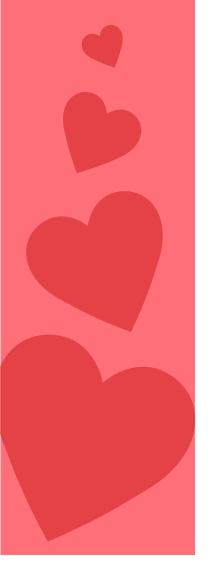**healthy**performance®

In this month's newsletter:

Looking After Your Heart

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Time to Talk Day

10 Daily Habits to Keep Your Heart Healthy

With Valentine's Day celebrated in February, it's the perfect time to look at ways to keep your heart in great shape:

1. Cut down on your sugar and salt intake
The recommended maximum daily intake of salt is just 6g for adults and 3g for children. Too much sugar could lead to weight gain, which can raise your blood pressure and cause diabetes and heart disease. Instead. try switching to fresh fruit with yoghurt.

2. Limit saturated fat
Butter, ghee, margarine, fatty meats, dairy, and processed foods such as pies, pastries, and cakes are believed to increase cholesterol levels. Switch to semi-skimmed milk and low-fat dairy, choose lean cuts of meats, and steam or grill instead of frying.

3. Eat heart healthy
Citrus fruits, sweet potato, aubergine, mango, and most beans and pulses are high in soluble fibre and may lower your cholesterol. Soy-based proteins like tofu are the only vegan sources to contain all the essential amino acids. Wholegrain foods will also help to fill you up for longer and are better for your heart as they're less processed.

4. Eat oily fish
Pilchards, sardines, mackerel, salmon, and fresh tuna are rich in omega-3 fatty acids, which are beneficial for your heart because they improve your cholesterol levels. You can also get omega-3 fats from spinach, wheat germ, walnuts, flaxseed and flaxseed oil, soya, canola oil, and pumpkin seeds.

5. Quit smoking
Smoking is one of the main causes of cardiovascular disease. Smokers are almost twice as likely to have a heart attack compared to those who've never smoked.

6. Cut back on alcohol
Alcohol can cause high blood pressure, abnormal heart rhythms, and damage to the heart muscle. You don't have to give up completely, just follow the guidelines - two to three units a day for women, and three to four for men.

7. Get moving
Studies show that inactive people are more likely to have a heart attack than those who are active.

Aim to get at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity a week to lower your risk of developing coronary heart disease. The longer you sit, the more detrimental it can be for your heart. Try to get up and move at least once an hour.

8. Keep your weight down
If you're heavier than you should be, your risk of high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and type 2 diabetes is above normal. Eating less sugar and saturated fat, while cutting back on alcohol, eating more fruit and veg and getting more exercise, can all help you lose excess pounds - and keep those pounds off in the long term.

9. Floss
There's a strong link between your gum health and your heart health. Studies have shown that periodontal disease can almost double your risk of developing heart disease.

10. Keep stress under control
If you're under a lot of stress, you may be more likely to smoke, exercise less, and drink more than a moderate amount of alcohol - all of which are linked with heart problems.

Practicing Self-care

Practicing self-care provides many benefits across physical and mental health. It also supports your relationships with others and your wellbeing at work. Although it's not always easy to make time for yourself, remember that even small acts can make a big difference! So whether you try an activity per day, or perhaps just a few a month, try to make some time for yourself and enjoy nourishing your body and mind.

Pick up a book and **read before bed**. It gives you a break from technology (which can disrupt sleep), and helps to reduce stress.

Try something new and take up a **new hobby**. It can help to give you a sense of accomplishment, and supports your overall wellbeing.

Practice **active listening**. This involves listening with our full undivided attention, rather than simply waiting to respond.

Have a **social media detox** and disconnect from your phone. It will allow you to have more time to yourself without being distracted.

Make a **positivity box** out of items that bring you happiness. You can then revisit this box to help boost your mood on days that feel challenging.

Try using a '**snacktivity**' approach to fit in physical exercise. Short bursts can mean it's easier to achieve the recommended 150 minutes of weekly exercise.

Take a moment to **check-in on others**. Do you know someone who may be feeling lonely? Or who is going through a tough time?

Adopt a **positive affirmation** that you can say at the start of each day. It can help to boost self-esteem and reduce negative thoughts.

Indulge in a **hot bath** to relax your body. The heat can help to soothe muscles and reduce inflammation.

Plan something to look forward to in future. It provides us with positive anticipation, which helps us to feel more energised and motivated.

Create a **personal playlist** of songs that have meaning to you. Music releases pleasure hormones, which in turn can help reduce stress.

Do something that pushes you **out of your comfort zone**. Challenging yourself can help you to grow confidence and develop your resilience.

Invest in a **house plant** for your home or desk. They can help to reduce stress, blood pressure and reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression.

Try **yoga**, whether you attend a local class or use an online video. It can help to improve flexibility, increase muscle strength and calm the mind.

Try using the **Pomodoro method** to get through today's tasks. Short sprints can improve efficiency and help you to avoid distractions.

Drink more water to help get into the habit of keeping hydrated. It can help to prevent infections and keep our organs functioning well.

Carry out a random **act of kindness** to make a positive difference to someone's day. It can help to improve self-esteem and our sense of belonging.

Take some time to **de-clutter** a room in your home. It can help to relieve anxiety and promote a sense of tranquillity.

Time to Talk Day is the nation's biggest mental health conversation. Happening every year, it's a day for friends, families, communities, and workplaces to come together to talk, listen and change lives.

We know the more conversations we have; the better life is for everyone. Talking about mental health isn't aways easy, but a conversation has the power to change lives. Explore this site for ideas on how to take part in Time to Talk Day, from organising an event in your local library or hosting a lunch and learn session to simply sharing information on social media or texting a friend.

Make space in your day for a conversation about mental health this Time to Talk Day.