

Learning Health from Babies

Who hasn't have heard about legendary super-healthy communities – people full of life, smiling and contented, enjoying an elixir diet, with unbridled energy? Reputed to live in places of exotic charm, high in the Himalayas perhaps or deep within South America, they are always a long way from where we live.

Indeed, Weston-Price travelled the world in search of such peoples and made fascinating discoveries. (1) But pause - from a naturopathic point of view, every community in every part of the world has such a population of super-health – they're called Babies!

Of course there is much to be admired in the lifestyle of idyllic societies where they do exist. However, simply appropriating their customs can also lead not only to a healthier awareness but also to stomachache, painful injury or emotional conflict from inappropriate application.

Contrast a fabled tribe with an actual roomful of babies. Follow an individual baby for a single day and prepare to be impressed. Adopt the baby's life style for a day and be amazed! Babies remind us about health not so much in what to do but how to be.

Babies Eat Selectively

Even at breastfeeding, a baby does not simply drink mother's milk but performs a primitive chewing action, accompanied by steady breathing. Also, much as survival hinges on the next meal, a baby cannot be coerced into feeding in an unfavourable environment, particularly if unwell. It may then use the breast as comforter but does not feed thoroughly.

Implications for health - our food increases in value if 'liquidised' before swallowing, and our digestive processes require ample oxygen. If unwell miss the next meal - if difficult, chew salad or fruit type foods, rather than take juices. (2)

Babies Combine Work and Sleep with Rest

The seemingly never-ending activity of a baby does not continue unrelieved until bedtime. It is punctuated by periods of passivity, such as bathing, story telling and music, to which the baby is particularly receptive. This allows for regeneration within the day. (3)

Implications for health - it is often difficult to sleep at night even when extremely tired. To help this, introduce calm-inducing interludes throughout the day, especially if under pressure from work. (Story-telling not to be underestimated).

Babies Resist Chairs

Except for a highchair during a distracting meal, a baby will often violently resist being artificially seated. Babies prefer to sit independently using the entire lower body, with legs in a variety of postures, which relieves pressure on the base of the spine. When fatigued, they do not resort to slump or contortion, they simply lie down.

Implications for health - although challenging for many adults, a gradual, cushioned return to floor level, at least in the home, is relieving if experiencing musculo-skeletal pains. Out of home, attempt to lie down on a flat surface in 1st Aid 'Recovery Position' twice per day. (4)

Babies Are Comforted by Touch

More than words or warmth or even food, physical contact reassures a baby that all is well. Babies are also selective with respect to touch and clearly indicate who handles them best. Frequently touched babies also seem to make good touchers eventually, which helps the world go around! (5)

Implications for health – touch and healing are almost inseparable. In later life, our reassuring touch need not necessarily come from our most intimate; in fact it often can be a contraindication. Confidently seek therapeutic touch with the same enthusiasm you track down organic food.

Babies Are Assertive

It may cause the greatest strain in parenting but a baby's capacity to express "yes" and "no" is life saving. Perhaps to avoid being overwhelmed by this world, the baby learns 'no' first; 'yes' seems to come as a result of confidence. (6)

Implication for health – deep down in our emotional brain, our decisions are always plainly 'yes or no.' Re-inforce your decision making processes by exercising the 'yes/no' neck posture of the first two vertebrae: once a day, with eyes open, perform clear head rotations, followed by gentle nodding. Practice the stiffer movement more.

Babies are Successfully Ill

We have been led to believe that the terrible sufferings of childhood illness have been overcome by medicines. It is clear now, however, that such conditions were relieved by improvements to sanitation and alleviation of poverty. In fact, babies innately resist medication; where immunity is allowed to develop naturally, babies are consistently triumphant in illness and injury. Perhaps babies also suffer well because they are unburdened by the fear of illness and have no reason to doubt their bodies, unless undermined by the attitude of adults. (7)

Implications for health – as a fearful species, human anxiety over illness is comprehensible, but our mature response is acutely conditioned by ignorance and superstition.

Ironically, people often behave more rationally the more seriously ill they become. This is a hint of wisdom from babyhood. We can fear and dread becoming ill until we have to die, or we can embrace the experience of illness as an adjustment and an opportunity for change and growth. (8)

Babies Are Irrepressible

Although relatively feeble and underdeveloped, babies make a big impression on life and those around. They do this by a supreme positivity. Babies may have inbuilt physiological mechanisms millions of years old but each day is a dare; their birth is a near miracle; they trust implicitly; they experiment and seem indifferent to success or failure; they prevail in a world not always welcoming, and yet, even against sometimes near overwhelming odds, babies rarely give up. Their eventual reward is a physique unrivalled in nature, a mental capacity unfathomable, and a spirit capable of the most beautiful and sublime creativity. (9)

Implications for health – babies say: "It's not the days in our life that matter, it's the life in our days!"

References

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