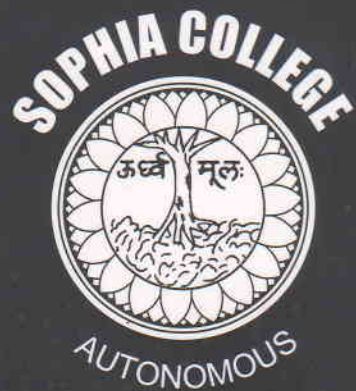


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## Determinants of the Healthy Life

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### Abstract

The value of being healthy is valued only when we lose health. The mind set of humans is to avoid primary preventive measures and start secondary preventive measures once the disease develops. The myths and assumptions around health are plenty and many have failed to protect and promote health of a given individual. There need to be perfect balance between physical, mental and social well-being to be healthy. To have a perfect balance we need to practice protective, promotive and preventive factors that keeps us healthy. This article shares few concepts of determinants of healthy life.

**Key words:** *health, hygiene, determinants, preventive, promotive, nutrition, habits*

### Introduction

*“Every human being is the author of his health or disease. The disease is the result of disobedience to the immutable laws of health that govern life.”* The importance of health is understood only when it is lost. While Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, the determinants are lifestyle, habits, nutrition, hygiene, spirituality, and peace of mind.

The issues regarding health and hygiene have received more importance during disease outbreaks and in recent days because of the COVID19 pandemic. We have suffered the epidemics of plague, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), Human Immunodeficiency Virus, Ebola, HINI/ Swine flu pandemics in this century. Do we need many more such pandemics to learn to behave?

India is projected to be top five in the prevalence of major diseases worldwide. One reason is the population factor. We are now leaders in having more cases of diabetes, COVID 19, tuberculosis, ischemic heart diseases, and malignancy.

The maintenance of good health is a lifelong entity and not merely during ill health or old age. The health status during our old age largely depends upon the fitness we maintain during young and middle age. There has been enormous research in the field of medicine which has led to the eradication of certain diseases,

improved and quick diagnostic methods, newer drugs in treatment and intervention which all have collectively added to the longevity of human beings. But it is the irresponsible acts of human behaviour that have created more health-related issues. The environmental issues have also contributed significantly towards worsening health situation. Through this article, I shall discuss various aspects like facts of health and disease, acute and chronic diseases, do's and don'ts for a healthy living and prevention of diseases.

### ***Facts about health and disease***

The peculiarities of the health and the behaviour of the human being determine the outcome. Few truths about the effects of health on our life are as follows.

#### ***1. The deterioration of health is always rapid and recovery is slow***

When the disease is diagnosed, more than fifty percent of damage has already occurred at the cellular level. This leads to rapid deterioration and delayed recovery.

#### ***2. Chronic diseases when not controlled, leads to permanent damage***

Chronic diseases like diabetes, hypertension lipid disorders when are not under control levels, they cause permanent damage to the end organs like the eyes, brain, heart, kidneys, and nerves after 10 to 15 years of onset. This has a negative impact on health because of the disabilities it produces. These disabilities occur during old age and add to more dependency.

#### ***3. Prevention is always better than cure***

The proverb has been known to mankind for many centuries. It is still in the mindset of the humans that, I will not have a disease, I can overcome them easily and there is a cure for it. All these are false beliefs and one needs to give a thought to them. It is also observed that most of the population starts lifestyle modifications only after being diagnosed with having a disease and not to prevent diseases. The use of gadgets like earphone and mobile phone have negative and detrimental effects on our health.

#### ***4. Mental health is equally important***

Most of the suffering in humans is due to negative thinking and imagining what could happen to me! Diseases like diabetes, hypertension, and heart attack are due to stressful lifestyles. The core mental disorders like anxiety, depression, loneliness, and suicidal thoughts have negative effects on overall physical and social health. Poor mental health leads to reduced workdays, disturbs the family life, and adds pressure on family members.

**5. Nutrition plays a major role both in prevention and recovery**

Both under and over-nutrition are detrimental to health. One has to consume balanced food and always prefer the locally grown staple food and fruits. Undernutrition predisposes to infections while overnutrition to noncommunicable diseases and hormonal disorders. Binge eating should be avoided. Maintenance of good oral hygiene is key for good health. It is said that the mouth is the mirror image of your inner health.

**6. Coordinated multiple determinants lead to healthy living**

Lifestyle modifications like exercise (walking, cycling, swimming), yoga, meditation, keeping our hobbies active, stopping habits like smoking and alcohol consumption will all contribute to healthy living. All these factors should be applied in a coordinated manner and followed in our routine life to live a disease-free or independent life.

**Acute Diseases**

Human beings are subject to various diseases of acute onset. It may be in form of infectious diseases, vascular events, accidents, and complications of existing diseases. The red flag symptoms suggest the disease is serious and needs immediate attention.

*Red flag symptoms*

The twelve red flag symptoms<sup>1</sup> which should never be ignored and if, are present should seek medical help immediately are:

1. Abnormal bleeding through natural orifices like ears, nose, mouth, vagina and, anal canal.
2. Significant weight loss or weight gain
3. Lump in the breast / Neck
4. Suicidal ideas / Mood change / Anger / Isolation / Forgetfulness/ Loneliness.
5. Unexplained Falls / Giddiness
6. Abnormal bowel habits
7. Chest pain or backache with sweating
8. Difficulty in swallowing
9. Breathlessness that restrict your daily activities
10. Impotence
11. Nagging cough
12. Change in voice

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.who.int/cancer/media/en/408.pdf>

### ***Chronic diseases***

Chronic non-communicable diseases like diabetes mellitus, hypertension, hyperlipidaemia, and thyroid disorders are now seen in middle age population and mostly are inherited. In few circumstances, they develop due to mental or physical stress. Many patients ask me why I got these diseases? The answer is that *we inherit not only property but also diseases from our parents.*

The diseases like stroke, Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, Epilepsy, and Cancer lead to debilitation and bedridden. Various modalities of care are available for the chronic diseases that lead to disabilities, in the form of physiotherapy, rehabilitation, and palliative care. These modalities have excellent outcomes provided when they are initiated in the early-stage and have to be applied for a long time for good results.

### ***Obesity***

Obesity is a new health fashion. *It runs in family because nobody runs in family!* The prevalence of obesity is on the rise and it has negative effects on mental and physical health. The quality of life is poor in them. Losing weight rapidly is no good. It is better to be overweight than underweight. This helps to have strength during illness. Exercising for one hour in the morning keeps you fit and reduces the weight while sitting for long hours in the office throughout the day adds to the weight.

### ***Undernutrition***

The irregular food habits, consumption of junk foods, and food taboos lead to a decrease in the intake of vital nutrients. This makes us prone to develop diseases. The prevalence of anaemia is to a larger extent in society. It is seen in children, middle-aged and older people. It is seen in poor and rich families as well. The most common cause in the rich class is the concept of maintaining the so-called "figure". They eat less to maintain figure and therefore develop anaemia. Apart from this, menstrual disorders in females and haemorrhoids in the male are cause for anaemia.

A well-balanced diet usually has a mixture of food with protein (beans, peas, or eggs), carbohydrates (maize, potatoes, cassava, rice), vitamins (vegetables, fish, fruits, or milk), and fats or oils (cooking oil). The use is based on availability and economic status. Consumption of water up to two litres a day is recommended. One should avoid drinking more water at night hours preferably after 9pm so that sleep will not be disturbed due to frequent urination. The concept of the healthy eating plate in figure -1, explains the contents of the food on our plate.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.health.harvard.edu/media/content/files/health-report-pdfs/healthy-eating-plate.pdf>



**Fig-1. Healthy eating plate**  
*Lifestyle modification should be party of life (Fig-3)*

**Fig-2. Food Pyramid recommended in India by National Institute of Nutrition**

It is observed that the person starts lifestyle modifications only when he is diagnosed having a disease. Till then *chaltha hai* attitude!

Eat less, live long! is a new slogan. Eat healthy and locally available food daily which provides all the essential nutrients in moderate and avoid junk foods.

The methods like yoga, meditation, exercise when practiced daily are long-term determinants of positive health. They also play important role in the rapid healing of the diseases when develops. They improve our immunity and provide a feel-good effect. Stress management needs to be addressed when in need. Habits have become a new social status! Alcohol dependence and tobacco are on the rise in teens and adults of all the strata of society, which leads to poor quality of life in them.

Many think that even the people who exercise regularly in form of yoga, cycling, walking also get diseases. The answer to this is simple. These lifestyle measures have five important advantages that are scientifically proved for having a healthy life. The first is, it is proved scientifically that the people who exercise regularly and maintain a good lifestyle have excellent recovery rate, both in days for recovery and quality of life,

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nin.res.in/downloads/DietaryGuidelinesforNINwebsite.pdf>

when developing disease. The second is there is a delay in onset of disease, third is the disease occurs in lesser intensity which leads to lesser morbidity and mortality, the fourth is they live long and fit during old age and fifth is their immunity status is better than those who do not practice.



Figure -3

*For good health, the following do's and don'ts are recommended*

Do's	Don'ts
Undergo screening for diabetes, hypertension, obesity, hyperlipidaemia, kidney and thyroid disease once a year preferably on your Birthday.	Mix 'pathies' – allopathic with Homeopathy or Ayurveda or Unani.
Donate blood at least once a year.	Seek pill for every ill!
Get immunized against communicable diseases	Try unscientific methods for health issues
Get your eye, ear, and tooth check-up once a year	Ignore red flag symptoms
Promote healthy environmental / pollution-free practices	Drink alcohol/smoke
Exercise in whatever ways you can – dance, walk, swim cycling, and yoga	Consume packed or junk foods
Practice your hobbies on a regular basis	Google for treatment of disease!
Keep your sexual health active	Hesitate to inform your doctor regarding your sexual or mental health
Promote mental health through meditation / Spirituality	Compare your health with others
Keep watching comedy serials and laugh till you have tears or abdominal pain	Sit for a long-time watching television or doing work on a computer.



Accept, if the disease has been diagnosed.	Question why the disease to me? Delay the treatment or spend time seeking advice from multiple sources
Get health insurance	Ignore mental health issues.
Pledge for organ donation	Stop drugs prescribed for chronic diseases.
Maintain good hygiene	Ignore protective methods.

***Prevention of diseases***

***Immunization in adults and older people<sup>4</sup>***

*Indradhanush* coverage is recommended for all children. The adults should be immunized against typhoid, human papillomavirus (HPV), tetanus, and hepatitis B. Girls especially teenagers and just before marriage can have their shot of HPV which helps prevent malignancy of the cervix.

Older people (>60 years) should be immunized against influenza, pneumococcal pneumonia, herpes zoster, tetanus, and hepatitis B irrespective of their disease status.

Those who travel abroad or endemic places should receive a vaccine against meningococci, cholera, and yellow fever depending upon the prevalence of endemicity.

The rabies vaccine is mandatory for those who have a dog bite irrespective of the immunization status of the dog.

***Good hygiene practices***

The World Health Organisation defines hygiene as the conditions and practices that help to maintain health and prevent the spread of diseases. Personal hygiene refers to maintaining the body's cleanliness.<sup>5</sup>

Practices like hand washing, daily brushing of teeth, daily bathing, trimming nails weekly, regular haircuts, menstrual hygiene, use of washed clothes daily are few good practices for maintaining good health.

<sup>4</sup> API Guidelines “Executive Summary The Association of Physicians of India Evidence-Based; Also see 5. Clinical Practice Guidelines on Adult Immunization” Expert Group of the Association of Physicians of India on Adult Immunization in India JAPI. 2009;57:345-56. [https://www.geriaticindia.com/indian\\_vaccination\\_guidelines.html](https://www.geriaticindia.com/indian_vaccination_guidelines.html)

<sup>5</sup> "Hygiene: Overview". World Health Organization (WHO). Retrieved 29 January 2020.

Because of COVID 19, the use of face mask and social distancing are to be followed mandatorily to safeguard ourselves. The role of personal hygiene, hand wash, and good nutrition has the upper hand in preventing the spread of the disease.

### **Conclusion**

We realize the importance of good health only when it is lost. Healthy living and active ageing should be our goal throughout.

The non-communicable diseases of the west like obesity have already conquered our population in India which is not a good sign. We need to think about what is good for our health and choose wisely.

Preventive methods and attending to the red flag symptoms should be our priority.

We need to balance physical and mental health together. The actions of our mind, heart, and behavior should be well-coordinated daily for a peaceful life.

Maintaining a healthy life is economical, while a diseased life is very costly. A holistic approach with protection, prevention, and promotion of health throughout our life should be our priority.

Preventing or delaying the disease is of vital importance in preventing physical, mental, and financial breakdown.

Do not fall prey to fabulism, misinformation, and falsehood on the internet. Remember only a human being (Doctor) can understand the emotions of another human (Patient). Good health despite diseases is the best life partner! *"To keep the body in good health is a duty... otherwise we shall not be able to keep our mind strong and clear."* Gautam Buddha.

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