



“The greatest weapon against stress is our ability to choose one thought over another”

- William James

In this month’s newsletter:

On your feet Britain

Stress Awareness Month 2022

Fact & Tip of the month



On your feet Britain

On your feet Britain takes place this year on Thursday 28th April and is the day when Get Britain Standing asks the nation to unite against prolonged workplace sitting.

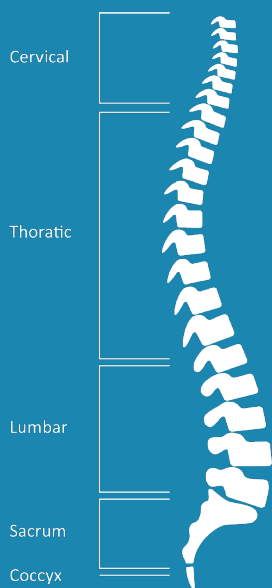
The challenge is to move more and sit less in any way that you can!

Reducing sedentary behaviour is a way that all workplaces and individuals can take action to improve health, wellbeing and performance.

Moving more doesn’t have to involve strenuous exercise, it simply means sitting less.



But what are the benefits?



Musculoskeletal Fitness

In layman’s terms, we’re talking about your joints and muscles and the benefit of daily movement.

Think of your body like a car – if you don’t run it regularly, it’s going to slowly start to deteriorate and seize up. Our muscle size decreases if we don’t use them, and our joints begin to feel stiff. Moving regularly and decreasing our time spent sitting, tells our body to wake up and reminds it that we do need our muscles, and our joints need to move freely.

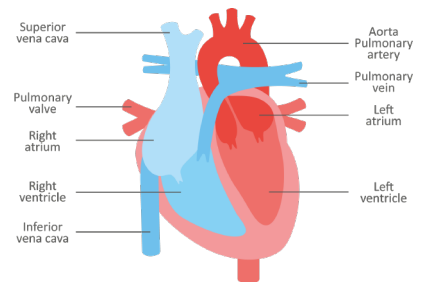
Movement is essential for maintaining joint health. Use of joints naturally increases flexibility and strength, but motion also lubricates joints and reduces swelling – not only does movement help to maintain joint health in the long term, but it also helps to reduce any joint pain symptoms*almost immediately due to the production of endorphins, our body’s natural pain killers.

Heart Health

Being inactive and living a sedentary lifestyle can lead to fatty material building up in your arteries. If the arteries that carry blood to your heart get damaged and clogged, this can lead to a heart attack or stroke.

It’s often forgotten that the heart is a muscle. When we think of exercise we think about our chest or our quads but just like any other muscle, the heart needs physical activity to help it work properly.

According to the British Heart Foundation, being active can reduce your risk of developing some heart and circulatory diseases by as much as 35%.



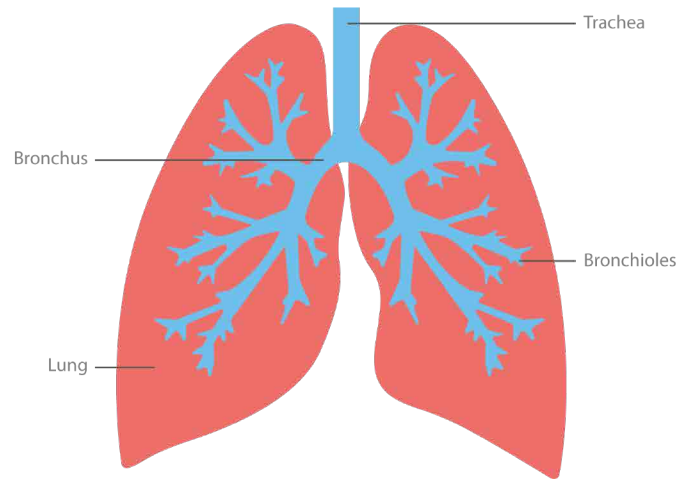


About one in every five cases of coronary heart disease in developed countries is due to physical inactivity. Regular, moderate-intensity physical activity reduces the risk of developing coronary heart disease and can reduce the likelihood of dying from heart disease. However, about 7 out of every 10 women and 6 in every 10 men in the UK are not active enough to protect themselves against coronary heart disease.

Improved Respiratory Functions

The lungs bring oxygen into the body, to provide energy, and remove carbon dioxide, the waste product created when you produce energy. The heart pumps the oxygen to the muscles that are doing the exercise.

When we exercise regularly, we improve our endurance meaning it takes longer or more intense activity to get to the point where we feel out of breath. This is a direct effect of our muscles strengthening through exercise. As the muscles become stronger, they require less oxygen to move and produce less carbon dioxide, helping breathing become more efficient and shortness of breath less common.



Better Sleep Quality

The relationship between exercise and sleep has been extensively investigated over the years with previous studies noting that proper exercise can alleviate sleep-related problems and help you to get a sufficient amount of rest.

Exercise contributes to more sound and restful sleep, increasing the time spent in deep sleep, the most physically restorative sleep phase. Deep sleep helps to boost immune function, support cardiac health and control stress and anxiety, so it's essential that we spend enough time in this phase! For more information on our sleep phases and their benefits, you can read our recent blog on [The Importance of Sleep](#).

Moderate-to-vigorous exercise can increase sleep quality for adults by reducing the time it takes to fall asleep, therefore decreasing the amount of time we lie awake in bed during the night. Being physically active requires you to expend energy and help you to feel more tired and ready to sleep at the end of the day while also helping to alleviate daytime sleepiness.

Reduced Stress Levels and Better Mental Health

A regular exercise routine, or regular movement, can help to reduce your stress levels. Linking in with the point above, stress is a common cause of sleep problems including trouble falling asleep and sleeping restlessly during the night.

Physical activity releases cortisol which helps us to manage stress – it also gives your brain something to focus on and is a great coping strategy for difficult times. Not only that but physical activity also releases feel-good hormones that make you feel better in yourself and is effective in reducing the likelihood of experiencing a period of depression.

Mind-body exercises such as yoga can help to quiet the parasympathetic nervous system, lower cortisol levels and reduce blood pressure, helping you to relax while having a positive effect on your mood.



So, how much movement is necessary?

To reduce our risk of ill health from inactivity, it is advised that we exercise regularly for at least 150 minutes a week and reduce our sitting time. But our key recommendation is to find something that you enjoy because if you don't enjoy it, you won't do it.

Some people love spending hours in the gym while others prefer going for a walk or a bike ride.

While 150 minutes a week may seem a lot, especially if you are sedentary, start small and consider how you can increase your movement. Here's our top tips:

- Take a stroll and get some fresh air on your lunch breaks
- For less formal meetings, consider walking, or standing rather than sitting at a table
- When taking phone calls, stand or pace the room while you're speaking
- Walk over to your colleague's desk (when social distancing allows) rather than sending an email
- In the evening, if you really can't fathom doing a workout, make the effort to do some laps of the room during TV ad breaks
- Utilise the hourly movement reminder on your fitness tracker, if you have one, to encourage you to move for just a couple of minutes every hour
- If you don't have a fitness tracker, download a pedometer app, and set yourself a realistic daily step goal and aim to improve on this over time
- Put some music on and have a dance with your family rather than sitting in front of the TV
- Take the stairs rather than the elevator

All the above are simple changes that can make a big impact on your time spent sitting as well as your overall health, and once you get started you may even find yourself wanting to take it a step further, continually increasing your activity levels until you're hitting 150 minutes per week.

*if you are experiencing joint pain or you are currently unwell please seek advice from your GP before participating in any exercise.



Stress Awareness Month 2022

Stress awareness month is an annual event that has been held every April since 1992 to raise awareness of the causes and cures for stress. The last two years have been challenging with disrupted social lives, travel restrictions and working from home keeping us in one place for long periods of time. This has led to many individuals feeling a heightened sense of stress, loneliness, and a lowered sense of wellbeing.

Stress isn't necessarily a bad thing and is our body's response to pressure. Many different situations or life events, such as those listed above, can cause stress, and is often triggered when we experience something new or unexpected.

Too much stress can affect our mood, body, and relationships and when experienced over a long period of time can lead to a feeling of physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion, often called burnout.

The stress hormone

Cortisol is a naturally occurring hormone that plays a key role in the body's stress response. While it is best known as 'the stress hormone', it also contributes to many of the body's processes. It's secreted by the adrenal glands and is involved in the regulation of the following:

- Blood pressure regulation
- Glucose metabolism
- Immune function
- Inflammatory response
- Insulin release

The adrenal glands release cortisol in response to stress or fear as part of the body's fight or flight response and although cortisol is important for your body to function normally, too much cortisol can be bad for your health.

Happiness chemicals and how to hack them

As well as cortisol, there are a number of other hormones that impact the way we feel including serotonin, dopamine, oxytocin and endorphins.

While we can't all be happy and stress free 100% of the time, making a conscious effort to incorporate activities into our days that get the happy hormones flowing can help to boost our mood each day!

Serotonin – the mood stabiliser

- Listening to music
- Meditating
- Walking in nature
- Writing or journaling
- Sun exposure

Dopamine – the reward chemical

- Self-care
- Completing tasks
- Eating good food
- Celebrating wins
- Getting enough sleep

Oxytocin – the love hormone

- Hugging a loved one
- Kissing
- Deep conversation
- Playing with animals
- Giving compliments

Endorphin – the stress reliever

- Laughing
- Exercise
- Chocolate
- Watching a comedy
- Physical touch

Fact of the month

Walking is a mood improver and great for mental health

Tip of the month

Standing up for a quick stretch can relieve muscle tension and help you relax during a stressful workday