

HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE – SOMETHING FORGOTTEN IN THE 21ST CENTURY?

- Dhruv Paranjpye (17th February 2018)

We are living in times where our sedentary lifestyle has taken a toll on our health. It's alarming to see so many young people falling prey to cardiovascular diseases and other serious health issues. Moreover these days as invasive surgical techniques have become accessible to the common man, although extremely expensive, you would find so many people who have undergone surgical interventions such as angiography and angioplasty. My grandfather, Purushottam Hari Paranjpye, who worked in the Geological Survey of India, is now 89 and I find it inspiring to see that he has never had any of the above medical issues. He still travels around the globe, walks a few miles to his friends' homes and once in a blue moon enjoys a glass of wine with the family.

He told me that he had earned his health working in mines and camps where he would have physical activity all through the day. He never had a job where he would sit on a chair all day and work. He always was on the move. However he learned his lesson of following a fixed schedule from his boss who would tell him, “Paranjpye! *Kam kitna bhi rehne do, 1 baje khana khana chahiye*” – Paranjpye! You must eat your lunch at 1pm no matter how busy you are. That suddenly opened my eyes to the fact that how careless so many of us are about our daily fitness and lifestyle. I went back in time when I was in school and followed a disciplined lifestyle when I used to be in bed at 10pm and be up in the morning at 6.

When I was in school (Loyola High School, Pune) I used to be prone to asthma at least 3 times a year. I remember that one of the most important activities of my day was a physical exercise which would come from playing a sport like Football, Cricket, Basketball or even Swimming. I was fortunate that I had a school which offered me the facilities to play all these sports. Being asthmatic a tedious workout would often leave me breathless for a long time. Surprisingly I never quit and in fact represented my house (teams that are made in 1st year of primary school) in 100m sprints and 4*100 relays. Furthermore as I grew up I also took up badminton and tennis as sports because of the amazing courts offered to me by the residential housing campus of IUCAA in Pune where my father worked. By the time I reached class 6, I was also into marathon running and that's one of the most challenging sports I have played.

Marathon running is not just a test of your stamina but also your will power to complete the run. I often find that many challenges of life are similar to marathons. If there's anything that is a hurdle, it is you yourself. You must keep moving forward no matter what. At one point, you will feel like quitting. You can't take the pain. But you also know that you are still going forward. That's where your choice matters. There would always be someone who would be faster than you and go ahead. But if you don't stop you eventually will reach the end which is better than quitting midway. Some might argue - "What is the point of taking those efforts if you have lost the race already?" I counter this argument by saying that completing the race gives you a sense of satisfaction of at least finishing it. That lets you know you can do it and will motivate you to do better ahead. I always competed with myself improving each day. Continuing to take up running as a passion I soon over grew asthma and since August 2011 I have never had any asthma attack and I give a lot of credit to my dedication to keep myself physically fit.

I believe that many young men and women of my age pursuing challenging courses like engineering, medical sciences or management often take health care lightly by not even caring to spend an hour for your fitness. The usual excuses are "We don't have time" or "We are already too tired for any exercise

because of the busy schedule" or "There are other duties at home and we can't afford to sacrifice those". I believe that these are simply excuses trying to hide our laziness and resistance to go out there and work hard.

I must admit I have been careless in my initial years of undergraduate engineering and had similar excuses for not having a daily physical exercise. However when I realised my mistake I set out a routine where I gave myself 7 hours of sleep, an hour long workout that includes running (because it's my passion) and specific hours set for work. Moreover all activities in the day are set for a specific time. Lunch at 1pm means I would have it latest by 1:05pm and not 2pm on one day and 12pm on some other. This motivation came to me by observing noted Astrophysicist Prof. J. V. Narlikar's lifestyle while working on my project at the Inter University Center for Astronomy and Astrophysics (IUCAA) in Pune. JVN as he is fondly known was the founder director of IUCAA and now an Emeritus Professor. Even at 79 years of age he is always seen coming to office at 9:30am, having his cup of morning tea at 10:45am and going back to office at 11am. When I tried to imbibe such a fixed routine in my life it helped me accomplish so many goals and tasks every day. I was once inspired by the quote "*There are no 'weak-ends' when you chase a dream*". However, after following such a disciplined routine I found myself finishing all work allocated for a week by Friday evening. On Saturdays and Sundays I get to focus on my personal life and socialisation which automatically refreshes me for the next week.

I am part of a small Whatsapp group initiated by my friend Geetanjali Mande in Pasadena, USA where you meet people with similar interests for health and fitness. We all target at least 10 thousand steps a day no matter what and that is good enough to keep us fit all through the day. It's amazing to see how dedicated people in this group are towards fitness. Many of them work at challenging places like JPL and NASA but do not compromise on their health. On a tea time conversation with 2 friends Abhijeet and Nitin, both who work at JPL, I remember Nitin telling us the tough regimen he follows by leaving for office at 5 in the morning and returning around 4 in the afternoon. However Abhijeet cautioned us by saying that once your health goes out of order it takes several efforts and medical expenses to stop that from happening. There is no point in sacrificing health for anything because ultimately 'Health is Wealth'. I think this is an important lesson for all of us because more or less all of us live a lifestyle filled with challenges and stress. Continuing on the 10k steps a day challenge, I find that my day is energetic because I had done a workout the previous evening and got adequate sleep.