

There are so many demands on a missionary's life that it is very easy to overlook one area in particular. That concerns the missionary's own needs – their health and general wellbeing. Without good spiritual, emotional and physical health the missionary will be hindered in their usefulness to the people he or she serves.

The purpose of this Bulletin is to encourage you to think a little of your own personal health needs and give a very simple reminder of things you can do to stay well.

Firstly, healthy eating. A good, balanced diet is very important in staying healthy. There is a lot of evidence that eating well improves health, mental functioning, immunity and many other aspects of life. Regular fresh fruit and vegetables, along with lots of fluids are necessary. A low fat (cholesterol) diet is good to prevent heart and vascular disease. A balanced diet will help to prevent obesity with all its associated risks for disease and poor health as well as reduced life expectancy. However, a little of what you like is never a problem, so don't get obsessive about it all!

Secondly, physical exercise. This tends to get squeezed out for many of us! Exercise is of great benefit in staying healthy. Not only does it help to keep weight down but, when taken regularly, it makes people *feel* much better. Evidence suggests that twenty minutes brisk walking per day, or at least three to four times per week, is adequate to keep fit. Anything above that is a bonus. All of us should be able to build twenty minutes into our busy schedules somewhere!

Thirdly, sleep. Good sleep patterns are essential for maximum functioning. The amount of sleep required by individuals varies enormously, but on average seven hours for a man and eight hours for a woman is what is usually quoted as being good. It is sobering to think that we spend one third of our life in bed asleep – or at least we ought to! Therefore to invest in a comfy bed, mattress and pillows etc. is sensible. Good routines prior to going to bed are useful so that sleep becomes an expectation! Many of course will have no problem dropping off from sheer exhaustion!

Fourthly, stress. Avoiding stress, or at least reducing stress, is extremely important for overall health. Stress causes many bad reactions in the body through the release of hormones etc. that have adverse effects on various organs. It is very difficult in a missionary's life to avoid stress by virtue of their calling, but learning to deal with it appropriately is key. Maintaining an up-to-date relationship and walk with the Lord is obviously very important. Praying and giving issues over to the Lord, as well as talking with others where appropriate, helps to reduce the impact of stress. Internalising stress is harmful.

Fifthly, personal time. Every now and again it is important to take some personal time out for mental and physical refreshment. That might include reading, walking, or any number of hobbies or interests to pursue. These activities are vital to refresh body, mind and soul and must not be seen as sinful or lazy enterprises. Most missionaries are very unlikely to go overboard on this one! Most find themselves among the highly motivated group of performers least likely to spend time or energy on themselves!

Sixthly, regular check-ups. It is very advisable for missionaries to take regular checks on their health. It should be possible to get many simple things done on the field. These might include blood pressure checks, cholesterol tests and cervical screening. More would be available on a furlough back in the sending culture, e.g. screening for breast cancer, bowel cancer and prostate cancer in particular.

If symptoms of ill health develop, then medical advice should be sought at an early stage and matters not put off until a later planned furlough.

It is of importance to know that British citizens working as missionaries overseas are entitled to free NHS care when they return to the UK.