

At 93 – Yes, I Think I Know What Good Health Means

by Herbert A. Townsley

What's the value of good health? I'm glad you asked. I'm here, at 93, to watch my grandchildren and great grandchildren grow up – isn't that good enough.



Boy, things sure have changed in 93 years. As a child in rural Indiana, everyone ate healthy and worked hard. Celebration food appeared with celebrations – not at every meal. After Purdue University and a trip to Europe for WWII, I returned to a country on the move – a country of prosperity and hope – a country with food on the table.

Little did I know that the 'never want to be hungry again' philosophy spawned of the depression would deliver the table of plenty that it eventually did. Meat at every meal and dessert was no longer for just special occasions – it was available at any time.

Unfortunately, all that comes with prosperity is not good. We were also introduced to tobacco products during the War. We became a generation of smokers – promoted, I'm sorry to say, by our own doctors to reduce stress. Fortunately, the truth was finally told.

At 74, the truths - and consequences - of my success hit me like a ton of bricks. I had stopped smoking the exact day that science and medicine hinted of the possible harmful effects of tobacco. I'm quite sure I had never been more than an ounce outside my ideal weight. But, I was to learn that saturated fat had apparently gotten the better of me. I suffered a near fatal ruptured aortic aneurism. A deadly misfortune for, what they tell me, are about half the folks who experience them. I survived! After receiving enough blood to bathe in and enough Dacron (grafts that is – which replaced my God given arteries) to make a nice sweater, I was awarded a sentence of life on earth. Thank you.

It seemed like a good time to consider some changes? We are so fortunate that evidence based science had not only produced the technology that saved my life, it had also produced information that clearly showed a relationship between health and nutrition. This was not long before Dean Ornish, MD, proved that heart disease was preventable which meant it might be reversible. It was from studies of other countries that did not suffer from heart disease like we Americans did that convinced me. From an engineering perspective, the dietary relationships to good health made sense. At least it gave 'me' hope.

Well, to make a long story short, I changed my eating habits. I gave up some foods I thought were my friends. I seldom, if ever, eat foods with saturated fats anymore. I eat mostly fruits, vegetables and grains. People say I'm lucky because these are the foods I like. Most everyone my age knew and liked these foods – they were the staples. We 'learned' to like the other foods.

I'm glad I'm here to tell this story. My changes were 'my' choice and have taken me well beyond the expectations of most doctors. If I had continued my unhealthy nutritional patterns I would have surely blocked those wonderful 'artificial' arterial replacements. I'd like to think that I would have made the changes because they made sense rather than having a life threatening experience. I'd like to think my family and their friends will get this message. I don't want them to have to learn the hard way. I am, after all, looking forward to watching my great grandchildren graduate from college and who knows what else. Shoot, maybe I'll take up dancing again!