

HEALTH CHOICES that pay off

By taking these positive steps now, you'll reap rewards for your mind and body later!

By SAM BAILEY

1

CREATE HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

"When we take on too much, whether imposed by ourselves or others, we risk causing harm to our physical and mental wellbeing," says psychologist David Fox from The Relationship Room in Sydney. "It can cause the body to release cortisol and deplete dopamine and serotonin, the two neurotransmitters needed for health and wellbeing."

HOW TO GET STARTED

By practising the art of saying 'no'. "If we don't state our needs clearly, people continue to get their needs met through us, which leads to resentment and anger," David explains. "By saying 'no' and being open, there are no misunderstandings, it keeps relationships intact and increases our self-esteem." See the box below for his helpful techniques.

2

VOLUNTEER FOR A CAUSE CLOSE TO YOUR HEART

As the saying goes, "What you give, you will get back tenfold." Charity work is a great way to help others and gain perspective, but now science suggests it will also keep you young. A Belgian study found that people who volunteer are, in fact, as healthy as non-volunteers who are five years younger.

HOW TO GET STARTED

Consider your natural calling. Are you a foodie? Sign up to OzHarvest's Cooking For A Cause - where you can take part in a cooking class and create meals that feed those in need. Fighting fit? Don a bib for a charity fun run. More of a talker? Get in touch with Lifeline and see how you can donate your time.

3

MAKE SPACE IN YOUR DAY TO REST

Running on empty will only get you so far. Just as your phone needs time to recharge each day, so too do you. Studies show those who take 'microbreaks' (5-15 minutes) be it in the form of a funny video, a chat, stroll outside, moment of mindfulness or snack break, are proven to be less stressed, more engaged and naturally more positive than those who don't.

HOW TO GET STARTED

Dedicate downtime into your daily schedule to recover energy reserves and give your brain a regular break. ►

3 WAYS TO STATE WHAT YOU NEED

Psychologist David Fox shares phrases to keep up your sleeve for when your boundaries feel threatened.

1 AT WORK "I understand this is something you would like me to do. However, I need to show you what I have on so we can decide what I will stop doing in order to do the thing you now want me to add."

2 AT HOME "I am feeling overwhelmed at the moment. I want to help as I know this is important to you, but I am worried about the stress I am feeling and want to get a few things out of the way first."

3 AT A SOCIAL GATHERING "I would really like to help, but unfortunately at the moment I cannot take on more than I already have on my plate."

PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES

4 Download a wellness app

INSIGHT TIMER

Soothe your mood with *Insight Timer*, a virtual library with more than 32,000 free meditations that offer everything from timed and guided meditations through to wisdom from spiritual leaders such as Thich Nacht Hanh.

CALM

Tend to toss and turn at night? *Calm* has a Sleep Stories series of carefully curated tales sure to lower stress and have you snoozing in no time. The best part? Actors such as Matthew McConaughey are the ones reading you the 'dreamy' bedtime stories.

GRATITUDE

Power up your positive thinking with *Gratitude*. The perk of this app is rather than you taking time out to 'journal', it will send you a daily text to ask what you're grateful for. Once you reply, texts are saved as virtual diary entries that you can look back at whenever you need a boost.

5

REPAIR A RELATIONSHIP

Is there someone in your life you can't forgive? Let go of the hurt you've been harbouring and clear the slate once and for all. Research shows those with strained friendships are at higher risk of chronic illness, while those with close family and friend ties show greater levels of wellbeing.

HOW TO GET STARTED

By sharing your intentions for the outcome, then setting ground rules, recommends psychologist David Fox. "It can be helpful to call a time-out if emotions are high, or decide to attack the issue at hand, rather than each other." As for the conversation, David says it's important to put your real feelings on the table and allow both sides permission to do this. "Be ready to accept and hold the emotions that may come out, and know, while difficult, the rewards often far outweigh the temporary discomfort."

6

TAKE PART IN A CLINICAL TRIAL

Donating time to science isn't just a noble act - it may help your health and others in the long-term. Clinical trials not only benefit patients and advance medical knowledge but are an alternative way to give back, with over 5.2 million Australians having participated in the past decade alone.

HOW TO GET STARTED

Go to australianclinicaltrials.gov.au or ask your doctor if they know of a trial related to a concern you're dealing with or wanting to prevent.

7

KNUCKLE DOWN ON FINANCES

Find money a source of strain? You're not alone. Studies show financial stress can take a serious toll on the body - increasing anxiety and depression, risk of heart disease and even leading to migraines, physical pain and insomnia.

HOW TO GET STARTED

Carve out time to get serious about finances. Be it consolidating debt, sorting out superannuation or budgeting better, by reducing financial burdens, you'll finally be rid of lingering 'to-do' tasks that can cause stress. If you need support, see a financial adviser or call a trusted friend - then take action.

8

FIND A DOCTOR YOU LOVE

There's nothing worse than dreading a trip to the doctor, or putting off a pap smear due to feeling uncomfortable. A GP should be someone you can feel at ease with. Research shows that those who are treated with dignity, respect and sensitivity by their doctors have more positive experiences than those rushed or left feeling helpless.

HOW TO GET STARTED

Begin by listing your wants and needs (Female or male doctor? Young or old? Plain-speaking or sensitive?) Then start researching. Getting a personal recommendation from either a friend or colleague can be a great way to ensure you find someone you can trust.

9

GIVE YOUR HOME AN OVERHAUL

Don't just wait for the first sign of mould to check in on your home's health - instigate a detox now. Studies show there are 45 chemicals in indoor dust alone, and of those, exposure comes with increased cancer risk, plus hormone, reproductive and nervous system disruption. With 60 per cent of indoor dust said to come from outside (via windows, doors and shoes), giving the house a regular once-over just became a health choice, rather than a chore.

HOW TO GET STARTED

Regularly vacuuming surfaces and following up with a barely damp microfibre cloth works best, according to research. Or if vacuuming isn't possible, a damp microfibre wipe followed by a dry microfibre towel works well, too. For any dust particles still present in the air, play it safe by purchasing some new pot plants such as devil's ivy or aloe vera. A study from NASA found both plants naturally absorb airborne toxins (such as formaldehyde and benzene) and help you breathe easier, too.

10

MANAGE YOUR MICROBIOME

It's not just about what you eat, but how it makes you feel. We now know an unhappy gut can lead to an unhappy mood, so, rather than eating habitually, be proactive and fuel your gut with bacteria that will benefit you.

HOW TO GET STARTED

Next grocery shop, look for a quality Greek-style yoghurt that has *Bifidobacterium* and *Lactobacillus helveticus*. According to research, those who consume both for 30 days show lower levels of anxiety and depression. Meanwhile, women who consume probiotic-rich yoghurt twice a day for four weeks also regulate emotions better than those who don't, according to a US study. 

fun fact
Aloe vera and devil's ivy absorb indoor airborne toxins, making them ideal house plants.
SOURCE: NASA CLEAN AIR STUDY

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