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Introductory note. The following is adapted from my article *Exercise and Beyond* published in the NIMH practitioner journal *Herbal Thymes* being a version of Appendix 6 of *Tai Chi For You*. In the spirit of friendship I am forwarding it to folks of Fylde Tai Chi Association and other friends and family to encourage continuation of regular activity and healthy diet etc., in these difficult and confused times. This brief account is not intended as a substitute for contacting your GP or attending an emergency clinic or following their advice in the event of developing symptoms of disease. It is offered as one example of a basic guide to engender healthy internal and external conditions in order to resist disease states and improve well-being and self-efficacy.

The best of healers is good cheer (Pindarus; c. 518 – 438 BC)

Be relaxed, happy, and without fear... (Karma Thinley Rinpoche 1931-)

It can be argued that stress and the anxiety, pensive sadness, and neurosis which arise from it, is a major factor in the development of immune dysfunction and thus limits the ability of the body's defence mechanisms when invaded by pathogenic organisms or assaulted by other disease states. Furthermore, anxiety, etc. have a positive-feedback effect on the stress that caused them and further exacerbates the diseases - physical and mental - which arise from it*. So, the first order of the day is to try to reduce stress and emphasise activities that will prevent its initial assault and reduce or eliminate its effects, e.g. meditation, regular efficacious exercise, healthy diet/lifestyle, and remedial action. The introductory quotations might be perceived as trite but nevertheless, they emphasise a state of mind that has very profound effects on health and so it might be best, in the first instance, to make a stab at that 😊.

So, for what it is worth, here are some suggestions that briefly elaborate some actions to help the body to adapt to pathogenic assault and consequently become stronger as a result (in most cases) and, desirably, resist disease conditions without succumbing to serious adverse effects. In my humble opinion, these methods and other balanced approaches to health and wellbeing, notwithstanding the pharmaceutical manipulation of microorganisms and molecules to produce substances (surely altruistic and benign?) that promise to save us from disease and death, provide us with mechanisms whereby individuals can create conditions conducive to optimal health and immune function. These preventive and reactive strategies are nothing new, as we can glean from the ancient text *The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine*.

The Yellow Emperor once inquired of his ministers:

“I’ve heard that in days of old everyone lived over one hundred years without showing the usual signs of aging. In our time however, people age prematurely... Is it due to a change in environment or is it because people have lost the correct way of life?”

Qi Bo the chief physician answered:

“In the past... people understood the principle of yin and yang balance... These days, people have changed their way of life. They drink wine as though it were water, indulge excessively in destructive activities, that drain their body’s essence and deplete their vital force... Seeking emotional excitement and momentary pleasures, people disregard the natural rhythm and order of the universe. They fail to regulate their lifestyle and diet, and sleep improperly... Internally, they are enslaved by their emotions and worries. They work too hard in heavy labour.

The Yellow Emperor’s classic of Internal Medicine. (Maoshing Ni, 1995)

Without ruminating on the nature of moral behaviour and the characteristics of hedonism, I think that what we can extract from Qi Bo’s assessment, if we are to maintain good health, is the need for a more regulated lifestyle that avoids extremes and excesses. Despite the many health interventions available to us, the most important way for humans to resist pathogenic influences, such as environmental factors, viruses and bacteria, or at least ameliorate the severity of their adverse effects and aid recovery once affected, is to adopt a personally-responsible, more measured, harmonious, and natural lifestyle.

The following suggests a balanced approach to some important aspects of lifestyle and health (not including specific and necessary therapeutic treatments) that has to some extent stood me in good stead over the years, along with my family and past patients. I am certain that it is not perfect or definitive and that there are other views and approaches that might be more specific or superior but not necessarily achievable for some of us at this point in time. It is not meant as medical advice for specific illnesses, although it might well help when used in conjunction with the guidance of appropriate health-care professionals such as doctors, nurses, herbalists, etc. It is what I consider, from personal experience, to be part of a balanced, pro-active approach to health maintenance. It is a proactive approach which the ancient physician Qi Bo (2500BCE) alludes to when he states, *“To take medicine when you are sick is like digging a well only when you are thirsty - is it not already too late?”*

A general approach to supporting health and well-being.

As mentioned, this article is adapted from my small book *Tai Chi for You - Appendix 6 "Exercise and Beyond"*. The reader might be wondering why I have included this section in a book about Tai Chi and Chi Gung. I have done so because, in a pro-active approach to health, it is not enough to exercise without attending to other essential necessities for health. As with Chi Gung exercise, one should maintain a balanced approach and avoid obsession, excesses, or indulgence in narcissistic fads. As Qi Bo informs the Yellow Emperor:

"In ancient times, people lived simply.....When the weather was cooled, they became active to fend off the cold. When the weather heated up in summer, they retreated to cool places. Internally their emotions were calm and peaceful, they were without excessive desires. Externally they did not have the stress of today. They lived without greed and desire... They maintained inner peace and concentration of mind and spirit. This prevented pathogens from invading.... When they did contract disease, they simply guided properly their emotions and spirit and redirected the energy flow using the method of zhou you [treatment]." (Maoshing Ni, 1995)

For convenience, we might say there are two general categories of approach that should be encouraged in a balanced approach to health. The first and unquestionably most important is, as the ancient physician Qi Bo often implies, a "pro-active" approach, which refers to encouraging a healthy internal environment (and sound structural support) within a healthy as possible external environment that "*prevents pathogens invading*" (this might imply any disease state). The second is the "re-active" approach, which refers to addressing the problem after it has occurred and usually when it is acute or has become chronic, i.e. "*using the method of zhou you*". However, although it is useful to discuss healthcare in terms of these two categories, they are not disparate, as the distinction between proactive and reactive often depends on when and how the methods are utilised. For example, pro-active methods such as Chi Gung and massage, can also be used to treat disease once it has taken hold and reactive methods such as herbs and nutrition can be used to prevent disease occurring. Nevertheless, the pro-active view and approach is most prudent. The following story told by Liang and Wu (1993) illustrates the superior nature of pro-active healthcare and, dare I suggest, a reason why there is more of an emphasis on reactive healthcare in the West!

There were once three brothers who were all doctors. The first could repair major damage and so received gifts and adulation from his patients. His fame spread far and wide as his skills were easily noticeable. The second brother could cure disease before it resulted in major damage, so his fame was great but not as extensive as the first brother. He was known only in his region. The

third brother was hardly known, yet his skill was the greatest of all! Of all three, the brother who was the least known was the greatest (but perhaps the poorest) because his methods (Chi Gung) prevented disease before it occurred, i.e. a pro-active approach! Oh well, to borrow from Queen, we can't all have, "fame and fortune and everything that goes with it"!

Why a Pro-active approach?

It is desirable to adopt a realistic (and therefore, manageable) and even-minded approach (i.e. avoiding a narcissistic or obsessive approach) to your own welfare and be actively involved in programmes that will engender continued well-being or recovery from disease. In this process, the aid of doctors, nurses and other healthcare folk, of any reputable tradition, cannot be dismissed, but unless medical intervention becomes necessary, it is preferable that they should only provide support and encouragement for a pro-active approach to repair and maintenance. The pro-active approach supports nature in what it does best, when allowed to do so. As Voltaire is reputed to have pointed out "The art of medicine consists in amusing the patient while nature cures the disease". Somewhat humorous, shallow, and limited in view, but you perhaps get at least one allusion that not uncommonly, given the right conditions, our bodies will naturally function effectively with little or no external intervention (review introductory note).

The inception and development of public health and welfare systems has of course brought many benefits, not otherwise available to a natural/traditional approach to health. It is therefore unfortunate (and perhaps ironic) that it has, perhaps inadvertently, fostered a mistaken, over-reliant 'cradle to grave' mentality and instead of promoting "freedom from fear" (quote used slightly out of context for effect) has created an atmosphere and conditions that blatantly promote fear. Furthermore, instead of developing a healthy community, it seems to have engendered a default acceptable epidemic of chronic and acute poor health (self-induced or otherwise). We appear to be tolerating poor health and perhaps this is partly because we have become over-reliant on our wonderful healthcare professionals (whom we dutifully and rightfully applaud in times of need, but when the sentiment wanes are only too ready to criticise and even draw into litigation!) Bless them and keep them safe.

There are many reasons for our epidemic of poor health but no doubt a mindset of abnegation of personal-responsibility for one's own health is a major factor. Strongly complicit in this is a wilful ignoring or rejection of the preventive/pro-active strategies, which is in no small part due to relinquishing of our knowledge of fundamental principles of health with the consequent over-

dependence on allopathic medicine to extricate us from our often self-inflicted conditions. Consider the wonderful but, arguably, mismanaged and unquestionably abused British National Health Service, battling to stay afloat amongst an over-reliant populace with unrealistic expectations of the medical profession (and perhaps a medical profession with a “magnificent obsession” that sometimes results in a well-meaning but deluded view of the superiority and efficacy of their own methods and wares). In the aforementioned mindset of abnegation and dependence, when illness or the fear of illness manifests, it can be very tempting to fully relinquish personal responsibility and hand over the reins to a professional “saviour” (which they often are) who, with the best of intentions, will take you where they think you need to go (or even where they think you think you need to go!). It is far more empowering and self-efficacious in the long term if you keep one hand on the reins in situations concerning yourself. Of course, it will occasionally and inevitably be expedient and necessary to engage with your medical advisor (allopathic, surgical, herbal, or otherwise). In these cases, you must “assume that the person you are listening to might know something [beyond Google!] you don’t” (Peterson, 2018) - wise advice in more than just health care. However, with deep gratitude and a fond adieu, you should re-take the reins at your earliest but medically appropriate convenience.

When a Re-active approach?

When illness takes hold, a reactive approach should be appropriately timed. To reiterate, seek and accept help when you need it, the earlier the better. We are very fortunate to live in a society where there are skilled and compassionate individuals (in all their wonderful manifestations) who have worked hard at great personal and financial expense to develop their skills and knowledge (yes, beyond Google!) and have perhaps experienced some of the many ailments that arise from simply being human. They can often help directly (by medical, physical, psychological, and emotional interventions), or at least “point the way”. However, to reiterate Qi Bo’s warning: “*To take medicine when you are sick is like digging a well only when you are thirsty - is it not already too late?*” alluding to the sanity of a pro-active approach. So now we will highlight some elements of a pro-active approach.

Under the heading of pro-action, we can consider three appropriate methods: appropriate activity (the main emphasis of this article and the book *Tai Chi for You*), appropriate diet and appropriate remedies - i.e. using them in a preventative way.

1. Appropriate activity

The physician Sun Si Miao explained, ‘*Moving water does not stagnate, active hinges never rust*’. While one can interpret his metaphor in varying depth, we can simply say that lack of movement results in stagnation and of course, stagnation inevitably results in conditions, environmental and physiological, conducive to pathogenic/disease states, e.g. abnormal tissue states (referring specifically to understanding of the quality and activity of organs etc.); energy stagnation or excess - inhibited or excessive neural (nervous system), humoral (immune system and hormones), fluid (circulation/chi), joint (skeleton) and tissue activity (muscles and organs); inappropriate absorption (how well we absorb nutrients) and elimination (how well we remove waste), etc. The optimal activity of these systems is vital for maintaining and improving health and, as mentioned earlier, all pro-active and re-active methods should consider all these points and, importantly, how they affect and are affected by our mental state, e.g. stress and anxiety, etc.

Regular exercise, especially slow, rhythmic, condensing and expanding movement, encourages effective internal stimulation of tissues and movement of fluids. With regard to reduction of stress, anxiety, etc., exercise should be also directed toward gently and progressively strengthening the constitution in order to gain physical and emotional strength and self-efficacy and further help to resist pathogenic influence. To this end, as indicated in the main text of *Tai Chi for You*, exercises collectively known as Chi Gung are extremely effective. Not only does Chi Gung address the physical necessities to engender healthy tissues, it utilises natural breathing techniques, postures and movement to develop mindfulness and clarity (something which is commonly lost to the overactive mind of stress and anxiety, which can often degenerate into the melancholic pensiveness of depression) and invigorates the spirit. Correct posture is a profound basis for Chi Gung effectiveness and for that matter all aspects of physiological and mental health.

Why is correct posture important?

Initially, for some, the corrective basic posture of Chi Gung is a somewhat contrived physical act of emerging from low spirits and beginning to address the depressed or maladjusted physical and mental constitution. How so? By a determined, “active reversal process”. Why and how does this help? Consider that the state of our mind is often reflected in the way we hold ourselves - this is a manifest “mind-body” effect. For example, when we feel healthy and in good spirits, we might display an open and raised countenance. On the other hand, if we are depressed, we might be stooped, folding into ourselves and then perhaps become caught up in a positive-feedback loop where the depression gets worse and then, too often, we can become susceptible to other illnesses.

What is to be done in this case, how can we begin to apply an “active reversal process”? We can, where possible, utilise the opposite “body-mind” effect, i.e. the theory that physical/physiological conditions affect the state of mind. In this case, beneficially adjusting the physical, will beneficially affect the state of the mind.

Why should this be the case? Consider how you feel when you have a physical/painful injury. Are you mentally in a good place? Unlikely! What happens to your mental state when the pain is prolonged? Perhaps you might find it difficult to cope psychologically/emotionally as well as physically and even become depressed, etc. What happens to your mental state when the pain is relieved, pharmaceutically, or otherwise? Perhaps you become less adversely affected psychologically and emotionally. In both cases the physical state has to some degree affected the state of mind. There are complex mechanisms involved and I have oversimplified them here but there is no question, now even in the modern medical model (i.e. “functional medicine”), that our mental state affects the physical state and vice-versa.

So then, to affect the state of mind beneficially, whether for maintaining physical health or helping to improve our mental state *per se* we can at least make a start by adjusting body structure, often to noticeable effect. The clinical psychologist Jordan Peterson (2018) advises (or perhaps admonishes), “...*attend carefully to your posture. Quit drooping and hunching around... walk tall and gaze forthrightly ahead... Encourage the serotonin [a brain chemical that affects mood] to flow plentifully through the neural pathways desperate for its calming influence*”. Could it be that when we adopt or, initially, just simulate this correct (and corrective) posture found in Chi Gung, we are imitating what we often do naturally when we “lift ourselves out of the doldrums” or when we are about to embark upon a difficult task that perhaps we are unsure of achieving and so we are, perhaps, causing the “*serotonin to flow plentifully*”. Naturally, we often tend to, if not totally overwhelmed by fear and anxiety, “soldier on” by lifting the head and body upward to raise our spirits and expand our physical presence so that we can engage the task with some courage and confidence. Thus, we engage with our surroundings while being mindful of our task instead of closing down and pensively mulling over the situation. Even if somewhat feigned at first, adopting this posture eventually may become a good habit, which can then become natural and thus, efficacious in the long term. To borrow a Buddhist analogy, in order to straighten a bent arrow, you first need to bend it in the other direction. So too, we may initially have to force or feign correct posture to overcome any habitual tendency or entrenched distortion. I am not suggesting that this physical action is the perfect way for everyone to feel better, but it might be a good start for some.

Clearly, there is more to health and well-being than just correct posture, but it is an important starting point. As mentioned, correct posture is a profound basis for good mental and physical health. Therefore, methods that develop or encourage a raised and open posture with a strong foundation, such as Tai Chi and Chi Gung, Yoga, the Alexander method, etc. are indispensable in a pro-active approach to health.

At the risk of rambling, but for completeness, it is worth mentioning the “body-body” effect, a term which can be used to describe how any bodily dysfunction, especially if unresolved, can result in a reflex dysfunction in other parts of the body. As we are discussing posture, a perhaps banal example is the nerve compression caused by incorrect or abnormal structure of the spine, which results in pain and wasting of the muscles that the motor nerve innervates. Clearly, a dysfunction in one part of the body, the spine, affects another part, a muscle. So, by applying or developing appropriate adjustment or readjustment of incorrect structure we can surely beneficially affect another part of the body. Extending this example of nerve compression caused by structural abnormality, by correcting structure we can remove the offending compression and thus, the wasting muscle can be correctly innervated and nourished to return to health. However, attention must also be paid to the distal problem if one wishes to fully address the “ostensive” cause.

The point to be emphasised here is that for any problem to be fully addressed, all three reflex mechanisms should be considered and a key element central to all three interactions is that of correct structure/posture. I should also point out that in addition to such active methods as Tai Chi, etc., there are also passive modalities, in the form of manipulation and massage that can contribute to not only structural but visceral and even psychological health. Importantly, referring back to my critique of our situation of community poor health, bear in mind that for all these methods to be effective the will to address one’s problems and help oneself needs to be present.

With correct posture in mind, in a pro-active approach to health and well-being, one should endeavour to carry out regular, safe, non-competitive exercise. Although, there is nothing particularly wrong with competitive exercise *per se* (although excessive exercise can adversely affect immune function) that is another story, and this is about optimum health, not being the best or developing the “body-beautiful”. We have seen that in addition to ensuring effective movement, non-competitive exercise can reduce and perhaps neutralise the effects of the often connected

and synergistic pathogenic conditions of depression/anxiety and stress. Recalling the advice of Nyanaponika Mahathera:

“To counter the unhealthy effects of the frantic pace of modern life, it is imperative that, in our free time, we try consciously to pause and slow down... slowing down is helpful in reducing mental and physical tension... Beyond the immediate effects of an exercise session, slowing down exercises influence the pace of the daily rhythm in what we do, how we talk and think”

Of course, I am labouring the point that a unique and comprehensive set of exercises which meet these criteria can be found in the Chinese methods of Tai Chi and Chi Gung but as mentioned, other methods can be utilised effectively to a greater or lesser degree. However, in deference to my own tradition, the apparently effortless, rhythmic postures and associated mindfulness encourage harmony of mind, body, and vital energy (known as *Chi* in Chinese medical theory) to engender a state of mental and physical well-being. To reiterate from the Yellow Emperor’s Classic of Internal Medicine: *“When internal energies are able to circulate smoothly and freely, and the energy of the mind is not scattered, but focused and concentrated, illness and disease can be avoided”*

To consolidate my laboured emphasis, a unique aspect of Chi Gung is that, unlike other forms of exercise, it is not limited by the weather, time or space (perfect in the current state of confinement), and because it does not rely on strength, speed or prowess, it can be enjoyed by people of all abilities, age and gender; anywhere, anytime!

Activity in Fresh Air and Sunlight

Last, but not only and not least, with regard to appropriate activity, it is essential that we get out in the fresh air, into open, green spaces and natural light (Just in case you need science, some research suggests this has a beneficial effect on the immune system 😊). We are, at least in a molecular sense, a synthesis of these conditions, so it is reasonable to assume that appropriate exposure to such an environment will nourish us. Conversely, the further we remove ourselves from that environment, the less we will be nourished. As Carl Sagan pointed out *“We are all connected: to each other biologically; to the earth chemically; and to the rest of the universe atomically”* An important element of our locale of the biological and chemical “universe”, that is essential to our survival and that of the planet which supports and nourishes us, is of course the Sun and its energy. Therefore, for a variety of reasons, it is important that we have access, wherever possible, to natural light and the natural, open, clean air spaces that have themselves resulted from its

nourishing energies. Although the detail of this topic is beyond the scope of this brief essay, you should pay attention to the importance of sunlight and health (for a useful starting point See Hobday, 1999). In any event, whenever you can, get out into the fresh air, preferably near a nice big tree and practise your Tai Chi, meditation or exercise, there's nothing like it!

Finally, take a trip to town and have a large chocolate and caramel latte (its healthy because it contains vanilla and cinnamon sprinkles), and a cheese (full of calcium) and bacon (great source of protein) toastie (digestible carbs), topping it off with a healthy, glucose-fructose syrup sweetened, gluten free brownie... Haha, just joking! Talking about diet...

2. Appropriate Diet

One should always consider one's individual medical history with regard to food intolerance, allergies, etc. However, appropriate diet is nothing more, or less, than ensuring effective nourishment for mind and body and by virtue of that, spirit.

In Brief:

- Other than special therapeutic dietary needs, maintain a balanced diet. Avoid processed food.
- Don't eat too much of anything at one time.
- Eat plenty of colourful, fresh fruit and vegetables and incorporate healthy herbs and spices.
- Drink sufficient water, as pure as you can get it.
- If you are vegetarian, make sure you have complete nutrition, even more so if you are vegan, as these diets do not have the easy access to essential proteins, fats, vitamins and mineral readily found in meats.
- If you eat meat, try to avoid excess, and source it as 'free from' as you can (free from substances antithetical to health – there are lots of them about!).
- If you eat raw wholefoods that is good, especially when you are trying to address a particular health issue, but cooked/hot food is necessary, and more effectively digested
- KEEP IT MOVING! It is important to have sufficient wholesome fibre in your diet. If you don't pooh easily and regularly, then something is amiss in your lifestyle and/or diet.
- When you decide to eat, EAT - don't multitask, it's not a virtue! i.e. sit down, enjoy and digest the food – respect it, it was hard come-by!

- Enjoy the things you like but in moderation - unless it causes intolerance, allergy, or reactive conditions.
- Regular supplements are an important part of a daily health regimen, especially in these times of forced, nutritionally deficient and ultra-processed food sources.

In more detail:

Adopt a straightforward, balanced approach to a diet that avoids extremes or faddish ideas. If attended to in a measured manner, appropriate diet will surely prove efficacious. The following are general safe guidelines; try your best to work towards them. However, a word of warning, they are not a substitute for medical dietary advice or necessary medical treatments. Also, if you have a specific condition, consult a relevant medical professional before embarking upon any special dietary or exercise programme.

To emphasise, avoid fad diets. Even before the advent of the internet, one person or another with their, arguably, narrow, and pedantic world view, presented, what they no doubt thought, sound reasons for criticising existing nutritional theories in favour of their own. They may or may not have validity but for sure, sooner or later, someone else will come along and put paid to their theories with a newer, more “valid” theory! Many people will undoubtedly swear by this new or old or whatever diet for one reason or another, but they may be trading short-term gains for long-term problems if the diet lacks appropriate balance. In the health arena, there are several views and rationale with regard to sources and ratios of nutrients but for the generally healthy individual, without nutrient related pathologies and intolerances, the WHO recommendations for daily nutrient intake is probably a useful and appropriate but very general starting point, e.g. 55-75% carbohydrates (vegetables, wheat etc); 10-15% protein (meat, pulses, eggs etc.); 15-30% fats (saturated fats are important but one should ensure a proportion of fats are from unsaturated fats from oils, etc.); sugary substances less than 10% - much less! (these should definitely be unrefined, and their sweetness derived largely from an unprocessed source). I tend to be more definite about dietary ratios than WHO as I am not particularly concerned with the enormous profits made from pushing sugar, meat, and animal/saturated fats. Not that, arguably, there is anything inherently bad about these foods, other than over-indulgence, excess and addiction; however, I only ever suggest what I know to have been beneficial for myself, my family and past patients.

Carbohydrate sources

- Try to eat around five servings of dark green, leafy and root vegetables a day, e.g. broccoli, cabbage, sprouts, carrots, parsnips, green beans, salad greens, peppers etc. (Yes, some of these foods do contain “adverse nutrients” but in a balanced diet, especially if cooked properly, for individuals who are not predisposed to certain conditions, the adverse effects are often irrelevant).
- Try to eat a minimum of three servings of fresh fruit or more a day, e.g. apples, pears, berries, citrus fruit, etc. These are best eaten raw, but sometimes it is useful to apply ‘mechanical mastication’ or heat, especially when trying to nourish poorly folk.
- Incorporate whole grains into your diet (unless you have a problem with them), e.g. whole grain rice, whole oats, pulses, quinoa, etc., If you are not intolerant to wheat which contain insoluble fibre and is high in gluten (lots of people are intolerant, to a greater or lesser degree) you can incorporate whole-wheat bread in reasonable amounts. Individuals who must contend with bowel disorders such as IBS, might need to utilise soluble fibre foods but it is best to consult an appropriate health practitioner about this (e.g. a herbalist, naturopath, nutritionist, etc.).
- Avoid refined sugar (even the packs that say unrefined or at least reduce intake, i.e. of white OR brown. Glucose-Fructose syrup (in all its guises) has been shown to be NOT good - that’s all I am going to say about that 😊! Avoid artificial sweeteners – they are probably not helpful – do your own research (There is a suggestion that Stevia is useful, but the jury is still out). If you do need to sweeten your foods (and you usually don’t) use small amounts of unprocessed honey (it has some useful beneficial effects) or other unprocessed sweeteners that contain nutritionally useful substances. If you are interested in the sugar issue, and it is a big issue, you might wish to read “Pure, White and Deadly: How Sugar Is Killing Us and What We Can Do to Stop It” (Yudkin, 2016). Although I am banging on about sugar, it important to have balance, and the occasional treat is fine and can in fact be beneficial to one’s demeanour!
- Avoid sugary drinks and carbonated drinks. Most concentrated fruit juices are ‘done to death’ and are basically sugary fluid, so you should dilute them (when we eat the whole fruits, we absorb the sugars less rapidly along with other vital nutrients and our body has to work to

digest and assimilate them). If you must have sweet drinks, freshly squeezed juices and freshly made “rainbow food” smoothies (‘mechanically masticated’) are preferable.

Protein sources

- If you are an omnivore, and you have a high intake of red meat, reduce your intake, and replace it with white meat, fish, and oily fish.
- If you are vegetarian, that is a healthy way to live, PROVIDING YOU MAINTAIN A BALANCED DIET (some “unaware” vegetarians do not). You should ensure you eat a variety of vegetable proteins in place of meat proteins, e.g. try to eat two servings of beans, lentils, or fermented soya (e.g. natto, tempeh and miso) each day. There are others but you should avoid focussing on just one type.
- If you are not vegan, then eggs are an excellent source of nutrients (despite the biased demonisation of cholesterol), including proteins, vitamins, and minerals. True free-range eggs (free to roam and forage on pastures) are the better option. Even better if they are organic.

Fat sources

- Saturated fats are an important part of our nutritional requirements but should be used sparingly (this topic is controversial regarding heart disease, etc. – do your own research). Unless you are vegetarian, saturated fats can be obtained from meat but is also sourced from coconut oil, butter etc. Avoid foods containing hydrogenated/trans-fats, e.g. found in some spreads, and pastries etc.
- Unless you are vegan, dairy products can be a useful and satiating dietary source but avoid excessive intake. Avoid them altogether if you are intolerant or allergic to them. A useful milk substitute might be almond, oat or rice milk (but they take a little getting used to and should not be overused as I have no doubt that some adverse-effect or other will be highlighted in the future!). There is some, not invalid, controversy about the adverse effects of unfermented soy products so excessive use of soya milk as a milk replacement might not be a useful strategy – do your own research!

- Try to incorporate into your diet foods containing important essential fats, e.g. foods such as walnuts, pumpkin seeds, sunflower seeds, etc. (Grind up a tablespoon and sprinkle onto your breakfast cereal, or salad). Oily fish are an important source of healthy essential fat.
- Natural probiotic yoghurt or similar fermented product (as opposed to just a plain dairy yoghurt) is beneficial to digestion and a useful source of fats, carbs, proteins, vitamins, and minerals. It is an excellent topping for fresh fruits (although there might be some debate about this combination, particularly in Ayurveda, I have not noted any problems other than in some individuals with certain digestive issues). You could add a sprinkle of your favourite muesli or ground seeds and a good dash of cinnamon or mixed spice for flavour (and to aid physiological functions).

Fluid intake

- Drink plenty of fluid throughout the day (it is important not to drink too much, too fast). Two litres provide an appropriate volume for the average adult in the average day, at least half of which should be pure water. Everything important that happens in our body happens in a fluid environment that is water-based, it is required in optimum amount for things to work properly. Dehydration is not always clinically apparent, and our bodies learn to adapt to 'sub-clinical' dehydration, which can manifest as cravings for food and stimulants such as coffee and sweet stuff. This type of dehydration can result in general feelings of malaise or a vague feeling of being unwell to a variety of illnesses. So why not eliminate dehydration and feel generally better by ensuring you drink enough water. Avoid, at least too much, consumption of cold water - room temperature or warm is perhaps best (yes, enjoy the occasional cold drink - live a little 😊).
- Avoid, at least too much, coffee and tea. Although they have some useful and beneficial effects, relatively large amounts can exacerbate anxiety and stress and cause difficulty sleeping, which is essential to a healthy mind, body, and immune system. However, green tea is useful for a variety of health reasons, depending on the type. You can replace tea and coffee with healthy herb teas (see 3 Appropriate Remedies).
- Avoid sweetened drinks such as cola, especially diet sodas and fizzy drinks. They contain the ideal ingredient for making human lard: sugar! Drinks with artificial sweeteners are suspect from a health perspective and are associated with increased appetite and consequent weight

gain. For sweet drinks, it is best to make your own fresh squeezed juice or smoothie. Again, balance is the key, enjoying the odd fizzy drink will not kill you. However, swilling it down every day from the cheap multipack and giant bottles pushed without shame but voluntarily purchased in large quantities from discount stores and supermarkets, will certainly contribute to obesity and consequent poor health.

General

- For a variety of reasons avoid heavily processed foods. Processing reduces the effective nutritional value and can cause poor digestion and elimination deficits. In addition, some research shows they can affect the immune system adversely.
- Despite misinformed and constant ridicule by the orthodox medical profession (less so of late), it is useful to take certain nutritional supplements. Supplementation is something that we need to be wary of with regards to what is or is not useful as this is also subject to fads and trends, so it is worthwhile obtaining advice from a reputable and experienced practitioner (e.g. a herbalist or naturopath, nutritionist etc.). However, a useful general daily supplement programme should at least incorporate a multivitamin/mineral. Avoid poor quality supplements that you might find in supermarkets or discount stores and ensure you purchase supplements of good quality that the body can absorb and assimilate optimally. I prefer a brand of “Food-State” supplements - you can purchase these or other good quality supplements from a reputable health food shop.
- Take regular exercise. You guessed it, Tai Chi and Chi Gung. walking, running (appropriate to your level), swimming, cycling, dancing, etc. are all excellent forms of exercise (but make sure it is within your physical capability). These things are essential to healthy digestion but also help maintain healthy functioning of mind and body, to lift one’s spirit, and engender a feeling of well-being, which is very important to immune function.
- Try to relax. With regard to diet, it will certainly aid digestion and elimination. In any case, it is useful to learn and practise relaxation-meditation techniques, Yoga or Tai Chi/Chi Gung. Stress is a major factor in digestive disease development and progression. These methods, by their very nature, help to engender a mindful approach to eating in addition to our general situation. They create the ideal conditions for digestive processes and if nothing else provide a brief and enjoyable respite from our problems throughout the day. It is worth mentioning

that a wholesome, personally appropriate, spiritual path and practice is essential not only to one's spiritual welfare, but it also to well-being of mind and body.

3. Appropriate Remedies

Proactive methods are vital to our health and well-being. They are generally safe and effective but sometimes, despite our best efforts, things can go wrong (that's life!). When this occurs, you should always seek advice from an appropriate medical professional - the sooner, the better. Natural treatment is a preferable option (e.g. herbalist/naturopath) but not always appropriate, orthodox treatment (e.g. GP, etc.) is necessary in acute or potentially acute conditions. In any event, a competent and qualified practitioner will know their limitations and refer appropriately.

Professional consultation notwithstanding, to try to help reduce the need for medical intervention we should also take the pro-active approach to "remedies" as suggested in this section of a clever ditty attributed to David Paul Brown – whoever, he was! (From the North American Magazine, 1883):

*Let doctors or quacks prescribe as they may,
Yet none of their nostrums for me;
For I firmly believe-what the old women say-
That there's nothing like camomile tea.*

*It strengthens the mind, it enlivens the brain,
It converts all our sorrow to glee;
It heightens our pleasures, it banishes pain-
Then what is like camomile tea?*

*In health, it is harmless-and, say what you please,
One thing is still certain with me,
It suits equally well with every disease;
Oh, there's nothing like camomile tea.'*

Whether, you like or dislike chamomile tea, implicit in these verses is the proactive and reactive nature of such remedies. The function of remedies (in the proactive sense) is dietary, yet they should gently but profoundly affect mind, body and, when used in conjunction with appropriate activity and diet, indirectly affect spirit. For an appropriate and proactive health remedy, there is

nothing like chamomile tea of course (except for those with an allergy to the *Compositae* family of plants, to which it belongs)! For the dis-likers of chamomile, there are many other herbs that can be safely used for such purposes. These herbs can be used to replace tea and coffee (which are themselves traditional herbal remedies). You can find a selection of these in the NIMH leaflet on Herb Teas and many excellent books written by its members. For details of highly trained and qualified Medical Herbalists see www.nimh.org.uk.

* For more a more in-depth discussion of stress regarding health see *Understanding Chi Kung*

The above information is a synthesis of some of the knowledge provided to me by all my kind teachers. Its structure and expression are my own, along with some personal (and undoubtedly biased) critique. Although my understanding is poor, I have attempted to pass on my teachers' knowledge as best I can, in a balanced way. I apologise to my teachers and the reader for any errors and misrepresentations.

Peter is a Consulting Medical Herbalist (retired), trained under the auspices of The National Institute of Medical Herbalists, of which he remains a member. For several years, Peter lectured in Clinical Examination Skills on the Herbal Medicine degree course at The University of Central Lancashire, he is author of 'Clinical Examination Routines, Common Signs and Symptoms', a series of lecture notes and an aide-memoire for Medical Herbalists and Complementary Health practitioners.

Prior to retirement, Peter also lectured in Human Physiology and other Biosciences, and for several years gave tuition in Tai Chi at Blackpool and the Fylde college. He is author of 'Qigong: A Scientific Perspective' published in the Qi Journal. He is co-author of 'Understanding Chi Kung' (2nd edition), an accessible but detailed discussion of the theory and benefits of Chi Gung and author of 'Tai Chi for You: Simple Tai Chi and Chi Gung Exercises for Daily Healy Maintenance'. As a Medical Herbalist, he utilised Chi Gung and Tai Chi as an integral part of his treatments. He is a co-founder of Fylde Tai Chi Association, a friendly group of Tai Chi practitioners who promote the benefits of Tai Chi and Chi Gung on the Fylde Coast. You can find some useful information about Tai Chi on our website www.fyldetaichi.com