

An Interview with Michael Klaper, M.D.

by Mark Huberman

Michael Klaper, M.D. is a clinician, internationally recognized teacher, and sought-after speaker on diet and health. He has practiced medicine for more than 40 years and is a leading educator in applied plant-based nutrition and integrative medicine. He is also the author of numerous DVDs, a series of “Healthy YOU” webinars, and dozens of articles. A source of inspiration advocating plant-based diets and the end of animal cruelty worldwide, Dr. Klaper contributed to the making of two PBS television programs: Food for Thought and the award-winning Diet for a New America, based on the book of the same name. Dr. Klaper graduated from the University of Illinois College of Medicine in Chicago in 1972, served a medical internship at Vancouver General Hospital in British Columbia, Canada, with additional training in surgery, anesthesiology, and orthopedics at the University of British Columbia hospitals in Vancouver, and in obstetrics at the University of California hospitals in San Francisco.



I understand that you have left TrueNorth as a staff physician. How long have you been there, and as you look back, what do you think you have learned?

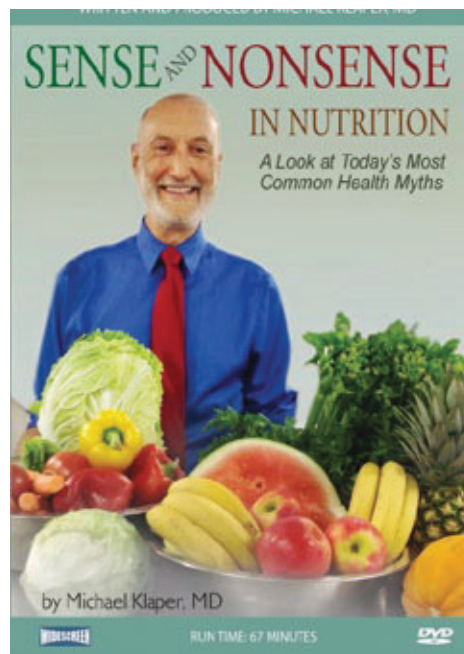
I have been honored to serve on the staff at TrueNorth for over eight years, and it has been an invaluable experience. The most powerful thing I have discovered is the astounding healing forces that are in every human body. I have found that no matter how obese, diabetic, hypertensive, inflamed, and stressed the person is, the majority of it is due to what they've been eating.

If you begin to follow a whole-food, plant-based diet, a remarkable healing change can take place before everyone's eyes, patients and doctors alike. The obesity starts melting away, the arteries open up, the high blood pressure comes down, the joints stop hurting, the asthmatic lungs stop wheezing, the migraine headaches fade away and the psoriasis clears from the skin.

It's a remarkable phenomenon to see this wonderful force unleashed!

But you knew a lot of that before you got to TrueNorth. What got grafted on to your thinking?

This was my first experience doing inpatient, plant-based medicine. When you're doing outpatient practice you can make suggestions to the patient and hope they go home and follow them. You just keep your fingers crossed until you see them at the next visit. However, here at TrueNorth when the patients are admitted as inpatients, especially if they're put on a water fast, you get to observe these changes in person, up close and personal, day after day. And you see these remarkable improvements within days! You also get a chance to learn more about the patient, including what is happening in their lives. What's keeping them from eating healthy? What are the obstacles in their lives? Where do they need help and support? We work to raise the understanding up to a level where healthy eating just becomes what you do and that's where the real victory is won! And that happens easier in a place where you have many cooking instructors, numerous videos, and a large, encouraging staff like TrueNorth.



One of Dr. Klaper's many great DVDs available on his website: doctorklaper.com

Prior to coming to TrueNorth had you ever been involved in water fasting?

No. That was another feature that was open to me that I had no real experience with. Like most Western-trained physicians, I held the view that fasting was an extreme, fringy thing to do, as well as dangerous, in that you seemed to be pushing the patient to the brink of starvation for no good reason. I had all those prejudices until I came to TrueNorth and saw water fasting employed in a safe, responsible and proper manner: patients being carefully screened prior to their arrival and then carefully monitored throughout their fast, measuring their vital signs twice a day, checking on them frequently, ordering blood tests regularly through their fast and really supervising their fast properly. This is nutritional medicine done right! And in that context, the wonders of water fasting display themselves to me on a daily basis. It was amazing to see psoriasis, a disease that I used to run the other way from when patients would walk in my office door, because I knew it to be recalcitrant—with stubborn, infuriating, itchy plaques that would defy all sorts of treatment. However, at TrueNorth we would put these people on a water fast and by day 10 the plaques were noticeably fading away and by day 20 (not as hard to do as it sounds) they were often barely visible. This was remarkable, certainly to me, but should also be remarkable to any dermatologist. I would like to bring them all in and have them witness the profound effect of water fasting on that and other chronic skin conditions, like eczema and urticaria (hives.)

What other conditions have you seen dramatically respond to water fasting?

Inflammatory arthritis is a major one. I have seen patients come in with inflamed, swollen joints to the point where it hurts just to look at them trying move their fingers; they're in such agony. I remember a few months ago I was making morning rounds with the interns when we came to a patient who was admitted for terribly painful rheumatoid arthritis. She was on day 19 of a water fast and she had tears running down her face. I said, "Are you in pain? Are you in distress?" She said, "No, these are tears of joy. This is the first time I've been able to close my fist in 10 years. I'm now



Mark Huberman with Dr. Klaper in his TrueNorth office

“The wonders of water fasting display themselves to me on a daily basis.”

cut down on their salt, but I know full well that they'll be going out to eat and loading up on salty food. These same patients are likely on powerful drugs that make them impotent and light-headed. However, when I care for them on an inpatient basis and put them on a water fast, dramatic changes take place, often within 10 to 14 days. Their blood pressure predictably reduces to the 120/80 range or lower. At TrueNorth, the interns and attending staff are immediately available 24/7 and they are well aware that elevated blood pressures fall – often dramatically – during a water fast. Therefore, it is a safe place to discontinue medications like lisinopril, losartan and metoprolol, and that becomes very dramatic for those folks. You *have* to discontinue these drugs because their effects will become too powerful during the fast. To see the blood pressure come down to a normal range with no medication, and to send these patients back out into the world without their bagful of pills they've been carrying everywhere, is a miraculous transformation in the context of modern medicine! Hypertensive patients would otherwise be taking these pills for the rest of their lives. It's really very simple: water fasting and a healthy plant-based diet is the key.

What has been your experience with patients suffering from diabetes?

Type 2 diabetes can respond beautifully to water fasting followed by a low-fat, whole-food, plant-based diet. Patients walk in the Center often with obesity that has been

able to open and close my hands!" I would like to get all the rheumatologists in the state and bring them to her bedside, and say, "Look, this is the power of fasting and a whole-food, plant-based diet, and these will be the keys to maintaining this improvement." (By that I mean, many R.A. patients may experience a "flare" episode becoming progressively milder. Rheumatoid arthritis is a formidable disease, often taking many months to finally resolve, and a whole-food, plant-based is the key to maintaining the remission and preventing progression of joint damage.)

High blood pressure can be another frustrating and infuriating condition to deal with on an outpatient basis. I tell the patient to

present for years. The enzymes in their insulin receptors are all inhibited (“clogged up”) from oxidized fats and free radicals, and it’s unreal to think that just 120 hours (5 days) on water is going to magically reverse this dysfunction on a cellular level. So often patients walk out with blood sugars still elevated, but they’re not the same person. Those insulin receptors are more responsive to insulin. However, more importantly, the patient has learned how to eat, and when they go home, this low-fat, high-fiber diet is going to cause their insulin receptors to open up a little more every day. As time goes by, those enzymes are going to be less inhibited and the insulin resistance will go away as the obesity melts away. It’s a very valuable first-step to getting patients out from under the burden of diabetes.



Dr. Klaper loves to Skype!

from mixed stools, coughing, salivating and skin rashes. It is amazing to see the body using every avenue it can to get rid of these substances, and we certainly do see these signs from time to time. Fortunately, they usually resolve and dissipate completely within 48 to 72 hours on the fast. So, detoxification certainly happens on that elimination level but also, as Dr. Alan Goldhamer says, “A water fast is like taking yourself to the car wash.” Day after day you’re just flushing fresh pure water through your body and it cleans you on a cellular level. It sounds unreal but, when you think about it on a biochemical level, that is what is happening. Quite remarkable, indeed...

What is the physiology of water fasting that is taking place? In the old days, Dr. Shelton and his contemporaries would say this is simply a matter of an elimination that occurs on fasts. Your body is toxic and that’s why you have these conditions, and during a fast the body will detoxify itself from these various conditions. Were they right?

Because it had been relegated to a fringe practice not worthy of the attention of Western medicine, the undiscovered, unpolished jewel of water fasting has been lying dormant for years. It turns out that the physiology of fasting is both intricate and profound, and we are only barely scratching the surface of it. However, of the physiology that we’ve begun to understand, it is clear that Dr. Shelton and others were fundamentally right. Fasting is a profound process of detoxification.

What toxins are we talking about? All of us have remnant molecules in our fat stores from every restaurant where we have dined, the fast foods we have eaten, and the snacks that are part of our daily fare. They all contain artificial colorings, flavorings, preservatives, conditioners and stabilizers, and untold chemicals that have become central to modern cuisine. It’s all building up in our tissues. On a fast, as you mobilize your fat stores, these molecules come out into circulation. On their way to the liver and kidneys these molecules can produce some detox symptoms.

We see everything in the first few days of a water fast,

“We often find that cancer patients on a fast will see their tumors stop growing or even regress.”

Is there a historical context for what we are recognizing as the positive role of water fasting?

Ideally, we are witnessing something very ancient and profound. I’m sure a million years ago on the African savannahs, our wandering, foraging forbearers would have to wander many days until they found the next berry bush with fruit on it. As a result, intermittent forced fasts were likely the way of the world. And during this time, I’m sure the body adapted, shifting into a state of ketosis to burn its emergency fuel, namely stored fat. Of course, you don’t want to stay in ketosis week after week, but a few days of it is not only cleansing for the body but it also unleashes some profound healing forces in the tissues. We see wounds heal better on a fast; and back then, if you were injured, say during a brush with a hungry leopard, you would not be eating; you’d be curled up under a bush, drinking water and healing while you fast. But during a fast, some other very profound things also happen. The body is so efficient that if it thinks no more calories are coming in, it’s not going to want to waste energy on non-useful reactions, one of which is inflammation, and we use that to advantage to help our patients.

How do you distinguish fasting and starving?

The direct answer to your question is “fasting” is when one is drinking water only and deriving most daily energy from stored fat. The “starvation” phase is entered after fat stores are exhausted and protein from muscle is being used

to maintain body temperature and other vital functions. We never want the patient to come anywhere near starvation.

But, speaking on a purely physiologic level, if you're starving to death, the body wisely turns off inflammation. Why burn precious calories off as heat in red, inflamed joints when you could use them to run your heart? So, during a fast we use that phenomenon to positive effect in patients with rheumatoid arthritis and other inflammatory diseases, like lupus and psoriasis. Fasting predictably brings on remission of symptoms in these conditions.

But even more profound is this: If you were starving to death - and the body doesn't know if more calories are coming in ever - one thing it certainly doesn't want to do is waste energy on supporting the growth of a malignant tumor. Consequently, we sometimes observe that cancer patients on a fast will see their tumors stop growing or even regress. The body's production of molecules called "sirtuins" no doubt are part of this anti-cancer mechanism induced by fasting. Dr. Dean Ornish has shown this effect in his plant-based diet patients where prostate cancers have been documented to arrest and reverse. Breast cancers have been documented to disappear after fasting and eating a plant-based diet. We've had two patients with lymphomas at TrueNorth who underwent fasting programs and their cancers melted away.

I have heard that Alan Goldhamer often fasts for a week or two over the Thanksgiving holiday just to "reboot his body computer." Is there some value to that?

I think it is a great analogy. You certainly can also reset your palate following a fast. After a number of days on water, whole, natural foods will certainly taste a lot better!

In the last five to ten years, I've seen a national consensus emerging that stresses the importance of being "vegan, SOS-free" (a term that I credit Alan Goldhamer with coining), meaning following a whole-food, plant-based (vegan) diet but without added salt, oil and sugar. Why is this so important?

It's turning out that salt, oil and sugar, the "unholy triumvirate" of Western cuisine, when consumed in large amounts, have severely adverse effects. But who knew? Again, your mother didn't know, my mother didn't know, and most doctors don't know. We've long understood that too much salt in the diet is bad for blood pressure, seeping into your artery walls, stiffening them and making you retain fluids - all of which contributes to the disease of hypertension. We are also now understanding that the sodium ions in salt turn on genes in our cells that predispose people to autoimmune and other diseases. Therefore, you don't want to be

eating lots of salty foods. But people will say, "You mean I can't even sprinkle some salt from the shaker on my food?" Actually, that's the one place you probably have some control over it. However, you don't have control at the Italian restaurant where the salt is already in the spaghetti sauce and at the Chinese restaurant where it's already in the soy sauce. This is the problem with processed foods—the salt is everywhere already in the food and you can't do anything about it!

How does oil create problems?

For years we thought that having oil in our diet was a key to living healthy but, indeed, it's not.

Of course, fats are important and you need fats in your diet every day, but not the kind that come in a bottle. Get your fats from whole foods, like avocados, walnuts, flaxseed, etc. When you eat the fats in these whole foods, the micro-droplets (of avocado oil, walnut oil, flaxseed oil) are tightly bound to the fiber of those foods. And when you chew these foods and swallow them, it takes hours for your digestive enzymes to penetrate into the little pieces of walnut and avocado and start emulsifying the fats and absorbing them. As a result, the actual amount of oil is small and enters your bloodstream very gradually, not exerting much of a pharmaceutical effect.

However, if you crush those olives, avocados and coconuts and turn them into liquid oil, now you're pouring liquid fat on your food. That fat leaps into your blood sugar by the tablespoon and nothing slows down its absorption. It gets into the bloodstream and coats each of your red blood cells with an envelope of fat. They start sticking together and your blood gets thicker and a sludging of blood in the capillary beds occurs, which slows down oxygen delivery to vital tissues. Blood pressure also gets raised because it takes more pressure to force thickened blood through tiny capillaries. Though the "Mediterranean diet" marketing hype won't tell you, oils have pharmaceutical effects that you didn't bargain for.

Does that apply to all oils?

All of them! Every one of them! They actually injure your artery walls, and the artery linings become inflamed and stiff. Numerous medical studies have shown this, as cited by Dr. Esselstyn in his remarkable book, *Preventing and Reversing Heart Disease*. The arteries lose the level of elasticity that usually absorbs some of the shock waves that come out of the heart as the ventricles contract. Over the years, these repetitive shockwaves that the stiffened arteries deliver to delicate tissues in eyes and kidneys contribute to retinal and renal damage. All the



way around, consuming oil is just destructive.

Are there any so-called health benefits of olive oil and coconut oil, or is it just marketing nonsense?

I have not seen any convincing evidence that makes me want to pour liquid fat on my food. No one needs isolated, processed oils, and the folks who use them may well find that their heart disease gets worse or cancer risk goes up.

What about sugar?

Sugar is simply a flavoring and a tiny bit on your cereal is nothing terrible. However, when you are eating it as a food, that is a problem. When you have a candy bar in your hand, you're eating a chunk of sugar as a food. The same is true for a cupcake, a donut, and a piece of coffee cake. Most Westerners are eating pounds of sugar each week, and when you eat those foods, it floods into all your tissues and soon you have sugar sticking to proteins throughout the body. The proteins become "glycosylated" and as a result, they become thickened and stiff - and problems begin to abound. The lens of your eye begins to glycosylate and that sets you up for cataracts. The elastic fiber in your skin glycosylates and it fractures more easily - and produces wrinkles.

Are all sugars the same?

No, they are not. Sugars in whole plant foods are the proper forms to consume. If my wife or I want to sweeten our oatmeal we'll add some dates or raisins while we are cooking it, and that sweetens it up very nicely. But you don't want to add pure sugar.

Do salt, oil and sugar combine to create the pleasure trap?

Yes, they do. They stimulate the pleasure centers of the brain without providing usable nutrition and that will certainly keep you coming back for more - because, as the saying goes, "You can't eat just one."

I suppose their continued consumption will keep physicians in business and the hospitals full?

They certainly will! And that is not right. We physicians are not being honest with our patients if we do not tell them



Dr. Klaper's favorite phrase: "It's the Food!"

"No one needs isolated, processed oils, and the folks who use them may well find that their heart disease gets worse or cancer risk goes up."

about the benefits of whole food, plant-based nutrition.

You've talked a lot about where modern medicine goes wrong, but would you comment on any areas where it might be going right?

Modern medicine is actually beginning to go right in a number of ways. First of all, the fact that more physicians are opening up to fasting at all is profound. The fact that the *British Medical Journal* recently published a write-up of a TrueNorth patient's lymphoma going away after water fasting and eating a plant-based diet, represents a profoundly positive step. The profession is slowly not only opening to the importance of nutrition, but specifically plant-based nutrition. Last September, I spoke at the Fourth Annual Plant-Based Nutrition and Healthcare conference in Anaheim, California. Over 800 health professionals from around the world attended, and it is clear that the plant-based awareness is awakening around the world at breathtaking speed due to social networking.

Of course, aside from that, modern medicine does some wonderful things. I had my cataracts fixed a few months ago. I was having trouble reading and driving, and within 20 minutes of a painless procedure, I could read license plates across the street. And certainly, there is the amazing, lifesaving world of emergency medicine. If you're in a bad accident, that's just where you want to be.

Another area I would like to ask you about is the seeming explosion of children being diagnosed and medicated for ADHD, and adults being treated for bi-polar and other mental health disorders. Is there something profound happening in America and around the world that accounts for this, and do you think diet plays a critical role?

Oh, absolutely. We now know that the food we eat determines the microbes that live in our gut. These trillions of microorganisms are not innocent bystanders. The metabolic products that these microbes turn your food into have names like "norepinephrine," "dopamine" and "serotonin." These are neurotransmitters that are absorbed into the blood and find their way back into the brain. They clearly have effects on our emotions and mental activity. If you give

kids a steady diet of Oreo cookies, Cheetos and sugar snacks, what kind of microbes are you going to spawn in their gut? And the gut microbes, in turn, are going to put out products that are going to increase sugar cravings and make the person eat even more sugar; and around and around it goes. It's going to have neurophysiological effects on how well the person can focus, and I think we can extend this to autism and the autism spectrum.

It's clear that these children have very different microbes in their guts than normal kids do. People are blaming the mercury in the vaccinations, but I'll ask, "What was this child eating in the years before he was diagnosed as autistic?" Was he the kid who yelled and was given a bag of Skittles and a Coke to keep him quiet? Has he been eating badly for the past three years? Maybe that's the bigger factor than some chemical that got introduced that may have injured the wiring of the brain. So, I think that ADHD may well be largely driven by the diet and the microbiome connection.

Contrast today's situation to what it was like when I was a kid. I can remember growing up on my uncle's farm. We got up at 5:30 in the morning, went out and milked the cows and spent the day slinging hay bales, driving and fixing tractors, harvesting oats and in the evening milking the cows again. I tell you by 7:30 or 8 o'clock in the evening, even though I was only 10 years old, I wanted to fall into bed - and I slept soundly. There was no issue of attention deficit disorder. I was out in the physical world, doing physical work. I was honestly tired. I think that's how human beings are supposed to be raised. Now we take children, isolate them, put them in front of an electronic screen, show them violent images that change every second, and feed them a steady stream of sugar and fat. Then we expect them to be normal, mature, centered, young people. Well, I think we can't be surprised when these kids are having trouble adjusting either socially or intellectually to the surroundings that they're in. So, absolutely I think the diet can explain at least part of the epidemic of autism and mental health disorders we are experiencing.

Do you then believe that a whole-food, plant-based diet and water fasting, where appropriate, can also have potential beneficial roles in reversing these conditions?

Oh, absolutely. We've seen microbiome changes within days of changing to a whole-food, plant-based diet. Those microbes follow right along like the tail of the dog. And there's no question that week after week and month after month of healthy plant-based eating is going to radically and beneficially change the organisms living in the gut. That, in turn, is going to change one's neurochemistry as

well. It is certainly step one. Of course, it's not the only step that needs to be taken, and a child's intellectual, emotional stability has to be ensured as well.

What will you miss most about TrueNorth?

I'll miss the people, but I will especially miss my colleagues that represent so many different disciplines—not just fellow medical doctors like Drs. Sultana, Lim and Soler, who are so in tune with nutrition, but also well-trained chiropractors and naturopaths, all working together on a daily basis toward a common goal. That's so refreshing. The reason I'm leaving is to try and awaken the rest of my medical colleagues to the fact that what their patients are eating is the prime reason they're sitting in the medical office with a disease. To have colleagues like those at TrueNorth, who know that already and who are in that state of awareness, was such a pleasure. That's like driving a Cadillac! I have to add that the entire TrueNorth staff from the housekeepers to the cooks to the office staff have been so supportive and so efficient, and I will also miss them a lot.

Does TrueNorth represent a model for the best medical care in the world?

The program at TrueNorth has much that healing facilities everywhere could emulate. It's a humble place - a converted apartment complex with no high-tech scanners and operating rooms. Yet healing on the most profound level imaginable happens in these halls every day.

And if there's a model that every inpatient hospital should take as an example—from outpatient recovery clinics, obesity services, Jenny Craig and Weight Watcher's—it's the power of a plant-based diet to truly get to the root of patients' problems, and give them the most powerful tools available to help them live truly healthy lives.

I have heard you say that you're not "retiring" you're just "re-wiring." Tell me about that.

As much as I've enjoyed my clinical practice, I realize that a general medical practice is not a very efficient way to change society. I spend eight hours in my office and I see six or eight people each day. I pour my attention into them and offer suggestions and ideas, but at the end of the day I've maybe helped six or eight people. Years are going by and our country is in great straights with a populous that is steadily getting more obese and more ill from diet-instigated diseases that could all be cleared in the vast majority of cases with a plant-based diet. But most medical professionals don't really know anything about nutrition. We're not taught about it in medical school and we don't have respect for its power. We think it's a sissy science that doesn't have much to do with real medicine. To make it more compli-

"Healing on the most profound level imaginable happens at TrueNorth."

cated, the doctors are eating these foods themselves. Since they're eating the T-bone steaks and Gruyere cheese, they're not going to tell their patients not to do so.

So, these are the three obstacles we really have to overcome. In my new life, I'm going to do everything I can to assault these barricades, to help pull my colleagues over the other side until they understand that nutrition is ultimately important and not that hard to effectively - and deliciously - use to help their patients. I want to utilize every modern tool - from online webinars to office pop-up screens on their computers that would alert them that "if you've got a Type 2 diabetic patient, here are the dietary considerations you both need to consider."

My goal is to do that for all the medical specialties: the rheumatologists, the cancer oncologists, the dermatologists and more. They are all seeing patients with dietary diseases, and I want to help them make that connection so they can see how the patient's diet has caused the problem and what they should recommend to actually help them overcome it.

How will you get in the door?

That's going to be the challenge, of course, but one avenue will be the medical students. I'm going to have online webinars for these students, telling them, "You've learned about congestive heart failure or rheumatoid arthritis this week, so here's what the nutritional viewing of those diseases tells you about helping them improve." My plan includes going to the medical schools, providing teaching rounds for clinical staff, and speaking to the increasing number of medical student nutrition interest groups. I've just spoken to one at the University of Rochester and was enthusiastically received. I also expect to spend a lot of time on Skype where I'll do Q&As electronically with students and practicing physicians. I will be an experienced physician saying to my colleagues, "Listen, what your patients are eating is the key to their health and recovery, and here is what you need to know about how to do it." I think students are going to be hungry for that.

What about the general public? Are you still going to try to reach out to them?

Oh, absolutely! In all my years on the lecture circuit I've yet to write a book and so I plan to do the "Dr. Klaper book." And, in fact, I'm going to do several of them. There



Dr. Klaper with his radiant wife, Alese.

is going to be one for my professional colleagues, but absolutely, I'm going to do one for the public. Of course, I recognize that it's been done "sixteen ways from Sunday" by all the other plant-based doctors, but I intend to find my own unique way of conveying the same message.

How can our readers keep up with you after you leave TrueNorth?

I invite all your readers to visit my website, DoctorKlaper.com, and click on "Contacts." If anyone wants to do a consultation with me by Skype, phone, or FaceTime they can fill out the form there and we will contact you to arrange a consultation. But if people just want to follow my lecture schedule, you will find that on my website, as well. At the bottom of every page there is

also a little red button to click on to sign up for my newsletter, "Medicine Capsule." And if you sign up for my newsletter you will be notified on a regular basis of where I'll be speaking and what I'll be talking about.

After 47 years of practicing medicine, are you looking forward to taking a little time for you and your wife, Alese?

Oh, absolutely, though I might have to make an effort to overcome my guilt to take some time off. I've got so much to do and I'm going to be spending six to eight hours at the computer all day, but you bet! There will be days when we'll go riding our bikes or hiking in the hills or go swimming in the ocean.

Do you plan to keep the big picture in perspective?

Yes. All work and no play make Jack a dull and irritable guy.

Finally, I want to ask you about your perspective of the pioneers of the Natural Hygiene Movement, of which you have become a modern day voice. Do you recognize the wisdom and foresight of those folks?

I am continually humbled at the profound truth underlying Natural Hygiene and the healing that they did, and that we still do, on a daily basis. They were way ahead of history and I will be forever grateful to them.

Best of luck to you in your "re-wired" life!

Thanks so much for your support! 