

Health and fitness

Turning good habits into a great life

Today health and fitness is a big, mega-million pound industry. A lot is written about it in order to sell dreams and shift products. Whether diet books, gym memberships, celebrity fitness DVDs, exercise equipment, dietary supplements or fancy fitness clothing, there is seemingly always some new magical product that guarantees you that perfect combination - eternal life and an attractive you.

For some strange reason, however, in health and fitness terms once you're over 50 you're suddenly relegated to the 'old' pile in terms of marketing thrust. Walk-in baths, stair lifts, back supports and comfy slippers...the mind boggles at who dares to insult **in my primers** with such things.

However, perhaps as a group we only have ourselves to blame. Like most of the rest of the population, our health and fitness levels aren't as good as they might be, so for some, **in my prime** becomes a prime time for the bad habits of a lifetime to come to roost.

It's never too late to stop bad habits

The good news is that it's never too late to cease those bad habits and get a grip on a better future. In fact, there's never been a better time in as much as we can no longer fool ourselves that our bodies will bounce back unscathed as they did when we were young.

So – what to do? Our view is that if you like the sound of something, try it. If it works for you keep doing it, and if you have success in one area, then add to it by doing something else to improve another aspect of your health and fitness.

However, if like many of us, you have tried every diet, and every latest fitness regime going, still without long-lasting success, we recommend going back to basics.

We believe the following is the most sensible and potentially productive route to take to improved health and fitness and encourage you to give it a go:

Start small – don't try and do everything all at once. You're in this for the long term i.e. the rest of your life, so you've plenty of time to build up to leading a perfect lifestyle. Make small changes, gradually, and concentrate on persistence and steady progress rather than sensational speedy results.

Check your health with your doctor at the outset. You'll find this health warning attached to every diet or exercise programme, but at this age, it's worth taking heed. You shouldn't have any problems if (see previous point) you start to make gradual changes, but it's better to be safe and sure.

Give up smoking - Everyone knows the risks so nothing more to say. Try these websites for useful advice: www.givingupsmoking.co.uk
www.nicotine-anonymous.org
www.ash.org.uk

Oh, and if you're using any drugs other than nicotine, give them up too. There's plenty of help around if you need it. The Mental Health Foundation, www.mentalhealth.co.uk has a list of organisations that help those struggling with substance abuse.

Restrict your alcohol consumption -

Fortunately for most of us, alcohol is an indulgence rather than an addiction. However, like all habits, it can get out of proportion and before long you find yourself habitually drinking too much, too often. The effects are detrimental to your health, weight and wallet – so take control and cut back.

Restricting alcohol will make you healthier, more energetic, slimmer and often, a much more interesting and amenable person. It can be good to start by giving up entirely for a while, just to give your system time to normalise. After a few days, you'll start to feel great and if and when you do decide to start drinking again, you'll find it easier to drink less.

Current advice on 'safe' drinking is:

- no more than two units of alcohol a day for women
- no more than three units per day for men
- you should have at least two drink-free days a week.

For support try:

Drinkline – the national alcohol helpline – tel 0800 917 8282.

www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk

www.al-anon.org.uk (support and advice for families of alcoholics)

Eat a balanced diet and smaller portions

Staying healthy means consuming all the essential nutrients you should, and very few of those you shouldn't. Regrettably in our affluent society we have become over-obsessed with food to the extent that 'food allergies' and 'intolerances' now seem hugely fashionable afflictions and eating disorders are becoming increasingly prevalent for people of all ages.

While not wanting to belittle those who suffer, it might benefit us all to think occasionally of our affluence and wonder how much our relationship with food would change if we had access to much less of it – both in quantity and range.

Obesity is now a major epidemic and for **inmyprimers** as our metabolisms start to slow down, it becomes an increasing threat. We have to eat less and exercise more in order to stay the same size – which is fine if you're currently the size you should be, bad news if not.

In terms of losing weight, there are, unfortunately no 'magic' foods or 'wonder' regimes that really make a lasting difference.

And, the whole point about being on a 'diet' is that it is a short term programme that often has little effect on your long-term eating habits. By all means, try a diet to kick-start your new eating habits, but keep it sensible. The easier it is to follow, the more you're likely to stick to it. For sensible advice see:

www.weightwatchers.co.uk

www.rosemary-conley.co.uk

www.fatmanslim.com - the first weight loss programme specifically for men

Take regular exercise. People often make the excuse that they 'haven't got time' for exercise. All that means is that they can't be bothered to make time. According to recent research, in order to get sufficient exercise, all we need to do is walk for 20 – 30 minutes per day. How difficult and time-consuming is that?

In our society, people immediately seem to talk about 'joining a gym' if they want to improve their fitness, but for many people that's an option which

is boring, unrewarding and expensive. If you're one of them, consider some of the other options – sport (e.g. tennis, badminton, sailing); dancing; hiking; cycling; skating; swimming; riding, yoga – the list is endless.

Essential elements of your chosen pastime(s) are that it should be something you actively enjoy doing, something that is relatively accessible on a regular basis, and something which ideally also brings you into contact with other people. And don't forget that mundane tasks such as gardening, housework, and washing the car are all good exercise too!

Get plenty of sleep. Sleep is a great mental and physical healer and enables us to cope better with the stresses of daily life. At this stage in life some people start to have more difficulty sleeping than they once did so positive action is called for. Instead of turning to sleeping pills, search google (How can I sleep better) or click onto www.bbc.co.uk/sn/tvradio/programmes/sleep

Get regular checkups and screenings. This can be the age where things start to go wrong, but even serious illnesses and afflictions can usually be treated successfully if detected early enough. So don't ignore unusual symptoms in the hope that they will go away, or hide behind the ridiculous excuse that you 'haven't got time' to see a doctor.

On the other hand, don't panic or over-react either. Heartburn is not necessarily a heart attack! In terms of your health, ignorance certainly isn't bliss, so keep abreast of health issues by clicking on:

www.netdoctor.co.uk

www.patient.co.uk

www.malehealth.co.uk

www.womens-health-concern.org

Ditch stress – lead a balanced lifestyle. If you're constantly stressed, you need to do something about it. The whole point of **inmyprime** is to help mature people to make changes, and so you need to start considering what changes you need to make in order to improve the quality of your everyday life.

Aim to achieve a balance between work, leisure, family and friends, and giving back – and allow some time for your self-development and spirituality, whatever form that takes.

We hear a lot about the negative effects of stress and it's easy to forget that stress is a natural and positive force in terms of motivation towards action. In fact, many people's stress comes from the fact that they are bored and lack purpose. Whatever the cause of your stress, it needs stamping out. Click on:

www.support4learning.org.uk/health/stress.cfm