



“Climate change is the greatest threat to global health in the 21st century.”

World Health Organization

Many of us know that healthy lifestyle choices are also environmentally responsible choices. We know, for example, that biking to work rather than driving, is healthy. We know that reducing our exposure to synthetic chemicals by using natural household cleaners and eating organic food is also correlated to better health. But have you stopped to consider *why* this relationship exists?

Why are environmentally responsible choices simultaneously healthy choices?

Traditional medical systems such as Chinese Medicine and Ayurvedic medicine teach us that **humans don't simply exist in the environment, they're manifestations of it**. What happens to our environment happens to us also and this is characterized well in the Old-World sciences. Western science is full of profound examples, even if our culture and medical approaches are slow to integrate this awareness:

1. **Our Microbiome:** Consider for a moment that humans have about 23,000 genes and that a tomato has... 31,000. This is possible in part because of our microbiome - an ecosystem of trillions of bacteria and other microbes inside and on our bodies, that outnumber our human cells 10 to 1. These bugs come from our environment, they reflect the quality of the environment we spend time in, and they influence *every* system in our body. (Even 20% of the small molecules in our blood are made by these guys!¹)
2. **Circadian Rhythms:** Our bodies have built-in rhythms that fluctuate alongside the moon, sun, and tide. Hormones such as melatonin (which is critical for sleep), and cortisol (a stress and immune system hormone), follow these rhythms and are disturbed by lifestyle factors such as night-time exposure to “light pollution” in urban environments, and wi-fi signals. Disrupted circadian rhythms are correlated to many health conditions, including some forms of cancer, depression, high blood pressure, and obesity.
3. **Epigenetics and the “Exposome”:** Just a few years ago we thought that our genes played a significant role in development of chronic disease. Turns out, about 80% of chronic illness (such as cancer and heart disease) is attributable to our environment and how our genes *interact* with our environment!²⁻³ Further, we can *inherit* the results of these interactions from our ancestors. Consequences of unhealthy environments literally last lifetimes.

Climate change isn't “just” an intangible global phenomenon characterised by rising temperatures and melting ice. It's personal. **We are our environment. And what happens to our environment happens to us also** – no matter what kind of technology we apply to compensate for ecosystem damage.

Environmental Destruction and Climate Change Cause Disease.

A quick review of climate change research reveals *hundreds* of correlated health conditions ranging from lung and heart disease, to mental illness and infectious disease like Lyme disease and Dengue fever.⁴⁻⁸ The Lancet Commission on Pollution and Health states that “pollution [which] is intimately linked to global climate change... is the largest environmental cause of disease and death in the world today”.⁹

As we each willfully engage in habits that erode our environment, we erode our own health and that of future generations. We also impair our ability to heal from environmental insults, since much of our ability to *adapt* to our environment depends on the very systems being threatened by it, such as a healthy and diverse microbiome and balanced circadian rhythms.

The science is clear: We’re *immediately* at a tipping point for preserving quality of life on this planet and change is *required*. But even the most inspired of us eventually find that these environmentally responsible choices feel more like a burden and a chore. The key to lasting change comes in understanding the lessons taught to us by this challenge.

Environmentally-sustainable choices can feel like a chore... But they don’t have to.

In his book, “Climate, A New Story”, Charles Eisenstein suggests that climate change is the second world event to teach humanity that we’re all intimately connected. (The first event was the use of the atomic bomb.) In other words, what you do affects me and what I do affects you.

Through these principles we come to understand that aligning our actions with the needs of our environment isn’t about giving up lifestyle luxuries to win the “battle” against climate change. **It’s about gaining a deeper awareness of who we are in relation to our community and our environment** which, according to both Eastern philosophy and Western research, inspires happiness, fosters health, and leads to a more fulfilled life. From this perspective, climate change isn’t our enemy – it’s our teacher.

Prescription for Change:

Spend time in nature each week. Use your senses to hear, smell, and feel nature. Notice how this affects your body and mind. Over time, notice how a regular practice outdoors impacts your perception of stress, pain, and your susceptibility to illness. Humans co-evolved with nature and denying this relationship has health consequences.

Find a natural resource in your neighbourhood that you appreciate and take care of it. This could be anything from turtles to an older forested area or marshland. Ask your Conservation Region Authority for suggestions.

Get to know your local organic farmers and support them. They offer an under-recognized and valuable community service by preserving and restoring healthy ecosystems, (yours *and* the Earth’s).

Educate yourself about environmental concerns and climate change. Read some of the resources below and remind yourself that how you treat our environment directly impacts your health and that of future generations.

Local Resources:

“Ayurveda’s Three Pillars of Health: A Map to Health, Resilience and Well-Being” by Mona Warner, 2019

“The Possibility Project: From Climate Change to Human Change”. Podcast, with host Sarah Knight. 2018 – 2019.

Additional Reading Material:

“Climate: A New Story” by Charles Eisenstein, 2018.

“The Secret Life of your Microbiome” by Dr. Alan Logan and Dr. Susan Prescott, 2017

“Toxic: Heal Your Body from Mold Toxicity, Lyme Disease, Multiple Chemical Sensitivities, and Chronic Environmental Illness” by Dr. Neil Nathan, 2018.

“Dirty Genes: A Breakthrough Program to Treat the Root Cause of Illness” by Dr. Ben Lynch, 2018.

“Forest Bathing: Discovering Health and Happiness Through the Japanese Practice of *Shinrin Yoku*”, by Dr. Cyndi Gilbert ND, 2019.

International Society for Environmentally-Acquired Illness (ISEAI.org)

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