

The Back-to-Health Plan

||||| BY JOHN BUCHANAN

New capabilities, based on old principles such as diet and exercise and the latest discoveries of medical science, are revolutionizing our ability to assess and optimize our well-being.

LIKE PRETTY MUCH EVERYTHING ELSE, FROM AN OLD PIECE OF furniture to a mechanically challenged automobile, your health can be rehabilitated. Ever since 2003, when the Human Genome Project completed its mission to map our DNA and unlock its mysteries, medical science has exploded with new capabilities for assessing and optimizing your well-being.

"The conventional primary medical approach, unfortunately, is still the traditional 'treatment of sickness' approach," says Dr. Lida Ghaderi, MD, founder and medical director at Santa Monica, CA-based CENIGENT, a genomic-based health enhancement institute that combines genetic testing with a range of therapies from diet to exercise. "Conventional treatments are based on parts of the body, but when you look at the human body, it really is a

complex, compound system. Today, science has come a long way. Now, we can really achieve an optimal state of health and well-being."

In order to accomplish that, you must understand what is possible and practical, says Dr. Steven Joyal, MD, vice president of scientific affairs at the internationally acclaimed, non-profit Life Extension Foundation, which has been at the forefront of the burgeoning wellness and



longevity revolution for more than a decade. "People need to focus on things they can control," says Dr. Joyal. "You can't control the genes you were born with. But you can control how they are expressed. And when you talk about gene expression, you talk about diet, nutrition, behavior, which includes exercise, and the measurement and management of cognitive and emotional stress in your life."

To what extent can your health now be controlled? With proper diet, exercise and lifestyle, under the care of a specialist who understands the most sophisticated current capabilities, you can prevent—and even *reverse*—Type 2 diabetes or heart disease.

"The big breakthroughs in managing your health have to do with nutrition, vitamins, antioxidants and nutraceuticals,



which are plant-based extracts,” says Dr. Robert D. Willix, Jr., MD, a former cardiac thoracic surgeon who is now CEO of Cenegenics Medical Institute of Boca Raton, another state-of-the-art health and wellness pioneer. “Examples of nutraceuticals are resveratrol, which reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease, and co-enzyme Q10, which also helps heart health.”

Like a growing number of physicians, Dr. Willix believes that a focus on perfect health rather than disease will alter the foundational concepts of future medical care. For example, the standard laboratory tests your doctor prescribes are used to diagnose illness rather than optimize well-being. Cenegenics screens and advises for a fasting blood sugar level below 85, while major medical organizations, including the American Diabetes Association, peg 120 as the acceptable number. “Another example is liver function,” says Dr. Willix. “By the time your liver functions become abnormal enough to be called in diseased ranges—and this is true of the kidneys, too—you have destroyed 50

percent or more of your liver, or will lose a kidney, before there is anything abnormal enough to catch in a screening with standard tests.” For an initial health assessment that includes a physician certified in anti-aging medicine, a nutritionist and an exercise physiologist, Cenegenics charges \$3,000.

When all of the best current science is applied, there is no longer any serious doubt that of all health and wellness factors, diet is the single most important. “Nutrition is a key factor in the development of disease,” says Dr. Willix. “At Cenegenics, we teach that food is medicinal, because it can reduce damage to cells.”

On the other hand, Dr. Willix says, among the most scandalous facts not reported by the media is that the much-touted “food pyramid”—promoted by virtually every major health organization in the U.S.—is actually a killer. “If you eat according to the food pyramid, you’re going to get sick,” he says, “because it tells you to eat high glycemic-index foods, for example.

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For maximum health, Dr. Willix recommends "eating organic whenever possible, foods that are as fresh as possible. Vegetables with some lean protein. Essential fats from seeds, nuts and grains. Nothing that is processed. Plenty of water. Herbal teas. Almost no refined sugar. And zero rice, potatoes, pasta, bread or alcohol."

Based on current scientific research, says Dr. Joyal, there is only one dietary discipline that will actually improve a person's health and longevity. That is a so-called calorie-restricted diet, which means consuming 25-30 per cent fewer calories per day than conventional wisdom calls for, based on your age and weight. For the average male, that translates to about 1,500 calories a day, as opposed to the "recommended" 2,000.

The reason reduced calorie diets work, Dr. Joyal says, is because they reduce free radical, or oxidant, stress—which more and more research is identifying as a root cause of a long list of dreaded diseases.

Dr. Michael Ozner, MD, FACC, FAHA, medical director for wellness and prevention at the Center for Healthy Living at Baptist Health South Florida in Miami, is a cardiologist who used to prescribe balloon angioplasty for his patients. Today, after what he calls "an epiphany" that resulted from his discovery in a medical journal of the latest research about the life-extending benefits of the so-called Mediterranean diet, he counsels patients to eat their way to health.

A generally accepted definition of the diet includes plenty of plant foods, key dairy products such as cheese and yogurt, olive oil as the primary source of fat, fish and poultry in low to moderate amounts, very little red meat or eggs, and wine consumed in low to moderate amounts, and fresh fruit as the typical daily dessert. Total fat should be 25-35 percent of calories, with saturated fat at 8 percent.

Unlike most diets, it is not a fad, or a marketing scheme created to sell books. It is a scientifically validated diet based on the centuries-old eating habits in Crete, Greece and other parts of the Mediterranean region that have yielded proven longevity well beyond the average American.

"There is no substitute for a healthy diet—and the Mediterranean diet is the one recommended by most authorities, based on the scientific studies that are out there, to reduce your risks of diseases like diabetes and heart disease," says Dr. Ozner, author of *Miami Mediterranean Diet*. When the nutritional program outlined in his book is combined with exercise, weight control, stress management,

a cessation of smoking and annual visits to your doctor to assess your health and discuss preventive or corrective strategies, he says, "you have a winning strategy that works."

In addition to diet, another important strategy for health and longevity is testing. "The cutting edge is to determine bone health, body fat and oxygen consumption, also known as oxygen uptake," says Dr. Willix. "Those are the three major risks for people as they get older."

Julia Havey, author of *The Vice-Busting Diet* (St. Martin's Press), is now working with Dr. Jacob Teitelbaum on a new anti-aging book based on the SHINE principle—sleep, hormones, immune system, nutrition and exercise. Based on her research, Havey recommends a full panel of bloodwork that tests levels of cortisol, growth hormone, progesterone and testosterone. Deficient hormones can and should be replaced.

Dr. Ozner suggests asking your doctor for tests such as an expanded or advanced lipid profile, which typically cost less than \$100 and is usually covered by health insurance. "It's the best money you'll ever spend, because it uncovers hidden risks before you have a heart attack," he says. Other critically important and inexpensive tests Dr. Ozner recommends are for inflammation and lipoprotein A. "If either of those are elevated, a person with a normal cholesterol level can still suffer a heart attack or stroke," he says.

Finally, people who want to explore the outer limits of what is becoming possible can submit to new forms of genetic testing that can help predict future vulnerabilities to diseases such as cancer, heart attack or diabetes and help identify preventive therapies based on everything from vitamins, minerals and other nutritional supplements to stress management.

An initial assessment at CENIGENT, which includes the best current capabilities for genetic screening and full body imaging, costs \$30,000.

Another new company, GeneWize Life Sciences, based in Longwood, FL, performs a genetic profile for about \$100, then prescribes a custom regimen of vitamins, minerals and other nutritional supplements that averages about \$100 a month.

With all of the new capabilities that science is delivering, says Havey, it's vital to keep one simple principle in mind. "Understand," she says, "that until you're dead, it's never too late to turn your health around. And there is no miracle to look for. It's just a matter of getting back to basics with things like diet and exercise, based on how the human body was designed to live." ■