

Review

Being healthy: Feeling healthy

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ABSTRACT

We have various understandings regarding health. Various medical systems being practiced in India other than conventional medicine i.e. Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy have defined health in their own way. From physical level up to spiritual level health has so many aspects which affect our overall personality. Some says that one who is established in self is healthy but some other says that in a perfect state of health physical homeostasis and mental equanimity occur in a balanced and healthy harmony. Another concept believes that health is normal and harmonious vibration of the elements and forces composing the human entity on the physical, mental, moral and spiritual planes of living in accordance with the constructive principles in Nature. At one place it is stated that good health means existence in harmony with evolution. The authors have reviewed various concepts and definitions of health and trying to conclude that health is a feeling which may be experienced only if you are really healthy. So, health is more and more balancing of all elements of your life in harmony with the universe.

Keywords health, lifestyle, healthcare

INTRODUCTION

What is health? And what exactly determines whether a person is healthy? These are the intriguing questions which have pricked human brains right from the advent of civilized society. The biggest of them all is the modern day question “Is health nothing but some parameters regarding height, weight and other body measurements or some other parameters based on some investigations/reports which show that the particular test report is within the standard range?”

Definitions of health

Health in our text books have been defined in many ways. Corporate Gurus, Practicing Medical Professionals, Sages and a layman; all see health from a different lens. But one thing can certainly be said, that health cannot be confined within the rhetoric of some parameters. Possibly, there cannot be a set formula for measuring and defining the health though certain parameters have been made in this regard. For ex. if your parameters are within the range, you are appearing to be healthy. Failing which you may not be completely healthy. So certainly, health is more than what meets the eye.

Various medical systems prevalent in India i.e. Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy have defined health in their own way. Let us have a look what these systems say about health:

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1. Ayurveda, the oldest Indian System of Medicine and one of the most ancient systems of the world, defines health as ‘Health is a state where in the Tridosha, Digestive fire, all the body tissues & components, all the physiological processes are in perfect unison and the soul, the sense organs and mind are in a state of total satisfaction (prasanna) & content’.

The practice of Ayurveda finds its roots in a body of knowledge and principles that were systematized in ancient text called ‘Charaka Samhita’. Health is defined “as physical and mental well-being; freedom from disease, pain, or defect; normalcy of physical and mental functions; soundness.” (Singh, 1998).

Ayurveda, defines Svasthya as:

समदोषः समाग्निश्च समधातुमलक्रियः I

प्रसन्नात्मैन्द्रियमनाः स्वस्थ इत्यभिधीयते II

“Samadosah samagnisca samadhatu malakriyah;

Prasannatmendriyamanah svastha ityabhihiyate II

(Sushruta Samhita, 15.38)

One who is established in self, who has balanced doshas, balanced agni, properly formed dhatus, proper elimination of malas, well functioning bodily processes, and whose mind, soul, and senses are full of bliss, is called a healthy person.”

In this definition of health, not only is the western concept of health encompassed, but surpassed due to the other layers; that of the doshas, agni, dhatus, and malas. Hence, Ayurveda views health as a balance of the doshas which are vata, pitta, kapha (in consideration of one’s prakruti), properly formed/functioning dhatus (seven tissues of the body), and proper elimination of malas (waste products). Thus, when Ayurveda looks at a disease, invariably, these aforementioned factors are taken into account and discussed.

2. The science of Yoga recognizes the importance of term “Well Being” as captured in the definition of health adopted by World Health Organization. From a Yogic perspective, “Well Being” is a vital aspect of “being” healthy as well as “feeling” healthy. There is no use in a doctor telling patients that all their investigations are “normal” when the patients themselves are not feeling “well”. This qualitative aspect of health is something that Yoga and Indian Systems of Medicine have considered important for thousands of years. The definition of asana given in the Yoga Sutras as ‘Sthira sukham’ implies this state of steady well being at all levels of existence;

‘Sthira sukham asanam’

Yoga Darshan II: 46

The great maharishi Patanjali, the propounder of Yoga also tells us that through the practice of asana we can attain a state that is beyond dualities leading to a calm and serene state of well being.

‘Tato dvandva anabhighata’

Yoga Darshan II: 48

Yoga aims at enabling the individual to attain and maintain a dynamic sukha sthanam that may be defined as a dynamic sense of physical, mental and spiritual well being. The Bhagavadgita defines Yoga as samatvam meaning thereby that Yoga is equanimity at all levels.

योगस्थः कुरु कर्माणि संगन्त्यक्त्वा धनंजय I

सिद्धयसिद्धयोः समोभूत्वा समत्वं योग उच्यते II

‘Yogasthah kurukarmani sangam tyaktva dhananjaya I
siddhyasiddhyoh samobutva samatvam yoga uchyate’ II

Srimadbhagavad Gita II: 48

This may be also understood as a perfect state of health wherein physical homeostasis and mental equanimity occur in a balanced and healthy harmony.

3. According to Naturopathy, a popular system of health care “Health is normal and harmonious vibration of the elements and forces composing the human entity on the physical, mental, moral and spiritual planes of living in accordance with the constructive principles in Nature.”

Naturopathy says that all beings in nature stay healthy and beautiful so long as they remain in tune with the nature’s laws. Man is the only being who has the freedom to choose and act. Those who choose to disobey the laws of nature acquire different forms of diseases or sufferings. When they go against the laws of nature, indulge in un-natural activities, they are bound to suffer. Anything in excess or less disturbs the internal environment of the body.

Further, it says that “Disease is the abnormal or inharmonious vibrations of the elements and forces comprising in the human body in one or more levels in accordance with the destructive principles of nature”.

Naturopathy describes that the natural healing process of the body is corrective in itself. When there is a disturbance in the normal and healthy vibrations of the body, the healing process immediately makes effort to correct it. Hence, acute diseases are primarily nature’s effort to eliminate the morbid matter and to restore the normal functions of the body. The disease processes are the efforts to bring the normal function

back to order and so one should not suppress these processes, but in turn cooperate with them by keeping the symptoms within tolerable limits. Any suppression of symptoms like pain, fever, vomiting, diarrhea, un-easiness, loss of sleep etc. brings about chronic forms of disease.

Naturopathy further emphasizes that ‘Health is Cleanliness’ - Cleanliness of the surroundings as well as self is necessary for being healthy. The body should be purified of morbid wastes, systemic poisons and disease taints. The disease-causing germs and parasites grow and multiply only in such bodies which are heavily encumbered and weakened by morbid and denatured food, drinks, chemicals, drugs, vaccines, serums and toxins. The germs and parasites feed on, digest and decompose on the morbid or pathogenic material in animal and human bodies. The house should be kept free from dust, dirt and germs, by cleaning with water, soap, brush etc. and allowing lot of fresh air and sunlight in the house. This will keep the house free of fungi, moulds or any form of germ invasion. Similarly, the human body is also to be kept free from morbidity so that there shall be no microbial invasions and resultant diseases.

It is said in Naturopathy that “Good digestion and excretion is a sign of good health”. The remnant matter left after digestion should be ejected from the body so that the body is perfectly cleansed. On knowing one’s digestion we can easily learn regarding the status of health of the person. A healthy person always feels well; knows nothing of pains or discomfort unless it is from external causes. He delights in work and enjoys activity till he feels tired and recovers back through relaxation.

4. According to Unani, a traditional healing system prevalent in the Middle East, India, Pakistan, and neighboring countries, the body comprises of four basic elements - earth, air, water, and fire - and four humors - blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile. Equilibrium in the humors indicates good health while a disturbance in this equilibrium results in disease.

As per Unani system, any cause and or factor are countered by Quwwat-e-Mudabbira-e-Badan (the power of body responsible to maintain health), the failing of which may lead to quantitatively or qualitatively derangement of the normal equilibrium of akhlat (humors) of body which constitute the tissues and organs. This abnormal humor leads to pathological changes in the tissues anatomically and physiologically at the affected site and exhibits the clinical manifestations (Unani medicine, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unani_medicine).

5. According to the Siddha medicine, its basic concepts are similar to Ayurveda. The only difference appears to be that the Siddha medicine recognizes predominance of Vaatham, Pitham and Kabam in childhood, adulthood and old age, respectively, whereas in Ayurveda, it is totally reversed: Kabam is dominant in childhood, Vaatham in old age and Pitham in adults.

Siddha medicine says that various psychological and physiological functions of the body are attributed to the combination of seven elements: first is ooneer (plasma) responsible for growth, development and nourishment; second is cheneer (blood) responsible for nourishing muscles, imparting colour and improving intellect; the third is oon (muscle) responsible for shape of the body; fourth is koluppu/Kozhuppu (fatty tissue) responsible for oil balance and lubricating joints; fifth is elumbu (bone) responsible for body structure and posture and movement; sixth is elumbu majjai (bone marrow) responsible for formation of blood corpuscles; and the last is sukkilam (semen) responsible for reproduction. Like in Ayurveda, in Siddha medicine also, the physiological components of the human beings are classified as Vaatham (air),

Pitham (fire) and Kabam (earth and water).

It is assumed that when the normal equilibrium of the three humors - Vaatham, Pitham and Kabam - is disturbed, disease is caused. The factors assumed to affect this equilibrium are environment, climatic conditions, diet, physical activities, and stress. Under normal conditions, the ratio between Vaatham, Pitham, and Kabam are 4:2:1 respectively.

According to the Siddha medicine system, diet and lifestyle play a major role in health and in curing diseases. This concept of the Siddha medicine is termed as pathiyam and apathiyam, which is essentially a list of "do's and don'ts" (Siddha medicine, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siddha_medicine).

6. According to the Homoeopathy, health can be covered in six words: 'the freedom to adapt to change'. A healthy person is able to adjust freely according to changing circumstances. The idea is that the body knows how best to respond and the best help we can provide is to encourage it in its healing efforts - to work with it, not against it. (www.ccrhindia.org)

Homoeopathy is a therapeutic system of medicine premised on the principle, "Similia Similibus Curentur" or 'let likes be treated by likes'. Homoeopathy is a method of treatment for curing the patient by medicines that possess the power of producing similar symptoms in a healthy human being simulating the natural disease, which it can cure in the diseased person. Homoeopathy treats the patients not only through holistic approach but also considers individualistic characteristics of the person. This concept of 'law of similars' was also enunciated by Hippocrates and Paracelsus, but besides these definitions, Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is based on a concept of balanced qi (pronounced "chee"), or vital energy, that is believed to flow throughout the body. Qi is proposed to regulate a person's spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical balance and to be influenced by the opposing forces of yin (negative energy) and yang (positive energy). Disease is proposed to result from the flow of qi being disrupted and yin and yang becoming imbalanced. Among the components of TCM are herbal and nutritional therapy, restorative physical exercises, meditation, acupuncture, and remedial massage.

7. As per the Merriam-Webster, health is defined as a condition of being sound in body, mind or spirit.

8. As per the Family Health Medical Encyclopedia, health is a state of physical, emotional, mental, and social well-being, in which the body is functioning harmoniously and efficiently and the person is reasonably in tune with his environment and with most of his associates (Family Health Medical Encyclopedia, 1984).

9. As per the book, 'The Science of Being and Art of Living' Good health means existence in harmony with evolution. (The Science of Being and Art of Living, 1966)

10. Vyavahare and Natu (2007) stated that health, even though a relative concept, is ultimately nothing but a perfect balance of physical, mental, emotional and spiritual levels.

11. Some more definitions available on Wikipedia are as under:

- Health is the level of functional and metabolic efficiency of a living organism.
- Health is a relative state in which one is able to function well physically, mentally, socially and spiritually in order to express the full range of one's unique potentialities within the environment in which one is living.
- Rene Dubos says that health is primarily a measure of each

person's ability to do and become what he wants to become.

12. The most quoted modern definition of Health was created during a preamble to the constitution of the World Health Organization as adopted by the International Health Conference, New York, 19-22 June, 1946; signed on 22nd July 1946 by the representatives of 61 States (Official records of World Health Organization no.2, p.100) and entered into force on 7th April 1948. It says:

'Health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.'

With so many definitions around, it gets confusing and the mind begins to ponder "what is health exactly?"

According to the book 'Philosophy for Health' 'the current philosophy of health and health care swings around the holistic approach. This is an approach which emphasizes the significance of considering the living being as a comprehensive unit comprising of physical, mental, social and spiritual attributes further linked with the cosmic and environmental factors' (Rastogi, 2002).

We see people around us; who have no material comfort to their disposal; but still they are cheerful and smiling. On the other hand, we also have people who have everything going for them in the world, still devoid of that happy feeling. So, among both, who we can term as healthy?

We as human beings are normally attracted to handsome and beautiful people around us and we remain attracted to them until they speak. Speaking exposes their inner mind set to us, and, decides whether the association is going to be long or short. So, aren't those good-looking people healthy, even if their mind is full of impaired emotions?

CONCLUSION

Authors are of the opinion that health is a feeling and the feeling cannot be described in few words. It is a feeling which may be experienced only if you are really healthy. It covers all the aspects of your life i.e. physical, mental, social, moral, spiritual and intellectual at the same time. This feeling can neither be prescribed by a physician nor can be purchased from any medical store or chemist shop. If you are living in coexistence with the nature, you can feel the vibrations of good health.

In other words, are you living in harmony with your surroundings? Be it your neighbors, living space, working space, relatives, spouse; friends, city or country? A harmony in these elements will put you in equilibrium with the energies in the Universe, and the vibrations shall be in perfect sync.

Health and happiness go hand in hand, though not evident in obvious sense. A happy person emits positive vibrations; which creates a positive energy in his surroundings and therefore creates a healthy environment.

So, based on the above discussion, it can be concluded that looking healthy and having a FIT report card may not be a real key to being healthy. It's more and more balancing of all elements of your life in harmony with the universe. So that, not only you, but everybody around you is healthy in true sense.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors have no conflicting financial interests.

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