

Tibb helps Recovery



By: Dr. John P. Glynn

Published: The Criterion

Oct 2012

A Science of Medicine
The Art of Care

Convalescence is the gray zone where we linger between the harmony of robust health and the disharmony brought about by a serious illness, surgery or injury. Life is put on pause for weeks, if not months, as the normal routine of life is abandoned in favour of chronic pain, boredom, depression and dependence on others. It is usually a time of anxiety, maybe of misery, chronic fatigue and a realisation of being mortal. Probably everyone except the very fortunate has gone through such an experience at some time in life.

Convalescence is also a time where complementary or natural medicine, such as Tibb, comes into its own. Its role is to boost inner healing, restore harmony to the body (or mind) and so help the healing process along. How can natural medicine help us as we convalesce? Tibb, for example, applies two basic strategies: first, it offers support to the “doctor within”, or what we term physis. Second, it suggests positive changes to our lifestyle. Physis is our body's natural, built-in, ability to heal itself, often referred to as the “doctor within us”. Not only is this the primary defence against cancer and infection, but it is also the force which drives our recovery from illness or damage, both physical and mental. As with most biological phenomena, it needs assistance in critical periods of life, such as when convalescing.

Physis during convalescence can also be promoted by “hands-on” therapies such as massage, cupping, hydrotherapy and aromatherapy. These contribute markedly to restoring wellness, but their use of course depends on overall severity, accessibility and costs involved.

The main Tibb lifestyle factor is food and drink. Although each case of convalescence is different, food should have qualities of heat and moistness, and contain plenty of protein to rebuild damaged tissue. Food should be “energy-dense”, attractive, moist, and easy to chew, swallow and digest. Eating well is more important than eating more. Getting into the habit of eating regularly, with small portions, also helps, as this ensures a steady flow of energy. Boosting the body's metabolism with simple measures, such as eating only quality nutrients and taking simple vitamin supplements is an important aspect of the convalescent diet. Breakfast should be the dominant meal of the day.

It is important for recovery to drink copious amounts of water (tap water is OK in this part of the world), or if preferred, beverages such as tea and coffee, because chronic dehydration is a common and troublesome feature of convalescence. Dealing with a sluggish waste elimination is also very important, as this can arise from poor diet, low water intake and lack of exercise. Food for the convalescent should be high in fibre derived mainly from fruit and vegetables.

Physical movement and rest is another major lifestyle factor. Physical activity should be balanced by periods of rest. Even so, too much bed-rest, especially in the elderly, can hinder recovery. We have to be realistic on this issue, bearing in mind the physical state of the convalescent. However, reasonable, mild exercise should be encouraged, as this helps rebuild wasting muscle, prevents bed ulcers from forming, and generally keeps the body in good tone. For example, moving around the house and (better still) the garden should be fostered. Time should be set aside for regular breathing exercises, as these are valuable in toning up the lungs and helping to eliminate some toxins.

Next, convalescence benefits hugely from regular, good quality sleep. This can be improved, if necessary, by adopting a few simple steps, collectively termed sleep hygiene. Short afternoon catnaps can be a real boon, and should be encouraged, as they not only top up poor night sleep and improve daytime alertness, but they also boost brain activity without interfering with normal sleep. Calming routines such as light reading and warm baths before bedtime also help. A sound emotional state is a key aspect of convalescence, as the recovering person usually feels miserable and forgotten. It is critically important to value family and social relationships, so keeping in contact with family and friends and maintaining social activity, even by phone, is important. Without this, speedy recovery will be delayed somewhat. Any inclination towards social isolation ('cocooning') should be opposed. Dealing with any emotional problems such as anger, resentment, anxiety or depression, although easier said than done, will help those convalescing enjoy life more.

This may need intervention Immune-boosting medicines and tonics, preferable natural and herbal should also be a regular occupant in the convalescent's medicine chest, as these help physis. Two in particular have been acclaimed over the years ñ Black Seed and Fenugreek. The former helps maintain harmony in blood circulation and a number of glandular secretions. The latter helps when breathing problems and fatigue arise.

Convalescence is a necessary but unwelcome intruder into a person's life. However, we do have a number of stratagems for dealing with the negative aspects of recovery, which hopefully shorten this unavoidable phase of the healing process, and restore the person affected to a full and satisfying life.