

# UNIVERSITY OF ILORIN



THE ONE HUNDRED AND SIXTY-FIRST (161<sup>ST</sup>)  
INAUGURAL LECTURE

## “HEAVEN IS FAR – ONLY THE FIT CAN MAKE IT”

BY

PROFESSOR ADETAYO EBUN TALABI  
**B.Sc (Chem.) PGDPE, M.Ed. Ph.D (Ibadan)**  
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN KINETICS  
EDUCATION  
FACULTY OF EDUCATION  
UNIVERSITY OF ILORIN, ILORIN, NIGERIA

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Chairmanship of:**

**The Vice-Chancellor**

**Professor AbdulGaniyu Ambali (OON)  
DVM (Zaria), M.V.Sc, Ph.D. (Liverpool), MCVSN (Abuja)**

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**PROFESSOR ADETAYO EBUN TALABI**  
**B.Sc (Chem.) PGDPE, M.Ed. Ph.D (Ibadan)**  
**PROFESSOR OF HUMAN KINETICS**  
**(Exercise Physiology)**

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Ladies and Gentlemen.

**“HEAVEN IS FAR – ONLY THE FIT CAN MAKE IT”**



**Fig. 1: Heaven for the Fit**

**Preamble**

Let me start this lecture by showing gratitude to God, The Almighty, The Maker of Heaven and Earth, The Giver of all blessings and goodness, The Alpha and Omega, in Whom there is always goodness.

Let me also affirm my belief in human beings, who I regard as sons and daughters of God, and heirs to the kingdom of God–paradise. Man has been endowed with the powers of mind to master the earth and to enjoy “some

form of heaven on earth”, if he so desires. I affirm my belief in the fact that where you and I find ourselves today is a product of our decisions. I hope it will also be our choice after today, to decide to enjoy “heaven”, if we are not already enjoying it.

I thank you all for permitting me to be where I am today, standing before you all and with the opportunity to give my infinitesimal expositions on my conclusion, after many years of theories and research, on how to enjoy “heaven on earth”. If at the end of today, I have been able to educate, even if it is just one person, I would feel fulfilled and be grateful to God. May our life be blessed as I give that which, to me, is truth and nothing but the truth. Only the fit can really enjoy “heaven” on earth.

### **My Journey into Sports**

Mr. Vice-Chancellor Sir, all other distinguished guests, I must start by telling briefly my journey so far into sports. My sports life started from my youth when I watched my father who played tennis and others who played cricket. In fact, my father took it upon himself to teach all his children how to swim.

Right from my primary school days, up to the university, I was actively involved in sports. I was admitted to the University of Ibadan to read B.Sc Chemistry.

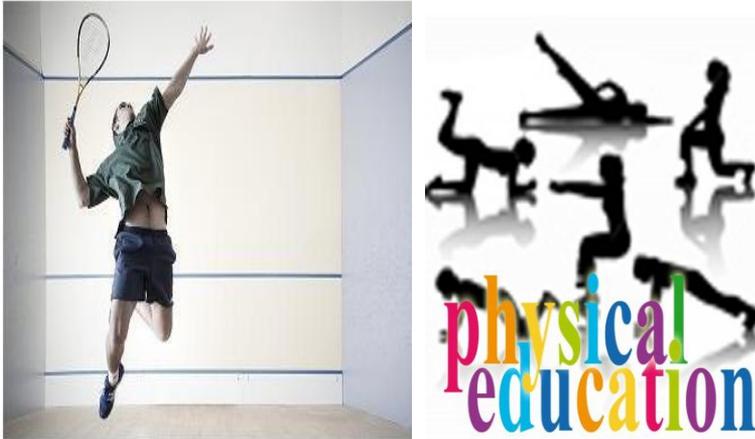


*Figure 2: Chemistry lab.*

Even though I enjoyed the chemistry classes, especially the laboratory practical, I really relished and enjoyed my evening sporting activities after classes.

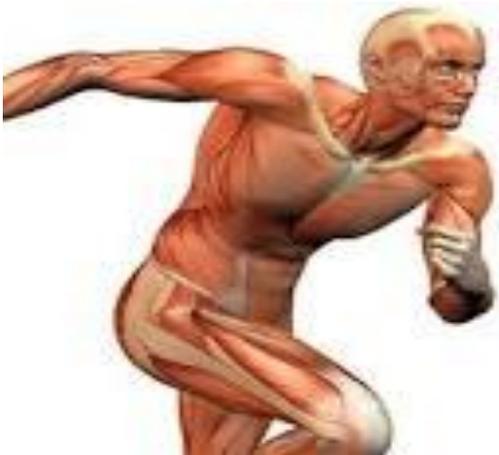
I became involved in sports at the University of Ibadan, first at the inter-hall games for Sultan Bello Hall in 1970. Few of us represented the Hall in almost all the sporting events that we participated in. I was involved in soccer, tennis, table tennis, swimming, etc. Finally, I became good enough to represent the University of Ibadan in Table Tennis at NUGA and WAUG games between 1970 and 1973.

I picked-up the game of squash very late in the University of Ibadan, a game in which I later became the National Champion in 1983, through 1985 and later as National veteran champion for several years thereafter.



***Figure 3: New Career in Sports***

As a result of my interest in sports, I finally decided to enroll for the post graduate diploma course in Physical and Health Education; a course that was designed for all teachers who had high interest in sports and or who were sports teachers in schools. The course gave me an in-depth understanding of that which I have been doing naturally without knowing the basic mechanics. I became a better player, coach and even sports official. Because of my biology/chemistry background, I found the sports science courses much easier and I later enrolled for the Master and the Ph.D. programmes in Exercise Physiology.



***Figure 4: Career in Exercise Physiology***

Let me categorically say that I have never had a dull moment in sports and I have never regretted the change to read Physical Education now called Human Kinetics. In fact, I am happier when I become involved with sports than when lecturing in the classroom. Sports has made me livelier, more agile, feel younger and happier. I thank God I listened to myself. Chemistry then had better prospects than sports but I do not know who I would have been or fared if I had pursued a career in Chemistry.

I thank God that I experienced sports to the fullest of my ability and have promised to always preach the “gospel of sports”. The topic of my lecture today is therefore a product of my experiences in sports and exercise physiology.

## **Operational Definition of Essential Terminologies**

**Heaven:** In most religions, “Heaven” is regarded as the paradise and the ultimate goal. It is considered a place of bliss, goodness, joy, happiness, harmony, etc.

Heaven in this context represents:

1. A state of superlative wellbeing/wellness
2. A state of complete control, tranquility and harmony between body and soul.

**Wellness/Wellbeing:** is defined by the World Health Organization as a state of physical-physiological, mental/emotional and spiritual health/fitness and harmony (Hoeger & Hoeger, 2011)

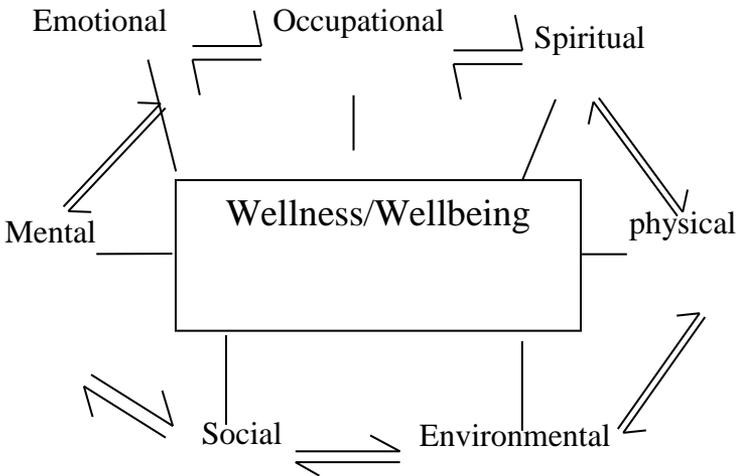
Physical-Physiological health/fitness is simply the ability of the body structures to function properly and effectively (Hoeger & Hoeger, 2011).

Mental-Emotional health/fitness is the ability to determine, organize and continue to do the work at hand against all odds (Fahey et al., 2013).

Spiritual health/fitness, on the other hand, is the degree to which a person is capable of harmonizing the body and soul together to perform a task to a logical conclusion (Hoeger & Hoeger, 2011). Wellness/wellbeing is also described as a state of health in which an individual progresses towards a higher level of functioning, achieving an optimum balance between the internal and external environment (Corbin *et al.*, 2011). Fahey, Insel and Roth (2005) defined wellness/wellbeing as holistic and more proactive view of health and this does not only include traditional criteria such as freedom from diseases, but also a number of proactive criteria. These include, ability to cope with everyday stress, feeling of accomplishment and

personal growth, capacity to love, compassion, forgiveness, strong, mature and supportive relationships with people in our lives and a good sense of humour.

According to Hoeger and Hoeger (2011), the seven main inter-related components of wellness/wellbeing frequently affect one another, making it difficult to neglect one at the expense of the other. (Fig.5)



**Figure 5: Dimensions of wellness (adapted from Hoeger and Hoeger 2011)**

Only the being that is fit and healthy can be well enough to cope successfully with life. Wellness/wellbeing is an expanded idea of health and fitness. In several surveys on the best gift in life, health/fitness and wellness have always been rated the best, over money, power, family etc. It has become clear to me that fulfillment, satisfaction, completeness, etc, in life, all rest on wellness.

Wellness  $\longleftrightarrow$  Health/Fitness  $\longleftrightarrow$  Wellbeing

Wellness is wealth, peace, harmony – in short “Heaven on Earth”. Wellness requires a strong body and “soul”. To achieve complete control and harmony between body and soul needs a high level of health and fitness.

Superlative wellness is therefore, a high state of wellbeing and goes beyond optimum fitness and the absence of disease (Hoeger & Hoeger, 2011). Superlative wellness therefore seems to be the greatest gift of life.

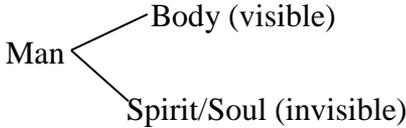
Superlative wellness/wellbeing in my conclusion is that state that allows you to:

- Enjoy your life on earth to the maximum
- Enjoy your wealth, family, position, etc, to the fullest
- Be able to face challenges of life without too much complaints
- Be an optimum person irrespective of where one finds oneself.
- Be grateful to God on a regular basis

- Be able to say “thank you God” when the time comes to leave this earth

### **The Living Man**

That which we call the man is a complex structure. As far as I am concerned it consists of two major parts:



***Figure 6: Dimensions of man***

The body which consists of atoms, molecules, tissues, organs and systems, can be likened to the house/the vehicle. While the soul represents the tenant/the driver. All religions seem to accept that the spirit/soul is from God and is different from the body (Lampe, 1990). I regard the soul/spirit as the real man and the body as the vehicle with which it operates. Without the soul (driver) the body

(vehicle) is useless and cannot function, and without the body, the soul is not functional on earth.

## **Soul $\iff$ Body**

The relationship between the body and the soul is central to the level of wellbeing. Any abnormality in the soul or body affects the performance of the other and also ultimately determines the level of wellbeing. For the man (body & soul) to function and be well integrated, exercise is very important.

The soul/spirit is a consistency that is within, occupies the body and stays and uses the body until it departs at death. While within the body, it determines what it wants the body to do, and if the body cannot cope or do not respond as required, (in short, dis-agreement) then the problem begins,-loss of wellbeing.

No matter how good the spirit (driver), it is limited to what the body (car) can do and also no matter how good the body (car), it is limited to what the spirit (driver) can do. It is believed by all major religions that the spirit is a special gift from God and man does not seem to have control over it (Lampe, 1990). However, the body it is to use, is a special production by humans. We should therefore direct all our efforts to producing a body that is capable of responding to the demands of our spirit. That is, a body that can respond and harmonise with our spirit to engender the necessary harmony and wellbeing.

## **Life's Journey- A Show of Struggle and Stresses**

A man's journey on earth can be likened to going from "hell to heaven". He starts out completely helpless, dependent and hopefully ends up completely self-sufficient. It is like climbing to the top of a hill. It is like converting a desert to a beautiful garden. Man must work hard and long to reach the goal. Without the adequate health and fitness (wellness/wellbeing) to match every phase, he will not be able to reach the goal, or will make it at a high cost.

All cellular actions are physiologically controlled by enzymes, hormones, and nerves. All cellular physiological variables are closely related to one's level of fitness. That is, the fitter you are, the better the muscle strength, endurance, heart rate, body mass index, nervous excitability, enzymes and hormone production, etc, to name a few. The fitter one becomes, the more the capacity of the system to deliver in quality and quantity. A person's journey and what it is capable of achieving starts from the fundamental unit cells (sperm & ovum).

To become pregnant needs adequate level of fitness. Even the act of sexual intercourse is a product of fitness. It is an energetic process requiring a level of fitness. The fitter the physiology, the better the quality of sperms and ova. The fitter you are the easier, more enjoyable and more fulfilling is intercourse. Ejaculation of sperm is more forceful, the movements of sperm cells by the peristaltic and ciliary actions are more energetic. Only quality sperm and ovum can result in quality zygote and finally a quality child's body.



***Figure 7: Sperm and Ovum***

### **Birth**

Every mother knows what goes on during delivery. Great energy, stress and struggles are involved in childbearing. Pregnant women are usually advised to work long distances regularly, prior to delivery. During delivery, they are enjoined to push, push and push. The pain, the cries and agonies are sometimes beyond description. This is a confirmation of the level of health and fitness (wellness) required for childbirth. The fitter the hip, abdominal and gluteus muscles, the higher the chances of easy and effortless delivery. Even the recovery after child labour is better for the fit mothers than the unfit ones. This clearly shows that for wellbeing of delivery, you need to be fit.

### **After Birth**

The journey is even more rigorous after birth. The child learns to walk, run and is exposed to the competitive world, which is the order of the day. The fitter child has

been known to be quicker, more versatile, more energetic, can stand pressure, have shown better ability to take responsibility, more independent and can handle their affairs of life better. The less fit ones are more dependent, less mobile, easily broken, tend to be fearful and less ready to take challenges head-on. They also end-up being less productive, weaker and in fact, become very dependent on others to face life. As things get tougher, they tend to become withdrawn, fearful, blame others for their problems and easily frustrated, all of which can lead to other emotional and psychological problems (Emiola, Talabi & Ogunsakin, 2000).

### **Adult Life and the Phenomenon of Aging**

The adult life represents high levels of struggle. Life becomes survival of the fittest. That is, the fit one survive much more easily than the less fit. Aging, with its debilitating conditions and ultimately death, seems to be the characteristic of all living things. In consequence, all living things show a progressive age-related deterioration (Shephard, 1998). All physical and physiological variables decline with age, even though not at the same rate. The period between 25-35 years of age is generally the period when both physical and physiological performances reach their peak (Shephard, 1998). Even though biological scientists expect that the functional capacity should match the physical age, there are nevertheless, wide inter-individual differences in functional status at any given physical age. The widening gap observed between functional capacity and physical age makes old age a dangerous and challenging time for senior citizens and that,

to me, is when the effect of exercise can be harnessed to make life better for the seniors.

Exercise scientists are unanimous that there is a difference between a person's chronological and physiological age. That is, a person can be 65 years of age and yet have a physiological age of 45, while another one can be 35 years of age and look like an 80 years old person based on the person's fitness and health status. It is clear that a person can control his physiological age by a regular physical fitness programme among others (Shephard, 1989, Fries, 1989). The physiological age of a person represents his functional physiological capabilities. This essentially increases the potential for better health and longevity. The slogan "graceful aging" (Fries, 1989) seems to be possible only to individuals who maintain a lower physiological age than their chronological age. Robust physical activity helps to delay or prevent chronic illnesses and diseases associated with aging and maintaining quality life and independence longer among seniors.

In short, a fit person enjoys better health and that in turn guarantees better wellness. He can then face circumstances better and enjoy his life to the outmost without undue stress.

### **Superlative Wellness:- A way of life**

Superlative wellness as a high level of wellbeing (health and fitness) does not depend on medicine, doctor, money, environment, occupation, position, gift or circumstances. It is a matter of small-small sensible little things that we should be doing. It is about consciousness of what our body needs and what goes on around us. It is

about the decisions we make and the wisdom with which we carry out these decisions.

To achieve superlative wellness, one must work towards it because it does not just happen. The holistic view of wellness suggests that physical and psychological problems are inter-related and to achieve superlative wellness, one must ensure that one's work, play and social lives are positive and appropriately balanced.

Even though an individual might demonstrate adequate or excellent fitness, indulgence in unhealthy lifestyle behaviours like smoking, drinking alcohol, not sleeping regularly, etc, will increase the risk of chronic diseases and decrease the person's well-being.

Therefore, superlative wellness should be seen as a way of life. To possess adequate and functional (superlatives) wellness for robust living, the following activities are foundational and very crucial but not exclusive.

- Adequate and regular physical activity level – The main anchor for wellness.
- Adequate and regular nutrition
- Adequate and regular water intake
- Adequate and regular breathing.
- etc

## **Adequate Physical Activity Level and Superlative Wellness**

The pressure of living life and especially now, generally exposes the individual to a lot of physical, emotional and psychological stresses. Almost all chronic ailment, like cardiovascular diseases, migraine, headaches, ulcer, allergy, cancer, and many more are stress related (Talabi, 1998; Nash, 2013; Wein, 2015). Areas of the body affected by stress include, the brain and nerves, muscles and joints, heart, stomach, pancreas, intestine, reproductive system, immune system, etc.

Exercise therapy is a potent anti-stressor when applied correctly and over time the body begins to adapt and prevents the stress syndrome from building up and affecting the body systems (Nash, 2013). While physical exercises alone do not guarantee the total wellbeing of an individual, it however represents a major factor in maintaining wellbeing (Mayo Clinic, 2015; Scoth, 2014; Havard Health Publication, 2011).

The ancient great civilizations, Indians, Greeks, Romans, etc. encouraged their citizens to engage in vigorous exercises for strength, endurance, power, gracefulness, youthfulness, serenity of mind and long life, among other benefits. (Bucher & Wuest, 2012).

According to ACSM-AHA (2007) all healthy, adults aged 18-65 years should participate in moderate intensity aerobic programme for a minimum of 30mins for 5d/wk or vigorous intensity aerobic activity for a minimum of 20mins for 3d/wk. Physical activity is any physical action that involves the use of the body. It could be whole or part body activities. Whole body physical activities like, walking, jogging, playing sports are very essential to our

wellbeing. Physical activity is also like a servicing machine. Adequate physical activity is the appropriate amount of work or activity for our age, occupation and status. It must be work of appropriate intensity, duration and frequency. The work or activity must task the body organs enough to mobilize blood, muscles, nerves, bones and chemicals. Blood, food and water, must circulate to all parts of the body and toxins from all parts must be removed. Lack of adequate systemic mobilization leads to stagnation and staleness of tissue fluid, which eventually leads to dis-ease, disease and death (Talabi, 1999; Emiola, Talabi and Ogunsakin, (2002).

There is a dose – response relationship between physical activities or physical fitness and the risk of coronary artery disease (CAD) and cardiovascular disease (CVD) (ACSM, 2014; Physical Activity Committee Report, 2008). The more intense the physical activity, the more the physical fitness and well-being derived by the body. Physical activities also help to strengthen, to scrub and flush the systems thereby keeping it properly serviced and cleaned-out. Physical activities help to tone the muscles, and the organs for better functioning.

Physical activities boost mental wellness; improve physical wellness by reducing risk factors. Adult who watched more than four hours of television a day had a 46% increased risk of death from any cause and 80% increased risk of death from cardiovascular diseases (ACSM, 2014)

- ❖ Physical activities prolong optimal health. Without regular physical activity, the body slows down, loses strength, stamina, and ability to function well. Physically active people have healthier weight, live

about 7years longer than others less active and obese (ACSM, 2014), Physical activity improves blood circulation, improves blood cholesterol level, prevents bone loss, boosts energy levels, helps to manage stress, and release tension.

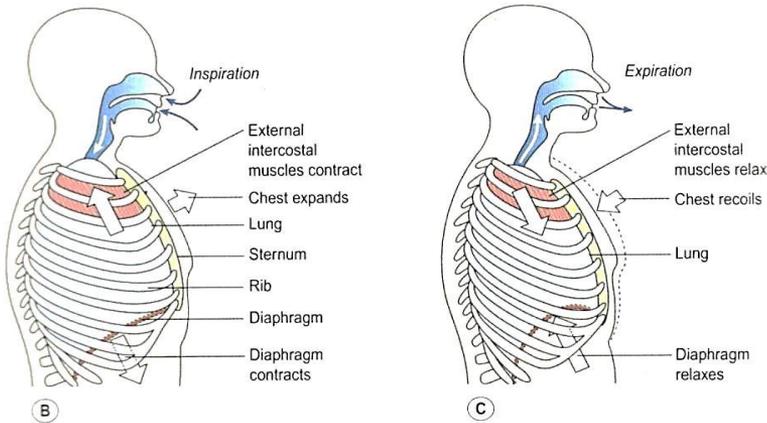
- ❖ Physical activities also promote enthusiasm, and optimism, counter anxiety and depression, help you fall asleep faster and more soundly. It improves self-image. Physical activity delays and prevents the development of cardiovascular diseases by 30-40%. It prevents and delays chronic illnesses and diseases associated with aging and maintain quality life and independence longer for seniors.

All these are aspects of life that are necessary to keep oneself in superlative wellness condition throughout life. Physical activity, as far as I know, is the only activity that has the capacity to do all the things mentioned above.

**To Further Aid the Ability to do more physical activities, the following are also essential.**

### **Adequate Breathing & Superlative Wellness**

Breathing is an activity of the respiratory system. It is the process of bringing air laden with different gasses into the alveoli of the lungs for proper absorption of oxygen and elimination of carbon dioxide. If this process is not adequate, less oxygen is made available to the body systems to function and excessive amount of carbon dioxide builds up in the body. This increases the acidity of the cellular environment thereby disturbing cellular homeostasis (Talabi, 1993).



**Figure 8: Breathing Mechanism**

Oxygen ( $O_2$ ) which is a natural constituent of the air we breathe, is a very important element in superlative wellness and wellbeing. Without oxygen, death occurs in minutes. It is an oxidizer and very key to the metabolism of glucose to produce energy (ATP). Without adequate energy production, the body organs will breakdown and stop functioning (death).

The brain which is about 2% of human mass needs about 20% of the body's need of oxygen, to function properly (Patrick, 2012). Lack of oxygen causes headache, fatigue, eye, nose and throat discomfort, breakdown of the body's immune system, which helps to remove toxins from the body (Patrick, 2012).

Otto Warburg–The 1966 Nobel Prize winner, demonstrated that the key condition for the formation of cancer cells is lack of oxygen at the cellular level. In fact, he concluded that almost all viruses, fungi, parasites, and many bacteria such as lactobacilli, clostridium and

bacteroides are strictly anaerobic because they do not thrive in oxygenated environment.

Patrick (2012) further confirmed that the high acidic environment at the cellular level due to carbon dioxide buildup, tend to facilitate cancerous build-up. That lack of oxygen and water, resulting in stagnation at the cellular level is the major cause of dis-ease, diseases and eventually death.

There is therefore the need to consciously and regularly do deep breathing to absorb the adequate amount of air into the lungs, where the oxygen extraction takes place. The practice of deep rhythmic breathing regularly during the day is particularly essential for superlative health and wellness in the humid tropics, due to the presence of high heat and water vapour (Talabi, 1992).

Breathing should be deep and slow, to allow air to reach the alveoli, which is the functional unit of respiration, thereby allowing enough oxygen to be absorbed and adequate carbon dioxide to be expelled (Talabi, 1998, Rocha, et al, 2015).

## Adequate Hydration and Superlative Wellness



**Figure 9: Clean Water**

Water is the body's most important nutrient. According to Truswell (2009), 40-60% of an individual's body weight is water. Out of the total amount of water in the body, an average of about 62% is intra-cellular and 38% extra-cellular. Every cell of the body is surrounded by water and, water is important for cellular homeostasis, waste clearing and other physiological processes in the body (Talabi, 1993).

Daily water input is mainly from food, and fluids intake. The principal outlets or loss of water in the body are urine, faeces, skin and lungs. Water is truly a remarkable nutrient that is essential to life. Without water, death occurs within days. It is the body's transport and reactive medium. Gases, nutrients and waste products are transported in aqueous solution. Water has tremendous heat stabilizing qualities, it lubricates the joints and helps to give structure

and form to the body through the bulk it provides for body tissues.

According to Hawley & Burke, (1998), proper hydration is important in health and wellbeing. Dehydration which is the excessive loss of water from the body causes:

- Increase in heart rate
- High lactic acid & toxins in the muscles
- Reduced plasma volume
- Increased plasma concentration
- Increased risk of breast and colon cancer
- Increased risk of skin diseases
- Increased risk of ulcer
- Reduced mental functioning and skill performance
- High body temperature

Without adequate hydration, food, oxygen, hormones, etc, will not reach the brain in adequate quantity, leading to brain cell dis-ease, disease and death. According to Kovacs (2005), Maughan (2003), Waug and Grant (2010), water loss of varying degrees leads to corresponding symptoms like thirst, loss of endurance, impaired physiology, slowed breathing, sleepiness, weakness, mental confusion, loss of balance, muscle spasm, exhaustion, delirium, stroke, etc.

The hot humid environment like ours, especially the southern part of Nigeria, has serious implication for further dehydration. Hot and humid environments cause more loss of water. Over clothing in hot humid environment disturbs

cooling effect, leading to more water loss. It also reduces the circulatory and temperature regulating mechanisms in the body (Talabi, 1992, 2001).

Improved hydration helps weight loss and the ability to tolerate stress. Truswell (2003), Manghan (2003) and many nutritionists are unanimous, that the average human being requires about 2-2.5 liters of water daily for proper well-being.

A dry diet, a hot humid environment and a higher activity level, etc, may require more for superlative wellbeing. Regular intake of water, all day long, guarantees that one sweats well, urinates well, faeces do not become hard, skin does not crack and the flesh is moist, all the time. This leads to a high feeling of wellbeing and the body is better able to cope with daily stress without fatigue (Talabi, 1990, 2000, 2001).

### Adequate Nutrition and Superlative Wellness

#### The three key food groups:



*Figure 10: Types of Food*

Nutrition is the totality of the nutrients taken into the body regularly. These nutrients constitute the foundation ingredients for manufacturing of cells, tissues, organs and systems. (The Nutritional Foundation, 1984; Burke, 1998; Truswell, 2003; Wardlaw & Smith, 2009)

Nutrition is a vital component of wellness and what one eats affects energy level, well-being and overall health. Eating habits can also closely be linked with certain diseases. Of particular concern is the connection between lifetime nutritional habits and the risk of the major chronic disease including heart disease, cancer, stroke and diabetes. Because diet is one area that is easy to handle, a knowledge and understanding of nutrition can be used to create a healthy diet plan as a significant step in a superlative wellness programme. Healthy food is important, and without healthy food our body:

1. Will not be able to perform as well as it should do
2. Will become susceptible to illness easily
3. Will not heal as quickly from injury
4. Will experience physical as well as mental limitation

The nutrients in food can be classified as:-

- i. Energy giving nutrients (Carbohydrate, Fat)
- ii. Body building nutrients (Proteins)
- iii. Health giving nutrients (Vitamins and Minerals)
- iv. Water (medium for chemical reaction)

Nutrients must be adequate in quantity and quality in order to build strong body structures that can withstand stress all day long. Badly constructed cells, tissues, organs and systems lead to dis-ease, under stress and eventually break down when stress is prolonged.

Of particular importance to superlative health and wellbeing is fat. Excessive fat has been linked to obesity which is a major health risk factor. Obesity is implicated in most cardiovascular diseases and other chronic diseases.

Scientist particularly nutritionist Truswell, (2003), Wardlaw & Smith, (2011), are unanimous on the need to consume all the classes of food on a regular basis for wellness. However, there is no unanimity in the modalities for sourcing and consumption. While the proteins, carbohydrates and fat are easy to source and consume, the vitamins and minerals are not generally available at one source. They are scattered in various food and no one particular food can provide the essential minerals and vitamins needed for superlative wellness (Kieninger, 1980; Nancy, 1990; Burke, 1998; Talabi, 2000).

To possess all the needed mineral and vitamins, one needs to consume a variety of foods. Even then, scientists are now very clear, that most of the supplies in present day food are generally inadequate in quantity and quality due to different geo-socio cultural conditions all over the world and especially in the tropical regions of the world where we have high temperature and rainfall yearly (Talabi, 2000).

It is argued that most tropical soils are leached due to erosion as a result of heavy rain and most nutrients have been washed away to the sea. At present only sea animals enjoy abundance of nutrients over that available to land animals. It is also, argued that the high temperature has

destroyed some nutrients that are not stable at high temperature e.g. Vit. C (ascorbic acid) (Talabi, 2000; Kieninger, 1980).

Apart from the augment above, the mode of preparation of the food (boiling and washing in water), has robbed most food of essential vitamins and minerals, especially the water soluble and heat sensitive ones (Vitamin C and B- complex) (Talabi, 2000).

Also the usual minerals and vitamin sources (fruit and vegetables) may not be available all the year round due to the different seasons. Even when available they are generally becoming expensive and out of reach to low income earners due to the population explosion and dwindling economy (Talabi, 2000). It is in the light of these facts that there is the need to supplement diet with multivitamins that are scientifically constituted and prepared. This will guarantee that one consumes the daily requirements on a regular basis.

Only a balanced diet that has all the six classes of food in adequate quantity and quality can create the needed superlative wellness and well-being.

## **Summary of my Contributions to Sports and Exercise Physiology**

Mr. Vice-Chancellor sir, before I conclude this lecture, it is pertinent that I give a summary of my contributions to sports and exercise. I became a professional athlete in 1974 when I joined the Oyo State Sports Council as a Player/Coach. I had wondered why, giving the same environmental conditions, some athletes at their peak cannot lift as much, jump as high or run as fast as others, who may be built very much like them. The work

of Karpovich and Sinning, (1971) made it clear that the problem can be found in the quality of their muscles, or/and in a more limited capacity for work mobilisation of their physiological systems and functions, or/and in insufficient motivation, all of which are largely genetical. This discovery led to the research title “The Progressive Production of Future Sports Champion –A Theory” (Talabi, 1987). The paper outlined how potential athletes can be produced and that the offspring of Champions are likely to be better potential champions, if properly managed.

Another impression at that time, especially in the Western part of Nigeria, was that athletes were academically inferior and that only intellectually weak students studied or participated in sports. My research finding led to the publication titled “The impact of physical Activity on Mental Development of Young Children” (Talabi, 1984). The result showed that physically active children were more mentally developed than their less active counterparts.

As a squash coach, I became interested in how to enhance squash playing ability of my athletes. The series of research work and observations were published in the papers titled “Body Purification –How Exercise can Help” (Talabi, 1990); “Athletic Performance in the Humid Tropics” (Talabi, 1992); “Cellular Homeostasis –A Vital Factor in Physical Fitness” (Talabi, 1993) and “Breath-Holding –An Adjunctive Training Programme” (Talabi, 1998). The four researches highlighted the types of fitness training programmes required for sports excellence in the Humid Tropics.

Other researches that followed titled “Sports Participation and the Development of Unilateral

Asymmetry” (Talabi, 1992) and “The Somatotype of Nigerian National Female Squash Players” (Talabi, 1997), highlighted the body composition variables essential to squash excellence in Nigeria.

I became the National Coach between 1991 and 2003. One important area of the job, apart from coaching, was to select players to represent Nigeria at international championships. I had to do further research into the ways of selecting quality players from among the good squash players in Nigeria. The result of that research work was the publication titled “Essential Variables for Assessing Squash Playing Ability of Elite Players” (Talabi, 2000) and “Using Volley as an Essential Skill for Attaining Squash Excellence” (Talabi 2000). The two papers identified simple instruments for the selection of a few players from a large population of quality squash players, especially when there is the shortage of time.

A lot of other challenges were encountered during my coaching career. They included the health of athletes, playing facilities, mental preparation of the athletes for competitions, among others. The resultant and necessary research work led to the publication of papers titled “Poor Facilities –A Deterrent to Skill Excellence in Sports” (Talabi, 1998); “Dietary Aid for Sports Excellence in Nigeria” (Talabi, 2000); Application of Oral Rehydration Therapy for Athletic Performance in the Humid Tropics (Talabi, 2001); “Optimal Strategies for the Game of Squash” (Talabi, 2006) and “Contribution of Mental Rehearsal to Sports Excellence” (Talabi, 1993). These findings have since become a blue print to many other coaches in Nigeria.

Also, during my coaching and playing career in sports, the issue of injury, injury prevention and rehabilitation, became important. I therefore focused my attention to the area of Exercise Therapy –The use of exercise to prevent, ameliorate and rehabilitate injuries. The research findings from relevant studies led to the publication of papers titled “Mental Work Stress: The Need for Exercise Therapy” (Talabi, 1998); “Exercise Therapy: A Neglected Aspect of Health Care Management in Nigeria” (Talabi, 1998); “Eye Defect: How Exercise can Help” (Talabi, 1997); “Effect of Therapeutic Exercises on Some Selected Drugs” (Onigbinde, Talabi, et al, 2011); “Occupational Stress Coping Strategies Among Lecturers in Ilorin” (Olaitan, Talabi, et al, 2011); “Comparative Efficacy of Cycle-Ergometry and Glucosamine Sulphate Iontophoresis in Pain Management of Subjects With Knee Osteoarthritis” (Onigbinde, Talabi, et al, 2011) and “Osteoarthritis: Glucosamine Sulphate Iontophoresis and Exercise Therapy” (Onigbinde, Talabi, et al, 2012). The above papers confirmed the efficacy of exercise in managing injuries.

I also participated in several research studies on Kwara State Children. These researches were funded by the Senate Research Grant of the University of Ilorin. The papers titled “Health and Performance Related Variables of Kwara State Children, Age 6-11 years” (Emiola, Ogunsakin & Talabi, 2000); “Growth Pattern of Kwara State Children” (Talabi, Emiola & Ogunsakin, 2000); “Effect of Activity Level on the Fitness and Health Status of Kwara State Primary School Children” (Emiola, Talabi and Ogunsakin, 2002); “Urban –Rural and Ethnic Trends in Body Composition and Fitness of Kwara State Children”

(Talabi, Emiola & Ogunsakin, 2003) and “Activity Level and Academic Ability of Kwara State Children” (Talabi, Emiola & Ogunsakin (2003), showed that the more active children were significantly fitter, healthier, more intelligent than their less active colleagues. The study also showed significant ethnic differences in physique of Kwarans with Ebiras being the most muscular group.

As at today, I have supervised 20 masters and 14 doctoral students in different areas of Exercise Physiology. Additionally, 2 doctoral and 6 Masters students are at different stages of completion.

## **Conclusion**

The decisions we make in life is based on the information we have. Knowledge only comes when information is used and wisdom can only come when we put knowledge into use. When we are poor, diseased, unable to achieve, weak, unfulfilled, etc., it is not always because we do not have opportunity; it is because we lack the knowledge and wisdom to act aright. There is so much information around us, but there seems to be very little knowledge and much rarer, is wisdom.

Exercise has been and is truly the best medicine.

It is easy to use

It is not expensive

It is cost effective

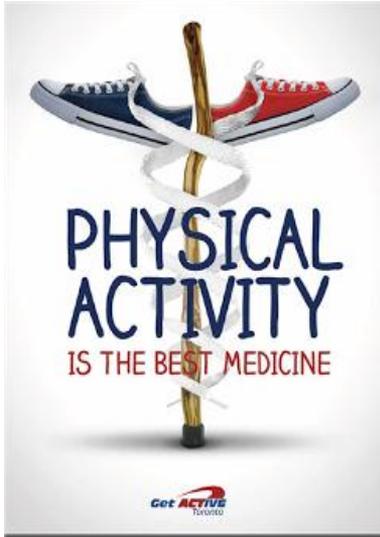
It is always available at any place and at all times

It can prevent many diseases

It can cure many ailments

It allows one to function effectively for a very long time especially during old age when self-respect, control, and dignity, are needed.

In fact, it guarantees the best “heaven” that one can have on earth.



Mr. Vice Chancellor Sir, distinguished guests, I personally have been an exponent of this philosophy and I have always spread the “good news” to all who care to listen. Since I started practising this philosophy, I have reduced to the barest minimum my use of any form of medicine, have reduced my visit to hospitals to about once in 5 years and I am always loaded with energy and have never felt tired before going to bed, in the last 10 years. Glory be to God.

My best medicine has been mainly:

1. Exercise
2. Proper Nutrition
3. Regular Breathing
4. Regular intake of large quantity of water.

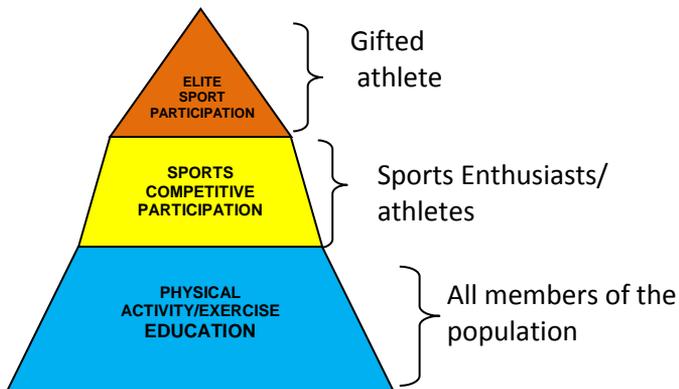
This practice has reduced the quantity of food I take on a daily basis and a lot of savings on food and drug use. Above all, I have been able to easily cope with the many stresses that life has always thrown on my path.

Notwithstanding, I am grateful to God for my superlative wellbeing, which I have come to regard as the best gift that life has offered me. I like to conclude with the words of one of my mentors – Prof. L. Emiola, (2008) “Even if exercise does not add years to your life, it will definitely add life to your years”. You can never have “paradise on earth” if you do not have peace of mind and you cannot have peace of mind if you do not enjoy superlative wellness.

## Recommendations

### The need for sports education

Mr. Vice – Chancellor Sir and all distinguished guests, there is the need for sports education at all levels.



**Figure 11:** Sports education pyramid (adapted from Emiola, 2008)

The provision of sports education must start from the home, through the primary, to the tertiary levels of education. It is one of the ways to help individuals to live a healthy and fulfilling life. This is very necessary because of the poor state of our economy, infrastructure, medical systems and personnel. This calls for strong intervention and the use of simpler, very effective ways of reducing the pressure on the nation's economy and health care system.

The benefit of good health and fitness, if experienced by the rulers and the masses, will lead to economic boom for the individual and the nation. The slogan "Sports for all" should be encouraged at all levels of government as a means of national man-power development because according to the World Economic Forum 2002, only the fit and healthy people can provide a strong foundation for economic developments (HFJI, 2003). Wilber George also affirmed that good health and fitness is a foundation for a quality day and life (HFJI, 2003). I will also say that only a healthy and fit individual can really hope to enjoy "heaven on earth".

University of Ilorin should initiate physical activity courses for all levels of students as a pre-requisite for graduation. Even a simple "walk for life" programme at every level, will raise the general status of students higher and better prepare them for future challenges. A walk to the gate and back, once a week, for all students at the University of Ilorin is hereby advocated as a course.

All students in preventive medicine (public and community health, health education) should offer courses in Health, Fitness and Wellness. This will help prepare them to be able to encourage wellness lifestyle among the people.

I pray that the little information I have given today, will translate to wisdom and result in superlative wellness to all who can take the plunge. “Heaven is far – only the fit can make it.”

Thank you all.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

To God Almighty, I cannot say thank you enough for your LOVE, GRACE and above all for LIFE. I pray that I may achieve that for which I have been destined.

To my parents, Mr. Ebenezer and Mrs. Elizabeth Talabi, of blessed memory, I bow my head in gratitude. I may not know all that it entailed to bring me to this world, but the education, experience, love that you gave me have grown into a mustard tree. I promise to be a blessing to as much as I can, while I live.

To Professor J.A. Adedeji (blessed memory) and Prof. Lasun Emiola I say thank you. Prof Adedeji permitted me and accepted me to read Exercise Physiology and Prof. Lasun Emiola brought me to Ilorin, where my life has been abundantly blessed. Thank you, Thank you and Thank you.

To University of Ilorin, where I had the opportunity to display my God given gifts and where I became a professor, I also say thank you. As long as God and you permit me, I will continue to be at your service.

To the whole of the Department of Human Kinetics where I worked for the larger part of my academic career, I thank you very much. It has been a worthwhile experience.

To the Nigeria Squash Federation and all Squash lovers in Nigeria who contributed to my exploit in my Squash career, thank you for all the money, effort, and sponsorships lavished on me, I will continue to see how I can pay back.

To my wife, children and others close and extended members of my family, I stand before you as the product of your love, care, and understanding. Thank you all for being there for me always. I promise to be there for you as the need arises.

And to all, who have come to grace this occasion, I thank you all and God bless you all.

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