

HEALTH — IN — BALANCE



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An Integrative Approach to Living Better

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Introduction

Why Talk About Integrative Health Today?

It is curious that, despite living in the age of information, many people feel lost when trying to make decisions related to their health. In theory, we should be better informed than any previous generation. Yet an abundance of information does not always create clarity. At times, it produces exactly the opposite.

Every week, new recommendations appear. Some experts defend one way of eating while others support a different position. Trends emerge related to exercise, supplements, fasting, monitoring technologies, and a seemingly endless list of strategies to optimize the human body. For many people, the search for health ends up becoming an additional source of stress.

Perhaps part of the problem is that we often confuse information with wisdom. Information allows us to know facts. Wisdom helps us understand which of those facts are relevant to a particular situation. Something similar happens in medicine. Two patients may share the same diagnosis and yet require completely different approaches. People are not algorithms. They are human beings living within unique contexts.

Throughout my medical practice, I have learned that health can rarely be understood by looking at only one part of the story. Laboratory results provide valuable information. Imaging studies provide valuable information. Medications can be extraordinarily useful. However, none of these elements exists in isolation. Behind every diagnosis, there is a person with habits, concerns, relationships, experiences, and circumstances that profoundly influence their well-being.

Patients often come to the office looking for a solution to a specific symptom. Yet as the conversation unfolds, we discover that the problem is broader. Perhaps they have been sleeping poorly for months. Perhaps they are facing high levels of stress. Perhaps they have stopped moving because of pain or because of the demands of daily life. Perhaps they have lost time for themselves. What initially seemed like an isolated problem ends up revealing a complex network of factors interacting with one another.

These experiences led me to ask an increasingly important question: is it possible to speak about health without speaking about life itself?

Modern medicine has developed an extraordinary ability to identify and treat disease. However, health appears to encompass something broader. It includes the ability to adapt to change, maintain meaningful relationships, find purpose, preserve autonomy, and experience physical and mental well-being over time.

Perhaps this is why different cultures, separated by centuries and continents, devoted so much effort to reflecting on health. Although they used different explanations, many shared a common intuition: life flourishes when a certain degree of balance exists, and it begins to deteriorate when that balance is lost.

This is not about idealizing the past or rejecting scientific progress. In fact, one of the central goals of this book is to avoid those extremes. Modern medicine represents one of humanity's greatest achievements and remains indispensable. At the same time, it would be a mistake to ignore valuable observations about habits, human behavior, and well-being that have accompanied our species for generations.

Perhaps the true opportunity of our time is precisely this: not to choose between one vision and another, but to learn how to integrate different perspectives in an intelligent and responsible way. To use science to better understand the human body without losing sight of the fact that the experience of being healthy transcends any laboratory analysis or specific diagnosis.

As we move through this book, themes related to nutrition, movement, sleep, stress, longevity, and various health traditions will appear. However, there is one idea that will serve as the guiding thread through all of them: health is not a fixed state. It is a dynamic relationship with ourselves, with our habits, and with the environment that surrounds us.

Perhaps health is not about finding perfect answers. Perhaps it is about learning to ask better questions.

PART I

UNDERSTANDING HEALTH

Chapter 1

The Evolution of the Concept of Health

The way we understand health has changed throughout history. What we consider normal in medicine today would have been unimaginable to previous generations, just as many practices from the past may seem strange from a modern perspective. Yet behind all the cultural, scientific, and technological differences, every era has tried to answer the same fundamental question: what does it mean to be healthy?

The answer has never been as simple as it might seem.

For much of human history, the main threats to health were infections, malnutrition, trauma, and complications of childbirth. In that context, survival was often the primary goal. Life expectancy was significantly lower than it is today, and the resources available to treat disease were limited. Health was understood mainly as the absence of immediate dangers capable of ending life.

It is difficult to imagine many of the conditions in which our ancestors lived. Diseases that can now be prevented with a vaccine or treated with antibiotics were once frequent causes of death. A minor infection could become a serious threat. An apparently simple injury could leave permanent consequences. The birth of a child, which today usually takes place in a relatively safe environment, once represented a considerable risk for both mother and baby.

With the development of modern science, advances began to emerge that profoundly transformed human health. The discovery of microorganisms made it possible to understand the origin of many infectious diseases. Later came vaccines, antibiotics, anesthesia, modern surgery, and diagnostic technologies that expanded our ability to understand how the human body works. Little by little, many of the threats that had accompanied humanity for centuries began to disappear.

These advances represent some of the greatest achievements of our species. Modern medicine has demonstrated an extraordinary ability to diagnose disease, develop effective treatments, and prevent complications that once seemed inevitable. It is difficult to imagine modern life without many of these discoveries. Those of us who work in health care witness their value every day. An infection that once might have placed a life in danger can now be resolved with relative ease. A procedure that once seemed impossible is now part of routine practice.

However, as often happens throughout history, the solution to some problems allowed others to become more visible. As many infectious diseases declined, chronic diseases began to occupy a more prominent place. Obesity, type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, sleep disorders, anxiety, and depression have become some of the most important challenges of our time.

This shift presents a fundamental difference. An acute infection usually has a relatively clear beginning and, in many cases, a specific solution. Chronic diseases, on the other hand, tend to develop slowly over the course of years. They rarely appear because of a single cause. Rather,

they arise from the interaction of multiple factors that influence one another: nutrition, movement, rest, stress, the social environment, genetics, and daily habits.

It is like observing a tree that has been growing for many years. When dry branches or visible signs of deterioration finally appear, the problem did not begin that day. It may have been developing beneath the surface for a long time. The roots may have been receiving less water. The soil may have gradually become depleted. The visible change represents only the final stage of a much longer process. In the same way, many chronic diseases represent the visible result of processes that began long before symptoms appeared.

This reality has led to an important reflection both within and outside medicine. Although scientific advances remain indispensable, it has become increasingly evident that health does not depend only on the treatments we receive when we become ill. It also depends on the decisions we make when we appear to be healthy.

Health begins long before entering a doctor's office or a hospital. It begins in the way we live our days. It begins in the quality of our rest, in the way we face daily concerns, in the relationship we have with food, in how much we move, and in the bonds we build with the people around us. Many decisions that may seem insignificant when viewed in isolation acquire enormous importance when they accumulate over the years.

Perhaps this is why different health traditions developed throughout history paid so much attention to daily habits. Although they used languages different from those of modern science, they shared an observation that remains relevant today: the way we live profoundly influences the way we become ill and the way we heal.

What is interesting is that today we are not forced to choose between one vision and another. We can benefit from the extraordinary advances of modern medicine while also paying attention to the aspects of daily life that influence our long-term well-being. We can value surgery when it is necessary and recognize the importance of sleep. We can be grateful for the existence of effective medications and, at the same time, reflect on our daily habits.

Perhaps the current challenge is not to decide which model is right and which is wrong. Perhaps it is to understand that each one observes a part of a broader reality.

Over the years, medical practice also led me to question some ideas I had initially taken for granted. Like many health professionals, I began my training by learning to identify diseases, classify symptoms, and understand the function of each organ and system of the human body. However, as I listened to people and observed their stories over time, I began to notice something different. Behind apparently different conditions, surprisingly similar patterns appeared. Stress accumulated over years, lack of rest, loss of movement, daily habits, the quality of human relationships, and the way each person faced adversity seemed to influence health far more than I had initially imagined.

Little by little, I began to see connections where I had previously seen isolated problems. Hypertension no longer seemed only like a cardiovascular disease. Diabetes no longer seemed

merely like a metabolic disorder. Sleep disorders, anxiety, excess weight, chronic pain, and many other conditions began to intertwine within much broader human stories. I came to understand that I was often not observing separate diseases, but different manifestations of the same life trajectory.

I also observed something that continues to draw my attention to this day. Some people live with serious illnesses and yet maintain a remarkable sense of well-being, purpose, and serenity. Others, despite having no major medical problems, seem to live trapped in constant worry, resentment, or the feeling that they have lost their way.

I particularly remember a patient with advanced kidney disease who had to undergo dialysis regularly. From a strictly medical perspective, he was a person with a serious condition. Yet every time he entered the office, he did so with a calm smile. He had been a runner for much of his life and, within his possibilities, continued to stay active. He did not deny his illness or pretend it did not exist. He had simply learned to live with it without allowing it to completely define who he was. He preserved an inner peace that was often more striking than any of his diagnoses.

Experiences like this led me to reflect on a simple but profound question: if the absence of disease were the only measure of health, how could we explain these differences?

Little by little, I came to the conclusion that health seems to encompass something broader than the physical state of the body. The body is extraordinary and deserves to be cared for with attention and respect. However, it is also vulnerable. Over time, all of us will face changes, limitations, losses, and uncertainties. No one is completely protected from aging or disease. But some people develop a remarkable ability to preserve serenity, purpose, gratitude, and hope even when circumstances are not ideal.

Perhaps health is not only about avoiding disease. Perhaps it also has to do with the way we respond to life when illness, difficulty, or adversity inevitably appear. Perhaps there is a dimension of health that does not depend exclusively on the body, but also on our capacity to adapt, find meaning, cultivate valuable relationships, and maintain a certain inner harmony as we walk our path.

The evolution of the concept of health continues to unfold before our eyes. It is no longer only about living more years. It is also about preserving energy, autonomy, mental clarity, functional capacity, and a good quality of life during those years. But perhaps it is also about something deeper: learning to live fully within the inevitable imperfections of human existence.

Because disease may begin in the body, but health always ends up involving the whole person.

And to understand that broader dimension of health, we must first direct our attention toward something that often remains hidden behind diagnoses: the person themselves.

Chapter 2

The Person Behind the Diagnosis

One of the great achievements of modern medicine has been our ability to name diseases. Through studies, analyses, and clinical observations, we have learned to identify patterns that allow us to better understand what is happening inside the human body. When a person receives a diagnosis, they often experience a sense of relief. Finally, there is an explanation for what they have been feeling. The problem has a name and, often, a treatment as well.

However, over the years I have come to appreciate a reality that rarely appears in medical textbooks: the diagnosis is never the person.

It is only a partial description of something happening within them.

When we look at a medical chart, we find medical history, laboratory results, medications, and diagnoses. All of that information is important. It helps us make decisions, assess risks, and design treatments. But a person's life does not fit inside a chart. Behind every consultation is someone trying to navigate the same complexities we all face. There is someone who works, worries about family, faces uncertainty, celebrates small victories, and carries challenges that often remain invisible to others.

We often think of illness as an isolated event, as something that suddenly appears in a previously healthy body. Yet reality is usually more complex. Health and disease develop within a story that began long before the first symptom appeared. A story shaped by habits, experiences, relationships, losses, lessons, and decisions accumulated over time. The diagnosis represents one chapter of that story, but rarely the whole story.

Perhaps this reality becomes more evident when we observe the way our days unfold. Modern life moves at a speed that few previous generations could have imagined. Many mornings begin before we have had the opportunity to listen to ourselves. Attention quickly turns toward responsibilities, messages, tasks, and commitments. The day continues moving forward and, before we realize it, night has arrived. We repeat this cycle again and again until it begins to feel normal.

In the middle of that constant rhythm, the body's signals often become background noise. Fatigue is interpreted as part of the routine. Sleeping little becomes a habit. Eating in a hurry seems inevitable. Lack of movement is justified by lack of time. Little by little, we stop asking ourselves how we feel and begin to focus only on completing the next thing the day demands.

What is interesting is that major changes rarely happen suddenly. Nature tends to move with patience. A river does not carve a mountain in one afternoon. A tree does not grow in one week. In the same way, many health-related processes develop slowly. So slowly that we barely perceive them while they are happening. That is why, when a diagnosis finally appears, the real question is not always what happened, but how long it had been happening. Sometimes illness represents the moment when something that had been developing for years becomes impossible to ignore.

As a physician, I have observed that some of the most important conversations inside a medical office rarely revolve only around a disease. Often, they end up being about life. They speak of stress accumulated over years. They speak of the difficulty of finding time for oneself. They speak of nights of insufficient sleep, financial worries, complex relationships, or responsibilities that seem endless. These are topics that do not appear on an MRI or in a blood test, but they profoundly influence the way a person experiences their health.

There is also another deeply human tendency that deserves to be recognized. When something does not work as we expect, we often look outward first. We search for an explanation, a cause, or someone to blame. We think about genetics, stress, work, circumstances, or the people around us. And although all of these factors can have real and important influence, there is a risk of forgetting an equally valuable question: what is this experience trying to show me about my own life?

It is not always a comfortable question.

We all prefer to hear what confirms our ideas. We all feel a certain resistance when a conversation invites us to examine habits we have maintained for years. This does not happen only with patients. It happens to all of us. It is part of the human condition. The mind seeks explanations that preserve its comfort. However, personal growth rarely occurs within that comfort. It often begins when we find the courage to observe ourselves with honesty.

Perhaps this is why one of the most important differences I have learned to recognize is the difference between blame and responsibility. Blame looks backward and searches for someone at fault. Responsibility looks forward and searches for possibilities. Blame asks who caused the problem. Responsibility asks what we can do now. An illness may have multiple causes, many of them beyond our control. However, we almost always retain some degree of influence over the way we respond to it.

People who achieve deep and lasting changes in their health are rarely those who find a magical solution. More often, they are those who begin to understand something about themselves. They discover patterns they had not seen before. They recognize habits that seemed insignificant. They learn to listen to signals they had ignored for years. Little by little, they stop seeing themselves merely as carriers of a diagnosis and begin to participate actively in their own well-being.

Perhaps this is where one of the most important lessons of medical practice can be found. Medicine needs diagnoses. They are indispensable tools. They help us orient ourselves, make decisions, and offer safe and effective treatments. But no tool, no matter how sophisticated, can capture the totality of a human life.

Because behind every diagnosis, there is a story.

And understanding that story is perhaps one of the most authentic ways to care for health.

However, once we begin to look beyond disease and direct our attention toward the person, an even broader question appears. What is it that sustains health throughout that story? Why do some people seem to preserve vitality and well-being despite life's inevitable challenges, while others gradually drift away from them? To answer these questions, we must direct our attention toward one of the deepest principles of biology and, perhaps, of human existence itself: balance.

Chapter 3 Health as Balance

Once we stop looking only at disease and begin paying attention to the person behind it, an inevitable question arises: what truly sustains health over time?

The answer may seem simple, but it contains enormous depth. From different perspectives, cultures, and moments in history, human beings have tried to understand why some people preserve vitality, function, and well-being for much of their lives, while others seem to gradually lose that state. The explanations have differed, but many of them point toward a common idea: health is closely related to balance.

When we think of balance, we often imagine something still. We visualize a perfectly level scale or a surface where nothing moves. However, nature shows us something different. True balance is rarely static. Rather, it resembles a continuous process of adaptation. A river maintains its course because it constantly responds to changes in the terrain. A forest maintains its vitality because countless organisms interact with one another in a dynamic relationship. Even breathing depends on a permanent exchange between taking in and letting go. The stability of life seems to arise not from the absence of movement, but from the ability to respond appropriately to it.

One of my medical professors defined homeostasis in an extraordinarily simple way: the maintenance of constancy. Although behind this definition lies enormous physiological complexity, it always seemed to me an elegant way to describe one of the fundamental principles of life. The human body is making adjustments continuously. Body temperature changes and corrects itself. Blood pressure fluctuates and stabilizes again. Glucose levels rise and fall throughout the day. Even while we sleep, the body continues working silently to preserve the conditions that allow life.

What is fascinating is that none of this occurs through rigidity. The body does not seek absolute immobility. It seeks to adapt. Health seems to depend less on perfection and more on the ability to respond to change without losing stability. Perhaps that is why homeostasis is not only a physiological concept. It can also serve as a metaphor for understanding many aspects of human existence.

When we observe our own lives, we find similar patterns. There are periods of greater activity and periods of rest. There are moments of growth, moments of difficulty, and moments of recovery. No stage lasts forever. Yet we often live as if health depended on reaching an ideal condition that will never change again. We hope to find the perfect diet, the perfect routine, or the perfect lifestyle that will finally resolve all our concerns. Reality is usually more complex and, at the same time, more human.

Health rarely behaves like a goal located at the end of the road. It is more like an ongoing relationship with ourselves. A permanent conversation between the body, the mind, our habits, and the circumstances around us. What works during one stage of life may need adjustment in

another. What is beneficial for one person may not be beneficial for another. Clinical experience teaches again and again that health rarely depends on a single factor. It emerges from the constant interaction of multiple elements that influence one another.

Perhaps one of the most useful metaphors for understanding this reality is that of an old scale. When we observe a scale from a certain distance, it appears still. Yet placing even a small weight on one side causes the entire system to respond. What is interesting is that the scale does not stop working when it moves. In fact, it was designed precisely to respond to change. Its purpose is not to remain rigid, but to find a point of balance again.

Something similar happens with health.

Throughout life, we all experience moments when one side of the scale begins to tilt more than it should. Work takes up too much space. Rest becomes insufficient. Worries increase. Important relationships receive less attention. Nutrition deteriorates. Movement decreases. Many times, these changes happen so gradually that we barely notice them. At first, they seem like small temporary adjustments. However, when they continue for months or years, they can end up profoundly changing our well-being.

What is curious is that major imbalances rarely appear suddenly. Most of the time, they begin as small accumulated deviations. One night of poor sleep seems insignificant. One week of intense stress seems manageable. One month with less physical activity seems to have no consequences. But life is not built from isolated events. It is built from patterns. And it is those patterns that, over time, end up tilting the scale in one direction or another.

Perhaps this is why many people feel they have lost their health without remembering exactly when it happened. There is no specific moment. There is no clear date. Instead, there appears a feeling of having gradually moved away from a more vital version of themselves. Less energy. Less enthusiasm. Less ability to recover. As if something had slowly changed while their attention remained occupied with other things.

The good news is that balance can also be recovered gradually. In the same way that health problems often develop over time, recovery is usually built through small decisions repeated with consistency. In medical practice, we rarely observe lasting transformations as the result of isolated actions. What most often produces meaningful change are daily habits maintained over months and years.

A daily walk may seem insignificant when viewed in isolation. A good night of sleep may seem ordinary. Spending time with family or preparing a simple meal is unlikely to appear on magazine covers. However, when these actions accumulate over time, they end up exerting a profound influence on health and quality of life. Nature often builds its most important changes silently, and health seems to follow a similar principle.

There is also a particularly valuable lesson in the idea of balance. It reminds us that extremes are rarely sustainable. In an age that constantly seeks quick solutions, immediate results, and spectacular transformations, it is easy to forget that most important biological processes occur

slowly. A healthy body is not built in one week. A meaningful relationship is not strengthened in one day. A full life does not emerge from a single decision. All of these things require time, attention, and consistency.

Perhaps this is why people who age with greater vitality are rarely those who pursue perfection. More often, they are those who have learned to make continuous adjustments. People who recognize when the scale begins to tilt too far and who develop the wisdom needed to correct course before greater consequences appear. They do not live free of challenges or difficulties. They have simply learned that health is not about eliminating every imbalance, but about developing the ability to return, again and again, to their center.

From this perspective, health stops being a distant objective and becomes a daily practice. It is not about reaching a perfect condition or controlling every variable of existence. It is about cultivating a more conscious relationship with our body, our habits, and our circumstances. It is about observing when the scale begins to tilt and having enough humility to make the necessary adjustments.

Perhaps health is not a goal located at the end of the road.

Perhaps it is the way we learn to walk.

And perhaps, after understanding the importance of balance, the next step is to explore one of the elements that most influences it day after day: the way we nourish ourselves.

PART II
THE PILLARS OF HEALTH

Chapter 4

Nutrition: Between Science and Confusion

If a person allows themselves to drift slowly with the current of a quiet river, they soon discover something that often goes unnoticed in daily life. The water moves forward without haste. The trees reflected on the surface seem to move slowly. The wind passes through the branches without announcing its arrival, and the landscape changes little by little, almost without one noticing. After a few minutes, a strange feeling appears for those of us who live surrounded by schedules, responsibilities, and obligations: the feeling that there is no need to rush.

Health is much more like that journey than a race.

And yet, few areas of health seem to be as dominated by urgency as nutrition. Eating is one of the oldest and most natural activities of the human experience. Long before nutrition books, scientific studies, calorie-counting apps, or dietary supplements existed, people were already sharing food around a table, cultivating the land, cooking for their families, and passing knowledge from one generation to the next. Food was part of everyday life. It was not a philosophy. It was not an identity. It was not a constant battle.

Today, the situation seems different.

We live surrounded by information. Every week, a new recommendation appears. New studies seem to contradict previous studies. Some experts promote one strategy while others defend the exact opposite. Social media amplifies simplified messages and often presents quick solutions to complex problems. In the middle of all this noise, it is understandable that many people end up confused.

What is curious is that we have never known so much about nutrition. Modern science has allowed us to understand extraordinarily complex aspects of human metabolism. Today we know much more about hormones, the gut microbiome, appetite regulation, inflammation, and physiology than any previous generation. And yet, despite all this information, many people continue to feel lost when facing something as ordinary as deciding what to eat.

Over the years, I have come to think that much of this confusion does not come from a lack of information. It comes from the way we relate to it.

Many people approach nutrition hoping to find a definitive answer. They look for the correct diet, the perfect food, or the strategy capable of solving all their health problems. They often come to the office after having tried different approaches. They have read books, watched documentaries, listened to experts, and followed various recommendations. Yet despite all their efforts, they continue to feel that something is missing.

When I listen to these stories, I rarely think the problem is the absence of a new diet. Instead, I wonder whether the conversation began in the right place.

Because the problem rarely begins with food.

It often begins with the relationship we have built with it.

Many people understand nutrition mainly as restriction. Eating well means forbidding oneself certain things. Resisting temptation. Constantly monitoring every food decision. From this perspective, healthy eating becomes a permanent struggle. Yet few things can be sustained for years when they are experienced as a daily battle. Guilt can produce temporary changes. Fear can as well. Even discipline can maintain certain habits for a time. But sooner or later, accumulated tension usually takes its toll.

Perhaps this is why, when a patient asks me what the best way to eat is, I rarely begin by talking about specific foods. Before recommending changes, I try to understand how that person lives. What their schedule looks like. How they sleep. What activities they enjoy. What their family environment is like. What their main concerns are. What obstacles they face every day.

I often discover that nutrition is only one piece of a much broader story.

A person may consume large amounts of highly processed foods, sugary drinks, or sweets. However, when we explore a little more deeply, other elements appear that also deserve attention. Long workdays. Lack of sleep. Chronic stress. Emotional exhaustion. Anxiety. Loneliness. Lack of movement. Disorganized routines. Little by little, it becomes clear that food is not always the main problem. Many times, it is simply the visible manifestation of other imbalances that have been developing for a long time.

Trying to correct nutrition alone without paying attention to the rest of the context can be as difficult as trying to dry the floor while the faucet remains open.

This observation has taught me something important. Nutrition does not exist in isolation. It is deeply connected to movement, rest, emotions, human relationships, and the purpose with which we live our days. When one of these areas loses stability for too long, the others often begin to suffer as well.

I often observe that people do not change simply because they received more information. Most have already heard many recommendations about food, exercise, and health. What usually produces real change is something more personal. At some point, they find an important reason to care for themselves. It may be family, independence, the energy to continue doing what they enjoy, or simply the desire to feel better. When that reason appears, many decisions that once seemed difficult begin to feel more natural.

Some want to preserve energy to share more time with their family. Others want to remain independent as they age. Some wish to continue practicing activities they enjoy. Others simply want to feel better and live with fewer limitations. When there is a clear reason to remain healthy, nutrition stops feeling like an obligation and begins to feel like an investment.

I often remember patients who spent years searching for quick answers. They constantly changed strategies. They followed increasingly restrictive diets. They lived focused on the scale. They felt motivated when the numbers went down and frustrated when they stopped doing so. Yet the most important change occurred when they stopped chasing immediate results and began to understand that health is much more like a marathon than a sprint.

The question stopped being what they could do over the next few weeks and began to become what habits they could sustain over the next several years.

It may seem like a small difference, but it completely changes the conversation.

Nutrition stops being a temporary project. It begins to integrate into everyday life. It no longer revolves exclusively around body weight. It begins to coexist with work, family, rest, recreation, and everything that forms part of a full existence. The person stops searching for the perfect diet and begins building a way of eating that can accompany them over the long term.

Modern science provides extraordinarily valuable tools for this process. Today we know that foods influence numerous mechanisms related to health. We also know that certain dietary patterns are associated with better long-term outcomes. This knowledge is important and deserves to be considered. Ignoring it would be as unwise as ignoring a map before beginning a journey.

However, even the best map has limitations. No map replaces the actual journey. In the same way, no nutritional recommendation can be completely separated from the daily reality of the person trying to apply it.

Eating happens within a culture, a family, an economy, and a personal history. It is influenced by schedules, traditions, preferences, possibilities, and circumstances that vary enormously between individuals. For that reason, balanced nutrition may take different forms in different people. What matters is usually not achieving a perfect model, but finding a pattern that can be reasonably sustained within a real life.

Health is built through patterns, not isolated events.

One meal does not determine our destiny. Neither does one celebration, one trip, or one particularly difficult week. What ultimately shapes our health are the decisions we repeat again and again. Over time, these sequences build trajectories. And as happens in many other areas of life, every sequence has a consequence.

This reality may seem demanding, but it is also deeply hopeful. It means that small, sustained changes have enormous power. It means that health does not depend on perfection. It depends on the direction we choose to follow and on our ability to continue moving forward even when progress seems slow.

Sometimes I think of some patients I have had the privilege of accompanying for many years. Some live with significant chronic diseases. Others have gone through surgeries,

hospitalizations, or diagnoses that would have been enough to discourage many people. Yet when they enter the office, they often do so with a serenity that is difficult to describe. They talk about their morning walks, their grandchildren, some simple project they maintain at home, or plans they still hope to carry out. They do not seem to live constantly reminding themselves of their limitations. Nor do they ignore the reality of their illness. Rather, they have learned to live with it.

There is in them a kind of practical peace that rarely appears on social media and that can hardly be summarized in a list of recommendations. They have understood that health was never synonymous with perfection. Perhaps that is why food occupies an important place in their lives, but not the central one. They eat with attention, try to take care of themselves, and then continue living.

And perhaps there lies one of the deepest lessons of nutrition.

Over the years, I have come to think that one of the most common mistakes is forgetting the role food occupies within a broader life. Feeding ourselves is important, but most people do not want to be healthy only so they can eat better. They want to be healthy so they can share more time with those they love, preserve their independence, continue working on projects they consider valuable, or simply feel capable of participating fully in everyday life. When we observe nutrition from this perspective, the conversation changes. Food stops being the center and begins to occupy its proper place: a tool that helps us sustain what we truly value.

With time, many people discover something simpler. They learn to enjoy food without turning it into a permanent concern. They learn to recognize that eating appropriately is a form of respect toward oneself. Not from obsession or punishment, but from the understanding that the body needs care in order to accompany us on the journey.

Like the traveler moving slowly along the river, health rarely needs more haste. It needs direction. It needs patience. It needs consistency. And when nutrition finds its place within that balance, it stops being a source of conflict and becomes a silent companion on the journey.

Chapter 5

Movement: A Biological Necessity

If we observe nature for a few minutes, it is difficult to find anything that remains completely still. Leaves move with the wind, rivers flow toward the sea, clouds slowly cross the sky, and animals explore their surroundings following impulses as ancient as life itself. Even what appears still continues to transform in ways that often escape our sight. Nature seems to constantly remind us that life and movement are inseparable.

Perhaps that is why one of the first signs we associate with existence is precisely movement. Before we walk, run, or perform any complex task, we begin by breathing. And breathing is movement. The heart beats through movement. The lungs expand through movement. The eyes scan the environment through movement. From the simplest processes to the most complex actions, our existence is accompanied by a continuous sequence of movements that make life possible.

We often think of movement as something optional, an activity we do when we have enough time or when motivation appears. However, the more I observe my patients and the more I reflect on human health, the harder it becomes for me to accept that idea. Movement does not seem to be a luxury or an activity reserved for athletes or particularly disciplined people. Movement is part of our nature. We were designed to move.

For most of human history, moving was not a conscious decision or an activity scheduled into a calendar. It was simply a natural consequence of living. Walking to find food, carrying objects, cultivating the land, building shelter, exploring the environment, caring for family, or participating in community life were all part of everyday experience. The human body evolved in a world that demanded constant movement. Not necessarily structured exercise, but movement integrated into life itself.

And yet, in only a few generations, our reality has changed profoundly. Many people spend most of their days sitting. They work sitting down, eat sitting down, travel sitting down, and rest sitting down. Technological progress has brought extraordinary benefits to humanity, but it has also reduced much of the movement that naturally accompanied our existence for thousands of years. Paradoxically, one of the greatest comforts of modern life has moved us away from something our bodies still deeply need.

For this reason, when we speak about physical activity, it is important to make a distinction that often goes unnoticed. Movement is not exercise. Exercise is one form of movement. Walking, dancing, carrying grocery bags, playing with children, working in a garden, practicing yoga, lifting weights, or climbing stairs all belong to the same biological language. They all represent different expressions of a fundamental capacity that has accompanied human beings since their origins.

Perhaps part of the modern difficulty arises because many people associate movement exclusively with formal exercise. When they hear recommendations related to physical activity,

they imagine gyms, complex training programs, or activities they do not necessarily enjoy. However, the human body does not distinguish between movement performed inside a gym and movement performed while actively participating in life. Both generate adaptations. Both send signals to the body. Both remind the body of what it was designed to do.

Over the years, I have observed something that deeply catches my attention. The healthiest and longest-living patients I know rarely speak of exercise as an obligation. Nor do they usually live obsessed with perfect routines or sophisticated training programs. What I repeatedly find is something much simpler. They wake up early. They prepare their breakfast. They care for a garden. They feed their animals. They do household tasks. They walk to visit friends, attend community activities, or go to religious services. They maintain projects. They maintain responsibilities. They maintain routines that require them to continue participating physically in life.

What is interesting is that the most active people rarely move out of obligation. They move because they have something to do. A garden to care for. A pet to attend to. Friends to visit. A family with whom to share time. Movement arises as a natural consequence of a life that continues to move forward. Perhaps that is why they manage to remain functional for so many years. They never stopped finding reasons to get up and participate in life.

When we observe some of the regions known as Blue Zones, places where populations with remarkable longevity are concentrated, we find surprisingly similar patterns. People do not necessarily spend hours inside a gym or follow complex training programs. What they do is move constantly. They walk to visit friends. They work the land. They cook. They carry objects. They maintain activities that require physical movement throughout the day. Physical activity does not appear separate from life; it forms a natural part of it. Perhaps one of the most important lessons these populations offer is that movement can be integrated into daily existence so naturally that it stops being perceived as a task and begins to form part of a person's identity.

Modern science strongly supports these observations. Numerous studies have shown that regular physical activity significantly reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, osteoporosis, functional decline, anxiety, depression, and premature death. It also helps preserve muscle mass, bone density, cognitive capacity, and autonomy as we age. For this reason, scientific organizations recommend that adults accumulate at least 150 minutes per week of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity or 75 minutes of vigorous activity, in addition to regularly incorporating muscle-strengthening exercises. These recommendations represent decades of research consistently pointing toward the same conclusion: movement is one of the most powerful tools we have to protect human health.

However, reducing movement only to a series of recommendations would miss something important. Movement does not only benefit the body. It also preserves something we often take for granted until we begin to lose it: functionality. The ability to rise from a chair without help. To climb stairs. To carry objects. To maintain balance. To react when we trip. To walk without fear. To continue participating actively in life.

When I think of some patients who reach their eighties or nineties while preserving a remarkable quality of life, their physical condition is rarely the first thing that comes to mind. What catches my attention is their functionality. They continue driving. They continue organizing their days. They continue making decisions. They walk a little more slowly than before, but they continue moving on their own. They preserve projects, responsibilities, and activities they consider important. They are often even concerned about the possibility of losing that independence, because they intuitively understand something modern medicine has confirmed again and again: our ability to move profoundly influences our ability to live as we wish.

When I review their medical charts, I find another striking pattern. Many of them rarely visit emergency departments or require frequent medical attention. Not because they have found a magic formula to avoid the passage of time, but because for decades they maintained simple habits that allowed them to keep doing what they loved. Physical activity was never an isolated intervention. It was part of a way of living.

Movement does not only preserve muscles; it preserves a world. It preserves the garden a person has cared for over the years, the walks that form part of their routine, the possibility of visiting friends, attending community activities, playing with grandchildren, or continuing to drive independently. In other words, movement helps preserve the ability to continue participating actively in life.

I have also observed the opposite pattern. Sedentary people often know the benefits of movement. In fact, many can list them easily. They know that walking would be good for their health. They know they should remain more active. They know they would probably feel better if they moved more. And yet, change continues to be postponed. "I'll start next week." "When I have more time." "When things calm down a little." Over the years, I have learned that the main obstacle is rarely lack of information. Often, it is the force of inertia.

Habits, both good and bad, have a remarkable ability to perpetuate themselves. When life has been organized around comfort for many years, movement stops feeling natural and begins to feel like an extraordinary effort. More hours in front of the television. Fewer walks. Less social interaction. Fewer projects. Fewer reasons to leave the house. At first, these changes seem insignificant, but over the years they can build a completely different trajectory.

I also frequently encounter people who have stopped moving because they are afraid. Afraid of falling, of getting injured, or of discovering limitations they did not have before. When this happens, I rarely tell them that their concern is unfounded. In many cases, there is a real risk. As with so many things in life, the goal is not to ignore risks, but to learn how to manage them in the best possible way. Sometimes this means starting little by little. Other times it requires the support of family members, physical therapists, or health professionals. What matters is understanding that the answer is rarely to abandon movement completely. Often, the solution is to find a safer and more progressive way to recover it. Patience, consistency, and the right support can achieve changes that initially seemed impossible.

Over the years, I have also begun to understand something that was once difficult for me to see. For a long time, I associated movement mainly with performance, strength, or physical conditioning. There is nothing inherently wrong with that. However, with time, I discovered that there is another way to relate to movement. One less centered on reaching increasingly extreme goals and more oriented toward sustainability. Less interested in constant competition and more interested in preserving energy, balance, and functional capacity over the years. Movement began to feel less like a permanent battle and more like a natural expression of harmony between the body and everyday life.

As with nutrition, the greatest benefits often appear when we stop pursuing perfection and begin building consistency. Not everyone needs to train in the same way. Some prefer walking. Others prefer running. Some enjoy swimming, dancing, practicing yoga, or lifting weights. What matters is not always the specific form movement takes, but the ability to incorporate it sustainably into a real life.

Health is built through patterns. And few decisions have as much capacity to influence those patterns as the decision to keep moving. Because movement is not simply something we do when we have time. It is part of who we are. And when we honor that nature, the body often responds by reminding us of something that was always there, waiting to be rediscovered: we were created to move.

Chapter 6

Sleep, Rest, and Recovery

If we observe nature at night, we discover something that often goes unnoticed during the day. As the light fades, much of the world begins to slow down. Birds return to their shelters. Many animals reduce their activity. Flowers that remained open under the sun begin to close. Even landscapes seem to acquire a different rhythm. Nature seems to understand something that modern human beings often forget: all activity needs rest, and every form of growth needs recovery.

And yet, we live in an age that seems to have declared a silent war against rest. Productivity is admired. Constant busyness is interpreted as a sign of success. Schedules fill up. Screens remain on until late at night. Work, responsibilities, worries, and entertainment continually compete for our attention. Little by little, we begin to live as if sleep were wasted time and not one of the most important biological activities of our existence.

Perhaps this is why sleep has become one of the most underestimated pillars of modern health.

It is curious to observe how we search for health in increasingly complex places while ignoring some of its simplest expressions. We spend time researching supplements, devices, exercise programs, and nutritional strategies. We look for answers in books, apps, courses, and new trends. Yet we often leave until last the very thing that sustains much of everything else.

Perhaps this happens because sleep is too simple. It is not sold in a bottle. It does not require a membership. It does not need sophisticated equipment. It does not generate striking headlines or extraordinary promises. No one boasts about sleeping eight hours as easily as they boast about a new exercise routine or the latest supplement. Sleep seems so natural that we often forget it is one of the most extraordinary functions of the human body.

Sometimes I think something similar happens with the air we breathe. We rarely think about it while it is present. Yet it only needs to be absent for a few minutes for us to remember its importance. Sleep shares that same paradox. It is silent. It is free. It is ordinary. And precisely for that reason, it often goes unnoticed.

Nature seems to have understood this truth from the beginning. No tree remains growing twenty-four hours a day. No season exists without transition. No river can move forward without periods of calm. Every living system alternates between activity and recovery. Yet modern human beings often try to live as if we were the exception. We artificially extend our days through screens, electric light, caffeine, and constant stimulation, as if rest were a limitation to overcome and not a need to respect.

Scientific evidence points precisely in the opposite direction. Insufficient sleep is associated with an increased risk of obesity, type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, cognitive decline, mood disorders, and reduced quality of life. Several scientific organizations recommend that most adults sleep at least seven hours per night on a regular basis. Far from

representing a waste of time, sleep is one of the most important investments we can make to protect our health.

When a person sleeps poorly for weeks, months, or even years, they rarely notice the consequences immediately. They do not usually wake up one morning with a new disease. The changes appear slowly. Energy decreases. Patience shortens. Concentration begins to fail. Mood becomes more unstable. Simple decisions require more effort. What once seemed manageable begins to feel heavy. Over time, the person becomes accustomed to a state of exhaustion they now consider normal.

I often see this in clinical practice. Some patients say they feel fine sleeping five or six hours per night. However, as the conversation continues, familiar signs appear. Increasing dependence on caffeine to start the day. Constant fatigue they consider normal. Greater difficulty concentrating. More irritability. Less patience with family. More cravings throughout the day. Small forgetfulness that begins to repeat more frequently. What is interesting is that many times they do not perceive these changes because they have lived with them for so long that they no longer consider them abnormal.

The patient who has been sleeping poorly for years rarely arrives saying only that they have trouble sleeping. Many times they arrive exhausted, with a low energy that can be perceived even before reviewing any laboratory study. They speak from fatigue, from resignation, and from necessity. They have to keep working. They have responsibilities. They support a family. They continue moving forward because they feel they have no other option. But at the same time, they know that this rhythm is taking a toll. We often find elevated blood pressure, weight gain, difficulty controlling glucose, irritability, discouragement, and a constant feeling of living each day uphill. It is not always a problem of willpower. Many times it is simply a body trying to function for years without the recovery it needs.

One of the most consistent observations I find in consultation has to do with hunger. When a person sleeps poorly, the body seems to begin asking for energy desperately. Appetite increases. Cravings become more frequent. Highly processed foods seem more attractive. The discipline that seemed reasonable in the morning begins to disappear as the day progresses. Many times, patients interpret this as a lack of character, when in reality they are trying to compensate with food for an energy debt that began the night before.

Sleeping well does not guarantee healthy habits. But sleeping poorly makes almost every healthy habit more difficult.

Over the years, I have come to think that sleep does not compete with productivity. It sustains it.

A rested person tends to think more clearly, solve problems more effectively, and manage the inevitable difficulties of life better. On the other hand, when exhaustion accumulates for too long, even the simplest tasks begin to feel disproportionately difficult. What initially seems like a lack of motivation is often simply a lack of recovery.

Perhaps one of the reasons sleep is so important is that it continues working when we stop working. While we sleep, the body remains active. The brain organizes information. Memory is consolidated. Tissues are repaired. Hormonal systems make constant adjustments. The immune system continues performing essential functions. Although we remain still on a bed, nighttime rest represents one of the most complex and productive activities of the human body.

What I have learned in recent years is that sleeping well is not only about accumulating hours of sleep. It also involves respecting the body's natural rhythms. Exposing ourselves to morning light. Maintaining relatively consistent schedules. Allowing the body to recognize when it is time to be awake and when it is time to rest. Modern life allows us to ignore these rhythms for long periods of time, but our body continues responding to them in ways that often go unnoticed.

For this reason, I am increasingly less interested in speaking about sleep only in terms of quantity and more in terms of quality. Just as we cannot force a plant to grow by pulling on its leaves, we cannot force sleep through the simple decision to sleep. We can, however, create the right conditions for it to appear.

People who rest better often develop rituals, although they do not always call them that. They gradually reduce the intensity of the day. They decrease exposure to screens and bright lights. They avoid excessively heavy meals at night. They create calm environments. Some read. Others meditate. Others practice breathing exercises, enjoy a warm shower, use essential oils, or simply remain in silence for a few minutes. The details vary, but the principle is usually the same: they help the body and mind understand that the time for rest has arrived.

This idea seems especially important to me because we live surrounded by stimulation. Many people move from a day full of responsibilities directly to a screen, and from the screen directly to bed. The body is lying down, but the mind continues running. The problems of the day remain present. Unfinished conversations remain active. Worries continue occupying space. Sleeping under these conditions is like trying to stop a car traveling at full speed and expecting it to remain still immediately.

That is why rest begins long before we close our eyes.

It begins when we decide to slow the rhythm. It begins when we allow the day to end. It begins when we accept that there will always be pending tasks and that some of them can wait until tomorrow. In a sense, sleep also involves an act of trust. Trust that the world will continue to exist while we rest and that our mind can allow itself to temporarily release what it is trying to control.

Over the years, I have also learned something I did not fully understand before. Sleep is not simply a pause between two productive days. It is a fundamental part of life itself. It does not represent an interruption of our important activities. It is one of them. Sleeping well means recovering energy, organizing thoughts, regulating emotions, and preparing ourselves to face the next day with a more functional version of ourselves.

As with nutrition and movement, the most important benefits rarely appear after a single night. They arise as a consequence of patterns repeated with consistency. One adequate night can make us feel better the next day. But months or years of good rest can profoundly transform the way we experience our health.

Nature seems to have understood this truth long before we did. After every day comes the night. After activity comes rest. After effort comes recovery. Not as a reward, but as a fundamental biological necessity.

Perhaps the real question is not whether we have time to rest.

Perhaps the question is how long we can remain healthy without doing so.

Chapter 7

Stress, Resilience, and Emotional Well-Being

If we observe nature carefully, we discover that change is constant. The seasons change. Trees lose their leaves only to recover them months later. Rivers rise and fall. Days become long and then short. Nothing remains exactly the same forever. Yet human beings tend to deeply resist change. We want things to remain as they are when they are favorable to us, and we want them to disappear immediately when they cause us pain. Much of our suffering is born precisely from that tension between how things are and how we believe they should be.

Perhaps this is why stress has become one of the most common experiences of modern life.

It is difficult to find a person who has not experienced worry, uncertainty, or moments of intense pressure. Stress is part of the human condition. It has always existed and probably always will. However, there is an important difference between experiencing stress occasionally and living trapped inside it. The problem is not that difficulties appear. The problem arises when the body and mind remain for too long in a state of constant alert, as if every problem were an immediate threat to our survival.

I often observe this in consultation. The typical patient does not arrive speaking only about stress. They arrive with elevated blood pressure. They arrive with insomnia. They arrive with anxiety. They arrive exhausted. They arrive with recurrent headaches, muscle tension, digestive problems, or difficulty concentrating. Many times, unexpressed emotions find another way to manifest themselves. The body hears conversations the mind believes it has forgotten.

Emotions are one of the most important pillars of health because they profoundly influence the way we experience life. When they remain unattended for long periods of time, they can contribute to exhaustion, suffering, and multiple physical manifestations. On the other hand, when emotional balance exists, the body often feels lighter, the mind clearer, and difficulties more manageable. Not because the problems disappear, but because our capacity to face them changes.

Modern science has confirmed something many traditions had intuited for centuries. Chronic stress affects practically every system of the body. Prolonged activation of mechanisms related to the fight-or-flight response can contribute to the development or worsening of high blood pressure, sleep disorders, anxiety, depression, cardiovascular disease, metabolic changes, and various gastrointestinal problems. The connection between mind and body is not a metaphor. It is an observable biological reality.

Perhaps one of the clearest examples is the relationship between stress and the digestive system. Many people have experienced how intense worry can alter appetite, produce abdominal discomfort, or worsen preexisting digestive symptoms. Today we know that there is constant communication between the brain and the gut. What happens in one influences the other. The mind and body do not function as separate entities; they form part of the same system.

What is interesting is that two people can face exactly the same situation and respond in completely different ways. I have seen patients go through major losses, serious illnesses, or significant financial difficulties while maintaining a surprising capacity for adaptation. I have also seen people feel completely overwhelmed by relatively minor problems. This does not happen because some are strong and others weak. It happens because resilience does not depend only on circumstances. It also depends on the way we interpret those circumstances.

I often remember an observation I heard years ago and have never forgotten. Life is very much like an electrocardiogram. As long as there is life, there are rises and falls. There are moments of joy and moments of difficulty. There are periods of calm and periods of uncertainty. Expecting everything to remain stable and perfectly controlled is as unrealistic as expecting an electrocardiogram to be a completely straight line. In fact, when the line becomes completely straight, it means there is no longer life. The variations are not a sign that something is wrong. They are a sign that we are still alive. The good moments and the difficult moments form part of the same human experience.

Perhaps this is why resilience is not about avoiding problems. It is about developing the ability to go through them without allowing them to completely define who we are. Over the years, I have begun to think of it as a kind of emotional callus. Just as the skin develops protection after repeated friction, the mind can develop strength after facing difficulties in a healthy way. It is not about becoming hardened or ignoring emotions. It is about learning to feel them without becoming trapped in them.

At this point, a teaching shared by different traditions becomes especially valuable: everything is temporary.

Joys are temporary. Difficulties are temporary as well. Successes are temporary. Failures too. Health changes. Circumstances change. Relationships evolve. Life itself is in constant motion. This observation occupies a central place in Buddhist philosophy, where one of the main sources of suffering arises when we cling to what will inevitably change. The more we try to control the uncontrollable, the greater our frustration usually becomes.

This does not mean resignation or passivity. It means developing the ability to relate to reality as it is, and not only as we would like it to be.

Perhaps this is why some people manage to preserve serenity even in difficult circumstances. Not because they enjoy suffering or because they have no worries. Rather, because they have learned to recognize that situations change. They understand that an intense emotion will not last forever. They understand that a current difficulty does not necessarily define the rest of their life. They preserve a perspective that allows them to continue moving forward even when the path becomes complicated.

One tool that has received increasing attention within modern medicine is mindfulness. Although it is often translated simply as full awareness or present-moment awareness, its essence is much deeper. It consists of developing the ability to observe present experience without

automatically reacting to it. Various studies have demonstrated benefits in anxiety, perceived stress, emotional well-being, and quality of life. What is interesting is that this practice does not seek to eliminate thoughts or emotions. It seeks to change our relationship with them.

Something similar happens with cognitive behavioral therapy. Many times, the situations that cause us suffering do not come exclusively from the facts themselves, but also from the interpretation we make of them. Learning to identify unhelpful thought patterns can help us respond in a more balanced way to the inevitable difficulties of life.

When a patient lives permanently worried, something else often happens. They begin to lose sight of what they already have. Family. Friends. Simple moments. A shared meal. A sunrise. A quiet conversation. Sometimes I describe this situation as observing life through frosted glass. The light is still there, but it is no longer perceived clearly. Constant worry can occupy so much mental space that it ends up hiding what truly gives meaning to existence.

This becomes especially evident when we talk about money. Over the years, I have known people with very limited financial resources who live with a remarkable sense of peace. I have also known people with material abundance who remain trapped in constant worry. The problem is not always how much we have. Many times it is our relationship with what we have. When attachment becomes excessive, the fear of losing begins to occupy more and more space. As the contemplative traditions of the East teach, suffering often increases when we confuse possession with security or accumulation with tranquility.

Over the years, I have also learned something I did not fully understand before. Adaptation is one of the most important capacities of the human being. Changes in work. Losses. Illnesses. Injuries. Unexpected transitions. No life is completely free of them. Yet again and again, we observe that people possess an extraordinary ability to adapt when they receive support, develop appropriate tools, and maintain the willingness to keep moving forward.

Some of the most important lessons of my own life have emerged precisely from circumstances that initially seemed negative. Injuries that forced me to rethink my relationship with exercise. Professional changes that led me to explore new paths. Situations that at first seemed like obstacles and that, with time, ended up becoming opportunities for growth. This does not mean that everything happens for a specific reason or that suffering is desirable. It simply means that life has a surprising capacity to transform us when we remain open to learning.

In this sense, traditions such as Ayurveda offer an interesting perspective. Beyond terms that may be unfamiliar to some people, much of its teaching revolves around a simple idea: recovering balance through daily habits. Waking up at consistent times. Eating with attention. Resting adequately. Breathing deeply. Cultivating spaces of calm. Maintaining routines that favor physical and mental stability. Ayurveda recognizes that the mind influences the body and that small actions repeated daily can profoundly modify our well-being. Ancient wisdom and modern medicine often use different languages, but they frequently end up meeting in surprisingly similar principles.

With time, I have come to believe that the goal is not to eliminate stress completely. That would probably be impossible. The goal is to develop a healthier relationship with it. To learn to recognize it. To learn to respond instead of react. To learn to pause, breathe, and remember that not every worry deserves to occupy the same amount of space in our mind.

Perhaps it also involves something more difficult and more important: learning to treat ourselves with compassion. Forgiving ourselves for past mistakes. Recognizing our limitations. Understanding that being human means making mistakes, learning, and trying again. When we stop constantly fighting against ourselves, a feeling of lightness that is difficult to describe often appears. A feeling of reconciliation. And from that place, it becomes much easier to build health, meaningful relationships, and a life with purpose.

Emotional health does not mean living in a permanent state of happiness. It means developing the ability to experience the whole of life. The pleasant moments and the difficult ones. Successes and failures. Certainties and doubts. It means learning to remain present even when circumstances are not perfect.

Perhaps resilience is not about avoiding storms.

Perhaps it is about remembering that no storm lasts forever.

PART III
ANCIENT WISDOM AND MODERN HEALTH

Chapter 8

Purpose, Meaning, and Health

After years of caring for patients, I have come to a conclusion that initially would have seemed strange to me. People rarely change because someone explained a disease to them perfectly. They also do not change because they understood every detail of a scientific study or because someone showed them a convincing graph. Information is important. Education is important. However, the deepest changes usually occur when a person finds a reason important enough to care for themselves.

I have seen patients quit smoking after decades. I have seen people lose weight, begin walking daily, improve their eating habits, or recover habits they had abandoned for years. When I ask them what happened, they rarely answer by talking about cholesterol, blood pressure, or glucose. More often, they talk about their children. Their grandchildren. Their partner. A project they still want to complete. Something that reminds them that it is worth continuing forward.

Perhaps this is why I am less and less interested in asking only what disease a person has, and more interested in asking what makes that person get up each morning.

The longest-living and most functional patients I have known usually share something in common. They do not necessarily have perfect health. Many have pain, limitations, or chronic diseases. However, they preserve a reason to participate in life. They get up to prepare their breakfast. To care for their plants. To feed their animals. To go for a walk. To talk with friends. To visit family. To drink a cup of coffee while watching the morning begin. These are simple activities, but deeply human ones.

What is interesting is that these people rarely speak about purpose using grand words. They do not usually describe an extraordinary mission or an epic search. Their purpose is often found in small daily actions. Perhaps because life itself happens mostly there. In a conversation. In a shared meal. In a quiet walk. In the satisfaction of caring for something or someone.

Society often teaches us to search for meaning in distant places. It pushes us to think that happiness will arrive when we obtain more money, more recognition, more success, or more achievements. However, clinical experience has shown me a much more complex reality.

I have known people with abundant financial resources who live deeply worried. Successful people who seem unable to enjoy what they have built. People who continue chasing goals without ever experiencing a true sense of satisfaction. I have also known people with limited resources who radiate calm, gratitude, and genuine joy for apparently simple things.

This does not mean that money is unimportant. It would be naive to say that. Basic needs matter. Financial stability matters. However, with time I have learned that happiness rarely depends exclusively on how much we possess. It seems to depend much more on the relationship we maintain with what we possess.

One person may have a lot and feel that it is never enough. Another may have little and experience a deep sense of abundance. The difference is not always found in quantity. Many times, it is found in perception.

Contemplative traditions have explored this observation for centuries. Buddhism teaches that much suffering arises when we cling excessively to what we wish to preserve or when we constantly pursue what we believe we need in order to feel complete. The more we depend on external circumstances to experience well-being, the more vulnerable our inner peace becomes.

Perhaps this is why an important question is: why do we want to be healthy?

The answer seems obvious at first. We want to avoid disease. We want to live longer. We want to feel better. All of that is true. However, when we look a little deeper, we discover something interesting. Most people do not want health for health itself. They want health because it allows them to live.

They want health so they can continue sharing time with those they love.

So they can continue traveling.

So they can continue walking.

So they can continue working.

So they can continue helping others.

So they can continue enjoying a quiet afternoon in the company of their family.

In other words, health rarely represents the final destination. Rather, it is the vehicle that allows us to participate fully in the experience of being alive.

This observation also explains why some apparently healthy people continue to feel empty. I have known individuals with good physical conditioning, normal studies, and no significant diseases who nevertheless seem to lack direction. They do not find reasons to feel enthusiastic about the day that begins. They do not feel connected to something that transcends their immediate needs.

We could say that there is a difference between being physically healthy and feeling alive.

A person can have a healthy body and still experience a deep sense of disconnection from themselves, from others, or from the world around them.

Perhaps this is why so many ancient traditions dedicated so much time to exploring questions related to purpose and meaning. They understood that health is not only the absence of disease. It also involves a sense of connection, direction, and belonging.

In recent years, disciplines such as yoga and Ayurveda have helped me reflect on this idea from another perspective. Beyond postures, techniques, or specific terminology, both traditions seem to share a fundamental teaching: living in balance.

Yoga taught me that physical flexibility often reflects something deeper. Learning a difficult posture requires patience, adaptation, and constant practice. It does not usually happen immediately. It often requires accepting temporary limitations while continuing to move forward little by little. Curiously, life seems to work in a similar way.

Mental flexibility is just as important as physical flexibility.

People who manage to adapt to change tend to suffer less than those who try to control every detail of reality. Not because they experience fewer difficulties, but because they develop the ability to move with them.

Something similar happens with injuries. For a long time, I saw them only as undesirable interruptions. Today I see them differently. Many injuries force us to stop, reevaluate habits, correct movements, or pay attention to aspects of our lives we had ignored. This does not mean that injuries are desirable. It means that even difficult experiences can contain valuable lessons if we remain open to them.

Clinical practice has also taught me something I consider fundamental. People change more easily when they feel understood. Empathy creates bridges. Connection generates trust. And trust allows recommendations to become real actions. When there is a genuine relationship between two human beings, the possibilities for transformation increase considerably.

With time, I have also learned that constantly searching for something more can become a trap. A new goal. A new objective. A new acquisition. A new version of ourselves. The problem is not growing or evolving. The problem appears when we believe that peace is always found in the next place and never in the present.

Searching without rest rarely has an end.

That is why one of the most important lessons I have learned during the last decade is that peace is not usually found at the end of the road. Peace must accompany us along the road.

Because if we are not capable of finding tranquility in the present moment, we probably will not find it when we finally reach what we are pursuing.

True wealth does not consist only of what we accumulate.

It also consists of our ability to remain present.

To appreciate a conversation.

To enjoy a meal.

To observe the sunrise.

To be grateful for what already exists.

To share time with those we love.

Perhaps purpose is not something we need to find in a distant place.

Perhaps purpose appears when we participate fully in the life we already have in front of us.

And perhaps health, in its deepest expression, does not simply consist of living more years.

Perhaps it consists of living those years with presence, meaning, and peace.

Chapter 9

Family, Community, and Human Connection

If there is one thing I have learned after years of caring for patients, it is that health rarely happens in isolation. We often think of health as something individual. We speak of our blood pressure, our weight, our nutrition, or our exercise. However, when we observe carefully, we discover that much of our life happens in relationship with other people. Family, friends, neighbors, community, and loved ones influence our health far more than we usually imagine.

The happiest patients I have known are rarely those who have a perfect life. Nor are they necessarily the richest or the healthiest. They are simple people. People who have learned to enjoy the small things in life. An unhurried breakfast. A calm conversation. A family visit during the weekend. A cup of coffee while watching the morning begin. They are people who continue to have problems, like all of us, but who have learned not to allow those problems to occupy all the space of their existence.

Something that catches my attention is that these people usually preserve meaningful relationships. They maintain contact with family members, friends, or members of their community. They do not necessarily have hundreds of friendships or an extraordinary social life. They simply remain connected. They continue participating in the lives of others and allow others to participate in theirs.

In contrast, the patients who suffer the most are often deeply isolated. Sometimes they are physically alone. Other times they are surrounded by people but emotionally disconnected. They often remain trapped in wounds from the past that they were never able to heal. They find it difficult to trust, forgive, or establish deep relationships. Many times, they expect happiness to come from the outside and place on other people the responsibility for something that can only begin within themselves.

This does not mean that solitude is always negative. We all need moments of silence, reflection, and encounter with ourselves. Learning to be alone is an important skill. However, there is a difference between choosing moments of solitude and living permanently disconnected. Human beings are deeply social by nature. We need to feel seen, heard, and understood.

Scientific evidence supports this observation. Various studies have shown that people with strong social relationships have better health outcomes, a lower risk of depression, less cognitive decline, and a longer life expectancy. Human connection seems to act as a form of biological and emotional protection. In some way, our body seems to understand that we belong to something greater than ourselves.

This reality becomes especially evident during difficult moments. When a patient loses a partner, a child, or a close family member, something profound changes within them. Many times, the loss consumes much of their emotional energy. The person may stop finding joy in activities they once enjoyed. They may isolate themselves. They may lose interest in caring for

themselves. They may feel trapped in a constant struggle against something that has already happened and cannot be changed.

I have observed that prolonged suffering often appears when the person cannot reconcile with the reality of that loss. They cling to the past. They continuously fight against something inevitable. Little by little, sadness begins to occupy spaces that once belonged to family, friendship, hope, or joy. Life becomes harder to see clearly.

For this reason, accompanying someone through grief is not about eliminating pain. It is about helping them move through it without becoming trapped inside it. It is about reminding them that loss is part of the human experience and that love for the person who is no longer present can continue to exist without preventing us from continuing to live.

Family plays a fundamental role in this process. When I propose important changes to my patients, I often try to involve their partner or other close family members as well. I do not do this only to explain medical recommendations. I do it because changes are easier when everyone moves in the same direction.

I have seen patients transform their health because a husband began walking with them. Because a wife decided to cook differently. Because a child began accompanying them to appointments. Because someone was willing to listen when things became difficult.

A person's health never belongs exclusively to that person.

When someone becomes ill, the whole family participates in some way. The partner helps. The children help. The parents help. Responsibilities change. Plans change. Family dynamics change. That is why caring for ourselves is also a way of caring for those we love.

There is also something deeply therapeutic about feeling accompanied. Many times, people do not need someone to solve their problems. They need someone to listen to them. They need to feel understood. They need to discover that they are not carrying alone what worries them.

When we share our difficulties, something interesting happens. What seemed unbearable begins to feel more manageable. Not because the problem disappears, but because it is no longer held by one person alone. Accompaniment works like a mirror that helps us understand ourselves better and reminds us that we remain part of a broader human community.

Perhaps this is why the so-called Blue Zones have attracted so much interest. When we observe some of the longest-living populations in the world, we find something that goes far beyond food or exercise. We find community. People who maintain friendships for decades. People who actively participate in religious, neighborhood, or family groups. People who preserve a sense of belonging.

Belonging matters.

Feeling that we are part of something greater matters.

Knowing that someone is waiting for us, appreciates us, or cares about us matters.

The absence of these connections can create a sense of emptiness that is difficult to describe. When we lose the sense of belonging, we often also begin to lose part of our identity. We stop remembering who we are within the network of relationships that gives shape to our existence.

Faith also plays an important role for many people. Beyond specific beliefs, faith often offers hope, community, meaning, and support during difficult moments. I have seen patients go through extraordinarily complex circumstances sustained by a deep trust in something greater than themselves. That trust does not eliminate problems, but it often allows them to face them with greater serenity.

Over the years, I have come to think that one of the greatest mistakes of modern life is convincing ourselves that we must carry the entire weight of our existence alone. We are taught independence. We are taught self-sufficiency. We are taught to solve problems on our own. Some of these qualities are valuable. However, when taken to an extreme, they can distance us from something fundamental.

No human being was created to carry all the weight all the time.

We all need help at some point.

We all need to be heard.

We all need companionship.

We all need love.

We all need to belong.

Life continues to have difficulties even when we are accompanied. Illness, loss, uncertainty, and difficult moments continue to exist. However, there is something deeply comforting in knowing that we do not have to go through them completely alone.

With time, I have come to believe that health is not only about caring for our body. It is also about caring for our relationships. Calling a friend. Sharing a meal. Listening with attention. Spending time with family. Participating in our community. Being present for others and allowing others to be present for us.

Because in the end, many of the most valuable experiences in life only acquire meaning when they are shared.

And perhaps that is why life becomes lighter when we walk accompanied.

Chapter 10

Aging With Dignity

There is a special serenity in some older patients that has always caught my attention. It does not appear in everyone, but when it appears, it is impossible not to notice. They speak more slowly. They walk more slowly. They even seem to breathe more slowly. Not because they lack energy or because they have surrendered to life, but because they have learned something that many of us are still trying to understand. Life does not need to be rushed in order to be lived fully. After years of caring for patients, I have come to think that there is an enormous difference between living fast and living well. Many times, it is precisely older adults who best understand this difference.

As people age, their concerns change. I rarely hear an older adult speak obsessively about wrinkles or about turning another year older. What truly worries them is something much deeper. They worry about losing their independence. They worry about no longer being able to take care of themselves. They worry about not being able to continue preparing their breakfast, going for a walk, visiting their family, or driving to the store to do their shopping. What they fear is not so much the passage of time as the possibility of no longer actively participating in the life they built over decades.

Modern geriatrics has begun to recognize something that many older patients have known intuitively for years. The goal is not only to prolong life. It is also to preserve functionality. The ability to move, think, decide, relate to others, and participate in our own existence is often much more important than simply adding years to the calendar. In other words, it is not only about living longer, but about preserving the ability to continue living the life we love.

One of the patients who has impressed me the most is not necessarily the oldest. What impresses me is the way this person faces the passage of time. Although their vision is no longer the same and their movements are slower, they continue trying to do what they enjoy. They speak about events that happened decades ago as if they had happened yesterday. They tell stories with enthusiasm. They smile easily. They walk slowly, but they keep walking. They accept that some things have changed, but they do not allow those changes to completely define who they are. There is a dignity in people like this that is difficult to describe. They are not at war with life. They are not at war with age. They have learned to walk alongside it instead of constantly fighting against it.

Something that always catches my attention is the importance that a driver's license has for many older adults. At first glance, it might seem like a small detail, but behind that license there is something much deeper. It represents freedom. It represents autonomy. It represents the possibility of deciding when to go out, where to go, whom to visit, and how to organize the day. When a patient tells me they hope to keep their license for a few more years, I know they are not talking only about a car. They are talking about an important part of their independence. They are talking about preserving the ability to continue directing their own life.

Similarly, when I hear a patient say they do not want to become a burden to their family, I rarely hear selfishness behind those words. What I hear is love. I hear the desire to continue caring for those they love instead of depending completely on them. For that reason, it is so important to preserve strength, balance, vision, hearing, and mobility. We know that a fall can radically change the trajectory of an older person. We know that loss of mobility can begin a chain of events that affects independence and quality of life. We also know that small actions repeated over years, such as staying active, preserving muscle strength, and caring for the senses, can make an enormous difference in the future.

Over time, I have observed that patients who age better often lead surprisingly simple lives. They do not live trapped in an endless race or seem obsessed with constantly reaching new goals. They have found a rhythm that works for them and remain faithful to it. They prepare their food. They go out to the garden. They feed their animals. They read the newspaper. They talk with relatives and neighbors. They perform small activities that may seem insignificant to many people, but that in reality sustain much of their physical and emotional well-being.

For a long time, I thought this simplicity was irrelevant. Today, I suspect it is one of their greatest strengths. Simplicity creates stability, and stability allows good habits to survive for decades. Many people spend their lives searching for complex systems to feel better, while some of the longest-living patients I have known have simply built a simple life they can sustain year after year without becoming exhausted.

Among all these activities, one appears repeatedly: caring for something. It may be a pet, a partner, the family, or a garden. I have seen how many older people find enormous satisfaction in caring for their plants. Watering them in the morning, observing new sprouts, or simply walking through the garden becomes a form of connection with life. At first glance, it seems like a small activity, but behind it there is something much deeper. Every morning, there is something waiting for their presence. Something that continues growing. Something that depends on them. In some way, while they care for the garden, the garden also cares for them.

Another characteristic I find repeatedly is gratitude. I am not speaking of a naive gratitude that ignores difficulties. Many of these patients have gone through illnesses, significant losses, financial problems, and deeply painful moments. They have buried friends, siblings, partners, and even children. They have known suffering. Precisely for that reason, it is so impressive that they continue finding reasons to be grateful.

After so many years of seeing patients, it is impossible for me to ignore that the most grateful people are often also the most serene. I do not know whether gratitude produces health or whether health facilitates gratitude. Probably both things nourish each other. What I do know is that I rarely find deep bitterness in those who age with peace. They seem to understand intuitively something that takes many of us years to learn: life will never be perfect, and expecting perfection is a sure recipe for frustration.

It also catches my attention that many of them preserve a genuine curiosity about life. They continue learning, continue asking questions, and continue being interested in understanding

the world around them. I have known patients in their nineties who still become excited when learning something new or hearing an interesting story. That curiosity seems to keep a part of them extraordinarily alive. Perhaps youth does not depend only on biological age. Perhaps it also depends on preserving the capacity for wonder.

Over the years, I have come to think that many older people understand something about life that younger people are still trying to learn. Not because they have all the answers, but because they have traveled farther along the road. The best way I have found to explain it is through a reflection that emerged precisely from observing these patients.

Life is very much like a plate of food.

We all know that eventually the plate will be finished. That was never in doubt. No one sits at the table expecting the plate to last forever. However, we rarely think that what truly matters is not how long it takes to finish, but the way we decide to enjoy it. Some people eat quickly, distracted, constantly thinking about the next thing they need to do. Others take the time to appreciate the aromas, textures, flavors, and company around the table.

Life works exactly the same way.

The patients who age with greater serenity seem to have understood this truth. They do not live ignoring that time passes. On the contrary. Precisely because they know time is limited, they have learned to be more present while it is happening. They have learned to enjoy a cup of coffee in the morning, a calm conversation, an unhurried walk, or a meal shared with family. Not because those things are extraordinary, but because they understand that much of life is made precisely of those apparently ordinary moments.

Perhaps the wisdom of old age does not consist of knowing more answers. Perhaps it consists of learning to be more present while life is happening. I have observed that many older patients stop fighting unnecessary wars. With the years, they seem to develop a clearer understanding of where it is worth investing energy and where it is not. They no longer feel the need to win every argument or constantly prove they are right. They have learned that some battles consume more than they offer and that inner peace often has far more value than a momentary victory.

There is a quiet wisdom in that way of living. It is not passivity. It is not resignation. It is discernment. It is the ability to recognize what deserves our attention and what does not. It is understanding that time and energy are limited resources and that spending them constantly on unnecessary worries eventually steals our ability to enjoy what truly matters.

Perhaps one of the deepest observations I have made over the years is the relationship many older people have with death. Contrary to what we often imagine, I rarely see them obsessed with it. Not because they do not recognize it, but because they have learned to accept it. And there is an enormous difference between resignation and acceptance. Resignation means giving up. Acceptance means understanding reality and still deciding to live fully.

The patients who age best often live from acceptance. They know that death will arrive when it has to arrive, and precisely for that reason, they focus their attention on making the most of the day in front of them. They do not waste too much energy fighting against the inevitable. They prefer to enjoy the conversation in front of them, the family in front of them, and the life in front of them. There is a very particular peace in that way of looking at existence.

With time, I have come to think that wrinkles are not really the problem. Wrinkles are evidence that we have lived. They are the silent record of joys, losses, lessons, mistakes, reconciliations, and experiences accumulated over years. Each one represents time traveled, moments shared, and lessons learned. Perhaps that is why I have never understood the modern obsession with completely hiding the passage of time. Aging is not a failure of the body. It is the natural consequence of having had the opportunity to live.

Aging well is not about looking young. Nor is it simply about living more years. Aging well means preserving our ability to continue being ourselves while time continues moving forward. It means maintaining as much independence as possible, continuing to learn, continuing to participate, and continuing to find joy in simple things. It means being able to look back with serenity and recognize that life was lived fully.

Because a long life is not worth much if it is not lived with dignity.

And a well-lived life is one in which we can look back and say, with calm and without unnecessary regrets:

I did what I wanted to do. I loved those I wanted to love. I learned what I needed to learn. And I made use of the time I was given.

Perhaps that is the most beautiful way to age. Not to avoid the passage of time, but to walk alongside it with gratitude, serenity, and dignity.

PART IV
TOWARD A LIFE IN BALANCE

Chapter 11

Modern Medicine and Ancient Wisdom

If someone asked me whether I prefer modern medicine or Ayurveda, my answer would be simple: both have a place.

For a long time, we have acted as if there were a competition between different ways of understanding health. As if one had to replace the other. As if science and tradition were destined to oppose each other. After years of clinical practice, I am increasingly convinced that this discussion begins from the wrong premise.

Wisdom is not about choosing between the modern and the traditional.

Wisdom is about understanding what each can offer and when to use it.

Modern medicine represents one of humanity's greatest achievements. Thanks to it, we can treat infections that were once fatal, perform complex surgeries, diagnose diseases with extraordinary precision, and save lives in situations that only a few generations ago would have been impossible to manage. When a person develops appendicitis, severe pneumonia, a heart attack, or requires cardiac surgery, few tools are as powerful as modern medicine.

However, I have also observed another reality. Many of the diseases that fill our offices did not appear overnight. Diabetes, hypertension, obesity, sleep disorders, anxiety, and many metabolic diseases usually develop slowly over years. They are the result of hundreds or thousands of small decisions accumulated over time. And it is precisely there that ancestral medical traditions still have much to teach us.

Ayurveda is one of the oldest medical traditions still practiced in the world. It has survived thousands of years of cultural change, empires, and social transformations. During the British colonial period, it lost much of its institutional influence, but it never disappeared. It remained alive because it continued to answer fundamental questions about human health. After India's independence, it recovered official recognition and today continues to form part of its health care system. Beyond philosophical or historical debates, it is difficult to ignore that a medical tradition that has survived for millennia likely contains valuable observations about human nature.

What most caught my attention when I began studying Ayurveda were not the unfamiliar terms or philosophical concepts. It was something much simpler. Ayurveda pays enormous attention to daily life. To how we sleep. To how we eat. To how we move. To how we breathe. To how our emotions affect our health. In other words, it pays attention to the habits that build health long before disease appears.

Curiously, modern science is beginning to reach similar conclusions. Today we know that sleep profoundly influences metabolism, mental health, and immune function. We know that exercise modifies cardiovascular risk, cognitive function, and longevity. We know that chronic stress alters multiple systems of the body and that social connection influences physical and emotional

health. In many ways, both paths seem to be observing the same mountain from different perspectives.

When I graduated from medical school, I thought that the more knowledge I acquired about diseases and medications, the better physician I would become. I believed the main goal was to correctly recognize a diagnosis and select the appropriate treatment. And although that part remains extraordinarily important, over the years I discovered that reality is much more complex.

Medications are extraordinarily powerful tools.

But they rarely tell the whole story.

I often think about patients with diabetes. Two people can have exactly the same elevated hemoglobin A1c and receive very similar treatments. However, their outcomes end up being completely different.

One patient consumes ultra-processed foods, sleeps little, and does not engage in physical activity. Another makes an enormous effort to eat well, but lives under constant stress, sleeps poorly, and remains trapped in worries that never seem to end. Modern science has shown that chronic stress can increase cortisol levels and contribute to insulin resistance, making proper glucose control more difficult. That is why I learned something important: we are not always treating only a disease. We are treating a whole life.

Over the years, I came to understand that medicine works best when the physician and the patient form a team. My responsibility is to use medical knowledge appropriately, choose safe treatments, and accompany the patient through the process. The patient's responsibility is to participate actively in their own recovery. When both sides work together, the results are often extraordinary.

I have seen patients improve significantly when they begin sleeping better, reduce stress, recover physical activity, strengthen family relationships, or find reasons to care for themselves again. Medications remain important, but they stop being the only tool. They become part of a much broader strategy whose goal is to restore balance.

One of the most important lessons patients have taught me is that there is an enormous difference between a disease and a sick person.

A disease can have a name.

The person who is ill has a story.

Two people can share exactly the same diagnosis and live completely different realities. One may have family support while another lives entirely alone. One may have purpose while another feels lost. One may sleep deeply every night while another lives trapped by anxiety. The disease may look the same on paper. The human experience is never exactly the same.

I also discovered something I did not expect. Some of the patients who taught me the most were not the sickest or the most medically complex. They were people who forced me to better understand human nature.

I remember patients who seemed extraordinarily tough. People who responded with few words, who seemed angry at the world, or who gave the impression that they did not want help. When I was younger, I might have thought they were simply difficult patients. With time, I understood that many times the exact opposite is true.

Behind some of the thickest armor, we often find some of the deepest wounds.

The image of the knight trapped inside his armor always comes to mind. Many people spend years building mechanisms to protect themselves. They seem hard because they are afraid of being hurt again. They seem distant because they learned to mistrust. They seem strong because they do not want anyone to see their wounds.

When we listen with patience and without judgment, those layers begin to disappear. Then the person appears. The fears appear. The losses appear. The worries appear. The hopes appear. And it is precisely there that true medicine often begins.

That is why listening became one of the most important tools in my clinical practice.

When I listen to a clinical history, I no longer hear only words. I hear the speed with which the person speaks. I hear the emotions that appear when they remember certain events. I observe how they move, how they breathe, and how they connect their thoughts with their emotions. Many times, laboratory results tell me what is happening in the body. The story helps me understand what is happening in the person.

Patients do not come only for a prescription.

They come because they want to be heard.

They want to feel understood.

They want to know that someone sees beyond the diagnosis and recognizes the human being behind it.

I often think that modern medicine and ancient wisdom are like two eyes. With one eye, we can see. With both eyes, we can perceive depth. One eye allows us to observe laboratories, imaging studies, physiology, and pharmacology. The other allows us to observe habits, emotions, human relationships, purpose, and meaning. When we close either one, our vision becomes incomplete.

Medicine is a science because it depends on evidence, rigorous observation, and knowledge accumulated over generations. But medicine is also an art. It requires creativity to build

individualized strategies, sensitivity to understand each person, and wisdom to know when to speak, when to listen, and when simply to accompany.

As with music, there are technical principles that must be respected. However, transforming those principles into something harmonious requires experience, intuition, and practice. Two musicians can play the same notes and produce completely different experiences. In the same way, two physicians can know exactly the same information and still connect with people in very different ways.

With time, I also learned something about change. Patients who improve rarely begin by improving their laboratory results. The first thing that usually changes is something much harder to measure.

Hope.

They begin to speak differently. They sit differently. They walk differently. They become more consistent with their habits. They speak more from the heart and less from fear. They recover reasons to be healthy. They recover reasons to get up in the morning.

On the other hand, some patients lose the battle before they even enter it. They arrive convinced that nothing will work because nothing has worked before. They arrive trapped in phrases such as, "I've already tried everything," "it's my age," "what's the point now," or "we are all going to die anyway." With time, I understood that each person is in a different stage of their process of change. Some are not ready yet. And that must also be respected.

The goal is not to push the patient.

The goal is to accompany them.

Perhaps one of the greatest challenges of our time is sedentary living. Not only because it promotes metabolic disease, but also because it represents a form of stagnation. Movement is part of our nature. To move means to participate actively in life. It means exploring, adapting, evolving, and growing. When we stop moving, something within us also begins to stagnate.

I have come to think that many modern diseases have a common root: we live too much outside ourselves.

We live worried about tomorrow. About social expectations. About what others have. About what we have not yet achieved. We constantly seek validation from the outside while neglecting our inner world. We become experts at observing the lives of others and beginners at understanding our own. And that has consequences.

Because constant comparison generates anxiety. Ego generates permanent dissatisfaction. Disconnection from ourselves distances us from the peace we are searching for.

That is why I increasingly give importance to self-compassion.

One of the things that most makes human beings ill is the lack of self-love.

I see it every day.

It appears in patients who live constantly blaming themselves. Patients who do not forgive themselves for their mistakes. Patients who believe they do not deserve to improve. Patients who seek approval everywhere except within themselves.

In contrast, when a person develops genuine self-love, they begin to treat themselves with more respect. They learn to care for themselves. They learn to set boundaries. They learn to understand themselves even when they make mistakes.

Self-love is not ego.

Self-love is born from understanding.

Ego is born from the constant need for validation.

Self-love creates peace.

Ego creates restlessness.

When a person finds the path to their heart, they stop fighting against themselves. They find self-compassion. They find acceptance. And when that happens, they begin to see life with more light, both inwardly and outwardly.

After all these years of seeing patients, I have come to think that healing does not mean only the absence of disease.

Healing means encountering our balance.

Perhaps that is why, if I had to teach one single thing to a resident beginning their path in medicine, I would not first speak about medications or clinical guidelines.

I would say something much simpler.

Listen.

Listen more than you speak.

Because many times the patient is showing you the answer before you have finished formulating the question.

And because behind every diagnosis, there is a person waiting to be understood.

Chapter 12

Living in Balance

If after everything we have discussed in this book a patient asked me what living in balance means to me, my answer would be simple. Living in balance means maintaining a peaceful mental state and staying connected to what we truly love and want to do. It means living a simple life, without excess, without falling into extremes, finding a middle point between our responsibilities and our dreams, between work and rest, between helping others and also caring for ourselves. It means developing a life that allows us to grow as human beings without losing sight of what truly matters.

For years, I thought health consisted mainly of avoiding disease. Today, I see it differently. After observing patients for much of my professional life, I have come to the conclusion that health is much more than the absence of disease. Health is balance. It is balance between body, mind, and spirit. It is balance between what we think, what we feel, and what we do. It is balance between our inner life and the world around us. Throughout this book, we have spoken about nutrition, movement, sleep, emotions, purpose, community, aging, and medicine. Although at first glance they may seem like different topics, they all end up pointing in the same direction. They all form part of the search for balance.

People often imagine balance as something perfect, as if there were an exact point we could reach and remain there forever. However, life does not work that way. Life changes constantly. Problems appear, circumstances change, people arrive, and people leave. Our plans evolve, and we ourselves also evolve. That is why I do not believe it is possible to remain always in balance. What I do believe is possible is learning to return to it again and again. In some way, life is more like navigation than a fixed destination. No ship moves in a straight line throughout the entire journey. The wind changes, the currents change, and the captain must make small adjustments continually to stay on course. What matters is not never drifting. What matters is knowing how to return.

I myself have lost balance at different moments in my life. I remember a stage in which I began to take on more and more administrative responsibilities. I enjoyed the challenges and felt satisfaction in the professional achievements I was reaching. However, little by little, I began to notice something. There was less time for patients and more time for meetings. There was less human connection and more administration. There was less opportunity to listen and more operational obligation. It was not something bad in itself, but it was moving me away from the reason I decided to study medicine. That experience taught me that many times people do not lose their way because they make bad decisions. They lose it because, little by little, they move away from what gives them meaning. That is why it is so important to pause occasionally and ask ourselves whether we are still walking toward where we truly want to go.

When I observe patients who live in balance, I rarely find perfection. What I find is something much more valuable: serenity. The most balanced person I have known enjoys silence as much as conversation. They maintain curiosity for learning even at advanced ages. They listen with attention. They show genuine interest in others. Many times, before I ask how they are doing,

they ask how I am. It may seem like a small detail, but it is not. That genuine interest in other people reflects a life that does not revolve only around itself. These are people who walk calmly, speak with pauses, and do not live in a hurry. When something goes wrong, they do not react from panic. They react from reflection. They understand that many problems have a solution, and that for those that do not have one immediately, there is a wiser way to face them.

I have also learned something important about happiness. For many years, I thought happiness was the final goal. Today, I no longer see it that way. Happiness appears and disappears, just like sadness, enthusiasm, anger, or frustration. All emotions are temporary. Perhaps that is why I am less and less interested in pursuing a permanent state of happiness and more interested in developing the ability to remain in balance. I like to imagine a person sitting at the edge of a river, observing the current as it passes. Sometimes the water flows calmly and other times it becomes turbulent. Sometimes there is a storm and sometimes there is calm. However, the observer does not need to throw themselves into the river every time the current changes. They simply remain present. Emotions are very much like that river. They change constantly. Balance consists of remaining centered enough to observe them without being carried downstream.

Perhaps that is why I find common points between Buddhism, Stoicism, and Ayurveda. Although they use different languages, they all seem to point toward a similar idea. We cannot control everything that happens around us, but we can learn to relate more wisely to what happens. Buddhism reminds us of the temporary nature of all things. Stoicism teaches us to distinguish between what we can control and what we cannot. Ayurveda invites us to seek balance in every aspect of our lives. In the end, the three perspectives seem to converge in the same direction: learning to live with greater awareness.

Another observation I have made over the years is that we live too much outside ourselves. We spend much of our lives worried about the future, money, the opinions of others, or what we believe we still lack. We constantly seek validation from the outside while neglecting our inner world. We become experts at observing the lives of others and beginners at understanding our own. Many people live according to expectations imposed by society without asking themselves whether they truly desire that life. And when that happens, a sense of emptiness inevitably appears that is difficult to explain. Not because material things are missing, but because connection with oneself is missing.

Peace, from my experience, does not mean the absence of problems. Peace means not becoming lost inside them. The person who lives in peace still faces challenges, responsibilities, and difficult moments. The difference is that they no longer allow every problem to kidnap their tranquility. They have learned to respond instead of react. They have learned to breathe before acting. They have learned that not every argument deserves an answer and that not every battle is worth fighting. That peace does not appear overnight. It is cultivated. It is built little by little, like any other important habit in life.

After years of observing patients, I have also come to think that one of the things that most makes human beings ill is the lack of self-love. I see it constantly in people who live blaming themselves, who never feel enough, or who demand far more from themselves than they would

demand from someone they love. They are people who seek approval everywhere except within themselves. That is why I consider self-compassion so important. Self-compassion does not mean conformism or resignation. It means treating ourselves with humanity. It means understanding that we are imperfect and that we can learn from our mistakes without destroying ourselves over them. When a person finds the path to their heart, they stop fighting against themselves. And when they stop fighting against themselves, they begin to live with more peace.

Every stage of life has something to teach us. Childhood teaches us to explore the world with curiosity. Youth teaches us to experiment, to make mistakes, and to discover who we are. Adulthood teaches us to build, to serve, and to assume responsibilities. Old age teaches us to contemplate, to integrate experiences, and to understand that many of the things that once seemed so important were not really so important after all. Each stage has its beauty and each stage has its challenges. When we live each of them fully, life acquires a different depth.

If I could leave one single teaching to my daughter for her to read fifty years from now, I would tell her something very simple. Enjoy every moment. Not because every moment is perfect, but because every moment is unrepeatable. Every conversation is unrepeatable. Every embrace is unrepeatable. Every sunrise is unrepeatable. Life moves much faster than we imagine, and many times we do not understand the value of something until it is no longer present.

I have also learned something about regret. I have seen people regret not asking for forgiveness. Not expressing affection. Waiting too long to reconcile with someone important. I rarely hear someone regret having loved too much. That is why it is worth telling people we love them while we still have the opportunity to do so. It is worth forgiving when possible. It is worth closing cycles before it is too late.

One reflection that has always accompanied me is imagining life as a train car. Throughout the journey, people get on and off. Some remain with us for many years, and others only for a few stations. None of us knows how long we will share the journey with those we love. Precisely for that reason, it is worth treating people well while they are still sitting beside us. It is worth listening, accompanying, understanding, and giving thanks. When we understand that no one will remain forever in the same car, we learn to value much more the company we have today.

If one day I reach an advanced age and have the opportunity to look back while drinking a cup of coffee in the morning, I hope I can say something simple. That my life had purpose. That I did the best I could with the time I was given. That I helped some people find health, hope, and balance. That I planted small seeds that continued growing long after I was no longer present. I like to imagine that influence as a stone falling into a quiet lake. The stone disappears, but the ripples continue expanding far beyond the place where it fell. They touch one shore, then another, and then another. Perhaps living well consists precisely of that: planting something good that continues growing in other people.

After all these years observing patients, studying medicine, and reflecting on health, if I had to summarize this entire book in one sentence, it would be this: living well means living in balance.

Not a perfect or motionless balance, but a human, dynamic, and conscious balance that allows us to move through the inevitable changes of life without losing sight of who we are. Because in the end, health is not a destination we reach. It is a way of living.

Conclusion

The Search for Balance

When I began writing this book, I thought I was writing about health. I thought I would speak about nutrition, exercise, sleep, disease, modern medicine, and some teachings from ancestral traditions such as Ayurveda. However, as I moved through these pages, I began to notice something curious. All of those topics, although they seemed different, always ended up leading me to the same place. Not to a specific diet. Not to an exercise routine. Not to a supplement. Not to a particular technique. They all led me to the same reflection: the search for balance.

Throughout my life, I have had the privilege of observing thousands of people. I have seen sick people and healthy people. I have seen young people and older people. I have seen people with a lot of money and people with very little. I have seen people with great success and people who never appeared on a cover or received any recognition. And after observing so many different stories, I have reached a simple conclusion: health and happiness rarely depend on one single thing. Rather, they seem to arise when different areas of life manage to coexist in harmony.

I have observed that excess almost always ends up charging a price. Excessive work distances us from our family. Excessive worry steals our sleep. Excessive food affects our health. Excessive control generates anxiety. Even excessive ambition, something society often celebrates, can distance us from what originally gave meaning to our path. With time, I understood that nature seems to constantly teach us the same lesson. Everything functions through balance. Day and night. Activity and rest. Inhalation and exhalation. Movement and stillness. We are no different.

I have also observed that we live too much outside ourselves. We live focused on the next goal, the next purchase, the next achievement, the next problem. We worry about what others think, about what we still do not have, or about what we believe we lack. Many times, we spend so much time observing the outside that we forget to look within. And when that happens, we begin to disconnect from ourselves. We lose contact with our values, our priorities, and what truly gives us peace.

Perhaps this is why some of the most serene people I have known led extraordinarily simple lives. They were not people free of problems. Nor were they people who had never suffered. On the contrary. Many had gone through illnesses, losses, disappointments, and difficult moments. What made them different was the way they related to life. They had learned to accept that there are things we cannot control and that constantly fighting against that reality only increases our suffering. Without knowing it, many of them seemed to have reached conclusions very similar to those taught by Buddhism, Stoicism, or Ayurveda for centuries.

Buddhism reminds us that everything is impermanent. Ayurveda teaches us that health arises when we live in harmony with our nature. Stoicism invites us to focus our energy on what truly depends on us. And although these paths were born in different places and times, I find a common idea among all of them: peace appears when we stop constantly fighting with reality and learn to live with greater awareness.

Over the years, my way of understanding happiness also changed. For a long time, I thought happiness was a goal that one day would be reached. Today, I see it differently. I have observed that happiness appears and disappears like any other emotion. There are joyful days and difficult days. There are moments of enthusiasm and moments of sadness. Pretending to remain always happy is as unrealistic as pretending that it will always be spring. What I have seen in the wisest people is something different. I have seen peace. I have seen serenity. I have seen an extraordinary ability to remain centered even when circumstances are not perfect.

Peace does not mean the absence of problems. It means not becoming lost inside them. It means understanding that problems are part of life, but they do not have to define our entire existence. I have known people with significant illnesses who preserve admirable tranquility and apparently healthy people who live trapped in a constant battle against themselves. That made me understand that true health does not occur only in the body. It also occurs in the mind and in the spirit.

Perhaps that is why one of the things that worries me most about our time is the lack of connection with ourselves. We have become very efficient at producing, competing, rushing, and accumulating, but we often forget to pause. We forget to breathe deeply. We forget to contemplate. We forget to be grateful. We forget to enjoy a conversation without looking at the clock. We forget to walk without haste. We forget to observe a sunrise or share a meal with those we love. And when we stop doing those things, little by little we begin to lose something that is difficult to describe, but easy to feel.

I have observed that a full life is not necessarily a spectacular life. In fact, many times the opposite is true. The most balanced people often find joy in extraordinarily simple things. They enjoy a cup of coffee in the morning. They enjoy caring for a garden. They enjoy a calm conversation. They enjoy helping someone. They enjoy learning something new. They preserve curiosity about life even at advanced ages. And perhaps that is one of the most beautiful characteristics of the human being: the ability to continue learning until the last day.

I often think that life is more like cultivating a garden than constructing a building. A building can be raised relatively quickly. A garden cannot. A garden requires time, patience, attention, and constant care. We cannot force a plant to grow faster. We cannot rush the seasons. We can only create the right conditions and trust the process. The same happens with our health. The same happens with our relationships. The same happens with our personal growth. The deepest transformations rarely happen suddenly. They are built slowly, day by day, through small actions that eventually become habits.

I have also learned that love, family, and community have far greater value than we usually recognize. No human being was created to carry the weight of life completely alone. We all need support at some point. We all need to be heard. We all need companionship. I have seen people find unexpected strength because of a word of encouragement, a sincere friendship, or a family that decided to remain united during difficult times. And I have also seen the suffering produced by loneliness when it lasts too long.

There is an image that often accompanies me. I think of life as a train journey. Along the way, people get on and off. Some remain with us for many years. Others only for a few stations. None of us knows how long we will share the journey with those we love. Precisely for that reason, it is worth listening more, giving thanks more, forgiving more, and loving more. Because one day the train car will continue moving forward, and some people will no longer be sitting beside us.

If today I had to summarize everything I have observed about health and life, I would say something very simple. Most people believe health is lost when symptoms appear. I have come to think that many times health begins to be lost when we move away from ourselves, when we stop listening to our body, when we live disconnected from our values, and when we forget what truly gives meaning to our existence. In the same way, healing means much more than correcting a disease. Healing means returning. Returning to our center. Returning to our values. Returning to what restores our balance.

After all these years observing life through medicine, if I had to summarize this book in a single sentence, I would choose the following:

Living well means living in balance.

Not a perfect balance. Not a motionless balance. Not a balance that eliminates all difficulties. I am speaking of a human, dynamic, and conscious balance that allows us to move through the different stages of life without losing sight of who we are. A balance that helps us enjoy the good moments with gratitude and face difficult moments with dignity. A balance that reminds us that health is not only the absence of disease, but a way of relating to ourselves, to others, and to life.

If these pages manage to inspire even a small reflection, then they will have fulfilled their purpose. Because in the end, transformation does not usually occur through great revelations. It occurs through small decisions repeated day after day. One more conscious meal. One more walk. One pending conversation. A moment of silence. An act of compassion toward ourselves. A decision to return to balance each time we move away from it.

And perhaps that is the most important teaching of all.

No matter how many times we lose our way.

As long as we continue breathing, we can always find the path back.

Bibliography

Many of the ideas presented in this book arise from clinical observation, the experience accumulated over years of medical practice, and personal reflection on health, disease, and the search for human balance. The following references represent some of the scientific, philosophical, and traditional sources that inspired part of this work.

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