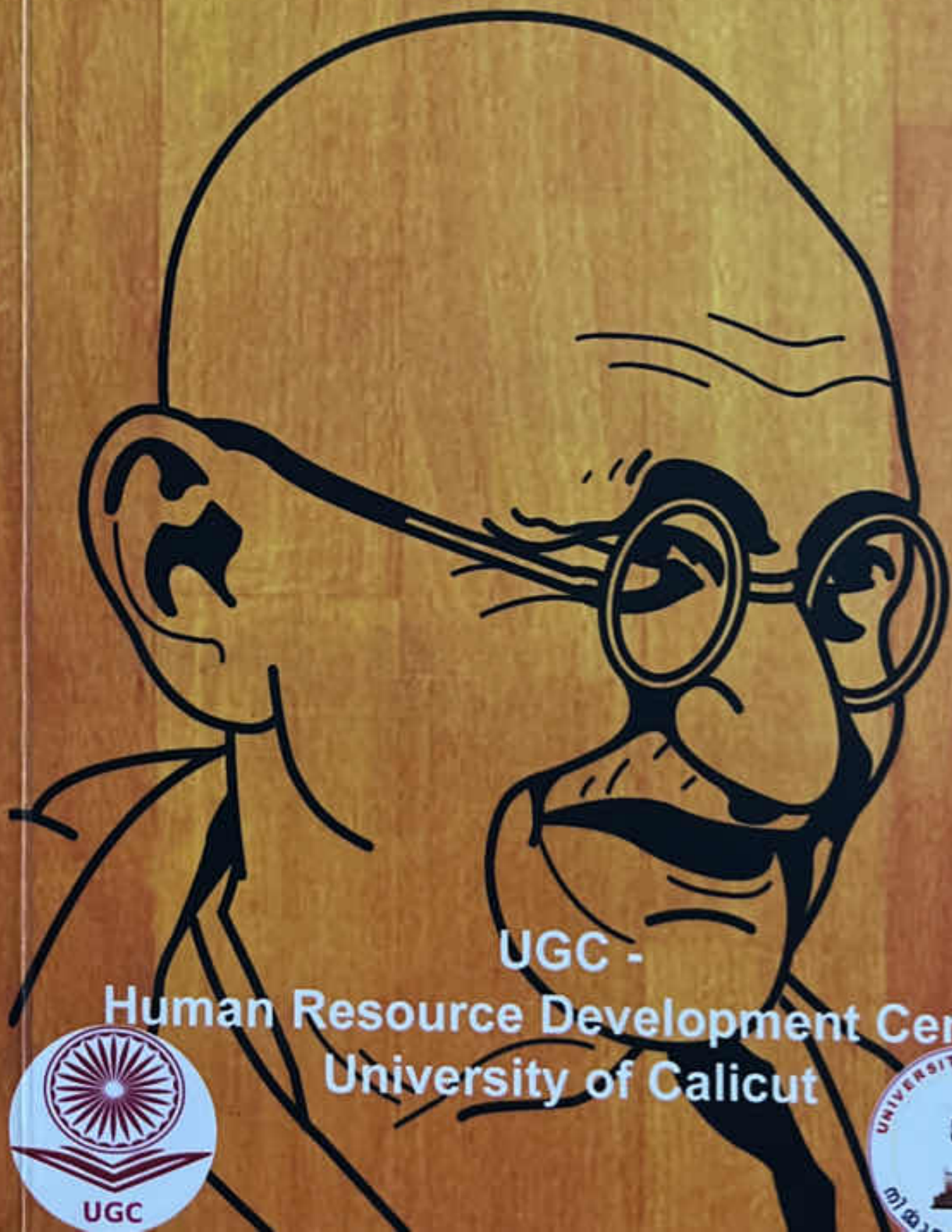


# GANDHIAN THOUGHTS: Different Perspectives



UGC -  
Human Resource Development Centre  
University of Calicut



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# Gandhian Views on Health and Physical Fitness in Daily Life

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"It is Health that is real Wealth and not pieces of gold and silver"  
- Gandhi

## Introduction

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948) was one of the few men in history to fight simultaneously on moral, religious, political, social, economic, and cultural fronts. Gandhi was an independent thinker. He looked at all ideas afresh. Mahatma believed that nothing is more valuable than good health, and passed this advice to all the future generations. Hence, make health, not wealth, your priority.

While Gandhiji was practicing law in South Africa he was suffering from digestive complaints. He used to take some herbal medicine. He thought that, every time taking some medicine for improving digestion and clearing bowels is not a proper way of treatment. He therefore thought that, there must be something wrong with the diagnosis and management of his problem. He was taking some medicines but they were ineffective. He thought that, what the use of such type therapy was when every day one has to depend on a doctor and a chemist. One of his friends from the vegetarian society gave him a book written by Adolf Just titled "Return to the Nature". He studied that book and tried simple measures like dietary reform, mud application over abdomen, use of wet compresses etc. He experienced relief by these simple measures. He thought that, such drugless therapy would be beneficial for a developing country like India, where most of the people live in villages and they do not have access to doctors and hospitals. He wrote

about his experiments in his own publication "Indian opinion" under the title "Guide to health" and some articles on nature cure, use of five elements and its effects. Those articles were written during the year 1906. When Gandhiji returned to India, those compiled articles were published while he was confined in Aga Khan Palace in 1942. The book is known as "Key to Health". It is translated in different Indian and European languages.

He believes that modern medicine is the bane of man when used to perpetuate bad habits. Unpleasant reactions to food, drink or bad habits are our body's way of telling us to form better habits but instead we resort to medicine to mask the symptoms and inculcates faith in our body's own self-healing mechanisms. Gandhi's book on "Keys to Health" is one of the most popular than all of his writings which sheds light on importance of his ideas regarding health. In today's day and age, there are so many new diseases and cases of obesity which people are being forced to struggle with. Unfortunately, in most cases, these problems are self-inflicted. That's right, you need to pay attention to your health and your fitness if you want to live a healthy life. Physical education is an education through physical activities for the development of total personality of a child thereby accomplishes the perfection in body, mind and spirit.

WHO has defined "health is a dynamic state of complete physical, mental, social and spiritual wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity"<sup>1</sup>. In 1986, the WHO further clarified that health is: "A resource for everyday life, not the objective of living. Health is a positive concept emphasizing social and personal resources, as well as physical capacities"<sup>2</sup>. In health, means body ease. He is a healthy man whose body is free from all disease; he carries on his normal activities without fatigue. Such a man should be able with ease to walk to twelve miles a day, and perform ordinary physical labour without getting tired. He can digest ordinary simple food also. His mind and his senses are in state of harmony and poise.

### Health may be of;

**Physical health:** Physical wellbeing involves pursuing a healthful lifestyle to decrease the risk of disease. Maintaining physical fitness, for example, can protect and develop the endurance of a person's breathing and heart function, muscular strength, flexibility, and body composition.

**Mental health;** Mental health refers to a person's emotional, social, and psychological wellbeing. Mental health is as important as physical health to a full, active lifestyle.



Here I have given below some key points about health.

Health can be defined as physical, mental, and social wellbeing, and as a resource for living a full life.

- It refers not only to the absence of disease, but the ability to recover and bounce back from illness and other problems.
- Factors for good health include genetics, the environment, relationships, and education.
- A healthful diet, exercise, screening for diseases, and coping strategies can all enhance a person's health.

### **Physical fitness**

Physical fitness is the component of health. 'Fit people are the assets of the country and sick people are the liabilities'. For building healthy nation we need healthy and fit individuals.

WHO has defined, "Physical fitness is the ability to perform muscular work satisfactorily"<sup>3</sup>.

### **Components of physical fitness:**

- Speed
- Strength
- Endurance
- Flexibility
- Coordination
- Agility

### **Types of physical fitness**

There are mainly three types of physical fitness. They are Health related fitness, Performance related fitness and Cosmetic fitness.

- Health related fitness; The fitness which has got direct link to efficient and smooth functioning of all the systems of the body is called as health related physical fitness.
- Performance related fitness; This fitness will serve as a strong platform for higher performance in sports and games. It meant for competition purpose.
- Cosmetic fitness; it meant for the effort of the individuals to improve the outlook and appearance of the body than the health benefits.

### **Objectives**

- To identify the Gandhiji's views on health and physical fitness.
- To analyse the relevance of physical fitness in daily life.



## ata interpretation

For a man who undertook a total of 17 fasts during India's freedom struggle (1913, 1914, 1918, 1919, 1921, 1922, 1924, 1925, twice in 1932 and 1933, 1934, 1939, 1943, 1947, 1948), his longest fast lasting 21 days, the Mahatma's experiments with food seem as elaborate as his experiments with ahimsa and truth. In his book, *Key to Health*, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi wrote, "Whilst it is true that man cannot live without air and water, the thing that nourishes the body is food. Hence the saying, food is life"<sup>4</sup>.

Gandhi states that observing Brahmacharya lead to a healthy life. It is the mode of life which leads to realization of God. The realization is through practicing self-restraint of senses. He further says that if there is determination to control the thought and the action, victory is sure to follow. Slavery of one's animality is perhaps the worst of all.

Gandhi was wise in matters relating to health and fitness. Gandhian views on health and fitness are;

**Non-violence is healthy:** Gandhi was a proponent of non-violent resistance and believed ahimsa is the true path to freedom and the best way to achieve life's goals. Non-violent behavior can extend to day-to-day life by applying this teaching to other areas of your life, by reducing stressors and remaining peaceful and calm. Studies have shown that calm people are less likely to get hypertension and heart disease. Remaining calm will also fend off unhealthy behaviors such as stress-eating and smoking.

**Go to bed early and wake up early:** Gandhi himself only slept 4-5 hours a night and awoke before the sun. Since modern day findings show that adults need 7-8 hours of sleep a night, we can still follow his motto of waking early to have a productive day.

**Fasting can promote health:** fasting not only promotes discipline but can lead to various physical benefits as well. Fasting allows your body the time to detox, cleanse the stomach, use up unused sources of nutrition like fat, and helps it cope with any infections that might be present and can help relieve constipation. According to Ayurvedic principles, one should fast for at least one day in the week. Gandhi himself famously fasted for 21 days to promote unity between the Hindus and Muslims.

**Watch your diet:** Gandhi famously said "The body was never meant to be treated as a refuse bin, holding all the foods that the palate demands"<sup>5</sup>. He himself went vegan for six year because he believed that our diet should be healthy and paramount to learning self-restraint.



**Walk, walk, walk:** The Dandi March was when Gandhi famously embarked solo on a 390 kilometer protest walk, and was soon followed by 10,000 strong. So keep walking!

**Avoid alcohol and tobacco:** Gandhi preached complete abstinence on these two drugs. Tobacco use increases risks of all types of diseases like lung cancer, stroke, and high blood pressure. Alcohol can increase the incidence of heart diseases, diabetes, and several cancers.

**Practice Meditation:** Meditation has been practiced in India for centuries. Recent studies show that it has been proven to reduce stress and anxiety. Meditation can also help lower blood pressure with consistent practice over time.

**Think Positive:** As Mahatma Gandhi said "A man is but the product of his thoughts. What he thinks, he becomes"<sup>6</sup> Setting your mind right with positive thoughts boosts your health, improves your skill, and improve your work.

**Forgive yourself and others:** Gandhi was a peace promoter, he said, "The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong"<sup>7</sup> When there's stress in the heart and mind- mental and physical health is being affected. Forgiving others has shown in research it effects in lowering blood pressure. Research also presented that HIV patients who practiced forgiveness had higher CD4 cell percentages, which are helpful for their immune system. It helps your health overall and reduces feelings of anger, depression, and fatigue.

**Show Compassion:** The actions of being compassionate bring out personal benefits to us. Gandhi wisely said "An eye for an eye will only make the whole world blind"<sup>88</sup><https://www.enotes.com> › Homework Help › Religion

When you pursue a compassionate lifestyle, you become more open to others, less judgmental, and understand how others feel.

### **Fitness Food: The Right Diet for Exercise**

The amount of food a person needs will vary with age, sex, weight, and activity level. The rate at which you burn calories depends not only on the type of exercise you do, but also on how vigorously you do it.

Travis emphasizes that it's important to divide your calories between carbohydrates, protein, and fat:

- **Carbohydrates.** Carbohydrates — sugars and starches — are broken down by the body into glucose, which muscles use for energy. Excess carbs are stored in the liver and tissues as glycogen and released as needed. It's glycogen that provides the energy for high-intensity exercise and prolonged endurance. Some good



sources of carbohydrates are whole grain breads and cereals, fruit, vegetables, pasta, and rice.

**Protein.** Protein should be part of each of your major meals because it will help slow absorption of carbohydrates. Fish, eggs, chicken, meat, and beans are excellent sources of protein, and 3 ounces per meal is enough.

**Fat.** You need some fat in your diet, too, says Travis. Low-fat dairy products, like 1 percent milk, and lean cuts of meat will give you the fat your body needs.

### **Physical activity or exercise**

Physical activity or exercise can improve your health and reduce the risk of developing several diseases like type 2 diabetes, cancer and cardiovascular disease. Physical activity and exercise can have immediate and long-term health benefits. Most importantly, regular activity can improve your quality of life. A minimum of 30 minutes a day can allow you to enjoy these benefits.

Regular exercise is one of the best things you can do for your health. It has many benefits, including improving your overall health and fitness, and reducing your risk for many chronic diseases. There are many different types of exercise; it is important that you pick the right ones for you. Most people benefit from a combination of them:

Endurance, or aerobic, activities increase your breathing and heart rate. They keep your heart, lungs, and circulatory system healthy and improve your overall fitness. Examples include brisk walking, jogging, swimming, and biking.

Strength, or resistance training, exercises make your muscles stronger. Some examples are lifting weights and using a resistance band.

Balance exercises can make it easier to walk on uneven surfaces and help prevent falls. To improve your balance, try tai chi or exercises like standing on one leg.

Flexibility exercises stretch your muscles and can help your body stay limber. Yoga and doing various stretches can make you more flexible.

Fitting regular exercise into your daily schedule may seem difficult at first. But you can start slowly, and break your exercise time into chunks.

Doing ten minutes at a time is fine. You can work your way up to the recommended amount of exercise. How much exercise you do depends on your age and health.



Other things that you can do to make the most of your workouts include

- Choosing activities that work all the different parts of the body, including your core (muscles around your back, abdomen, and pelvis). Good core strength improves balance and stability and helps to prevent lower back injury.
- Choosing activities that you enjoy. It's easier to make exercise a regular part of your life if you have fun doing it.
- Exercising safely, with proper equipment, to prevent injuries. Also, listen to your body and don't overdo it.
- Giving yourself goals. The goals should challenge you, but also be realistic. It's also helpful to reward yourself when you reach your goals. The rewards could be something big, like new workout gear, or something smaller, such as movie tickets.

### **Benefits of regular physical activity**

If you are regularly physically active, it has amazing benefits. Here are just a few:

1. Physical activity helps you live longer and prevent many chronic diseases, such as heart disease, high blood pressure, abnormal blood lipid (cholesterol and triglyceride) profile, stroke, type 2 diabetes, metabolic syndrome, and colon and breast cancers.
2. Physical activity improves cardiorespiratory and muscular fitness.
3. Physical activity raises your metabolism and helps you lose weight more easily (or eat more without gaining weight).
4. Physical activity helps reduce stress, anxiety, and depression and improve your mood.
5. Physical activity helps maintain brain function in older adults.
6. Physical activity helps with digestion and promotes regular bowel movements.
7. Physical activity increases bone density.
8. Physical activity helps you age more gracefully by maintaining your looks and your agility.
9. Physical activity improves sleep quality.
10. Physical activity improves your overall quality of life. And also,
  - reduce your risk of a heart attack
  - manage your weight better
  - have a lower blood cholesterol level
  - lower the risk of type 2 diabetes and some cancers
  - have lower blood pressure