

OLD NEWS

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In the past 10 years and particularly over the last few, there has been a tremendous emphasis on better aging and wellness. We have the NIH Aging Center telling us that there is no “magic pill” to prevent aging, but that lifestyle activities and nutrition help us maintain what we have in a healthier state. A large percentage of the population is overweight, and this is associated with debilitating diseases which are made worse in the long run by the extra pounds that a person has to carry around. All the emphasis on health and wellness sounds like new information, and you could infer from all the advertising about various pills, antioxidants, vitamins, and other things you could take that the key to success lies with these modalities.

However, you can go back in history a little bit and read about certain people who had really “broken the code” early on and learned how to stay healthy even during times when vitamins, exercise machines, and medical care was not readily available. What is pertinent about all of this is that the people who were able to stay healthy in past times had a true commitment to doing so. This commitment was strong enough to supercede all of the temptations of the many food “treats” which were available then and which are now presented to us either in advertising or on the grocery shelves.

For the purposes of recommitment to a better diet and lifestyle, I go back from time to time to read Luigi Louis Cornaro’s book on “The Temperate Life” – also entitled “How To Live 100 Years” – which gives a lot of insight into what it takes to stay healthy. Like many of his colleagues during his time, he lived a life which led to him being greatly unhealthy. His physicians told him that if he continued on this pathway, he would certainly die an early death. Having been informed of this and having no desire to pass on early, he sought a better understanding for how he could improve his health. He found that “It is requisite that men should live up to the simplicity dictated by Nature, which teaches us to be content with little, and accustom ourselves to eat no more than is absolutely necessary to support life, remembering that all excess causes disease and leads to poor health.” Cornaro wanted to improve his constitution, shrug off his infirmities, and take the pathway of temperance in eating and drinking.

As part of his early discoveries after making the resolution to be healthier by better food choices, he wanted to determine if what agreed with him in terms of his desires were the same as what made him stay healthy. He noted that things which pleased the palate sometimes disagreed with his stomach and made him feel worse. He soon found that eating fewer and healthier food choices was better for him, particularly when he ate only as much as he could comfortably digest. In other words, he always rose from the table with a desire to eat and drink just a little more.

Compare this pathway to the Okinawans who have a philosophy of eating only 80% of what it takes to make one feel full. Getting up from the table in that manner always leaves you with a slight sense that you could eat a little more to satisfy yourself or fill your stomach. Of course, we know that the Okinawans have the greatest longevity, best health record, and highest number of 100 year olds in their population than any other culture.

At the same time that Cornaro pursued a careful nutritional pathway, he avoided those things which were extreme to his body such as very warm and very cold temperatures, dust, and uncleanness. He paid attention to the amount of rest that he was able to get. He also tried to resolve himself of depression, anger, and other violent passions.

He was able to regulate his eating to the point of taking in about 12 ounces of solid food each day and drinking about 14 ounces of new wine. His menus consisted of meat, vegetables, soups, seafood, breads, and fruits. In those days there was no table sugar or transfat to worry about. He took no vitamin supplements, energy drinks, or cola drinks.

With a simple life and sustained moderate caloric restriction, he lived a healthy life and died at 102 as he predicted. He was born in 1462 and died in 1564. Sometimes “old news” is very much up to date.