

Lifestyle advice - A priceless gift to our Children

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Perhaps the best gift parents or guardians can give their child is empowering him or her in lifestyle choices. Informing the child in the basic elements contributing to wellness ensures that the child will be more likely to develop and maintain good health. This fact is recognised by Tibb, which considers lifestyle factors to be the bedrock of true wellness. The three main lifestyle factors looked at here are food and drink, physical exercise, and good sleep habits.

We now know that many chronic or recurring diseases that plague us as we get older can be avoided or lessened by changes to our lifestyles. The best outcome is achieved if health-promoting personal behaviour is encouraged in childhood. It is all well and good taking up jogging, cutting down on carbs or fatty foods, or loading up supplements in middle age or later. There will be some benefit, although Nature does not go along with short cuts to optimum health. The true value of a prudent lifestyle will only be fully realised if it is adopted in childhood.

Present day statistics reveal that by the age of 65 - not considered an old age these days - most will have developed one or more circulation problems, osteoporosis, rheumatism, diabetes, cancer or other chronic diseases of lifestyle. The irony is that people who have worked hard and saved conscientiously for many years, looking forward to a well-deserved and anticipated retirement enjoyed in good health, will instead spend much time (and money) on visits to the doctor, pharmacy or clinic.

Tibb's approach to children's health rests on three principles: provide, prevent, protect. Provide what children need for good health; prevent personal behaviour that can erode good health; and protect against a noxious environment, whether it is physical, mental or spiritual. Although it may sound suspiciously like a bank advert jingle, it does actually empower children - and their parents or guardians - with practical guidelines for keeping fit and healthy.

For instance, a child should be encouraged to reduce or avoid the dietary demons - fat, sugar and salt. Hippocrates, recognised as the "Father of Medicine", said: "All diseases start at the stomach". For many children this is only too true. In Tibb practice, people are advised against regular, excessive use of processed foods, especially of the convenience and junk variety. These have large amounts of fats, salt, sugar, corn syrup and sometimes trans-acids added. Consuming these regularly invites problems for the child's heart and blood vessels in later years.

It is particularly important to avoid consuming foods and soft drinks sweetened with cane sugar or corn syrup. Much of these two sweeteners is made up of fructose, which is now regarded as a promoter of many chronic diseases, from diabetes to cancer, in later years.

Salt is another culprit - it is implicated in the onset of hypertension, which puts the user at risk of stroke and kidney problems later in life.

The parent or guardian can also help the child by pointing out the pitfalls of exotic or eccentric diets and weight loss programmes. These rarely, if ever, achieve the desired effect, and usually lead to eating disorders and metabolic disturbances such as osteoporosis. The same diets can upset the child's physis, or inner power of self-healing, leading to internal disharmony.

Another Tibb lifestyle factor is physical exercise. Many adult chronic disorders have their origins in childhood; most of these could have been avoided or lessened during childhood by systematic and moderate exercise, such as walking, swimming, skating or jogging. As is only too evident, the number of children who are overweight or obese is increasing steadily, visibly, and alarmingly. This effectively condemns the child to a life of poor physical activity, with type 2 diabetes and joint problems likely to appear sooner or later. The only practical ways of avoiding these is by appropriately reforming daily food intake and controlling realistic, physical exercise. Valuable activities such as muscle control and hand to eye coordination, and physical attributes such as muscle mass, strength and endurance, develop during the child's early years. For example, children who exercise three to four times weekly get higher than average exam grades. Physical exercise also introduces the ideas of personal discipline, the need for hard work to achieve success, and the value of self-empowerment.

Yet another way that a child's wellness is boosted is by helping him or her develop good sleep habits. Tibb has long regarded quality sleep to be a major Lifestyle Factor, and one of the cornerstones of good health. Sleep allows physis the time to carry out essential running maintenance on the child's body and mind, and organise various important brain activities. In the short term, a poor nights' sleep dulls the child's memory, and blunts physical and mental performance. Poor quality sleep has, over time, negative effects on the body, and is implicated in the onset of obesity, several circulation and digestive disorders, and emotional upsets such as depression. It also injures the child's immune system, making him or her more inclined to succumb to infections.

Disorders like obesity, hypertension and diabetes, rare phenomena in children only a few years ago, are becoming increasingly common. Guiding the child in simple changes to his or her lifestyle, especially in eating and sleeping habits, and physical exercise, will pay major dividends in health benefits for the future.