

Pulling Health Out of the Body

Health can be realized not so much from chasing after exotic treatments or elixirs, as from accessing what we have within ourselves. Given very basic requirements, the human system is very self-sufficient. Naturopaths recognized generations ago that in our over-civilized world, what we simply require is stimulation.

In how we eat and use our food, from contact with nature and the elements, and quite importantly, from gently pushing towards our personal limits. In the language of the environmentalist, we merely need 're-wilding' !

Newcomers to naturopathy might find the following examples of stimulation - not eating, splashing about in cold water, and throwing our body to the ground, quite radical. But no harm can be done with an experimental attitude, just remember to 'Pull' gently!

Not Fast Food - Just Fast

Ever since the prehistoric human inadvertently dropped some simple food into the fire, we have become enamored with gastronomy. As we all know, more time can be taken up in a health consultation, more column inches in popular magazines, and more abstract thinking can be taken up with the subject of eating than (almost) any other. Eating quite obviously satisfies so many longings, but the basic function is so often overlooked – food is of little consequence, even if obtained from the best organic sources, unless it is utilized. If not, it can take more energy to pass through the body than provide.

Feeding ourselves is an extension how food itself is grown. Within our body is a root system (villi), which is watered by the consomme of all that we have eaten. From these roots our body develops and grows, but it will not show health until it engages with the outside world. This engagement is primarily with substance like itself in the physical world, but it also seeks contact with the subtle and essential of things.

Another analogy could be that of fire itself. The constituents of our diet could be compared to ingredients of a good blaze. Both require combustible materials, but once ignited are dependent on air to really get going. The same is true for us, and we access ample air from free and easy breathing.

With the body energized, the health within us can then direct us ever further towards other sources of stimulation, and life begins to get interesting.

Most curious to the orthodox mind, not eating is also a way of stimulating the body, hence the tradition of fasting in nature cure. Everyone knows about fasting, since sleep interrupts even the glutton, but withholding food merely for the sake of it, can be counterproductive – normal appetite could feel compromised, and we may resurrect memories of an unhappy start to our life.

Fasting only seems irrational to the 'got to keep your strength' mentality. In fact, most people who have the luxury of shopping around for food are overfed. Investigations have now shown that restricting food intake truly strengthens – it increases the availability of our 'wear and tear' hormones. Also, perhaps more relevant to our times, fasting compensates for the dramatic under use of our bodies from convenience style living.

Ideally a fast is spontaneous, such as when upper tract inflammation makes swallowing painful, which is a reliable guide to not eating. But one might want to take the hint from feelings of tiredness or a during a holiday period, to give the system a lighter time for repair and renewal.

Fast Type 1

Simple: for a period of a few days up to a week, excepting raw food, avoid eating what one normally eats most (e.g. bread or cheese). It can be quite revealing to discover how much concentrated food items have crept into a reformed diet. During this fast, normal routine is rarely affected, although a marked increase in energy is often noted.

Fast Type Two/'Detox'

This fast can be seasonal, quite appropriately before spring, when foods may have been scarce in former times. Or it can be followed when feeling unwell or immediately after a physical trauma.

Modest: for up to a week, eat a mono diet, simple salad or one fruit (grapes or pears) until real hunger returns. Ideal over a holiday time.

Extreme: (under professional supervision) drink only water as desired for a few days. This is perfectly safe for the majority of us; we are designed to go without food for extended periods, and this fast can be interrupted at any stage with the mono diet if feeling very weak. Expect to feel a bit groggy initially, rather like a 'hangover'.

The romance of a soul-cleansing fast/detox, the sense of elation sometimes experienced, can come to climax in a spectacular rush to the toilet, so ideally, accompany with bed rest, no newspapers, no radio perhaps music.

While fasting, rest lots but in Type 1 & 2 practice deep breathing, maybe a little walking to help. If you feel like staying in bed all day, then Fast Type 3, deep breathing on the hour. Learn how to do self-massage of the abdomen.

What Fasting Pulls Out:

Rests the stomach; refreshes the intestines; resets true appetite; clears the head. (1)

It's Elementary - Water

Nature Cure's focus on water is entirely ecological. Of the elements it is the most plentiful; it is the most manageable; it is free (if you can collect it); and for external purpose it does not even have to be clean! And possibly from our experience in the womb, most of us are happy to be surrounded by water

Water works for us not simply because it is wet but because it is a useful conveyor and conductor of temperature. Being warm blooded we possess a wonderful homeostatic mechanism, but we are apt to overheat, suffer from exposure to cold, and get uncomfortably congested. By using water to help move blood around the body, we can solve many of these problems.

The other immediate benefit comes from using water on the skin. Although claiming many functions, the skin is foremost a nervous organ, and using water selectively, we can influence the interior of the body. The skin also is an enthusiastic interactor, and appreciates direct contact. An overprotected skin may look smoother, but it will become increasingly pallid, and is more likely to sag over time.

Water is also the first of First Aids. Since our body takes its form in water, it should not be surprising if water is conducive to healing. If there are misgivings about its use, they are almost always based on misconceptions about its application, especially in relation to cold water. Our preference for a hot bath is probably a response to living in cooler climates, for on a sunny day, who would consider it! At the same time, since swallowing too much water is disastrous, we can understand the reservations of someone who has had an unpleasant bathing or choking experience. Nevertheless, water, once the very definition of nature cure, still qualifies as its emblem.

Water Treading & Splashes

Famously promoted by Pastor Kneipp in the 19th century, treading cold water (or walking in the dew) immediately after rising, is the stimulating way to begin the day. The circulation is effectively increased to the legs and the arms, and to the brain. Perfect after a late night, restless sleep or a disturbing dream - you can't but really wake up and begin to feel positive.

Method: On rising, urinate. Meanwhile run six inches of cold tap water in the bathtub. In winter keep on a top covering but in summer step into the bathe naked. Walk up and down the tub for one minute. Squat down and as quickly as possible, give some scoops of water between the legs and splash the face.

Get into your largest towel to dry quickly and dress well. Keep moving around for a while before sitting down to breakfast.

To Help Sleep

"Can't sleep" (won't sleep!) is a very common complaint. Typically, someone who falls asleep much against their will in the early evening at show or concert, finds it impossible to 'switch off' when they go to bed. Sleeplessness is rarely primary symptom, but the influence of this water application is hard to resist by even the most confirmed insomniac. The ratio of blood to head and arms is tilted towards the latter, and the (fore) brain should quieten.

Method: Just before getting into bed, to keep warm put a towel around the shoulders and go to the sink. Run the cold tap and flow the water over each wrist, then over the forearms up to the elbows, until the arms feel slightly chilled (a sort of pleasant/verging on unpleasant sensation).

Dry by 'patting' rather than rubbing. Get into bed, lying on the side and crossing the arms, put a hand under the opposite underarm. Your arms will be tingling pleasantly. Close the eyes, breathe a little deeper, go 'heavy' and pretend to be asleep.

(This is usually enough for a slender make-up; if you are fuller, apply water to the feet and calves instead.)

Waist Compress – Be Kind to Your kidneys

Our nervous system is cleverly arranged in such a way that stimulus on the surface of the body can be transmitted to organic structures lying deeper. Scratching one's head is a very common example (it is significant which side of the head/brain is being scraped), and both domestic and farmed animals can make quite a performance of it. The art massage, of course, is another exquisite example, and this application is a form of self-massage.

The organs at the waist, principally our liver and kidneys, are bloodthirsty. Their functions are almost too numerous to describe but their healthy workings depend on the adequacy of their throughput to and from the rest of the body - and of course, they have to look after themselves. By applying a compress, especially at the beginning of the night, we can refresh these organs, rather like wringing out a sponge.

Method: Get ready for sleep. Lay a strip of warm material (a scarf or piece of blanket) 6-8 inches wide, depending on your waist size pelvis to ribs, long enough to go around your body and cross over a little. Take a piece of linen or cotton 4 inches wide and soak and ring out fully from the cold tap. Lay this piece on to the scarf, and in a nifty movement, wrap it around the waist. (Don't hesitate or try to do it gradually - if done quickly you should experience a microsecond of cold contact with your skin.)

Immediately get into bed and get comfortable. Your sensation should be of being held by the compress, not of wetness, so keep it fastened neatly, either by tucking in or a safety pin.

The application works by the body drying out the compress quite soon during sleep, which should come soon (another choice for insomnia), as the vessels in the skin alternately relax and contract in response to the cold contact. By reflex, similar action takes place in the organs. If this drying is not achieved and you wake up drowsily, feeling slightly damp, take a message: your health is more 'run down' than you may be recognizing. But sometimes it is just learner's technique, so wait a few nights and try again.

(Note: in applications, cold water refers to what is cooler than our blood, so don't be deterred from experimenting by what might feel like ice-cold from the tap – create a comfortable temperature, but the cooler the better.)

What Water Pulls Out:

Increases awareness, reduces discomfort, encourages healing, and much more. (2)

Too Busy to Exercise? (*Exercise: Latin - 'to keep busy'*)

For all the words of natural poetry in the philosophy of naturopathy, it is an outlook essentially for 'doers'. We are asked not to 'bury our treasure' of our life, hiding conservatively and securely in our space, but to get out and about and use ourselves. This is never more obvious than in the potential we have in physical body. We grow bones which can be compared to metal scaffolding poles for durability, but they only keep their strength from using them – try to preserve them from pressure and they quickly go soft. Equally, our muscles rely on being shredded by their actions on a daily basis so that they grow anew, otherwise they start to disappear. How much more so, we might speculate, the structures we can't see!

In using our bodies to capacity and asking reverentially for more, we can draw on the deep and ancient. Although our forebears might have lived shorter lives, their struggles serious and not inconsiderable, enough of them must have survived on their own initiative, simply to explain our existence today. Until comparatively recently, they must have done this because they had no choice, but this is something which is increasingly being made for us - by options outside ourselves, in modern, convenience strewn life.

If the popular solution to highly stressed but sedentary life is to resort to exercise, naturopathy takes a more leisurely attitude. If we go back far enough in human history, as primarily fruit eating tree dwellers, life wouldn't have been such a strain, but it was physically varied.

The healthy movements recommended by naturopaths have more in common with posture than 'work-out'.

The Aching Back and More – No Surprise

By virtue of having developed our backsides, we enjoy being upright, can see further, and as Sigmund Freud said, in consequence consider ourselves pretty superior to other creatures. These debatable advantages are no more prized, however, than in the freedom of the arms. All in all, this alone would seem to be worth all the effort of our infancy.

Unfortunately for the remainder of the body, it is the arms' accustomed activity that is the source of great discomfort. Not in their finer use, which gives delight, but in the everyday occupation of – carrying things. As a clue to their actual purpose, we find that no arm muscles are developed from carrying things, otherwise avid shoppers would be the most muscle bound among us. In contrast arms soon become beautiful looking and strong from simply reaching and stretching, and especially pulling. Other arm use is destined to produce strain in the lower body.

Low body problems are legion – pressure at the spine itself, pelvic tilt, which produces circulatory problems and prolapsed organs to name a few. While remedying these locally, seek long-term relief with these simple movements.

Methods:

1 Occasionally raise your arms above your head for a few seconds. If you cannot do this comfortably, it probably explains why your lower body is in trouble. If you can, stretch a little further, one/two, one/two, lengthen your stretch, and take a deep breath before lowering. Do this especially if you have sit for extend periods.

2 You require a soft rug on a shiny floor. Attach something like a rope to the bottom of a wall a few feet away. To begin with, try facing downwards and gently pull yourself towards the wall, helped by the slide of the rug. As you get stronger then do facing upwards but be careful not to overstretch the shoulders. Facing downwards is good enough.

3 If you get really strong but not before, you can improvise a standing version: attach the rope to the ceiling and climb up (but not far!)

Don't Sit Around – Do Our Pets and Others?

Have you noticed that a sitting dog or a cat doesn't hesitate to roll over after a few moments, having checked if the coast is clear? And in the wild, who else sits? For we who have become accustomed to sitting, having been sat up in babyhood to please adults as soon as our heads stopped bobbing, there is further to consider - we sit squashing muscles which we rely on to keep us standing up; even more defeating, when sitting we press on our tails!

This situation might not be so serious if our seats were the hard floor, but the more we pad ourselves up or invent furniture which aims to perch us more conveniently, the more complicated it becomes. At least on the floor, warning discomfort would oblige us to move around more. The chair's primary claim is that it makes us more comfortable but how difficult it can be to try to stand up again, far less a 'sleeping' leg!

More insidious is that a similar seat has been modified for evacuation of the bowels. No position, even standing on one's head, could be more opposing to evacuation than sitting in this way. It is responsible for innumerable congestive problems in the pelvis and the circulation generally, and it is no exaggeration that for the frail in arteries, it is quite dangerous.

Ideally, like a dog or cat, we should recline as soon as practicable, but from schooldays onwards unfortunately it is simply not done. However, practice of the following squatting posture, naturally adopted by millions of people around the world, can be of great benefit to us in the furniture-filled West.

Method

For many of us this position is not attainable straight away, and may need to be modified. Also, because the beneficial change in blood pressure induced will be unfamiliar to some, we should be tentative. Where the health of the knee joints has been compromised, it will definitely be more modest.

Preparation: Sit on a normal chair and place a platform (piece of wood or pile of books) in front to place the feet flat upon. Increase the height of the platform until the knees are well above the height of the hips. (You can now use this set up to your advantage at the toilet seat).

Stand up and place two books, one for each foot, under the ball of the foot. Alternately rise up and down on the toes. These movements will gradually tease out the muscles of the lower legs, which have shortened from regular sitting.

To Squat: Stand holding the back of a chair or something equally substantial. On flat feet, bend the knees and attempt with support to lower the hips towards the floor. Go as far as comfortable, and then recover slowly. (It is important to keep the feet flat throughout as this will prevent overstretching and strain on the knees.) Consciously relax the back muscles and use the thigh muscles to control the movement.

With each attempt aim to get lower until you reach you resemble a successful squat. Although in the East, one sees people in this posture for lengthy periods, for Westerners, one minute done daily is beneficial.

The 'Recovery' Position – No need to Wait

To return to our dog or the wild creatures: one does come across an animal lying flattish on its back, either in front of a fire or at midday, but it is a vulnerable posture and rarely adopted. The relaxing animal is more likely to be in a semi-twist, resting on its chest, with pelvis and legs to one side, with the head. In the human realm this is known as the "Recovery Position", of First Aid, and for some it is rarely adopted (unless being placed after becoming unconscious).

Occasionally it is used spontaneously, having resorted to a similar position when pregnant or trying to get to sleep. Usually this is qualified with the query that perhaps sleeping face up or down, like a baby is more 'natural'. This constitutes a missed opportunity, since the Recovery Position is not only favorable to us in an emergency; it is just as likely to benefit us consciously.

The attending First Aider knows that breathing is facilitated and pressure on the body's vital centers are minimized when in Recovery Position. In addition, from our point of view, pent up tension is released from the base of the spine. The influence of this is far reaching: after a few moments, we begin to feel a harmonizing of pressure within the cavities of abdomen, chest and skull; pains are eased; and we feel we are asking the earth for support.

Method

We have to discover which is our 'natural' side to lie: stretch out on an even surface on your right side; try to draw the left knee up as far as you can alongside the chest or at least higher than the level of the hip; move the left arm up and place the hand under your cheek, looking left; put your right arm loosely down alongside your right leg. Pause and assess sense of ease. Then repeat the posture to the opposite side, right leg up etc. and compare - one side will feel 'correct' for ease and comfort. This is your naturally unwinding side.

When in chosen position, take a few sighing breaths, then occasionally a long breath out. Feel the shift of gravity pressing down on your spine to the back of the body, at the tail end; or as if the whole earth is drawing you closer. When you breath out, notice that your head seems to extend from your neck.

Use this posture at any time you feel undue pressure or spasm type pain. Certainly, it can be made a habit as soon as waking, and just going off to sleep. If you have regular backache.

There is evidence to suggest that if we are successful in not allowing tension to build up in the body, all our activities naturally become more skillful – and the inevitable mishaps less harmful.

Leisurely Exercise Pulls Out:

a lighter body; flexibility, to help shift attitude; deep rest (3)

Happy Experimenting, and share your findings with others – it's how naturopathy developed!

References

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