



Restate the theme of this essay as expressed in the first sentence.

A. A person's honest observation of his own physical condition is the best way to safeguard his health.



Clarify the distinction in Bacon's "safer conclusion."

A. It is safer to discontinue a habit that does not feel beneficial than to convince oneself that a habit is benign simply because one does not yet feel any ill effects.



What "things" might Bacon be warning us to moderate as we age?

A. Possible answers: diet, excessive intake of alcohol, keeping late hours, or excessive exercise or sports.



How does Bacon suggest that change be accomplished?

A. Bacon suggests that any major change should be undertaken gradually. He feels that small changes are better than one dramatic change. If a change is too difficult, Bacon suggests that one wait and try again.



What, according to Bacon, extends life? What is to be avoided?

A. A positive attitude during meal-times, when one falls asleep, and during periods of relaxation, extends life, according to Bacon. Fear, internalized anger, envy, excessive highs, and repression of emotions are to be avoided.



What characteristics does Bacon recommend should be cultivated?

A. He recommends: **a.** developing a positive attitude; **b.** maintaining interest and alertness, but never to excess; **c.** maintaining a sense of excitement and wonderment; **d.** broadening the mind by studying and discovering.



In what areas, other than diet and exercise, is moderation recommended?

A. Medication should be taken in moderation. Refusal to use medication is irresponsible, but overuse diminishes its effectiveness.

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How does Bacon suggest that change be accomplished?

What, according to Bacon, extends life? What is to be avoided?

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Of Regiment of Health

Francis Bacon

FOCUS: THE ESSAY

There is a wisdom in this; beyond the rules of physic*: a man's own observation, what he finds good of, and what he finds hurt of, is the best physic to preserve health. But it is a safer conclusion to say, This agreeth not well with me, therefore, I will not continue it; than this, I find no offence of this, therefore I may use it. For strength of nature in youth, passeth over many excesses, which are owing a man till his age. Discern of the coming on of years, and think not to do the same things still; for age will not be defied. Beware of sudden change, in any great point of diet, and, if necessity enforce it, fit the rest to it. For it is a secret both in nature and state, that it is safer to change many things, than one. Examine thy customs of diet, sleep, exercise, apparel, and the like; and try, in any thing thou shalt judge hurtful, to discontinue it, by little and little; but so, as if thou dost find any inconvenience by the change, thou come back to it again:

for it is hard to distinguish that which is generally held good and wholesome, from that which is good particularly, and fit for thine own body. To be free-minded and cheerfully disposed, at hours of meat,* and of sleep, and of exercise, is one of the best precepts of long lasting. As for the passions, and studies of the mind; avoid envy, anxious fears; anger fretting inwards; subtle and knotty inquisitions*; joys and exhilarations in excess; sadness not communicated. Entertain hopes; mirth rather than joy; variety of delights, rather than surfeit of them; wonder and admiration, and therefore novelties; studies that fill the mind with splendid and illustrious objects, as histories, fables, and contemplations of nature. If you fly* physic* in health altogether, it will be too strange for your body, when you shall need it. If you make it too familiar, it will work no extraordinary effect, when sickness cometh. I commend rather some diet for certain seasons, than

HELPFUL DEFINITIONS

physic — the art or practice of healing.
meat — here, food.
inquisitions — here, puzzling problems.
fly — avoid.
physic — here, medicine.

2 The following reasons are often cited to fuel the belief of many that Bacon wrote the works commonly attributed to Shakespeare.

a. It is clear that Bacon amassed the knowledge evident in the plays. **b.** He was a contemporary of Shakespeare. Many of his popular axioms appear, slightly altered, in the texts. **c.** Pope and Twain believed Bacon to be the author. **d.** Bacon and Shakespeare shared a similar style of writing; both were masters of the apt phrase; both shared a pool of vocabulary and metaphor. **e.** Bacon was broadly educated in science, horticulture, law, medicine, philosophy, classical literature, and history, and was familiar with foreign languages. Critics doubt that Shakespeare was able to master all these skills.

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frequent use of physic, except it be grown into a custom. For those diets alter the body more, and trouble it less. Despise no new accident in your body, but ask opinion of it. In sickness, respect health principally; and in health, action. For those that put their bodies to endure in health, may in most sicknesses, which are not very sharp, be cured only with diet, and tendering. Celsus could never have spoken it as a physician, had he not been a wise man withal, when he giveth it for one of the great precepts of health and lasting, that a man do vary, and interchange contraries, but with an inclination to the more benign extreme: use fasting and full eating, but rather full eating; watching* and sleep, but rather sleep; sitting and exercise, but rather exercise; and the like. So shall nature be cherished, and

yet taught masteries. Physicians are, some of them, so pleasing and conformable* to the humor* of the patient, as they press not the true cure of the disease; and some other are so regular,* in proceeding according to art for the disease, as they respect not sufficiently the condition of the patient. Take one of a middle temper*; or if it may not be found in one man, combine two of either sort; and forget not to call as well, the best acquainted with your body, as the best reputed of for his faculty.

About 2,000 years ago, **Celsus**, a Roman citizen, surveyed medical science from Hippocrates to imperial times. Although probably not a physician himself, his collection preserved 72 classical works that would have otherwise been lost to posterity.



Define “despise” and “accident” as they are used in this essay.

What is Bacon’s advice on how to choose a doctor?

What is one of Celsus’ “great precepts of health and lasting”?

Who does Bacon consider perhaps the best-qualified judge of one’s medical condition?



Define “despise” and “accident” as they are used in this essay.

A. Bacon suggests listening to one’s body’s signals, and then consulting an expert for advice.



What is one of Celsus’ “great precepts of health and lasting”?

A. Variety and moderation in all activities is important. Examples offered by Bacon include fasting *and* eating, with the latter activity predominating; staying up late *and* sleeping, with the latter activity favored, etc. One should practice moderation, in all things; do not overeat, stay up too late, diet too excessively, exercise too much, or be too sedentary.



What is Bacon’s advice on how to choose a doctor?

A. He advises the reader to turn to the physician or physicians who are familiar with his medical history. One should not choose a doctor who caters to the wishes of his patient, nor a doctor who treats “by the book,” ignoring the patient’s unique needs. Rather, the practice of medicine should be geared to each patient and to his or her condition.



Who does Bacon consider perhaps the best-qualified judge of one’s medical condition?

A. The person who is the patient is the one who best can judge how he or she is feeling.

Answers to LITERARY CRITIQUE can be found on the following page.



LITERARY CRITIQUE

1. Which advice of Bacon’s is still sound and relevant today?
2. Explain the following: “So shall nature be cherished, and yet taught masteries.”
3. What is the “secret” of nature and state?
4. List three effective uses of parallelism.
5. Describe the tone and voice of the essay. How do they help achieve the goal of the work?

HELPFUL DEFINITIONS

watching — here, not sleeping; staying up late at night.
conformable — here, agreeable.
humor — here, wish.
regular — here, unvarying in method.
middle temper — characterized by a moderate approach.

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Bacon’s private writings were inaccessible to Shakespeare yet there is an eerie similarity between lines in Shakespearean plays and lines ascribed to Bacon. Examples include:

BACON: “It is nothing else but words, which rather sound than signify anything.” SHAKESPEARE: “It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.” (*Macbeth*)

BACON: “Be so true to thyself as thou be not false to others.” SHAKESPEARE: “To thine own self be true, and it must follow, as night the day, Thou canst not then be false to any man.” (*Hamlet*)

In a private letter Bacon referred to himself as a “concealed poet.” He left a manuscript with a list of works he had created, and some of Shakespeare’s plays are on this list!