



Go Healthy With a Positive Attitude

by MARIE WALL

As this school year draws to a close it is interesting to note that in looking back, time seems to have gone by faster than had been anticipated. I guess this can parallel our experience of creating a healthier lifestyle; looking back may have more clarity. This year the Living Well articles have focused on the themes from the three provincial health education initiatives: Go Healthy! Healthy Schools; Healthy Students; and Be Free. The NLTA Employee Assistance Coordinators have written articles about activity, nutrition, resiliency, smoking cessation, and medical health checks to encourage teachers to consider maintaining or developing a healthy lifestyle that supports them in their personal and work lives.

Encouraging teachers to take responsibility and ownership of their health and fitness can be a daunting task. Knowing both benefits and obstacles may lead teachers to conclude that achieving levels of wellness may be out of their control because their jobs are so demanding. We know the time and effort can be arduous, but outweighing this is the benefit to you, your family and your students. Most importantly, you are worth it. As summer comes it is time to again evaluate where you are and whether you have attained the healthy lifestyle you want. Is it time to take on a new area of health or continue working on the area you have already chosen? We know that all aspects of health need our attention.

One of the biggest assets we have to influence change is perspective. A positive, problem-solving approach empowers you to deal with the external pressures that arise daily. Your attitude is dependent on the mental habits you have developed. Dr. Ronald Grossarth-Maticek, researcher and author, says that improving your attitude can have a greater effect on your physical health, happiness and longevity than genetics or lifestyle change. Of even greater importance, positive attitudes can be learned and developed. We yearn to have feelings of pleasure and well-being. By developing self-regulating behaviours which maxi-

mize these feelings for long-term benefit will help enhance your immune system, your life, your relationships and much more. This is done by paying attention to the behaviours which produce these positive effects and adjusting our behaviours accordingly to heighten the desired outcomes.

The physical effects of exercise are widely known, and individuals have commonly experienced the mental affects, the positive feeling of an endorphin release. There are many possible reasons why our mood is affected by exercise; whether it is the chemical reaction, the sense of accomplishment, the social interaction or a distraction from everyday stress, the positive benefits are real and creating increased long-term feelings of pleasure and well-being will be the outcome. Incorporating regular physical activity into our daily routines is part of a healthy lifestyle.

When it comes to nutrition there is no brain surgery there either. What we eat and why we eat play a major role for our bodies. Having a healthy attitude toward food and creating the habits which enhance this aspect of your lifestyle means eating balanced meals on a regular basis. One question that sometimes arises is “why bother”? In reality, nobody wants to be tired all the time or to be overweight; yet, we have all eaten what looks good at the time or what is easiest, knowing that it was bad for us and will not have the desired consequence. We have all heard the idiom “you are what you eat”. Our bodies need healthy food sources as building blocks to keep us in top form. A balanced diet of natural foods – fruits, vegetables, protein sources and healthy fats – are essential to physical and mental functioning. When we eat balanced meals our energy is sustained and our mental acuity is heightened. Food is fuel for the body. While many of us use food for comfort we should instead refocus our attention to healthy emotional affection with the ones we love, rather than food. People who plan their weekly menus have the potential benefits of not worrying about what is planned for supper when they are tired and lowering

the cost of their grocery bill by not gravitating to fast food options. Planning makes a lot of sense.

Wellness is focused on your body for the betterment of your life and the overall attitude towards your body is paramount. Having a positive body image instead of viewing your body as shameful or as an accessory will help with a healthy attitude. Your body is the vehicle from which all relationships and activities radiate.

Educational activist Parker Palmer says as teachers, it is your self, body and mind, that is the most important component of your craft. Give your self the priority you deserve and allow its healthy energy to sustain all the demands of your life and work.

Some people believe that if they take care of themselves they are being selfish. This is far from the truth. Your healthy lifestyle is not only for you; it is also for your family and your students. You are a role model. When you show others, through your actions, that a positive, healthy attitude is the cornerstone of long-term pleasure and happiness, you are in actual fact teaching.

Our whole lifestyle contributes to the ability to create good relationships, a satisfying work life, energy and health. It is possible that the single greatest influence in all these areas is a healthy perspective and attitude. Developing a positive sense of mental health may leave you capable of dealing more effectively with situations that arise. Positive health and well-being need to become a natural part of our lifestyle and will lead to a better sense of control over our lives. Whether it is fitness, nutrition, mental health or a medical condition, having a positive approach will improve the chances of a positive outcome.

Marie Wall is an EAP Coordinator with the Employee Assistance Program for teachers. For confidential assistance contact Marie Wall (ext. 265) or Kathy Taylor-Rogers (ext. 242).