

# Wellness and Aging

by Charles Gant, MD, Ph.D.

**A**s a physician who practices complementary medicine, I am mostly concerned with shifting the emphasis away from disease toward wellness. These are two different states and as I cannot make potentially fraudulent claims about curing disease, I can nevertheless promise patients that by honestly working a plan of recovery, they will be more well than before. In other words, you may still have a disease but you will be more well than when you started. Of course, by getting well most symptoms usually disappear in most people, but that is impossible to predict for any single individual.

Wellness is best defined as homeostasis, which means a state of balance — of mind, body and spirit. Religious practices to assist people in attaining spiritual homeostasis have been available for thousands of years. Psychotherapy techniques to help people reach mental homeostasis have been available for a hundred years. Biochemical testing and nutritional science to assist people in reaching physiological homeostasis have become increasingly available for a few decades. Thus, the science required to define physical wellness is in its infancy. It's little wonder that so few people, even medical professionals, are uninformed about it.

We can now define wellness at the physical level with great precision. We can do biochemical testing of the hair, saliva, stool, blood and urine to determine if certain nutrients (minerals, vitamins, essential fatty acids and amino acids), certain critical metabolites of those nutrients (for example, thyroid hormone, melatonin, DHEA), are out of balance in the tissues, and if certain toxic substances (lead, mercury, allergic food proteins) are present. Such imbalances cause the body's physiology to go out of kilter, and they disrupt homeostasis — wellness is threatened.

Whether or not you feel well, or are free of disease or symptoms, you may have

imbalances in cellular homeostasis that could set you up for problems later. You may not know that you are not at peak functioning. Conventional medical testing only looks for the most extreme imbalances, so people who have severe metabolic imbalances often show completely "normal" test results. The doctor then may say the symptoms are "all in their head," and refer them to a psychiatrist, a minister or a priest. Sometimes a lack of psychological or spiritual wellness does cause the symptoms — my experience indicates the culprits actually are testable metabolic imbalances.

At the physical level, aging could be defined as a tendency of cellular physiology to be thrown out of homeostasis more quickly by any nutritional deficiencies, hormone imbalances or toxin exposure. Therefore, the older we get, the more care we must take to keep ourselves in a balanced state. That means that testing is more important than ever. Unlike our younger selves, even slight imbalances can cause symptoms or create risk factors for heart disease or cancer. Now that we have this new science of wellness testing, we can maintain much more control of wellness, and this promises to add not only years to our lives, but even more importantly, life to our years.