or sing, or dance, or scream silently or audibly, we know that at that moment we are being fully heard and that we are being supported. There are no hide-and-seek games within this form of expression. This allows great spaciousness for our feelings, and now our feelings are no longer congested but are a manifestation of the force of life that runs through us.





Cravings, Addictions, and Weight Loss

Addictions of various sorts are both a disease in their own right and a contributing factor to further illness. To be addicted is to surrender oneself to something habitually or obsessively (Webster Dictionary). The problem with an addiction is that we surrender ourselves. When we surrender ourselves to the dictates of something that is not true to ourselves, we can no longer fulfill ourselves. We are “possessed”, we are no longer in control, we have lost our free will, we are no longer truly living. In an addiction, we no longer satisfy ourselves and our true needs; instead, we try to satisfy an obsession that will never make us feel whole.

It is no wonder that addictions have been an area of major concern throughout the history of medicine. In the language of ancient China the obsession can be considered a demon, and the addict can be seen as possessed. Later, non-demonic psychological states have been used in describing the same phenomenon. Medically, the Chinese saw addiction as so important that they described an important channel system (the *Yin Wei* channel) as the mechanism that fails in the addict, and named points accordingly. The first point on this channel is called the Guest House (*Zhu Bin*), indicating that this channel’s role is to help us play host to ourselves, to be comfortable with who we are, and to not allow unwanted “guests” (such as addictions) in. Today, we still use this channel in treating addictions. Basic human behavior is much the same as it was two thousand years ago in China, the words have changed, the means have become more sophisticated, but our basic needs and desires are very much the same.

Cravings are natural. They express the fact that we lack something. We need to learn to handle them before they take us over and turn into addictions. If we can learn to fill the void from within, we would then be able to handle our cravings. Behind the craving there is a call, often a desperate one, for us to pay attention, to address an inner pain. When we fail to understand the true calling of the craving, and simply satisfy the external manifestation, we fall victim to it and become addicted. We have now escaped ourselves, our pain. We no longer live in our true body, we are no longer living in the moment. We have masked our true self and the present moment with an addiction.

Whatever the addiction is, be it alcohol, cigarettes, drugs, food, love, sex, work, etc., it is often very hard for us to recognize. Like a despotic ruler, the addiction is not going to simply give up control. It is very clever about it. It might pretend it does not exist, or that it is only a natural thing. It might tell you that you, the true owner of the self, couldn’t possibly exist without it, the “benevolent” addiction. It pretends to be a natural “coping mechanism” while in truth it is you who have to cope with it. No matter what people around us say, no matter how disapproving, recognizing the addiction for what it is, a foreign ruler over our true freedom, is extremely hard for many of us.

Learning Satiation

Coming back to the present moment and learning satiation are tools to both recognize addictions and to conquer them. Our tendency is to not be satiated. We have a bite of ice cream, and rather than recognizing that it is good and being thankful for it, we waste no time and immediately reach for the container, gulping down a full pint before we ever had a chance to enjoy the first bite. We simply do not know how to recognize satiation. As soon as we like something, we let go of the present moment feeling of “hum, this is lovely” and we rush to the future, trying to

secure “more”. If we can conquer this habit in various activities, we might just recognize our addictions. Our addictive habits would be the ones we never seem to be able to slow down or to find a satiation point.

Learning satiation is learning moderation, even in areas where we seem to have no problems with. When we eat, we can eat very slowly, one bite at a time, making a conscious effort to enjoy each morsel of food. We can support this by taking time to prepare the meal and the table. Taking one bite at a time, chewing slowly, taking time to breathe and reflect between each bite, allowing ourselves to enjoy the food, our movements, our breath. This practice has helped many people loose weight. Once they slow down their eating habits, they recognize that they are satiated with less food, they eat less and begin to loose weight.

We can practice learning satiation by simply slowing down and taking note of what is happening to us. Learning satiation is basically learning to be in the present moment. It is stopping the habit of moving into the future. When we shop, we can pick each item with care (after all if we are about to buy it, why handle it roughly). When we drive a car, we can stay at the speed we are at (remember, this is an exercise, try it) rather than assume we would have a better time at a higher speed. When we are with friends, we can just pause and be with them, we do not have to exhaust all subjects of conversation immediately or go somewhere in order to have fun.

Once we recognize our addiction, we need to exercise satiation in that realm. With some addictions (involving life-sustaining activities such as eating) we can still do the activity but we need to slow down in order to recognize our point of satiation. Then we can stop the activity. With some addictions, we cannot afford to engage in the activity at all.

In either case, we need to learn what emotional states lead us to the addictive activity, and exercise spaciousness so that the emotion will not take us over. Most often the emotions behind an addiction are loneliness, isolation, fear, worry, and anger. If we can fully accept who we are, then we can accept our situation, and we will not need to escape.

Healing the Emotion Behind the Addiction

Professional help is crucial as it is very difficult (and often impossible) to untie ones own knots. Support groups are useful too. Denial is very strong in addiction, as are shame and hiding. We need to break those behavior patterns since they feed the addiction. Support groups are composed of people who share our experience, we cannot hide from them, we cannot deny our feelings to them, and we tend to be less ashamed with those who share our shame. At the very least, support groups help us break the habits that feed our addictions.

There is no magic wand that waves addictions away. There is no generic path. Each person must find his or her own path. We have found the following imagery exercises to be useful. Acupuncture can be extremely helpful in calming cravings and opening the mind-heart throughout all stages of the recovery process. A detoxification program is very useful, however, in the acute stage of recovery it is usually too difficult to master. The most useful elements of our detoxification program during the acute recovery stage (the “detox stage”) are the coffee enemas (once a day for 3 days, with 3 days rest following) and carrot, dandelion, and parsley juice. These help to detoxify the liver, the organ most involved in chemical addictions.

Taking time and space for contemplation, meditation, imagery, and all other inner work is essential. Kicking an addiction is a transformative process that requires as much internal and external support as one can get.

Being over-weight is a matter not only of overcoming addictions, but also of adjusting metabolism. One might be able to readjust one's metabolism through the use of proper foods, or, in cases where there are more serious disease processes already set in, one might need medical help. In either case, we believe it is best to seek the advise of a health care professional. Acupuncture can address and adjust the metabolic process, as can herbal remedies.

In all addictions, the issue of self-image, and reinforcement of a new, positive image, must be dealt with. The first image we suggest for weight loss can be adjusted for any other addiction, craving, or desire to let go of an old image and forge a new one.

Imagery Exercises for Weight Loss

Draw an image of yourself (on paper) as you are now. Label the inches of areas of concern. Put an X through the paper, and fold it four times (into 16 pieces). Cut the paper into the 16 pieces. Burn them and flush away (or bury them). Now draw an image of how you would like to look and hang it up (you can use the mirroring exercise).

Mirroring – creating the image of yourself as thin: this is the image you will become.

Breathe out slowly three times. See yourself in a mirror. The image in the mirror is thin. Enter the mirror and merge with your image. Notice how you feel. Breathe out once.

Come out of the mirror. Push the image of your thin self to the right with your right hand. Breathe out and slowly open your eyes.

Do this exercise as needed (to reinforce the thin image).

See your thin self each time before meals.

Restructuring – to reshape the body (do the imagery 20 to 30 minutes before meals)

This is a progressive exercise. Each week you add another component to the previous ones.

The basic exercise (week one): As you breathe in see all four extremities folding in. The fingers and toes fold into the hands and feet; into the wrists and ankles; into the forearms, elbows, calves and knees; into the upper arms and shoulders, thighs and hips; all folding into the abdomen under the diaphragm and meeting there. Image this quickly in one deep inhalation. On your out-breath, see gray smoke coming out and drifting in the air. (This is your fat coming out of the skin and disappearing into the universe.) Do this three times, on 3 full breaths.

Get up from the chair and stand by a wall. Face north and stretch on your toes and stretch your arms in the air. Turn to the east (90° to the right). Stretch on your toes and stretch the right arm. Turn another 90° to the right, facing south. Stretch on your toes and stretch both arms. Turn another 90° to the right, facing west. Stretch on your toes and stretch the left arm. Turn again and repeat (3 circles in all).

On week two: Do the above exercise 20 to 30 minutes before each meal. Just as you sit down to eat, tell yourself the content of the meal you are about to eat. Tell your body to take in exactly what it needs and to reject what it does not need.

Week three: After folding and stretching (3 times), sit in the chair, close your eyes and physically bend your body over from the waist, elevating your legs, stretching the legs and stretching the arms in front of you. See your arms and legs extending far away (for miles!) when you exhale, and relax. Do this three times.

Do this three-week cycle, and then stop for a week, starting another three-week cycle, breaking for one week, etc.

Imagery for Addictions

Close your eyes and breathe out three times. See yourself in a large open field. See in front of you a golden ladder stretching straight up. Count the number of rungs in the ladder (you must know the exact count). Climb up the ladder while carrying your addiction in your hand. Go up one rung and take note of what is happening. See, hear, smell what is around you, and notice how you feel. Notice what is in your hand. Now go up to the third rung, and stop to see, hear, smell what is around you, and notice how you feel. Note the substance in your hand. Go up to the 5th rung, and stop to see, hear, smell what is around you, and notice how you feel. Note the substance in your hand. Go up to the 8th rung, and stop to see, hear, smell what is around you, and notice how you feel. Note the substance in your hand.

Keep going up. Your next stop is on the 12th rung. The gap between the stops is increased by one rung each time.

When you reach the rung that is 3 rungs below the top (if the ladder has 20 rungs, stop at the 18th), stop to see, hear, smell what is around you, and notice how you feel. (If you are nervous, know that you are wearing a golden belt that protects you from falling.) Note the substance in your hand.

Climb one more rung. Feel, see, and hear what is around you. Note the substance in your hand. Take note of your feelings.

Climb up to the last rung. Stand at the top of the ladder (remember your golden belt). Take the object that is in your hand and throw it behind you. Do not look back. Come down the ladder as quickly as you can, and notice your feeling.

Breathe out once, and open your eyes.

Do this exercise for 21 days with the intention of giving up your addiction.

What you hold in your hand can be the addictive substance (e.g., a cigarette, a bottle, etc.) or can represent your addiction in some manner.





Three Common Health Conditions

We have chosen to expand on three disorders that are extremely common, allergies, fatigue, and repetitive stress injuries. While we certainly hope you can get some tips on how to handle your own situation, we do not mean for this to be the most authoritative or most complete description of self-treatment options. Rather, we use these three conditions as examples of how to look at a health situation and implement the understanding brought about throughout the rest of this book. These examples should prove to be useful for anyone, whether they suffer from the particular problem or not as they illustrate a way of looking and resolving health problems.

In each case we outline the possible causes, and treatment strategies that are easily implemented. We also describe an emotional profile that seems to correlate with the condition. These philosophical statements are somewhat of a dogma, and like any dogma, they need to be tailored to the individual case. The same is true to any advice given here. For example, dairy is the most common contributor (if not creator) of allergies. Most people feel much improved when dairy is eliminated. There are, however, people with allergies who seem to be unaffected by dairy and do not seem to get better even after months of eliminating dairy from their diets. Those people are rare, and the allergy-dairy connection still holds true because medicine is not an exact science, but a statistical one. And since healing is an art, it is impossible to summarize it in a book.

Sinus Allergies

The most common form of allergy is the sinus allergy. This can be a reaction to pollen, dust, mold, animal dander, etc. Many clinicians believe that underlying almost any allergy is a food allergy. The food allergy is often subtle and does not manifest strongly. Once the known allergen is introduced, it acts as the “straw that breaks the camel’s back” and it brings about the full blown allergic reaction.

The allergic reaction is a result of the immune system trying to neutralize what it perceives as an unwanted foreign substance (e.g. pollen). The mobilized IgE antibodies cause a release of histamines which cause sneezing, congestion, and itching. Taking anti-histamines blocks the effect of histamines. It does not cure the allergy. Most over-the-counter anti-histamines cause drowsiness. Non-sedating anti-histamines (usually obtained through a prescription) do not cross the blood-brain barrier as easily and thus do not cause drowsiness, but they still provide only temporary relief.

Allergies can be the first stage of more serious chronic degenerative diseases. With an over-zealous immune system, the body can become accustomed to being in attack mode. This could lead to auto-immune disorders in the long run and begins to tax the autonomic nervous system. Sinus allergies also prevent us from breathing fully and cleanly, contributing to toxic build up.

Allergies are a full-body systemic problem. One cannot ignore the possibilities of food allergies, of immune problem, etc.

Diet for Sinus Allergies

The first step in addressing allergies is the elimination (or at least a very serious reduction) of known allergens, sugar, dairy and wheat products. Citrus fruits are also phlegm producing and are best avoided. A general detoxification program is likely needed. A clean diet is of the essence in dealing with allergies. The nose is the opening of the lungs, and in Chinese medicine the lungs are paired with the bowels. Avoiding sticky foods is important in order to keep the bowels open.

Eat plenty of green vegetables, especially dark leafy greens. Lightly cook or steam your vegetables. Eat non-glutinous grains (no wheat or rye). Avoid cold drinks. Dark leafy greens help decongest the liver. Liver congestion can play a role in allergies. Warm foods and elimination of cold drinks helps maintain more efficient digestion and reduces phlegm production. The most important dietary change you can make is the elimination of dairy, sugar, and wheat.

Nasal Rinsing

The sinuses are cave-like structures that are dark and are not well nourished by blood vessels. They are ideal breeding grounds for bacteria and other pathogenic microbes. Because of their poor circulation, it is hard to clear sinus infections with antibiotics. The antibiotics simply do not reach the target area. Just as one treats an infected hung nail with external application of iodine solution, the sinuses are best treated externally through a nose rinse. Even though you may not have a sinus infection (50% of allergy sufferers do have a sinus infection) it is important that you rinse your sinuses, to prevent accumulation of phlegm and bacteria. Research has shown that some bacteria, including streptococci, when treated with antibiotics will travel to the sinuses, where they will thrive unaffected by the antibiotics. The original infected site is cleared, but the bacteria will then come back and re-infect it, causing chronic infections. Rinsing the sinus cavities cuts this cycle.

Rinse your sinuses twice a day with sea salt water. Use one cup of warm water with a teaspoon of sea salt. Snort the water up one nostril, and spit the water out through the mouth (or through the other nostril; it is important that the water pass through the sinuses). Repeat a few times, snorting salt water through each nostril a few times. At first this sinus rinse may feel like you are drowning in the ocean, but after a few rinses you will get used to the feeling and learn to adjust the quantity of water.

Instead of using salt water, you can use bancha tea. Using water boiled in dandelion root is even more effective when there is an infection because of the anti-microbial effect of dandelion root. For a serious sinus infections use following essential oils in the salt water. Two to three drops of peppermint essential oil, 2-3 drops of tea tree essential oil, and 2-3 drops of thyme essential oil. This combination is highly anti-microbial and strongly opens the nose.

Massage Techniques for Sinus Allergies

Sinus allergies are correlated with a very tight navel. It is crucial that this tightness be softened. The navel is where original immunity has been passed from mother to child, and often the umbilical cord has been cut while it was still pulsating, contributing to allergies later on in life. When taking a bath (or just lying down on your back) you can massage the area around the navel in towards the center of the navel, as if trying to touch the inside of the abdomen behind the navel.

Tight upper back and hunched shoulders further congest the lungs. To release these, lie on your back and feel that your shoulders are sinking into the ground below you, relaxing and widening with each outbreath. Concentrating on the relaxation of the shoulders and upper back and opening of the chest for 10 minutes each day, will cumulatively change your posture.

The Emotional Profile

The emotional statement of allergies (of any nature) can be “I do not like the world I live in and I am constantly fighting it”. Of course, we all have moments when we feel we are at war with the world. People with allergies are called upon to look at their attitude in accepting the world as is and seeing the world as supportive rather than combating them. The attitude in question may be a very hidden one, in an area we never suspected it (had it been obvious we might have resolved it already!).

You may want to use the following imagery exercises:

1. Breathe out three times. See your demons facing you. Put on a scary mask and with your outbreath, project the force of the mask so as to scare the demons off. Breathe out once. Transport yourself to a pine forest. Breathe in the aromatic fragrance of the pine. Feel the pine permeating your whole body, waking it up, opening, and relaxing your body. See the pine trees breathing in as you breathe out. See the pines breathe out fresh air as you breathe in that air. Breathe out, and open your eyes.
2. Breathe out three times. See, feel and know the place in your body where there is fighting. Do what is needed to bring truce to the fighting. See the white light of peace glowing from the place where previously fighting took place, and see the light expanding through your whole body, surrounding you and the air around you. (If you have trouble with creating the truce, remember that this is an image, anything can happen. You can mobilize whatever resources are necessary.)
3. Breathe out three times. See yourself in a large open space. Stretch your arms up towards the sun. Your arms are becoming very long, stretching toward the sun. Allow the rays of the sun to nourish your hands, palms and fingertips. At the end of each fingertip there is a ray connecting to the sun. At the fingertip of each finger of your right hand (left, if you are left handed) see a small hand (5 hands in all), while at the fingertips of your left hand (right if you are left handed) see 5 eyes. Bring the arms toward your sinuses. Enter the sinus cavities, shedding rays of light into the sinuses. With the small hands at the end of your fingertips, using golden tools, clean out what needs cleaning: brush, sweep, wipe, take away. See that the sinus cavities are now clear, pink, and smooth. Come out of the sinus cavities, hold your arms up to the sun, and let the eyes and hands pull back into your fingertips. Breathe out and open your eyes.

Acupuncture can be very helpful in sinus allergies, and specific allergies can be treated using applied kinesiology techniques. Using these techniques we can reeducate the nervous system to accept what was previously treated as an allergen.

Fatigue

Almost everybody experiences fatigue at some stage of his or her life. For some it is an occasional exhaustion after doing too much, for others it is an almost daily occurrence, and for others it is a serious debilitating problem that has earned the title *chronic fatigue immune dysfunction syndrome* (CFIDS). We refer to other fatigues as the “common fatigue” as distinguished from this debilitating fatigue.

The “Common Fatigue”

Fatigue can be correlated with a variety of disorders, any of which might be the root cause or a major contributing factor. These can be thyroid dysfunction (hyper- and hypo-thyroidism), low blood pressure, liver insufficiency (ranging from former hepatitis to blood transfusions), adrenal exhaustion, immune disorders (including allergies) and infections, chemical exposure, lack of sleep, depression, trauma and surgeries, and just simply over-doing it. In almost all forms of fatigue one finds sugar metabolism problems.

From the Chinese standpoint fatigue is seen as a deficiency in the Spleen (digestive/absorption system) and Lungs, as well as a congestion of energy mostly due to emotions or to Dampness or Phlegm. Dampness or Phlegm can be seen as metabolic waste products that are not being cleared efficiently from the body (fat is a form of “dampness”). Dampness and Phlegm obstruct the flow of energy. They act as a swamp, obstructing, not allowing us to easily connect through their viscosity.

The importance of sugar in fatigue stands to reason, as sugar is the form of energy our body uses. The habit of getting a quick energy fix with coffee and sugar causes a rapid rise in blood glucose levels with a rapid drop afterwards, leading to a slump. In many cases fixing sugar metabolism through both treatment and diet solves the problem. Though eliminating sugar may not solve the problem, it is almost always a preliminary step prior to addressing other issues. Sugar metabolism and underlying factors can all be addressed and treated with acupuncture and other modalities.

Diet for Combating Fatigue

Most importantly, eliminate sugar, coffee, and sodas from your diet. The post-lunch coffee-sugar fix is detrimental to your health. It elevates and then drops your blood sugar level as well as activates your adrenals and puts you in stress mode. Instead of coffee (or soda) and sugar, try carrot juice. Get a glass of fresh carrot juice right after you eat lunch, and drink it about half an hour to an hour after you return from lunch. Also be sure to get some fresh air during your lunch break. In this context sugar also includes simple carbohydrates.

Eat your protein in the morning and at lunch rather than in the evening. You need the protein during your active hours. A tofu breakfast may sound weird, but it is excellent for combating fatigue.

Reduce, or eliminate dairy and wheat products. Both products are highly allergenic, with many people displaying only fatigue as the allergic reaction.

Eat lots of dark leafy greens. These help decongest the Qi (energy life-force) of the Liver, and they are rich in chlorophyll which is plant blood and are thus very nourishing.

Drink plenty of water (spring or purified rather than tap water). Dehydration can be a contributing factor to fatigue.

Deep diaphragmatic breathing helps to cultivate energy as well as free its flow. Swimming, Yoga, or Tai Chi, are the preferred exercises in fatigue so as to avoid exertion.

Sleep Disorders

Lack of sleep, disturbed sleep, or sleep that is not restful, will lead to fatigue that can be long lasting. In Chinese terms, sleep is seen as the phase when the Blood returns to the Liver after circulating in, and nourishing, the body. Liver time is between 1am and 3am. This is the time for the deepest sleep – REM sleep. People who are not asleep between 1 and 3am, even if they sleep at another time to compensate, tend to have less restful sleep. It is good to be lying down by 11pm (though not necessarily asleep) as this is the beginning of Gallbladder time (Gallbladder is the Yang component of the Liver), and to be actually asleep by 1am.

Too many thoughts and anxiety can disturb your sleep also. Clear your mind by practicing the body scan relaxation just before you go to sleep.

Low blood sugar can affect sleep, as will going to bed on an overly full stomach. Caffeine, tea, alcohol, chocolate, marijuana and other drugs (recreational and otherwise) can all affect sleep.

Insomnia is a hard habit/condition to break. There are many herbal remedies for insomnia, and finding the best one for you is sometimes a matter of trial and error. If valerian root, passion flower, hops, and chamomile do not help, an herbal consultation is probably called for.

Chronic Fatigue Immune Dysfunction Syndrome

Some 500,000 people, mostly women, suffer from CFIDS in the U.S. This form of fatigue can be correlated with memory impairment, flu-like symptoms, body aches and/or headaches, sleep disturbance, and above all depression. It is considered a syndrome. There is no definitive diagnostic test for CFIDS.

All the contributing factors to the “common fatigue” can be found in people with CFIDS (though not necessarily all in the same person): adrenal and pituitary involvement, low blood pressure, sleep disturbances, viral infections, candida and yeast, etc. These are often reported as prodromes (precursors) in CFIDS. All of these need to be addressed in treating the condition. Any allergies must also be resolved because of the over-sensitive immune system (“up-regulated” immune system).

CFIDS sufferers must absolutely avoid all sugar, coffee, alcohol, tobacco, and sugar substitutes (Nutrasweet). A detoxification regimen may be called for and should be done gradually due to the high sensitivity of people with CFIDS. Do eat lots of kelp, seaweed, dandelion greens, and some cashews. Tofu, legumes, seeds, nuts, whole grains, and dark leafy greens are high in magnesium which has been found to be useful in CFIDS (some clinics use Mg injections). Lots of water is a must. Large quantities of garlic are often used, especially if there is an underlying yeast infection.

Because people with CFIDS can also be suffering from a variety of vitamin, mineral, and amino-acid deficiency, it is often the case that any one diet will help for a while and then stop helping (as another deficiency is making itself apparent). Finding the new diet for the next stage can take time and some trial and error.

Supplements for chronic fatigue:

- Vitamin B-12 in very high doses
- Vitamin C – up to 10,000 mg a day
- Vitamin E – 400 IU a day
- CoQ10 – 120 mg a day
- Magnesium – 20 mg three times a day
- Garlic
- Flaxseed oil – 1 teaspoon a day
- Kelp and seaweed in large quantities

Diaphragmatic breathing is crucial. Mild forms of swimming and stretching, yoga, and Tai Chi, are recommended. Vigorous exercise is not possible and only aggravates the condition. Stress management and relaxation techniques are also important in order to avoid further adrenal exhaustion.

Avoid exposure to chemicals because of the oversensitive immune system. Moderate exposure to sun is a good thing, but over-exposure can be too tiring.

Almost all CFIDS sufferers have some form of depression complicating their condition. The depression is often a result of the debilitating fatigue, and in some cases has preceded it. There are now many support groups for people with CFIDS and it is well worth checking those out. This can provide much needed emotional support in a world that can seem abrupt and hostile to those who cannot keep up the pace. Because of the uncertain diagnostic nature of this disease, many treatments are patient-initiated. You might learn a lot in the information exchanges that take place in a support group.

The Emotional Profile

The philosophical statement that comes out in fatigue is one of boredom. It is as if one is saying “I do not want to engage with the world” or “I will not engage with the world.” Again, you may find this extremely obvious, or you may find no resonance with this profile. You may not see boredom or lack of engagement as your issues, nonetheless, it may be worth spending time in looking into your attitudes towards boredom as well as its opposite, being busy, being excited, to see what residual messages you can find.

You may want to try this imagery exercise for fatigue. Do it once in the morning (following the seaside exercise described in the chapter on imagery), and once in the early afternoon. Breathe out three times. See yourself in your nest curled in the fetal position. Breathe out once. Let the rays of the sun bring light and warmth into the nest and caress you. Feel the rays of the sun on your body, waking each part of you. Stretch and come out of the nest and into the garden of life. Walk in the sun-filled garden and enjoy the hidden treasures. As you walk, start dancing with people, animals, trees, and other objects in the garden that bring joy to you. Breathe out once. Come back to your nest, still filled with sun. Rearrange the nest to your liking and sit in it allowing the sun and the garden to penetrate your heart. Breathe out and slowly open your eyes.

Repetitive Stress Injuries (RSI, CTD, and RMI):

Repetitive stress injuries (RSI) have become an epidemic in the workplaces of the 90s. The symptoms can be tightness, stiffness, pain, tingling, coldness, numbness, and loss of strength anywhere in the arm, from the elbows down: that is, elbows, forearms, wrists, palms, hands, or fingers. Many people refer to their symptoms as “carpal tunnel syndrome”, but in most cases the carpal tunnel is not involved. In carpal tunnel syndrome, a specific ligament is involved (flexor retinaculum) with pressure on the median nerve, resulting in pain in the palmar side of the wrist and pain and tingling in the index, middle and ring fingers, but not the small finger.

Repetitive stress injury is also known as cumulative trauma disorder (CTD) and as repetitive motion injury (RMI), with different clinicians preferring one name to the other. RSI seems to be the most common “street name” and we will stick to it here.

The epidemic proportion of RSI has been blamed on keyboards, on the mouse, etc. (which is further pushing the technology of sound recognition). But the most important factor is the fact that more and more people are working longer hours with fewer breaks. People can spend a full day at the computer keyboard and accomplish many tasks, making it appear as if they have done a variety of jobs, while in the physical sense they have sat in the same place doing the same physical activity all day long. In the days when typing was relegated to typists, it was considered “humane” to take breaks. Now that everyone is doing the typing, people seem to be on the keyboard for much longer periods of time without interruption.

RSI is a result of repeated injuries to an area. These injuries, by themselves, are not a great cause of concern. An inflammatory process is started, and normally it would clear. The problem in RSI, is that a bad, constrictive, posture is preventing proper blood supply into the area and thus the inflammation is not fully cleared, another injury is accumulated on top of the first uncleared one, and a stronger inflammation is developed and, again, is not fully cleared. The postural problem always precedes the injuries (which often go unnoticed).

Hormonal changes (pregnancy and menopause) seem to accompany a number of RSI sufferers. Perhaps our ability to clear inflammation is modified during hormonal changes. A slouched posture, tightness, and constriction are still major contributing factors.

Wrist surgery is not the solution. Many people complain of the same pain again after surgery. The best solution is to change postural habits.

While ergonomics when typing is very important, the posture we are talking about is a habit people have acquired long before they started typing for too many hours. Ensuring correct alignment of the wrist while typing is important, but just as important, if not more so, is avoiding a forward bending neck, slouched shoulders, posture. The slouched posture restricts blood flow starting in the neck and throat, through the chest, and on to the arm, and that is a determining factor in your ability to recover from repeated minute injuries and to prevent repeated inflammatory process.

From the Chinese perspective, RSI is considered to be a blockage (as it is in Western terms), but an aspect of Blood Deficiency is also often diagnosed. This concept of Blood Deficiency does not imply anemia, but does mean that the quality, or quantity, of blood is insufficient. To help nourish and build blood, it is recommended that you take chlorophyll, dark leafy greens, and root

vegetables. Carrot juice several times a day can be very helpful. Carrots nourish the blood, they contain beta-carotene so they act as anti-oxidants and as precursor to vitamin A which is anti-inflammatory. High doses of vitamin B-complex are also useful.

External liniments such as Tieh Ta Yao Gin are sometimes helpful as is application of moxa (moxa is a very penetrating heat which allows for increased blood flow at the deep and superficial levels, thus opening blockages).

Warm-up Exercises

Before engaging in activity that might be repetitive and cause damage to your hands, warm up the arms and hands and increase circulation and flow. These exercises should also be done at the end of each hour of repetitive motion.

Extend both arms straight in front of you. Extend the wrist and stretch the fingers (the finger tips are now pointing to the sky, the palm points directly to the front). Hold this for the count of five. Be sure you are breathing deeply.

Now make a fist (while the arm is still straight in front of your chest). The knuckles will face directly front. Release the posture, relax and repeat 10 times.

After 10 repetitions, shake the hands and then start your work.

Postural Tips for the Office

When typing, the wrist should not be bent either vertically or horizontally and should maintain a slight and natural curve in the palm (it is as if the hand was forming a shallow crescent from the tips of the fingers to just above the wrist). This means that you want your wrists at about level with the keyboard, not below it. Having a wrist pad is a great reminder, but beware that putting weight on the wrist pad will encourage twisting of the wrist from side to side which can cause problems also. To avoid side-to-side flexion of the wrist, be sure you use both hands when using shift keys simultaneously with other keys.

Do not tuck the phone between your chin and shoulder. This creates a twist in the neck, chest and shoulder that when habituated can constrict blood flow into the arm.

Remind yourself to let your shoulders and neck relax, to gently open the chest, and to allow your head to float upwards without strain. A few lessons in the Alexander technique can dramatically change your understanding of posture.

Opening Postural Blockages in the Upper Back

To facilitate a better, non-slouched, posture, lie down on your back on the floor (do not do this in bed as the bed surface is too soft). Bend your knees so that the small of your back is touching the floor. Let your whole back be in contact with the floor: hips, the whole spine, and the full width of the shoulders. Use a thin to medium size book under your head so that your head is not pulled back and your neck constricted (you might feel a very slight tuck in the chin using the book, if it gets stronger, the book you are using is too thick). Do not use a pillow. Place your feet about shoulder width apart, and allow your knees to point up to the ceiling (at about a 60-75° angle). Letting the feet go into the floor, the hips go into the floor, and the knees are floating towards the ceiling. Place the palms of your hands on your chest or abdomen so that the elbows are bent, with the elbows directed outwards. Release all the tensions in the neck and the shoulders. Allow the shoulders to sink into the floor so that the shoulders and chest are widening.

It is this widening and releasing of the shoulders and chest that you want to mostly concentrate on. However, also pay attention to your hips and lower back, allowing them to “grow” into the floor, so that the whole back lengthens and widens. Keep releasing the neck, so that it is not being held rigidly, and think of the crown of your head pointing away to a point above you. In your position lying face up on the floor, the crown of your head will be directed to the wall behind you, while your forehead is directed toward the ceiling. If you were to only think of the crown of the head growing out without the forehead growing forward, you will most likely stiffen the neck and pull it back. Thinking of the head going forward and up further facilitates the neck to be free and relaxed.

Keep giving yourself these directions: freeing the neck, allowing the head to go forward and up, lengthening and widening the spine by allowing the hips, shoulders, and spine to sink and grow into the floor. Do this for about 10 minutes. Keep breathing deeply and consciously to facilitate further lengthening and widening.

To get up, roll over to one side, and push lightly with your arms into a sitting position. The feeling in your back should be very different than what you usually experience. This new length and width will last for a short while, but you can remind yourself of this postural possibility many times during the day, thus facilitating better flow into the arms.

Do this exercise at least twice a day for 10 minutes at a time. The postural changes that can occur over time are very beneficial and will become long lasting.

This exercise is based on the Alexander technique approach. By taking lessons you will gain a better understanding (in your body rather than in your intellect).

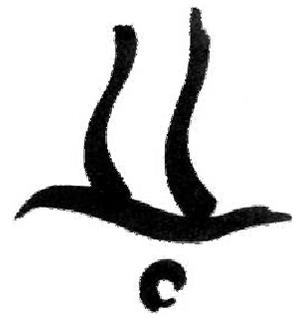
The Emotional Profile

Once RSI sets in, treatment tends to be prolonged. The philosophical statement that might be behind RSI is “I do not want to grasp the world”, or “I cannot grasp the world”, “I refuse to grasp the world”, or even “I do not know how to grasp the world”. Our hands are how we take in the world. A child explores the world by grasping objects and placing them onto his/her tongue. This activates the full range of the Heart channel. The two channels most affected in RSI are the Heart and Lung channels, which are the channels of interaction with the world and allowing the world to come into our core and influence us. As in all philosophical statements, you may not find much resonance with it at first (some people may find themselves reacting in violent opposition to these statements applied to them). Again, the emotional aspect involved may not be obvious and may require much meditation before it becomes apparent. The subjects for contemplation can be in the range of what scares me in the world, what are my dependencies, do I feel I can depend on things/people in the world, do I have enough support to do what I want to do in the world, etc.



Creating Your Own Herbal Kit

Common Chinese Herbal Remedies



Chinese herbal prescribing is a complex art. Herbs are not matched with symptoms as much as with therapeutic properties. Thus an herb is seen primarily as performing a certain function energetically (e.g., clearing Heat, spreading the Qi, descending the Blood, etc.) and only secondarily as addressing a specific symptom or body part. When prescribing herbal combinations the Chinese practitioner takes into account such parameters as whether the condition is one of Heat or Cold, Excess or Deficiency, which organ and channel are involved, where the energy blocks are, and how the flow of Qi (energy life-force) and Blood are affected. Herbs are prescribed in formulas, rarely singly. Clearly not a skill one learns just from a book.

However, there are many folk remedies as well as prepared pills that are extremely effective. When used for the conditions described, these remedies can make a great contribution, and for the most part, they carry no adverse side effects. A given symptom can be the result of a number of different patterns, and each pattern requires a different set of herbs. So while ginger is an excellent herb for just about any digestive problem, it is also a very warming herb. Because nausea might be of a hot or cold nature, we recommend neutralizing the warming effect of ginger by combining it with peppermint which has weaker digestive properties, but is cooling. This way one can use ginger for digestive issues regardless of their root cause without fear of aggravation.

There has been some controversy over the use of herbal pills made in mainland China. Some pills are made with toxic animal substances, endangered species, or even Western pharmaceuticals that are added to the herbs. None of the remedies we recommend contain animal products. Nonetheless, some people prefer to buy American-made pills that are beginning to be more readily available. These products will carry the same name or they will indicate the original Chinese formula name. You can get Chinese patent medicines at Rainbow, Real Food, Whole Foods, and many other health food stores, as well as in China town, or on Clement Street.

Colds

Ginger root and scallions at the beginning stages of a cold. Boil 3 generous slices of ginger, with 4-5 stalks of scallion (both the white and green part) in 1½ cups of water for about 5 minutes, and drink the water. Go to bed and stay under the covers. You should sweat mildly. You can also add peppermint and garlic to this decoction.

Peppermint (or spearmint) is excellent for sore throat, for the nose, eyes, and helps clear the lungs. It is best to use fresh peppermint, or peppermint essential oil (though not for eyes)

Garlic is highly anti-microbial and anti-parasitical and is excellent for both sore throats and ear infections. Peel a garlic clove and suck on it, or put it in the ear (do not push in).

Ma Huang (or Ephedra) is an excellent herb for very severe colds with chills as well as for phlegm in lungs (as long as the phlegm is white). However it is also a speeder, and many people use it for that, giving *Ma Huang* a bad reputation. The kind of cold for which *Ma Huang* is

meant for is not common in California, and is more common in extremely cold climates. (When boiling *Ma Huang*, white froth will form – remove it and continue boiling, this neutralizes its “speed” effect.)

Yin Qiao Jie Du Pian is a patent medicine fashioned after a formula that was originally geared for sore throats. Although many people use *Yin Qiao* at the beginning stages of any kind of cold, it works best when there is a sore throat involved.

Gan Mao Ling and *Zhong Gan Ling* are very effective patent medicines for colds. However, some versions of it appear to have contained salicylic acid (aspirin). To still enjoy the pure herbal form, get an American-made pill (it may come under a different name).

Bi Yan Pian is an excellent patent medicine for nose problems (especially runny nose).

When having a cold it is very important to rinse the nose and sinuses with salt water, as the sinus cavities are ideal breeding grounds for bacteria. You can also rinse the sinuses with water that has been used to boil dandelion root as this is more antiseptic. You can also add 2-3 drops of peppermint, thyme, and tea tree essential oils to the mix. Simply snort the liquid in through one nostril and spit it out, then snort through the other nostril, spit out, and repeat.

Cough

Loquat Syrup is very useful for any kind of chronic cough.

Baked pear is an effective folk remedy, primarily for dry coughs.

Headache

Peppermint and chrysanthemum teas can help as well as rubbing peppermint and cinnamon essential oils (60-100 drops in 2oz. carrier oil). However headaches can be caused by so many factors that it is impossible to presume what the effective remedy will be without a thorough diagnosis.

Digestive Problems

Ginger, fennel, and peppermint (best in combination) tea can be used for nausea, vomiting, stomach cramps, gas, and diarrhea.

Curing Pill (*Kang Ning Wan*) is the most popular pill for digestive problems. It is highly effective.

Lotus root (cooked in soup) is useful for diarrhea. It is commonly sold in Chinese grocery stores and looks like tiny white skulls. Well-cooked barley also helps with diarrhea.

Mild Constipation can be helped by oils (blend a whole lemon, a tablespoon of olive oil, and a glass of fruit juice, strain the liquid and drink), or fiber (use fresh apple juice, or psyllium seed). Acute constipation can be alleviated with senna leaf tea or rhubarb. Do not use either senna leaf or rhubarb root on regular basis. Chronic constipation can be caused by insufficient water intake (sodas and coffee do not hydrate your body) as well as lack of fiber. Acidophilus balance can also be an issue in constipation or diarrhea.

PMS

Xiao Yan San is the most commonly prescribed Chinese patent formula. It can also treat digestive problems, headaches, allergies, etc. It is the most prescribed formula because it addresses the two most common underlying problems: energetic congestion (Qi Stagnation) and exhaustion of Blood, both symptoms are extremely common as a result of stress.

Dang Gui (sometimes referred to as “women’s ginseng”) is an excellent blood tonifier and can help with pain. It is also rich in phytohormones. Cook it in rice or soup. It has a unique astringent flavor and smell.

Dandelion greens decongest the liver and can be used for PMS and cramps.

Tien Chi Powder (*Shu Tien Qi Fen*) is the same as *Yun Nan Bai Yao*, and is an excellent pain herb. (It contains only one herb – radix notoginseng.)

Injuries

As long as there are no open wounds, use the liniment *Tieh Ta Yao Gin*, which can also be drunk. It smells strongly like wine, and will discolor the skin. Though it washes off the skin easily, it does not wash off clothes as easily. Wait a minute or so until it dries before putting clothes on the area.

If there is bleeding use *Yun Nan Bai Yao* powder – this is a Chinese miracle herb (radix notoginseng, not the same as regular ginseng) which is used to both stop bleeding and to eliminate pain. Soldiers, and many people, in China carry *Yun Nan Bai Yao* in case they are injured. We recommend you carry some with you in your purse and glove compartment.

Frankincense (*Ru Xiang*) and myrrh (*Mo Yao*) are excellent pain relievers (they are the main ingredients in *Tieh Ta Yao Gin*).

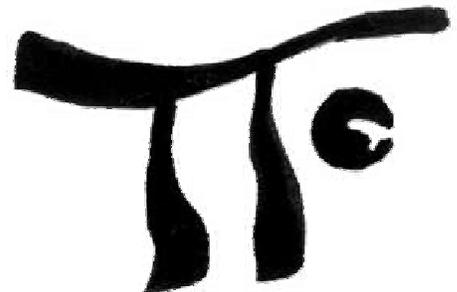
High Blood Pressure and Cardiac Conditions

Hawthorn berries (*Shan Zha* – Carthagus) is the common herb of choice. It is very sour though and most people need some adaptation period before enjoying hawthorn berry tea. You can buy the herb in China Town as well as in the bulk section of Rainbow, Real Food, and Whole Foods.

Insomnia

Emperor’s Tea (*Tian Wan Bu Xin Wan*), *Suan Zao Ren Tang*, and *An Mien Pian*, are all good medicines for insomnia. However, we find that insomnia sufferers benefit more from decoctions, of the same formulas, rather than pills.

Siberian Ginseng and the syrup *Wu Jia Shen* are also helpful.



Adaptogenic Substances

These are herbs that have become very popular due to their ability to help the body adapt to stress, and they seem to be able to adjust various systems in the body in whatever direction is needed (that is they are multi-directional, hence the name adaptogens, they help the body adapt).

Ginseng (*Ren Shen* which means root of humanity) is the most well known adaptogen. It is used as a tonic and is favored by people with fatigue. We believe that overuse of ginseng can weaken the adrenals, especially ginseng tinctures. It is also important that you get good quality ginseng (which is hard to ascertain in tincture form). The white, unadulterated form is best, as the red form (“Korean ginseng”) is treated to create a much warmer herb which is less appropriate in milder climates such as in California. The white ginseng is called *Bai Shen* (white root), and can be bought in herbal stores in thin slices. The whiter it is, the higher its quality. Many Chinese merchants will encourage you to buy the larger roots. This is not necessary.

Ginseng was originally prescribed for the very sick. It is considered a life saving medicine. With indiscriminate long-term use it is possible to get “overdose” signs, such as constriction, tightness, constipation, and an increase in frequency of colds. These are the result of “over-tonification” and will pass once you stop taking ginseng.

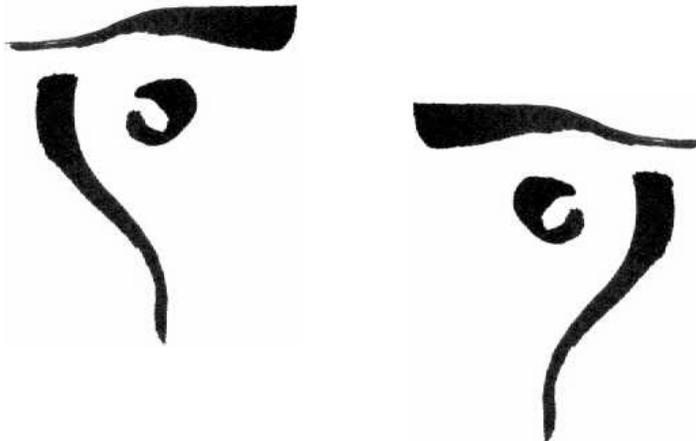
Siberian ginseng (*Ci Wu Jia* – Eleutherococcus or Acanthopanax) and American Ginseng (*Xi Yang Shen*) belong to a different family. American ginseng is milder, and not considered warm. Siberian ginseng is considered to be a stronger adaptogen than the Chinese ginseng.

We have not seen unprocessed ginseng (of any variety) in health food stores, perhaps because of its high price. However, Chinese stores do sell it.

Ginseng can be chewed as is. It has a very faint taste.

Astragalus (*Huang Qi*) is an excellent immune system modulator. It regulates blood glucose levels and fortifies the Qi (energy life-force). It can be cooked in rice and soups, but the actual root is then taken out because it is too fibrous to eat. Astragalus is sold in the bulk sections of Rainbow, Real Food, and Whole Foods. (It looks a little like a wooden tongue depressor.)

Schizandra (*Wu Wei Zi*) is an adaptogen which is famous for its ability restore liver function. It also has an adaptive effect on blood glucose level. It is commonly used for nervous conditions and insomnia as well. Schizandra is sold in the bulk section of Rainbow, Real Food, and Whole Foods. It looks like a small purple berry (it is a seed).



Compassion and Forgiveness



To flow is to live, lack of flow is the opposite of life. We have looked at negative emotions that obstruct the flow of life, that dominate our emotional arena so as to congest us. We have looked at creating spaciousness, through conscious breathing and calming, as an antidote to congestion. There are also states of mind that are the opposite of the congestion of anger and fear. States of mind that give us more space and light. States of mind that keep us open, spacious and flowing. These states are compassion and forgiveness. Compassion makes all pain and suffering universal and thus less congesting while forgiveness is the letting go of pain and suffering.

Compassion as a Path to Spaciousness

Compassion is seeing ourselves and others as one. The Chinese character for compassion (*Ren*) is the combination of the characters for a person and two lines (the number two), meaning, the person and a second (a neighbor) have become linked. In the state of compassion we see the pain and suffering of others as if it was our own. We no longer feel the need to compete with others, to destroy others, to prove ourselves above others. We are no longer separate from others. We become part of something that is bigger than ourselves: we become part of humanity, the environment, the universe, etc.

Compassion allows us to transcend the feeling that our own pain and suffering are our own private suffering and are not shared. When I have compassion for another being, I can see how their pain is the same as my pain (at least potentially), and the natural conclusion is that my pain can always find a match in the heart of another. Thus compassion gives a great deal more space to our own suffering and can prevent negative feelings from arising.

Forgiveness as Letting Go of Pain and Suffering

Forgiveness is letting go. We are not referring here to forgiveness in the legal sense, that which involves two parties, one asking forgiveness and the other granting it pending reparations etc. The kind of forgiveness we are referring to is of the “unilateral” kind. It is about letting go of pain and suffering.

Being in pain is being in a narrow place. It is like being in a dark and narrow alley with no light in sight, all one can see or feel is thick darkness. Our pain and suffering act as the dark alley, not allowing the light in. When I can only focus on my pain, I am focusing only on negative feelings, allowing them to take over me. I am locking myself into the narrow place, and I am unable to move on, unable to live fully. We often hold on to pain rather than transform it. Holding on to pain brings us, time and time again, to the narrow place, the place that leads to desperation.

We should never have to be in a narrow place, we always have the option to spread our wings and create spaciousness. However, in some circumstances it has been very hard to avoid the trap of the narrow place. We have already been there in the past. We hold on to the pain of the past, and enter constriction and narrowness, because it is familiar. Sometimes we hold on to pain because we have the illusion that pain is transformative or because we believe our pain defines us. We re-live our pain when we are no longer confronting what caused us pain, yet we are reliving our reactions: our shame and our vulnerability.

Forgiving Ourselves Lets Us Let Go of Pain

Holding on to pain makes us feel unworthy, vulnerable and unable to accomplish our task in the world. Holding on to pain is to stay in the past, to not allow for the flow of life to move freely through us.

To let go of pain we need to forgive ourselves for having once been vulnerable in a negative or destructive way. When we forgive ourselves for having once been vulnerable in a negative way, we no longer need to re-live the pain and we can let go of the shame and the fear.

In order to be free, we must let go. To be willing to give up pain means that I am willing to make the sacrifice (sacrificing the pain), and in order to do that I must forgive myself: I must forgive myself for having been vulnerable in a negative way, for having once failed myself.

Once we let go, the flow of life can be reestablished. Forgiveness is letting go of the grasping on to what blocks us in life. In order to be free, we must let go.

When we can forgive ourselves, we become free, free from the hold that the past exercises on us. Through self-forgiveness we become less rigid. Once we exercise self-forgiveness, it becomes easier to forgive others, removing further blocks in us, and avoiding the creation of blocks in the future.

Developing Compassion

The Tibetan practice of Tonglen is a wonderful practice that develops our compassion.

Sit comfortably, close your eyes, and begin to focus your attention on your breath. Visualize in front of you a person in great suffering. See clearly all of his or her pain and suffering. Allow the pain and suffering to manifest as black heavy smoke. As you breathe in, breathe in the black smoke of the other person's suffering. Bring the smoke into your heart, allowing it to intermingle with your own suffering and pride. As your breath changes into an outbreath, allow the black smoke to be transformed into a bright, white, healing, and radiating light. With your outbreath send the white healing light to your suffering friend. Breathe in again the black heavy smoke of suffering, and breathe out the white, healing light. Keep doing this until the black smoke begins to disperse and is totally lifted, and your friend is fully surrounded by the white light, becoming one with the light, radiating white-healing light.

This exercise can be done first with a very close friend or family member or with oneself, then with friends who are less close, and ultimately with people who we consider to be enemies. It can also be done with situations and not just with individuals.

This is not an imagery exercise but rather a visualization meditation, and can take much longer than the other quicker imagery exercises.



Imagery for Forgiveness

1. Breathe out three times. Look in a mirror and see yourself holding on to a pain that is not yet forgiven. Turn the mirror around. You realize that it is a two-sided mirror: now see yourself forgiving. Breathe out, and open your eyes.
2. Breathe out three times. You are jogging down a path. To your right is a grassy area, and then a stream of running water. Feel the sun and the air. Beside you is the one who has caused you pain. Keep jogging together. Come to a stop and sit close to the water – sit facing each other.

Sitting in front of the person who caused you pain, pick out arrows of pain out of your heart, explain to them what the arrow means, how it got there, who put it there. Then cast the arrow into the clear fast-running water, and both of you observe it being carried away.

Keep pulling out arrows, one by one, and explain what they mean, how they got there, who put it there, and cast the arrow into the stream. When you are finished, rest.

Make sure there are no more arrows in your heart. If there is one more arrow, pull it out, explain it (what, how, who) and throw it in the water. Breathe out once.

Now the person in front of you is pulling arrows out of his or her heart. Let them explain to you what the pain is, who placed it there and how. Observe the arrows with them as they are swept away by the water. When they stop, allow them to search for one last arrow.

Both of you get up and return to the jogging path. Go on jogging. You arrive at an intersection. Keep jogging, either parting or continuing on the same path.

Transport yourself to an island. It is surrounded by water. It is sunny. Lie on the grass and allow the sun to heal the wounds of your heart. Breathe out, and slowly open your eyes.

3. Breathe out three times. You are cleaning and fixing your house, going from room to room, cleaning, clearing, arranging. Transport yourself to a country path in a meadow near a forest. You are wearing white or blue. As you come close to the forest and approach the first line of trees you see those who have caused you pain coming out of the forest from behind the trees, coming out one at a time. Breathe out.

Approach them. Identify each one of these people and approach them one by one. Ask each one why they caused you grief. Ask them what makes you vulnerable to them. Hear their answers. Look at each one straight in the eye and see them disappear. When you have encountered the last person, breathe out.

Walk through the trees to a clearing in the center of the forest. Feel the warmth of the sun shining through the trees. Smell the flowers and listen to the sounds of life around you.

Breathe out and transport yourself to a beach. Walk along the beach. See a cave by the beach. Your ancestors are waiting at the entrance to the cave. Listen to what your ancestors have to tell you.

Part from your ancestors and ride the outgoing tide to where the sea meets the sky. Rest there in the rays of the sun. Ride the incoming tide back to shore. Pick a grain of sand and turn it in your hand until you feel it has transformed to something. Open your hand and see what you are holding. Breathe out and slowly open your eyes.

These are three separate exercises that need not be done in sequence. Use the ones that seem to help you the most.



Healing and the Role of Health Care Providers



We have defined health as the state of optimal flow and openness, a sense of balance where no one element predominates to the point of not allowing new possibilities to take root. Healing is a process that allows for flow and openness, that allows letting go of blockages. The process of healing is the process of expanding, of finding space and light. It is moving from the narrow place to spaciousness, or at times, finding spaciousness within an apparently narrow place.

Thus, healing is a process of transformation: transforming the narrow, obstructed, and congested into spaciousness, flow, and openness. The character for transformation in Chinese (*Hua*) is made up of the character for a person with the head down and feet up. In other words, change and transformation is allowing the world, or the self, to be upside down. In transformation we let go of our habits, of our notions, and allow them, if necessary, to be turned inside out, upside down. Transformation requires that we take the risk that we might find ourselves upside down. To be able to take that risk, we must let go of our assumptions of what is the right side up.

Healing vs. Curing

Healing is not the same as curing. In curing a specific medical problem, we may cut it out, defeat it chemically, radiate it, etc. In healing we create a change in the person, not in the problem, and as a result the problem is no longer a problem. Healing may involve lifestyle changes, attitude changes, new belief systems, etc. It is about changing the human being that we are, allowing our humanity, our soul, to shine. It is not about fixing a specific problem (though that is often the starting motivation in a healing journey). The process of healing is not one of fixing, but of becoming. Becoming open to the possibilities of life, becoming open and flowing so as to continue to find and create new possibilities, becoming open to, and accepting, who we are and letting go of regrets.

It is possible to have not been cured, to have not “fixed” the problem, and yet to have been transformed and healed. An example of this is when a family member is very ill and begins the death journey. The whole family might come together and begin anew. Forgiveness, acceptance, and love might be rediscovered. The beloved family member dies, yet a lot of healing has taken place, even though we did not fix what seemed to have been the problem.

In the process of healing we accept that some things cannot be fixed and that we are not in control.

Clarity

Another aspect of healing is clarity. Arriving at greater clarity is a healing process. We need to ask and answer these three questions:

1. who am I?
2. where am I going?
3. how am I going to get there?
or alternately (option 3-b), who am I going to get there with?



These questions need to be answered in this order. We cannot know how to get somewhere unless we know where we are going, and we cannot know where we are going if we do not know who we are. Most people tend to live life in response to the third question: *how am I going to get there*, without any consideration of the first two. The temptation of the second option of the third question, *who am I going to get there with*, is far too great for most of us, leading us to abandon the deeper question of *who am I*.

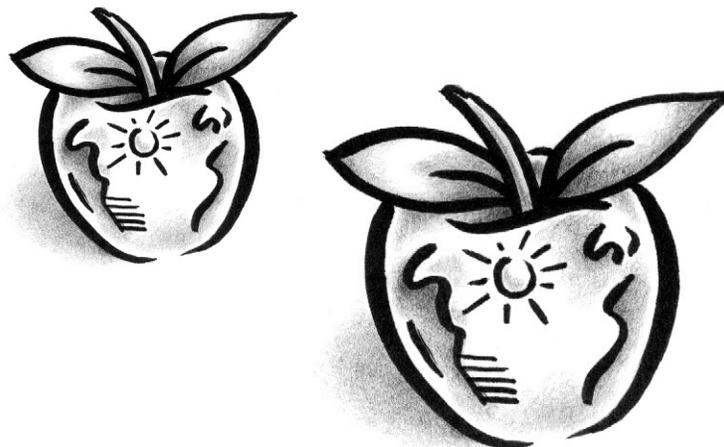
When we can answer with full integrity the question of *who I am*, and then the question of *where I am going*, we gain tremendous freedom. Answering these questions without conveniently skipping to the third, which looks at the means only, liberates us from the suffering of attachment to the means, and allows us to connect deeply to our true selves.

Sometimes we have a simple shoulder pain. We went skiing, and fell on our shoulder, and it is not healing. Perhaps the pain keeps us awake at night, or we are unable to do the things we want to do. Removing the pain can be a great act of healing. We can now transform our lack of sleep, our obsession with pain, and become clearer, more focused, able to live life more happily. This may not be considered to be healing on a high spiritual level, but on some level it is. When I am caught in pain, I am far less likely to fulfill my path in life. Removing the pain helps me live life more fully.

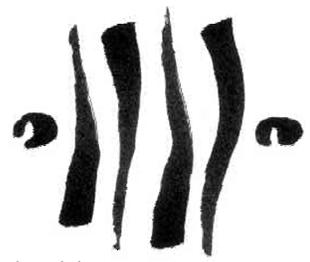
The same shoulder pain, however, might also prompt me to start to look at my life. Perhaps I decide it is a metaphor for other life issues, or perhaps the pain simply prompted me to seek a practitioner who will get rid of the pain and, in the process, reflect to me some other problems that I have. In this case there is an intention behind getting rid of the pain that is beyond the pain. This intention can foster further awareness and transformation than simply removing the pain, and facilitates a far more meaningful experience.

We Have the Ability to Heal Ourselves

The human organism (body and mind) has a remarkable ability to heal itself. The role of the practitioner is to simply allow it to happen. By identifying the blockages and removing them, the body-mind can then do its own work. This is the principle of acupuncture. It is not about intervention, fighting, or forcing the body into health. It is about removing obstructions so as to allow the body to create the appropriate flow. Rather than dictating, acupuncture is suggestive. And the suggestion is enough, the body's own intelligence can then take over. This way we maintain the integrity of the body and of the individual's free will, allowing them to do the healing.



Community



Our health is not isolated from the world we live in. Although we tend to think of our health as our own individual business, in fact our health is constantly influenced by outside factors. How can we be healthy when we are living in polluted environments, breathing polluted air, eating irradiated foods? How can we be healthy when our freeways are a source of so much frustration, when we feel unsafe walking down certain streets? How can we be healthy when we are worried that we might end up old and lonely, or possibly as a bag lady?

It is impossible to separate our health from our environment. We are interwoven with our physical, emotional, intellectual, and social environment. If we want to be healthy, we need to make sure our surroundings are healthy and health inspiring. Our health depends on the support we get from our community. If we are constantly battling some factor or another in our community and we are at odds with our environment, then we cannot truly create and sustain health within ourselves.

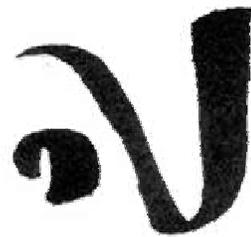
We may not be able to easily influence global community factors. We know that the cutting down of rain forests affects our health, yet we feel powerless to change this. We know our water sources are polluted, and all we are able to do is get a water purifier. We know the congestion in our streets, and we feel we have reached our limit by merely avoiding it. Indeed, we may not be able to change every unhealthy factor in our life, but we can make steps towards healing ourselves, our community, and our planet. These are not three separate entities. They closely depend and reflect one another.

We can take simple steps. Smiling to another person on the bus is acknowledging their humanity. How often have we failed to do this simple act, even while we interact with them directly? Planting trees and flowers in our neighborhood brings us together and enables us to appreciate the beauty in life. Helping others who are in need takes the edge off our fears of being unsupported when we might be needy. Studies have shown clear health benefits for elderly living in care facilities or hospitals and who are regularly visited by children or animals.

When we feel lonely, unsupported, anxious, frustrated, and we have no one to turn to, we turn to food (any food) for comfort, we turn to television to shut our minds off, we turn to drugs. Little by little we have become addicted to some unhealthy activity; we gain weight, we become bored with our lives, we smoke, we drink excess amounts of alcohol. We lose the ability to care for each other. We find it more and more difficult to exercise compassion, our hearts become more congested, and we feel an even stronger need to exercise our unhealthy behavior in order to escape the growing loneliness and isolation.

Our theme is not one of social change, but we cannot ignore the strong connection between disease and lack of community. In our culture we have lost our sense of community. As a result, we are encountering a plague of loneliness, isolation, fears, frustrations. Being lonely and isolated seems to be the lot of so many of us. We feel we are unheard, unwanted, unworthy. We need the support of our communities to help us overcome these unhealthy feelings. Psychotherapists can help us understand our congestive states of mind, but they cannot replace what we have lost. Only a functioning community that cares for, and supports, each other can do that. Building community is one road toward health.

Your Health Check List



We have arranged this checklist in three sections. The first consists of the absolute basics and can be implemented now. Once you have accomplished those, or at least started, move on to the next section, and start to implement items from each sub-section here. These subsections are formulated as a pyramid of health: air is the most basic need we have, then come water, rest, food, light, exercise, and meaning. Finally, there is a section on long-term projects.

Implement Now:

Start with these right away. The sooner you get around to them, the healthier you will feel.

- ✓ Drink 2-3 quarts (8-12 8oz. cups) of water a day
use purified or spring water
(You can get a water purifier through Multi-Pure 800-622-9205)
- ✓ Reduce your consumption of sugar and simple carbohydrates
- ✓ Reduce your dairy consumption
- ✓ Decrease your fat consumption and increase fiber
- ✓ Start a mild exercise program:
swimming, walking, Tai Chi, or yoga
- ✓ Practice diaphragmatic breathing as often as you can
- ✓ Practice the body scan relaxation once a day
- ✓ Stop during the day and breathe deeply

These are the very basics. It takes almost no time to implement these. Where reduction is called upon, start slowly and build up with time to the point where you have basically eliminated sugar, dairy, and fatty foods from your diet, while allowing yourself an occasional indulgence (once a week or less).



Daily Checklist:

Once you have started on the basics, move on and pick at least one item to begin working on each week. We have arranged these by subsections. You might want to pick one from each subsection or one from up to three subsections each week. Be firm yet gentle with yourself. You decide on the pace. You may also modify our suggestions (for example, you might choose to meditate only 5 minutes as that is all you can fit in your schedule). Once you decided on implementing a checklist item, try to keep at it for at least three weeks as this will allow you to develop a habit and to see the benefits.

AIR:

- ✓ Get fresh air. Do not stay in the office at lunch.
Take a short walk outside every 2-3 hours.
- ✓ Get rid of electronic instruments in your bedroom
If you are living in an environment rich in extremely low frequencies get a neutralizing agent (Environmental Protective Equipment 805-898-7019)

WATER:

- ✓ Do not drink ice cold drinks. Drink room temperature water, or warm water (or tea)
- ✓ Do not drink sodas or cokes. Drink water, tea, or juice when you are thirsty
- ✓ Reduce your coffee consumption

REST:

- ✓ Make sure you are getting enough sleep
Try to be in bed by 11pm, and sleeping by 1am
- ✓ When you are sick, rest is a remedy. Be sure to take it.
- ✓ Take just a few minutes each day to release all tensions by doing a body scan

FOOD:

- ✓ Reduce sugar and dairy
- ✓ Reduce fat and increase fiber. Move to a plant based diet
- ✓ Eat your food cooked rather than raw: slightly steam or stir-fry your vegetables
- ✓ Reduce your consumption of processed foods. Cooking is a lot more fun than you think

- ✓ Move to a plant based diet:
Decrease your consumption of animal based products: chicken, red meat, eggs, dairy
Substitute low fat plant based foods for animal bases foods:
use tofu, legumes, seaweed, grains, and nuts
- ✓ Increase your consumption of dark leafy greens and root vegetables
- ✓ Get organic fruits and vegetables
- ✓ Reduce your consumption of wheat-based products, breads, pastas
Eat rice cakes instead of bread. Use rice, barley, millet, quinoa, instead of pasta
- ✓ Do not rely on vitamins and supplements. Eat a varied diet
- ✓ Eat your protein in the early part of the day
Use plant base protein such as tofu, edamame, legumes, nuts
- ✓ Substitute complex carbohydrates for simple ones
- ✓ Substitute carrot juice for snacks
- ✓ Plan your meals and eat slowly and consciously
Stop eating on the run

LIGHT:

- ✓ Get full-spectrum lighting
- ✓ Minimize your exposure to computers, cellular phones, and other electronic instruments

EXERCISE:

- ✓ Mobilize your joints and stretch for 10-15 minutes each day
- ✓ Start an aerobic exercise routine at home or the gym.
Do 30 minutes of aerobic exercise 3 times a week
- ✓ Practice yoga, or Tai Chi
- ✓ Remove postural blocks by consciously reminding yourself of any bad habits (slouching)
Keep reminding yourself to allow your back to lengthen and widen
- ✓ Walk out in nature at least once a week

STRESS:

- ✓ Start a sitting meditation routine
Start with the intention of sitting 10 minutes and increase to 20
Even if you end up sitting for only two minutes, do sit so as to develop the habit
- ✓ Practice the body scan relaxation daily
- ✓ Practice telephone meditation as often as you can
Let the phone ring three times while you enjoy your breathing, then pick up the phone
- ✓ When you are about to get stressed take three conscious breaths
- ✓ When you are caught in stress, take two to three minutes for walking meditation

GOALS AND MEANING:

- ✓ Communicate with your inner world, and confront your life issues
Create imagery to help you look at root causes and avenues for solutions
Develop a meditation routine and join others who seek greater awareness
- ✓ Set time aside to be on your own and to commune with God, nature, or the spirits
- ✓ Find means of artistic expression
it is never too late to learn to play an instrument, paint, sculpt, or any other venue
- ✓ Create community consciously
Join a gardening project, volunteer time to work with those in need
- ✓ Consciously exercise compassion and forgiveness
- ✓ See each person you encounter as manifesting a Divine spark
Smile – it helps
- ✓ Affirm each day to bring joy to one person in the morning
and to ease the pain of one person in the afternoon



Projects:

These are long-term projects that you may need more time to implement.

- ✓ Look into the three questions:
Who am I?
Where am I going?
How am I going to get there (and/or with who)?
Be sure to come to some satisfying answer on the first question before moving on
- ✓ Look at your job, relationships, interests and community
Determine what your goals are and how you want to achieve them
- ✓ Go on a detoxification regimen once a year
- ✓ Go on retreat for a weekend, or even a week, at least once a year
- ✓ Get a supportive team to help you with your health
This can include friends, therapists, massage therapists, acupuncturists, chiropractors, homeopaths, etc.
- ✓ Find a sympathetic medical doctor who listens to your needs.

It is not important that you implement every item on this list. What is important is that you look at your life honestly and determine what elements are of benefit to you. Once you determined those, start with those which are easier for you. Do not set yourself up for failure by starting with the one item that is hardest for you. Once you pick an item, exercise discipline and stick to it. Do not be discouraged by failure. Pick yourself up and start again. If you find that you keep stumbling and failing on a certain item, let it go for a little while and pick it up later. If you still find yourself unable to handle the item, it may be time to seek help.

