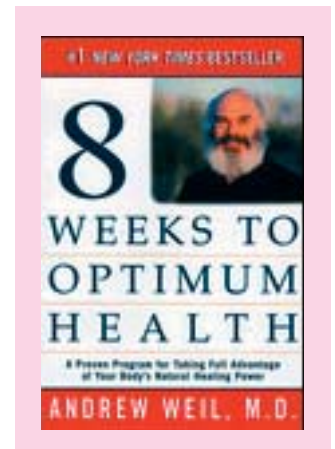


BOOK SUMMARY

Eight Weeks to Optimum Health

by Andrew Weil, M.D.
Little, Brown and Company, 1997



Summary

Dr. Andrew Weil is a pioneer in the field of mind-body medicine. This Harvard-trained physician has revolutionized the way that people perceive their health. Dr. Weil believes that health is the natural condition of perfect balance when all systems run smoothly and energy circulates freely. Unlike many mainstream physicians, he believes that the body is a whole and all of its parts are interconnected. Dr. Weil uses a combination of diet, exercise, breathing techniques along with conventional medicine. Eight Weeks to Optimum Health is a combination of several different sections. Dr. Weil includes a week-by-week plan for improving health. He also reviews the cases of several people who have benefitted from this program. The end of the book has many useful addresses and other resources for improving your diet and lifestyle. Most of this summary is a review of the concepts that Dr. Weil recommends as part of his eight week health improvement plan.

Key ideas

Throw out any artificial sweeteners containing saccharin or aspartame and any products made with them. There is mounting evidence that these artificial sweeteners disturb the physiology in some people and are possibly linked to cancer. Dr. Weil recommends that you use a moderate amount of sugar or honey instead. Make a commit-

ment to read labels of all food products you buy.

Throw out any products containing artificial coloring (indicated on the label by phrases like "color added," "artificially colored," or the name of a particular dye). Many of these chemicals contain highly reactive molecules that may interact with DNA in ways that increase the mutation and malignancy of cells.

Use olive oil instead of the partially hydrogenated oil used in margarine and other commercial cooking oils. Olive oil is more easily digested by the body. Look for olive oils that are greenish or yellowish in color with a fruity aroma. On the other hand, these partially hydrogenated oils are created with a process that forms trans-fatty acids (TFA's). These TFA's may cause an unbalance of the hormonal systems that regulate healing and encourage the development of cancer.

Drink filtered water whenever possible. The best filters combine a carbon block with electrochemical method that cleans toxins out of the water. Run the tap for a minute in the morning to clear out any metals from the pipes before drinking the water. Never drink hot water directly from the tap since it leaches compounds from the metal pipes. Don't drink water that tastes of excess chlorine.

Start eating some fresh broccoli (or other crucifers) this week. They have major anti-cancer properties, along with containing many nutrients and fiber.

Eat salmon, sardines, or kippers at least once this week. These foods have omega-3, which has been shown to reduce the risk of heart attacks by inhibiting the clotting of blood. If you do not want to eat fish, buy some linseeds (flaxseeds) and sprinkle them over your food once or twice this week.

Consider a fruit fast for one day with only fruit and herbal tea. This is an excellent way to clean out your system and rest your organs.

Avoid foods with natural carcinogens- these include grocery store mushrooms, salted pickles, barbecued meats, etc.

The highest concentration of pesticides are found in non organic fruits such as apples, peaches, grapes, raisins, oranges, strawberries. The most contaminated non organic vegetables- potatoes, carrots, lettuce, green beans, peanuts and wheat. Go organic!

Start taking vitamin C if you do not do so already. Dr. Weil recommends 1,000 to 2,000 milligrams with breakfast, another dose with dinner, and a third dose at bedtime, if convenient. Begin also taking vitamin E- 400 units of natural d-tocopherol, with selenium (take at different times than C), also take beta carotene with lycopene at least once a day. These vitamins help to reduce the free radical damage to the body and promote wellness.

Tonics- these are natural food substances that have the ability to stretch or tone the body when used regularly over time. Some of the tonics that Dr. Weil recommends include- ginger, garlic, green tea, astragalus, maitake and reishi mushroom along with milk thistle.

Garlic- protects the body from cancer, and can actually begin to heal degenerative cells in the liver and brain. Cook it lightly or eat it raw (avoid supplements).

Ginger- stimulates digestion, settles upset stomachs, anti-cancer, etc. Use both fresh and dried ginger (different effects). Try a compress with grated ginger covered with hot cloths, applied to any sick or hurting part of the body.

Iron- avoid it in supplements. It is difficult for the body to eliminate. High levels of iron in the body may produce cardiovascular disease and cancer.

Exercise- Try to walk ten minutes a day five days this week as a minimum level of exercise. Find a sport or activity you enjoy doing and

stay with it. Stretch your body in opposite ways to the way that we hold ourselves most of the time during the day.

Visit a park or other favorite place in nature. Connecting with nature is healing. It slows us down, takes us out of our routines, and reminds us that we live on a remarkable planet that we share with other forms of life.

Take a one-day news fast. Paying attention to news commonly results in anxiety, rage, and other emotional states that probably impede the healing system. Dr. Weil does not recommend that people stay uninformed of current events, only that they exercise some control over how much sensationalism they are exposed to.

Pay attention to mental imagery and make a few notes on the kinds of images that have strong emotional impact on you. Think about how you could use them in healing visualisations. Visualization is a powerful technique to gain access to healing by vividly imagining and rehearsing a desired outcome. In some cases visualization can produce complete healing responses, in others, it can boost the effectiveness of conventional therapies.

Do some volunteer work. Practice some kind of service work, such as volunteering for a few hours at a hospital or charitable organization or helping someone you know who is disabled or shut it. Do this without any expectation of return. Dr. Weil believes that volunteering can help people to overcome the feeling of disconnection. This often results in an increased inner happiness and peace for both the giver and the receiver.

Take a sauna or steam bath. This ritual is practiced in many cultures to sweat toxins out of the body and as a form of spiritual meditation. Use cycles of dry and wet heat with a cold plunge at the end. Be sure to drink lots of filtered water during the experience.

Practice forgiveness. Start the process of healing a damaged relation-

ship in your life. By forgiving, you can reduce your own emotional pain towards an estranged friend or relative, and experience more inner peace, no matter what the response of the other person.

Miscellaneous advice

Microwaves- use them only for rapidly cooking food. Don't use for long cooking of main dishes. Don't stand near them since they sometimes leak radiation. Never microwave in plastic containers or wrap. Use glass or ceramic with a towel cover.

Sun protection- avoid midday sun (11 am--2 p.m.) within 3 months of the solstice. Use sunscreens that block UVA and UVB rays. Use UV blocking sunglasses.

Plants- help absorb toxic gases from the air. Easy to grow plants include: spider plant, Boston fern, English ivy, and striped dracaena.

Talk to friends about their healing experiences. Less dramatic kinds of healing are OK. Ask for details. What did the person do, in his or her own mind, that allowed the healing system to take care of the problem? Did they use a treatment? Did the experience change their way of thinking about the body and about dealing with illness in the future?

Electromagnetic hazards- use a computer radiation screen, avoid having a clock or TV close to your head while sleeping.

Gifted and talented healers live in many places. Dr. Weil found an excellent physician, Dr. Fulford, in his own back yard after searching all over the world for a healer.

After doing the 8-week plan in the book, Dr. Weil recommends that you review the changes that you have made in my lifestyle over the last 8 weeks and decide how many of them you want to make permanent. Create a realistic plan that you can stick with.

Breathing

Throughout the book, Dr. Weil provides breathing exercises and describes their benefits. Here are three of the techniques.

1. Simply observe the breath for five minutes. Follow the contour of the inhalation and exhalation cycle. Try to notice the points where one cycle changes into another without trying to change anything.
2. Imagine that with each inhalation the universe is blowing breath into me and with each exhalation withdrawing it. Imagine myself to be the passive recipient of breath. As the universe breathes into me, let myself feel the breath penetrating to every part of my body, even to my fingers and toes.
3. Breathe in and out rapidly through the nose, keeping your mouth lightly closed. Inhalation and exhalation should be equal and short, and you should feel muscular effort at the base of the neck just above the collar bones and at the diaphragm. (Try putting your hands on these spots to get a sense of the movement). The action of the chest should be rapid and mechanical, like a bellows pumping air.

The first time you try this exercise, do it for just fifteen seconds, then breathe normally. Each time you do it, increase the duration by five seconds, until you get up to a full minute. This is real exercise, and you can expect to feel fatigue of the muscles you are using. (Of course, they will become stronger with practice.) You will also begin to feel something else: a subtle but definite movement of energy through the body when you return to normal breathing. You feel it as a vibration or tingling, especially in your arms, along with greater alertness and dissipation of fatigue. Try using some of these breathing exercises instead of caffeine as a pick up in the afternoon.

