

What We Need Reflects Who We Really Are

Michael Cheikin MD

Part of being human, with our superior intellect, and part of our being American, with our fierce sense of independence and freedom sometimes causes us to forget how much we are a dependent upon nature and a part of the universe. An examination of what we need first to just survive, and second to reach our full potential as human beings, can shed light on where we came from and who we really are.

We need oxygen. In fact, of all the "nutrients", our need for oxygen is most immediate. Losing our supply for just minutes is fatal. What is the source of oxygen? Plants, which use the sun's energy to convert carbon dioxide back to oxygen. So, ultimately, we need plants, not only to eat, but to keep the earth habitable for humans.

We need the sun. The sun is the ultimate source of light, heat, and energy. Without sunlight, we would lack Vitamin D and other benefits, that would eventually turn our bones to jello and cause our immune systems to severely dysfunction. Of the "food, clothing and shelter", the sun represents the clothing and shelter parts. Without the warmth of the sun, we need to be indoors or bound up in thick clothing. Even animals that do not generate their own heat, such as reptiles, need to bask in the sun, or go into hibernation.

We need darkness and sleep. Without a period of darkness and rest every day (i.e. night), virtually every system of our body would cease to function.

In fact, there are some current theories that one of the causes of our sleep problems, weight problems, and other chronic medical conditions is that we don't sleep dark enough, long enough, or follow the seasons. Fire, and the light bulb, two of the hallmarks of our human intellect, may be a hidden cause of illness.

We need bacteria. In fact of the trillions and trillions of cells that make up our body, only 10% are really us. The rest are the bacteria (and other organisms) that cover our skin, and fill our guts. We evolved in a bacteria-laden environment, and were designed to carry around three pounds of bacteria in our gut. Without these symbiotic creatures, others would (and do) take over and make us ill, and are for some the causes of serious medical conditions such as lupus, rheumatoid arthritis and other autoimmune conditions.

We need gravity. Not only to be able to walk,

but to maintain our bones, our muscles, and other vital tissues.

We need to move. Immobility for the young limits intellectual development. For the elderly, it can cause death. A hip fracture in the elderly is considered a medical emergency, not because of the broken bone, but because of the devastating effect immobility can cause to a frail system in a matter of hours or days.

Regarding "food", there are several things we need. The most important being: water, vitamins and minerals, bioflavenoids (from fruits and vegetables), essential amino acids, essential fats, and then proteins and carbohydrates. What we do not need is the sugar, salt, genetically modified foods, hydrogenated oils, and other chemicals that are overwhelming our meals, childrens' TV commercials (outlawed in Europe until age 12), and our health system.

We need information. Information is power. It enables us to make the best choices as life gets more complicated.

We need truth. We need to know what's real. We can only go for so long on based on false understandings, lies, or denial. The truths that we don't face in this generation are passed on to future generations through our psychology and ecology.

We need play. Sometimes it is called recreation; sometimes "intellectual stimulation". But without it, in childhood, or in old age, our minds wither and our creativity and specialness are not realized.

I believe we need music and song. Ever notice how every religion has music and song as a part of it's ritual? I've always thought of religion as a source these nutrients, especially as most of us don't have time for much of it during the week, expect perhaps in the car or the shower.

We need stories. When young, we need to hear them; when old, we need to tell them. It is the way that we pass on the subtle aspects of our humanity from generation to generation. Before we had our writing, there was an oral tradition that passed on this knowledge.

We need comedy and tragedy. These forms of story exaggerate aspects of being human, enabling us to relieve tension and clarify issues that lie below consciousness.

We need art and beauty. While having many definitions, I think of art as an appreciation of the

beauty of life itself, where one person, the artist, shares his/her own perception with others. A great piece of art changes us forever. And connects us to the artist, and to all others who share that art.

We need love and connection. While some species that develop in eggs do not need their mothers, we do. We need love and nurturing. We need community. Our corporate culture tends to ignore or minimize our commitments to each other, and yet people who are connected live longer and healthier. And better.

We need compassion and forgiveness. Without these two qualities of mind and spirit, we can get stuck in the past, or get stuck in hate. Ultimately these states of mind hurt us, by making us feel disconnected, or by causing a negative chain of physiological responses in our minds and bodies.

We need to have a time of reflection, quiet or repose. The speed of life can distract us from what is really important. As Charles Hobbs says in his book, Time Power (see reading list), we tend to whittle away our lives on "urgent trivialities", letting them steal time from the things that are most important to us. Tending to our thoughts, observing our thoughts as if they are as real as material objects (which they may be!) is an important, thought overlooked practice. (see Steiner's How to Know Higher Worlds... for more information on this idea). Journalling is a wonderful method of reflection.

Finally, we need to have sense of mystery, if not spirituality. While we can get away without it, those who see their lives as a part of a greater whole live life more fully. Remembering death as a part of life is the ultimate reality-check.

It can keep us present, and it is the litmus test for all of our thoughts and actions. Our current society is based on thought and philosophy that is thousands of year old, based on reason. Our scientific advances beginning in the 1700's have led us to think of ourselves as biochemical machines. But as you can see above, we are connected to the earth, and the universe, in far more ways than we realize. We are literally made of stardust. Instead of thinking of ourselves as "human beings seeking a spiritual existence", let us think of ourselves as "spiritual beings seeking a human existence". Perhaps this is the most important nutrient of all.

For More Information

See my article entitled "Elimination and Detoxification", which reviews these concepts, the complement of nutrition, from both a biochemical and spiritual point of view.

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- o Becker, Ernest: The Denial of Death. New York: MacMillan, 1972. ISBN 0684-832-402
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- o Hanley, JL et al: Tired of Being Tired. New York: Putnam, 2001. ISBN 0399-147-497.
- o Pizzorno, Joseph: Total Wellness: Improve Your Health by Understanding and Cooperating with Your Body's Natural Healing Systems. Prima Publishing, 1997, ISBN 0761-510-94X.
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Michael Cheikin MD is a holistic physician, Board Certified in Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation ("Physiatry"), Pain Management, Spinal Cord Medicine and Electrodiagnostic Medicine. He has provided leadership to several local medical institutions. Dr. Cheikin utilizes energy medicine (yoga, acupuncture and NMT), nutrition, as well as other "alternative" modalities to enhance the healing of obscure, chronic and severe problems. He is Medical Director of the Center for Optimal Health (c4oh.org), a Holistic Health Center in Plymouth Meeting; 610-239-9901 or drc@c4oh.org.