

Health is Wealth

Jo Butler from Physio 1to1 on the benefits of keeping active

'Health is wealth' is a saying we don't use enough in daily life. Unfortunately 'Time is money' tends to get quoted far more often. We live in a wealth-focussed landscape but it is really our health that will ultimately define us. It is our health that allows us the ability to make the most of the personal circumstances we find ourselves in.

During the good times, our good health can help us reach our highest goals and achieve our dreams and ambitions. When we find ourselves in difficult times, sometimes challenging circumstances, our good health can help us be robust enough to withstand all that befalls us and get back on our feet. Health is the currency we use to navigate through the various circumstances we find ourselves in throughout our life.

An online poll by YouGov this year worryingly found that in the past year, 74% of people have felt so stressed they have been overwhelmed or unable to cope. 46% responded that they had begun to eat too much or eat unhealthily due to stress, whilst others reported an increase in alcohol consumption. It is all too easy to get into a downward spiral with stress.

When we feel stressed a hormone called cortisol is released by the body and if this happens too often, our body can no longer respond to stress and starts to feel fatigued. Stress can also exacerbate heart, respiratory and other underlying conditions. Even something as mild as increased muscle tension can contribute to musculoskeletal injuries. We need to pay more attention to the 'health is wealth' mantra and take time to reflect on how our lifestyle is impacting on our inside health, then take control by taking steps to change and improve it.

As a Chartered Physiotherapist, I spend a lot of my time

encouraging people to be more active. Regular exercise is one of the lifestyle choices that can have a profound effect on improving your health and wellbeing. Evidence suggests that physical activity boosts the natural production of serotonin (a feel-good chemical), not just during the activity but for hours after it. Serotonin is also used in antidepressants due to its positive effect on mood and wellbeing. Rather than take medication, you can produce it yourself just by exercising.

Starting to become active can be daunting, especially if you haven't done much exercise before or if you are managing a health condition. It is all too easy to stop moving when you have a health condition. Keeping moving is one of the most important aspects of managing long term health conditions, ranging from arthritis, chronic pain through to conditions such as Multiple Sclerosis (MS) or Parkinsons Disease (PD).

If you have arthritis, it is okay to experience some pain, or even a slight increase in pain during and after exercise. As long as it settles back to pre-exercise levels within 24 hours, your activity level will be about right. If it lasts longer try reducing the level of exercise.

The pain should also not be too severe or coincide with protracted swelling, heat, or redness of joints. You could try exercising in a pool initially where there is decreased weight bearing through your joints. You don't have to be able to swim, just walking in the pool, doing some squats or marching will all help build muscle strength. You can then aim to do this on land once you feel stronger.

If you have chronic (long-term) pain, focus on how your ability to do the activities changes rather than expecting the pain to reduce. Once again gradually increase your activity levels and do things at your own pace, monitoring your improvement over time.

If you are in a wheelchair most of the day, move within your

level of ability. This could be arm movements holding light weights, marching your legs up and down or bending and straightening your knees. It is sometimes useful to adopt a 24-hour approach to moving. Try to break up your day so you don't stay in the same position for too long. This is particularly important if you are limited in your ability to move. Sometimes a change of position, such as lie down in bed to stretch out your legs, can be hugely beneficial to your wellbeing.

With long term conditions you can have good and bad days. Monitor your activities based upon how you feel and don't get overly concerned with the bad days, they will come and go. If you are unsure always talk it through with your GP or Physiotherapist. Exercise should be gradually introduced to allow your body to get used to the increased activity.

Remember 'Health is wealth' so take time out of your schedule to pay attention to your body. Get moving, enable those natural feel good chemicals to flood your body and melt away your tension.

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