

QI HEALS

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MOVE ON! **Circadian Cycles**

All living things are in a state of constant movement. You are unable to stop the movement within you, and for good reason: it would kill you. The heart keeps beating, the lungs keep expanding and contracting, the spleen keeps processing red corpuscles, the neurons of the brain keep dying, etc. The body's cells keep doing whatever it is they do, and the body's atoms keep spinning, dying, and being recreated. Movement is good in that no alternative other than death exists.

Most people have a circadian cycle (also called a body clock) that runs on a 24-hour timer. The cycle moves the body through changes without your having to think about it. What follows is a brief overview of a typical cycle.

Early Evening: The core body temperature begins to drop 4 to 5 hours prior to bedtime. An hour or two before bedtime, the core temperature drops sharply, which stimulates the pineal gland to release the sleep-inducing hormone melatonin.

The early evening drop in core body temperature produces four other effects: 1) the stomach produces more acid 2) blood pressure begins to drop 3) urinary output increases 4) the body's pain threshold reaches its lowest point about 21:00, meaning aches and pains are felt more keenly. Take pain medication about 20:00 to avoid this.

Nighttime: 1) Sensitivity to allergens increases. 2) the body's immune system strengthens due to an increase in the flow of

interleukin 1. 3) Immune cells called helper T lymphocytes increase until about 1:00 a.m. 4) This is the time most pregnant women are likely to go into labor. 5) Levels of HGH (human growth hormone) reach their peak about 2:00 a.m. 6) Cortisol, an anti-inflammatory hormone, reaches its lowest levels after midnight. 7) Pro-inflammatory and spasm-producing compounds called leukotrienes reach their highest levels late at night. This accounts for the majority of severe asthma attacks occurring between 3 and 4:00 a.m. If you are prone to asthma attacks, do not eat sweets before bedtime, because this weakens the adrenal glands which are necessary to avoid such attacks.

Morning: Assuming you do not sleep in a crypt or a coffin, light begins to hit your eyes, stimulating the retina. The retina sends a signal to the suprachiasmatic nucleus (SCN), wherein the body's biological clock is kept. The SCN sends signals to the pineal gland informing it that it is time to wake, and so reduce the output of melatonin. As the melatonin decreases, this stimulates the following: 1) core body temperature begins to increase. 2) Insulin levels fall to their lowest point, and levels of the adrenal hormone cortisol begin to increase. 3) Heart rate and blood pressure begin to rise quickly. Ingesting caffeine will accelerate the rise. 4) In women, the pelvis relaxes, and so menstruation tends to begin early in the morning. 5) Levels of the helper T lymphocytes of the immune system decline at this time.

Midday: 1) The muscles expand to their utmost, the spine elongates, and the body is at its maximum height. 2) Natural killer cell activity accelerates. 3) Blood hemoglobin levels peak.

Afternoon: 1) Body temperatures begin to cool down. Many people experience a sense of drowsiness as a result. 2) By mid-afternoon, airway openings are at maximum extension, and breathing becomes easy. 3) The body's reflexes are at their highest level of performance, and your natural strength reaches a peak.

Once More With Feeling
DRINK LOTS OF WATER!

More data in from clinical studies:

About 75% of all Americans are chronically dehydrated.

In 37% of Americans, the thirst mechanism weakens to the point where it is often mistaken for hunger. Weight gain results.

Even mild dehydration will slow the body's metabolic rate as much as 3%.

One glass of water before bed shuts down midnight hunger pangs in over 95% of dieters studied.

Dehydration is the primary trigger of daytime drowsiness and fatigue.

Drinking 8 glasses of water daily significantly eased back and joint pain in 80% of subjects.

Drinking even 5 glasses of water daily decreases the risk of colon cancer by 45%, and reduces the risk of bladder cancer by 50%. Early data indicate that it also reduces the risk of breast cancer.

For those of you who avoid drinking water in order to lose weight, you are living in a fool's paradise. The body needs a certain amount of water in order to function, and will retain as much water as it needs. If fresh water is not forthcoming, it will retain the old water, which is not healthy. People come to see me complaining of pain along the inside of their thigh; women, especially, complain that one thigh is swollen. I have them increase their water intake, and the "problem" vanishes. The body will retain fluid in the thigh if not enough fresh water is forthcoming, and the urinary tract will tighten, causing the discomfort along the inner thigh.

UNCLE ARNIE (XI)

I spent the afternoon taking in the sights of Steubenville on the off-chance that the atmosphere and local color would provide an added dimension to the story I had just heard. It was a noble but fruitless effort. I don't suppose that Uncle Arnie saw anymore of Steubenville than the shortest distance between the bus station and 126 Lantern Street.

I caught the bus that Uncle Arnie and Arthur would have taken, and arrived at Silver Birches in the early evening. I wanted to see if the magazines had been taken away as I had requested.

The Reception area was dimly lit and unattended. I was looking for a light switch when Benny Balsom and his walker appeared like an apparition, startling me. As the self-appointed official host of Silver Birches, he was pleased to see me, and greeted me with a ghastly, wheezy little laugh.

"Big doins today, big doins. Lotsa noise." He was excited, and pounded his walker on the linoleum to demonstrate the noise.

I changed the subject. "Benny, did Arnie Balsom give you money?"

He was nonplussed. "I ain't seen 'im around for a while. What's it t'you?" His tone was threatening.

"You're the most irritating person I've ever met," I said with feeling, but put my hand on his shoulder to soothe him.

"Take yer mitts offa me," he shouted.

The light in Helen McElroy's office suddenly flashed on.

"Who's out there? Is somebody out there?" she called.

I pushed Benny aside and went into her office to ask for the key to Arnie's apartment. Her face was flushed and haggard. There were soggy puffs of tissues scattered over her desk. She had been crying in the dark, for hours it seemed.

"It's a tragedy." Her voice was so soft I had to lean across the desk to hear her. "First Arnold, and now Arthur."

A young employee of the home had gone to Uncle Arnie's room that morning to remove the crate of magazines. Arthur Pillars was lying on the living room couch. When he did not respond to words or prods, the young man panicked and rushed to Helen McElroy who summoned the resident physician. Together they

ascertained that Arthur was dead. Rigor mortis had set in. Arthur had been dead for hours. A note in Arthur's hand addressed to the Manager had been left on Uncle Arnie's dining room table. The note was now in the manager's possession.

Toots had come in person to remove the body. Death-hardened as he was, handling the corpse of a man he had joked with only two days before left him profoundly subdued. As Arthur had no next of kin, the memorial service and funeral would be held the following day. A young woman in the office next to Helen McElroy had been busy phoning employees of the home to notify them of the fact, and to solicit donations for another plaque.

I asked, "How did Arthur die?"

The words might have been gnats; Helen waved her hand, batting them away.

"It doesn't matter. It won't do him or the home any good if it was found that he didn't die of natural causes. There will be no autopsy. He showed no signs of illness or injury. The physician put 'sudden death' on the death certificate. That's not unusual at Silver Birches."

"How do you think he died?"

Helen looked confused. The last thing she expected to be asked was her opinion on the cause of death. She hated me for asking.

"I pray that he lost his will to live when he lost his best friend," she said, and held her palms up towards heaven like a suppliant.

I knew he had died of shame.

"Will you be attending the funeral?" Helen McElroy asked, when the phone rang. The question was a courtesy, not an attempt to include me in the ceremony. I felt relief when she picked up the phone; I would not have to answer her.

"Yes, he's here," she said dully, hung up and motioned to the Manager's office. "The Manager would like to see you. He says it's very important."

I crossed the half-lit Reception area. Benny Balsom was gibbering at an attendant who was trying to persuade him, by non-violent means, to leave off greeting and go to bed. The introduction of violent means was only a moment away.

The Manager was a small, dapper man with knife edged creases in his slacks and face. Any sudden change of facial expression resembled the movement of an accordion door. The door expanded and contracted with remarkable rapidity at his greeting. He wished to show simultaneously his pleasure at meeting me and his distress at all the recent deaths. His hands fluttered expressively; like the rest of him, they were small and neat. He spoke with audible tension as if resisting a powerful urge to shriek.

"Thank God you're still here! I thought you might have spoken with your father and left for Los Angeles already." He was truly relieved. He said 'God' as if he had caught the fellow in the palm of his hand. I was surprised and not a little unnerved by the statement, but he ignored my expression and dove headfirst into the turbulent waters of his own problem. Before hitting water, he motioned me to sit.

"Your father and uncle rearranged Arnold's finances when they installed him in his new apartment. His trust fund was discontinued and the money made over to him directly. That meant your Aunt Ruth and Uncle Paul no longer exercised trusteeship, but that Arnold had direct access to his funds. What's more, Arnold was made into a revocable living trust, and a will was drawn up. I was entrusted with keeping the will. Arnold was a very frugal man, and I doubt that he touched any of his money. He left an estate of, oh, in the region of sixty or sixty five thousand dollars."

Here he paused and pursed his lips. The accordion door contracted until it hid a mole on his cheek. I was more impressed with his facial trick than with his news; Mort had already told me about the revocable living trust and will. He had arranged for a lawyer to visit Uncle Arnie at Silver Birches and work out the necessary details. I fidgeted in my seat as a spur to the Manager to get on with his story. The next installment proved stupendous.

"There really hasn't been time to think," he said with dancing hands, "and I don't know if I should begin with 'I have wonderful news for you' or 'I have sad news for you'. So I will dispense with introductions and just tell you plainly that you are Arnold

Balsom's beneficiary. You have just inherited about sixty thousand dollars!" The exact figure turned out to be \$65,493.

The little man was taken aback when I didn't rush to embrace him. He had anticipated high drama, not skepticism. The velvet lining left his voice, and he spoke only to conclude the interview.

"I haven't read the will and don't know the exact terms. However, you were not first in line as beneficiary. Arthur Pillars was to have received the estate and you were second in line. You become the beneficiary now that Arthur is dead." He smiled a creased little smile, and from his desk drawer removed two envelopes, one fat and the other thin. The fat envelope was imprinted with the name of a legal firm, the thin envelope was addressed to the Manager in Arthur Pillars's hand.

I received the envelopes and fingered them uneasily. "Why me?" I asked the Manager. "Wasn't there anybody else besides Arthur in his life? No special friend in the home?"

The Manager shrugged. "Not that I know of. You're the only nephew, aren't you? He knew his brothers are well off and don't need the money. Maybe that's why he left it to you."

I was his only nephew. He had two nieces, but I was certain their lineage precluded them inheriting anything from Arnold Balsom: they were Paul and Ruth's children. I had met him twice, and now through a vagary of fate I was his heir. I wanted to cry, but not in front of the neat little man.

The Manager was not yet inclined to let me go. He had something unpleasant to tell me. I was eager to be on my own with the will and letter, and so made the telling easy for him. I sat still, and from my copious repertoire called up my approachable look.

"There's a matter of some delicacy that I'd like to speak with you about," he began tentatively. His hands looked about to fly off to roost on top of the bookcase.

I nodded benignly.

"You probably are aware that Arnold's cousin, Benny Balsom, is a resident of the home," he said with distaste. Benny's presence seemed to the Manager to lower the tone of Silver Birches. "It's a long story about how he got here. He was working in a menial capacity at a Las Vegas casino until his infirmities overcame him

and he was forced to stop work. His ex-boss, who insisted on anonymity, but whom we all know, paid for Benny's apartment. Benny wanted to return to Pittsburgh and be with his cousin Arnold who, he claimed, was his best friend. His boss bought the apartment, but cut Benny loose without funds. Arnold had been paying for Benny's maintenance and food out of his salary until the time of his death. It's not a large sum, and I wonder if, now that you have Arnold's money, if you wouldn't, uh, provide Benny with an endowment for his upkeep?" he said quickly, and looked away.

I felt swollen with rage, but kept my voice cold and crisp.

"Did Benny himself or an anonymous boss named Bruno threaten Arnold in any way to have him pay the maintenance?"

The Manager looked confident and answered glibly. "Benny Balsom is in no condition to threaten anyone."

"That's no answer," I said angrily. "Benny abused Arnold in his childhood and he could have had a lingering fear. Or, as I say, somebody else might have threatened Arnold."

"No, that wasn't the case. In fact, I spoke to Arnold about providing for Benny, and he eagerly agreed. He..."

I cut him off. "Considering Arnold was the poorest of the Balsoms, why did you go to him for money? Why not to his brothers?"

The Manager was eager to defend himself. He squared his bony shoulders, narrowed his eyes, and became the very image of a bantam cock. "I had no knowledge of Arnold's finances," he said defiantly. "I assumed he either had money of his own or was receiving sufficient funds from his brothers."

"Which is why he was living in a cage in your boiler room," I sneered.

He winced, and became contrite. "I knew nothing about that, really. I've only been here eleven years. His living conditions went back far beyond my time in office." His eyes softened as a prelude to telling the truth. "I run an intricate organization here. He was the elevator operator. I didn't inquire into his living arrangements. To get back to Benny, Arnold made it clear that no other Balsom would support him. When I told him that Benny would be left homeless and destitute if no one paid his

maintenance fee, he eagerly offered to have the money deducted from his monthly salary. As it turns out, he had money and could easily afford the stipend."

The woman had said it; Uncle Arnie had a big, fat heart. Why not keep it beating in memorium? I agreed to create some sort of mechanism to provide for Benny's support. I prevailed upon the Manager to allow Benny to run up a tab until Uncle Arnie's inheritance was sorted out. In the meantime, I could work something out with my father and his brothers.

The Manager and I rose in sync, and he extended his hand. "No hard feelings about your uncle, I hope?" he said in a quivering voice. We shook hands, and I remembered to ask about my father. Why had the Manager thought I'd gone to Los Angeles?

Oh that? He spoke lightheartedly. He had only to deliver a simple message. "Your father phoned and asked that you call him in Los Angeles at once. I think your Uncle Louis died." He knitted his brows in recollection, and then perked up. "You'll find out when you call him. Here, use my phone," he gestured, and fled the room, shutting the door behind him.

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