

Some Jewish Quotes From Over the Centuries Related to Bodily Health

Pulled together by Rabbi Simkha Y. Weintraub, LCSW © 2009

So take good care of your *n'fashot*/whole beings...

Deuteronomy 4:15

There is no wealth like health.

Apocrypha of Ben Sira, 30:16

If a gourd has a hole as tiny as a needle's eye, all its air escapes;

Yet man, with so many cavities and orifices, retains his breath.

Verily, "You do wonders!" (*Psalms 86:10*)

R. Tanhum bar Hiyya in Midrash B'reishit/Genesis Rabbah 1:3

If you marvel at the waters of the sea, that the sweet and salty do not mingle,

Think of the tiny human head, where the fluids of its many fountains do not mingle.

Midrash B'midbar/Numbers Rabbah, 18:22

Once, when Hillel was taking leave of his disciples, they said to him: "Master where are you going?" He replied, "To do a pious deed." They asked, "What may that be?" He replied, "To take a bath." They said, "Is that a pious deed?" He replied, "Yes. If, in the theaters and circuses, the images of the king must be kept clean by the person to whom they have been entrusted, how much more is it a duty of a person to care for the body, since we have been created in the divine image and likeness."

(In a parallel situation, Hillel answered the disciples' question:)

"I am going to do a kindness to the guest in the house."

When the disciples asked whether he had a guest every day,

Hillel answered, "Is not my poor soul a guest in the body?"

Today it is here, tomorrow it is gone."

Tosefta Sotah 4:13

Drink plenty of water with your meals..

Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 40a

Three, if drawn out, prolong life: praying, eating, easing.

R. Judah ben Ezekiel in Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 54b

Three things restore a person's good spirits: beautiful sounds, sights, and smells.

Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 57b

Cold water for the eyes in the morning and hot water for the limbs at night

Are far better than all the salves in the world.

R. Samuel in Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 108b

The Sages said in the name of Rav: It is forbidden to live in a city that has no bathhouse.

Babylonian Talmud, Mishnah Kiddushin 4:12

There are eight things that taken in large quantities are bad but in small are helpful:
Travel, sex, wealth, work, wine, sleep, hot baths, and blood-letting.

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Three things sap one's strength: worry, travel and sin.

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Eat a third, and drink a third, and leave the remaining third of your stomach empty.
Then, when you get angry, there will be sufficient room for your rage.

Babylonian Talmud, Gittin 70a

No man is reconciled to bodily defects.

Abbaye in Babylonian Talmud, Ketubot 75b

Do not sit too much, for sitting aggravates hemorrhoids;

Do not stand too much, for standing hurts the heart;

Do not walk too much, for walking hurts the eyes.

So spend a third of your time sitting, one third standing, and one third walking.

Babylonian Talmud, Ketubot 111a

The human body has three kings: brain, heart, and liver.

Midrash HaNe'elam (Midrash Ruth HeHadash), chapter 1, p. 8b

The body is the soul's house. Shouldn't we therefore take care of our house so that it
doesn't fall into ruin?

Philo (20 BCE – 40 CE; Alexandrian philosopher), The Worse Attacks the Better

The human body as such...is altogether pure,

for defilement is not a matter subject to sense perception or logic.

Sa'adia, Emunot veDe'ot, 933 6:4

Trust not your health; many lay down never to rise again.

Eliezer ben Isaac, Orhot Hayyim, ca. 1050

One does not consider exercise though it is the main principle in keeping one's health and
in the repulsion of most illnesses...

And there is no such thing as excessive bodily movements and exercise. Because
body movements and exercise will ignite natural heat and superfluties will be formed in
the body, but they will be expelled. However, when the body is at rest, the natural heat
is suppressed and the superfluties remain...

Exercise removes the harm caused by most bad habits, which most people have. And
no movements is as beneficial, according to the physicians, as body movements and
exercise.

Exercise refers both to strong and weak movements, provided it is a movement that is
vigorous and affects breathing, increasing it. Violent exercise causes fatigue, and not
everyone can stand fatigue or needs it. It is good for the preservation of health to shorten
the exercises.

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Emotional experiences cause marked changes in the body which are clear and visible to
all and bear witness in clear testimony.

You see a man strongly built whose voice is powerful and pleasant and whose countenance is splendid. When he is affected all of a sudden by a feeling of great disgust, his facial expression falls and loses its luster. The light of his countenance changes, his posture becomes low and his voice hoarse and weak...

You see quite the reverse in the man whose body is weak, whose appearance is strange and whose voice is low. When something happens to him which causes him to rejoice greatly, you will see how his body becomes strong, his voice rises, his face brightens, his movements become manifest in his face and eyelids....

...When one is overpowered by imagination, prolonged meditation and avoidance of social contact, which he never exhibited before, or when one avoids pleasant experiences which were in him before, the physician should do nothing before he improves the soul by removing the extreme emotions.

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In order to strengthen the vital powers, one should employ musical instruments and tell patients gay stories which will make the heart swell and narratives that will distract the mind and cause them and their friends to laugh.

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The physician should have both technical knowledge and skill as well as understand the patient's personality and lifestyle.

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All of the preceding are from Maimonides (1135-1204 CE; Egyptian Physician, Theologian, Jurist), The Preservation of Youth

Since by keeping the body in health and vigor one walks in the ways of God – -- being impossible in sickness to have any understanding or knowledge of the Creator – it is a man's duty to avoid whatever is injurious to the body and cultivate habits conducive to health and vigor.

Maimonides (1135-1204 CE) Mishneh Torah: Laws Re: Moral Dispositions and Ethical Conduct

A good, sound body, which does not disturb the equilibrium in man, is a divine gift...

But it is not impossible to conquer a bad constitution by training...

The well-being of the soul can be obtained only after that of the body has been secured...

Maimonides (1135-1204 CE), Guide for the Perplexed, 1190 (3:8; 3:27)

God, who loves the soul, cannot despise the body,
So essential to the preservation of the individual and the species.
Anatoli, Malmad HaTalmidim, 1149 CE; p. 79b

If a physician cannot give a patient medicine for the body,
he should somehow find and give medicine for the patient's soul.
Zohar

When you need a physician, esteem him a god;
When he has brought you out of danger, you consider him a king;
When you have been cured, he becomes human like yourself.
When he sends you the bill, you think him a devil.

Jedaiah ben Avraham Bedersi ("HaP'nini," French poet and philosopher, ca. 1270-1340)

When you build a new house, construct a parapet for your roof
so that you do not bring blood upon your house, should any person fall from there...

-- *Deuteronomy 22:8*

(and on this quote from Deuteronomy:)

From this (*Deut. 22:8*) we learn that man must not rely on miracles or Providence alone,
but must himself do whatever he can to maintain life and health.

Rabbi Isaac Arama, 15th century Akedat Yitzhak, Sha'ar xxvi

Clothing, bed, table, especially dishes,
indeed everything that we ever take in our hands,
must be clean, sweet, pure;
and above and beyond all, the body,
made in the image of God.

Orhot Tzaddikim, 15th century, chapter 1

You may be free from sin, but if your body is not strong,
your soul will be too weak to serve God aright.

Maintain your health and preserve your strength.

Ba'al Shem Tov (1700-1760), as brought in the Keter Shem Tov of Aaron of Apt; p. 4a

The noble man has his soul rule his body;

The wicked has his body rule his soul.

Satanov, Mishle Asaf, 1789

The body often seems to have more insight than the soul,
And man thinks far better with his back and belly than with his head.

Heinrich Heine (German poet, 1797-1856) Romantic School (1833), ii. Chap. 2

Your health comes first – you can always hang yourself later.

To a doctor you shouldn't wish a good year.

Ask the patient, not the doctor.

Sorrow makes the bones grow thinner.

An imaginary illness is worse than a real one.

Jewish/Yiddish Sayings/Proverbs

Respect your own body as the receptacle, messenger, and instrument of the spirit.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, The Nineteen Letters (1836), no. 11