

Sound in Mind and Body

Sunday, 10 February 2008

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Fitness shouldn't only encompass our physical health, it must also entail our mental and spiritual wellbeing. In order to reach and maintain an optimum level of health, we must address each of these areas and make sure they are in balance.

Most of us are aware of the physical aspect of our health, but what about our mind and spirit? Many of us probably do not even know what makes up our total emotional state, let alone how to exercise it. But a truly balanced workout should take into account all aspects of our health, not just the muscles and bones.

Get physical

We are all aware that we must maintain a certain level of physical activity to be healthy. If we neglect to exercise we can starve the body of mood-boosting chemicals that can significantly ease depression. All that is required is around 30 minutes of aerobic activity, three to four times a week.

Ensure that you get enough sleep and that you consume enough calories to satisfy your needs. A fat-free diet is not essential since some types of fat are good for your body. Try not to skip breakfast as this meal often forms the foundation for the rest of your day.

Smoking is a definite no-no. On the other hand, a moderate amount of alcohol is acceptable - in fact, research has shown that a couple of glasses of red wine can be good for the heart.

Taking care of emotions

Depression is a real thing - it contributes to the chances getting heart-related problems. It certainly has an effect on your relationships with others and if left unchecked can result in lowering the quality of your life.

If you are feeling wronged by someone over a particular incident, then express your feelings. Recent studies have shown that those who bottle up negative feelings expose themselves to the risk of issues such as eating disorders, emotional distress and hypertension.

If you start to feel yourself becoming irritated, step back and take a break for a few moments along with some deep breaths. When you feel calm enough to come back and take an analytical approach to the problem in a level-headed manner, re-approach the situation. If it involves another person, try the calm, non-confrontational approach - you will be surprised at how well it works.

If you are looking for the causes of your depression, take a close look at the family tree. Many emotional disorders are hereditary - just like physical characteristics. This does not mean that if your grandfather suffered from insanity that you will suffer the same fate, it merely means that you are aware of a problem in your family's past that may need consideration when analysing your own feelings. With proper guidance or treatment you may be the generation that can

overcome such a challenge.

Looking after the mind

The brain should be considered as another muscle. Accordingly, ensure you give it a regular workout. Learning new things or playing chess, doing crossword puzzles or just reading the newspaper all help to exercise it.

Being optimistic about life can have a positive effect on your overall attitude but do not take this too far. If you are riding high and experience a failing you may fall far and hard. On the other hand do not worry about everything. Constant worry burns up a lot of energy and will leave you feeling down and powerless. If you are in a position to do something about a situation, then do so. If not, let it go!

Be prepared to accept your small imperfections. If you have concerns about your weight, try not to become fixated on the figures on the scales - try checking the scales less and reading your feelings more. Remember your positive attributes and be less concerned about reaching a certain weight.

Relating to others

When it comes to your relationship with a loved one, listen to advice. A close friend can often spot weaknesses not visible to those involved directly in the relationship.

Ensure that you give yourself enough "me" time. Do not feel guilty taking one night a week off to do your own thing - it could mean the difference between becoming sick or remaining healthy. Those with a packed social calendar are the often the ones who are more sickly.

Remember to reach out to family or close friends in times of need. Being too independent can result in depression from loneliness.

Resolutions to dilemmas can often be achieved by approaching them from a different perspective. When help is offered, do not be too quick to criticise or reject such assistance. Those who tend to readily criticise others are often giving an indication of their own insecurities.

Guiding your career

If you are your career, beware. Leave some time each week for your hobbies or interests. People who become so wrapped up in their career that they have no time for anything else will suffer from "professional burnout" and end up just plain dull.

Try to socialise with at least one co-worker to assist in handling daily matters. This form of social assistance on the job can help prevent work-related illness by relieving stress.

It is all too important that you must like your job. It is critical to feel challenged and fulfilled - if not, do something about it. If you cannot find these basics within your present work environment, then it may be time to start looking further afield.

It is also important to be able to delegate responsibilities within your workplace. Trying to handle every little detail is a recipe for disaster - you will burn yourself out.

If you regret your choice of career and wish you had tried something different, don't whine about it - do it! Take a part-time course or weekend activity related to what you wished you had tried. This way you can maintain the day job until you find out if that life-long dream job is in fact for you.

Ensure you take time off to relax. Skipping vacations can be detrimental to your overall health. Make sure that the break is long enough to completely detach from the office. Delegate your communications to others and avoid calling in to see how things are going. Enjoy your skiing holiday or make the most of those weeks lazing on the beach.