

## **Find Balance to Experience Happiness, the Mediterranean way!**

Growing up in Greece I couldn't escape the teachings of the ancient Greek philosophers! At first, these philosophical ideas had no real effect on me, or so I thought. However, life has its ways to dig deep down into your subconsciousness and resurface old experiences. And so, over the years, between studying, creating a family, and building a professional career, I came to realize how brilliant, but also challenging these teachings truly were!

Throughout my adult life, the two concepts that I have been struggling with the most are "balance" and "moderation". Aristotle asserted that to find happiness, "people should aim for the golden mean, always strive for a balance between the two extremes". The basic principle of the "golden mean" is moderation! I love Aristotle and Aristotelian logic, but I have been encountering serious problems following his recipe for happiness. Not only in my personal life, but in my professional life as well!

I have always tried hard to find balance between work and family life, between meat and vegetables, ouzo and tsipouro (Greek spirits), the mountains and the sea, the USA and Greece! I'm still struggling, but I feel that, as I grow older, I'm slowly getting the idea. My older son Andreas was a great help in my quest to find balance, when in answering my decades old question "where should we live permanently, Greece or the USA?" he wisely replied: both! Why choose one over the other, the two extremes? Live in both countries, balance! He was only 15 years old at the time! These Gen Z's scare me!

But, alas, the concepts of balance and moderation became a huge headache for my professional life as well. You see, for the past 30 years I have been researching and teaching the effects that lifestyle factors, such as nutrition, physical activity, stress, sleep, and others have on our health. My research, and that from many other brilliant colleagues, suggests that there are no magic bullets when considering healthy lifestyles choices. For example, in the nutrition field, super foods are a myth. Foods that, when consumed often or in large quantities, help us achieve good health simply do not exist. On the contrary, too much of a good thing may be bad for you! For example, whereas vitamin D is essential for good health, too much vitamin D can increase the risk of cancer! Inactivity is a killer, but excessive exercise is also detrimental to our health. Lack of sleep is unhealthy, but too much sleep is an indication that something is wrong. Too much stress is bad, but no stress at all is counterproductive and dangerous.

So, what do these findings mean, and what kind of recommendations can we give to people based on them? Well, it depends on whom you are asking. If you asked me, I would say, “study the ancient Greek philosophers for answers”! Plato introduced moderation as “the harmony between reason, spirit, and desire”. “Pan metron ariston”, meaning “everything in moderation”, declared Kleovoulos in the 6th century B.C. The father of medicine, Hippocrates wrote: “Everything in excess is opposed to nature” and “all parts of the body should be used in moderation”. And of course, Aristotle with his “golden mean”. What did these bright minds know that we have forgotten today?

Well, the Greek philosophers were apparently affected by the area they were living in, the Mediterranean region. Balance and moderation prevail in this area of the world. The climate is mild, the soil is neither too rich nor poor, the mountains are not very high, the rivers are not massive. Everything appears to be in the right proportions. No wonder that the lifestyle of the inhabitants of the Mediterranean region has been characterized by a balance with nature and a relaxed attitude about life.

So, balance and moderation, the Mediterranean way, seems to be the answer. Eat everything in moderation, balance work and family life, have a few good friends, use stress to your advantage, sleep well, be happy, but not too happy! Everything in moderation.... even moderation!

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