

LIFE-STYLE MEDICINE (1)

March 2016

As you will have read from your invitation to this presentation, “Lifestyle Medicine” is thought to be a relatively new approach to treating and preventing many chronic diseases.

Before we begin let us realise that there has always been “Life-style” medicine – people being treated for disorders and diseases acquired because of their life-style. There have always been forward-thinking practitioners who have tried to steer people away from sewers and rat-infested hovels to a cleaner and better life, or to give up smoking and drinking, realising this would help them to live longer and be healthier.

Just think – about 100 years ago – at the time of the First World War – the sad state of much of the Nation’s health only became apparent when the army realised that many of their poor recruits were too short and too small to meet their minimum requirements. It was not uncommon to have rickets, TB, worm infestations and skin infections. **What could Life-style medicine have prescribed at that time?** More food, better medical knowledge. Free doctors & more medicines. Warm dry homes, fewer babies, clean water, better hygiene, less smoking and drinking, clean air – the list is endless. We may wonder how they survived – but the human race is designed to survive and that is what they did.

However. Think again. They must have been doing something right, because today we have more 100 year olds than ever and they were born and raised at that time. What could it be? They had close communities, family, church, friends for support. They were physically fit (if they survived) because there were no cars so they walked – everywhere, every day. They had a sense of the seasons – by the length of day, by what they ate. Apples in the autumn, ‘spring greens’, summer fruits and vegetables etc. No strawberries in December! They ate food uncontaminated by additives. Jam was fruit & sugar. Nothing else. They cooked and baked. And their entertainment was often at home or in the pub around a piano

Children played, and they played outside.

Now move forward to the 1940’s and 50’s. The world had moved on and life should have and would have been better. Electricity was the norm which meant the ordinary working man could have refrigerators (freezers came later). Better housing. Better education. Cleaner living conditions meant fewer infections. We now had free medicine, Penicillin! Insulin! Wireless, then TV, telephones, cars. **So what would Life-style medicine have prescribed at that time?** Maybe warmer homes (no central heating, even then if it was cold there were icicles outside your windows – if it was very cold the icicles were INSIDE your windows.) Cleaner air (we had filthy, killer smog). Reduced smoking & drinking. Improved use of the new medicines that were coming on stream. Better medical and pharmaceutical knowledge – after all even at that time if you had a heart attack – you probably died. If you

had a stroke – you probably died. If you got cancer – you probably died. If you got TB, scarlet fever, pneumonia – you probably died.

But again - we survived the hardships of rationing and limited foods and fuel. Broken families post war. The trauma of stress and distress.

What helped? Maybe the same as 40 or 50 years earlier. Family. Community. Good quality food (what little there was of it). Still eating seasonal foods – but now we had been taught how to grow our vegetables and fruits in the garden (if we were lucky enough to have one) or on shared patches of land – allotments. Still home cooking and baking. Still walking and cycling. Still home entertaining and singing in the pub – before the TV got us.

The children were still playing, and still playing out in the streets.

Now let us look at today. We have EVERYTHING that could have possibly been prescribed or wished for all those years ago. More than could have been dreamed of. Most of us have heated homes. We are educated free up to the age of 18. We have a free, established health service. Medicines, medical equipment and services that could never have been envisaged. We have established Social Services. Food is so plentiful it is ploughed back into the earth or dumped at the back of supermarkets. We don't have to walk anywhere – ever! Even the cleanliness of the air is monitored.

You never have to leave your home. Everything can be bought on line if you want it – not even with a computer but through a tiny phone that it is so powerful you can speak with your friends and family on the other side of the world at the touch of a button – which is where they often live. Entertainment: again in house, at the touch of a screen, plugged into your ears.

We know so much more. Smoking can cause cancer, drinking can cause liver disease. And if we don't know it we can look it up on Dr Google.

Does this mean we are now the healthy, happy long lived individuals that should be the outcome of all this 'progress'? Long lived – I'll give you that. But we oldies are the survivors and products of those earlier years. I personally doubt any future generations will have the benefit of a hardy beginning followed by the gradual improvements to living and health that we have seen. They will have worn out their thumb joints by the time they are 25 and their hips will be 'fixed' by the time they are 50 – from lack of use!

Healthy? Today's life-style is causing its own explosion of health problems including increased rates of obesity, diabetes, stress, heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, liver disease, sleep & digestive disorders to name but a few. The hospitals are bursting at their seams. GP surgeries are stretched to the limit. Whatever you hear, our NHS cannot keep up with the demand.

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Happy? Mental Illness and depression are weighing down the services that are there to help them. We no longer lock people away in institutions – that was obviously not the solution - but how many people do you know that can truly say they are happy? That they have enough? That they enjoy their lives? That they are not stressed, anxious or discontented?

What has gone wrong? I cannot tell you. But changing some attitudes and offering some thoughts on today's Lifestyle Medicine maybe we can help to make ourselves and our families just that bit healthier, happier, contented.

The lifestyle choices we make today can decrease our risk of serious illnesses like:

Type II Diabetes, Coronary Heart Disease, Cancer by as much as 60%.

Public Health England 23rd March 2016

21% of children play outside, down from 71% when their parents were children.

A quarter of British adults now walk for less than 9 minutes a day.

Physical inactivity is a direct factor in 1 in 6 deaths.

Simon Stevens, head of NHS England.

1st March 2016

The whole concept of Lifestyle medicine you will see touches on every aspect of your wellbeing, mental and physical health. It is based on NUTRITION, PHYSICAL & MENTAL ACTIVITY, STRESS MANAGEMENT, REST, SLEEP AND THE ENVIRONMENT. It means that you and your clinicians work together to keep you healthy and try to avoid chronic illnesses; If and when necessary you can be helped to manage these conditions.

I hope you do not mind that this first evening of 'Lifestyle Medicine' is going to go right back to basics and we are going to look at what helped our centenarians survive until today. Very basic basics in fact. (1) Growing food (2) Walking and (3) Entertainment – in the form of singing. They all involve Community. They all touch on the **ABC** for Good Mental Health:

Act – maintain or increase levels of physical activity (exercise, dancing, gardening) cognitive activity (doing puzzles, reading, study) and social activity (saying hello to neighbours, chatting to shopkeepers, keeping in touch with friends and family)

Belong – join a group, meet with family or friends, join in community events.

Commit – take up a cause or challenge – e.g. volunteer or learn a new skill.

This is thought to underline the very essence of HAPPINESS and thus contribute to an improvement in our mental health, which in turn affects our physical health.

Joan Manning B.Sc. M.Sc. R.Nutr (Public Health)

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The First of our three very entertaining and interesting presentations came from Mr Sandy Belloni, from the Paddock Road Project:

“We have a beautiful allotment at Paddock Road and we are very keen to get local people involved in developing community structures and events at the allotments. We are in the process of creating communal plots, gardens and areas to sit, eat and work together and apart from the horticultural side (maybe a sensory garden) we’d love to develop regular arts and crafts activities, art classes, cooking and just coming along for coffee and cake.

This can be a good opportunity for young people to develop new skills and contribute to the local community, adding substance to personal statements. It’s also an opportunity for everyone, regardless of age, to get addicted to the joys of shaping, creating, sharing and learning in the stunning setting of Attenborough Fields and Merry Hill.”

(Tel: 07956 410670)

The Second came from representatives of Hertfordshire Health Walks.

The ladies advised us that we didn’t need to be experienced walkers, because all abilities are catered for. The walks are led by trained volunteers (who carry first aid equipment) and as well as being healthy and good for you, they are very friendly and sociable occasions. Our nearest local walk starts at the café building in King George Recreation Ground, King George Avenue, Bushey and the walkers meet at 10.30am every Thursday.

There are numerous other walks in and around the area (Cassiobury, South Oxhey, Holywell, Croxley Green etc.) and all are welcome.

(01992 588433/www.hertfordshirehealthwalks.org)

The Third presentation was from Charlie Foskett, representing Rock Chorus. This choir has groups around the county and our local one meets every Thursday evening from 8pm – 9.30pm at Tennet Hall, Watford Grammar School for Girls, Watford. We were encouraged by the fact that there are no auditions, no prior experience is required and everyone is welcome (doesn’t matter how bad you think you are, if you want to sing just come along). There is a great atmosphere and the choirs give public performances and have raised sums of money for charity. They aim to put some fun back into your life and again it is another place to meet new friends.

(01582 668211/www.rockchorus.com)

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The talks were so well attended that we had to organise a second evening to accommodate all of our interested patients. It has been requested that this should be the first in a series of talks under the heading of ‘Lifestyle Medicine’ and that the other subjects mentioned (Nutrition, Stress, Sleep, Environment etc) will be covered in the future. We have asked patients to notify us of their preference. If you have not done so already, please contact the PPG at: mvppg1@gmail.com and your comments and choices will be added to those we already have.

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