

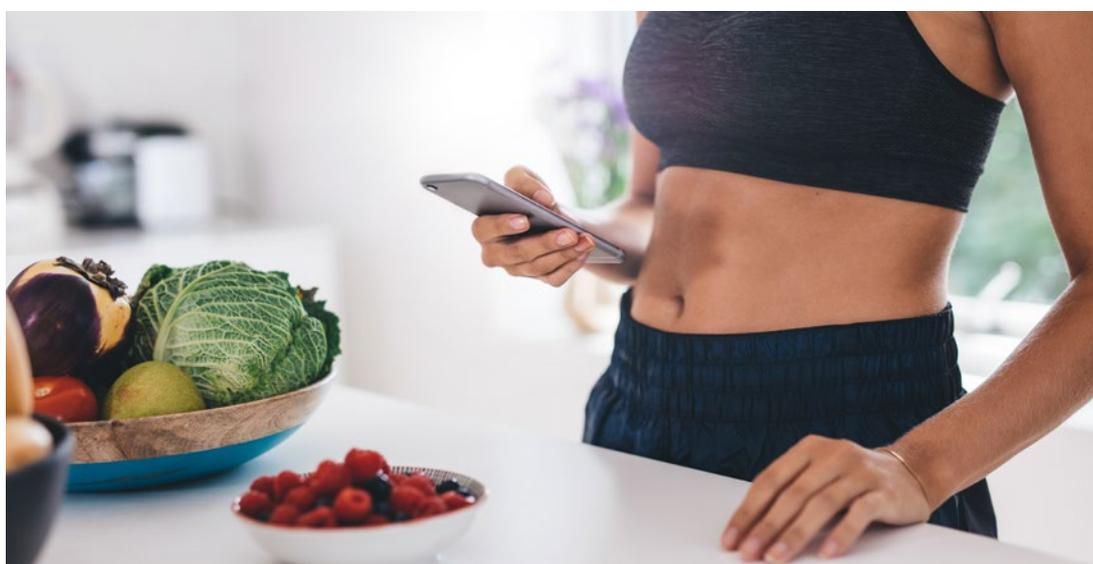
7 Simple Steps to Improve your Health

Improving your health, losing weight, or whatever your goals are can seem very daunting when you start looking at the literature that is out there.

NUTRITION
PROVOCATEUR

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Many wasted hours can be spent trawling the internet, and in the end you come away in a state of confusion and bewilderment, doomed to not only groaning as you rise from the chair, but even worse, groaning as you sit down in it!

There is an overwhelming amount of information around, different diets such as 5:2, Paleo, low carb, low fat, juicing, smoothies it is no wonder that often you just don't know where to get started!

Aside from the vast array of different diets and information there is that old aged issue of mind over matter.

The actual task of getting started. Diets only ever start on a Monday. Really? Why? Surely it would make better sense to start on a Saturday, when you are in your own kitchen for the weekend, you can relax, prepare and be two days in if you are returning to work on a Monday!





Perhaps you could even go to the gym or take the dogs for a walk. (Or borrow someone else's!) You can plan for the week ahead, shop the food, schedule your exercise in, and be generally in more of a routine when Monday comes around.

But do we do that? No. Instead of that we spring out of bed on a Monday morning with the proclamation of 'the diet starts today!', clueless as to what we are doing and doomed for failure by Tuesday afternoon, that's if we make it that far! Honestly, how many times have you skipped breakfast, avoided lunch because you haven't planned it, and, 'you are on a diet', that therefore means that you can't eat the rubbish available in the staff canteen or from the local shop.

If you are at home, you are eyeing up the loaf of bread in the corner for a cheese sandwich but instead think it is better to maybe not eat at all. By 3pm you are on course for a MAJOR drop in blood sugar levels.

By the time you get home, as much as you are desperate to resist, the crisps or cookies or bread are simply YELLING at you 'EAT ME, EAT ME!' Do you know what happens then? You end up back at square one, battling the demons in your head that are reinforcing the negative feelings you have toward yourself. See where I am coming from?



1. FAIL TO PREPARE, PREPARE TO FAIL

Plan, plan plan. I can't say it enough times. Know what you are doing for the week ahead. Clear the rubbish out of the pantry, plan the meals and shop the list. If Monday is your day to get started, then spend the weekend planning the week ahead.

Talk to the family, get them on board, have them give their input into the meal planning. If you have a family it can be a nightmare to please all, so try to get them involved in the planning process. If they are involved in the food choices, kids in particular, it can seem less of an uphill struggle.

You can become frazzled trying to cook several different meals choices at once, I know, I've been there!



2. BE POSITIVE - Kill the ANTS!

'Kill the ants?!' I hear you say, what's that got to do with it? You'll be glad to know we don't mean that little annoying insect that carries its bodyweight in jam out of your cupboard! Although just as annoying, ANTS stands for automatic negative thoughts, that negative buzz that goes on in the background of your head without any control.



It has probably been there for years, prodding away at you, telling you what a failure you are constantly. It is built out of previous experience, perhaps failure, if only we could enhance the positive thoughts every time we have a success instead. Turn around the damning negative thoughts and make them positive thoughts instead. Well, it is simple, you can, you just have to literally put your mind to it! Which brings us to our next point...

just
breathe

3. AFFIRMATIONS

Unless you start having positive thoughts there is no way that you are going to be rid of the negative ones and start to construct long term positive beliefs about yourself. Try pushing these negative thoughts out of the way by starting the day on the right footing and supercharging your mind with self belief and positivity. You don't need anywhere in particular to do this and these affirmations do not need to be chanted out like a Tibetan monk whilst circling your bedroom!

Try setting your alarm just a few minutes early and make your first thoughts of the day positive. Set the tone for the rest of the day and you will soon be achieving great things! Think of about five targets that you wish to achieve in the day and let's get real about this, "I treat my body as a temple. It is holy, it is clean and it is full of goodness" may work for some but may just be way to vague and yoga-like for others. Get down to the REAL nitty-gritty of what you want achieve that day. It may be something like this: -

1. **Today I will eat 5 portions of vegetables.**
2. **Today I am going to try a recipe I have never tried before.**
3. **Today I am going to spend 10 minutes extra in the gym.**
4. **Today I am going to be positive.**
5. **Today I am going to be in control of my thoughts and emotions.**

Repeat these affirmations about 4-5 times whilst relaxed with your eyes closed. Take deep breaths as you repeat them. Repeating these mantras daily will reinforce them and bring them from the thoughts in the deep depths of your mind into reality. The more we verbalise and say something, the more we start to believe it, and the easier it becomes to make the desired action into reality.



4. LET'S GET PHYSICAL!

Simple. Get off the couch, from behind your desk, wheel of your car, or wherever you may be and MOVE, MOVE, MOVE! The human body is designed to MOVE! You didn't catch cavemen sitting around and checking his emails whilst his next meal strolled by. There are a million excuses for us not exercising and the advent of the internet has not helped. How many times have you sat down to check your phone only to realise that when you come back to the real world 45 minutes has passed? Make exercise your priority, not your phone, Instagram, Facebook or Twitter, it will all still be there after 30 minutes of not looking!

What else is stopping you? Sadly it is not just the distraction of the internet, there are a whole multitude of other lame excuses that stop us getting off our backsides. Lets bust through a few more:-

THERE ISN'T ENOUGH TIME

Well we can bust through this one in a jiffy! New research says that shorts bursts of intense exercise are way more effective than spending 30 minutes dying on the treadmill or whatever your choice of CV equipment is! High Intensity Interval Training (HIIT) can be performed between 4 – 30 minutes with highly effective results. It may take you longer to change into your workout gear than perform the actual workout!

I'M NOT FIT ENOUGH

You think with your backside sat in the chair you are ever going to be? GET UP! You don't have to even change into gym gear if you are anxious about making that step. Just get on a pair of comfortable shoes and take a brisk walk. Exercise, whatever form it comes in can make you happy! It is a well researched fact that it improves energy, mood, sleep, and health to reducing anxiety, stress, and depression. So swop the 'I can't' for 'I can' and get out there and make a difference.



I JUST DON'T HAVE THE ENERGY

Well, provided you are not suffering from an illness that does prevent you from exercise, your luck is in. Exercise boosts your energy!!!

YES! I am not lying to you, it may sound like ploy to get you out of the door, it kind of is, but THIS WORKS! Physical activity will reduce your fatigue and boost your energy levels in the long run.

Even more, when you have established your regular routine you are going to feel much more energized, refreshed, and alert at all times. You may feel a little tired to begin with as your body adjusts to the new demands you place upon it, but guess what? Rome wasn't built in a day, don't go all out to start with, take it easy. Find something you enjoy doing and don't overdo it, break in gently. You'll soon be feeling fit and fabulous!

I HATE THE GYM

This one is easy.....DON'T GO!

If competing around a gym or just being in the gym with others really isn't your thing then try something different! Take a walk around the park, ride your bike, go dancing, there are a whole load of activities to try that don't involve you being a gym member if you don't fancy it. Many local schools and halls have Pilates or yoga classes if that is something you fancy.

You can still be social without the cost or commitment to paying a monthly fee for membership. This leaves you flexibility to try different things. How about you use the internet for something productive? There are many free programs that you can follow and also a whole array of apps that you can download. Some may charge a small fee to download but then you have your own portable exercise class in your hand!



There is really no excuse not to exercise. Cut out the negative ANTS and just get out the door and do something. Or maybe don't get out the door and play an app in your front room! Choose something that you enjoy, don't go all out in the first session. The current recommendations for most adults is at least 150 minutes of moderate activity per week, but don't let that scare you! Break it down into bite sized pieces and work up to it gradually. If you exercise for 30 minutes, 5 times a week that should do it. However, if you can't do this for a week then something is better than nothing. Don't look at the week and think well, I can only schedule in two workouts this week, look at the diary and break it down into some 15 minute workouts some days, if you are short you don't need to ditch the whole week!

And, here is some more good news, moderate exercise for most people is good enough, it will improve and maintain your overall health, there is no need to keep pushing yourself over the edge, that is unless you enjoy it!

So enough said on the exercise front..... Basically, GET UP AND MOVE!

5. PILE IN THE PLANTS

There is a saying that 'if your Grandmother doesn't recognize it you shouldn't be eating it'. We have become a nation of beige food eaters, pasta, bread, chips, crisps etc. It is quite simple, if you want good health you have to eat plants, or fruit and vegetables to be more clear.

The government's current guidelines are a five-a-day recommendation, but this is based on 25 year old guidelines issued by the World Health Organisation (WHO). The latest research suggests eating at least seven portions of fruit and vegetables a day is more effective at preventing disease. However, be careful of over eating the fruit as whilst it may be good for you it does contain hidden sugars called fructose. Make just two of you daily allowance fruit and you will help maintain your blood sugar levels.



Not only are plant-based diets rich in antioxidants and other good-for-you nutrients, they're also better for your waistline. Fruit and vegetables fall into five different colour categories: red, purple/blue, orange, green and white/brown, with each colour carrying its own unique set of disease fighting chemicals called phytonutrients. It is these phytochemicals that give fruits and vegetables their vibrant colour and of course some of their healthy properties. Get them into a meal or snack at every opportunity and soon it will become a habit.

It may seem daunting at first as perhaps you are not used to consuming this volume, but it really isn't difficult. For instance, start your day with a smoothie:-

- HALF A BANANA
- 6 OR SO RASPBERRIES
- HALF AN AVOCADO
- A GOOD HANDFUL OF SPINACH
- A SPOON OF GREEK YOGURT
- ABOUT 250ML OF ALMOND MILK
- A TBSP. OF CHIA SEEDS

You have already started the day with your two portions of fruit and one portion of vegetables besides all the other healthy ingredients in there. Try some chopped crudites such as carrots, peppers, and celery, along with some hummus as a mid-morning snack. You will have probably tallied the total up to at least two more portions of vegetables. That just leaves around two to three portions to spread across lunch, afternoon snack and evening meal. This isn't an exacting science but more of a quick example of how easy it can be.

There is no doubt that we are what we eat. Man cannot live on beige food alone. I read in a book by Alan Carr an analogy that likened a car to our bodies. He posed the question of if you put shoes in your fuel tank would you expect the car to run properly? So, why do we continue to put the incorrect fuel into our bodies and expect the same performance as usual?

It's a no brainer – PILE IN THE PLANTS!!



6. SLOW DOWN THE CHOW DOWN!

You must have been under a rock in the Outer Hebrides if you haven't heard of everyone's favorite new buzzword; MINDFULNESS. It is a term that is virtually being applied to everything, short of a visit to the toilet. In essence it means concentrating on the job in hand whatever that may be. So when we hear the expression mindful eating bashed around, it fundamentally means sit and eat with no distractions.

Let's be honest, many of us see eating as an inconvenience, a distraction of the day's work, something to do as an aside to checking our phones. It is interesting how far down the list of priorities eating has become.

Here is something to make you sit up and listen, eating mindfully can actually reduce your waistline! Yep, that gotcha didn't it!! How so I hear you ask? It really is quite simple, there are two little hormone friends that control you hunger and feeling of satiety. They are called Leptin and Ghrelin. In very simple terms Leptin signals Ghrelin when the body has had enough to eat. However, if you wolf your food down in 30 seconds flat there is no time for this signal to reach its target and that naughty Ghrelin makes you reach for that second donut! Even worse, if you are eating the wrong type of foods, those high in sugar for instance, you can become Leptin-resistant as the hormone keeps circulating in your blood stream. You then have the double impact of Leptin and Ghrelin running amock around your body and you not knowing whether you are hungry or not. Not only that but your body then stores even more fat due to faulty signaling!

So, get these naughty hormones in check by sitting down and allowing the reinstating of proper cell signaling and the correct amount of time for these actions to take place. That way you won't feel like you ate all the pies in one sitting!

Eating is a biological process. From the second we view our food, smell our food, and taste our food there are many processes that prepare the body for digestion.

In addition to the breakdown of hormone signaling as above, rushing our food does not allow for the correct secretion of the digestive enzymes to break down the food properly. This can result in all sorts of other digestive issues such as heartburn, bloating, and IBS symptoms.

Eating should be an enjoyable process. I am sure that sitting looking at a beautiful plate of different coloured foods, rather than a plate of beige food, followed by the time to sit and savour the textures and flavours, is far better both mentally and physically to our bodies.



7. GET GUZZLING!

And we don't mean heading to the nearest happy hour. We all know, we have all heard it, DRINKING WATER IS GOOD FOR YOU! Fluid losses occur daily through sweating, breathing, bowel movements and urine output and activity such as increased exercise can also up the need to take on more water. Apart from these obvious reasons, we also need water to support the following:-

REDUCE FATIGUE AND INCREASE ALERTNESS

Your brain is made of mostly fluid so drinking water can prevent dehydration and allow more clarity and focus.

SUPPORT DIGESTION AND ABSORB NUTRIENTS FROM FOOD

Adequate hydration keeps things flowing along your gastrointestinal tract and prevents constipation. There is concern that drinking water whilst eating will dilute the digestive juices and interfere with the digestive process. As long as you are taking sips of water there really is no concern.

HAVE A HEALTHY GLOWING SKIN

A lot of attention is given to anti-aging creams for the skin when in actual fact one of the best things you can do is stay hydrated! A regular intake of water throughout the day keeps cells bathed and can prevent dehydrated skin. This in turn keeps your skin looking healthy and glowing!

DECREASE MUSCLE AND JOINT PAIN

There may be many reasons why your joints are hurting, arthritis, gout, flu or even chronic dehydration. Increasing your water intake may not cure your joint pain completely, but it can help your body handle the underlying issues that are causing you pain.



Although there doesn't seem to be any scientific evidence behind it, 8 x 8oz glasses per day seem to be around the bench mark. Sounds easy enough right? But if you're struggling to take in enough H₂O, use these tips to meet your daily quota.

ADD YOUR OWN FLAVOR

Yes, water can be pretty boring. Why not add some flavor by adding natural ingredients such as sliced cucumber, slices or lemon or lime, even watermelon chunks and mint! To intensify the flavor let it sit for a few hours in your fridge.

KEEP IT CLOSE

Let's get real, with the best will in the world, if you are stuck at a desk all day, or in your car travelling, prioritising water sometimes goes by the wayside. Make the water bottle your new best friend, carry it everywhere and refill whenever possible. If you work at a desk, leave it in plain sight so you're constantly reminded to take sips throughout the day.

USE YOUR PHONE

Yep, can you believe there's an app for that! In fact, there are several. Try Waterlogged for iPhone or Water Your Body (for Android and iPhones). Not big on apps? Just set a few alerts on your phone throughout the day to remind yourself to head for the water cooler or grab your water bottle.

DOWN A PINT!

So, I know that you are sensible on a night out and always drink a glass of water in between each glass of wine (right!?). It may start well but probably goes by the wayside three drinks in! However, one favour you can do yourself is take a pint of water to bed and drink half enroute. It will sure help with the hangover the next day by helping to rehydrate you, and when you wake up in the morning dying of thirst the other half will be there ready!!

We have given you many good reasons to increase your water intake and a few good ideas on how to do it. Just one more thing, don't forget it is free! It is cheaper than a cappuccino and much better for you – so get swapping!

So, there you have it! 7 Simple Steps you can take NOW to better health.

There is no outlay required unless this is something that you choose.
All of these 7 steps can be carried out without spending a penny.

Just remember, these are the 7 Simple Steps that you
can take NOW! What are you waiting for!

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*P.S.
If you loved these tips on how to keep
healthy - simply, digest some more
at www.nutritionprovocateur.com
Sarah X*

