

Introduction

A long time ago, while I was addressing an audience in Sugar Land Texas, I began with, “Let’s imagine for a moment that you are a proud owner of a thoroughbred race horse worth in excess of \$10 million dollars. You have already won two major races and now you are getting ready for that third and final race—the Kentucky Derby—to snatch the Triple Crown. You are excited, your horse is ecstatic, and all systems are ready to go. Now, you are waiting for that final pistol sound, so the horses can soar through the gates to the finish line. Amen!”

“Let me pause here for a moment and ask you a couple of questions. How many of you would let this horse over-indulge in eating, drinking, smoking, cursing, and dancing until three o’clock in the morning to heavy-metal-rock or hip-hop music? (If you can call that music!)”

A deafening silence swept the auditorium.

“Of course, you are not going to do that,” I continued. “That is gambling on a \$10 million dollar investment.”

Instead, you are going to hire the best horse doctor in the country to make sure that your horse is maintained in optimal health. You are going to employ the best equestrian-chef in the country to provide your horse the most balanced diet possible. And you are going to hire the best stallion trainer to coach the horse in such a manner that it will win

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the *Triple Crown*, even if it means by the length of its nose at the finish line—would you not?

The expression on the face of the audience reflected, “So what?”

I had already been a speaker for many years, and I knew silence is deadly. Since it was my job to keep the momentum going I continued, “What about you? Do you realize that undoubtedly you are racing through your life in what God gave you—a *billion dollar body*? Do you think you take care of yourself as well as you would a ten-million-dollar horse?”

Silence, again. This time the audience looked at me like I was crazy.

“Probably not!” I said, “That is why I am going to give you a prescription for a *heart-healthy lifestyle*. Yes indeed, you do need my prescription for a *heart healthy lifestyle*—*Nikam’s Diet*.”

I paused here, thinking that I would finally get a positive response from the audience. Again, the room was quite lifeless except for a few sardonic giggles that were abruptly interrupted by a ninety-three-year old lady who stood up from the end of the hall. “Young man,” she began, “I don’t know why you have come here to preach us. I am ninety-three-years *young* and I am healthier than that creepy ten-million-dollar horse you are trying to sell me. I certainly don’t need a prescription from a teenager like you.”

No sooner did she finish than her nursing-home colleagues rose with a thunderous applause and a standing ovation.

I was really astonished. Not only had she evidently lived the secrets of a heart-healthy lifestyle, but she also knew the persuasive public speaking tricks that would influence her audience, something I had failed to do all morning.

But, I did not loose heart--yet. As a speaker, I had bombed many times in the past and recovered before the audience could feel my agony. I was not ready to give in. Instead, I joined the audience in applause and continued, “Well, ma’am, I agree with you one-hundred percent that *you* don’t need a prescription. But, in reality, I only presented this story to see how many of you were awake at the beginning of my presentation.”

“Not finished yet,” she shot back, “Why don’t you go back to the school and get a medical degree before you start selling prescriptions to old folks!”

That evening as I was driving back, I intensely contemplated on the interaction I had enjoyed with that wonderful ninety-three-years young (not old) lady. I realized that I was preaching to the choir. These people had already lived long useful lives. I wondered if I *should* go

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back to school again and research the true meaning of a heart-healthy lifestyle.

Then, I recognized that I should actually be addressing the people who were just at the dawn of their adult life, those in their teens, twenties, thirties, or forties—especially those who were already overindulging in eating, drinking, smoking, cursing, and practicing unhealthy lifestyles.

Hello, I'm Dr. Nikam. Welcome to my heart-healthy diet. This diet is designed to provide you with useful information that you can use to simply modify your old eating and lifestyle habits, and enjoy a new heart-healthy approach to your life.

In the past, I gave numerous health-related presentations with little or no effect on the seminar-attendees' lifestyles. At my office my efforts to educate my patients on a heart-healthy lifestyle had marginal impact, with the exception of those people who had a major heart attack or heart surgery. Even those people who adhered to my advice for a few months eventually slipped back into their routine lifestyles.

As I analyzed the deficiencies in my past techniques, I realized that my recommendations for a heart-healthy lifestyle were grossly inadequate. When a person signs up for a language, art, or music class, he is provided with one-on-one coaching, textbooks, reading material, homework, classroom training, internet sources, and a library of information to sharpen his knowledge and accelerate his learning skills.

But what do *we* offer those who entrust their hearts to us? We offer them a bucket full of pills and say, "Eat less fat and cholesterol, loose weight, exercise, and I will see you in three months, that will be \$250, John!" With that type of advice, what are the chances of seeing a noticeable change in your weight or cholesterol level? If a similar amount of instruction was given to school students, I wonder how many of them would even get a passing grade?

An exceptionally good music teacher is someone who is accomplished in her own musical talents. A healthcare professional cannot preach what he himself does not practice. In order to practice anything lifelong, those guiding principals must become second nature to you. Hence, I felt I must design a system that I myself could practice a lifetime. So, I started practicing the same principles to get a first-hand experience at a heart-healthy lifestyle. I will admit it was not easy. I realized that preaching cardiology was a piece of cake compared to practicing it on myself.

Soon the general recommendations that I had given to my patients for years proved ineffective, even for myself. That inspired me to take a second look at the latest medical literature on a heart-healthy lifestyle. I

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spent countless hours burning the candles at both ends just trying weed out useless commercial information, non-practical solutions, and unconventional alternatives labeled as *natural* or *wholesome*. While some books covered weight control highlighting only carbs, proteins, or fats, others only emphasized exercise showing a herd of young body builders as models. A heart-healthy lifestyle is more than just loosing weight or toning obliques, which most people fail to appreciate. It also addresses management of stratosphere-piercing stress levels and sky-high cholesterol levels. But, in fact, there is hardly any book exclusively devoted to an all-inclusive heart-healthy lifestyle that you can understand and apply in your daily life.

After extracting the most pertinent information from the vast medical sources, I started publishing a series of easy-to-grasp and follow life-transforming articles for my patients.

I even decorated my waiting room with the same articles. Ironically, they were disappearing on a regular basis from the binders, and we happily refilled them.

As I accumulated more and more useful information, my twenty-page handout expanded to over two hundred pages. When it became a problem for us to reproduce those articles on our copy (coffee) machine, I decided to put them on our website www.sugarlandheartcenter.com. However, many patients did not have access to the Internet. That inspired me to write this book, so that each person could have a comprehensive lifetime guide for his future.

The other day I was quietly making rounds in the hospital seeing my patients, when my old friend nurse Kelly and her cronies trapped me in the nurses' station.

"You look a little thin, Dr. Nikam," Kelly smirked. "What's the matter, business isn't good?"

Now, first of all, let me say something about nurse Kelly. She is not just an ordinary nurse. I have known her for over twenty years. Not only is she sharp of mind, but also sharp of tongue. She assumes absolute interrogation authority over me concerning everything from patient care to my vitals statistics, including belt size.

"I guess your kids are still on your payroll and you are on a financial diet," she continued.

"What? Am I on the witness stand? You must be a plaintiff lawyer. Any more questions Miss—Your Honor?" I bantered back.

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"Yes, Dr. Nikam. As a matter of fact, we want to know if you are on a diet," they chuckled.

"Yes!" I said, hesitating for a moment.

"Get out of here! Is this another one of your phony plots?" Kelly said, "What do you girls think?"

"Noooooo....," I said. "But I do have a plan called, *Nikam's Diet: A well-balanced, heart-healthy lifestyle for working men and women.*"

"Yeah! But you don't work!"

"Well, if I don't, you must not either!" I snapped back.

"You're just popping pills and calling it *Nikam's Diet*," she charged.

"Well! As long as you are speaking on my behalf, I will rest my case."

"No, you are not going to get off the hook so easily," yelled the cronies. "We want to know why you think your diet plan is *so* special?"

"Well! The proof is in the pudding," I said.

"What do you mean?" They leaned back.

"Well! It got your attention did it not?"

"Can you speak English—tell us how *is* your diet different."

"You want me to spill out fifty years of my research now?"

"Sure, we are not in a big hurry. Since we have been serving your patients for the past twenty years, the least you could do is to tell us your main points of your diet," Kelly spoke for the group.

"You can come to my office for a consultation. Then you can read a copy of the diet book that I am working on."

"I'm not going to come to your office, sit there for hours, and pay a hefty consultation fee for you to tell me what I don't want to hear. Why don't you tell me right here. If I don't like it, I can go back to my work." She said.

"Where do you want me to start?"

"At the beginning."

"Let's imagine for a moment that you are . . ."

"Hold it! Hold it! Dr. Nikam, we don't want you to read your entire book to us line by line. Just give us the main points."

"Well," I began, "staying trim is more than dieting. First, we need to understand what our food is made up of. There are three main calorie contributors in our food: carbohydrates, protein, and fats. Actually there is a fourth one, alcohol."

"Carbs, oh that's *Atkin's Diet*. I knew you were going to come to this!" Kelly gloated.

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“My recommendations are not unlimited fat allowances like *Atkin’s* supports. I have written a chapter in my book discussing exactly how much carbohydrate you need and how you can cut down on them. Reducing your carbohydrate intake 10 approximately 100 g per day will supply you with a heart-healthy amount of carbs that is practical on a daily basis.”

“So what about proteins?” she quizzed. “Are they really that important to consume every day?”

“Although you can live without carbohydrates, you can’t live without outside sources of protein,” I stated.

“Why not?” The group asked.

“There are eight essential amino acids that come from plant or animal sources that have to be absorbed by your body on a regular basis. If you keep your protein intake to about one gram per kg of your body weight, you will get a healthy amount of proteins for the day. You can read more about proteins in the chapter, *Proteins—Legends*”

“Do you believe in fats?”

“What is there to believe in? Fats are everywhere. Yes, fats are the third major calorie source in our diets,” I added, “and they may be the primary cause of most of the problems we face. What you really want to achieve is a controlled fat diet having only 15-30% of your total daily calories coming from fat. Then your body will break down its own fat for energy rather than just using the fat coming into it. Your body has a remarkable ability to adapt, much more so than your taste buds.”

“What! Dr. Nikam, do I look like I would have a hard time adapting to a diet plan? Are you calling me fat?” Kelly shot out amid general laughter.

“Not at all Miss, I was just stating a fact about how hard it can be for *people in general* to adapt their taste buds to healthy foods!” I laughed.

“Sure, that’s what you say *now*,” Kelly pretended to pout.

“What about the alcohol— is that allowed?” a nurse in the group questioned.

“An occasional glass of wine is okay. However, if you have to have a drink, make sure it is red wine. That is the best for your heart. Even then, I recommend no more than one glass per week.”

“Boy, you are knit picky! If I had you always around, I could loose weight by just watching you watch over me!” Kelly cried. “Okay, so those four things— carbohydrates, proteins, fats, and alcohol account for the calories and that’s it. Basically that’s all to your diet.”

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“Hold it! Hold it! There is much more than that. Being a cardiologist, I am concerned not only about people understanding the dynamics of the main food components, but also about appreciating the significance of cholesterol, omega-3 fatty acids, vegetables, vitamins, minerals in their dietary regimen.

“Now that you mention cholesterol, what are the ideal levels one should aim for?”

“Keep your total cholesterol level less than 200 mg%. According to the latest research, the desired levels of LDL (the bad cholesterol) are between 60-80 mg%. As for HDL (the good cholesterol), aim for levels above 40 mg%.

“How do I do that? Don't you too tell me that I have to exercise. I hear that enough from my *real* doctors!” Kelly whined.

“Sorry miss, but I'm afraid you are going to hear it again from me as well. Regular exercise can maintain your good cholesterol level at a higher percent than you might normally have if you tend to have a low HDL level. However, exercise is not the only solution for cholesterol reduction.

“Wow, sounds like I better get busy!”

“There is more to my heart-healthy lifestyle you know,” I returned. “Let me add that omega three fatty acids are amazing.”

“What are omega three's?”

“Omega three's are amazing!”

“Nik, That's it?”

“I have dedicated an entire chapter on omega three's. Most Americans don't realize that omega-3s are the most important fatty acids they should consuming on a daily basis.”

“That's interesting.” she said.

“I would suggest you read the chapter on omegas-3s on my website, and let me know what you think.” I said.

“What about vegetables?” She asked.

“You can eat acres of celery and lettuce, and not have to worry much about calories.” I said.

“Do you recommend certain vegetables?” she asked.

“Yes, I recommend leafy vegetables. I also recommend fresh fruits in place of fruit drinks which are artificially sweetened.”

“Is that it?” she asked

“Then there is an article on vitamins and antioxidants. Did you know the antioxidants are known to reduce the cholesterol deposition in the arterial walls.”

“Anything else, Doc?”

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“In the chapter on spices, I stress the important relationship between salt and high blood pressure. I also list the foods that you should be avoiding which are loaded with salt. Ah, Uh, it will be an eye opener since people with congestive heart failure also should drastically reduce their salt intake.” I said.

“I will need in degree in nutrition to take this technical mum bo, jumb bo, and translate into practical solutions, don’t I?” she questioned.

“No, you don’t, that’s my job. I have provided this basic science information chapters mention for both better understanding of food and it’s composition. The following chapters on breakfast, lunch, and dinner give more practical information on what you should select or avoid at the cafeteria lines on the spur of the moment.”

“What if I’m going out for a dinner?” she asked.

“That’s out.”

“What do you mean ‘That’s out!’”

“If you want a heart healthy lifestyle you cant be eating out all the time.” I said.

“Then no one will follow your advice, Dr. Nikam.” She said.

“That’s why I have written a chapter, restaurants on the road, an interesting reading that provides invaluable tip on trimming carbs, and fat of your favorite dishes while carefully selecting the items that you enjoy. You may want to have someone read this chapter to you every time you go out for dining. It’s a great appetizer or and appetite suppressant depressant depending upon your mood.”

“That’s it!” she asked.

“No, there’s more.” I said.

“Like what?” she said.

“Exercise must be an essential part of a heart healthy lifestyle. Running your fingers through the lab top keyboard or your favorite dessert is not considered exercise.” I said.

“Then what is consider exercise?” she asked.

“There are three chapters covering stretching, aerobic and strengthen exercises to improve your physical fitness, cardiac fitness, and appearance.”

“I think I need a cigarette break.” She sighed while yawning.

“Hold it miss, what did you say?” I asked.

“I said, I need a cigarette break.”

“No you don’t. You need to read the chapter on smoking before you light another cigarette.” I said.

“Oh boy I’m sleepy.” She said.

“Sleeping on the job could be hazardous to your health and wealth, not to mention the fact that you may not be able seep good at night.”

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You said it right! I can't sleep at night, and what can I do about it."

"Reed the chapter on, Good night sleep—for a fresh day."

"You have stressed me out."

"If you are tired or stressed out, you will enjoy reading the chapter on meditation. Also relax while you soak you mind in the chapter on stressless mind."

"The biggest stress I have at work is taking care of your patients. You're the only doctor who wants his nurse to make rounds with him. None of the other doctors bother us. But you know Dr. Nikam there are many nights where I can't sleep. Do you have any suggestions?" she asked.

"Sounds like a boring book all this time you have been telling me, do this, do that, don't do this, don't do that. Is there any life beyond this?" she asked.

"I think you hit the nail on the box. All work and no play make for a lifeless living."

"Are you calling me *lifeless*?"

"If you are, then you need a social network where you can associate with people, have special interest to devote your energy, time and effort to make your life more meaningful."

"How do you do that?"

"You need to develop hobbies, special interest, to help you spend time outside of your job in a more meaning full manner. They will come in handy. Read the chapter on Social Network, where I describe how you can create your own dream world."

"What about those jokes you have been telling all these years?"

"Sense of humor is an essential part of a heart healthy life style. You need to set aside time to have fun with your family you should be able to laugh at a joke and more importantly laugh at your own follies shortcomings. Then you become a true human being as vulnerable as the rest of them, but lovable and heart-healthy. Indeed, there is a chapter on humor. Here I share my philosophy of life and how you can create sense of humor for your friends' and your entertainment."

"Anything else?" I she asked.

"You need a social network where you can network with people, have special interest to devote your energy, time and effort to make your life more meaningful."

"How do you do that?"

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“You need to develop hobbies, special interest, to help you spend time outside of your job in a more meaning full manner.”

“Oh! I got to go. My boss is looking for me.”

“What about bill?”

“Bill! Bill! Do not worry, I will send you one. I have your address!”

To be completed