



A Science of Medicine  
The Art of Care

# ***Lifestyle and its role in health***

**Dr. John P. Glynn and Prof. Rashid Bhikha**

**January 2014**

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## ***Preamble***

Lifestyle is a general term used to describe the activities and behaviours which make up our daily life. In the sense that Tibb uses it, lifestyle refers to the features which affect on our state of health, for better or worse. The main ones, the so-called “Tibb Lifestyle Factors”, are six in number. They are: the way we breathe, the food we eat, the physical activity we undertake, the quality of our sleep, the state of our emotions, and the efficiency of waste and

***Good health is achieved via five major routes – herbal remedies, physical measures, conventional drugs, surgery, and changes to a person’s lifestyle.***

toxin elimination. Tibb firmly believes that a healthy lifestyle is the cornerstone for the treatment of many chronic disorders which afflict us, especially as we get older. Meaningful changes to our Lifestyle Factors are often effective when carried out on their own – for example, in the treatment of type 2 diabetes and depression. They can also be applied

with advantage combined with herbal medicines or conventional drugs. Until quite recently lifestyle changes were not viewed in a serious light. However, more and more research is now confirming the powerful effect that changes in breathing technique, food intake, sleep hygiene and other factors can bring about. They are effective not only in restoring health, but also in preventing or delaying many diseases. Losing excess body weight, becoming more physically active, sleeping better, reducing stress levels have been shown to protect the person from the onset and progress of numerous common diseases of lifestyle.

## ***Current healthcare scenario***

In recent time’s lifestyle changes were considered rather unimportant as factors in determining a person’ state of health. The situation has quite recently turned full circle: changes to the way someone lives are now seen as absolutely necessary when dealing with the many chronic diseases now afflicting most societies.

***Chronic diseases are taking years from our lives, and in most cases quality from our remaining years.***

Chronic diseases are inexorably on the march worldwide. They do not only appear in middle age onwards, but increasingly in younger and younger people. In some developed countries the overall quality of life is in decline, together with life expectancy.

***Soft and cold drinks were not a staple of life before they were invented; thirsty people drank plain, natural water.***

One of the main public health challenges facing many countries, especially South Africa, is the tidal wave of obesity and ailments connected to it. Hand in hand with obesity is an abysmal diet, based on the ready availability of energy dense, often nutrition-poor food. Couple this with the decline in physical activity brought about by a passive way of life, reduced sporting activity, labour-saving devices and screen entertainment, and the situation is indeed dire.

It is a worrying situation now; it is expected to get even worse in the years to come. Patients labouring under the burden of diabetes, various cardiovascular diseases, osteoporosis and cancer will rise dramatically in numbers. In parallel with this trend the medical and social costs will grow exponentially. Chronic and recurring diseases undoubtedly impose an enormous burden on the human and economic aspects of our society.

***A huge role is played in health and disease by the food we eat, our physical activity and sleep quality, and our response to stress.***

We now know that this epidemic of obesity and its attendant ailments has not arisen from one single source, whether metabolic disorder, nutrient deficiency (or excess), environmental factor or genetic aberration. There are several factors working in harness which conspire to boost body mass. It is unlikely therefore that a disorder which is multifactorial in origin will respond to a simple intervention like strict diet, appetite suppressing drugs, dietary supplement or massage. There is no magic bullet to fix excess weight.

### ***Diseases of lifestyle***

The table (*below*) lists a number of disorders which have been conclusively linked to an abnormal or unbalanced lifestyle.

<b><i>Diabetes, type 2</i></b>	<b><i>Depression</i></b>
<b><i>Obesity</i></b>	<b><i>Insomnia</i></b>
<b><i>Hypertension and coronary heart disease</i></b>	<b><i>Skin disorders, esp. acne and allergies</i></b>
<b><i>Osteoporosis</i></b>	<b><i>Osteoarthritis</i></b>
<b><i>HIV/Aids</i></b>	<b><i>Alzheimer's disease</i></b>
<b><i>Digestive disorders, esp. irritable bowel syndrome</i></b>	<b><i>Dental diseases, esp. periodontal disease</i></b>
<b><i>Certain cancers</i></b>	<b><i>Anxiety, bulimia and anorexia</i></b>

### ***The conventional approach to diseases of lifestyle***

Conventional medicine has been less than effective in dealing with chronic diseases. Although often spectacularly successful in dealing with surgical problems and in providing acute or emergency relief, the long-term benefit of conventional drugs leaves much to be desired. Furthermore, many patients are loath to take medication over the long term. They are usually aware, with varying degrees of accuracy, of the catalogue of unpleasant side effects and long-term reactions, and challenge the need for continuous medication. This usually leads to an early exit from drug treatment. This is especially so in people with chronic disorders like lipid-related problems, certain heart diseases, hypertension and early diabetes, which are relatively free from troublesome side effects.

***After trying a host of different drugs, patients with chronic disorders of lifestyle often hope for a lifestyle change to provide relief instead.***

Another factor is the trend towards the medicalisation of disorders. Not all health problems are medical in nature, and do not need the extensive use of drugs. Simple changes to lifestyle are often all that is needed. Insomnia, depression, hypertension, type 2 diabetes, obesity, restlessness and a number of musculo-skeletal disorders often respond in time to lifestyle changes, without the need for extensive drug treatment.

Finally, most conventional practitioners are inclined to accept that lifestyle changes, bolstered by vitamin, mineral, nutrient or herbal remedies, has any real part to play in the healthcare situation – preventing, treating or curing.

### ***Tibb and lifestyle***

All living beings interact closely with the outside environment, taking from it what it needs for survival, repair and growth, and returning to it what it no longer needs. Hippocrates, the early pioneer of Tibb, was a firm believer in the need for harmony with our environment, and considered health and illness as a measure of the degree of this harmony. He thought our lifestyle played a critical part in determining whether we were healthy, whether we succumbed to illness, and if so, whether the outcome was recovery, chronic disability, or death.

He identified a number of features related to our way of life which determine our state of health. These features were based on what we consciously take in from the outside, and how we react to it. He settled on a group of six features, termed the *Governing Factors*, which, as the term suggests, govern where we are on the spectrum between excellent health and severe disease.

Following input from later pioneers in healthcare, such as Galen and particularly Ibn Sina, the term *Lifestyle Factors*

#### **The major Tibb Lifestyle Factors:**

- ***Environment and Breathing***
- ***Food and Drink***
- ***Movement and Rest***
- ***Sleep and Wakefulness***
- ***Emotions and Feelings***
- ***Elimination of Waste & Toxins***

was introduced to describe our interaction with the immediate environment. The major ones are listed in the box (*opposite*). Each of these factors is person-focused, and reflects the Tibb view that healthcare is about the patient only.

Tibb regards the lifestyles each of adopts affects us positively or negatively. The Lifestyle Factors are central to Tibb philosophy, together with Physis, temperament and humours. In practical terms, it means that a great deal of attention is paid to conserving lifestyle activities which maintain optimum health, and making reasonable changes to eliminate illness.

There are a number of other influences known to have a significant effect on our state of health (*box opposite*). One in particular is under the spotlight these days: personal habits. These include consumption of alcohol, the smoking of tobacco products, and drug intake, whether these are illicit or prescription. Various aspects of personal hygiene also fall into this category, such as dental, skin and care.

**Other Tibb Lifestyle Factors:**

- **Personal habits**
- **Exposure to pathogens**
- **Occupation**
- **Geographical conditions**
- **Background radiation**
- **Physical age**
- **Gender**

***Lifestyle and Physis***

We all possess the power for inner healing – “the doctor within”. Tibb firmly believes that support of this potent force is paramount in any treatment for a particular illness, whatever form it takes – herbal therapy, lifestyle changes, hands on therapy, etc. Each and every change to a person’s lifestyle should be directed at supporting his or her inner Physis.

In relation to lifestyle, there are number of points to consider.

1. Chronic ailments have usually taken many months if not years to become full-blown, so rapid improvement should not be expected. Physis should be allowed time to exert its beneficial effects. There is no quick fix for chronic diseases of lifestyle.
2. Any change to lifestyle should be introduced slowly, and increased gradually. This avoids confusing Physis, and will actively support the healing processes.
3. Lifestyle changes should only be introduced one at a time, not all at once. Again, this stratagem avoids confusing Physis by disrupting internal harmony, and is more likely to succeed. Avoid changes all at once, for example, to food and drink habits, taking up serious exercise, adopting stress relieving measures, suddenly stopping smoking, and going to be early.
4. The person’s temperament should be taken into account. Everyone reacts differently. Changes to a person’s food and drink consumption should consider this or her temperament.

If applied properly, the Tibb Lifestyle Factors offer a powerful route to maintaining good health and supporting recovery from illness. They can also be supplemented by other Tibb healing measures, such as fasting, massage, cupping and herbal medication. They can also be incorporated into conventional medical practice, in a healing paradigm termed Integrative Medicine.

***Benefits of lifestyle changes***

The original founder of Tibb, **Hippocrates**, noted more than 2500 years ago the potential for lifestyle as medicine. Modern observations support the wisdom of his observations. Over the past two or three decades the use of lifestyle changes has been established as a given in the prevention, treatment and recovery from chronic diseases. Unbalance food consumption, lack of physical activity, smoking and drinking to excess are often the source of chronic disease and premature death. Chronic diseases are almost entirely preventable.

People who eat wisely and well, control their body weight sensibly, are physically active and exercise routinely, and avoid excessive tobacco, alcohol and drug consumption have a very low probability during their life of developing major chronic disorders. These include heart disease, cancer, stroke, diabetes and dementia. In contrast, those who eat unwisely or badly, do not exercise to any real degree, lose control of their body mass than those who smoked, ate badly, didn't exercise, and lost control of their weight are prone to develop one or more of these disorders.

Clinical evidence is now emerging that shows we can eliminate the occurrence of heart disease and strokes, diabetes, and many cancers with basic lifestyle changes.

For example, it has been shown that reasonable and patient-friendly lifestyle changes in high-risk adults perform better than drug therapy in the prevention of type 2 diabetes. Another study reveals that simple changes to lifestyle, particularly to nutrition, exercise and smoking cessation, can greatly reduce the risk of heart attack, even in those at high risk.

For someone at risk of hypertension, simple lifestyle changes involving eating nutritious foods, shedding excess weight, giving up smoking, and exercising regularly is regarded by many now as the cornerstone for preventing and treating it.

As treating with drugs can be (and usually is) very expensive, lifestyle changes, when carried out properly, are much more cost effective.

### ***Recent findings on the value of the Lifestyle Factors***

Many well documented scientific studies have shown that simple changes to a person's lifestyle can prevent or treat a wide range of common chronic and acute ailments.

Here are a number of recent findings on the value of lifestyle in the maintenance of good health.

#### ***Breathing***

- Breathing exercises combined with meditation are very effective in relieving mental and physical stress.
- Controlled breathing helps a person experiencing strong emotions like anxiety, anger and grief.
- The sinuses inside of the nose secrete an active gas, nitric oxide, so breathing through the nose leads to better oxygen absorption by the lungs and improved sexual competence.

#### ***Food and drink***

- Hypertension, diabetes type 2 and coronary heart disease respond very well to dietary intervention.
- Irritable bowel syndrome, indigestion and constipation can be largely eliminated by changes in diet and eating habits.
- Insomnia and other sleep disorders can be improved changes in eating habits, especially timing and type of food.
- Gout can generally be prevented over time by increased fluid intake and changing the temperament of food intake routinely.
- Acne responds well to changing the diet to include more natural foods and fluids, and avoidance of food additives.

#### ***Physical activity***

- Light to moderate physical exercise has been shown to deal with many of the symptoms of ageing
- In children, regular exercise improves academic achievement and raises their grades
- Exercise is one of the "golden tickets" to preventing disease and slowing the aging process.

### ***Sleep***

- The risk of diseases of the heart and blood circulation is reduced.
- The onset of type 2 diabetes is delayed, or even prevented.
- There may be protection against the development and progress of some forms of cancer.
- The formation of facial wrinkles is delayed.
- Vulnerability to infection is markedly reduced.
- Depression is less likely to develop.
- Job performance is enhanced.
- Physical skills are picked up more effectively.
- Psychological performance is enhanced.

### ***Emotional state***

- Hypertension, depression and other chronic disorders can be brought on by long-term emotional stress.
- Quality of Life improves, and physical pain reduces, when emotional stresses are relieved.
- Raised blood pressure, inflammatory disorders, lower immune system activity and increases tumour growth have been linked to emotional stress.
- Studies show that kindness – whether an action or just a thought directed toward yourself or others – can lengthen your life.

### ***Elimination of waste and toxins***

- Waste products accumulating in the brain from metabolism are thought to encourage the development of nervous ailments like Parkinson's disease and Alzheimer's. Reasonable changes in lifestyle are thought to offer promise in preventing these.
- Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is thought to be the result of a hectic and unbalanced lifestyle, especially in young adulthood. Changing the lifestyle regarding stress levels and eating habits improve this common disorder markedly.

### ***Summary***

Much of the present day South African burden of disease is increasingly being laid at the door of a poorly controlled, disharmonious lifestyle. Often the opportunities for achieving a healthier and so better Quality of Life are squandered by poor breathing practice, faulty or junk diet, reduced personal activity and lack of real physical exercise, stress-inducing behaviour, and irregular excretion patterns.

Knowing what we know now, a better, longer and healthier lifestyle should beckon. We could 'add years to our life, and life to our years'. Unfortunately, the present epidemics of non-communicable diseases of lifestyle like obesity, diabetes, cancers, digestive problems and movement disorders indicate otherwise. Diabetes, for example, will be highly prevalent in the decades to come in virtually every society. Tellingly, many advocates of lifestyle suggest that most cases could be prevented by simple lifestyle changes.

Virtually every lifestyle change made is free from adverse reactions – no side effects, or long-term metabolic disturbances. They are non-discriminatory; they can be carried out in both young and old, in rich or poor, of all ethnic groups and in every community. Very little in the way of financial outlay is required; no personal trainer is involved; no prescription is essential. All measures are within the control of the person. Missed doses do not create problems. If lifestyle changes are discontinued, withdrawal symptoms are unlikely. Lifestyle changes are ubiquitous – they can be made on their own, or in partnership with natural medicine, or together with drug therapy.

Changing a dysfunctional lifestyle is without doubt our best and most powerful medicine, and Tibb offers a wide range of possible options. Reasonable changes to someone's daily living habits can lead to much improved health, and prevent the onset and severity of most if not all chronic diseases.

### ***Further information***

#### On lifestyle and health:

- Bhikha, R H. and Haq, M.A. (2000). *Tibb - Traditional Roots of Medicine in Modern Routes to Health*. Mountain of Light. South Africa.
- Chishti G M. (1991) *The Traditional Healer's Handbook. A Classic Guide to the Medicine of Avicenna*. Healing Arts Press.
- Bhikha R. (2006). *4 Temperaments; 6 Lifestyle Factors*. Tibb, South Africa.
- Others links to follow

#### On Tibb theory and practice:

- Bhikha, R H. and Haq, M.A. (2000). *Tibb - Traditional Roots of Medicine in Modern Routes to Health*. Mountain of Light. South Africa.
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Keywords:

***Current healthcare scenario, Diseases of lifestyle, The conventional approach to diseases of lifestyle, Tibb and lifestyle, Lifestyle and Physis, Benefits of lifestyle changes, Recent findings on the value of the Lifestyle Factors***