

Fourth Edition

Invitation to **Holistic Health**

A GUIDE TO LIVING A BALANCED LIFE

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Preface

There has been a steady evolution of holistic health since the publication of the first edition of this book. Therapies that were viewed with curiosity and suspicion have gained respect as credible approaches to healing. It now is recognized that health and illness are affected by all components of an individual—body, mind, spirit—and that efforts to promote health and treat illness benefit from an integration of conventional Western medicine with complementary and alternative therapies. Consumers increasingly desire and are using options beyond conventional Western medicine. Optimum holistic health has become a desirable goal in the health-care system.

With his statement, “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts,” the philosopher Aristotle laid the foundation for our understanding of holism. When applied to health, holism implies that the health and harmony of the body, mind, and spirit create a higher, richer state of health than would be achieved with attention to just one part, such as physical functioning. A synergy is created in which $1 + 1 + 1 = 3$ or 5 or more. Although some people equate it with the use of complementary and alternative therapies, holistic health is a philosophy of care in which a wide range of approaches are used to establish and maintain balance within an individual. Complementary and alternative therapies may be part of the approach to holistic health promotion, but so can healthy lifestyle choices, counseling, prayer, conventional Western medical treatments, and other interventions.

While a holistic approach to health may seem unquestionable, we need to recognize that historically it has not been reflected in the U.S. health-care system that has functioned within the biomedical model. Rather than a health-care model, the biomedical model has more resembled a sick care model, built upon certain tenets, highly valued by scientific minds, that include:

- *Mechanism.* This belief advanced the concept that the human body is much like a machine, explainable in terms of physics and chemistry.

Health is determined by physical structure and function, and disease is a malfunction of the physical part. Malfunctions and malformations are undesirable. Disease is treated by repairing the malformed or malfunctioning organ or system with physical or chemical interventions (e.g., drugs, surgery). Nonphysical influences on health status are not considered, and healing, dysfunction, and deformity serve no purpose.

- *Materialism.* Within this thinking, the human body and its state of health is influenced only by what is seen and measurable. Physical malfunction is the cause of illness; therefore illness is addressed by concrete treatments. Emotional and spiritual states are considered to have no impact on health and healing.
- *Reductionism.* This perspective reduces the human body to isolated parts rather than a unified whole. Treatment of a health condition focuses on the individual organ or system rather than the whole being. Good health is judged as having body systems that function well, despite one's feelings or spiritual state.

The first major challenge to the biomedical model occurred in the 1960s, when the relationship of body and mind began to be discussed. In retrospect, it is difficult to believe that the medical community was skeptical that the mind could cause illness, yet the resistance to accepting the body–mind connection was real. Similarly, recognition of the role of the spirit in the cause and treatment of illness has met similar skepticism. As the dust settles, however, health-care practitioners are understanding the profound, dynamic relationship of body, mind, and spirit to health and healing and moving toward a holistic model of health care.

Holistic health recognizes that the human being is comprised of integrated, interacting components of body, mind, and spirit. Growing numbers of practitioners are recognizing this and expanding their approaches to health promotion and disease management. In addition, consumers are adopting more practices that impact their total beings. The meaning of health and the measures used to achieve it certainly have undergone a transition.

About This Book

Invitation to Holistic Health offers guidance for the journey to whole person health. There are no special formulas provided that guarantee eternal youth and freedom from illness. There is no revolutionary diet or plan that will change your life in 30 days or less. No exotic substances that you can use to develop a new you will be found among the pages of this book. Instead, solid principles

for building a strong foundation for optimal health are presented with practical, evidence-based advice that you can easily adopt and integrate into your life.

The book is divided into four parts. In the first part, “Strengthening Your Inner Resources,” practices that can build your body’s reserves and help it to function optimally are discussed. You will be guided through a self-assessment of your health habits so that you can determine areas that may need special attention. The realities of good nutrition are examined along with an in-depth look at dietary supplements. Exercise is approached from a body, mind, and spirit perspective. Likewise, the important activity of enhancing your immune system is considered from a mind–body framework. Methods to flow with the inescapable reality of stress are discussed.

“Developing Healthy Lifestyle Practices,” is the second part of this book. The many complex factors that influence your health status as you interact with the world beyond your body are addressed in chapters on topics such as growing healthy relationships, family survival skills, spirituality, humor, touch, and the environment. In recognition of the significant impact of work on our lives and our changing attitude toward it, a chapter is dedicated to balancing work and life.

The third part of this book, “Taking Charge of Challenges to the Body, Mind, and Spirit,” offers information to equip you to be proactive in keeping yourself in balance. The hidden meaning of symptoms is explored to help you learn about the factors behind your health conditions. Practical advice is offered on how you can work in partnership with your health-care provider to ensure you get the best care possible. Transitions associated with menopause are examined, along with a wide range of approaches to manage the symptoms that may be experienced. Interesting insights into gambling, drugs, overeating, and other addictions are shared. Skills for being an effective, healthy caregiver are presented.

With the growing use of nonconventional therapies, the fourth part of this book, “Safe Use of Complementary and Alternative Therapies,” offers a review of these therapies based on scientific evidence. The purpose, benefits, and related precautions of the major types of therapies are presented to promote the sensible use of these products and practices. Chapters discuss the use of alternative medical systems, nutritional supplements, herbal medicine, aromatherapy, mind–body therapies, manipulative and body-based therapies, and energy therapies to offer practical insights into the safe, effective use of these popular therapies. The validity of these therapies based on current research is included to guide safe, effective use. There is emphasis on the importance of an integrative approach to health care, in which the best of conventional Western medicine and complementary and alternative therapies are utilized together.

The appendix offers extensive resources that can aid you in being an informed health-care consumer.

A useful approach to using this book is to give it an initial fast read from cover to cover. This can be followed by a focus on chapters that address specific interests and needs. Although some of the chapters may not pertain to you directly (for instance, if you're not a caregiver, you may not have a keen interest in the "Surviving Caregiving" chapter), you may find that a quick review of the chapter could acquaint you with its content so that you'll recall it in the future if you or people you know are faced with this issue. You'll probably find that the rich facts and resources provided make this book a great reference for your personal library.

This edition includes updates of scientific evidence supporting, as well as debunking, specific therapies and products. Each chapter contains a "Tip for Practitioners" that offers considerations to those assisting people in their holistic health journeys. Recommended readings and resources are included with each chapter to assist in exploring the topic deeper and obtaining more information.



Acknowledgments

When the first edition of *Invitation to Holistic Health* was written, comprehensive books on this topic were rare. At that time, a group of professionals who were carving new paths in the holistic health arena shared their expertise and assisted in laying the foundation for this book. Appreciation is given to these individuals for their contributions:

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