



Pills & Procedures Aren't Healthy Substitutes for Good Habits

by Mike Hawkins
mike@alpinelink.com



As we get older, our health becomes increasingly important. We hope to live to a ripe old age, but with a key condition - that we be healthy enough to enjoy the experience.

I remember hearing the many forms of “you better take care of yourself” from my parents and other “elders” when I was young, but when you’re young and healthy, you don’t pay much attention. Now, having been invited to join AARP, I’m not so young anymore and my health is becoming one of my top priorities.

Being healthy not only improves your longevity and makes living longer more enjoyable, it has immediate benefits – regardless of age. Being in good health gives you more energy, makes your mind sharper, increases your productivity, and makes your life more fun. Poor health on the other hand makes you tired, dulls your senses, prevents you from getting your work done, and can make life miserable.

People who take medication to treat their illnesses can also suffer from the side effects of their medication. I remember fighting the drowsiness associated with antihistamines when I had chronic allergies. Then there are medications that have side effects which require additional medications. Negative side effects also result from a variety of medical procedures. To be clear, medications and medical procedures are essential and can be life saving, but they are regularly misused. What I’m referring to here is their misuse. Doctors routinely prescribe and patients take medications or undergo procedures that are unnecessary at best and worse can perpetuate the real problem. It is as if some doctors feel they are not doing their job if they don’t autograph a prescription form, or two, at every appointment.

The biggest issue with medications is that people use them to treat symptoms rather than properly dealing with their underlying problems. People don’t want to have to exercise self-control, stop a bad habit, or make some other behavioral change. Even when they know what they’re doing is hurting their health, they would rather temporarily eliminate the symptoms by taking medication or having a procedure performed. Out of sight, out of mind.

Numerous medical studies show that the consumption of added sugar (sugar not from natural fruits), artificial sweeteners, saturated fat, highly refined and processed foods create significant health issues. As an example, there are 146 diseases including cancer, diabetes, osteoporosis, coronary heart disease, and various mental disorders that have been directly linked to the consumption of added sugar alone. Yet people get addicted to foods and drinks that contain added sugar relegating them to poor health along with its associated medications and procedures. Combine bad nutritional habits with a sedentary lifestyle void of aerobic activity and you have the ingredients for a health disaster.

Not to say that diet is the sole source of all our illnesses. Clearly it isn’t. But studies show that what we have control over, e.g. what we do, think, and eat, are by far the primary sources of doctor visits and illness. I am an example, as are countless others, of how changes in thinking, eating, and exercise habits can result in dramatic improvements, not only in fitness and mental acuity, but in overall health. There is an undeniable correlation between what you do, think, and eat - and your health.

What is it that makes people regularly eat fast foods full of saturated fat, drink sodas with poisonous sweeteners, and snack on junk food high in calories, all of which are clearly unhealthy choices? Or to perpetuate a high-stress environment? Or to avoid aerobic exercise, yet spend hours watching television? For some, they don’t grasp the real consequences of what they are doing. For others, it is simply that change is difficult. Habits are hard to break – good ones or bad ones. When our family switched from eating regular bacon to turkey bacon, it didn’t taste right at first. Now, after eating it for several years, when I try regular bacon, it doesn’t taste right. It’s not just bad habits that are hard to break. So are good ones. The fact is that any routine is hard to change and therefore all the more reason to create good ones.



Pills & Procedures Aren't Healthy Substitutes for Good Habits

Change can be difficult, but it is possible. I'm a poster child for change as are hundreds of my clients who have become better leaders, listeners, speakers, delegators, sales managers, project managers, and so on. Those of us that choose to change and go about it in the right way, find it very doable. If you've read my book *Activating Your Ambition: A Guide to Coaching the Best Out of Yourself and Others* (see www.activatingyourambition.com), you know how to change. So no more excuses. If you're not eating right, thinking right, exercising, or taking care of your health – it is because YOU choose not to do so!

Please give this serious consideration. If you have recurring abnormalities such as headaches, moodiness, memory loss, reflux, fatigue, insomnia, weight change, skin conditions, joint pains, cramps, nausea, and so on, consider that your eating, thinking, or doing habits could be contributing factors. These symptoms can be your body's way of telling you that you are not taking care of it. Your body-mass index, blood pressure, resting heart rate, and cholesterol level aren't the only indicators of your health and fitness. So are these symptoms.

If you care about your mental acuity, productivity, or quality of life, make maintaining your health and fitness a top priority. Make a commitment to get your mind and body in shape. Don't rationalize your poor thinking, dieting, and exercise habits any longer. It's not just a coincidence that being tired, getting sick, feeling bad, or losing your mental edge happens concurrently with letting your fitness level down. Illness is not merely the result of heredity or other circumstances out of your control. The true sources of most problems are poor choices and bad habits within your control. Consider how you can reduce your stress and follow proper fitness and nutrition guidelines before you over rely on medications or medical procedures, particularly those with known negative side effects.

We all want a quick-fix, but if it is too good to be true, it probably is. Don't be a fool. The improvements provided by a pill, shot, procedure, fad diet, or exercise gadget will be short-lived without real changes in your eating, fitness, and/or behavioral habits. The reality is that it can take as long to undo your damage as it took for you to do it, assuming it is reversible. So don't delay. Put the passing of time back on your side and get started now.

Talk to your doctor about proper nutrition, vitamins, and mineral supplements. Maintain an exercise program that is appropriate for your age and fitness level. Get control of any stinking thinking or unhealthy circumstances you have. Reduce your stress. Replace your bad habits with good ones. Your choices in these areas are more important than just about anything else you can do.

If you're not convinced, at least give good nutritional habits and proper exercise a try for 30 days to experience its effect. You might be surprised how quickly your mind and body responds.

Here are a few resources on maintaining good health and fitness:

- The truth about diet sodas and artificial sweeteners: <http://www.naturalnews.com/004416.html>, <http://health.yahoo.com/experts/eatthis/22630/the-truth-about-diet-soda/>.
- The problem with sugar: <http://www.healingdaily.com/detoxification-diet/sugar.htm>, <http://rheumatic.org/sugar.htm>.
- Weight management (and body mass index table in Appendix A): http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/guidelines/obesity/prctgd_b.pdf.
- USDA nutritional guidelines: <http://www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines/dga2005/document/html/brochure.htm>.
- Aerobic exercise recommendations: <http://www.cooperaerobics.com/Health-Tools/Aerobics.aspx>.
- Strength training and work-out recommendations: <http://www.beachbody.com>.
- Tips on how to deal with stress, anxiety, and worry: <http://www.wikihow.com/Deal-With-Stress>, <http://familydoctor.org/online/famdocen/home/common/mentalhealth/stress/167.html>.

Ponder the possibility that proper practices provide physical and psychological performance, yet pills and procedures can produce problems and poor productivity!

I wish you the best of health.



Pills & Procedures Aren't Healthy Substitutes for Good Habits

Article written by Mike Hawkins, author of *Activating Your Ambition: A Guide to Coaching the Best Out of Yourself and Others* (www.activatingyourambition.com), winner of a silver medal in the 2010 Axiom Best Business Book Awards on coaching and mentoring, and president of Alpine Link Corporation (www.alpinelink.com), a consulting firm specializing in leadership development and sales performance improvement.

For other articles, visit www.alpinelink.com/Leadership_Sales_Management_Consulting_Papers_Tools_Templates.aspx.