

Taking Care of Life's Greatest Gift

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Abstract

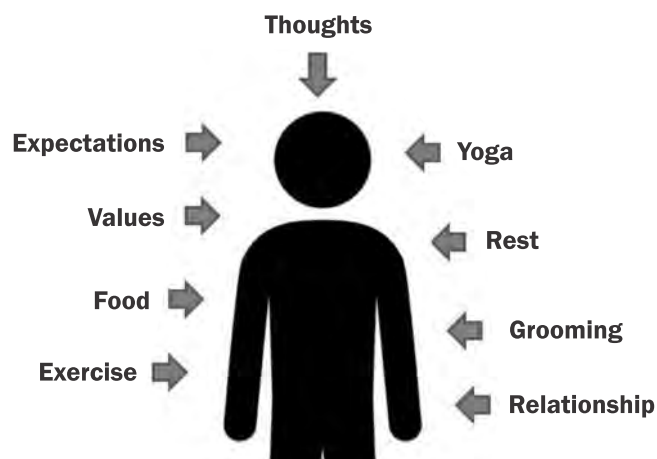
Life offers us a plethora of gifts. But the greatest gift of them all is our body. If our body is healthy then we can achieve any task. But if our body is not functioning properly then even the smallest task seems onerous. So our prime responsibility is our duty towards our body.

A healthy body not only helps us to maintain a daily wellbeing but also helps us age gracefully. We need to ensure that all our systems are working harmoniously – circulation, digestive, excretory, muscular, skeletal. And to ensure a functioning body we have to make the effort like we do to for any other endeavor. Whether we want to indulge in the pleasures of the world or we want to tread on the spiritual path, a strong and healthy body is a necessity.

There are 5 basic inputs to ensure a well maintained body. We are aware of food, exercise and rest, though we may not put these to efficient and effective use for our body. This article starts out with listing the steps for the optimum use of the importance of food, rest and exercise these for our bodies. Then there is a short description of grooming as an input to the body. Finally, the article describes in detail the one input that most of us do not consider as a contributor to our physical wellbeing.

If you lose wealth you can borrow. But you cannot borrow health. You have to invest and earn a healthy body.

Introduction



There is a popular Hindi proverb that says “जान है तो जहान है”. It means if you have good health (life) you can conquer the world. There are a variety of inputs that we subject our body to. And all these inputs are necessary to nurture and nourish our bodies. The table below lists the broad categories of inputs for our body and the constituents of these groups.

Basic Inputs	Composition
Food	Fruits, Vegetables, Pulses, Water,....
Exercise	Walking, Going to the gymnasium, Stretches, Yoga,...
Rest	Sleep, Relaxation,.....
Grooming	Body massages, Manicure, Pedicure,....
Thoughts and Emotions	Relationships, Expectations, Values,.....

Categories of Inputs for the Body

Most of us are aware of the first three categories – Food, Exercise and Rest. But we do not ensure optimum utilization of these categories. Many of us abuse our bodies. We skip meals. We eat fast foods regularly. We eat late.

Very few people have made exercise a daily habit. Not many people know the importance of the constituents – doing weights, stretches and yoga.

We sleep late. Sometimes we don't sleep at all – either partying or completing a task to meet a deadline. Many people are unable to get a good night's sleep. The mushrooming of call centres has ensured that the majority of a generation does not sleep at night. Many people think manicures and pedicures are a waste of time and money.

Thoughts and Emotions? How do they affect the body?

The best investment we can do is for our body. So let's look at how we can nurture and nourish the body which is our most important instrument to live life.

Food

Most of us know about this category of input. There are many Dos and Don'ts for this category. These are my simple to follow Ten Commandments for Food

1. I will not skip meals.
2. I will eat balanced meals.
3. I will avoid processed, refined and packaged foods.
4. I will eat freshly cooked meals as often as possible.
5. I will include a salad in my main meals.
6. I will have a fruit every day.
7. I will have nuts and dry fruits as snacks.
8. I will drink enough water daily. *1
9. I will avoid stimulants like caffeine. *2
10. I will incorporate foods of different colours (orange, yellow, red, purple, white) in my meals, especially green.

Rest

Restful and effective sleep helps improve our physiological functions and also makes our brain function optimally. Many people believe in the adage that “आराम हराम है”. If we don't do any other activity then rest is definitely detrimental to our health. Otherwise we need to have enough sleep that makes us feel rejuvenated in the morning. The food we ingest and the exercises we do have a direct impact on the quality of our sleep. These are my Ten Commandments for effective sleep hygiene.

1. I will avoid alcohol, caffeine and nicotine before bedtime. *3
2. I will exercise regularly to promote good quality sleep.
3. I will steer clear of heavy/ fried/ spicy foods for dinner.
4. I will ensure adequate exposure to natural light. *4
5. I will limit my daytime naps to 30 minutes. *5
6. I will establish a regular relaxing bedtime routine – taking a warm bath, reading a book, or doing light stretches. *6
7. I will avoid emotionally upsetting conversations and activities (TV) before going to sleep.
8. I will switch off all digital media at least half an hour before I sleep.
9. I will make sure that my bed and bedroom are comfortable.
10. I will sleep early to help my body carry out its physiological activities to rejuvenate itself.

Exercise & Grooming

Everyone knows the benefits of exercise – burn calories, lubricate the joints, ensure active life during old age. Many people frequent spas to pamper their bodies. Pampering the body is not the same as caring for the body. Others feel manicures, pedicures and facials are a waste of time. Manicures and especially pedicures are required to take care of parts of the body we don't give daily attention to. Also they help to remove dead skin and skin ingrowth which may prove to be harmful in the long run. A back massage is recommended again since parts of the back are difficult to reach during our daily bath. Many people avoid facials because they want to age gracefully! Consider facials as a facilitator in the aging process. Most facials today include a back massage! These are my Ten Commandments for exercise and grooming.

1. I will do basic body stretches daily.
2. I will do some exercise regularly which I can do easily and which is enjoyable – walking, swimming, playing a sport.
3. I will introduce a regular yoga routine of at least 15 minutes.
4. I will rest the body once a week if I am exercising on all the other six days.
5. I will hydrate my body adequately during exercise.
6. I will take a daily bath and wash my hair regularly.
7. I will regularly oil/ moisturize my body.
8. I will have regular manicure and pedicure.
9. I will have regular head and/ or body massages especially if I am in a stressful environment most of the time.
10. I will understand the difference between pampering my body and taking care of my body.

Thoughts & Emotions

Most of us are not aware of the effect of our thoughts and emotions on the cells of our bodies. Recommended reading for this topic are

- You can Heal your Life by Louise Hay
- The Power of the Subconscious Mind by Joseph Murphy

The only advice for this is to stay positive – ALWAYS. Do not fight thoughts of sadness, grief, and despair. Negative thoughts will come. Accept them, and move ahead.

I will share some simple tools to train the mind to be positive. These exercises will be difficult to practice. After all we have to undo several years of conditioning. The key to success is to persevere. It takes 3-6 months of consistent practice to form a new habit. Don't give up!!

- **Don't sweat the small stuff** – Anger is a positive and useful emotion, if it is expressed appropriately. We use it inappropriately most of the time. Anger affects the heart, immune system, nervous system and lungs. Please do read Richard Carlson's book - Don't sweat the small stuff.
- **Don't cry over spilled milk** – We all love drama and making mountains out of molehills. If you analyse your life daily you will realise the number of times you have actually cried over spilled milk and affected your state of mind. Focus on the next steps, not what has happened and cannot be changed.
- **Let go of the ego** – Most of the time we are angry or irritated because of our ego. Ego, simply explained, is the “I”. Why did she not listen to “me”? Why did he not do what “I” said? Letting go is the most difficult thing in this world. But not impossible if you are determined.
- **Eliminate sources of negativity** – Stay away from negative people and negative situations. TV serials and newspapers (read only the business section, if you must) are the constant sources of negativity in our lives. We don't realise their impact on our subconscious mind. Do crosswords, Sudoku, and jigsaw puzzles. Color, paint, write. Keep your mind involved in happy activities as much as you can.
- **Self Compassion** – In subtle ways we are told that if we think of ourselves we are selfish. We seek perfection and success in whatever we do. When we make a mistake, we are unduly harsh on ourselves. Just like we have compassion for others, we need to be compassionate about ourselves. We need to refrain from criticizing ourselves too harshly. We should be careful not to confuse self-compassion with self-pity or self-indulgence. Do refer to Dr Kisten Neff's website on self-compassion for tips and practices.
- **Mindfulness** – Most of us eat while watching the TV or read the newspaper in the toilet. There are many activities that we do simultaneously to make efficient use of time. But the myth of multitasking has been busted. You can take any two activities and compare the duration of completion when you do both of them simultaneously and when you do them separately. So start doing one activity at a time and savor the experience.
- **Introspection** – All the above are possible only if you do daily introspection where you write down your unpleasant experiences, analyse them without judgement, determine the root cause, define an action plan and execute it consistently.

Conclusion

If all this seems too overwhelming, follow the mantra of “Moderation”. Do everything in moderation. Try to refrain from binges of any kind. And be grateful for everything you have in life.

If you have any questions or clarifications, please do not hesitate to connect with me at annchaks@gmail.com. If you wish to, please join my FB page which celebrates life – Joy Hamesha. I also publish weekly articles on my Wordpress blog by the same name.

- *1 Enough water means
 - Throat should not be parched
 - Lips should not be cracked
 - Urine should be pale yellow colour
- *2 Exists not only in coffee but in tea and coke
- *3 Though substances like alcohol may be considered as sleep inducing, too much of it interferes with sleep as the body begins to process it.
- *4 A walk in the park once or twice a week is highly recommended.
- *5 Daytime naps can help to improve mood, alertness and performance.
- *6 Many times we watch TV serials mistaking them to be relaxing. Do not watch TV and immediately go to sleep. Follow the relaxing routine before going to sleep.