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**SPEECH BY DR RICHARD HU,
MINISTER FOR FINANCE AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT,
AT THE LAUNCH OF THE WORKPLACE HEALTHY LIFESTYLE PROGRAMME
AT MINISTRY OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AUDITORIUM
ON SATURDAY, 5 SEPTEMBER 1992 AT 11.00 AM**

Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In school, our children have regular PE lessons. Most students also take part in sports, games or other extra-curricular activities which contribute towards building healthy bodies and minds. Similarly, the majority of our young men go through National Service. They have to keep fit in order to undergo the tough training and perform their rigorous military duties.

2. However, the rest of us tend to pay little attention to exercise and fitness once we start working. Hectic work schedules, family commitments and lack of facilities are common excuses given by working adults for not exercising. In a recent survey conducted among staff in the Ministry of Finance, we found that on average more than 30% of our staff indicated that they do not exercise at all. Many of those who indicated that they do exercise are not doing enough or might not be doing the right kind of exercises which will enable them to reap the desired health benefits. Nationally, the problem is also reflected in a recent study on working women which showed that about 60% of them do not exercise at all. There seems to be

an uptrend of women taking to drinking alcohol or smoking, possibly to relieve stress. There is therefore much room for improvement not only in the area of exercise but also dietary habits and stress management.

3 We know that an average person spends the greater part of his or her life working and the time spent at the workplace takes up about half of our waking hours. Yet there is a vital missing link to keeping healthy after we have passed through school and national service. Because of the length of time spent at work, there are tremendous opportunities to reinforce healthy lifestyle messages at the workplace. Employers thus have a very important role to play in encouraging their employees to stay fit and healthy.

4 The Americans have found that health promotion at the workplace is effective. My Cabinet colleagues and I have noticed that, increasingly, executives from successful U.S. corporations whom we have met tend to be trimmer and healthier. The once widely held image of the 'corpulent corporate executive' is no longer the norm. This interest in healthy living is not confined to the handful of health buffs but to a wide cross-section of people who have realised that their lifestyles determine their state of health and decided to change for the better. A recent survey of chief executives in the U.S. found that 64% exercise regularly despite their extremely busy schedules, only 10% smoke and more than 90% pay attention to their diet. These

health-conscious executives set an example for the rest of their corporations. In fact, in many corporations in the U.S., health promotion programmes have become an integral part of human resource management strategy.

5. The Government, being a major employer in Singapore, has thus decided to take the lead in promoting healthy living. The Public Service Division of the Ministry of Finance was tasked to co-ordinate the introduction of workplace healthy lifestyle programmes in 7 organisations, namely the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Health, Ministry of the Environment, Ministry of Home Affairs and 3 statutory boards, PUB, PSA and JTC. These organisations were chosen to participate in the pilot programme because they have a good cross-section of employees. The workplace healthy lifestyle programme will be offered to all employees in the 7 organisations.

6. The promotion of workplace healthy lifestyle on such a large scale is relatively new in Singapore. The National Productivity Board (NPB) Company Wellness Centre will provide the expertise and guidance as part of the national effort to promote healthy living among working adults. With the experience gained in this pilot phase, the programme will be fine-tuned before it is extended to the entire public sector. We hope that our experience will also encourage the private sector to make a similar effort to promote healthy lifestyle at the workplace.

7. For the initial 5 years, the Government will spend about \$25 million on the programme. Health education and health promotion activities will be organised around the workplace. We will also create a supportive environment to encourage our employees to adopt a healthy lifestyle, by altering or adapting social or physical surroundings, for example by encouraging availability of healthier food in workplace canteens and providing exercise and shower facilities, where feasible.

8. Employers can only facilitate healthy living. A successful transition to a healthy lifestyle involves modification of the individual's behaviour. Thus it is the employees themselves who have to be responsible for their own health.

9. As the workplace healthy lifestyle programme will show, there is actually a lot that we can do to determine our own health. We must eat wisely, exercise regularly, keep our weight under control, refrain from smoking or consuming excessive alcohol and be more safety conscious. As individuals, you should play your part by taking full advantage of the programmes that the employer provides. Peer support is also essential. Our colleagues can be a great source of encouragement so I urge you to support each other and, together, make the change towards a healthier lifestyle.

10. The benefits of a healthy lifestyle, such as increased

vitality, better quality of life and improved self esteem, are available to all who take part in healthy activities. A healthy lifestyle means you can get more out of life, all your life. It also means more active, creative and productive citizens contributing to more growth and prosperity for our nation. So I hope that each of us will play our part so that we can all "add years to our life and life to our years".

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