

The National Health Association: History and Evolution from Hygiene Society to the NHA

It often has been said that if you do not remember the lessons of history, you are likely to commit the mistakes of the past. However, inherent in the lessons of the past are also past successes and wisdom that afford us a unique starting point from which to accelerate a positive change and evolution of awareness. This process has been referred to as time-binding. As we pay homage to the people who have paved the road before us by standing on their shoulders as our starting point, we can benefit from their original insights and accomplishments to foster even more exponential growth and progress in our present and future.

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The current National Health Association (NHA) is the natural evolution and present embodiment of the oldest existing whole plant-food diet/health organization in the USA, the American Natural Hygiene Society, which was founded in 1948 by Dr. Herbert Shelton and a group of like-minded physicians and thinkers. The purpose of the original Society was to spread the knowledge of hygiene and hygienic living

as a unique perspective and science of health. It is important to realize that the principles of hygiene are as old as life itself and directly address the fundamental biological and psychological needs of all living things. Hygiene echoes an ancient fundamental truth that when the basic requirements of life (proper nutrition, fresh water, activity, rest, sunshine, fresh air, and emotional poise) are appropriated consistently by all living organisms that have the inborn ability to regulate and heal themselves, health follows like water flowing downhill. Health is not a commodity that can be bought and sold. It is simply and profoundly built and maintained by healthful living.

Yet as basic as this science of health is, it took a group of physicians and forward thinkers in the 19th century to resurrect and expand the principles of hygiene. Their investigations and teachings were in direct response to the poor, abysmal, crowded, and nonhygienic living conditions and health practices around the time of the industrial revolution. It was a time when there was no running water and feces were dumped in the streets. Drinking water was withheld from people with fever and diarrhea as they dehydrated to death, while windows were kept closed and sealed for both the sick and the well, depriving them of much-needed fresh air. The typical diet of the time was tainted pork, lard, and excessive alcohol, while fresh fruits and vegetables were not allowed to be sold or consumed because it was feared that these foods caused deadly diseases

such as cholera. Bathing was uncommon. Physicians—who rarely washed their hands—spread infection among their patients, routinely killing huge numbers of mothers and babies in childbirth. Drug treatment of the day was an array of poisonous substances including mercury, strychnine, arsenic, tobacco, and deadly herbs and plants, coupled with routine bleeding, leeching, and purging that reinforced the epidemic spread of disease and death.

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On this background, early pioneers like Sylvester Graham, a minister and pioneer of health education in the early 1800s credited with the creation of fiber-rich Graham crackers, and medical doctors including Isaac Jennings, William Alcott, Thomas Nichols, Russell Trall, and Susanna Dodds challenged and changed the abuses of the day. They advocated for the inclusion of all hygienic requirements, including fresh air, bathing, diets of fresh fruits and vegetables, and women's

rights, and they even established hygienic medical schools that were the first to train female physicians. These iconic figures, along with Dr. John Kellogg and Ellen White, the founder of the Seventh Day Adventists, promoted high-fiber cereals and breads, plant foods, and temperance with alcohol and tobacco, and led a Hygienic crusade against the abusive medical practices of the day. Drs. Trall and Alcott also helped found the first American Vegetarian Society in 1850.

The impact of these new ideas, practices, and radical thinking had a revolutionary, widespread influence on all of society, including writers and activists of the day, that led to major medical and health reform. It fostered a major interest in public health along with an attack on the inhumane and unsanitary conditions in meat-packing plants, a positive change in governmental regulations of food and drugs, and a significant decrease in widespread infections, morbidity, and mortality, thereby increasing life expectancy and quality of life.

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By the early part of the 20th century, the fundamental principles of hygiene became diluted in a variety of nontraditional therapeutic schools and alternative treatment approaches. This led Dr. Herbert Shelton, a naturopath and chiropractor in the 1920s and 1930s, to highlight, gather, and organize the fundamental principles of ancient hygienic wisdom and the work of the health pioneers of the 19th century into a body of knowledge he called *natural hygiene* to distinguish it from general practices of sanitation and personal hygiene linked with an assortment of questionable therapies and therapeutic

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schools of the day. Dr. Shelton, arguably the most prolific writer and teacher of hygienic living, spread the knowledge of hygiene in his monthly *Hygienic Review* magazine; in his own hygienic center/water-only fasting institute, Dr. Shelton's Health School in San Antonio, Texas; and in almost 40 books he wrote on all aspects of the philosophy, principles, and practice of hygienic living. In many ways his classic book, *Natural Hygiene: The Pristine Way of Life*, is the bible of natural hygiene. His passion and commitment to hygiene drove him to establish the American Natural Hygiene Society in 1948, and he and the Society were a major influence on thousands of health seekers and like-minded physicians who practiced fundamental hygienic healthcare along with water-only fasting from then until the present day.

The work of Dr. Shelton and his early contemporaries, Drs. William Esser and Christopher Gian-Cursio, paved the way and passed the baton to several generations of dedicated hygienic physicians including Drs. David Scott, Alec Burton, Virginia Vetrano, Keki Sidhwa, John Brosious, Gerald Benesh, Robert Gross, and eventually to the hygienic physicians practicing today.

What sets the NHA apart from all other health organizations is its foundation in the principles of hygiene, the true science of health, and its advocacy of water-only fasting for detoxification, recovery, and healing. It promotes the essence of true health care—promoting the conditions that support the normal functions of life and rejecting choices that have no healthy or normal relationship to our well-being and

outcome of health. It does not promote therapies and treatment modalities but rather a way of life that is grounded in the true requirements of health.

The NHA is at the vanguard of teaching the most important nutrition and lifestyle modifications essential to support our best opportunity to be well. And as we unequivocally support health science, it is so profound and important to realize that the best that science has to offer continues to corroborate, reinforce, and provide the evidence base for the health truths this organization has been about since its inception. The NHA is unwavering in its commitment to expand this evidence base and continue to support the research and investigations that emphasize the value of plant-exclusive nutrition, healthy lifestyle modifications, water-only fasting, and the fundamental truths of hygiene. The NHA is compelled and committed to utilize all technology and media platforms to spread and share the information critical for healthful living to promote the health of all people, all species, and planet Earth itself. We invite you with open hearts and minds to join us on this worthwhile endeavor and journey.



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