

HEALTH PROMOTION

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. concept of health: The Concept of Health

What is health? How do you define it?

* Health is a state of being free from any disease.

* Health is a state of perfect harmony between all the organs and systems of the body.

Or is there more to health? Let us explore.

The first definition of health has a basic fault in it – it tries to define a primary state through a secondary state. Health is a primary state. It cannot be fully defined through a secondary phenomenon, disease. And then there is a larger question. Does being free from any disease which can be given a name, makes one healthy? I think, no. I know so many people who have no known disease and yet they are not healthy. I know a woman who likes to show off her tons of jewelry to those who can't have it; a woman who snobs at everyone. She has no known disease. But would you call her healthy? I know a man, who is a couch potato. He goes to his job and does nothing else. He does not help his wife with family responsibilities. He behaves with her as if she is his servant. He has no known disease. But would you call him healthy? I know a man who brags about his achievements till everybody around drops dead. He has no known disease. But would you call him healthy?

'Health' is an elusive word. Most people who consider themselves healthy are not. And many people who are suffering from some known disease, may be relatively healthy. Health is a concept which does not merely relate to the absence of disease, of healthy working of organs, or having good thoughts. Health is a holistic concept. It relates to a person as a whole. Not just the person you see, but also the person you 'feel'. Health is a tri-une of three parts:

- Emotional Health

- Mental Health

- Physical Health

Let us explore each one of these.

Physical Health

This is probably the easiest to define and yet it is sometimes the most difficult to understand. Physical health can be defined as a state in which all the body parts are anatomically intact and are performing their physiological functions perfectly and harmoniously. It is a very simplistic definition, but it basically covers everything like:

- All the body parts should be there
- All of them are in their natural place and position
- None of them has any pathology
- All of them are doing their physiological functions properly
- And they work with each other harmoniously

This may seem a bit idealistic to some, but here we are talking about the ideals. But even this definition does not cover it all. Let me give an example. There are lots of people around us who catch a cold with every change of season or with every sudden change of temperature. Now in common parlance, we say that these people have low immunity. But the fact is that most of these people have normal blood counts and normal immunological tests. So when these people are not down with cold they are in perfect health as per the above definition. And yet they are not perfectly healthy. Their system breaks down with every stressful condition. So we can add another aspect to the above definition of physical health:

The anatomical and functional integrity of the body parts and systems should be maintained under moderate stress.

Now a bit more tricky part. Read the following statement carefully.

‘Not feeling ill at all is also not a sign of good health‘

This statement needs to be understood carefully. It is a normal phenomenon to occasionally get a cold, a fever, or a stomach bug. There is nothing wrong in getting an occasional acute ailment. It is quite natural and also good for our immune system. Occasional sickness keeps our immune system in a ready state.

But you might have seen many people around you, who never seem to get an acute illness. People who have never had a cold or never had a fever in ten years. Not all of these people are healthy. In fact many of these people are more ill than their counterparts who keep getting their occasional acutes. I say this because these people are not super humans and most of them are not in 'ideal' health either. The fact is that these people do get affected by environmental factors and other stresses. But the result of these forces is not seen on physical plane. Such people are more affected on the mental and emotional plane. They become 'dis-eased' but their disease is not easily apparent on the physical level. If you want to cross-check my statement, then go to a mental asylum and enquire about the rate of prevalence of acute ailments. You will find it extremely low.

Now let us move on to the mental health.

Mental Health

When we talk about mind, we basically refer to our capability to perceive, comprehend, think, judge, and remember – the intellectual and reasoning faculties. Now pause for a moment and think. Think about all the people you know, who have rather strange perceptions of people around them, or about certain cultural and political ideologies. People whose perceptions are delusional. Think about the people around you who need to be told everything twice before they understand you. Think about the people who either do not think at all (thoughtless ones) or who think too much. People who take wrong decisions even when facts are against their decision. And then think about the children at school who do not seem to remember anything. And the housewife who looks for her specs while wearing them on her nose.

I do not intend to say that all such people are mentally ill. But many of them are. Not everyone can have the same level of mental faculties, but these signs do show that these people are not in their optimum mental health.

I will not talk here about the mental sickness that takes some of us to asylums. My focus here is on the concept of mental health and not on mental sickness. Although they are totally related but there is a difference of degrees.

There is no absolute definition for mental health as there is a great variation in the level of mental faculties among people. But still we can set some reasonable standards. Some of the markers of mental health can be:

- having a mental aptitude near or above social average.
- having the ability to perceive things as they are, and not as one thinks they are.
- having the ability to understand the social structure and ability to comprehend vocal and other forms of communication within that social structure
- having a reasonable ability to make judgments regarding good and bad or right and wrong.
- having the ability to remember and reproduce information collected through various senses or through learning to a reasonable degree.

These are just some of the basics and even these cannot be given a measuring scale. The only measuring scale we have is that of social average. But even that has its limitations. The concept of mental health is so vast that whole books can be written about it- without reaching to any conclusions!

The modern medical science does not consider a person mentally ill, if he or she cannot be given a disease label to wear. But look around you and you will see so many 'mentals' moving around. Most of us are unable to recognize when our mental health starts to fail. The reason for this is that when our mind is affected, our ability to reason and judge ourselves is also affected. And so people often do not realize that they are not in optimum mental health, until the things start taking bad shape.

As we appreciate changes in the normal functioning of body parts as probable signs of disease, similarly, we should appreciate the subtle signs which reflect a change in our mental being. Most mental deviations cannot be labeled as 'disease'. They are at best 'deviations' that need correction through social and medical therapies.

Emotional Health

Our brain is the part which regulates both our mental and emotional faculties. So these two are highly related. In fact, most of the people who suffer from some psychological disease are both mentally and emotionally ill. But in this part, I will specifically focus on the emotional health.

Technically speaking, our emotions are neuro-hormonal reactions occurring in response to some physical or mental stimulus, which in turn, affect our response to the same stimulus on the physical and mental plane. This may sound like a very

unromantic explanation, but it is a fact. Emotions do not come from our heart, they are generated in our brain. All the emotions we feel – love, joy, hate, anger, sorrow etc. are nothing but some primitive algorithms that are processed to generate response on the physical and mental level.

Let me give an example. Suppose somebody abuses you. Afterwards you feel angry towards that person. The question is how is this ‘anger’ generated? And why only ‘anger’ is produced? Why do not you fall in love when somebody abuses you?

First, let me answer the second question. What kind of emotional response is generated depends on two factors – our subconscious mental awareness and, through social learning. Our subconscious mental awareness is probably a mental reflex action that comes without learning. For eg, a young child also shows reaction to anger and shouting. This is what is inherent in us. The second thing that affects our emotions is our learning. Through social learning we are taught the meaning of love, joy, hate, anger etc and we are taught to differentiate them.

Now I come back to the first question as to how ‘anger’ is generated. The moment somebody abuses you, your mind perceives it as a threat or offence based on its social learning. To counter this threat, the mind needs to prepare the body and itself for some reaction. Based on the perception of stimulus, some neuro-hormonal reactions are generated which create ‘emotions’. What we perceive as ‘anger’ is the after result of that processing. Our mind generate negative thoughts towards the concerned person. The concentration level of mind increases and it is focused on the current situation. Our eyes become prominent. The winking rate decreases, muscles in face and the other parts of the body become tense in anticipation of further action.. In this state we say a person is ‘angry’. But this is the primary response occurring as a reflex phenomenon. There can be a secondary phenomenon like you can also hurl abuses or hit the person, or just walk away. This secondary reaction is based on the intensity of emotions and the integrity of the regulatory mechanisms in our brain.

Other kind of emotions are also generated in a similar way. There is a primary stimulus which generates the ‘emotions’ based on the perception of stimulus, and which leads to appropriate physical and mental response.

I have delved deep into the probable mechanism of emotions so that it becomes easy to understand how our emotional health can fail just as our physical health does. As the physiological reactions taking place in our liver or lungs can go awry,

so can they go wrong at the emotional level. Our brain can produce too strong an emotional response for a small stimulus or it may produce a very weak response against a strong stimulus. The response may persist for too little a duration or too long a duration.

Let me give some real life examples to explain this. It is normal to be angry when somebody abuses you. But if you can't let that anger go for a very long time, then everything is not right with you. It is normal to feel sad when somebody close to you passes away. But if you try to kill yourself after that, then you are not emotionally healthy. If you always feel elated (not just happy) without any good reason then you are not emotionally healthy.

These are only a few raw examples. Our emotions show very fine variations from person to person. There is no measurable way to define emotional health. The three basic attributes that can be given to an emotionally healthy person are:

An emotionally healthy person is -

- able to show correct emotional response based on the stimulus
- able to express his emotions (actually, able to express the thoughts generated as a result of emotions)
- able to regulate the mental and physical response generated due to an emotion.

There are so many people around us who are unable to cry when they need to; who are unable to fight when they need to; who fear every passing wind; who lose their ability to reason when they fall in love. These people do not have any 'disease' and yet these people are not 'healthy'!

The Triune

So far, I have discussed the three components of health as separate entities to understand each one of them more thoroughly. But emotional health, mental health, and physical health are not separate entities. You cannot have a healthy mind without a healthy body or healthy emotions and vice-versa. The degree to which one of these components is affected can vary from person to person, but ultimately it is the person as a whole that is affected.

This understanding of the human being is why I like Homeopathy so much. And this is the reason why Homeopathy is so different from every other system of medicine. The dominant medical school still has to realize that just as the parts of a

human body can not work in isolation, they also can not fall ill in isolation. There can not be a disturbed liver or a damaged lung unless and until there is a primary disturbance which affects the person as a whole. We can not forget that every part in our body and every cell in those parts has come from a single cell. A cell which had a life force of its own. How can any one dissociate the body parts which have all come from one single cell?

Leave aside the differentiation of parts, even the classification of health as emotional, mental, and physical is not totally true. These are components which can not be separated – neither in health, nor in disease!

Factors for Failing Health

While discussing physical, mental, and emotional health, I did not discuss the causes for the derangement of health. I left that part because there is hardly any cause which affects one plane without affecting the others. Our mind and body are so closely integrated that when one is affected there are bound to be repercussions on the other. Let me give some examples to elaborate this. Even a small cut in your hand (physical plane) can make you worry (mental plane) about the bleeding or injury in general and can make you angry (emotional plane) with yourself that you were not careful enough. Again, mental anxiety (which often results from emotional problems) is a well known cause for peptic ulcers and hypertension. These are not isolated examples. Nearly every known disease, be it physical or psychological, can be associated with signs and symptoms on the other planes.

Now let me elaborate some of the most common factors affecting our health.

1. Genes – Yes! our genes are one of the biggest factors in deciding the way in which our health gets deranged. They also decide which plane is affected the most in a particular person. Through ages, it is known to humanity that children tend to inherit their ‘mother’s nose’ or their ‘father’s eyes’. But what most of us do not realize is that children can also inherit the ‘father’s temperament’ or ‘mother’s thought process’. And as children inherit the physical and mental makeup from their parents, they also inherit the tendencies and susceptibilities to acquire diseases. For example – it is a well known fact that conditions like obesity, hypertension, peptic ulcers, Crohn’s disease, diabetes, depression etc often run in families.

Defective genes sometimes directly result in diseases. What we commonly call as genetic disorders. But even the ‘emotional instability’, ‘tendency to worry a lot’, or

the ‘tendency to catch a cold frequently’ can be attributed to our genetic inheritance.

2. Life-style and Social factors – Our contemporary life style is the second biggest factor for failing health of people. Increasing sedentary habits, long working hours, reduced rest hours; diet containing highly processed food, poor in fiber content and with loads of artificial colors and flavors; increased anxiety and tensions related to education, career, job, performance, etc are some of the factors that are responsible for decreasing the health status of our society at large. Coupled with environmental factors and allopathic drugs, these factors are playing havoc with our health.

3. Allopathic Drugs – Even allopaths say that allopathic drugs are one of the biggest cause of health problems today. Allopathic drugs not only have their side-effects, but their excessive use is decreasing the immunity level of our society at large. The pill-popping culture is an open invitation to chronic ailments. People keep suppressing their ailments and keep working until their body finally gives up.

4. Environmental factors – Increasing pollution of our air, water, and earth is a well known factor in the increasing level of many diseases. There is a high level of asthma and other allergic complaints in urban areas. Depleting ozone layer is a known factor in increasing rate of skin cancers. Noise pollution is a recognized factor in increasing anxiety and stress levels in our society.

These are some of the major factors. One factor that I have left and which is commonly considered a cause for illness is – bacteria, viruses, and parasites. What about these? Are they not a major cause of disease? Yes, they are a cause of disease – but not a major one. The ability of these microorganisms to make a person sick relies on two factors:

- virulence (quality and quantity)
- immunity

Plus there is a third factor that made me say that bacteria, viruses etc are not a major cause of human sickness:

Social health

If a person gets infected by a potent microbe and has a low immunity against it, then he may fall ill. But bacteria and viruses are not a cause for decreasing health status of our society. Man himself is the cause for it.

People through their life-style and drug-abuse, decrease their immunity and create fertile grounds for these microorganisms. And people themselves act as the carriers and create conditions for their spread. Think of it this way – if there is no drug abuse, no sexual perversions, no promiscuity – what will be the rate of infection of HIV or Hepatitis-B? Extremely low. And that applies to most of the modern diseases in some way or the other. Bacteria and viruses cannot rage a war against us – it is us who help them kill us!

What about Spiritual Health?

I could not have left this one! Homeopathy does consider that we all have a ‘spirit like’ vital force, which animates us. And it is this spirit like vital force which gets deranged before we fall sick. Also most of the humanity believes in God. And if you believe in God, you cannot logically disbelieve the spirit within us. And since homeopaths themselves are human beings and deal with other human beings, we cannot just shun the beliefs of a large proportion of humanity. We need to work with them and on them.

The first question that comes up in context of spiritual health is whether you believe in spirits? And then there are related questions like – do you believe in God? good spirits and evil spirits? after-life? hell and heaven? etc. All are very philosophical questions and the only answer scientific reasoning can give to them is – ‘NO’. But I believe there is more to life than just science and so I will give my views regarding these questions in relation to the question of spiritual