

OVERVIEW: HEALTH, FITNESS AND HAPPINESS

By

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BODY WEIGHT

One of the most common signs of a person who is not living a well-balanced life is progressive weight gain. Each and every year small increases in bodyweight often occur and over the longer term it is quite easy to end up obese, in very poor health and dissatisfied with your body image. This is currently happening on a world wide scale and the negative health effects of obesity have become a major global epidemic. Excessive weight gain is a clear sign of a body that is not being well managed.

Diet vs Exercise

It is popularly believed that exercise and diet play an equal role in weight loss. This is not true. Weight loss is about 90% diet and about 10% exercise, and hence effective and long term weight management is all about improving your food intake. Exercise is important to develop a fit and healthy body and it is certainly an essential component of a healthy, fit and happy lifestyle, but it is not a major component in the weight loss equation. Above I have outlined what a small amount of food makes up 250 calories i.e. 1 small chocolate bar. Now let's look at how much exercise you need to do to burn 250 calories. Let's imagine you are 100 kg body weight and want to lose weight. To expend 250 calories of energy through exercise you would have to walk briskly for about 40 minutes, train vigorously in the gym for about 25 minutes or swim, cycle or slow jog for about 20 minutes. And you would have to do one of these activities every day. So is it easier not to eat 1 small chocolate bar or briskly walk for 40 minutes? And of course once you finished your 40 minute brisk walk you feel hungry and thus tend to eat more. This is why you see so many over-weight people in the gym who do not lose weight, even after years of training. The exercise sessions burn up relatively small amounts of energy, and when they are finished they tend to eat more food. Hence they are not achieving an energy deficit. They are not addressing the main cause of their problem, which is excessive energy intake. This is the key to weight loss, attention to diet (energy intake).

HEALTH AND STRESS

Another obvious indicator of a person who is not living a well-balanced lifestyle is excessive stress and poor health. This is often seen through repeated illness, such as colds and flues, outbursts of anger, constantly being impatient, upset or worried; excessive moodiness and poor sleep quality. Like being over-weight, poor physical and mental health is a major problem in our society and prevents many people from achieving a well-balanced, happy and healthy life. It is a truly sad indictment of our time that the number one cause of death for people under 44 years of age in many developed countries is suicide. Problems such as depression and anxiety are rising as the stress of life increases. Various strategies need to be undertaken to reduce your exposure and responsiveness to stress and medical illness.

The Benefits of Exercise

Exercise is a well-established technique to reduce stress and improve health. The hormones and endorphins that are naturally produced during and after exercise allow the body to improve its immune function and reduce the possibility of disease and stress. The human body is designed to move and exercise. It is not supposed to be sitting in front of a small computer or TV screen for long periods of time each and every day. It does not function well without regular physical activity. Hence it is imperative to commence a regular exercise routine where exercise becomes a normal part of each and every day. I recommend training every day as daily habits are easier to maintain than training every second day or 5 times per week (i.e. weekend off). Positive life habits are easier to maintain if they are done every day and you become accustomed to doing exercise every day. It becomes a normal and natural part of your everyday life.

Every day I exercise for 1 to 2 hours duration. I do a different exercise each day and every 4 days I run for 1 hour as part of my fitness routine. Previously I have done this while running on the beach or road. However, as I have aged my knees find the impact force of running on the road or beach too hard and now I run using an elliptical cross trainer. I push myself quite hard and try and achieve somewhere between 12 to 14 kilometers in the hour, maintaining a constant speed with an average heart rate of about 150 beats per minute. Before running I may have many dramas going on in my life. But after pushing myself for 1 hour I am physically exhausted and mentally relaxed. I can feel the endorphins kick into my system towards the end of the run and they have a remarkably calming effect on my thought processes. I often have not figured out what to do about all my life dramas. I have just understood that all that stuff is not as important a problem as I had imagined. It is a remarkably effective stress relaxation therapy, as well as having positive effects on the health of my cardio-vascular system. It is often called "runners high" and it is fantastic, a real health enhancing stress reduction gift that should be a natural inclusion to everyone's weekly routine. Now if you are currently over-weight and unfit you are not going to be able to run intensely for 1 hour. But gradually you can build up over time and experience the "runners high" as a regular part of your weekly routine.

Recreational Activities

Along with my regular exercise routine, my other main health enhancing and stress reduction strategy is recreational activities that allow me to actively engage with beautiful natural surroundings. All life forms on planet earth are sustained by the planet. The air you breathe, the food and water you drink are all provided by the planet. You may buy your food from the local shops but it is produced by the earth, sun, water and natural elements. They sustain all of us. In recent time many people have removed themselves from regular exposure to nature and spend most of their time indoors sitting in front of a computer, or a TV screen and have little exposure to the natural elements. This is not a healthy situation. Regular exposure to nature is a useful strategy to help reduce daily stress and improve your health. Each week I will go cycling, swimming and/or walking through nature as part of my recreational activities. I do not count these activities as exercise. They do burn some energy, but the focus is to allow me to connect with my natural surroundings.

For example, I currently live in a gated community which has beautifully maintained gardens with lots of birds and trees. Once or twice a week I ride my bike with my wife around the residence and take in all the beautiful natural surroundings, the sound of the birds, the beauty of the trees, the smell of the cut grass and flowers, the morning sunlight and the feeling of the cool breeze. It is simply magnificent. We ride for about 1 hour and I do not record the speed or my heart rate or distance. I do not ride particularly fast and I do not wear headphones or bring my mobile phone. I am connecting with nature, this is my recreation time. Similarly, I also swim once or twice a week. In my residential community we have a beautifully maintained outdoor pool surrounded by lovely trees and gardens. I will swim one lap and walk back and perform this for about 20 minutes doing about 10 laps of the 35 meter pool. After finishing my swim I will lie out for about 10 minutes in the sun. It is really lovely and performed once or twice per week helps me maintain my sanity in my busy life. Recreational activities are really useful stress relaxation strategies to employ in your weekly health, fitness and happiness routine. The trick is to keep the focus on the natural surroundings, to take in and connect with all the natural beauty. It does not really matter what activity you are doing.

Sleep Management

Another fundamental aspect to a healthy and happy lifestyle is consistent good quality sleep. The restorative power of deep sleep is absolutely essential to a well-functioning system. Regular exercise will aid in consistently good sleep as it will physically tire the body and make it easier to fall asleep. Another strategy is to develop a regular sleep routine. There is a tendency for busy people to go to sleep late. However, optimally you should try and go to sleep before 10 pm at night and naturally awaken at about 6 am, without the need for an alarm. People will vary in their sleep requirements but you should provide your body with the opportunity to sleep soundly for at least 8 hours per night at a similar time each night. Do not drink coffee or other stimulants late in the day and try to avoid using alarms in the morning, and allow the body to naturally awaken. Also avoid having mobile phones, computers, TVs or other electrical devices in the bedroom. The use of a water fountain or relaxing musical sounds in the bedroom can be helpful techniques to improve the quality and consistency of good deep sleep.

TIME MANAGEMENT

Successful business people are typically busy and often cannot find the time to perform the necessary exercise and recreational activities required to develop a healthy, fit and happy lifestyle. But this is basically because they do not understand or value the benefits of such activities, of course until it is too late. Successful people should be in charge of their life and be able to time manage their commitments. There are many examples of successful world leaders and business people who manage their worldly affairs as well as their lifestyles effectively. The other factor to be aware of is that people who are healthier, fitter and happier are often more productive, less likely to be sick and less likely to be the cause of disruptive conflicts in the home or workplace. Overall it pays to invest the time and effort into a healthy lifestyle, both for you, as well as your family members and employees.

Personally I wake up as the sun rises at about 6 am and often spend a few hours working from home on my computer. I find I am very mentally fresh and productive first thing in the morning. After a few hours I become mentally tired and then go and exercise. Often during my workout my mind relaxes and then thinks of some really interesting additional information to add to the work I have already started in the morning. I come back from the gym and update my work, have lunch and go to the office. I generally work for 2 to 3 hours on Saturday and Sunday mornings from home to make up my 40 hour work week. I find that working this way makes the 40 hours I commit to my work each week very productive.

This schedule allows me to perform all my work as well as my daily health and fitness routine. There are some days when I have to go to the office early and I re-arrange my schedule. When I travel I try and maintain my healthy lifestyle as best as I can. The key is to understand that a well-balanced lifestyle consisting of work, fitness, recreation, good healthy food and sound deep sleep is important and must be prioritized. It is also important to realize that truly successful people are in charge of their life and should take responsibility to ensure that it is well-balanced and so are the lives of their employees and loved ones.

Holidays

Regular holidays are an important part of life. However, they are also the cause for many people to drop their well-balanced healthy lifestyles and fall into poor habits. After a few weeks of eating fatty foods, drinking alcohol and not exercising, many people put on extra body weight and find it difficult to re-establish their healthy lifestyle. The trick is to keep up your healthy lifestyle habits during your holidays. Thus keep exercising for 1 hour every day, no breaks. Watch what you eat and do not drink excessive amounts of alcohol. You have worked too hard to develop this healthy lifestyle to throw it away. Plan your holidays around active recreational activities such as hiking, cycling, canoeing and swimming and ensure there is access to a high quality gym. Do not sign up for all you can eat restaurant deals and maintain some discipline during meal time. Enjoy the time off work, the additional time with family and friends and the extra recreational experiences in nature, but do not waste all the hard work you have put in. Nothing tastes as good as a lean body feels and after the holiday is over you will still have to live in your body, so take care of it all the time, even on holidays.

The next article to be released from Greg is entitled "Achieving a healthy bodyweight." Something all members should be interested in.