



Dear Friends,

The aim of this article is to provide you, the reader with a deeper understanding of the term 'health' and the environmental factors that affect it. Armed with a greater awareness of this subject, you will be in a position to make key positive lifestyle and behavioural changes in order to promote your own levels of health, fitness and wellbeing.

For the purpose of this article, 'health' will be understood as the absence of disease combined with an abundance of vitality. There are three ways to measure health (also known as 'positive' or 'functional' health), and these are through;

- Physical and mental performance
- The absence of ill-health
- Longevity

The characteristics of positive health include;

- A high level of energy
- Emotional balance
- A sharp mind
- The desire to maintain physical fitness
- Bodily awareness; knowing what enhances our health and what our needs are at any given time

- A resilience to infectious diseases and the protection from killer diseases, such as heart disease and cancer

The main promoter of your own health is you and as such, there are two modifiable factors that you can control in order to achieve positive health. These are diet, and exercise.

Diet

In order to fully appreciate the important role that diet plays in our overall health, let us digest (excuse the pun!) the following fact:

'Your body is composed entirely of molecules derived from food'

Just take a second to think about that. In a lifetime, you will eat one hundred tons of food and every cell within your body, including the skeleton is made up of these broken down food particles. Doesn't that bring about a whole new meaning to the phrase 'you are what you eat'?

By understanding this fact, we can see that what we put into our bodies, will dramatically affect our ability to stay healthy. When we eat, macronutrients (carbohydrate, fat and protein) and micronutrients (vitamins and minerals) are absorbed through the digestive tract, whose health depends primarily on what you eat. Eat healthily and you will provide your body with a vast array of nutrients, allowing your body to reach its health potential. Eat foods lacking in vital nutrients, and your ability to adapt and maintain health will be significantly reduced.

So now we know that what we eat is imperative to our health, what exactly does eating 'healthily' mean? In order to answer this question, the revolution of 'Optimum Nutrition' is introduced.

The Institute of Optimum Nutrition was founded in 1984 by Patrick Holford, a pioneer in new approaches to health and nutrition. Patrick describes optimum nutrition as;

'...simply giving yourself the best possible intake of nutrients to allow your body to be as healthy as possible and to work as well as it can'.

There are no set rules with optimum nutrition, rather, it identifies everybody as unique with differing nutritional needs. (However, 'no rules' is not to be misinterpreted, there are of course general guidelines that apply to us all!)

Optimum nutrition focuses on obtaining the optimal intake of nutrients (to date 50 have been identified as essential for health) to promote and maintain health. The intake of nutrients provided through optimum nutrition;

- Promotes optimal mental performance and emotional balance
- Promotes optimal physical performance
- Is associated with the lowest incidence of ill-health
- Is associated with the longest healthy lifespan

By achieving your optimal intake of each nutrient every day, your entire body (yes, including your skeleton!) is rebuilt and rejuvenated.

Consequently, optimum nutrition can;

- Improve mental clarity, mood and concentration
- Increase IQ
- Increase physical performance
- Improve quality of sleep
- Improve resistance to infections
- Protect you from disease
- Extend your healthy lifespan

So what do you need to eat in order to ensure the optimum intake of nutrients? Without going into the discussion of evolution and how we have evolved to eat certain foods (this topic will be the focus of a further newsletter), quite simply, we are designed to eat natural, raw, unprocessed foods. Our evolutionary diet was rich in carbohydrate,

consisting of fruit and other vegetation and meat, when hunted was lean and wild (i.e. organic). A large proportion of the foods we eat should be able to be picked from the ground or from plants and trees. Take a look in your kitchen cupboards. Could you go into the wild and pick these foods?

The recommended food intake includes eating three pieces of fresh fruit a day, eating two portions of beans, lentils or seed vegetables a day, eating four portions of whole grains (e.g. rice, oats, bread or pasta) a day, and eating five portions of dark green, leafy and root vegetables (e.g. watercress, spinach, broccoli, green beans, peas, peppers, carrots and sweet potato) a day. Additionally, aim to drink six glasses of water a day (this could include herbal and fruit tea or diluted fruit juice). Electric kettles were very rare in the jungle so try to avoid stimulants such as tea and coffee.

By adhering to these dietary recommendations, you will be well on your way to achieving better health.

Exercise

Exercise is a key aspect when promoting and maintaining health, and is an integral part of any healthy lifestyle.

Being physically active can prevent major illnesses, and has well documented benefits. Regular physical activity can;

- Boost self-confidence
- Help to prevent depression
- Increase energy
- Help to maintain a healthy weight
- Boost the immune system
- Lower blood pressure
- Increase the levels of 'good' cholesterol reducing the risk of heart disease
- Reduce the overall risk of cancer
- Promote healthy blood sugar levels to prevent and control diabetes

- Promote bone density to protect against osteoporosis

Having read these healthful advantages, it seems absurd that two in three men and three in four women do less than the minimum amount of recommended exercise each week. Why?

We have all heard the commonly used excuses for not doing exercise.... 'I'm too tired'... 'I don't have time'... 'it's too expensive'.... The list goes on. It may be reassuring to note then, that the recommended amount of exercise is not about sweating for hours, or getting up at a ridiculous time to go training. What is advised is 'moderate physical activity'. This can be easily incorporated into your every day life with minimal interruption to your routine.

It is advised to part take in some form of moderate physical activity on most days of the week (at least five) for thirty minutes. However, you may start by simply doing fifteen minutes three days a week and gradually build it up.

Moderate physical activity includes;

- Walking
- Strenuous housework such as hovering
- Gardening
- Dancing
- Swimming
- Cycling
- DIY
- Taking the stairs in place of the lift

By taking time to think about incorporating these exercises into your day, and changing your current habits and attitudes towards physical activity, you will begin to see that 'exercising' is really very simple.

Start today. Start right now. Put this article down, and go for a short walk around the block, or grab your partner and dance ridiculously around the kitchen. Go on, I dare you! Next time you pick up the car

keys to drive two hundred metres to the nearest shop, stop and think. Grab your coat instead, and walk. Next time you go to take the lift or the escalator, stop and think, and take the stairs. On your day off this week, enjoy a short bike ride, or go to the park with the kids instead of watching the T.V.

The first step is the hardest. Once you get out there and start feeling the benefits of physical activity, you will only want more, I guarantee it.

Over to You

Armed with this knowledge of health, diet and exercise, you now have two choices. You can pretend that you never read this article, and continue your current lifestyle which may include symptoms such as a lack of energy, being overweight, illness or mood swings. Or you can use this knowledge to make key lifestyle changes. Changes that will increase your energy levels, increase your feelings of vitality, improve your physical and mental performance and lead to a long, happy and healthy life.

That decision of course, is yours.

Laura