

## DR. JOHN CHISSELL ON TAKING CHARGE OF YOUR HEALTH



By Claude Reed, Jr.

*Dr. John Chissell is a family physician practicing in the Baltimore area. He has been a doctor since 1954, and has been treating patients from the optimal health perspective for the past five years. The optimal health concept is quite different from what is more widely practiced medically. This approach encompasses one's total state of well-being with the impetus of care on the patient. The following interview explains this concept and how it is being administered today.*

**National Scene:** What caused you to explore the optimal health approach?

Dr. Chissell: I developed hypertension a few years ago. To cure this condition I used the same kinds of drugs that I prescribed for my patients. I got my blood pressure down to normal, but I just didn't feel the way that I wanted to feel. I didn't have the creative insights that I wanted, nor the enthusiasm, nor the "natural" high that I like to have. So this let me know that I had to find some other way of treating hypertension. Subsequently, I got into natural means of treating hypertension through optimal health.

**National Scene:** In a sentence, how would you define Optimal Health?

Dr. Chissell: Optimal Health is a total state of well-being psychologically, emotional and physically.

**National Scene:** Can you give an example of how Optimal Health is applied in your practice?

Dr. Chissell: If a patient comes in with some sort of sickness, is ill at ease or just generally does not feel well, then I try to find out how the problem bothers them.

I give a physical exam to find physical signs, then I make a diagnosis. Next, I give the patient several options on how they can be treated involving natural or conventional medical methods. Lastly, I give the patient the option of the Optimal Health concept. The option of what they thought was well evolves to the level of Optimal Health. Now, I don't know how healthy it is possible for you or me to be, but I can move a patient in that direction.

**National Scene:** Suppose you had a patient who showed no physical signs of illness after diagnosis. How would you treat this patient?

Dr. Chissell: If in the course of examination no physical signs are discovered then I must deal with the emotional level of the patient. I would reassure the patient that there is nothing wrong with feeling ill and showing no physical signs. We all have different ways of manifesting sickness. My job is health care, but individual health is that individual's responsibility. My job is to educate the patient as to how they can get back "in charge" of their health. Once a patient is in charge of their health, they only need to check with me if there is a major problem.

**National Scene:** What kinds of care do you recommend from the Optimal Health concept?

Dr. Chissell: My major areas of concentration are: Optimal nutrition, aerobic exercise and some method of balance so that your internal environment is in tune with your external environment.

**National Scene:** What is aerobic exercise?

Dr. Chissell: Aerobic exercise is any exercise that causes you to bring in more oxygen to your lungs, improving the cardiovascular system (your heart and blood vessels). Aerobics can be as simple as walking to as complicated as gymnastics.

**National Scene:** What other benefits are there to aerobic exercise?

Dr. Chissell: A person develops a general sense of well-being. A number of studies have shown that if you do aerobic exercises for 45 minutes or more substances called endorphines are created in the brain. Endorphines have an anti-depressant effect, or if you are excited, a calming effect. In general, they create a sense of balance.

**National Scene:** How do aerobics compare to breathing exercises done in Yoga?

Dr. Chissell: Only from the standpoint that they both encourage breathing more deeply. Yoga creates the demand to breathe more deeply. It is a discipline to learn how to take a

deep breath. With aerobic exercise your body does it automatically. . . . Naturally. You breathe more deeply simply because of the muscles that you are using. However, the end result of yoga or aerobics is deeper breathing which can create the same benefits.

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**National Scene:** How extensively do you recommend meditation to your patients and how successful has this practice been?

Dr. Chissell: Well, I recommend some form of arriving at an inner balance, but it does not always require one to meditate in the formal sense. Sometimes it just involves sitting quietly and listening to the messages that you get from your body. If you just sit still for 15-20 minutes it can be a very spiritual experience. The most common way to meditate is prayer to whatever God you believe in. Meditation is a more formal technique. The main thing is to get the patient to study what is inside his or her self. I strongly recommend this form of inner balance because the messages that you need are within yourself.

**National Scene:** Can you cite an example of how meditation has helped one of your patients?

Dr. Chissell: A professor at Morgan State University came to me to be treated for hypertension. I suggested meditation and talked to him about his diet. I told him that meditation could help him balance stress. By the way, he was already exercising. I didn't see this patient for 18 months. When I did I didn't recognize him because he had lost thirty pounds, was wearing a designer suit and looked entirely different. He was now running five to seven miles a day and knew as much about nutrition as I did. He had done exactly what my program is all about. In effect, he had become his own doctor.

**National Scene:** Do you prescribe a general health diet?

Dr. Chissell: I think that the simplest thing to do is to have at least 50% of your diet raw food. If this is done the person will immediately drop most of their bad eating habits. Many of the foods we are used to eating are no good for the body. I recommend that my patients give up red meat entirely because of the contaminants found in them. I also discourage fried or broiled foods. Evidence now shows that once you cook a food at a certain temperature for a certain length of time all the nutritional value is lost. Your body treats this food as a foreign substance. Once you have experienced the taste that you desire, your body is in trouble. This kind of