Sample Article

Sweat Away Your Stress

The 'fight or flight' mentality created by stress can be a good thing, forcing you to take action and propelling you ever forward. However, like many things in life, too much stress can be bad for the mind and the body. If you feel stressed long-term, it can cause anxiety or depression: the two most common mental health issues in the UK. Physically, being overstressed can lead to raised blood pressure and heart rate, and reek havoc with your immune system, due to the accumulated chemicals your body releases to try and combat stress including adrenaline and cortisol. But the good news is there are a number of measures you can take to help relieve your feelings of stress and calm the negative effects of the emotion.

Eating a healthy and balanced diet, cutting down on caffeine and alcohol, eating regular, preferably low GI meals for a consistent release of energy, and ensuring you make time for some relaxation and enough sleep, are all things that will undoubtedly help you combat stress. However, when it comes to keeping stress down to helpful, motivational levels, exercise is one of the most powerful tools.

Just 30 minutes of exercise four or five times a week will boost you both mentally and physically, especially exercise which increases your heart rate and makes you sweat.

Make it personal

Before embarking on a new exercise regime, think about your individual needs. If you have been feeling stressed for some time, your blood pressure and heart rate may be elevated and exercise could add further strain to your already-overworked system. Always check with your GP first, and be realistic about your exercise goals.

Gradual is best

Begin exercising at a level you feel comfortable with as it is much better to build up your stamina and strength over time. You could take a stroll, go for a quick run, swim some lengths in the local pool, kick a footie around your garden or get on your bike – whatever your preferred choice of exercise is, the important thing is to get enjoyment from it. Without that, you won't continue to exercise.

No matter how intensely you exercise, if your workout increases your heart rate it will increase blood flow and increase oxygen to your brain, enabling you to think more clearly, remove toxins more quickly, and give you a real buzz.

Negative to a positive

Exercise creates a natural and constructive outlet for your negative emotions such as anger or frustration. This will help you feel calmer and more in control, a feeling amplified by the chemical serotonin which a workout releases.

You will feel great after exercising, thanks to the increased levels of endorphins pumping around your bloodstream. Endorphins are pain relievers and 'feel good' hormones which help you stave off depression by giving your mood a real lift, as well as keeping stress at bay.

Regular exercise could also reduce the levels of cortisol in your body, which will aid the effective breakdown of food and absorption for energy and nutrition. Your body will be less likely to store fat and you will find it easier to maintain a healthy weight.

Social momentum

To maintain momentum and help you stick to your chosen exercise routine, one option would be to workout with a friend or colleague. There are so many sports which can be enjoyed in pairs or larger numbers – or you may want to join a gym, a local sports team or fit camp so you can exercise and socialise with others.

Exercising socially can spur you on and help you increase the intensity of your workout over time, encouraging you to run that little bit further, stay on the cross-trainer for an extra ten minutes, swim another five lengths, work through the sweat, breathlessness and stitch to beat your personal goal.

Quick, look over there

When you exercise, you are distracted. Like other relaxation techniques such as reading, gardening, taking the dog for a walk etc, exercise will keep you so

preoccupied, you will temporarily forget your troubles. And after your session, the endorphins and serotonin will help keep your mood high.

Stress, what stress?

Regular physical exercise, which you can enjoy alone or with others, will help you stay positive and fighting fit. Combine it with a good diet and sufficient sleep, and you are sure to feel able to manage stress. In fact, research suggests that exercise and stress are linked, and that healthier people who exercise regularly are more able to cope with stress.

An exercise routine which has your heart beating faster and your body sweating is undoubtedly doing you some good. You will feel in better shape and *be* in better shape for the challenges life throws your way.

So, why not fight your negative emotions with exercise and, quite literally, sweat away your stress?