

"Bloody hell, this is good - for all you Jims out there -
get off your arse and do something about it!"

RICKY TOMLINSON

GET OFF THE SOFA



A PRESCRIPTION FOR A HEALTHIER LIFE BY
DR ANDREW CURRAN
THE WELLNESS DOCTOR

**GET OFF
THE SOFA**

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IT WAS A QUIET DAY
FOR SELF-DESTRUCTIVE BEHAVIOUR
IN BOLTON.

Preface

Writing this book is my present to me. For years I have watched people in their millions inflict more illness and suffering on themselves than any war has ever done. Both as a practising doctor and as a simple observer of the Saturday afternoon crowds that throng the centre of most cities, I have watched suffering on a scale that is beyond apocalyptic. For years at a time I have been distressed to the core of my being. Sometimes I have watched with indifference. Most of the time I have been nearly inchoate with rage at the blind stupidity of what I am seeing. What is this biblical plague, this monstrosity of suffering? Self-inflicted illness. The fat guy smoking a cigarette. The thin woman flayed raw by alcohol. The kid jamming another fat-laden time bomb into its face. The millions and millions of couch potatoes who haven't done a minute's decent exercise since they passed puberty. So what happens to all these millions upon millions of people? Nothing for most of the time. They are just the same as all their friends and their relatives and, God help us, far too many of the health professionals that look after them.

But then it all changes. Sometimes suddenly – a heart attack, stroke, cancer. Life changing, irrevocable events that stuff their lives and the lives of everyone around them. Or not so suddenly – the slow suffocation of emphysema, the long autumn of health related unemployment, the desperate loneliness of congestive cardiac failure. And that doesn't half wreck the lives of everyone around them.

Is it preventable? Not all of it, no. Some diseases just happen even with the best will in the world. But is a large part of it preventable? Yes, absolutely.

So what's my point? Ignorance. All this unimaginably vast ocean of suffering is to a greater or lesser extent ignorance. A result of poverty – the poverty of knowledge. The *information* is out there, no doubt of that. There are vast rain forests worth of health information to deal with the ignorance. But it's

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pretty dry stuff by and large. Boffins writing for boffins, or worse, health professionals patronising lay people in politically correct jargonese.

So this book, this indulgence of mine, is my contribution to accessibility. If you don't like plain English, don't read it. If you aren't prepared to apply it to yourself and take responsibility for your own health, don't read it. It isn't a book full of references and science. It's just a book about being healthy.

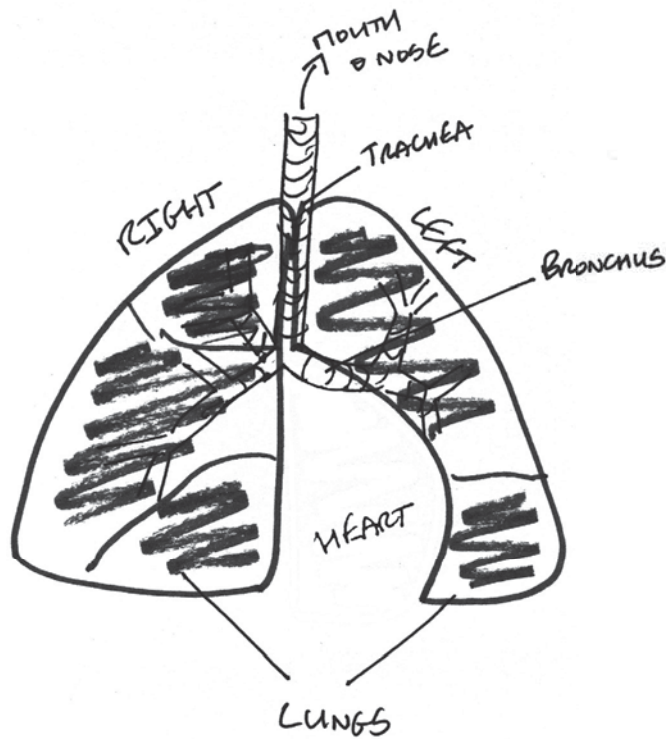
I hope you enjoy it.

DR ANDREW CURRAN

Chapter 2

Your Lungs

So. Your lungs. In your chest (obviously). Wrapped around your heart on both sides. Encased by your rib cage. Connected to the outside through your voice box and out through your mouth and nose. Fascinatingly complex your lungs. They are made up of millions and millions of little air sacs called *alveoli*. These air sacs are truly tiny but because there are so many of them they contain up to 7 litres of air (9 litres in a very few people) when you take a really deep breath.



HE DIDN'T KNOW WHY HE
WAS HOLDING HIS BREATH. IT
JUST SEEMED LIKE A GOOD IDEA.



What Do Your Lungs Do?

Their job is to keep you alive by collecting oxygen from the air you breathe in. Oxygen is essential to your life. It is so important that:

within two minutes of your oxygen being cut off you
will start dying and if you don't get oxygen pretty quick
within four to five minutes you will be dead.

Very scary thought. So what does oxygen do and why is it so important to your continuing health?

Oxygen is the chemical that allows your cells to produce energy. This energy is what keeps your cells, and therefore you, alive. Energy is made in your cells by a chemical reaction called *oxidative phosphorylation*. (Not as complicated as it sounds. It basically means adding oxygen and phosphate to a special molecule called *adenosine* so that your cells can use it like your car uses petrol.) This makes a compound called *adenosine triphosphate* (ATP) which is basically the fuel that your cells run on. Your cells burn up ATP at an alarming rate. They need a steady supply of oxygen all the time so they can make ATP to stay healthy.

So you have to have your lungs to get the oxygen into your body so your cells can make the fuel ATP so you can stay alive and healthy.

So far so good. But your lungs don't just bring oxygen into the body. They also get rid of poisons, especially a substance called *carbon dioxide* (which just means a carbon molecule with two oxygen molecules attached). This substance is produced by your cells when they are burning up energy. Too much carbon dioxide is poisonous. Carbon dioxide is usually a gas but when it is carried in your blood most of it is actually dissolved into the water that makes up so much of your blood (in this state it is a chemical called *bicarbonate*). However when your blood reaches your lungs the bicarbonate turns back into the gas carbon dioxide. This leaks across the cell membranes in the

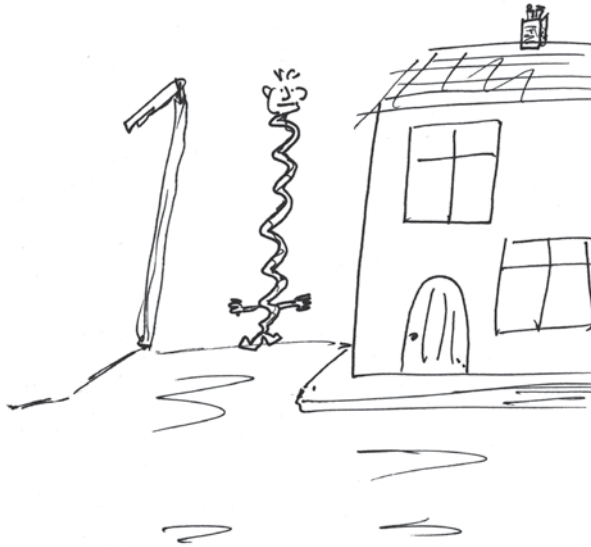
Chapter 4

Your Digestive System

What Does Your Digestive System Do?

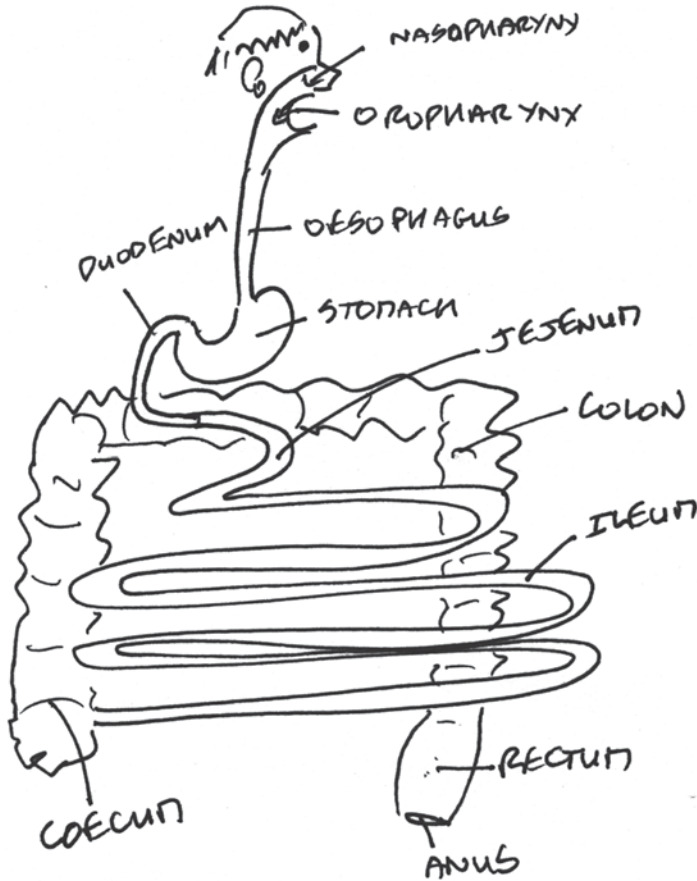
Your intestine is really long. Really, really long. In fact if you stretch it out it is nearly longer than a two-storey building is tall: 7.5 metres (25 feet) of intestine hangs out in your belly.

HELPING OUT IN ANATOMY DEMONSTRATIONS
HAD LONG CEASED TO BE FUN FOR PAUL.



GET OFF THE SOFA

It is divided into sections.



So what does it all do?

Lots and lots actually depending on which part it is.

Your *oropharynx* is apparently not very complicated. It chews up your food and swallows it. Sounds very simple but you actually use eight muscles to chew and a further fourteen to swallow. A *very* complex process.

How To Look After Your Kidneys

Looking after your kidneys is pretty simple

- Drink enough (your urine should be pale straw colour or paler).
- Eat healthily. Just a normal balanced diet. Nothing clever.
- Have your blood pressure checked regularly. As I will tell you below in how to wreck your kidneys, high blood pressure is a real kidney damager.
- Stay slim. Overweight people are inclined to have raised blood pressure.

So mostly just be sensible.

How To Wreck Your Kidneys

Wrecking your kidneys is actually quite a challenge. They are pretty tough little organs. They can take a lot of abuse before you start to feel it. However the good news for health wreckers is that once you wreck your kidneys you are very likely to die young. About 13,000 people die every year in the UK from kidney disease. That's quite a lot. So if you can wreck your kidneys there is a good chance it will kill you.

So what is the recipe to wreck your kidneys?

Pretty much the same as what I have already talked about for other organs.

Ingredient 1

BE FAT. Great for raising the blood pressure and hardening the arteries. Both these things significantly compromise how your kidneys work. The good news is that once you have done enough damage to your kidneys with high

GET OFF THE SOFA IS, QUITE SIMPLY, A BOOK ABOUT BEING HEALTHY

As a practising doctor, Andrew Curran has watched people inflict illness and suffering on themselves. From the fat guy smoking a cigarette to the thin woman flayed raw by alcohol. From the overweight kid jamming another handful of processed fat into its face, to the millions of couch potatoes who haven't exercised since they passed puberty.

And what happens to all these people?

Nothing for most of the time. But then sometimes it all changes. Suddenly – a heart attack, a stroke, cancer.

Or not so suddenly – the slow suffocation of emphysema, the long autumn of health related unemployment, the desperate loneliness of congestive cardiac failure.

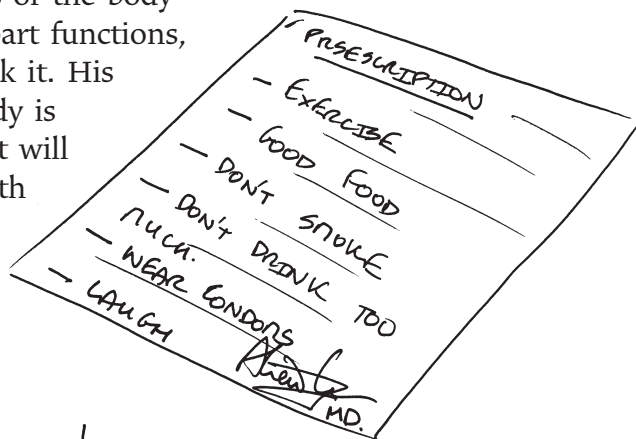
Is it preventable? Not all of it, no. Some diseases just happen even with the best will in the world.

But is most of it preventable? Yes, absolutely yes.

Exploring different organs and parts of the body Dr Andrew Curran explains how each part functions, how to look after it, and how to wreck it. His advice on how to look after your body is surprisingly simple. The facts about what will happen if we continue to wreck our health are horrifying.

"Remarkable ... It puts across the most important health messages in language that anyone can understand."

Christopher Peterson, GP



WELL! WHAT DID YOU
THINK IT WAS GOING TO
SAY?

Family & Health



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