# Landing in Chronic Medical Conditions

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**Introduction**

Perhaps, student life is the most vulnerable to land into chronic medical conditions, quite unknowingly. The peer pressures to excel in studies; the uncertainties in selecting an academic path; ups and downs in extracurricular activities such as sports and community service; blossoming adulthood, and financial restrictions; all contribute to losing track of deteriorating medical conditions. If not properly controlled, these would result in chronic medical conditions, and I could attest to that fact. It would take lot more effort, expense, and treatments to combat the precipitated chronic medical conditions

## Excessive coffee drinking, smoking, and other addictions

During my high school and college days (late 50s and early 60s), like many other students, I had to stay away from parents, because of the accessibility of the educational institutions. The finances coming from parents were just sufficient for educational purposes, and nothing else. In order to support our other habits like going to movies, sports events, restaurants, and other non educational and recreational activities, we had to work odd jobs. To balance the time between studies, jobs, and the non educational activities, we had to spend extended hours. In that self inflicted loop, along with other students, I picked up excessive coffee drinking and cigarette smoking to stay awake. At times, we used to take pain medications as well. Even though it was fun initially, these habits literally consumed us financially and medically, and our educational grades started falling down. Also, I became very nervous, and could not function properly without coffee and cigarettes. ***When my father found out and confronted me about my smoking, I denied ever touching a cigarette. He said to me (during my senior year of high school) “Son: I am now least bothered about your smoking; but I am ashamed and disturbed that you have become a downright liar without any self esteem. I am not going to ask you to stop smoking, because you would agree to stop, but would resume smoking and become a chronic liar. Let me know when you really stopped smoking, and be assured that your mother and I would be the happiest persons”. I broke down immediately and admitted to my smoking and other addictions.*** The forgiving attitude of my father did have a dramatic impact on me. However, it took me more than 25 years from that day to stop smoking. Smoking, such a powerful and destructive addition, one should never get into. I observe that in the present times (2009/2010), all over the globe, teen age smoking and other addictions are on rise, which ultimately would result in health hazards and lack of productivity.

## Irrational eating and irregular sleeping habits

Even though I could not really stop smoking, I reduced my smoking and coffee drinking, and I was boastful of my accomplishments. But, inadvertently, as a replacement for smoking, I picked up irrational eating of cookies, candies, snacks, and whatever I could get my hand on. The academic pressure in the college and the university graduate school further added heavy burden of performance, and the normal and regular sleeping patterns were compromised. I used to sleep short intervals, several times a day. My class and roommates were cautioning me about my irregular behavior, but apparently either I did not want to acknowledge, or I was too proud of my academic accomplishments that my irrational and irregular eating and sleeping habits did not bother me***. It is unfortunate that human beings neglect health and disciplined life styles, in preference to academic or professional achievements, until they develop some chronic medical conditions, and I was not an exception. I realized my compromising health and life styles too late, until I got myself into some of these chronic conditions.***

## Tension headaches and stressful conditions

When my sports career got cut off, during the college days due to injuries, as an alternative, I always wanted to become an engineer. But my academic credentials were short of getting me into the engineering colleges. However, I developed a taste for Physics, Mathematics, and Chemistry (PMC), and wanted to pursue graduate studies. Nuclear Physics fascinated lot of students during 60s in India. I was fortunate to have secured respectable academic rank in the Bachelors degree in the PMC disciplines. Also, I stood out in the national competition as well, to obtain admission into the PhD program of Nuclear Physics and Instrumentation, at the Andhra University, affiliated with the Atomic Energy Commission of India and the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR), an internationally reputed research center in India. It was considered an achievement by my professors, colleagues, and my family circles. The performance requirements were very intense with bi-weekly examinations, presentations, and national and international interactions. That had put severe stress on all of the students in the program. My irregular and irrational eating and sleeping habits caused lot more tensions in me and I resorted back to smoking. I developed tension headaches and was taking prescription medications as well as off the shelf medications, to control these headaches. I also, I developed a kind of nervousness and resentment towards the examinations and presentations, (which I never had until then). There were occasions I wanted to drop out of the PhD program of Nuclear Physics, unable to bear the stress and the headaches. Desperately, I was watching my other classmates performing well and coping up with the pressures, where as I was deteriorating. Even though, I was able to maintain respectable grades, I had to literally work and study twice as hard, and my heath conditions were further falling apart.

My own cousin Mr. Butchi Wunnava was in the graduate program at the Andhra University in Chemical Engineering. He and I grew up from the childhood days through college and university education. He had always been like an elder brother to me, even though he was hardly few months older to me. But his disciplined and well balanced life style made him a student mentor for most of us. He made me realize that more than half the health problems and the educational stress conditions were my own creations, and could be easily corrected, if I was willing to make adjustments to my behavior and life styles. I was really desperate to improve myself and Butchi gave me lot of moral support.

## Regular physical exercise and disciplined life styles helpful

***Andhra University administration realized that there were several students like me who had been compromising their health conditions, and to help us they had set up health clinic. Dr. Perraju, a well renowned Physician and Surgeon was one of the lead medical counselors with the health clinic. He introduced “Yoga and Meditation” concepts to us. Yoga was an ancient Indian way of exercise, and Meditation an ancient way of focus and concentration. In spite of his extremely busy medical schedule, Dr. Perraju used to be at the Andhra University campus by 6.30 AM, three times a week, to guide us through Yoga and Meditation. We all used to run for a mile by the ocean side of the university, lead by Dr. Perraju. Within two months, most of the participating students in the program (including me and Butchi) were tuned to Yoga and Meditation. As a result, I regained my confidence level, definitely lowered my nervousness, and gradually moved into disciplined life style, and my health conditions dramatically improved.*** I am proud to acknowledge, even today (2010) after nearly 50 years of exposure to Yoga and Meditation, I still practice them. I can attest to the fact that the Yoga and Meditation provided me with a disciplined life style and stress handling capabilities. I would ever remain grateful to Dr. Perraju, Andhra University, and my cousin Butchi Wunnava. Later, I discovered that my own father Venkat, (who had always been practicing Yoga and Meditation) and Dr. Perraju were associates in their college days, and were leaders in the sports as well. What a small world!

**Summary**

Unknowingly, people compromise on health conditions, and develop irregular eating and sleeping habits, which ultimately lead to chronic medical and associated stress conditions. While it is good to have ambitions to perform and excel as students or professionals, they should not result in neglected health conditions. Medications could only be temporary. Sustained exercise methodologies, and adherence to Yoga and Meditation type of activities would not only reduce tensions, anxieties, and stresses, but also would provide a disciplined life style, and improve self control and confidence level, and I could attest to these from the bottom of my heart.