

SPECIAL FEATURE

WORLD HEALTH DAY, 1986 HEALTHY LIVING—EVERYONE A WINNER

World Health Day commemorates the date 7 April 1948, when the Constitution of the World Health Organization was adopted. This year's theme, "Healthy Living—Everyone a Winner," points up how each individual is responsible for his own health, and how a healthy lifestyle promotes a healthy life.

BECOMING WINNERS FOR HEALTH

**Halfdan T. Mahler, Director-General
of the World Health Organization**

The theme of this year's World Health Day, "Healthy Living: Everyone a Winner," focuses on healthy lifestyles. This reflects the growing conviction that greater emphasis should be placed on the positive actions that individuals and communities can take to protect and promote health. The Alma-Ata Declaration of 1978 clearly states "that people have the right and duty to participate individually and collectively in the planning and implementation of their health care." As the movement of Health for All by the Year 2000 gathers momentum, it is high time to put this into practice.

The world around us has been changing rapidly, but often standard medical practices and the functioning of health services do not reflect these changes. In many places, the emphasis remains on curative measures and neglects positive steps that individuals can take to stay healthy. Partly as a result of some spectacular successes of modern medicine, an attitude has spread to many parts of the world that health is something the doctors provide for people, instead of something that a community and individuals achieve for themselves. Yet, today, it is evident that

there is a growing trend which shifts the emphasis from hospital-based care to those everyday actions that promote health. This new approach, based on a positive goal of fitness, is broad enough to include all of society.

Exercise, Nutrition, and Personal Responsibility

Three major elements of a healthy lifestyle deserve particular attention: exercise and sports, nutrition, and personal responsibility.

Exercise should be thought of in the broadest sense—one that includes walking and any other leisure pursuit. It has a direct influence on health and can act as a spur to fitness, thus improving health generally.

Active physical exercise is necessary for everyone at all stages of life. During the early years it prepares the body for tasks to be undertaken in adulthood; during adulthood it enables the body to give its utmost and to resist stress; and in later years it maintains mental alertness and physical mobility. But, perhaps most important of all, keeping physically active adds to the joy of life, contributing to that sense of well-being which is the true foundation of health.

Everyone recognizes that food is the staff of life. But today's eating habits are in a state of change just as are many other ways of life. There is a menace in some new and popular ways of eating. "Junk food," for example, heavy in fat or drenched in sugar, threatens the heart and the teeth. Of course, WHO is not recommending a universal diet that every people should adopt. On the contrary, it recognizes that every culture is able to provide the basic ingredients for a diet which promotes the growth and maintenance of a healthy body.

Today there is a greater need to be aware of how diet and nutrition function, and to consciously encourage those eating habits that can help to produce excellence in sports and general well-being.

Personal responsibility covers a wide area. Individuals must be encouraged to take steps to preserve their own health and to avoid behavior that is detrimental. This refers directly to the use of tobacco in any form and the abuse of alcohol and other drugs.

Smoking is the most important single preventable cause of ill health and premature death wherever it is widespread. And the smoking epidemic is one that doctors can't cure; only prevention works. What is needed are positive models of health so that youth does not begin to take up a lifelong and pernicious habit. Although it is the individual who has the responsibility, there are many factors over which society has considerable leverage that help determine the choice of the individual. And the individual in question may be only 11 years old when called upon to make that important choice.

In the case of alcohol and other drugs, individuals should be helped to make wise choices that will ensure their own maximum capacity to use their bodies and to enjoy living.

Winners for Health

WHO and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) have signed an agreement to launch a "Winners for Health" program, precisely in order to enlist those members of society whose example and practice can inspire others, even though they are not formal health professionals. Olympic champions and popular sportsmen are role models for millions of young people. They can help convey the message that those promoting health don't want to take away things that are pleasurable, but rather to live their lives to the fullest and avoid damaging their health through such acts as misuse of alcohol and drugs.

Working with national organizations (including Olympic committees) which are being encouraged to organize health fairs, runs for health, and other activities, WHO will attempt, with the IOC, to stimulate and encourage national and international activities that underline the role of health preservation and protection as a fundamental human right for the individual and an integral part of national development. Here again, sport furnishes an excellent example: To the extent that a nation can provide good nutrition and a healthy way of life for its citizens, it can begin to produce individuals and teams capable of competing at all levels, from the village square to the Olympic stadium, at the same time adding to the joy of living by means of bodily and mental exercise.

Thus everybody can become a messenger for health. The message should be carried everywhere: Health is the only race where everyone is a winner.

REALIZING OUR HEALTH POTENTIAL

Carlyle Guerra de Macedo
Director of the Pan American Health Organization

This year's World Health Day theme, "Healthy Living: Everyone a Winner," has a special message for every man, woman, and child in the Americas. Given the proper knowledge of what is good or bad for our health and well-being, we have a responsibility to make the right kind of decisions for ourselves, our families, and our communities; and—once those decisions are made—we have an added personal responsibility to take action. When we do, we all become winners in the race for health.

We Are Decision-Makers for Health

The choices I am talking about relate mainly to what is now commonly referred to as lifestyle. Every day we are called upon to make choices which reflect our personal way of living and which also may have a direct effect on our mental and physical health. For