

## Health Styles -- Are We Any Better Now?

Lendon H. Smith, MD

Only a few of us were around 80 years ago when life was simpler. People then had to work hard. Farming, fishing, lumbering, ranching, washing, sewing, cooking, and building were the main occupations. Diseases were simple. You could get sick and die. Pneumonia, tuberculosis, typhoid fever, abscesses, osteomyelitis, meningitis, scarlet fever, peritonitis, erysipelas, child-bed fever -- all the bacterial infections were rampant in those days. The hospitals with their aspirin, purges, baths, and mercury treatments were ineffective in curing these overwhelming infections.

In 1912, a higher percent of people were addicted to morphine than at any other time in our history. It had been used in most cough syrups as it was the most effective cough suppressant ever. The cough might have gone away but the addiction continued. The Harrison Narcotic Act put a damper on morphine's use.

We had our Typhoid Mary, the 1918-1919 influenza epidemic, and the streptococcus passed on to the public by the milk handlers. A cleaner life plus some prudent hand washing improved the health of the nation -- at least controlling some of the bacterial infections.

Degenerative diseases were almost unheard of, partly because people were dying of other things before they got old enough to be in the age group to acquire a degenerative disease. Cancer was around, but not at today's rates. Heart attacks were rare. High blood pressure was present, but did not lead to the rate of strokes that we see today. The people who did live to a ripe old age had somehow missed the fatal infections. Most were stiff and sore and moved slowly, but they were alive and long-term memory was intact.

The health advice in those early days of the 20th century had our grandparents believing that we must sleep with the windows open, drink three glasses of fresh spring water daily, walk in the fresh air for 30 minutes daily, keep the bowels open, and have no negative thoughts. Dancing was thought to produce pelvic congestion and the risk of sterility for both male and female.

We have made some progress on the way to universal health, but it does not seem to me to have anything to do with the miracles of "modern" medicine. We are still at the mercy of the impoverished top soil, toxic air and water, and the inappropriate remedies from the pharmaceutical industry.

It looks to me that we must junk much of the prescription approach to modern treatment and get back to a cleaner lifestyle of fresh fruits and vegetables, low-fat protein, and whole grains. We have the germs under some control, now we have to improve the immune system of the population to help fight the stresses of life that lead to allergies and virus infections.

I don't think we should cut out the dancing, however. Dancing might lead to fecundity, but has little to do with fertility. Throw in a few vitamins and minerals and a visit to your friendly chiropractor or naturopathic physician makes sense to me.

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