

The Great PHYSICIAN

| By Brent M. Egan, MD

A scientist's perspective on helping patients achieve optimal health by applying Biblical truths.

In 1922, Dr. William Prebble presented his research findings to the New Brunswick Medical Society and stated that overweight of 15 pounds or more was a serious condition with advancing years conducive to high blood pressure and diabetes as well as disease of the heart, arteries, and kidneys. He concluded that it was the duty of physicians to acquaint the community about the gravity of obesity. More than 80 years later, Dr. Prebble's words ring as true as ever. In several ways, we are rediscovering the wisdom of his words.

The prevalence or percentage of people that are overweight or obese has increased dramatically over the past 20 years. The epidemic of obesity has impacted all age and ethnic groups as well as men and women. The obesity epidemic is growing ever larger throughout the world and the United States leads the way, as 65 percent of adults are either overweight or obese.

More Than Skin Deep

Obesity is more than a cosmetic disorder with effects that transcend physical appearance. The adverse impact of obesity on health touches most organs and systems with higher rates of high blood pressure, high blood sugar or diabetes, elevated triglycerides, reductions in good cholesterol, higher rates of stroke, heart attack, sudden death, kidney damage and failure, arthritis of the hips, knees, and back, gallstones, cancers of the breast, colon, prostate, and uterus, menstrual disturbances, polycystic ovaries, and dark patches of velvety skin called acanthosis nigricans. The medical costs related to obesity total more than \$100,000,000,000 annually with a disproportionately high share related to cardiovascular risk factors and related complications.

Access To Excess And The Metabolic Syndrome

Access to excessive calories and a passive, sedentary lifestyle are the main causes of metabolic syndrome, which is a constellation of risk factors for diseases of the heart, stroke, and diabetes. The leading cause of death among all ages in the United States includes heart disease (30 percent), stroke (seven percent), and diabetes (three percent). Obese men and women are about 10 times more likely to have the metabolic syndrome than their lean counterparts. Metabolic syndrome is associated with two- to four-fold increases in risk for heart disease, stroke, and kidney disease. Metabolic syndrome patients without diabetes are at a 10-fold greater risk of developing diabetes compared to individuals without the metabolic syndrome. And, while some obese individuals do not have cardiovascular risk factors today, they are up to four times more likely to develop hypertension, 40 times more likely to develop diabetes, and two to three times more likely to have a heart attack or stroke in the next 10 years than are lean people.



Not All Gloom and Doom

Let's look at some positives. Positive lifestyle changes go a very long way to correcting the risks of the metabolic syndrome. Among a group of obese patients enrolling in a weight loss program, two-thirds had the metabolic syndrome. Four months later (and 15 percent lighter) impressive reductions in risk factors were discovered, including a blood pressure drop of 14/8 mmHg, a drop of 104 mg/dl in triglycerides, and a drop of 24 mg/dl in blood cholesterol. Lifestyle changes reduce cardiovascular risk factors and help to prevent heart disease. The Oslo Heart Study randomized 1,200 middle-aged men at high risk for heart disease to either a control group or a lifestyle program that included instruction on smoking cessation and reduction of dietary fat. The lifestyle intervention group gave up half their cigarettes, reduced dietary fat from 41 percent to 27 percent of calories, and lost an average of eight to nine pounds. Over the seven-year study, heart attacks, sudden death, and the need to have blocked arteries bypassed were reduced more than 50 percent!

Walking and DASHing

If losing weight isn't your thing, don't despair, there are still some very healthful and effective options. Research has shown that people who are fat and fit, i.e., obese

but in good aerobic condition, have a risk level for heart disease that is similar to the lean but unfit individual. Women who walk more than 60 minutes weekly reduce their heart disease risk by 50 percent compared to women who walk lesser amounts. It doesn't seem to matter whether the walk is fast or slow, the key is to walk.

The Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) eating plan lowers blood pressure, even when weight remains constant and salt is not reduced. The eating plan lowers blood pressure even more when salt is restricted. DASH is high in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, beans, and low-fat dairy products. Details of the DASH eating plan, including a seven-day, 21-meal eating plan plus snacks, can be found on the web by typing in DASH on the search of www.nhlbi.nih.gov. In hypertensive patients, DASH is about as effective as any single blood pressure medication. The DASH diet can reduce blood pressure 8-14 mmHg. Losing 10 kg (22 pounds) can reduce blood pressure 5-20 mmHg. Decreasing dietary salt can reduce blood pressure 2-8 mmHg. Physical activity can reduce blood pressure 4-9 mmHg. Lifestyle change is powerful! So, how do you get people to change?

A Holistic Approach To Health

As cited earlier, 95 percent of Americans

believe in God, 80 percent view good health as a blessing, and 66 percent claim to base their entire approach to health on their religious beliefs and want their healthcare provider to address spiritual issues. In fact, for thousands of years, spiritual leaders and healers were one and the same. During the past two centuries, Western medicine in particular has moved progressively to a 'scientific' approach to healthcare, which largely excludes the spiritual domain.

The history of health and healing are consistent with biblical scripture, which indicates that man is a spiritual being. Scripture (the Word) is man's spiritual food. Scripture contains a wealth of timeless advice for every dimension of our life including nutrition and health. It is not possible in the context of this brief review to note every relevant verse of scripture, so consider the following.

The Power of Scripture

Genesis 1:27

God created man in his image

John 4:24

God is spirit (so man is spiritual)

Matthew 4:4 Man does not live on bread (physical food) alone but on every word (spiritual food) that comes from the mouth of God...

Psalms 119:165a Great peace have they who love your law (word, spiritual food)...

Proverbs 14:30a A heart at peace gives life to the body...

Timeless Nutritional Advice

Genesis 2:9 And the Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground – trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food (fruit).

Daniel 1:12,15 (Daniel said), "please test your servants for 10 days," Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. At the end of 10 days, they looked healthier and better nourished than the young men who ate the royal food.

Proverbs 23:1-3 Avoid rich (royal) food and gluttony. When you sit to dine with a ruler (royal food), note well what is before you, and put a knife to your throat if you are given to gluttony. Do not crave his delicacies for that (royal) food is deceptive.



Dr. Brent M. Egan explains how biblical truths can offer a path to optimal wellness, both physical and spiritual.

Consequences Of Royal Food

- **HUNGER:** Insatiable appetite (Ecclesiastes 6:7, Philippians 3:18,19)
- **WEIGHED DOWN WITH:** Obesity, Fatigue, Sleep Apnea
- **THREE FREE HIGHS:** Blood Pressure, Sugar, Cholesterol
- **ATTACKS & FAILURE** of brain, heart, kidney (failure)
- **CANCER** of Prostate, Breast, Uterus, & Colon
- **WORN OUT PARTS:** Loss of 'Nature,' Old Timer's disease, Arthru(itis)

Scripture provides sound advice, proven by medical studies that fruit and vegetables are healthful foods, where as "royal" or rich foods, often with added sugar and fat, are deceptively attractive and detract from good health. The warning against royal food is very clear with the recommendation for a drastic measure if one is attracted to such cuisine—a knife to the throat. The serious health consequences of royal food provide justification for the dire warning, and are consistent with the admonition posted by Dr. William Prebble more than 80 years ago. Not only are these recommendations good for the heart, moderation and variety to achieve normal weight and consuming more fruit and vegetables can significantly decrease your risk for cancer.

The Medical Care Factor

For people with risk factors, in addition to a strong spiritual and lifestyle foundation, it is also important to obtain good medical care. Seeking the best medical care is consistent with and obedient to scripture.

Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with (olive) oil in the name of the Lord. —James 5:14

Recall that religious leaders were also healers at that time as for most of human history. Furthermore, there are two Greek words for anoint. One is the ceremonial/symbolic use and the other a physical/medicinal use. The word for anoint in this context was for physical/medicinal use and represents good medical care. As an aside, this next verse, James 5:15, "And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well," is sometimes misunderstood. While physical healing, often miraculous, does occur, the verse does not guarantee physical

healing but rather restoration, which at the very core is the state of our spirit and eternal relationship to God.

In 160 patients with multiple metabolic syndrome factors including high blood pressure, diabetes, and hyperlipidemia (high blood fats), random assignment of 80 to a program of comprehensive lifestyle education and more intensive medical management of the various risk factors reduced serious events like heart attacks and stroke by 50 percent. There are many safe and effective medications for lowering blood pressure, controlling blood sugars, and normalizing blood cholesterol. The need is to manage these chronic conditions through a combination of lifestyle modifications and a trusted relationship with your physician, who can guide you through the myriad of diagnostic tests and treatment regimes. Healthcare is a partnership!

Putting It All Together

We've just taken a whirlwind tour of some health problems associated with "access to excess." Overweight and obesity pose significant health risks to many organ systems in the body with especially serious consequences for cardiovascular risk factors and related complications. The obesity epidemic is a real and present danger, which continues to grow each year. The threat to the health and economic vitality of our country is significant and is already touching every element of our society. Healthy lifestyle patterns, while not representing a guarantee of lifelong prevention, are very useful in health promotion and disease prevention. Good health includes mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual dimensions, which operate in concert and not in isolation. When risk factors are present, it is especially important to review each of these areas, to strive for balance, and to seek good medical care.

The Great Physician

As a Christian called to a career in science and medicine, I recognize that Jesus is the Great Physician, the one who has the power to forgive all sins and heal all diseases (Psalm 103:3). For by Him all things were created. . . and in Him all things hold together (Colossians 1:16,17). As a scientist, it is my calling to discover His timeless truths to better health. As a physician, it is my calling, with the Lord's blessing, to

assist everyone I touch to apply those truths, so that they may attain better health and longer, more productive lives. It is important for everyone in science and medicine to realize that we never create truth or cause good health but rather that we simply discover and apply that which He created. With the Lord's gracious blessing, physicians can contribute to healthier, happier, and more productive lives for a season. Jesus can do that for eternity.

Remember: Great peace have they who love Your law (know, understand, and apply timeless truth) and nothing can make them stumble. A heart at peace gives life to the body. It is my hope that the information provided in this brief review will help you to discover a holistic and life-long approach to better health.★

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