



Teachers Go Healthy

by MARIE WALL

With all the demands directed at teachers, it is not surprising that many of you relegate self-care as optional. Although you may know what needs to be integrated into your life and that no one else is going to make time for you to eat right or get physically active, you may feel hard pressed to actually do something about it. It's interesting to note that when a colleague is faced with a life-threatening event, a lifestyle change is more likely to occur. So what stops you from taking control? Now is the time to take action; your health and wellness depend on it.

The time to start is right now, early in the school year. Create a routine that works for your lifestyle and make the changes that put balance and wellness as a priority in your life. Three of the focal points of the provincial government health initiative, *Go Healthy*, are healthy eating, being physical active, and being smoke free. Some of the payoffs are improved health, more energy, and feeling and looking better. The benefits are interconnected as one change plays off the others, e.g. being more active often impels you to consider what you are eating and vice versa.

Take a moment to consider what benefits you want and whether you are going to achieve them with your present lifestyle and routine. Ask yourself, "Do I have to wait for a crisis to decide it is worth taking care of myself?" Taking action for health and wellness may seem selfish because it will take time and focus away from other things, but the payoffs are far reaching. With more energy and positive attitude, your family and students will be better served. So what are you waiting for? Start with one step and let it grow.

Health and wellness is not only a personal responsibility; it is also a family, community and provincial endeavour. The roots of the *Go Healthy* program come from our health status as a province. The *National Population Healthy Survey (1994-2005)*, Statistics Canada, shows that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are the least fit and least healthy population in this country. It seems that the attitude around fitness and eating are making us fatter and less healthy. The *Go Healthy* program is a response to support, education, and to increase awareness on all

levels, including developing personal skills.

Through the *Healthy Schools, Healthy Students* program, many schools have been equipped with fitness equipment and fitness rooms have been created. While the equipment has been provided for the use of students, teachers are also able to access the equipment. While some teachers may feel sharing this equipment with students is not convenient for staff, there are a few things to consider. The fitness equipment and room are a benefit to the school community and thus a financial benefit to you. A typical membership to a fitness centre can run you around \$50 per month; that's a \$500 yearly perk to you. Another thought has been that because students use this equipment after school, teachers cannot. The general population typically have to access their fitness centres between five to eight in the morning or after five at night. The key is deciding; when you make it a priority, you will schedule a time and make it work for you. If there is no fitness centre in your school you may need to become creative. Get a group together for a fitness or yoga class or make walking or running a part of your regime. Take action that puts you in the driver's seat of your health and wellness.

Eating healthy is a challenge and again, choices are a major key. Nutritious eating does not have to be solely for weight loss. Maintaining a healthy weight also requires awareness of food's qualities and quantities. Making this a family lifestyle also counters the many temptations we face. Planning ahead and assessing how you feel when you eat lighter, healthier food will provide you with the self-motivation to make eating healthy a part of your daily routine.

Tobacco use is also a huge health factor and affects not only the smoker, but family and friends as well. Smoking is a hard habit to break and many may not want to change. I had one man say to me, "I don't want to quit, but I do want to be healthy for my kids". Others enjoy it and don't believe quitting will change anything. I suggest giving it a try. Being able to breathe easier, not sinking your money into government coffers, and feeling good about yourself are all reasons to quit.

Injury prevention, mental health, environmental

health, child and youth development and health protection are all other issues the *Go Healthy* program will address. A well-rounded, healthy population are much more capable of achieving their goals, having improved self-esteem, and increased productivity. These are all good reasons to pursue a healthier lifestyle.

The EAP for teachers also has a responsibility to get active. Although this program has been working with teachers for more than 10 years, this renewed health and wellness focus challenges us to build a stronger education and awareness program for teachers, to make it more accessible and work with groups that can make a direct impact for teachers. Through these *Living Well* articles we will continue to expand on the themes presented in the *Go Healthy* program. We will also have a health contest this school year and we will develop a web page to make health and wellness more accessible to you. If you have further ideas you want to share, please contact us.

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