

Questions to Fundamentally Change Your Approach to Being Healthy in the New Year!

From F.Perry Wilson, MD and author of
How Medicine Works and When it Doesn't

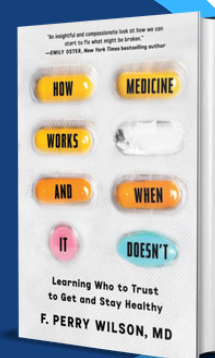
1. Am I a victim of “one simple thing” mentality?

Tough love here – there are a lot of people heavily invested in selling you on the idea that one simple thing can change your life. Who doesn't love a quick fix? One exercise to give you shredded abs... one food to add to your diet to prevent cancer... one medication to reduce your risk of heart attack. In 2023, it's time to realize that simple fixes are attractive because they don't demand much personal change or growth. Resolve to go bigger. Change more. Investing in yourself requires a diverse health portfolio.

2. Is what I want to be true actually true?

Motivated reasoning is the number one reason people make bad choices about their health. They don't want to quit smoking, so they focus on anecdotes of people who smoke their whole lives and live to be 100. They fear the side-effects of chemotherapy, so choose to believe that cutting out sugar from the diet cures cancer. They don't want to exercise, so they tell themselves that they don't have enough time in the day to make a difference. Deep down, we all know the truth – we know what we should be doing to get healthy. It's time to let go of what we wish to be true.

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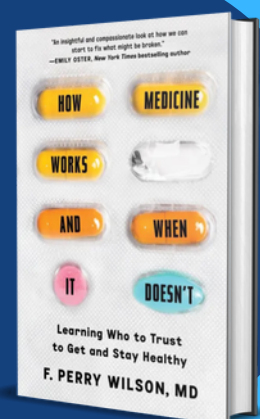
3. Am I lonely?

Social isolation is a huge problem – perhaps even the central problem of our era. We feel connected to others through Instagram pictures, facebook posts, and other virtual networks, but meaningful social connections have become less and less frequent. Its one of the reasons so-called “deaths of despair” – those due to suicide, alcohol, or drug-abuse – continue to rise. But we never talk about it. We don’t admit to ourselves that we might be lonely. Ask yourself the question and if the answer is yes, commit to going out there, into the real world, and meeting people. If you have an interest, I guarantee there is a community near you that wants to engage with you. Find them.

4. Is my doctor treating me, or treating society?

Doctors are trained to look at the effects treatments have on a population of individuals. If we see a study that shows that drug X reduces deaths from 2% to 1% in a group of people, we celebrate – that’s a 50% reduction in deaths. But for an individual patient, this reduction is much less impressive. Chances are, after all, you won’t die whether you get the drug or not (98% of people survive, right?). Make sure you’re talking to your doctor about your risk and your benefit before you start taking a new medication – not the benefit to society at large.

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5. Who can I trust to help me get healthy?

It's a big question. There is no shortage of people vying for your attention here. The "wellness" space is crowded (dare I say overpopulated) and many of those who are promising to help you will do little more than lighten your wallet. So this year, learn the "red flags" that tell you someone is (at best) misinterpreting data or (at worst) an outright fraud. That means shunning "one simple thing" solutions. It means appreciating that getting healthy is not simple, and those who appear certain they have an answer clearly haven't done their research. It means recognizing that what you want to be true may not be true, and accepting that. And it means having an open mind, accepting facts that may be unpleasant, and making the hard decisions – the fundamental changes to start to create a new future. But you can do this. **Trust yourself.**



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