

WELLNESS

A YOUNG ADULT'S ENCOUNTER WITH ELLEN WHITE ... ON WELLNESS

There is much focus on health these days. You've seen it—many diets, gyms, and health foods. Men and women are trying to get in shape. Complicated programs are everywhere, but I have seen that being healthy is actually quite simple. I don't mean that using all your willpower to resist that piece of chocolate cake is easy, but the principles behind the whole thing are. I know there are people with special health needs, but for most of us what we eat and what we do determine how fit we are.

*I had been a vegetarian for more than three years when I started my first year of college. I also started reading *The Ministry of Healing*, and discovered it was really interesting. That book sounds just like what the health community is currently publishing! Where I live there is a great focus on health, but it seemed ironic for me to be reading a book about health that had been written more than 100 years ago and yet contains the same basic guidelines as the modern journals.*

I started following the vegan lifestyle and increased my exercise, intake of water, and time with God. Within the first semester, I was not only feeling better physically (and minus those excess 25 pounds), but more connected spiritually. When I resisted my appetite, I found that I was stronger against temptation. Also, since my brain was no longer clouded from a high-sugar, high-fat diet I discovered that I could hear the voice of God more clearly.

Ellen White's counsel made a visible, tangible difference in my health and appearance. More important, practicing that counsel has strengthened my relationship with my Savior

—Tara, age 21

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I grew up vegetarian, but still didn't always make healthy choices. Although my family always ate healthfully, I grabbed at any chance I could get to sneak in desserts and snacks. However, I took a class on Daniel in academy and was required to read Ellen White's counsels on diet, rest, exercise, and health, in order to better understand Daniel's example.

I began to realize that even though I was a vegetarian I wasn't living up to the information I knew about healthful living. I cut out dairy products, refined foods, and most sugar. I soon felt like a new person and could remember what I studied much better. I also began a regular exercise program, tried to get more sleep, and drank more water. I am still continually astonished at how seldom I get sick, how much more energy I have, and how much more efficiently I study in comparison to the previous years of my life.

Another aspect of mental wellness that Ellen White has brought to my attention is trusting in God. I am a chronic worrier, and doubts and fears used to dominate my thoughts and prayers. However, God continues to change my heart slowly and imperceptibly, often through Ellen White's writings. She reminds me that my trust is in the Omnipotent One, who longs to give me peace and wants me to know how much He cares about every detail of my life. One of my favorite quotes is from In Heavenly Places: "Educate yourself to have unlimited confidence in God."⁸⁵ I long to do that day by day, and throughout my whole life, as the most integral part of my wellness.

—Rel, age 21

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I have worked as a counselor or boys' director at a Seventh-day Adventist youth camp for the past four summers. I am continually searching for the perfect materials to use in my worship thoughts with campers each night. The Bible and Ellen White's writings have been my staples. I use those same writings extensively for wisdom in discipline, my personal meditation, and to answer questions from boys of varying ages.

*In this past summer's search for ideal devotional material, my thoughts turned to Ellen White's work *The Sanctified Life*, specifically her stories about Daniel and his Hebrew friends in Babylon. I now have adopted the Genesis 1:29 diet and place a high priority on whole, unrefined foods, very little sugar, plenty of sleep, and water. Because these decisions have been so beneficial in the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual realms of my life, I wanted to share with my campers the inspiration for, and potential benefits of, such changes.*

Each week I would demonstrate my health habits to my campers by declining to eat fried, sugary, or otherwise unhealthy foods in lieu of fruits, vegetables, and grains. "My" boys knew the value I placed on sleep, water, hygiene, and healthy habits through my constant interaction with them and by observing my lifestyle choices. This led them to badger me with questions concerning the health benefits or liabilities of a variety of foods and habits of their own. In turn, our worship thoughts on Daniel and his friends allowed me to share the biblical principles behind my actions and choices. Ellen White's writings on these matters have opened my mind to the benefits of wellness, and I have been privileged to pass on the wealth!

—Brian, age 23

SCRIPTURE

Then the king commanded his palace master Ashpenaz to bring some of the Israelites of the royal family and of the nobility, young

men without physical defect and handsome, versed in every branch of wisdom, endowed with knowledge and insight, and competent to serve in the king's palace; they were to be taught the literature and language of the Chaldeans. The king assigned them a daily portion of the royal rations of food and wine. They were to be educated for three years, so that at the end of that time they could be stationed in the king's court. Among them were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, from the tribe of Judah. The palace master gave them other names: Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego.

But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the royal rations of food and wine; so he asked the palace master to allow him not to defile himself. Now God allowed Daniel to receive favor and compassion from the palace master. The palace master said to Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king; he has appointed your food and your drink. If he should see you in poorer condition than the other young men of your own age, you would endanger my head with the king" (Daniel 1:3-10).

"Please test your servants for ten days. Let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. You can then compare our appearance with the appearance of the young men who eat the royal rations, and deal with your servants according to what you observe."

So he agreed to this proposal and tested them for ten days. At the end of ten days it was observed that they appeared better and fatter than all the young men who had been eating the royal rations. So the guard continued to withdraw their royal rations and the wine they were to drink, and gave them vegetables. To these four young men God gave knowledge and skill in every aspect of literature and wisdom; Daniel also had insight into all visions and dreams.

At the end of the time that the king had set for them to be brought in, the palace master brought them into the presence of Nebuchadnezzar, and the king spoke with them. And among them all, no one was found to compare with Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; therefore they were stationed in the king's court. In

every matter of wisdom and understanding concerning which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom (verses 12-20).

Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, just as it is well with your soul (2 John 2).

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20, NIV).

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Among the Israelites who were taken as prisoners of war to Babylon were men and women who were as true as steel to principle, not corrupted by selfishness but willing to honor God at the loss of everything. In the land of their captivity these individuals were to carry out God's purpose by showing to non-Christian nations the benefits that come through knowing God. They were to be His representatives. Never were they to compromise their faith. In good times and bad they honored God, and God honored them.

Daniel and his three friends stood up for God—wonderful examples of what young people may become when they unite with the God of wisdom and power. From the comparative simplicity of their Jewish homes, these youth from royalty were taken to the most fabulous of cities and directly into the court of the world's greatest emperor.

Seeing enormous intellectual potential in these young men, Nebuchadnezzar decided that they should be trained to fill important positions in his kingdom. To prepare them for their administrative careers, he arranged Chaldean language study, as well as entrance to the three-year specialized education reserved for royalty.

A crucial test came right at the beginning of their elite

training. As a token of the king's approval and personal interest in their welfare, he provided the Jewish students with cuisine and drinks from his own table. However, since part of the meal had been offered to idols, anyone who ate it would be recognized as respecting the gods of Babylon. Loyalty to Jehovah prohibited Daniel and his friends from honoring a false god in any way. Even pretending to eat the food or drink the wine would be denying their faith.

Additionally, these young people dared not risk reducing their vitality and squandering their physical, mental, and spiritual health. They remembered the sad results of Nadab and Abihu's drinking, and didn't want to injure their own physical and mental powers through the use of wine.

Daniel and his friends had come from homes in which parents had emphasized abstinence from alcohol. They had been taught that God would hold them accountable for their talents and abilities, and they must never undermine or deplete their strength. This early childhood education helped Daniel and his friends make good choices, though degrading influences and strong temptations were all around them in the luxurious and corrupt court. No power, no influence, could move them from the principles they had learned earlier by studying the Word and works of God.

If Daniel had desired, he certainly could have found an excuse in his surroundings for giving up his strictly temperate habits. He could have argued that since he was dependent on the king's approval and subject to his power, there was no other option for him than to eat from the king's food and drink his wine. If he followed God's teaching, he would offend the king and probably lose his position, and even his life. On the other hand, if he ignored the commandment of the Lord, he could keep the approval of the king and guarantee a highly successful career.

But Daniel did not hesitate. The approval of God was

more important to him than the approval of the most powerful earthly monarch, more important than life itself. Whatever the outcome, he would stand firm. He “resolved that he would not defile himself with the royal rations of food and wine” (verse 8). His three friends supported his position.

The Hebrew youth were not arrogant in coming to this decision. They relied totally on God. They didn’t go out of their way to be odd, but if being peculiar was necessary in order to honor God, they were willing. If they yielded to wrong in this situation because of the pressure of circumstances, that compromise would weaken their sense of right and their hatred of wrong. The first wrong step would lead to others until their connection with heaven would be cut off, and they would be swept away by temptation.⁸⁶

Daniel appealed to Melzar, the officer in special charge of the Hebrew youth, requesting that they might be excused from eating the king’s food and drinking his wine. He asked for a ten-day trial of simple food, while the other captives ate royal gourmet.

Melzar, though worried that going along with this request would bring on the displeasure of the king, nevertheless consented. Daniel knew that his case was won! Sure enough, at the end of the ten days’ trial the outcome was exactly opposite of what the officer feared. In personal appearance the Hebrew youth were much more fit and strong than their other friends. As a result, Daniel and his associates were permitted to continue their simple diet during their entire course of training.

For three years the Hebrew youth concentrated on Chaldean studies. During this time they remained loyal to God and depended constantly on His power. Along with practicing self-discipline, they combined goal setting with focus and hard work. It was not pride or ambition that brought them into the king’s court, into fraternity with those

who didn't know or respect God; they were prisoners of war in a foreign country, placed there by Eternal Wisdom. Separated from home influences and spiritually minded friends, they tried to conduct themselves with distinction for the honor of their oppressed homeland and for the honor of Him whom they served.

The Lord approved the firmness, altruism, and pure motives of the Hebrew youth and gave them His blessings. He gave knowledge and skill in every aspect of literature and wisdom; Daniel also had insight into all visions and dreams (verse 17). The promise was fulfilled: "Those who honor me I will honor" (1 Samuel 2:30). As Daniel clung to God with unwavering trust, the spirit of prophetic power came upon him. During the time that Daniel was learning the duties of court life from his teachers, God was teaching him to read the mysteries of the future and to record events covering the history of this world until the close of time.

At the examinations at the end of the training period, the Hebrews were tested for placement in government service. But "among them all, no one was found to compare with Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah" (Daniel 1:19). Their keen comprehension, their extensive knowledge, their precise and articulate language, testified to the unimpaired strength and vigor of their mental ability. "In every matter of wisdom and understanding concerning which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom" (verse 20).

Brilliant students, representing every country, the most talented, highly intelligent, and culturally educated youth in the world, could not compare with the young Hebrews. Strongest, most handsome, most knowledgeable, and with the quickest recall—they stood at the top, living testimonials of healthful living.

Though far more successful in the examinations than

their fellow students, Daniel and his friends' academic success did not come from chance. They did well because of the disciplined use of their abilities, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. They chose to connect with the Source of all wisdom, making the knowledge of God the foundation of their education. In faith, they prayed for wisdom, and they lived their prayers. They placed themselves where God could bless them, avoiding anything that would weaken their abilities and taking advantage of every opportunity to learn in all subject areas. They followed the rules of health, guaranteeing strength of intellect. They pursued knowledge for one purpose: that they might honor God. And God Himself was their teacher. Constantly praying, conscientiously studying, keeping in touch with the Unseen, they walked with God, as did Enoch.⁸⁷

Through the consistent practice of health principles demonstrated by the Hebrew youth, God is speaking to the youth of today. Where are young men and young women who, like Daniel, will do and dare for the cause of right? Pure hearts, strong hands, fearless courage are needed. The warfare between good and evil calls for constant watchfulness. Satan comes to every person with temptation in many alluring forms to indulge appetite.

The body is the most important agency through which the mind and the soul are developed for building character. That is why the adversary, Satan, directs his temptations toward weakening and degrading physical power. If he succeeds here, it often means the surrender of the whole being to evil. The tendencies of our physical nature, unless under the control of a higher power, will eventually bring ruin and death. The body must be disciplined. Our passions must be controlled by choices submitted to God's will. Consecrated reason is king! Intellectual power, physical stamina, and length of life depend upon unchangeable laws. Through

obedience to these laws of health, youth may conquer themselves, conquer their own inclinations, and conquer the “rulers of the darkness of this world” (Ephesians 6:12, KJV).

The spirit of Daniel can be the spirit of the youth today; they may draw from the same source of strength, possess the same power of self-control, and reveal the same grace in their lives, even under similarly unfavorable circumstances. Though surrounded by temptations to indulge self, especially in our large cities, where every form of sensual gratification is made easy and inviting, youth may resist every temptation. But only to those who determine to do right because it is right will the victory be gained.

God desires to reveal through you today the same mighty truths that were revealed through these young men. The life of Daniel and his friends is a demonstration of what He will do for you if you seek Him with your whole heart.⁸⁸

(For additional reading on this subject, we recommend *The Ministry of Healing*, *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, *Counsels on Health*, and *Temperance*.)

THINK ABOUT IT

1. What are several advantages of healthful eating to the serious Christian?
2. What three things might you change in your lifestyle that could result in more peace in your life?
3. Identify several reasons Daniel and the three worthies did not eat Nebuchadnezzar’s food.
4. Think of several examples of life issues in which it is appropriate to “dare to be a Daniel.” Where might it be better to compromise?
5. What is the relationship between appetite, self-control, and Christian character?