

Tibb, a natural companion for ageing

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Everyone wants to lead a long, healthy and happy life, but no one wants to get old. The unspoken dread among many of those on the wrong side of fifty is becoming infirm, physically or mentally – or both. The increasing chance of forsaking our present quality of life to dread diseases such as cancer, heart disease and Alzheimer’s intrudes more and more, and the inevitable loss of independence, respect and dignity stares us in the face. Many dread diseases are the outcome of a faulty lifestyle or poor personal habits.

Tibb’s view of ageing

What happens to us as we get older? A great deal and most of it unwelcome. One feature of old age is that our metabolism slows down resulting in a reduction in the level of heat. This is obvious as older people feel colder, and may also suffer from conditions of dryness such as osteoporosis and constipation. Ibn Sina noted that dehydration in cellular tissues is “a sign of senescence”. This means that any measures taken to oppose or soften the effects of ageing have to acknowledge this, both by restoring the qualities of heat and moisture, and by avoiding activities that diminish them.

What can be done?

Tibb accepts that there is no plausible or confirmed way of reversing the ageing process: no “Fountain of Eternal Youth”, “Elixir of Life”, exotic herbal formula or magical supplement. Even so, there is quite a lot that we can do to slow down the process.

Physis is a cardinal concept in Tibb. It is our body’s constant, built-in ability to heal itself, and our principal defence against chronic disease, infection and a toxic environment. As with many processes, it tends to get weaker and slower with age, and so it needs all the support it can get. It can be fostered by simple “hands-on” therapies, such as massage, hydrotherapy and aromatherapy, and by the occasional period of fasting. Implementing the Tibb Lifestyle Factors as discussed below will most certainly help.

The food we eat

A faulty lifestyle often precedes the onset and progress of many chronic ailments of ageing. The food and drink we consume are probably the most important part of this. Tibb suggests some simple dietary changes.

Selecting foods which are nutrient dense which will increase qualities of heat and/or moistness. This includes eggs, morogo/spinach, oily fish such as sardines and pilchards, herbs like garlic and ginger, liver, and sweet potato. Get into the habit of eating 5-6 small portions daily i.e. use a side plate for main meals with snacks in between. Breakfast is a particularly important meal. Drink more water, preferably room temperature or warmer. This is essential to avoid dehydration. Avoid cold, refrigerated foods, sugar rich, refined and processed foods.

Physical exercise delays ageing

Exercise increases heat in the body. Practice walking and stretching exercise regularly for 10-15 minutes daily to keep the muscles flexible and elastic. Stretching exercises also help improve balance which will help prevent falls which could result in leg and hip fractures commonly associated with the aged

Sleep and ageing

Good quality sleep, a welcome bonus with advancing years, should be encouraged. Sleep is important because it lets Physis detox and repair damage to the body without interference. Contrary to popular opinion, the elderly need just as much sleep as younger people. Short afternoon catnaps can be a real boon for some, as they compensate for poor night sleep, improve alertness, and boost brain activity. And they do not interfere with normal sleep. Calming regimes, such as a warm bath or shower and light reading before bedtime also help. Be sure to practice the same steps every night to programme your body and mind into a sound sleep routine.

The air we breathe

Open up the windows during the warmer times of the day to allow plenty of fresh air to circulate in to your surroundings.

Elimination and ageing

The body's ability to detox naturally slows down with age. The result is often troublesome constipation and fatigue. The use of a mild, natural laxative such as senna leaves or aloe, on a regular basis may help to gently eliminate waste from the body.

Emotions and ageing

On the emotional health front, it is critically important for cherish family and social relationships as one ages. Without these, optimal wellness will be difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. The unfortunate trend towards social isolation should be recognised, and actively opposed. Activities such as volunteering and doing community work, enrolling in an adult education course, joining a book club or gym help enormously to avoid this. Dealing with any emotional turmoil such as anger, anxiety and depression, although easier said than done, will help the elderly enjoy life more. This may need intervention from a healthcare practitioner.

Personal habits

Tibb strongly supports dumping certain personal habits that hasten the onset or aggravate existing age-related disorders. They include curtailing smoking and avoiding smoky venues, limiting caffeine and alcohol consumption.

Summary

There is much more to ageing than just looking after the skin, as most advertising media imply. Tibb asserts that there is much we can do to stave off the damage that ageing does both inside and outside, so prolonging good health, physical and mental activity, and protecting our overall Quality of Life. We cannot prevent becoming old, but we can certainly delay becoming decrepit or senile. The last part of the journey of life may be along a one-way street, but it need not be all downhill. As Sophocles, a wise old Greek philosopher noted: “no one loves life as those who are growing old”.