

Eight Weeks to Optimum Health

A Proven Program for Taking Full Advantage of Your Body's Natural Healing Power

by Andrew Weil

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I had my own bout with good health a number of years ago, so I'm not entirely unfamiliar with the basic concepts in *Eight Weeks to Optimum Health*. I had become convinced that my body was out to kill me. The signs were obvious — it was drawing up plans for my execution — and decisive action was called for. I threw out everything in my kitchen that my stomach craved — processed foods, animal or otherwise — and hauled in as much fresh, preferably organic, produce as would fit. I dropped the chocolate, the alcohol, the occasional smoking. I bought running shoes and actually used them, developing an enviable pair of sculpted muscular legs and a toned midriff. A memorable evening months later, out to dinner with friends, I ordered a bottle of wine and prime rib and that was the end of my flirtation with good health.

Dr. Weil's program to better health has much to recommend it. The tolerable time frame combined with his common-sense advice make the goals of each of his eight weeks seem completely achievable. For the first week he asks you (after more than a few lively testimonials to the success of his program) to take some small steps: use olive oil instead of other oils in cooking, eat broccoli and fish, take vitamin C, walk ten minutes a day

and "observe one's breathing". Week two expands upon these steps and includes switching to purified water, adding whole grains, soybean and carotene supplements to the diet, and participating in a one-day news fast. ("I do not want you to become uninformed about the state of the world," Weil writes, "but I note that paying attention to news commonly results in anxiety, rage, and other emotional states that probably impede the healing system." It sounds like a bit of unsupported new-age theorizing, but he does have a point.)

Weeks three, four and five see more fruits and vegetables incorporated into your diet, soy-based products substituting for meat, and garlic and ginger introduced in various applications. Recipes in the commentaries for each week are well-presented, the ingredients are common to most stores and instructions are easy to follow (while I've had ginger-carrot soup before, in the context of the book the recipe is somehow new and awe-inspiring). In these three weeks you'll also encounter breathing exercises, simple yoga, a trip to a sauna and, as an option, a one-day fruit fast. (By this, Weil means that you should avoid everything but fruit, water, herbal tea and vitamin C. At the end of the eight weeks you can advance to an optional one-day water-only fast.)

The work in weeks six and seven (and now it is beginning to feel like work) includes further improvement in diet (cooked greens), exercise (a forty-minute walk five days a week) and mental state (he focuses on volunteering and forgiving in week seven). In week eight, you are

asked, as you might guess, to review your accomplishments and look to the unavoidable ninth week. There are no recommendations for a celebratory drink or cigar, and the news fast requirement is now an entire week. The truly converted can proceed to the remainder of the book, which addresses readers in specific age groups or living under particular circumstances (frequent travelers or city dwellers, for example). A modest appendix lists resources for the more obscure items to which the author refers.

Although Weil devotes most of the book to generally agreed-upon steps toward improving health, there are items that will invigorate the skeptic. However, the many enthusiastic letters and anecdotal accounts scattered throughout detract significantly from the book. To wit, a woman with multiple sclerosis describes how a trip to a clinic specializing in natural ayurveda (a practice that seeks to heal the mind and body together) reduces her symptoms dramatically; another proponent walks out of a doctor's office after a diagnosis of bone cancer and is alive six years later to tell the success story of Weil's advice. Too often Weil mentions research but fails to cite it, and support is often lacking for what he claims to be beneficial. These problems take the life out of his arguments, which in their essence are sound and practical.

That said, as I turned the pages, I marveled at what Dr. Weil's routine must be. I tried to piece together the time and effort it would take him each day to get through his dietary agenda, breathing work, stretching, walking, forgiving and enrichment of his mental and spiritual life. Overall, one can only be impressed.

