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It Is Up To You

Kate Vander Veen

Dordt College, kate.vanderveen@dordt.edu

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It Is Up To You

Abstract

"If indeed you desire to be healthy, or to at least try to work toward living a healthier life than you do now, you must first answer one core question: what does healthy living mean to you?"

Posting about life choices that promote health from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/it-is-up-to-you/>

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Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College](#).

It Is Up To You

 [inallthings.org/it-is-up-to-you/](https://allthings.org/it-is-up-to-you/)

Kate Vander Veen

It is up to you, how well you live. The choices you made yesterday, and make today or tomorrow will affect your health in time to come. If indeed you desire to be healthy, or to at least try to work toward living a healthier life than you do now, you must first answer one core question: what does healthy living mean to you?

There are any number of analogies that could be used to discuss healthy living. Think of your kitchen table. The kitchen is often the hub of the home environment and it is at the table where your first cup of tea is sipped before the clamor of daily expectations begins; where the kids flop down for their after-school diatribe of school experiences; and where supper is savored and family time is treasured. For the purposes of this discussion, the table represent healthy living. The table is supported by four legs labeled physical health, emotional health, social health, and spiritual health. As you conjure in your mind the image of your health table, consider the stability of the table and the repercussions if one of the four legs were to be damaged, broken, weak, splintered, or shortened.

Physical health includes not only the genetics you were born with, but also the biological processes God created for you to steward. The body functions quite remarkably under varying types and degrees of stressors, among them malnutrition, dehydration, physical strain, and environmental exposures. Herein lies where your choices may potentiate either wellness or illness.

Malnutrition results when your body is not receiving the essential nutrients (vitamins, minerals, protein, carbohydrates, and yes, even fat) it needs for normal function. Malnutrition also includes instances when your body receives food or beverages in excess of the necessary requirements. If you are not sure what nutrients your body needs and in what quantities, a good place to start is the [My Plate](#) web site. When it comes to nutrition, there is some truth to the adage 'everything in moderation'. If you really love mint chocolate chip ice cream, then surely enjoy it. But (and there is always a 'but' when moderation is in play), understand the quality of the ice cream and the effect it will have on your physical health. Likewise, if there is no way anyone will convince you that you will live long and prosper by eating spinach, then don't. But... what will you consume in its place that will give your body the same quality of nutrients, in as few calories? The amount of calories you should consume (or limit yourself to) depends largely on your gender and activity level. Remember the kitchen table leg needs to be strong in order to support the table top. When your body is filled with poor quality calories, your bones, blood, circulation, immune system, and brain are compromised.

A similar application is made when considering the fluids you drink. The multitude of beverage choices is astounding. The quality of those choices, in the context of physical health is less so. Like the foods we choose to consume, the beverages we choose to drink need to be considered carefully also. Milk is promoted as a healthy beverage, and indeed it is if it is your primary source of calcium – but – whole milk, or buttermilk contain milk fat which your body doesn't need. Likewise, fruit juice is a good source for many necessary vitamins, yet also may be laden with unnecessary added sugar. Need it be mentioned, that which is in *caffeinated* or *alcoholic* beverages? Water is essential for life. Period. If you don't like the taste of tap water (who said water was flavorless anyway?), then find an alternative source. The average person should consume 8 cups (a half-gallon, or 2 liters) of water a day. Choices being what they are, your responsibility is to make stewardly, wise choices by enjoying what you may, but only in the quantities your body can manage without duress.

Physical strain, like malnutrition, results from acts of commission as well as omission. Our musculoskeletal and cardiovascular systems are marvelous creations. Being systems however, they rely heavily on a variety of connections and actions to function normally and repeatedly. Our cardiovascular system pumps blood throughout the body, influenced by the quantity and quality characteristics of the blood and blood vessels. The quality of the

blood itself is nurtured by the nutrients we consume and store within the body (review *malnutrition* above). Pumping of the blood requires muscles to contract. When the muscles are compromised due to lack of nutrients, or weakened from being underutilized, ill-health ensues. Healthy living includes physical activity. However, high-impact, aerobic exercise, is not for everyone. Instead, move your body – arms, legs, back and neck – in the full ranges of movement against a moderate variety of resistance. It is that simple. If you are choosing to have a healthy physical leg to your life-table top, you will need to include 30 minutes of physical activity among your daily endeavors.

Your physical health is also impacted by the environment in which your body lives. Hazardous activities that carry a risk of injury notwithstanding, if you desire to live well, increase your awareness of the potential environmental exposures that surround you and endeavor to avoid or reduce them. The most obvious example is smoking. There is nothing redeeming about tobacco. If you have convinced yourself it is an enjoyable experience, stop doing it (smoking, inhaling, chewing – whichever). If you think it isn't hurting anyone else, think again. It is hurting you and thereby all those to whom you are important. Now is the time to consider the horrific health outcomes of smoking related diseases that creep up on you so insidiously you will not be aware until it may be too late. Radiation exposure is another easy choice you can make. The sun is an unfathomable creation our glorious God gifted to us. However, unprotected sun exposure puts the body at risk for skin cancer. Reducing your exposure to ultraviolet radiation (sunlight) is as simple as staying out of the sun, or covering your exposed skin with clothing or sunscreen. There are a variety of sunscreen products and many levels of SPF (sun protection factor). One rule of thumb: when in doubt choose the higher number. Living well includes taking the time to consider the stuff that surrounds you and potential health risk exposures. Are there tripping hazards from toys, or electronics? Are you being exposed to fumes from smoke, or carbon monoxide in poorly ventilated spaces? Are you being exposed to others who carry bacteria or viruses eager to hop on to a new host? The cheapest and many will argue the most effective step you can take to lower your exposure to infection is frequent hand-washing. Your physical health is a critical component to living well.

Emotional health primarily involves being honest with yourself. It is a benefit to your emotional health if you are consciously aware of the “things” that make you happy as well as things that make you mad, sad, or otherwise. Many poor health behaviors become habits out of unconscious reactions to emotional turmoil. For example, binge eating is a common reaction to anxiety. It satiates and momentarily makes you feel better. Now is the time for you to comprehend that you are fearfully and wonderfully made! We are who we have been created to be and you can fight it or you can work with yourself to achieve a higher level of emotional health. We are commanded to love ourselves, and truly cannot care well for others when we are not caring for ourselves. Combat medics during the great wars understood this truth all too acutely. However, when you forsake others at your own expense – be it in behaviors of verbal anger, physical neglect, denial of care or concern, your ability to love and care for others around you has become perverted. Yet, you may be thinking, ‘what about me?’ One way to get out of a funk is to list the blessing that surround you. Give it a try: “I have a washing machine that works, an automobile that is trustworthy, I have a husband who mows my lawn (bless him!), I have a home that keeps me warm in -20 degrees.” You get the idea. Perhaps, by the time you get to the end of your list, you will realize you have a lot more to be thankful for than to be disappointed about.

When you reach for food in response to an emotional event in your life, take a minute to consider what the feeling is you are experiencing (anxiety, worry, guilt, or insecurity) and understand that the food, in and of itself, will not resolve the issue at hand. No one wants to face a self-proclaimed or other-induced criticism. And yet, if you are being honest with yourself, your discontent (wrath, envy, pride, gluttony – recognize any of these?) is based in something that warrants appraisal. Contentment does not come easy, but it will come, if sought.

Social health goes hand in hand with emotional health. As human beings, we were created to be in relationship not only with God and his creation that surrounds us, but also the multitude of human beings with whom we interact. Just as you were wonderfully made, so were the many others on this planet. Clearly each of us has strengths and talents, and passions and interests. Understanding that we all have weakness, short-comings, and dis-interests is pivotal to our social health. The biblical analogy of one body with many functions is illustrative here. Your very smart

head would be useless without the feet to carry it where it deemed necessary to go. Likewise, your bones would fall the ground without the muscles to move them along. From the grocery clerk to the chief executive, we must all treasure each other's presence.

Another component of social health is truth-telling. It must be cemented into the fabric of who you are, both to yourself and in your interactions with others. Otherwise, steps taken to improve your health will be wasted. You cannot expect others to understand or respect you, if you do not seek to understand or respect them. Additionally, when considering all that could be said about achieving social health, which is endless, a hearty dose of selfless service on a regular basis is recommended. Placing yourself among those who walk in that proverbial other-shoe, namely the vulnerable, lonely, homeless, poor, hungry, orphaned or widowed, will reinvigorate the core of who the Lord created and desires you to be.

Spiritual health comes about through a process of inquiry similar to those of physical, emotional, and social health. First you must come to some conclusions regarding whether or not you believe God is working in your life, how you feel about that, what you may or may not want to do about it, and if you are ready to have a conversation with God about it. Perhaps you may be experiencing some trepidation in effecting changes to your current level of spiritual health. We cannot hide our thoughts or intentions from God; it is unnerving to consider he knows our thoughts, actions, and words even before we do. The recitation of [Psalm 139](#) may offer a first-step in gaining spiritual health. Not only is it important to comprehend God's mercy regarding our existence, it is equally important to understand his grace in response to our failures. [Psalm 143](#) may offer a next-step in beginning a conversation with God and the taking of steps toward spiritual health improvement. Whether you are consciously aware of it or not, you reveal your beliefs about God and his importance in your life by the decisions you make, the conversations you have, and in your behaviors. The quality of the life you lead and the relationships you make and maintain reflect the degree of intimacy with or estrangement from God and his will for your lived experiences. Your physical, emotional, social, and spiritual health are outcomes of your enacted beliefs. Like physical, emotional, and social health, your spiritual health has both personal and public ramifications. We do not live in isolation from one another and are asked to love each other deeply, faithfully administering God's grace in all its forms. If this seems unfathomable to you, then perhaps it is time to recite [Psalm 143](#) again.

Most professional journals ask the authors of articles in their publication to submit disclosure statements. And so, here is mine: My table wobbles. I confess that in no way have I achieved fully any of the recommendations I have shared with you. For example, I love a loaded combination pizza. However, I know that this doesn't cover the 5 servings of fruits and vegetables I need daily for healthy living. So in addition to eating the foods I enjoy, I also choose to eat healthy snacks like for example, apples or almonds. Throughout life you make choices and indeed, it is up to you how well you live. If after completing your physical, emotional, social, and spiritual health self-assessments, you desire to make improvements, then act now to shore up the weaknesses in the table legs that can be more easily corrected. Otherwise, start with one small change at a time and stick to it. [James 1:12](#) says blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. May the Lord bless you in your suffering, and may you experience truly healthy living.