

health

AGENDA

Inspiring you to make healthier choices

WORKPLACE BURNOUT

HOW TO SPOT IT
AND TAKE ACTION


+

ENDOMETRIOSIS

RENEWED HOPE FOR
AUSSIE WOMEN

fit
for life

THE BENEFITS
OF EXERCISE IN
OLDER AGE



A HEALTHY BODY AND MIND
ARE THE SECRETS TO A
LONG AND HAPPY LIFE, SAY
EXPERTS. AND WHAT BETTER
PROOF THAN NICHOLAS
BASTAS, A PROFESSIONAL
ATHLETE WHO MOTIVATES
OTHERS EVERY DAY.

Words Charmaine Yabsley

Photography Chris Elfes

THE RACE OF *life*

Nicholas Bastas, 81, is an inspirational runner who credits his health and positive attitude to his exercise regime. It's a training schedule that would even tire a man half his age, but Bastas, who lives in Sydney with his wife and son, believes it's when we stop moving that we get old.

"I've always been a competitor," he says. "When I was a kid, I didn't like to compete against people my own age; they were too slow. I'd run with the older kids instead. Sometimes I'd cop it from them because they didn't want me beating them."

Bastas has always been ambitious, even when facing challenges. He moved to Australia from Egypt in 1954 when he was 15 years old and instead of going to school, his father enrolled him in technical college to study engineering.

"I speak five languages, but when I arrived here, I couldn't speak much English. I had to study twice as much as the other boys. But nothing comes easy; you have to work hard at it," Bastas recalls.

"As I got older, I got stuck into work, but I still made time for fitness."

A LIFETIME OF ACHIEVEMENTS

In his late 30s and 40s he started competing in long-distance running competitions in the 5,000m, 10,000m and marathons. He proudly points out that he's clocked up a total of 22 marathons.

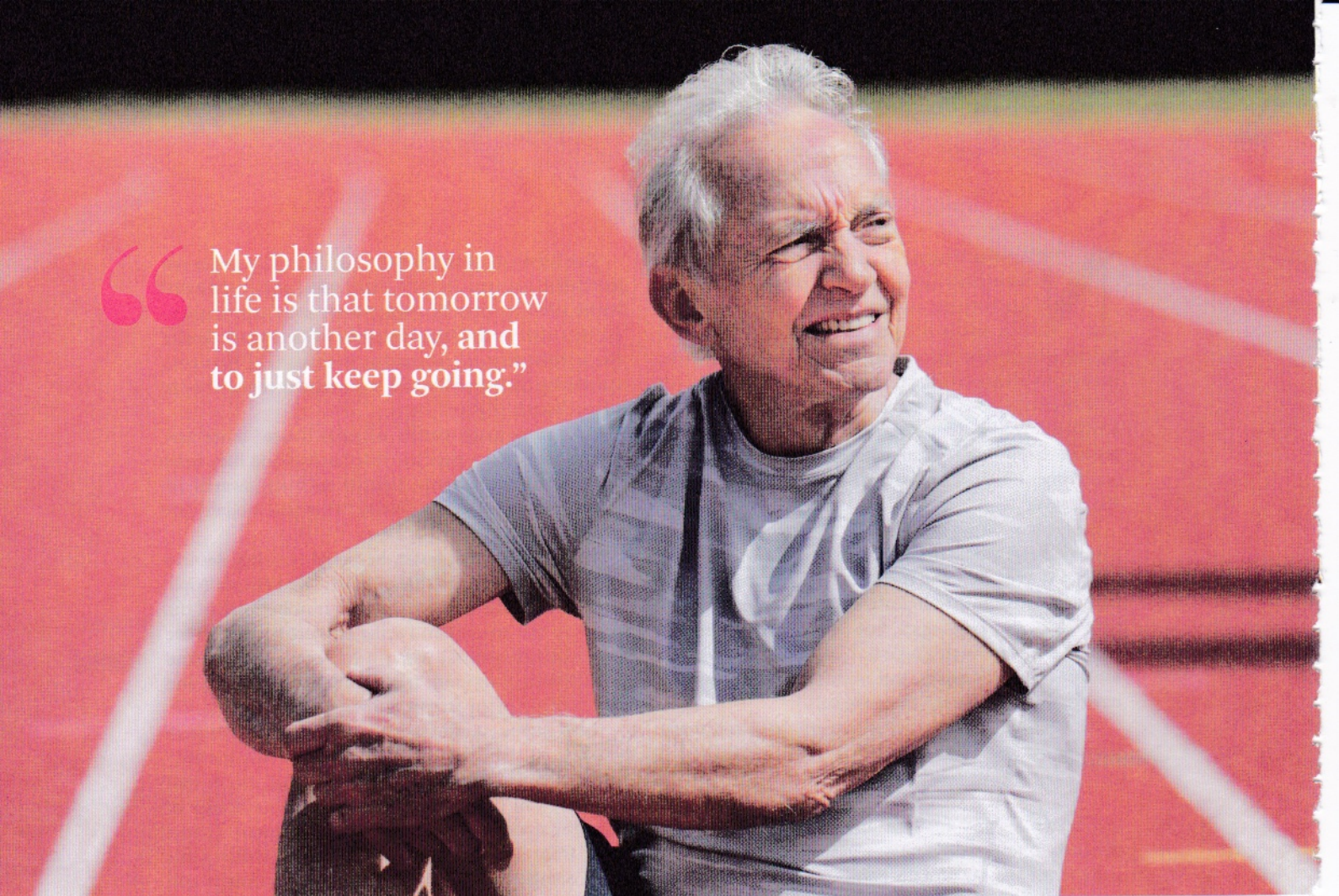
"I've been competing for the last 10 to 12 years in the Australian Masters. In 1978, I was asked to join the NSW Police running club. In 1980, I went away with them to the USA and ran the Bay to Breakers in San Francisco and also 10-mile races in Los Angeles, San Diego and Honolulu against the US Police. I'm still involved with them. They're a great bunch of guys."

There are so many medals in Bastas' house – more than 400 at last count – that his wife has banned him from bringing any more home. Despite his many awards, he doesn't have them out on display. "They [the medals] just sit in boxes," he laughs.

If Bastas wanted to boast, he would certainly deserve to. In 2017, he won the title of Australian Masters Triple Jump Champion and he's ranked number one in the world. At the recent Pan Pacific Masters Games on the Gold Coast he won the 60m (in 9.5 seconds), 100m and 200m sprints, long jump, triple jump and high jump, and came second in the javelin throw.

"I was happy coming second in the javelin – the man who beat me admitted he couldn't run to save his life," he says. "I also competed in the shot put, discus and heavy weight [weight throw – a round metal ball of different sizes and weight with a short chain]. I came home from the games with 20 medals. In February this year I competed in the NSW State Championships and won eight medals: six gold, two silver." ➤





“My philosophy in life is that tomorrow is another day, and to just keep going.”

**fast
fact**

52%

of Australian males over the age of 75 were sedentary or had low levels of exercise in 2014–15.

Source: Heart Foundation

Like all dedicated athletes, Bastas has experienced a few health setbacks along with all his wins. “I had a heart attack when I was 49 years old. Then, two years later, I had a bigger, massive heart attack and a quadruple bypass,” he says. But this didn’t dampen his enthusiasm for life and fitness. Instead, he got up and kept running.

“It was a shock, since I was so fit, but I didn’t spend any time feeling sorry for myself. I didn’t ask why it happened. My philosophy in life is that tomorrow is another day and to just keep going. It’s like running: you just have to keep going, looking ahead, not at the people behind you, but forwards to where you’re going.”

While he loves the competitiveness and comradeship of running, he also knows that it plays a large part in keeping his health and wellbeing in check.

“Running keeps me calm, and it helps keep my brain alert,” he says. “I don’t forget things. I don’t need to write a shopping list, even if it’s 20 items; I won’t forget anything.” Bastas says that his wife relies on him to remember their shopping list – a challenge he enjoys exercising during their morning strolls to the local shops.

In fact, almost every part of his day is spent doing something active, whether it’s business, socialising within the local community or at his local sports club.

“I like to keep active,” he says during our interview, as he gets ready for his daily training session. “Every day, I

get up and do my work. I’m semi-retired now. I’ve built pools my whole life, but it’s heavy, hard work. So I’ve scaled back, troubleshooting and putting in filters and pool pumps. I work in the mornings, then I come home and take my wife for a coffee at one of our local cafés. There’s always someone to talk to there.

“Plus, I do a lot of training. I train three times a week with the UTS Norths athletic club in Sydney. There’s about five or six of us. They’re a bit younger than me, but I’m not the eldest. I’ve been lucky with my knees – most of my friends have had knee replacements,” he says.

He fully participates in his club’s training regime, including 200m, 100m and 60m sprints. He then moves on to track and field training, including long jump and triple jump, before going to the gym for weight training.

And while he competes in the big leagues, he also finds time to participate in interclub competitions, including the Northern Zone, which takes place from September to March.

HEALTH HABITS TO LIVE BY

After Bastas’ quadruple bypass, he took stock of his lifestyle habits and diet. While he has never smoked or drunk heavily, mainly due to his time spent in Europe when he adopted the Mediterranean way of life, he’s still careful about what he eats. He starts each day with a glass

of warm water, a squeeze of lemon and a dash of honey, "to settle his stomach". Then he'll have porridge and a banana, followed by a cup of tea.

"My lunch is fruit – whatever is in season – and two to three eggs," he says. "I'll eat two whole eggs, and just the white of the other. Then three grain biscuits with avocado – never butter. I look at food and think about whether that food gives me anything positive," he says. "If it doesn't, it goes back on the shelf. I do have a small portion of dark chocolate every day; my heart surgeon agrees that a little of what you like is good for you."

On training days he'll eat lightly at midday and drink plenty of water. And he always ensures he has a banana packed with his running kit for a boost of energy.

Bastas eats meat just once a week, preferring to enjoy fish, such as Atlantic salmon, and a lot of vegetables, on the other nights.

"I was lucky to inherit good genes and habits from my parents and grandparents. I had the nasty heart but it hasn't worried me too much," he admits. He says that he is so healthy that his heart specialist doesn't even want to see him, secure in the knowledge that Bastas looks after himself on a daily basis.

"After my quadruple bypass I was shocked and worried about how long I'd be able to continue to train. But as long as I keep enjoying it, I'll keep doing it."

Nothing, it seems, daunts Bastas – not even an invitational challenge from a world champion.

"A couple of years ago, when Usain Bolt was in Australia, they tried to set up a race with me running 60m to his 100m. I guarantee you I'd have been ahead of him!"

Bastas is still waiting on a race date, but we'd bet that he'd give Bolt a run for his money. 🏃

Nicholas Bastas' tips for good health

- 1 **Be positive.** You're never too old to try something. If I can do it with a quadruple bypass, anyone can.
- 2 **Don't be lazy!** I get up at 5am every day, and by 7am I'm ready to go and do some of my work.
- 3 **Train your muscles.** The heart is a muscle and by doing exercises you'll strengthen it a bit. Don't sit around waiting for doomsday.
- 4 **Keep social.** I've got friends from all over the world and they'll come and watch me doing my silly races. Then we'll all go out and celebrate together.



Find out about heart disease factors to watch for on page 6. Members with extras cover, aged 18+, can get a free heart health check at a local HCF branch, visit hcf.com.au/victorchang for dates and details.

BELOW

Bastas has earned many medals and awards, including Australian Masters Triple Jump Champion.

