Foundations of Health

When we are surrounded by urgent challenges, it’s easy to forget important truths. Urgent action may seem more important than long-term investment in health. The NHS and politicians are of course focussed on treating the ill, hospital capacity, appropriate treatments, and the aim of vaccines for specific immunity.

But what about the long-term determinants of health? Farmers get the environment and feed right for their stock – so what can we do for ourselves? Sleep, sunshine, food, vitamins, exercise and rest are all important.

High quality sleep in darkness is paramount. Eight hours is thought to be good, darkness ensures melatonin production, especially the earlier in the night we start. [www.healthandself.care](http://www.healthandself.care) pp47-48

High quality food, including fresh vegetables and fruit, provides nourishment for the body. Chewing food and eating slowly support good digestion. Sensible sunshine on the skin, fresh air and exercise are vital.

Biology and medical school teach about deficiency diseases, such as rickets (appearing again in cities in Britain) and scurvy, not about optimum health. Anti-oxidants such as Ascorbic Acid AA (Vitamin C) are important in several aspects of the immune system. Interestingly, out of all mammals, humans and apes, guinea pigs and bats lack the last enzyme to produce our own AA so rely on it from food alone. Whereas goats can produce 13g a day! In vitro virucidal, in vivo AA helps support the immune system under pressure.

As a GP in Chard, patients shared with me their home health practices, including the use of Vitamin C, found helpful to shorten the duration of viral illnesses. We used this for many years with anecdotal benefit in aborting colds – 0.5 – 1 gram, twice daily. A review in 2017 by Hemila is **Vitamin C and Infections** Harri Hemila, 2017 Nutrients <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5409678/> backs up our anecdotal use, whilst high dose is supported by the NIH National Cancer institute as safe - Contraindications apparently only are G6PDH deficiency, caution in pre-existing renal disease

Living in Europe, there’s not enough sunshine from September to March for our bodies to make vitamin D at all – now known to have important effects throughout the body, including the immune system – and many of us spend our days indoors. If we have darker skin, our bodies make less, even in sunshine. PHE has recently advised Vitamin D supplementation for everyone during the current crisis of lockdown indoors: 400iu (10micrograms) daily. Larger doses may be helpful, as many people are deficient, advises retired GP Dr Chris Health in Essays in Good Practice. A BMJ Rapid Review article from April 2020 is intriguing <https://www.bmj.com/content/369/bmj.m1548/rr-6>

One day a week away from work is important for refreshment, to release sympathetic drive and move onto parasympathetic rest, repair and digest

Good health long term requires attention – it doesn’t happen by accident – but we mustn’t let the urgent make us forget the important [www.healthandself.care](http://www.healthandself.care) pp157-8. Go Well!