



HFF Practitioner Training Presentation
Module 2, Lesson 2
The Natural Human Lifecycle

As we move through this course, we are slowly demedicalizing health. By adopting a holistic/functional perspective on health and the natural human lifecycle, we can move toward natural immunity, disease prevention, and disease resolution. The things that have been ignored or forgotten such as connection with our own bodies, minds, spirits, and inner wisdom; connection with the natural rhythms of growth and development such as pregnancy, birth, midlife, transitions, and death; connection with family and community, as parents, grandparents, youth, and elders; and connection with our natural world and environments can be relearned, reawakened, revered, and respected. This reawakening can return our ailing population to the ease of health we were naturally meant to inherit.

Training Presentation

Demedicalizing the Human Lifecycle; Back to Nature

As Richard Louve asserts in his groundbreaking book, *Last Child in the Woods*, "the lack of nature in children's lives and the rise in obesity, attention disorders, and depression" are intimately linked. Our current poor state of the health of not only children, but that of adults and the elderly, as well, can be attributed to



our moving away from the natural world and our inherent, instinctual, and autonomic rhythms of functioning and being. Fast paces, medicalization of health, and our desire to find quick fixes and rely on *conquering* nature, rather than recognizing our humble place *in* it, has put us on the fast track, yes, but the fast track to ill health.

Stages of Development from a Functional Perspective

Many of the readings for this lesson are based on the beginnings of life: the health of the parents (especially the mother), conception, pregnancy, childbirth, postnatal, and early childhood, as the first 2 years of life are pivotal in relation to one's health; it is these circumstances that can dictate health for years to come, and in many cases, for the rest of that person's life.

We are not going to get into the physical development of the human brain and body here as our goal here is to go *beyond* the basics to a **functional view** of development.

A quick view of the basics is this: we are conceived, we gestate, we are born, and we grow up to be children, then adolescents (who go through puberty, sexual maturity, and menstruation for girls), then adults (who transition through menopause and andropause), and finally elders. Human development involves many processes, both physiological (such as brain development, sexual development, and organ growth). We start out with all of the organs and body parts we need, then every part matures and grows through the maturation process.

Once we hit a certain stage of development, the cells of our bodies start to decline, deteriorate, and essentially die through processes such as oxidation, apoptosis, and waning ATP production in the mitochondria. (Please read more about that in the Human Longevity Project interview with Ted Achacoso in your materials.) The aging body does not work as it did in its youth, and it becomes physically weaker. Yet, if care has been taken, one can age with grace, free of chronic, debilitating disease and actually become spiritually and mentally *stronger*.



So, let's back up. What do I mean when I say that we are taking a **functional view** of development? If you think that I made up that phrasing, I did! It was the best way to express how we can dig deeper into human development, beyond the basic physiology, to identify what mechanisms are behind the creation of a strong, healthy baby who will evolve into a strong, healthy adult. It is essential to identify these foundational components, as they not only dictate disease and ill health but also health and lasting wellbeing. Given what we have learned so far, it will not be a surprise that the following appear to be behind both ill health *and* longevity depending upon the choices both the parents and the individual make throughout the course of their lives:

- Developing a healthy nervous system which entails maintaining a healthy balance, expression, and processing of stress
- Developing a healthy immune system at the root of which is a healthy, diverse, balanced microbiome
- Resulting in a healthy digestive system, brain, circulatory system, reproductive system, excretory organs and systems, endocrine glands and systems (both steroidal (sex) hormones and systems *and* stress hormones and systems)
- Further resulting in good mental and physical health.

The Development of the Nervous and the Immune Systems

Mom is the first point of contact between a developing baby and the rest of the world. Both parents pass on their genetic material to the developing fetus which determines whether that child will have brown eyes or green or if they will be tall, stocky, or extra hairy. Yet, there is another level of inheritance that is passed on to baby by the parents, and most especially from the mother. Mom has her own ecosystem of microbiota, chemical and hormonal balances, immune system, and nutritional status, which are also either directly passed on to her baby or influence her baby's development in a myriad of ways (or both). In this way, baby inherits mom's nervous system *and* immune system.

There are many ways by which parents, and namely mothers, contribute to their baby's nervous and immune systems such as:



The five senses: physical contact and touch, sound through voices or music, sight once baby is born and is able to take visual cues from the people and the world around them, taste, and even smells can affect development by either contributing to baby's brain development and/or by allowing the baby to identify mama, papa, and therefore, safety, which is essential for feeding and nervous system regulation.

Mama's own health also affects the health of her baby. If she is deficient in vital nutrients, her baby may be, as well. If her cells are full of toxins and heavy metals, her baby will potentially inherit those toxicities. If mom has a virus, her baby may be born with that virus. It has been estimated that over 200 chemicals have been found in the cord blood of newborns (some report as high as 280), which is compelling proof that mama's environmental exposures are also baby's exposures. The old belief that the womb was a sterile environment that protected the fetus from the outside world has been proven to be false.

Mama's internal environment also affects the development of the nervous system. Natural chemicals and hormones in the body are passed to the developing fetus through the placenta. Those hormones and chemicals (such as excess cortisol, or on the flipside, adequate calming hormones) affect the baby's brain development, synaptic firing, neurochemical balance, and hormone levels. Therefore, a baby can be born with thyroid dysregulation, high stress responses, and even phobias, without even having experienced life outside of the womb.

Breastfeeding is another way that mom's health affects her children, yet it is, for the most part, profoundly positive. In this way, baby receives a special blend of essential nutrients made just for that baby and a responsive, dynamic, adaptive immune system unlike anything we could ever make in a lab. Please see extensive materials regarding breastfeeding in your materials.

Yet, the most profound and fascinating way mothers pass down either a healthy or unhealthy immune system is through the microbiome, and some of the way this happens is, in fact, via the nervous system! Cutting-edge research has shown that microbes can and do pass through the nervous system via the vagus nerve and occupy the brain, affecting all sorts of processes including neurochemical production. The microbiome has a profound impact on both the nervous system and the immune system by not only *affecting* these systems, but



by *playing an integral role in their actual function*. Please refer to your reading entitled *The Psychobiotic Revolution*, Chapter 3, for an excellent explanation of the microbiome thought the developmental stages to complete this section.

The Power of the Family, Community, Traditions, and Culture

As Mary Pipher so powerfully illustrates in her book *The Shelter of Each Other*, our families are in trouble, and if the family is in trouble, then so are our communities and our global village. Why such a grand statement? If you take a step back and see how the human system works from a functional, natural perspective, the health of the body is made up many subsystems that work as a whole. Such is the case with families and communities. There are individuals who make up the family and families who make up the communities, and so on. If the individual is healthy, they elevate the rest, and if the opposite is the case, then they contribute to the ill health of the unit. This is a law of nature.

We now live in a time when tradition and culture has been replaced with pop culture, green spaces with pavement, social interaction with handheld personal devices. We have careened down the path toward medical suppression of our bodily functions, have been misguided and sold empty promises of quick fixes such as pleasure and reward and social recognition that come in bags, boxes, and pretty wrapping. Our youth take their cues from the media and advertisements rather than their parents or elders, both of whom may have even lost their own confidence in their inner wisdom, unable to access what they have to share with the next generation. We run too fast and miss all of the roses. We react rather than respond. We cover up rather than explore. This life is reckless, threatening to create a highly stressed population of people with autism, ADHD, cancer, mental health problems, and addictions, and at the heart of this crisis is the fast pace in which we live. And it is within the family that we can find our center again, our balance, our safe space to stop, observe, and move through this thing we call life.

Healthy parents inspire health in their children, and families and communities who experience, nurture, and cultivate close bonds between family and community members have been proven to create healthier societies in both physical health as well as emotional and mental health since these bonds create



robust immune systems, balances nervous systems, and physical and mental wellbeing is a result.

Conscious parenting is a concept that is currently in the forefront of the disciplines of psychology, lifestyle medicine, and even immunology, where we are now using the word “parent” as a verb, a conscious action, rather than simply a role or state of being. Parents (and other family members who are close to the child) profoundly affect the development of a child and their future health.

This revelation does put further responsibility on parents to be cognizant about the choices they make and how they handle their own health and mental and emotional wellbeing, as well as how they react, respond, and relate to their children, yet it also brings exciting new insight into the “whys” of both health and disease, and also the “hows” so they can put their own epigenetic powers of influence over the health and wellbeing of the entire family into action.

It is not only parents that are important for healthy development and longevity, but also grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, siblings, and other members of the community or close friends that become family once close bonds are made. We need all of us to take on the responsibility of health, of not only that of human beings, but also our natural world and the other creatures on it. Microbiota and viruses are more adaptable and resilient than human beings. Respecting the rhythms of nature grants us wisdom and good health since nature can and does work without our influence in a more complicated, fluctuating, fluid dance than we could ever attempt to replicate, manipulate, or control. It is in understanding those natural rhythms that we can *allow* health to be our default.

Longevity, Lifespan, Ageing, and Dying

We all want to “live long and prosper.” Yet, our current population is living long, but not prospering. Through his work on the topic of creating better brains, John Medina helps us to differentiate between lifespan and longevity, with lifespan being the length of time that we stay alive, and longevity the length of time that we stay healthy. They often do not match up.



Here are the keys to longevity simplified:

-Prevention of ill health and chronic disease through creating a clean environment (inside and out) which requires addressing toxicities and deficiencies in body, mind, spirit, relationship (community and families), and in our air, water, food, and sensory environment.

-Lifestyle practices such as proper exercise, nutrition, sleep, rest, stress reduction, and maintaining healthy relationships.

-Empowerment and independence: When we increasingly do less for ourselves as we age, as we do when we medicalize aging, we become increasingly helpless, relying on and potentially exhausting our loved ones and inadequate institutions. Aging becomes a disease, a handicap, rather than a natural process. Learned helplessness is the sure road to physical and cognitive decline. Performing our own tasks and caring for ourselves to the best of our ability well into old age gives purpose, motivation, and slows the decline of our bodies and minds. Outside of rehabilitation from injury, occupational therapies such as folding laundry should be obsolete. We would not need such “therapies” if we simply folded our own laundry.

-John Medina seconds the above keys to longevity emphasizing aerobic exercise and lifestyle practices such as sleep and constructive meditation, but also adds a few items that may not be as obvious such as: productive engagement, reading, listening to music, and nostalgia (see “Counterclockwise Experiment” in the materials), and avoiding “intellectual arthritis.”

The human body is not meant to live forever – in nature, the old has to pass on, be recycled and repurposed by bacteria to make way for the new. Immortality would, in fact, be crazy-making in that there would be no end, no closure, no destination or limitations, and limitations foster innovation, creativity, attention, and motivation. In the end, we all die. This is a law of nature that cannot be broken. Yet, when we de-medicalize health and aging, the beauty of the cycle of life can be fully experienced without fear, denial, resistance, battling, and, chronic disease. The natural process of aging is, in fact, a coming into the self where there is wisdom that the young are drawn to, where they find comfort and guidance. This is what is called aging gracefully. When death does come, it is



my hope that, with this re-claimed perspective of the natural lifecycle, it will not be feared but takes place with dignity leaving loved ones celebrating a life.

On a broad scale, our individual health affects the *individuals in* and the *functioning of* our families, communities, and global population. Individual ill health affects our ability to perform, contribute, elevate and advance our collective state of being. It is not only the right and privilege of both young people and elders, but their *responsibility*, to seek health for the betterment of us all.

As practitioners, we must help our clients to empower themselves, to help them not act out of a fear-based model of health but out of an excitement for and movement toward optimal health with purpose and clarity. With your knowledge and guidance, your clients can reclaim control of their own health, and hence, their own destinies, having not only a longer lifespan, but longevity, which is our ultimate goal. This is why the designation “health coach” is grossly inadequate to describe the work that we are so privileged and fortunate to do.

Let the discussion begin!

