

Executive Health

T.S.Nagarajan*

(Names are changed, but the Biyani of the story still goes around attending Belle Vue).

I have always been conscious about the need to pay attention to executive health. This has been a neglected area. Very few executives seem to be really concerned about their physical condition.

An executive life style is not always conducive to good health.

Quite often the executives had risen from the ranks. Sales executives were promoted from the cadres of salesmen. Out in the field they worked hard, often spending 10 to 12 hours in the market, where they got plenty of physical exercise. Once they got promoted, their lives became sedentary and they tended to become desk bound.

Yet the calorie intake increased. The social whirl – the cocktail circuit, the perquisite cars, air-conditioned comfort, all tolled on their health. The only exercise they had was a stiff walk to the bathroom.

With the sudden affluence their life style at home also changed, with the wives pampering them with rich food and comfort.

I made it a point to talk to executives about health and exercise. We organised lectures by eminent cardiologists. We encouraged executives to go in for medical check-ups. It was not a popular move. Most of them began to feel insecure and to fear that the company was trying to get rid of them as medically unfit for service.

The Belle Vue Clinic in Calcutta had started a health club – a very modern one, probably the first of its kind in the country – replete with every gadget and device.

There was the “sauna” and the “Turkish baths,” a “tub vibrator” and other mechanical devices like the stationary cycle, bars and “spot reducers.” I became one of its earliest patrons. To some of us regulars it became a sort of a club. We compared notes on our weights, gave free advice on new ways of weight reduction, miracle tablets and the like and generally were very commiserative.

* T.S.Nagarajn, retired Managing Director of Brooke Bond India, has been associated with Management Education in India and has served as visiting faculty at both Institutes of Management, Ahmedabad and Calcutta.

Uttam Kumar, the famous Bengali screen actor, was a frequent visitor. He had us in awe. There were various versions about his age. Some said he was past sixty, but he had a smooth unlined torso and didn't look a day beyond forty. They came to Belle Vue in all shapes and sizes. They were mostly Bengali or Marwari businessmen, very conscientious and regular, but their weights kept increasing.

"What can I do, Sir" bemoaned Sircar the pleasant and enthusiastic coach who ran the place.

"They leave here after exercising, but make up by eating every kind of malai, kulfi and other rich food."

Sometimes when the weighing scales showed an increase, they blamed Sircar, they blamed Belle Vue and they blamed Avery (*the weighing machine manufacturers*).

One of them had developed a knack of standing on the scale with an edgy approach to keep the scale at 84 kilos always.

But we enjoyed exercising together. There was no talk of shop. Occasionally we would talk of football – the Secretary of Foot Ball Federation was a frequent visitor to the health club – or the Bundhs, but never about the share market or business.

And we hardly ever tried to become friends outside the club. I had never been to any of

their homes nor did we think it necessary to include one another in the party circuit. If we met at all at parties or at airports, it was by chance and yet there was a bond in that Belle Vue had brought us together.

One of the regulars at Belle Vue was Biyani. Most of us used to play truant from time to time, but not Biyani.

He was regularity itself. He came promptly at six and stayed on until most of us had left and he attacked the spot reducer with gusto.

He was enormous and in his long shorts and vest looked like a fat bouncy baby swathed in diapers. He was round and flabby.

He had been given a very light course. He made a few attempts at toe touching, but never the twain could meet. He would gasp, snort and thump his chest after each attempt and generally walk around expecting the plaudits of the multitude.

I once said to him "Why don't you go for a long walk instead? You can go around the Victoria Memorial, you know. Do you good."

"I am a peculiar case" he answered with great solemnity. "If I walk long distances, my blood pressure – it goes up. My doctor says 'Don't walk.'"

He would gesticulate, attempt touching his toes a few more times and then come up like a propoise surfacing for air.

“Why don’t you go on diet?” I ventured feeling sorry for the way he gasped and groaned. “You should cut down on your calories.”

I am a peculiar case. If I go on a diet, my blood pressure, it goes down. My doctor says “Don’t diet.”

“You have a very obliging doctor.”

“Yes. He is a very famous cardiologist. Treats all the leading Marwari families in Calcutta.”

“But, what then does he say you should do?”

“My doctor says “Attend Belle Vue.”

