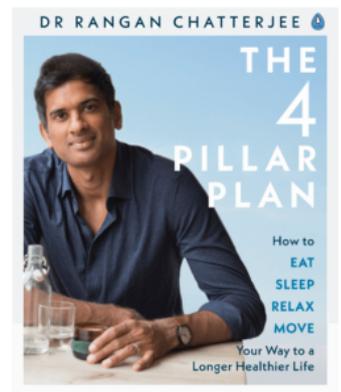


THE PILLARS OF HEALTHY LIVING

We are living in peculiar times. Not too long ago, you could expect a traveller, in the subcontinent, to open their lunch box during their journey and divide their food equally among those present. That type of empathy, kindness and the cultural values of the bygone era no longer exist. We have become individualised and selfish. People all over the world are becoming westernised now. We are becoming socially secluded and less connected with each other.

You must have noticed too when you go into a bookshop; you see a whole lot of books on self-help. Section after section is dedicated to treating individual issues. Some books are promoting diets while others are promoting other techniques like weight loss. Each one is claiming to have found the panacea for modern illnesses. I had been hesitating to review all such books. When I read Dr. Rangan Chatterjee's book, [*The 4 Pillar Plan: How to Relax, Eat, Move and Sleep Your Way to a Longer, Healthier Life*](#) (Penguin Life, 2017), I decided to write a review. The reason is he takes a holistic approach to solving the enigma of modern health problems.



To rejuvenate health we must pay attention to our mental, physical and spiritual needs; as they all impact our overall health. Our problems persist simply because we either take on an excessive exercise routine at the gym or we go on an extreme food diet; both approaches when taken individually cannot bring desired results. Dr. Chatterjee's book brings into perspective the importance of sufficient sleep and meditation as well as natural foods and exercises. I agree with him that silence is a place of great power and healing. We have forgotten all about the mental, physical and spiritual benefits of stillness.

We spend most of our spare time on the internet and watching television. Not realising that taking time to relax is essential for the mind and body. Meditation needs to be subscribed more regularly by the doctors as *“relaxing helps us to switch off our over-active stress response.”* We need at least 15 minutes relaxation time daily, says Dr Chatterjee. Everyone should have ‘me’ time, doing something for selves without feeling guilty; like gardening or visiting a local café, or any hobby that you enjoy. I can see the wisdom in Islam making 5 times daily prayers mandatory. Disconnection is vital.

“The grey matter in our brains increases when we have regular periods of mindfulness, whilst meditation stimulates neuronal activity, aids sleep quality, aids concentration and lowers blood pressure.”

The science is only beginning to appreciate the benefits of religious practices like gratitude. Gratitude is now considered to be vital for our mental and physical wellbeing. Most motivational speakers now include gratitude as a must have in their seminars. Charles Poliquin, the famous strength coach, has three questions he always asks his daughter before bed:

1. What have you done today to make someone else happy?
2. What has somebody else done today to make you happy?
3. What have you learned?

Social connections play an important part in maintaining our emotional equilibrium. Perhaps, it is for this reason that Dr. Chatterjee thinks we should reclaim the dining table. We must try to have at least one meal daily together as a family. He is correct, *“even as recently as twenty years ago it was common for families to eat their evening meals together”*. Our eating habits have changed, now most people are eating in front of the television, alone. This is feeding the [loneliness](#) epidemic in the western world.

The problem is we are seeking the solution for the pain of loneliness in the wrong places. More often than not we are chasing instant gratification, using tools such as the social media, while ignoring to chat with family members. Thus, in the long term, our feeling of loneliness is exasperated. Keeping all smartphones and electronic devices switched off when at the dinner table is a good idea. Dinner table should be a place for healthy conversations and healthy foods. Choosing non-processed foods is a good start to a better health.

I thought it was courageous of Dr. Chatterjee to tell his readers to stop eating wholemeal bread; in fact, his advice is *"to avoid food products that contain more than five ingredients"*, this includes all types of processed foods. Perhaps we need to start baking bread at home using organic ingredients. *"Our major problem is not that we're simply eating too much food; it's actually that we're eating the wrong type of food"*, he says. Our bodies are just not built for [processed foods](#). Eating fresh, unprocessed, local produce is the healthy option. In Dr. Chatterjee's view:

"Our culinary environment has changed to the point that we are now eating large quantities of low-quality food. I'm convinced that by simply focusing on quality, many of our problems, including obesity and type 2 diabetes, will simply fall away."

He says:

"Sod calories. Sorry to be blunt, but I believe our obsession with calories is not only misguided but also actively damaging our health."

Yes, we need to stop searching for the perfect diet, *"it's tempting to believe that there is, somewhere out there, the perfect diet and all we need to do to achieve perfect health is find it."* This is a false belief. All we need to do is eat

what's in season and stop eating all processed foods containing sugar. Our problem is that *"we have outsourced our food choices to massive global corporations."* These corporations are criminal for putting too much sugar and salts in the processed foods. *"Overconsumption of sugar alters our taste buds."* Hence, we have *"cravings for sweet foods and snacks between meals"*, due to its addictive properties.

This means, somehow, we have sleepwalked into a culture of harm. We are harming our bodies and mind with these modern changes in our living and eating behaviour. Then when we become ill due to eating low-quality foods, we start to believe that regularly going gym will repair all the damage that has been done. Dr. Chatterjee thinks otherwise, and in order to have good health; we should cancel our gym memberships.

"In fact, I believe we should stop talking about 'exercise' altogether and start thinking, instead, about 'movement'. We simply need to move more during the day, throughout the day, every day. We need to design our lives around movement."

Hmm, the problem I see is we are living in a consumer culture and people opt for most convenient options rather than healthy ones. But I like his idea. His argument is that:

"A gym session is not the antidote to sitting. The answer is to sit less and spend more time fidgeting and moving, at least 10,000 steps per day."

He has illustrated many exercises that we can do at home and in the office. Oh, and his modeling pictures are top notch. We should not be surprised if we see our good doctor in next Hollywood blockbuster. Joking aside, if you are interested in finding out why you are not getting the desired results after your hard effort to stay healthy, then this easy to read book is the answer. The book is thought-provoking, insightful and engaging. Dr. Chatterjee challenges the traditional way of

thinking about healthy living. It certainly made me reconsider so many basic questions about healthy living.

And yes, we need to shift away from the unhealthy culture of eating low-quality foods, insufficient sleep habits, lack of relaxation in our daily lives as well as less movement outside of the gym.

It is generally accepted that the human mind and body are [resilient](#) and can heal given the chance. The question is, are our cultures resilient too? Can we go back to the healthy living, healthy eating lifestyles? I believe, Dr. Chatterjee has in a way answered that question. We need to make changes for the better and value time. Making time daily to meditate, get sufficient sleep and moving more often (during the day) is key to a healthy living and [restoring the mind](#).