

the pepper story



pepper



putting health in the hands of people

Why are health-conscious people uncool?

Why are we 'market segments' for healthcare companies?

Why do we sleep on our health until we are jolted?

Why do we not get up and move about?

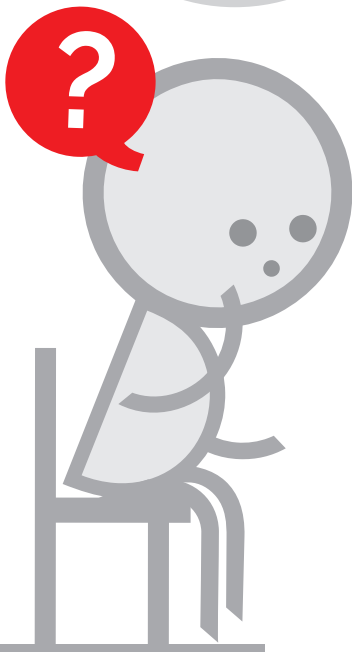
Why are business leaders not worried about their human capital?

Why do doctors treat diseased organs—not unwell people?

Why are we on the way to becoming the diabetes capital of the world?

Why does our hospital bill bloat if we have 'insurance cover?'

Why are those who eat to live asked, "Dieting?"



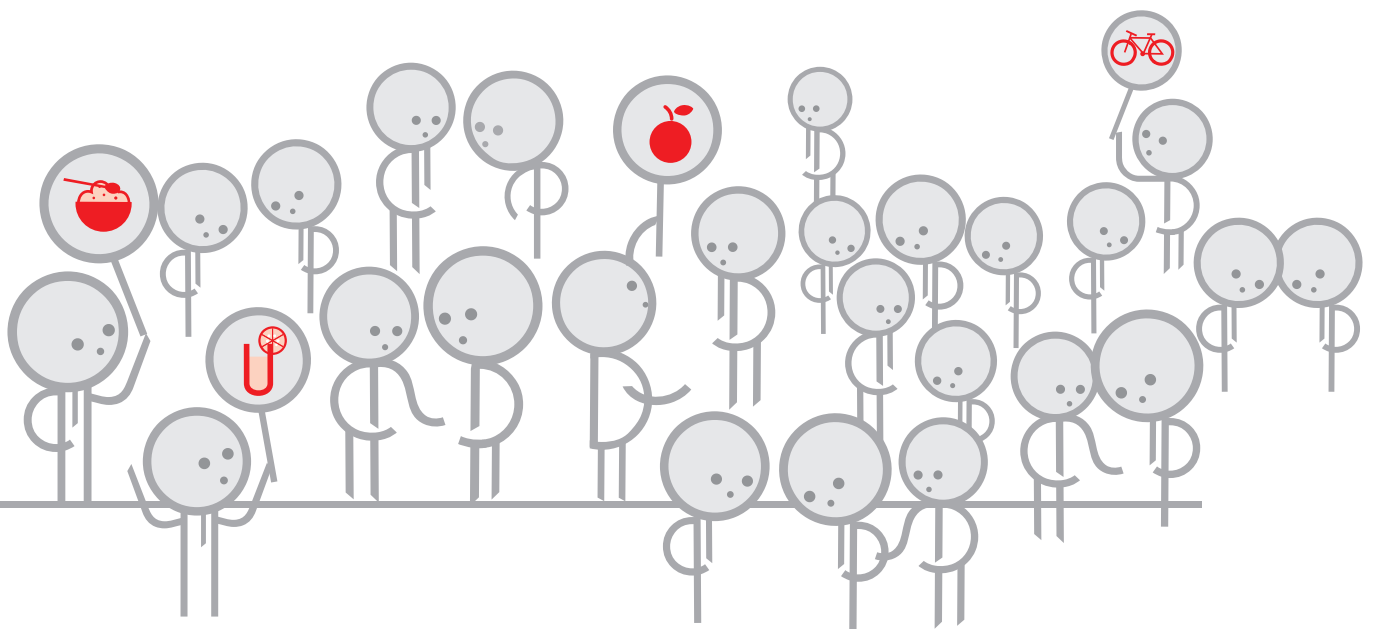
So many whys were disturbing us, we thought it's time we did something about it.

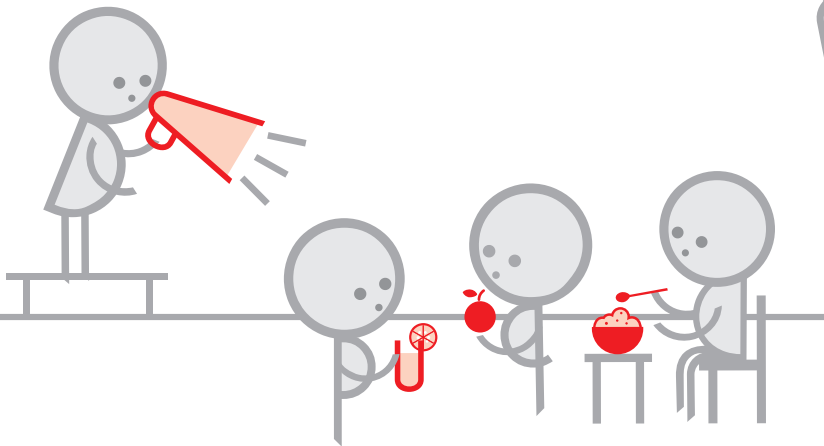
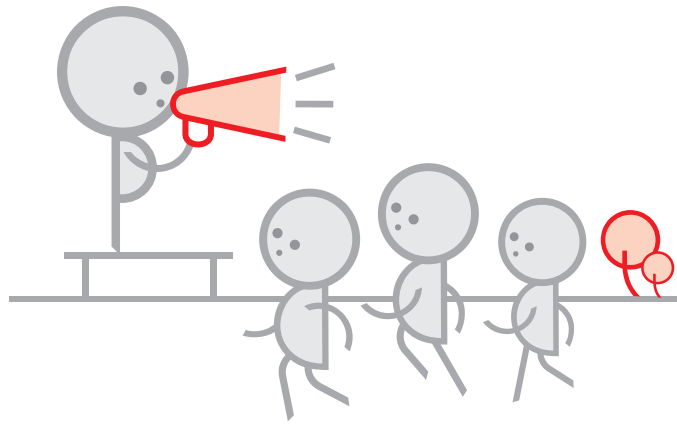
We started exploring—spent over a year talking to people from all walks of life, data mining, and meeting experts. Was the situation really beyond repair?

Were the powerful forces of advertising, mindless consumption and institutional apathy sweeping away our health from under our feet?

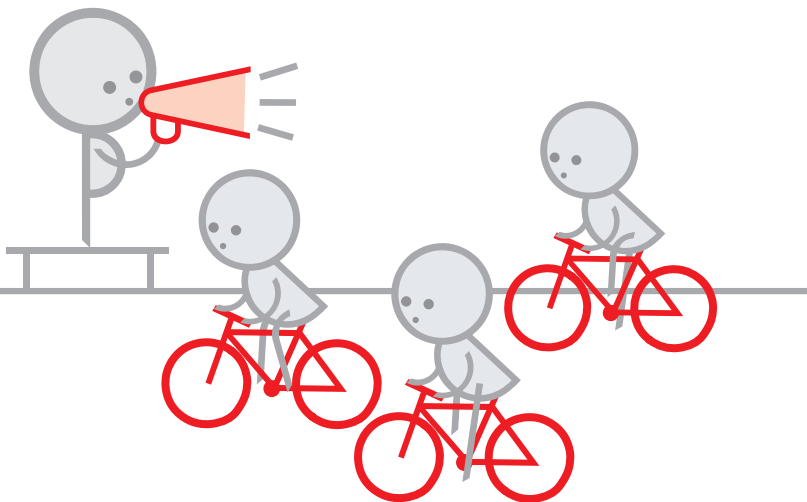
Many people echoed our thoughts.

But to our pleasant surprise, we also met those who were going against the flow: people who had decided to take charge of their health.





Some of these people had taken it upon themselves to spread the benefits of valuing health—doctors who wanted patients to be experts, athletes who trained executives to run, an ordinary man who after losing his right limbs to paralytic stroke became a left-handed artist, a super model who wanted every woman to be fit.

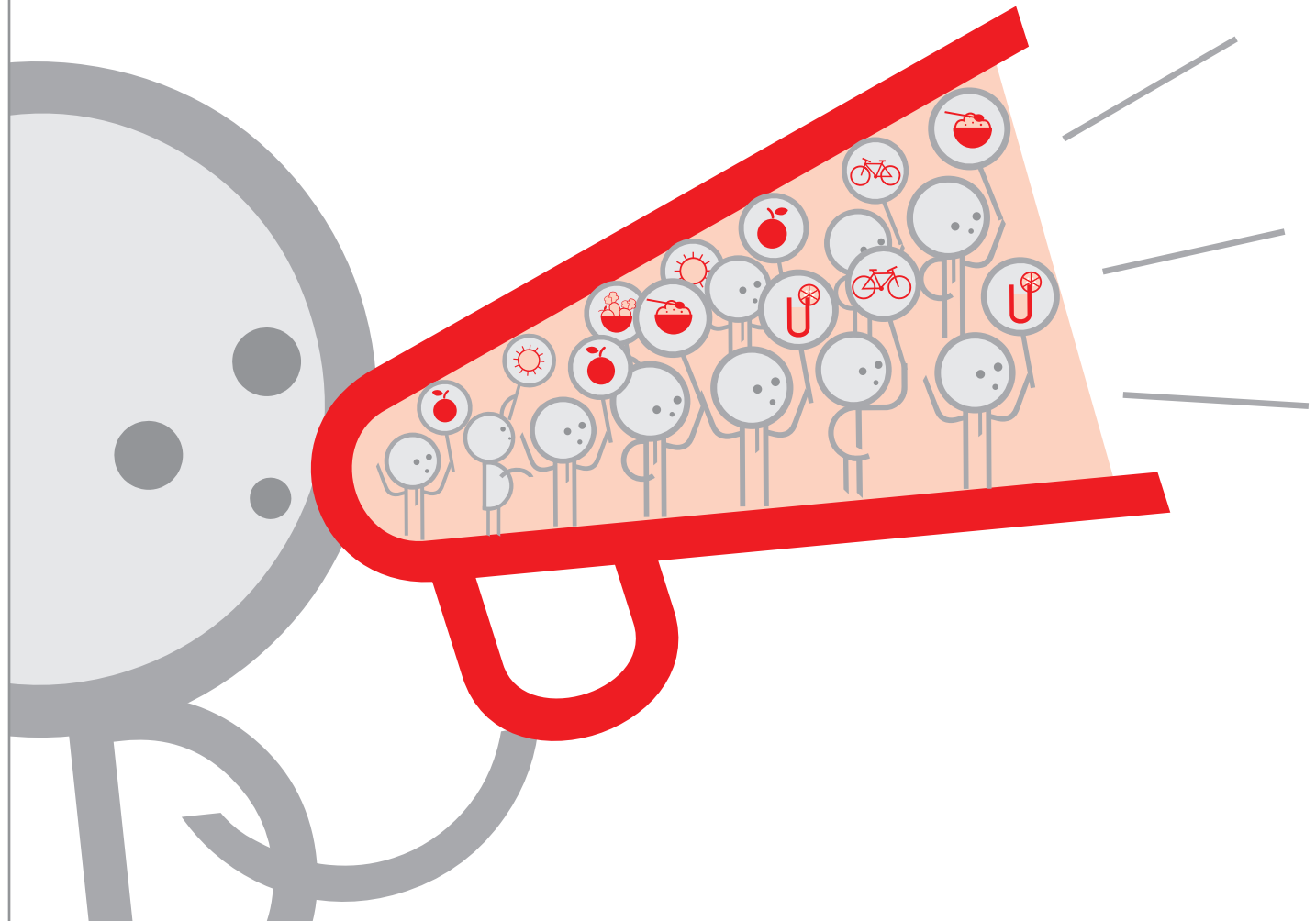


And that was it.

We decided to make it our life's work to put health in the hands of people—unify these small groups of health-conscious people into an ever expanding community; give them tools to get healthier; a platform to exchange ideas and inspire others to value health.

In this way we want to lead a nationwide movement that will one day put the whys to rest.

What are the founders' ideas? Read on.





Bindu Menon

Everybody needs a buddy

The journey towards good health can seem long and lonely when you have to go through it alone. Everyone needs a buddy, someone to talk to. Not just someone who can give medical advice, but someone who cares, someone who can be rational when you tend to be emotional, someone who can be positive when you want to give up. And that someone can be a family member, a friend, a neighbor, someone who has gone through a similar situation, a colleague, and sometimes a stranger who can listen with empathy.

Knowingly or unknowingly I have been that friend to many such people. Maybe it was because my work in the healthcare industry made me appear a bit more knowledgeable. And as I travelled with them on this path, I discovered some strengths in the Indian way, where caring for a family member is a way of life, where trusting a doctor without questioning is the norm. And on the other hand, was also confronted with a lot of issues, like lack of knowledge about the disease, not knowing whom to consult, contradicting opinions given by doctors, no standardized way of treatment, lack of adherence, late detection, non availability of treatment and lack of affordability. When a very loved family member lost the battle with kidney disease at the age of 22, we did not realize that it was not destiny, but a wrong choice at a very critical time that took him there. And then there were instances of people dealing with health situations in their own unique and beautiful ways.




While looking at these instances more carefully, one thing came through very strongly. People who live well despite their conditions are those who made better choices. They chose to eat better, exercise better, breathe better and lead a more wholesome life. It is a Pramod, who became an advocate for CML patients and decided to spread awareness among his fellow patients, a Sriram who decided to change his food habits to get his weight back on track, a Sujeesh who conquered stress and became a marathon runner.

While listening to their stories and of many others, I learned some very valuable lessons. Yes, disease is a reality. But it is not the end of life. It can trigger positive changes and make life more balanced and beautiful. While medicine and medical advice is important, equally important is the person's own decision to be healthy. Often a little nudge from a friend can help us get back on a healthy track. And most important, health has to be one of the primary values for every family. While we set career goals, financial goals and personal goals, we should not forget to set health goals. That will keep our life positive and happy.

I know everyone has a story to tell. About how medical insurance companies did not pay the promised sum, how doctors prescribe medicines that are unnecessary, how a person was unaware of the harmful side effects of the drugs he was taking, how better control of a condition was achieved by making one small change in diet, how a family got back to health by controlling obesity in their children.

The desire to give a voice to such experiences inspired us to start this movement called pepper. I sincerely believe pepper can fuel the next revolution by putting health in your hands.



" People who live well despite their conditions are those who made better choices: to eat better, exercise better, breathe better and lead a more wholesome life."



Sujeesh Sukumaran

I thought I was superman!

I have been a physically active person as far as memory takes me. My love for sport persisted throughout my college days. I played all kinds of sport – football, hockey, table tennis, basketball, swimming and badminton.

When it came to food, I could digest anything. My roommates called me 'dustbin'. Because I didn't like wasting food, I used to finish what they couldn't eat. Though I used to hog, I was always in good shape, had great stamina and good strength. So, naturally, I thought I was superman. I thought I would always be healthy because I used to exercise regularly and eat mostly homemade food.

Then, I started working. I enjoyed my work, so I used to put in long hours. I travelled, and had street food across the country. I did very little physical activity. Of course, I continued to think I was superman.

Then came the rude shock, 5 years into my work life. I had a panic attack. There was a pain in the chest region, lot of acidity and slight perspiration. I thought I was having a heart attack and woke up my wife, who made me relax. Fortunately, the pain and discomfort subsided in a couple of hours and both of us could sleep. Because I believed I was superman, I thought I had over-imagined the situation. I forgot about the incident and did not even visit a doctor.




I experienced such attacks three or four times in the next 5 years. By this time I had ventured into entrepreneurship by starting a healthcare communications company. But, ironically, I did not have the time to think about health. Over time, the frequency of the attacks started increasing and it reached a stage where I started having nightmares along with the pain and discomfort. I used to spend sleepless nights 2 to three times a month. I decided to go to a doctor and under his treatment the nightmares vanished. I continued the medication for a year and then stopped.

After a small gap, the attacks came back with a vengeance. It happened once or twice a week. I said to myself, I am only 38. I can't continue to live like this. I have to take charge. I decided to use the knowledge I had gained working with healthcare companies.

I cut down on my long work hours, reduced intake of outside food and started exercising 5 days a week – 2 days of yoga and 3 days at a gym. Though not perfectly regular, I managed to do it most of the time. Yoga helped me relax and de-stress. It improved my flexibility. Slowly and steadily, things started improving. This motivated me to continue. It paid off. For more than 3 years now, I have been sleeping like a log every day.

I am 42 now and have run two half marathons (I could not run more than 3km when I started), the last one at a speed of 12 kmph hour. I am training to run the full marathon this year. I also cycle regularly. I feel active, healthy and energetic. I no longer believe I am superman. I am conscious about having a healthy lifestyle and now do things in moderation.

I know there are millions out there like me who want to better their health. I want to help them make it their primary concern. I think wealth has meaning only if you have the health to enjoy it. And that's why I am part of pepper. Join me. Let's start a movement towards better health.



"Health should be our primary concern. If we are in good health, we can enjoy all our wealth."



Krishnan Sivaramakrishnan

Stubbing the habit

I was a schoolboy of regular habits until grade eleven, when, at age 16, I turned a smoker. Three years of being a heavy smoker, averaging three packs a day, I quit the habit, September '79. How did I quit? I believe I did four things that worked for me.

Get in touch with the voice in your head.

We all have a voice in our heads that guides us to right choices. Years of not following the guidance subdue that voice. I believe the power behind my decision to quit smoking came from my resolve to revive that voice.

Three months ago, dissatisfied with a life headed nowhere, I decided to drop out of my university exams. That decision irked my friends. They branded me an escapist. But I needed time to take charge of myself, put my studies back on track, I reasoned. That decision changed my life. It was the first big decision I could call my own, after my mother's sudden passing a year ago. It thrust the onus on me, to shape up—which I did.

Owning that decision showed me I could stand up for what I believed in. And each time I stood up for myself, I felt the voice in my head grow stronger.



Promise yourself you'll break the habit.

Looking back, I believe quitting smoking was part of that wave of reform in my life. Again, another powerful element was at play—a promise to myself, a pledge to a close friend. Those days, I had a persistent cough that would rattle my ribs. And when I produced spit, it would be dark grey. “Tar,” my friends would reassure me, knowingly, “It’s normal—relax.” That often made me wonder with concern what smoking was doing to my body.

I would often tell Matthew, my close friend, that I would soon kick the habit.

Don't try to quit—just quit.

I had tried quitting smoking many times: successful, until I lit the next cigarette. I would cut cigarettes into two: to taper the habit until I stopped, eventually. I would stay away from the canteen, a smoking hotspot. I used to take smoking holidays...

It became clear that trying to stop did not work for me.


But that day in September, a few blocks from home, when I lit a cigarette, I didn't know it was to be my last. It was a powerful moment, as I dragged in smoke, that made me stomp the cigarette and say, “I'm done with smoking”. And it's been 35 years since that day.

Put yourself to test.

The morning after I quit, at 7.15, I walked to college, a street from my home. Stepping inside, I glanced at the cigarette store across the road, my first port of call every morning. Only yesterday, I had stood in front of the store, bought my smoking supplies, and lit my first cigarette of the day. Would I succumb to temptation, if I were to stand in front of the store, facing its friendly owner?

To test my resolve, I crossed the street. Greeting Luckoo, the owner of the friendly neighborhood store, handing him Rs 10, I asked for a pack of Kismi, a popular candy. Used to handing over my customary pack of cigarettes, his eyes popped.

“Maine cigarette chod diya,” I declared in triumph, handing over a candy, “Meetha khao.”



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in our heads that guides
us to right choices.
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decision to quit smoking
came from my resolve
to revive that voice.



Jitendra Kotian

Health is wealth

I have been a person with average energy and moderate level of fitness. Though, in my childhood I used to be frequently unhealthy, I started working on my health from my mid teens. That helped me improve my immunity and reduce medication. Last 3 years of my schooling had been without any absenteeism, and that was a great achievement for me, then.

During my college days, I started believing the saying 'Health is wealth', however never tested my capability. I have been always a firm believer of balanced diet and without a smoking or drinking habit this provided a good balance of sound health.

I got a self boost to improve my health only with an easy access to gym within my residential complex. I started working on building those muscles and improving my endurance and strength. Soon, became one of those very few regular ones and started to be recognized as a committed body builder. During this period I also realized the importance of nutrition and diet for the right set of muscles and stamina.

In 2007, I was one of the 96 participants chosen by my organization to run the Standard Chartered Mumbai Marathon (SCMM) Half Marathon of 21.097 kms. I had never run more than a km in my life. With sheer will power, I was the only one from my organization to complete the run. It was no doubt a very painful experience but the accomplishment kept the pain at bay.



This was just the beginning and I realized some aspects of my body and health:

1. Age is just a number for any beginning and more so for physical fitness
2. Preparing mentally and adhering to it is the key to physical well being
3. There is no limit to achievement as long as it is practical
4. If committed and consistent the Best is always to come

I have been always an organized person and with this understanding and self motivation I felt the need to take my personal fitness to the next level. I started feeling good when others got motivated because of me. I always wanted to make a positive difference in peoples' lives. I decided to run at least every SCMM, if not other marathons. And, since then have run about 4 half marathons and 3 full marathons, and my performance has always been improving till now. My mantra was to prepare and adhere to my training schedule. With just over two months of regular training I have been successfully running full marathons. The first one clocked about 5:21 hours and the latest one being at 4:46 hours. Over the last two years I have also figured out the effect of nutrition in my daily diet on my body that directly affects the muscles and fat percentage. The level of self-confidence built is far more than these statistical numbers determining performance improvement. I believe fitness is a combination of well-being, energy, stamina, endurance and strength. With a sound knowledge and constant awareness I believe to be my own guide. With some milestones achieved I have been felicitated and known in my social and community circles.

I would personally feel very good if I could contribute to my family and friends on their well-being. But, my satisfaction level can be exponential if my learning and experiences could motivate and increase the health value of a larger population base. With this value and thought I am now part of Pepper to take my dreams of better health and well being for the people of my country.

