

■ The benefits of regular exercise

'Walking is the best medicine'
– *Hippocrates* –

- ① Exercise provides a way of releasing a great deal of muscle tension and accumulated adrenaline which is the result of high levels of stress. Exercise is a relaxant. Exercise maintains good circulation, lowers blood pressure and improves the body's immune system in its constant fight to ward off diseases.
- ② Exercise improves the mood, self-image, appearance and control of weight. Exercise can be used to clear the mind of the clutter of worrying thoughts and anxiety. Hormones are released during exercise, such as endorphines, which act as a natural anti-depressant and raise mood.
- ③ Ideally you should aim to do twenty to thirty minutes of exercise, two or three times a week, starting slowly and building up intensity. The best form of exercise combine the three distinct elements of *stamina*, *suppleness* and *strength*. Easy rhythmic movements, such as swimming, cycling and walking, are the best all-round types of exercise.
- ④ Your pulse rate, or heartbeat, is a good measure of your fitness. Many of the world's top athletes have a resting pulse of only forty beats per minute. In contrast a person who is out of shape may have a resting pulse of ninety to hundred beats per minute. Another indicator of a healthy heart is the speed at which your pulse rate returns to normal after vigorous exercise.

■ A well balanced diet

'Let food be your medicine, let medicine be your food'
– *Hippocrates* –

- ① You would not run a classic car on low octane fuel and expect a good performance. Similarly, we cannot perform to our best on a poor diet. Healthy eating can increase our performance,

strengthen our immune system and enable us to cope better with stress. Eating should be pleasurable and relaxing. Always allow time to sit down and enjoy your food. Aim to eat three main meals a day.

- ② *Eat more high fibre foods.* Healthy eating does not mean eating less of everything. There is something that you can eat more of and that is fibre. The term refers to a special group of carbohydrates that you get from foods that grow in the ground. Fibre reduces the amount of cholesterol in your blood. Foods rich in fibre include: cereals, beans, vegetables, fruit, bran, wholemeal bread, pasta.
- ③ *Eat less fat.* Saturated fats that you find in meat, dairy products, cakes and crisps are unhealthy because they are loaded in calories which lead to weight gain. They also increase your cholesterol levels in your blood, clogging up your arteries. However, unsaturated fats do not raise cholesterol levels in the same way. These include vegetable oil and oily fish. Grill bake or boil rather than fry.
- ④ *Cut down on mood foods.* Certain substances such as salt, sugar, alcohol and caffeine can affect your mood. Eaten in excess these can influence your stress levels. Caffeine is a stimulant which can activate your adrenal gland and mimic the stress response. If you do drink too much caffeine your body becomes agitated and the side-effects may well be panic attacks, palpitations and headaches. Similarly, a high intake of sugar gives you a short-term surge of energy but this can lead to overworking the adrenal glands, depleting the body's strength and causing irritability and mood swings.
- ⑤ Try not to exceed the recommended weekly alcohol intake levels: 21 units for men and 14 units for women. One unit is the equivalent to one pub measure of spirits, or a glass of wine, or half a pint of beer.
- ⑥ Bear in mind the age-old adage 'Everything in moderation'.