

# Healing & Disease Reversal

THE SERIES

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*This series explores Dean Ornish's 30-year research experience into healing & disease reversal by dietary and lifestyle changes. He is a California University Professor of Medicine in San Francisco. This instalment continues to explain his claims why his programme works, whilst others prove unsustainable*

In Professor Dean Ornish's experience, there are two basic strategies that work to achieve and maintain dietary and lifestyle changes. The first approach is making small, gradual changes, so they don't seem too intimidating. You walk a little more, and you eat a little less, every day. Over time, small changes add up and are often sustainable.

The second approach is to make comprehensive lifestyle changes all at once. This seems unbelievable, especially to doctors, who often say that they can't even get their patients to take pills, let alone getting them to change their diet, start exercising and meditating, and spending more time with their friends and family. In Ornish's experience however, it's sometimes easier to make big changes than small ones. When you make big changes, you experience big improvements. Most people feel so much better so quickly that joy of living replaces fear of dying.

Another reason why making big changes can be easier than making small ones is, that when you make big dietary transformations, your taste preferences often change. When you first switch from whole milk to skimmed milk, it tastes like water – not satisfying. After a while, you get used to it and, if someone puts whole milk by mistake in your tea, it tastes too fatty and too rich. However, if you use whole milk, and occasionally some skimmed milk, your palate will never adapt to the skimmed.

Ornish's programme is all about freedom of choice. Depending where you want and need to get to, you can make small or big changes. The more you move to the healthy end of a range of choices, the faster, greater and quicker the benefits.

There's no point in giving up something you enjoy unless you get something back that's even better – and quickly. People are always making choices and they are not afraid of making big changes in their lives if they understand the benefits and how quickly they may occur. People are not afraid of even monumental lifestyle changes like having and raising a child – lots of

people do it, and often more than once

If it's fun, it's sustainable. If we view diet and lifestyle change as deprivation and sacrifice, well, forget it. Instead, if we understand that what we gain is so much more than what we give up, it doesn't feel like a sacrifice. Lifestyle choices can be seen as opportunities to transform our lives in ways that make us happier. For example, I'm writing this article instead of spending the day out because it brings meaning to my life knowing that the feature may be helpful to some people – transforming work into joy. Having a child can be viewed as a sacrifice or as a joy. You would choose to eat healthier foods because they make you feel better, not because someone told you to do so.

How we approach food is how we approach life. Choosing not to do something that we otherwise could do helps define who we are, reminds us that we have free will. When we consciously choose to limit what we're doing, it liberates us. Discipline can be liberating if it's freely chosen rather than imposed. Many people think that we have to choose between living a moral, spiritual life that's dry and boring or an immoral, secular life that's exciting and interesting. Fortunately, that's not the choice. We can go through the world any way we want to. Some approaches lead to health and joy, others lead to illness and suffering. We have a range of choices in all aspects of our lives.

People are always making choices, sacrifices. The word "sacrifice" has an austere, depriving connotation. But people don't usually think about it that way when they put their money aside for their kids' education or wedding, and so they don't buy a new car when they could do so. These choices – what not to do as well as what to do – bring meaning to our lives. Choosing to eat and live differently can be a joyful practice rather than one leaving you feeling deprived or depressed. You can enjoy life more fully by making these conscious choices. Instead of resolving to make diet and lifestyle changes out of a sense of austerity and deprivation, Ornish finds it much more effective and fun to be motivated by feelings of love and joy.

## Bibliography

1. JO, et al. Obesity and the environment: where do we go from here? *Science* 2003; 299 (5808): 863-66.  
Ornish D. *The Spectrum*, New York Ballantine Books 2007.