

MEN over matter

LIFEWISE TALKS TO THREE MEN WHO WERE INSPIRED TO TURN THEIR LIVES AROUND, HEALTHWISE.

INTERVIEWS BY **GENE KHOR**

POON TIEN SHEU 62, RETIREEE

➔ **"I WAS DIAGNOSED** with stage 4 prostate cancer in February 2007, two months after I saw my doctor. I had blood in my urine. The worst part of the news was that my cancer was inoperable as it had already spread to most of my organs. I was told I had at most five years left to live. I was shocked and upset. I watched what I ate and didn't drink and smoke, so I couldn't understand how this could have happened to me.

But with the love and support of family and friends, I slowly began to get over my bitterness. As a devout Buddhist, I also turned to the philosophies and teachings of the religion to help me cope.

One of the things I believe in is that personal suffering occurs because you're not content — you need to be grateful for what your body has given and done for you. I came to the realisation that I should focus more on the positive aspects of my life instead of dwelling on the negative.

The biggest life change I made was

in 2011; I retired from my work as a civil structural engineer. I had been very stressed out in the years leading up to my cancer diagnosis because of my many responsibilities, and I was constantly complaining.

Now I'm happy to have free time on my hands. I start my day at 5am with an hour-long routine that includes Buddhist prayers, and stretching and strength exercises

like bicep curls and tricep extensions with dumbbells. I try to exercise whenever and wherever I can. For example, if I'm in a lift that has hand railings, I'll support myself on them and do air kicks.

To help control the spread of my cancer, I take a pill every morning and see my doctor once every three months for a hormone injection.

I am also taking free online courses to feed my curiosity on subjects like



astrobiology — the study of the origin, evolution and future of the universe and whether or not there is life out there — and how to think using mathematical and logical models, which is a technique that is used to make sense of a complex world.

I also attend religious classes at the Mahaprajna Buddhist Society twice a week, where I learn about philosophy, empowerment and other Buddhist teachings.

I also visit the Tsao Foundation — which is dedicated to making elderly people's twilight years more fulfilling — at least once a week to help the folk there

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chronicle their lives in writing. Doing so enables them to look back on their lives and will also help them feel less depressed. And on the first Saturday of each month, my Mahaprajna Buddhist Society classmates and I visit Kwong Wai Shiu Hospital where we spend time chatting with the senior citizens.

The rest of the weekend is spent with my family — my 63 year-old wife; my 33 year-old son, his wife and their two children; my 31 year-old daughter and her husband; and my 23 year-old son.

My meals are quite simple. For breakfast, I usually have fruits such as an apple, orange, bananas or papaya with a handful of unsalted mixed nuts and other dried fruits.

I might also have steamed sweet potato or pumpkin with some cereal, or some porridge with red dates, lotus seeds and cordyceps. I maintain my 61kg weight by eating healthily — lunch often consists of stir-fried vegetables with porridge, and dinner is brown rice with stir-fried vegetables.”

RASABALAN PALAYYAN

47, HEALTH, SAFETY AND ENVIRONMENT TRAINER

➔ **“IN MID-2008, I BEGAN TO FEEL WEAK** and had to urinate frequently. When I saw a doctor, he ran some tests which showed that I had developed Type 1 diabetes. I wasn’t too surprised as my parents also have diabetes. Since then, I have to take two pills twice a day to control my glucose level. It’s troublesome, but I’ve gotten used to it.

I was also diagnosed with high blood pressure during that check-up, but that has since gone down as I started running regularly that same year.

I used to weigh 80kg but exercising has reduced that to 75kg. I used to run frequently as a schoolboy, but after I turned 16, school and then work became a bigger priority.

Now that my workload is more

manageable, I jog for an hour three times a week in the evenings around my neighbourhood. On weekends, I jog at least once for three hours. To me, running isn’t just physical — it’s an opportunity to clear my mind and relax. That’s why I enjoy doing marathons; I have run 12 since 2008. The next one I plan to do is the 42km leg of the Sundown Marathon on 31 May.

During the week, I wake up at about 5am as it takes me around an hour to get to my workplace at Benoi Road from my home in Jurong West. Breakfast is usually fried noodles with a fried egg and a cup of coffee.

I used to be addicted to coffee and drank a cup almost every hour, but I now limit myself to one in the morning. I start my lunches with freshly squeezed orange juice as I read that fruits ferment in your stomach if you consume them after a meal. This is followed by white rice with fish or chicken and a variety of vegetables, washed down with green or Chinese tea.

I finish work around 6pm and head home for dinner, which is usually white rice with curry and vegetables that my mother cooks. And every evening without fail, I’ll spend two hours meditating and reciting my Hindu prayers.”

“**IN ADDITION TO DIABETES, I WAS ALSO DIAGNOSED WITH HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE, BUT THIS HAS GONE DOWN SINCE I STARTED RUNNING REGULARLY**”



NUR HIDAYAT SAMAT

27, CIVIL SERVICE OFFICER

→ **"I WASN'T A VERY** active kid growing up and at my heaviest, I weighed 70kg. I am 1.65m so that put me in the moderately obese range. That was in 2005 when I was studying at ITE College West (Dover). I was feeling really down after my mother was bedridden following a stroke, and I ate a lot of comforting junk food to cope. I had fast food for almost

every meal, and could easily finish two burgers and dessert in one sitting.

I didn't realise how out of shape I was until I enlisted for National Service in 2006. I couldn't do any pull-ups and was only able to do 25 sit-ups at a time. Because of my strict four-month Basic Military Training regime, I slimmed down to 56kg, was able to do six pull-ups, and could do at least 40 sit-ups in under a minute. I also cut down on junk food, only eating it on occasion.

" I GOT MORE ACTIVE IN POLYTECHNIC. AT 23, I WAS OLDER THAN MANY OF MY PEERS. THEY WERE REALLY FIT AND ACTIVE, AND I WANTED TO KEEP UP WITH THEM.



I got more active after I started at Singapore Polytechnic in 2009. I was 23 years old, older than many of my peers there. They were really fit and active, always exercising or playing sports, and I wanted to keep up with them. I began swimming and hitting the gym at school, and also took up kayaking as a co-curricular activity. It's a lifestyle

I maintained until I graduated last year.

Although I'm working full-time now, I still find time to exercise. In fact, I think I'm working out more these days. On Monday and Friday mornings, I head down to Marina Bay around 7.30am for a 5km run before making my way to my office at Chinatown around 8am, where I take a shower before settling into work. I sometimes hit the gym after work on those days as well. Tuesday and Thursday evenings are for dragonboat training —

I took this up because I wanted a water sport that would challenge me more physically than kayaking. I give my body a rest on Wednesdays. I have one last burst of exercise on Saturday afternoons by swimming non-stop for an hour.

I don't really watch what I eat these days, but I take everything in moderation. Breakfast is usually cereal with milk, though sometimes if I get a craving, I'll have fried noodles. Lunch is usually rice with meat and vegetables, or noodles in soup. I sometimes make my own lunch, usually a simple pasta dish.

When I have dragonboat training, I usually have dinner after we're done at around 9pm. I'm not fussy and will eat what my teammates decide on. I might still snack on *keropok* (prawn crackers) after I get home as well, but I don't take sweet carbonated beverages — I tend to only drink water or tea.

I feel fine and am not aware of any medical conditions. However, my 58 year-old father has Type 1 diabetes, and my mother's family has a history of high blood pressure."