

HEAL

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Building a healthier generation

In an e-mail interview, Malaysia's former squash champion Datuk Nicol Ann David tells **Syida Lizta Amirul Ihsan** why it's important to introduce sports to children

NOW THAT YOU ARE RETIRED, WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN KEEPING BUSY WITH?

It has been two years since I officially announced my retirement and this new stage has been rewarding.

I've been able to be a part of so many amazing projects, initiatives and partnerships that address topics I personally identify with, such as fitness, mental health, early adoption of sports, women empowerment and, of course, squash.

Last year, digital communication had made it possible for me to continue sharing my passion for health and wellness with others — through online seminars or panels — and I've been able to share my thoughts and experience on different topics.

Last year, I joined the AIA Malaysia family as its ambassador to support its journey to help Malaysians lead a healthier life.

It has been a great ride so far. It has enabled me to explore new ways of staying active and healthy.

HOW IMPORTANT IS IT TO START CHILDREN EARLY IN SPORTS?

I've always believed that introducing sports to children at a young age can help inculcate good virtues and discipline.

My parents put me and my sister on squash when we were young to keep us occupied — and burn off our excess energy.

Knowing how sports has positively influenced me in my behaviour, my approach towards life and how I see myself, I wanted to bring that quality out in others, especially in young girls and help them build confidence in themselves.

Through the Nicol David Foundation, I want to share what squash has given me, and give girls the opportunity to dream big and achieve their goals.

I always try my best to lead by example, whether it's in my daily life or on my social

media platforms, and suggest short workout routines to keep fit, bring awareness to a health issue, or just share what I have learnt from my experience as a professional squash player.

HOW DO YOU GET THE YOUNGER GENERATION TO MAKE HEALTH A PRIORITY?

I believe we need to continuously educate them on the importance of health and staying active in the early years.

The current perception of health as something that only older people should worry about is a misconception we need to break.

The National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS) 2019 shows that one in three Malaysian adults have low health literacy and that they are unable to understand the health risk factors in their life.

One of the advantages of the younger generation is they are tech-savvy and news goes around very fast among their social circles.

We see how young people get passionate about various health trends, such as oat milk, going vegan, embracing low-sugar alternatives and also talking about mental health.

The best way to get them to prioritise health is to sustain the conversation that they have started through everyday education and to find fun ways to get them to par-

ticipate in physical activities like marathons, dance classes or team sports.

If there is one thing the pandemic has shown us, it is the importance of our immune system in fighting the virus, and this is something that everyone is becoming aware of.

If we can make health and wellness a life priority, making it just as important as getting an education, I believe that we will be able to build a healthier and better Malaysia.

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE HEALTH AWARENESS AMONG MALAYSIAN CHILDREN, TEENS AND YOUNG ADULTS?

While awareness is high, there is still work that needs to be done.

Education and consistency remain key factors in developing strong health awareness.

Having been an athlete from a young age, I've been exposed to a health regimen that has shaped the way I view health.

Over the years, I have benefited from learning about what is right for my body, both physically and mentally.

As a result, I lead an active life, maintain a healthy diet and train my mind to be strong and healthy.

While most Malaysians don't need the strict regimen that I had when I was competing professionally, I believe having

a solid understanding and awareness on health will bring long-term benefits and this is something that should be instilled from young.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR YOUNG ADULTS WITH REGARDS TO THEIR PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH?

Always be kind to yourself and make your health and wellbeing a priority.

Keep in mind that having good health is not just tied to having good physical health — the state of your mental health is equally important.

Just like in sports, we need to build a level of discipline to lead a healthy life.

From maintaining a simple exercise routine, making healthier eating choices to practising mindfulness, leading a healthy life is a choice that we consciously have to make. Over time, making healthier options will become second nature.

WHAT DO YOU DO DURING YOUR DOWNTIME?

Some people may think that all I do is work out but there are days where I have no plans, meetings or workout sessions.

On these days, I do simple things that help me unwind, such as listening to music while reading a book, sketching, catching up with friends and family, or heading out for a walk. slizta@mediaprima.com.my

Nicol says having a solid understanding and awareness on health will bring long-term benefits.

