



**HOW TO LIVE A
LONGER,
HEALTHIER
AND HAPPIER LIFE**

A straight-talking health guide

DR. BRET S. PALMER

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HOW TO LIVE A **LONGER, HEALTHIER AND HAPPIER LIFE**

A Straight-Talking Health Guide

First edition

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ISBN: 978-1-4834-2440-8 (e)

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Cover Art: Reese Dante <http://www.reesedante.com>

Lulu Publishing Services rev. date: 1/13/2015

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all of my friends who provided support throughout the writing of this book, and my long-suffering wife, who has put up with the long evenings of me working on this book for the benefit of everyone who is interested in improving their health.

Bret Sheldon Palmer
England
UK
January 2015

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Preface

In this short, simple guide you will find advice on how to change your life in a few easy steps. This guide has been put together so that, by following these simple suggestions, you will maximise your genetic potential to live a longer, healthier and happier life, and increase your chances of living past one hundred years. While living past 100 cannot be guaranteed, improving your chances can be.

The advice in this book is already well known and is frequently dispensed by the medical profession, physiologists, sociologists and many self-help groups and charities. A common way of offering basic advice is through long books which try to improve just one or two aspects of your life. This guide aims to be different. It is a collection of all the good advice you might find on the High Street as well as in the scientific literature, but it is presented in an easy-to-read and accessible format without all of the jargon.

This book starts with the most important aspect of health improvement, which is a quick review of ‘free will’ and ‘acceptance’, with the remaining areas being split up into three main sections covering body, mind and soul. Each section has a number of practical steps you can take and each step gives a short explanation of why you need to change this particular aspect in your life, with a list of items you need to change. You may already be doing some of the things this book covers, but I would advise you to still read these areas of the book as this will reinforce what is good and healthy in your life.

This book aims to give you the facts and conclusions from decades of research performed by the scientific community. Further information can always be sought and a list of helpful websites and references is given at the back of this book.

On a more personal note, I would like to thank my friends and family for their patience over the past few years while I have compiled the information within this book.

About the Author

I have had an unusual route into medicine. After leaving secondary school with very few qualifications during the tough recession of the 1990s I became a filing clerk in the court service. After a number of years I realised I needed to pursue my passion for science so I took myself to night-school to study A-level chemistry, and this gave me the qualifications to study at Leeds University. I worked for British Nuclear Fuels in Cumbria for a year during this degree. I eventually left Leeds with a master's degree in chemistry.

After my science degree I took a little time off from studying and ended up gaining knowledge of the fitness industry by working as a fitness instructor and personal trainer. This allowed me spare time to study for the entrance exams for medical school, and I eventually gained entry into Bart's and The London Medical School, London. During my medical school days I spent some time with the European Astronaut Centre in Cologne, Germany, as part of my medical elective. After qualifying as a medical doctor, I then worked in hospital-based medicine for 4 years, mainly working in emergency medicine and care of the elderly.

My hospital experience reinforced for me the maxim of 'prevention is better than cure'. Most of the cases I dealt with, especially in emergency medicine, were wholly preventable. The most surprising aspect of most of these cases was that the patients had no idea of the basic life changes they needed to make in order to improve their lives for the long term. I quickly realised that, in order to make any difference, I would have to specialise in public health. Part of my training as a specialist public health doctor was to study at the

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London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, an institution which specialises in public health. I presently work within the public health training programme in the south-west of England. I also perform some voluntary duties at the Great Western Hospital, Swindon, England, working in the sexual health department in the evening, helping to provide services directly to the public. I also teach and tutor medical students about public health at the University of Bristol.

The information in this book has been collected over many years throughout my journey to becoming a public health specialist.

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SECTION ONE: What Everyone Needs To Know

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Free Will

In order to change your life there are many things you just have to accept (see next section on Acceptance), the most important of which is that every human on this planet is free-thinking but is NOT autonomous in their actions. Much is said by politicians about us all having free will and that it is up to us to choose what we want to be, so failure is really a failure of our character. I hope to give a short explanation of why this is untrue and show that our politicians have even less free will than the general public.

There are many explanations given as to why the majority of people fail to change their lives around for the better; for example, they fail to lose weight, or fail to get the relationship or the career that they want. There is a host of theories out there as to why some people are successful in achieving a goal while others are not. All I will say on the subject of success or failure is that it is all relative. Just because you don't become a lottery winner or you're not a big shot in your chosen field, be it acting, teaching or zoo-keeping, does not mean you have failed in life. There are many successful celebrities, bankers and entrepreneurs out there, but many of them are not winners in life. They may, for example, have failed to gain improved health or, more importantly, happiness.

So why don't you have free will? Let me explain this with an example – you! Let's start with a simple question: what are your present circumstances? In other words, what job do you have? Where do you live? How much debt are you in? What types of friends do you have?...

No one has chosen their circumstances; you are a product of your experiences and your environment. How you behave if you feel ill, win money, have an argument, are mistreated, are complemented, in fact all of your desires, beliefs and intentions, are all based on your previous experiences in your environment. As an example, let's take what you did yesterday. I would guess that it was just another day, you did what you were supposed to do, not much more and nothing less. What time you woke up, what you had to eat, how you got to work etc. had all been decided for you. You didn't, out of free will, choose to do something different.

Even your level of education is based on the level your parents had. If you are now sitting with a large smile on your face because you went to college and your parents didn't then you can stop smiling; you did what you did because you fell into the right peer group and were pushed along in that direction. The job you do now is also not just choice; you do the job you are doing because of your past experiences. Most doctors, lawyers, accountants, even politicians are there because that is what some members of their family did or what their families wanted. Politicians always behave in a way that is expected of them; they are fulfilling their role in life just like an automaton, pleasing their social group and acting how they are expected to. Any deviation from the norm means that they will be unelected. The difference between you and a politician is that your choices are not made public and you may get the backing of your social group, but only if they are supportive of your goals.

Before you think *why did I get this book if I can't change anything in my life anyway*, this book is about first accepting what is there. Only when we realise that free will is, in reality, very limited can we then stand up and say enough is enough. If you really want to change then you need to demand change. People who realise this are the ones who go to university when their parents and peer group didn't, or are the individuals who break free from what

is expected of them to allow them to do something completely different. Everything else is nothing more than habit. This book is about changing lifelong habits and stopping you from running on automatic; but you have to work at it and start with one step at a time.

Free will may be a lot more limited than we think, but then it comes down to us making damn sure that our automatic habits benefit and not hinder us and that we make conscious and positive changes in our lives.

Acceptance

We all have difficulty in accepting certain aspects of our lives but it is absolutely essential to accept these in order for us to find happiness. The inability to accept or let go of negative events that have occurred in our lives can destroy our future and our ability to adapt to upcoming events. Below I list various pointers on what we all need to do. After reading them, think about what negative events have occurred in your life and how they have impacted on you. Have these events stopped you from doing things or achieving your goals in life, and if so how?

- Accept parts of your life that cannot be changed, for example your genes.
- Accept that we all age and will eventually die.
- Accept that the ones we love will, at various times, become ill and may die, and plans may not work out as we expect them to.
- Accept that life will always throw us a curve ball which we won't see coming – that car crash, the house fire or other misfortune.
- Accept that life can be unfair and that we all need to find closure for an unjust event to eventually allow us to come to terms with and accept what has happened.

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- Accept that once you have accepted all of the things you can't change, you are in a stronger position to deal with the things you can change.
- Don't live in the past by hoarding too many old memories; look to the future otherwise you will be unable to enjoy life.

However

- Life can be trying at times, but this is not a reason to live our lives in fear or in anger.
- If you feel events are destroying your life then you hold the key in choosing to get help from your doctor, health services, good friends, charities and helpful members of your family.
- Accept that all people are different and have different beliefs and lifestyles, many of which you might not share, but if they are not hurting anyone (mentally or physically) then be happy for them and live your own life.
- You don't have to settle for less or accept your 'place' in life – as you improve your body, mind and character you will become happier and opportunities will come your way.
- Don't accept prejudice; you are perfect in every way, so never make excuses for who or what you are.
- Don't accept any rudeness directed at yourself or others.
- Be kind to others and respond to the kindness of others with gratitude. A smile goes a long way.

Accept that treating others the way you yourself would like to be treated is of paramount importance.

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SECTION TWO: A Healthy Life by Improving Your Body

Understanding Your Genetics

Whether we like it or not, we are all products of our genes. Medical technology is able to perform many great feats, but changing our genes is not one of them, not even in the foreseeable future. We all have genes that make our bodies more susceptible to at least some form of disease. Only a few of us are unlucky enough to have a genetic disease which will prevent us from living up to 100 years of age. For most of the human population, long life is about limiting the effects of the environment on our bodies so that we can prevent, for as long as possible, the onset of any genetically susceptible diseases.

Most cancers, heart attacks, strokes etc. are diseases that come about due to smoking, excess alcohol, poor diet and lack of exercise. To find out what you are at high risk of developing it is worth looking at your parents, grandparents and other direct blood relatives (relatives that have married into the family, such as a brother-in-law or sister-in-law or an uncle or aunt by marriage as opposed to direct blood line will not affect your genetics). Look at the medical problems they have or, if they have died, what disease/s they died from.

For example, if all four of your grandparents smoked and one died of a stroke, two from a heart attack and one from cancer then, as all of these diseases are shown to be directly linked to smoking, you know that if you smoke you are highly likely to suffer or die from these diseases as you are a product of your, and their, genes. After all, if you don't change your environment then the damage caused

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will be the same as in your parents' and grandparents' generation. Below are a few pointers to help you understand your genes.

- Try to find out all the medical problems of your parents and if possible your grandparents.
- If you do have an inheritable disease, find out as much about it as possible. Make sure you understand new developments affecting that disease. It is your life so make sure you get the best health outcome you can.
- Find out if exercise, diet or other lifestyle factors affect the disease and, if so, in what way.
- Most diseases or conditions have an association or society which can give you a great deal of information. Also they can put you in contact with other people who have the same condition so you don't have to feel alone.
- Remember, if you are very lucky and all your grandparents lived to over 100 years old then this does not mean you can smoke, drink, take drugs or have sleepless nights and expect to live past 100 years.
- Don't live a life of paranoia about disease; being happy and healthy will extend your life. Death as well as disease is an inevitable part of life. Don't live in fear of what might come, but make the most of what you have (read the Acceptance chapter again).
- If you find a lump on your body or cough up blood, pass blood in your stool or urine or are experiencing unintentional weight loss or any other problem that concerns you then

seek advice from your family doctor immediately. DO NOT IGNORE IT!

- Make sure you know as much as possible about any procedures you will have done to you. Ask about the risks as well as the benefits.
- The most important message is: it doesn't matter if you have good or bad genes, if you are healthy now you can extend the length of time you are in good health by following the advice in this short guide. If you are in a state of ill health then following the advice in this book may well be beneficial to your quality of life. If there are any aspects of this book which may conflict with the management of your disease then ask your doctor or nurse for clarification. As a general rule, most diseases improve with reduction of stress, improved diet, increased exercise and increased sleep.

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**SECTION THREE:
A Happier Life by
Improving Your Mind**

Learn How to Relax Part 2 – The Art of Sleep

We all have busy lives and learning how to switch off and relax is of paramount importance. Learning how to deal with stress can lower the risk of many problems such as heart disease and depression to name just two.

- Try where possible to keep to regular hours, even at weekends. You can still have a lie-in and enjoy lazy days but your body has to know what is going on.
- If you exercise your brain during your work then you have to tire your body out as well. Regular exercise is a great way of getting your mind to relax.
- When it comes to bedtime have a routine and keep to it. Never have a television or computer in your bedroom. Bedrooms are for relaxing and sleeping. When you go to bed and are unable to sleep then read a book or get up and do something else until you start to feel tired.
- Don't eat for three hours before sleep and try to avoid sugary and caffeine-loaded drinks in the evening.
- You should be having enough sleep so you can wake up before your alarm clock; on average this means between 7 and 9 hours. The amount of sleep you need declines with advancing age and is very individual to you. If you are always woken by your alarm clock then you are not getting

enough sleep. Sleep is extremely important as it allows your body and brain to rebuild.

- One form of sleep usually not practised today is to allow a completely natural sleep pattern. A natural sleep pattern occurs when you try to sleep for over 10 to 12 hours a day. For example, if you go to bed between 7pm and 8pm, after a couple of weeks you will soon wake up between 1am and 3am for a few hours and then go back to bed for a second sleep until about 8am. Some people suddenly click back to this pattern and spend hours trying to get back to sleep, but it's better if you don't. If you are wide awake at 2am get up and do something. Before the invention of street lighting this period was used by couples to make love and then allow themselves to drift into the second sleep cycle. In today's modern life it is very difficult to follow this sleeping pattern, but it is important that you are aware of it as many people think they suffer from insomnia, when in fact they have just clicked over into a more natural sleep pattern.
- If you and your partner are fighting over who has most of the blankets then just have two separate double duvets.
- If your partner snores, suggest a visit to see the family doctor. There may be various medical reasons for snoring which your doctor can help with. If your GP can't help, and the snoring is becoming intolerable, then it is OK to consider sleeping in separate bedrooms, but only if it is acceptable to both parties. If one partner is being pushed into another room for any other reason then this is not good for the long-term foundation of your relationship.

Apart from getting enough sleep and keeping regular hours there are many other aspects of your life you can change in order to help you relax:

- If you have a stressful job, try to have a proper lunch away from your work area. Eat slowly and, if possible, with other people.
- Using social media via phone or computer is great to keep in contact with individuals or groups but it has its place; your life should not be ruled by it. Also, social media should not be used as an exercise in narcissism (self-love). Informing people of what's happening in your life, if that's what you want to do, is OK but should be kept down to once or twice a day. Live your life first with the people you see every day, then spend a short time with people you have never met in person.
- Always sit at a table to eat and not in front of the television, make eating a sociable experience at the table, talk to your other half or the other people you live with. If you live on your own try to eat with friends two to three times a week where possible. Cook with your friends.
- A power nap in the afternoon is great if it is just for 10 to 30 minutes. If it is longer than that then you are probably not getting enough sleep during the night.
- Don't stand if you can sit and don't sit if you can lie down.

**SECTION FOUR:
A Longer Life by Improving
Your Character**

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Morals

Your moral code has nothing to do with religion. Religions have tried over the centuries to package morals into what a particular church believes is right or wrong. Different communities can put emphasis on different moral values, and moral codes have been around far longer than any present day religion. Morals are the intrinsic fabric of human society and only a very basic understanding is needed to make your life healthier and happier. Humans have evolved to be social creatures, to live in interactive groups and to work together for their overall benefit. This is why actions or behaviour which may disadvantage our society feel inherently wrong and why, if we misbehave, our conscience can get to us.

There are many different takes on morality which try to organise our moral thoughts and guide our moral behaviour. Most moral codes in the past have assumed that we are all amoral (without a moral compass) and need strict guidance because, given half the chance, we will all perform unspeakable acts. This is no longer the accepted view in many societies as most educated individuals are not religious and many people today do not believe in God.

A person does not have to follow a religion to have a moral code; everyone, regardless of teaching, social class and upbringing, has an inbuilt moral code. This moral code may be buried due to a poor, suppressive or violent environment, but it is still there. All humans have evolved to be social creatures; for example, it's natural for us to respond to the cry of a child.

When we break our own internal moral code this makes us despondent and unhappy, and can lead to some very self-destructive behaviour, which then automatically means we break our own internal moral code again, leading to a spiral of self-destruction which, if not broken, can result in depression. Understanding what our intrinsic internal moral codes are is of extreme importance to our happiness, as well as our health.

There is only one moral code or rule you have to follow if you want a healthy and happy life. This rule used to be called the golden rule in ancient Greece and the modern form is:

Treat others the way you yourself would like to be treated.

All other moral codes, rules or laws either come from this rule or collectively can be condensed into this rule.

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SECTION FIVE: Future Methods of Life Extension

SECTION SIX:
For Public Officials and
Other Movers and Shakers

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