

Introduction

Civilization Diseases and Their Relations with Nutrition and the Lifestyle

Never has so much attention been paid by professional and lay public to civilization diseases as it is at present. World statistics even put us in fear of the trends of increase of civilization diseases that spread all over the world “epidemiologically” as consequences of unsuitable nutrition and lifestyle. The people know the composition of foodstuffs already, daily observe their body weight and the subject of everyday talks of the people is the increase of body weight without gender differences. Women deal with the subject of body weight more, but gender differences disappear.

Even though every reasonable man is able to understand physical laws of certain balance between intake of energy in food and output by physical work and movement, we postpone interventions to our boarding habits with high offer of foodstuffs.

We are able to define exactly what the health is and what is its value for us, but that is where our interest in boarding habits ends. We are able to analyze all in detail, explain and, especially, justify to get, in fact, to the world of innocent victims of the market, our everyday stress, lack of time and, especially, the main “cause” of our current problems of globalization exported to us from the West, especially, from the USA. This is by which many of us also justify their indolence and indifference to our own health. Only the contact with sudden disease or death near us will address us to really think about ourselves.

When we speak about nutrition, we mean the scientific discipline dealing with food in general and making use of it. We need not convince one another that what we eat influences directly our health, it is correct and balanced food, it even has a preventive influence against different civilization diseases and also helps to recover from them.

Food brings certain chemical substances to us necessary for maintenance of the health. It brings substances to us necessary for the creation of cells and tissues, for reparation processes and energy for maintenance of functions of body structures.

Processed food chymus goes from the stomach to the small intestine, where digestion and absorption are completed, and goes over to the blood circulation. It is the blood that distributes nutrition to the cells and tissues.

Waste substances are discharged by the kidneys in urine and concentrated in the colon also by the stool.

If the main problem in the past was undernourishment, today it is rather overfeeding and obesity. Overfeeding frequently begins in the childhood already. The mothers that react to every weeping of the baby by offering the bottle, indirectly teach them to compensate negative body feelings by intake of food. Also our current evenings at the TV are often connected with diverse offer of sweets, chocolate, ice-cream or, on the contrary salt sticks, peanuts, sweet or alcoholic drinks and their alternation.

Alcoholic drinks complete the received already calories and do not bring essentially nourishing substances.

Positive effects of small doses of alcohol are often discussed, but for pregnant women, children and adolescents alcohol is unsuitable. It is handed down about women that they drink more than they did in the past, mainly wine and spirits.

If a person consumes more calories than it needs, the body stores the excessive calories in the form of fat which further leads to obesity. Obesity increases the risk of adult type of diabetes, high blood pressure, vascular events, even some malignities. It is also necessary to mention osteoarthritis and pain connected with it of the obese. However, among civilization diseases we must include also the increase of depressive psychoses and suicides. The different habit dependencies kill and traumatize not only individuals, but also their families.

Some techniques may decrease the risks of obesity. E.g., to be careful and not to use food for filling in loneliness and boredom. To leave out quick refreshments rich in fats and sugars. On the contrary, prefer vegetables and fruit. We should dilute fruit drinks with water, prefer de-fattened milk and de-fattened yoghurts. Amylaceousoids connected with fats are a high source of calories.

Civilization diseases kill and invalidate more people than all wars and ethnic conflicts. They are not only pathogenic bacteria and viruses, parasites, but an increase of chronic degenerative diseases.

What does current science on nutrition offer to us? The key is balanced food that includes all nourishing

substances: They are 5 groups of food:

1. vegetables
2. fruit
3. bread, cereals, rice, potatoes
4. milk, yoghurts, cheeses
5. meat, poultry, fish, dry beans and peas, eggs, nuts, etc.

However, the problem of civilization diseases does not end with our boarding habits. The point is also the way of living.

Long-term stress poisons our mental well-being, decreases the feeling of physical comfort, creativeness, concentration on the performance of occupation and effectiveness and disturbs also sexuality.

Movement belongs inseparably to the way of living. Estimated is the optimum number of movements daily of 7.500 to 10.000 steps a day which represents about 5 km of walking. The use of a car daily even for short distances has become rather the fashion and indolence than need. For the recent 10 years the number of people increased markedly working in a sedentary employment and requiring high concentration. They are the professions of a lawyer, scientist, manager, workers in the fields of advertisement and marketing. Those who spent the larger part of the day without movement, should exercise at least 40 minutes a day.

The possibilities of health service to improve the state of health of the inhabitants are limited, because it influences only about 20 % of it. Further 20 % is the participation of the living and working environment. Moreover, it is influenced by the factors of the style of living, unsuitable composition and excessive energy of food, smoking, the above-mentioned lack of movement activity, psychic strain and stress, misuse of drugs and unsuitable sexual behaviour. This is why the challenge of the time is to change our priorities included into which must be also sufficient sleep and relaxation activities.

Every year new civilization diseases originate, especially, “from sufficiency” and the human organism gradually degenerates. The especially endangered occupations are all office occupations, 8 and more hours at the computer, drivers and those who travel frequently due to work, especially, for longer distances, pilots, truck drivers, sitting “sportsmen” and sedentary leisure time activities. We use lifts without thinking also to low floors and do not walk on foot.

Pessimistic conclusions say that mankind has attempted to destroy itself since its origin already, but the development of technology in the last century makes that possibility realistic.

Although the medical science will probably find medicines for the most serious civilization diseases, such as HIV infection and AIDS, cancer, in parallel new civilization diseases will originate.

The man, *Homo sapiens* will continue to fight against civilization diseases and will stop pessimistic visions.

Some experts see our possibilities at two levels.

Either the increase of interest in religion and overall improvement of moral behaviour or, on the contrary, a still larger deflection from morality witnessing to which is the behaviour of a part of the young generation.

The challenge of the time is to think in common and seek for solutions against civilization diseases. We mentioned some of them and it is only up to us to introduce them to our life. The improvement of the state of health of the population, slowing down the process of ageing, prediction and prevention of diseases will become the main orientation also of genetics of the 21st century. Its potential for the fulfilment of these aims is probably larger than we guess today.

Prof. MUDr. Ladislav Šoltés, DrSc.

Department of Medical Ethics SZU in Bratislava