

EDITORIAL

Seven Health Sins

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As we all know, health cannot be sold or purchased by anyone anywhere. According to the holistic concept of health which is based on 'Bio-psycho-social model', a person can only be healthy if he/she is able to maintain a harmonious balance between physical, mental/emotional, social and spiritual dimensions of self. No doctor or hospital however big they may be, can give health to anyone until and unless a person chooses to be healthy by making the right choices in his day to day behavior. Adolescence is the time when a person learns to make the choices about his daily behavior. Therefore, giving them the correct information about the routine behavior is of paramount importance for everyone concerned with health including public health experts. One such concept has been developed by the author as 'Seven Health Sins' which he has been sharing with the adolescents in the schools as well as the first-year medical students.

These Seven Health Sins are as follows:

1. Not eating the right food in the right amount at the right time;
2. Having a sedentary lifestyle;
3. Not having enough sleep;
4. Not following sexual discipline in life;
5. Substance abuse (including smoking, gutka, alcohol, etc);
6. Chronic stress due to 'too much too soon' approach and poor social connectivity;
7. Lack of hygiene and cleanliness

inside and outside body (including oral hygiene, bowel clearance, hand washing, bathing, etc).

If an adolescent avoids these health sins, it can be almost ensured that he/she will remain healthy and happy throughout their life. The healthiest populations in the world having the highest proportion of healthy centenarians live in the so called 'Blue Zones' of the world which include The Italian island of Sardinia; Okinawa, Japan; Loma Linda, California; Costa Rica's isolated Nicoya Peninsula; Ikaria, an isolated Greek island. (*The details are given in a well written book 'The Blue Zones – 9 Lessons for Living Longer by Dan Buettner'*). The inhabitants of these Blue zones by and large avoid these seven health sins which is a testimony towards the effectiveness of this approach.

Let us discuss these seven points briefly.**1. Not eating the right food in the right amount at the right time**

As far as right food is concerned, Dr. T. Colin Campbell, the well-known co-author of the bestseller 'The China Study' (based on one of the biggest epidemiological study on relationship between diet and health done in China) emphatically argues that the most prudent diet for human beings is 'WHOLE FOOD PLANT BASED DIET (WFPB DIET)'.

His research and that of many other leading scientists in a way proves that to prevent all major non-communicable diseases including cancers, diabetes, hypertension and coronary heart disease, everyone should consume WFPB Diet from early childhood. (*Kindly go through the outstanding book 'WHOLE – Rethinking the Science of Nutrition by T. Colin Campbell'*). As far as 'Right Amount and Right Type' eating is concerned, there is enough literature about overeating and upcoming literature about the 'Right Timing' of eating food. Interestingly, in Ayurveda, (the age-old science of healthy living), 'Aahaar', i.e. food, has been given the highest importance and the topic has been dealt in great length in 'Charaka Samhita' and other Ayurvedic texts.

2. Having a sedentary lifestyle

In last 10 years or so, several research studies published in the most prestigious medical journals have shown that sitting for more than 2 hours a day can be a major risk factor for several non-communicable diseases including diabetes and CHD, among others. Moreover, any amount of physical activity in the morning or evening cannot neutralize the harm done by prolonged sitting, therefore the rule of '20-20' is very important which means every 20 minutes, one must stand up from the chair and move his/her body for at least 20 seconds. *In the famous book 'Eat, Move, Sleep' by Tom Rath, he asserts that everyone should walk at least 10000 steps every day to avoid being sick.*

3. Not having enough sleep

In the recent years, there have been lots of published studies showing that 'Voluntary Sleep Deprivation' is an important risk factor for insulin resistance leading to Diabetes and other ill effects of Metabolic Syndrome. Therefore, to have enough sleep (which may vary from 6-8 hours' person- to- person) is an important determinant of health which is being neglected in today's fast pace of life surrounded with electronic gadgets. Sleep deprivation not only predisposes to diabetes and obesity but also leads to irritation, loss of concentration and memory loss – all of which compromise our work capacity and ability to think innovatively. Therefore, it is very vital to have good quality of sleep every day for 7-8 hours. (*Refer to the book 'Eat, Move, Sleep' by Tom Rath*).

4. Not following sexual discipline in life

Sexual discipline is not the same as suppression of sexual energy which is next to impossible. In the matter of sex, the young persons should avoid both the extremes – suppression may lead to various psychological problems as highlighted by Sigmund Freud while free indulgence without moral and legal considerations may lead to host of problems being faced by western society and now also being seen in India e.g. teenage pregnancies, abandoned kids, single parent homes, HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, marital discord, etc. The answer lies in the age-old concept of 'Brahamacharya' where the sexual desire is initially diverted (sublimation) towards studies and career making and then later on it is satisfied through the institution of marriage and finally it is transformed to Love and 'Self Actualization' (*Carl Jung*).

5. Substance abuse (including smoking, gutka, alcohol, etc)

It is a common knowledge that any kind of substance abuse at any point in life is one of the biggest sins towards health. Some publications tried to prove that moderate drinking is good for cardiac health yet none of them proved that moderate drinking decreases overall mortality. Moreover, the study designs were found lacking on account of selection bias, recall bias and controlling confounding factors. Therefore, no public health specialist would recommend moderate drinking being good for health considering the impact of alcohol use in road traffic accidents, broken families and crimes.

6. Chronic stress due to 'too much too soon' approach and poor social connectivity

It is being said that chronic stress is the mother of all diseases of modern civilization including CHD, Hypertension and even Cancers. A new body of research collectively known as 'Psychoneuroimmunology' is being published world over in several journals which gives the evidence and biological mechanism of chronic stress leading to immunosuppression which in turn leads to several NCD's as well as increased susceptibility to communicable diseases. (*Kindly refer to the work of well-known researcher Dr. Herbert Benson, who is world famous for his books – 'Beyond the Relaxation Response' and 'Timeless healing'*). Social isolation is yet another new area of research being shown to be an important determinant of health. Several epidemiological studies (*Refer to the book 'Love and*

Survival: The Scientific Basis for the Healing Power of Intimacy by Dr. Dean Ornish, famous for 'Reversing Heart Disease') have shown that social isolation can be a leading cause for morbidity and mortality.

7. Lack of hygiene and cleanliness inside and outside body (including oral hygiene, bowel clearance, hand washing, bathing, etc).

'Swachh Bharat – Swasth Bharat' – The mission launched by the present central government clearly shows the importance of cleanliness and hygiene in a country like India where Diarrhoeal diseases are still one of the leading causes of death in the Under-7 population. In Charaka Samhita, all types of cleanliness of the body including bowel clearance have been highlighted in great detail.

In conclusion, the author would like to suggest that 'Seven health sins' is a concept which should be taught to the school going children from 5th class onwards so that the idea gets disseminated to the families and the community through 'Child-to-child' transmission channels. This will ensure that the people avoid the seven bad habits and live a long and fruitful life like the healthy centenarians of the 'BLUE ZONES' which can never be achieved by medical measures alone.