

## Exercise – Buddhist View



The Buddha wanted us to keep the body healthy to not hinder the practice. If you eat right and exercise your body will get strong and healthy.

Healthy and fit body does not need to be seen as an attachment. If a monk took the Bodhisattva Vow, all his activities will be done with the wish to benefit others. A healthy body is actually a very useful tool if one wants to help other beings. During a long life free from illnesses one can do much more than during a short life with numerous visits to doctors and hospitals (which are usually costly). Precious human body is also a topic of various teachings (see this or that) which invite us to realise how rare it is to obtain a well-functioning human body and how easy it is to lose it. With that in mind, maintaining a healthy body is a very wise thing to do.

In Tibetan Buddhism one of the main meditation practices involves doing physical prostrations. In Vajrayana traditions all practitioners - monks and lay ones - need to complete at least 100.000 prostrations as a part of preliminary practices. Some practitioners continue to do prostrations on daily basis and even Dalai Lama admitted that he indeed does them every day.

The Dalai Lama takes daily exercise, including walking on a treadmill if it's too wet to walk outside. It makes sense to me since given that this human life is very precious in that it gives us an opportunity for moving towards enlightenment, it follows that it's a good thing to keep the body alive for as long is reasonably possible.

In his wonderful book "A path with heart", by Jack Kornfield, the author, himself a Buddhist monk under Ajahn Chan for several years talks about exercise and several other normal things monks ignore in order to pursue enlightenment single mindedly. He advises against this extreme behavior, and urges monks and spiritual seekers to not ignore normal healthy living.

He recounts interviewing several monks who suffered from diabetes and other lifestyle diseases that came from not eating healthy food, from not exercising, from developing an aversion to their body and consequently not caring enough.

That said, Zen monks and nuns in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh perform the ten mindful movements as a group daily. It is a slow exercise set to be performed with mindfulness. In itself it is a meditation, when performed so beautifully by the monastics. His order breaks with tradition in several ways, including allowing monks to cook their own healthy food instead of depending on donated food. A logical thing to do in this age. Someone at plum village told me that they used to get

catered food but it made everyone sick often, so They changed the rules to allow monks to take turns to cook their own healthy vegan food and eat thrice a day. The monks also modified their uniforms from traditional Vietnamese dresses to suit the French climate.

Perhaps in times when monks only walked around from place to place, that was more than enough exercise. In modern times, especially in countries like Thailand where monks often live in cities, and can ride for free on buses, trains where usually someone pays their fare, or offers a ride, walking is minimal. Plus, devout people often offer rich or special food into the monk's bowls because they think it gets them extra merit. So food for survival gets turned into abundance. Eating a single meal a day means the body goes into glycemic shock after the meal, which can affect the insulin secretion adversely in some.

Bodhidharma according to some accounts allowed his legs to rot away by sitting in the cross legged posture for nine years. The cross legged position can cut off blood flow, which isn't a problem for a few hours, but if a monk sits in this position regularly for hours, bad side effects maybe expected. Such attitudes and role models don't help.