

Leadership Letter

How healthy is your lifestyle?



How are you? Our general answer is “fine”. But are we really? And when we say “fine”, which aspect of our life are we talking about? The world health organisation defined health in its broader sense in 1946 as "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." I personally would add “spiritual” to the definition. So how are you doing?

Let me relate to you a short ‘health timeline’ of my wife, Rite. She grew up in a big family with a mum who was into canning her own salmon, pickles & fruit; having salad at every meal; cooking most things from scratch and having an open home with many guests. They were a very active family in terms of walking, swimming and hiking and I found out her Mum lived according to the motto – if you don't work you don't eat! So when I arrived on the doorstep, I had to work for my supper! When Rite came to her DTS, she was a little underweight with relational and lifestyle stresses. When she left she was spiritually impacted but 30 pounds heavier! All the carbohydrates, sugar, lack of fresh fruit, vegetables and exercise were the culprits. Before our wedding she got back on a healthy diet and lost the excess weight. When we re-joined YWAM in Scotland, we were tight in finance and our diet consisted more of potatoes, carrots, lentils, beans, eggs and less meat – which actually wasn't bad! At a low point we even had nettle soup. During her preschool ministry years, she developed healthy snacks for the kids in the school. However during time pressured years with a young family, we succumbed to the quick and easy processed and fast foods. Then it happened – an event that would stimulate change.

We were out celebrating our anniversary and enjoying a nice meal in a hotel where we were staying for the night. As I looked across the table at her, I could see she was beginning to look pale. So I asked if she wanted to go up to our room. She nodded her head and as she tried to get up, it was as if she was drunk and stumbled back into a chair. The waiter came over looking worried and between us we managed to get her to our room. The cause? MSG. Monosodium glutamate. MSG has been called the “nicotine of food” since it gives food a kick by enhancing the flavour and addicting us to it. Most people know that MSG is found in Chinese food. But with a growing number of processed food items, MSG can be found in cereals, sauces, diet foods, soft drinks, processed meats, ice cream, fast foods and the list goes on. Its even in Tim Hortons coffee! It is classified as safe by the U.S. & E.U although a high percentage of people are intolerant to it. Rite recovered over night but this began a learning curve regarding healthy eating. The next incident involved her falling unconscious on a plane with a doctor having to rush to her aid with an EpiPen. Now it was really serious and changes had to be made.

God gives us instructions in his word that have to do with looking after “our temple” and being a good steward of the body he has given us. After all, the great commandment encourages us to “love our neighbour as we love ourselves”. So if we

love ourselves, and have the fear of God with the Holy Spirit living within us, we will make sure we have a healthy lifestyle.

11 changes we have made over the last few years:

- 1. Check out food labels for chemical additives.** The fact is that the food we buy contains all kinds of additives, which have specific “E numbers” or chemical names attached to them. For instance MSG is E621 in Europe. In some countries they use other terms. If you see hydrogenated anything – avoid it like the plague. It stands to reason that the less man made chemicals we consume the better. Or put another way, the more natural produce we eat, that hasn't been tampered with, the better!
- 2. Drink more water.** It's amazing what drinking 2 litres of water each day can do for you – healthier skin, stops dehydration and headaches that result from it, helps digestive system & flushes out toxins. We have also decreased coffee intake and increased herbal teas.
- 3. Eat less, eat better, eat more often.** Experts say that we need to eat three regular meals plus three snacks each day. A friend of mine decided to eat from a smaller plate to make sure he ate less. For many years I have had a value of not having second helpings (broken only occasionally when dessert is served).
- 4. Engage in regular exercise.** As little as 30 minutes a day will change your life. Check out this video on YouTube: *23 and 1/2 hours: What is the single best thing we can do for our health?* The benefits of simply walking for 30 minutes are incredible. Of course if you like running, trampoline, sports of all kinds, then doing 30 minutes of exercise 3 times a week where you raise your heart rate to 120 is excellent. Exercise is critical because it increases serotonin levels and endorphin levels in the brain. Be consistent as your brain loves a routine.

QUOTE: 90% of our sicknesses are food and lifestyle related.
- 5. Sleep.** Sometimes we think of sleep as a necessary evil that stops us from more work. How sad! Sleep is more than a time of rest and relaxation, it is also a time of recuperation and repair, growth and regrowth. We all need on average 7 hours sleep each night. If you aren't sleeping, don't just try to fix it with sleeping pills, because it is a symptom of another problem. Emotional issues such as stress, anxiety, and depression cause half of all insomnia cases. For me personally, I know that if I don't have enough sleep for a couple of nights, I will have a headache the next day. I have found it's important to go to bed and get up around the same time every day. I cut down caffeine by making my last coffee after lunch each day and have recently decided to not have wine in the evening either as it has a tendency to cause you to be drowsy but then stimulates you several hours later. Another sleep robber for me is stress from unresolved issues, or carrying too many roles and responsibilities from work. I have to give these to the Lord and let them go each night usually with a little walk with our dog. Lastly it's important to get adequate light during the day (no problem for me) and the room to be quiet, dark and cool at night.

- 6. Cut down on refined sugar.** Soft drinks like Fanta, Sprite and Coke are full of sugar so we personally cut them out completely. The problem with going to diet drinks is that they substitute chemicals like saccharin and aspartame which have all kinds of negative side effects. If you are a Starbucks coffee fan, you may be interested to know that if you have one of the special syrup drinks it can have 800 calories! I am a dessert lover but for my health I need to be careful how often and how much I eat. We have replaced sugar with honey where possible. Chocolate isn't bad unless you eat a whole bar in one sitting! (higher levels of cocoa and dark chocolate are better) Baking & desserts have become a special treat. We also make our own dressings for salad and avoid bought ones which again have so many additives and sugar. The standard dressing in Spain is olive oil and vinegar which is always a healthy option.
- 7. Minimise processed food.** When we have time, we make as much food from scratch as possible rather than buying anything that is packaged. Processed meat tends to be full of additives, so we cook whole chickens, carve the meat and use the bones for soup. It also works out cheaper in the long run too. The general guideline has to be: – eat food that man hasn't tried to improve upon. If you saw the process that Margarine goes through you would never spread it again! So switch to butter and avoid partially hydrogenated oils. Only about 10% of the salt in the American diet comes from salt added at the table. The other 90% is already added in processed foods. The real problem is that this salt is also refined with additives that make it free flowing. So we moved to sea salt which doesn't contain iodine or any other additives.
- 8. Poultry and Fish.** We tend to eat more chicken and fish rather than lots of red meat. (red meat is expensive too). When we do buy ground beef, we prefer to get it from the butcher where its 100% meat rather than the 80% you get in many supermarkets.
- 9. Choose whole grains.** Since Rite started to make our own granola, it's hard to eat the boxed cereals. We are also back to good old porridge in the winter too as its so good for you. Even bread has E numbers – we look for ones that don't have any, which means wholegrain. The downside is that they will go stale quickly. We also cut down on pasta unless its wholegrain.
- 10. Increase raw foods and superfood.** After realising that iceberg lettuce is just about all water with little nutrition we started using more spinach and cabbage. We love vegetables and enjoy stir fries where you keep all the goodness rather than boiling it all away. We also love superfood like garbanzo beans and make lots of humus. What a great starter! If you have been to our house you will have experienced this. Superfood has high concentrations of essential nutrients with proven health benefits, with few properties generally considered to be negative (such as being high in saturated fats or artificial ingredients, food additives or contaminants). Examples of superfoods that are fruits include tomatoes, blueberries, cranberries, red grapes, pink grapefruit, mangos, papaya and watermelons. Superfoods are said to prevent all kinds of diseases including cancer.
- 11. Reduce your environmental toxins.** I realised one day that my deodorant spray actually stung me when I put it on in the morning. Having read about it I then

understood that my body is absorbing all the chemicals in deodorant – and there were lots of them. I switched to a roll on. The same with toothpaste – many contain artificial sweeteners and again a whole list of chemicals that go straight into our system. Cleaning agents in the home – all toxic. Our Spanish supermarket has just started selling vinegar as a cleaning agent – might not smell great but it cleans, is very cheap and guess what – it has only one ingredient – vinegar.

Don't be overwhelmed by all these things. If you want to make some changes, take one or two at a time and make them part of your lifestyle and then move on to others.

If you are a leader or have influence on the lifestyle of others, there are implications from reading this article and gaining understanding. We are to do all we can to provide and model a healthy lifestyle for our staff. Again take a few steps at a time and bring about positive change. We are on a journey with health, and it's a long road.

Further resources: Check these out on You Tube: 1. Food matters; 2. Food incorporated; 3. Jamie Oliver's TED Prize wish: Teach every child about food

Questions to ask yourself:

How healthy do I feel?

What does a healthy lifestyle mean to me?

What changes would I like to make? What do I add, take away or replace?

What are the challenges to my health? – food I eat, stresses, exercise, relationships, pace of life, ...

What's positive or negative traits do I have to watch for in the culture in which I live?
Eg Spain is known for the least amount of sleep in Europe.

Taking a health inventory.

Body: Fitness and nutrition

[] 1. I have sufficient sleep every night. On average people need 7-8 hours each night. Your caffeine and stress levels can affect this.

[] 2. I am involved in regular exercises. We need exercise in walking, running or sports to increase our heart rate to 120 for 20 minutes at least 3 times a week.

[] 3. I have regular smooth bowel movements. Drink warm water first thing in the morning until you feel full, exercise, make sure you have fibre in your diet.

[] 4. I have good energy levels. A balanced diet, good exercise and not missing breakfast go a long way to help.

[] 5. I drink enough water. If you are drinking enough, your urine will be very pale yellow.

[] 6. I eat a balanced diet: lean meat, fish, eggs, milk, fruits and vegetables, and grain.

[] 7. I avoid foods high in refined sugar or refined salt.

[] 8. I avoid eating food that is high in hydrogenated fat. Trans fats are thought to be worse for us than saturated fats because they not only raise total and LDL (bad) cholesterol, they also lower HDL (good) cholesterol. These fats in cakes, pastries, pies, chips, fast foods...

[] 9. I eat 3 modest meals a day (including breakfast).

[] 10. I have small healthy snacks between meals.

Soul - Emotional & Mental:

[] 11. I take a day every week free from responsibility to relax.

[] 12. I express feelings such as love, fear, and anger constructively.

[] 13. I have friends or relatives with whom I discuss problems.

[] 14. I keep anxiety from interfering with my activities at work or at home.

[] 15. I do not let stress build up and give me headaches or an upset stomach.

[] 16. I have hobbies that help get me away from my daily tasks.

[] 17. I read books and articles on a regular basis. I am a life long learner.

[] 18. I have honoured my parents. It comes with a promise of long life.

Spirit:

[] 18. I spend time each day in prayer – thanks, intercession and worship.

[] 19. I spend time each day reading and meditating on the bible.

[] 20. I am able to forgive freely and let issues go.

[] 21. I speak blessing and encouragement over people.

[] 22. I am confident in who God has made me to be.