



Are You Healthy?

by Robert S. Ivker, DO, ABIHM, FAAFP, HTCP

Your answer to this question is most likely based on whether or not you suffer from symptoms of disease, or have a chronic illness or nagging condition that never quite goes away. If you don't, then you may automatically assume you are healthy, since the conditioning that the majority of us have experienced since childhood has taught us to define health as the absence of illness. Yet the words health, heal, and holy, are all derived from the same Anglo-Saxon word, haelen, which means, to make whole. Viewed from this perspective, two questions that more directly and accurately address the issue of health are, "Do you love your life?" and "Are you happy to be alive?"

Health is far more than simply a matter of not feeling ill, or in the case of most of the patients I treat, being free of sinus, asthma, or allergy symptoms. It is the daily experience of wholeness and balance -- a state of being fully alive in body, mind, and spirit. Such a condition is also called optimal or holistic health -- wellness or thriving.

Holistic health results from a state of harmony and balance in the physical, environmental, mental, emotional, spiritual, and social aspects of your life. When this harmonious balance

is present, you will find yourself naturally and spontaneously experiencing the unlimited and unimpeded free flow of life force energy throughout your body, mind, and spirit.

This life force energy has been recognized and referred to throughout history in almost every culture of the world. For more than 5,000 years, it has been known as Qi ("chee") in China and prana in India, and has been the essential component of both traditional Chinese medicine and Ayurvedic medicine

(the traditional medicine of India). In Japan, this same energy is known as ki, while in the spiritual healing tradition of Judaism, the Hebrew word for it is chai. Other synonymous terms are pneuma, the vital current, and, in the Star Wars movie trilogies, The Force.

Here in the Western world, the phrase that comes closest to capturing the feeling generated by this energy is unconditional love, regarded by holistic physicians as life's most powerful healer. The corollary of this belief is that the perceived loss of love from family, friends, God, or from oneself, is our greatest contributor to physical, emotional, and spiritual disease and imbalance. These beliefs: Love heals, and the perceived loss of love is our greatest health risk, comprise the foundation of medicine's newest specialty -- Integrative Holistic Medicine.

In 1980, as a 33-year old family physician, I had been in a solo practice for five years after completing a family practice residency. I was a well-trained board-certified family doctor who believed that the conventional medicine that I'd been taught was state-of-the-art. That belief was quickly dispelled by my ENT (Ear, Nose and Throat) physician. While consulting him about

my worsening sinus problems (the sinus infections were occurring more frequently and were less responsive to antibiotics), he told me that although he could offer me surgery, he couldn't guarantee a cure. Then he delivered what felt like a death sentence, "Basically Rob, you're going to have to live with it."

After recovering from the initial shock, I made a commitment to cure this ailment that was not only making my life miserable -- but doing the same to almost 40 million Americans. It has been one of our nation's most common chronic conditions since 1981, and is currently the world's most common respiratory problem.

Although I knew of no one who had successfully cured chronic sinusitis ("chronic" is a medical euphemism for "incurable"), I was determined not to live the rest of my life in this compromised state. The first step was to strengthen my belief that it was possible to cure this so-called incurable condition. The next step in my scientific investigation was to eliminate milk and dairy from my diet. That meant no more evening bowls of ice cream, a habit that I'd continued since childhood. What a huge difference that made!

Seeing such a significant improvement with my sinus symptoms greatly strengthened my belief that it was possible to cure chronic sinusitis. This change was soon followed by experimenting with saline nasal sprays, nasal irrigation, negative-ion generators/air cleaners, lots of vitamin C and other supplements. Although I was getting better, it wasn't until I started working on my emotional and spiritual health (especially the life-changing discovery that I'd been blessed with the gift of a healing touch), that the mission was accomplished.

It took seven years for me to feel as if I had succeeded in curing sinus disease. (With a committed effort it now takes most of my patients three to six months.) But far more than fixing a broken part, I had embarked on a lifelong journey of healing my life. I had also begun training in what would soon become a new specialty, integrative holistic medicine -- the art and science of healing that addresses the whole person -- body, mind, and spirit; and practicing what is today a certified energy medicine modality -- Healing Touch.

Optimal health for me manifested as the experience of:

- unlimited energy and vitality

- harmony with my environment
- peace of mind
- a job I loved which challenged me to fulfill my greatest potential
- high self-esteem
- a greater degree of intimacy with my wife
- a heightened sense of purpose and connection with God

While I had set out to cure a chronic physical dysfunction, I'd learned from my own experience and the experience of the majority of my patients that a successful outcome usually entails a healing process resulting in a state of being fully alive -- a condition I describe as relaxed vitality. It's a synthesis of a rejuvenated body, a peaceful mind, an opened heart, and a soothed soul. In one word -- HAPPINESS!

In 1997, while writing a book on men's health entitled, *Thriving*, I developed a holistic health self-test. It's a questionnaire that I've continued to refine over the past 11 years. It has since been adopted by the American Board of Integrative Holistic Medicine (ABIH) as part of their certification process for physicians, and many of these board-certified holistic doctors are administering it to their patients as part of their intake information along with a complete medical history. It is also included in the curriculum of the Healing Touch Program (HTP).

The ABIHM Holistic Health Questionnaire (a reprint follows this article) provides the "test-taker" with a much better understanding of the meaning of holistic health, and helps to direct them toward this experience of optimal well-being. As you respond to the questions of this self-test, you can quickly see where your strengths and weaknesses lie.

If you're seriously considering making a commitment to improving your health, I'd recommend filling out the questionnaire just before you begin and at 3-month intervals to evaluate your progress. You may want to take at least the first month to focus most of your attention on the physical and environmental aspects of health (Healing Your Body), before moving on to the mental and emotional (Healing Your Mind) and the spiritual and social (Healing Your Spirit) components of health. Although each aspect of your life is essential to your overall sense of well-being, if you're physically uncomfortable or in pain, it's extremely difficult to enjoy your life.

In the years ahead, I plan to devote my professional life to providing others with information and resources that will empower them to enhance their state of physical, environmental, mental, emotional, spiritual, and social health, as I do the same for myself.

About the author:

Dr. Rob Ivker is a physician healer, health educator, and author. He is a board-certified holistic physician (ABIHM), a Fellow of the American Academy of Family Physicians, Healing Touch Certified Practitioner (HTCP), and certified laughter yoga leader (Dr. Kataria's School of Laughter Yoga). He has been practicing medicine since 1972. For the past 20 years his holistic medical practice has focused on the treatment of respiratory disease – chronic sinusitis, asthma, and allergies – and the creation of optimal health.

Dr. Ivker is the Co-Founder and Past-President of the American Board of Integrative Holistic Medicine (ABIHM); co-creator of the Annual ABIHM Review Course, ABIHM certification examination, and the ABIHM evidence-based curriculum. He is also a Past-President of the American Holistic Medical Association (AHMA). Dr. Ivker is a former Assistant Clinical Professor in the Department of Family Medicine and is currently a Clinical Instructor in the Department of Otolaryngology at the University of Colorado School of Medicine.

He is the author of four editions of the best-selling *SINUS SURVIVAL: The Holistic Medical Treatment for Sinusitis, Allergies, and Colds*. Dr. Ivker has also written six other books, and in November 2008 he published a new e-book, **LOVE YOUR NOSE NATURALLY: Integrative Holistic Medicine for Sinus Infections, Chronic & Fungal Sinusitis, Allergies, and Colds**. The e-book is currently available on his website:

www.physicianhealer.com; and will soon be followed by *LOVE YOUR LUNGS NATURALLY: Integrative Holistic Medicine for Asthma*.

Married for 40 years to Harriet, a psychiatric social worker, they have two daughters and sons-in-law and three grandchildren. They live in Littleton, CO.