IMPROVING YOUR PHYSICAL WELLBEING

In a car, we know that the battery needs to be well charged for optimal performance and the same can be said for your body, with your lifestyle habits either replenishing or depleting your internal battery. If you spend too long depleting your battery and not enough time replenishing it, your health and wellbeing may suffer.

During a time where 'social distancing' is becoming a way of life, we are being asked to live differently, albeit temporarily. Feeling isolated from family, friends and community can have a significant impact on our wellbeing so it's critical we find new ways to support body and mind.

Justin Jones, Professional Head of Physiology at Nuffield Health explains: "To make sure you are looking after your overall wellbeing you need to make sure you focus on replenishing factors, such as good quality **sleep**, **exercise**, **hydration** and quality **nutrition**. Try to limit depleting factors such as **alcohol**, **caffeine** and leading a **sedentary** lifestyle."

"Having a bad night's sleep over a long period of time can have a dramatic effect on your health. But luckily, there are some simple changes you can make to improve your sleep, which will help contribute to overall wellbeing."

1. Follow a schedule all week
"Sleeping in" on weekends makes it harder to wake up early on Monday morning because it re-sets your sleep cycles for a later awakening. Try instead going to bed at a set time each night and setting your alarm for the same time each morning. This has the added bonus of giving you extra time to be productive at the weekend.

2. Exercise daily
Try to exercise for 20 to 30 minutes every day. Daily exercise can help to use all of the energy you've stored from eating and so can help you sleep. This could be as simple as a brisk walk round the block. When you work out is equally important because exercise can also cause a spike in adrenaline, which keeps your body in an alert state. For maximum benefit, try to get your exercise about five to six hours before going to bed.

3. Limit caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol
These are all stimulants which increase your blood pressure and heartrate, keeping you awake. Cutting out caffeine could in the long run remove the desire for that mid-afternoon pick-me-up cappuccino.

4. Unwind before bed

Taking a warm bath, reading, or meditation before you go to bed can make it easier to fall sleep. Lavender is a naturally soothing scent which can be used to help lull you to sleep too. It's possible to train yourself to associate certain restful activities and smells with sleep and make them part of your bedtime ritual.

5. Control your room temperature

Extreme temperatures can disrupt sleep or prevent you from falling asleep in the first place, so try to maintain a comfortable temperature in the bedroom either by opening a window, using air conditioning or adapting the thermostat or heaters in your room.

6. Sleep until sunlight

Sunlight helps the body's internal biological clock to reset itself each day so if possible, wake up with the sun, or use very bright lights in the morning. There are even alarm clocks that mimic the effect of the sun rising to wake you up gently every day.

7. Turn off all other lights

Light from under the door or electronic devices can be very disruptive to your sleep, particularly if the light is flashing. This is because your body is naturally programmed to wake up with light. So, if you have a light on your phone or any other device turn it off to give your body the best chance of uninterrupted sleep.

8. Put down your phone

And your laptop. These devices emit blue light, which can be disruptive to sleep. Put them down at least an hour before bed and maybe pick up a book instead.

Jack Meeks, a personal trainer with over 10 years' experience in the fitness industry, has helped countless people make the right choices when it comes to their overall fitness and wellbeing, including their heart health. He also shares his top tips for staying on top of your health and wellbeing.

Add more fibre into your diet

A high-fibre diet is associated with a lower risk of stroke, heart disease, and bowel cancer. Eating plenty of fibre also helps to keep you feeling fuller for longer and normalises bowel movements. To add more fibre into your diet, add oats, fruit, unsalted nuts and vegetables to your shopping list!

Be creative with your cooking to make it easier to get your 'five a day'

Getting your 'five a day' can be made a lot easier if you aim to have vegetables with every meal. If you are looking for easier ways to get more vegetables into your diet, try blending leeks, carrots, peppers, courgettes and tomatoes together to make a delicious pasta sauce. When it comes to snack time, step away from the sugary treats and opt for fruit instead. An apple could provide you with the sweetness that you are craving.

Step away from the salt

A lower sodium diet can reduce the risk of high blood pressure, heart disease and stroke. A lot of the food that we buy from the supermarkets contains salt, so before you reach for it at the dinner table, taste your food first!

Remember how important it is to drink plenty of water!

We've all heard that we need to drink more water. Water is vital for health and can help as part of any weight loss plan.

Water ensures your brain and body are functioning optimally. Dehydration slows down every cellular process in the body, and not consuming enough can impair your strength, power and performance output.

More specific to weight loss, not getting enough water means your liver will metabolise less fat as it has to step in and assume some of the functions of your kidneys when dehydration sets in. Water can also help to fill you up more and reduce hunger when losing weight.

A good daily water intake target to aim for is around 1 litre per 20kg of bodyweight. A useful tip anyone can use is drinking a glass or two of water 10 minutes before you eat a meal – it really helps with dietary adherence and curtails overeating.

Look after your mental health

From meditation to a change of scene, there are many ways to look after your mental health. What might suit one person may not necessarily suit another, so it is important to play around to find out what works for you. Listening to music, writing down your thoughts and feelings or talking to a loved one can all be valuable.

Keeping a gratitude diary is extremely helpful – writing down your 3 daily wins at the end of the day helps you to stay positive. It could be something as simple as, 'finished a book I really enjoyed reading' or 'reconnected with an old friend over skype'.

Make time for rest and recovery

Rest is crucial, so aim for at least 7 hours of sleep each night. To unwind before bed, change into comfortable clothing and avoid playing on your phone 1 hour before you plan to sleep. If your day has been particularly manic, it's okay to have that well-deserved time off.