

Taking Responsibility for Your Good Health

We live in the 'information age'; everywhere we turn there is 'information' available to us. Most of us have the internet at our fingertips most of the time which means information on any topic is only a search away. The challenge with this is that there is such an overwhelmingly large quantity of information available; on any given topic you will likely find numerous different and contradictory viewpoints, all stated as fact, and it is very difficult to verify the accuracy of most of it. So how do you know what to believe?

Unfortunately there is no easy answer to that question! My advice is to read as widely as you possibly can but retain a healthy scepticism about everything you read. At times that will get very disheartening because you'll just find yourself getting increasingly confused as you uncover more 'information' that contradicts the things you've read up until that point, but that isn't a good reason to stop!

It is very difficult to find proper research that has been undertaken in a truly unbiased way. It is absolutely right to be suspicious of research that has been directly or indirectly funded by big companies who have an interest in proving a particular result. But remember that pretty much everyone has an agenda of some kind (and if you're thinking "but this person doesn't benefit in any way from me following their advice, it's not like they're selling me a product so they must be independent", how about considering that it might just be all about their ego - "how many people can I get to believe me"...) and those who truly don't, who are genuinely just providing you with information designed to help you, are generally not in a position to have conducted scientifically valid research to back up their claims. "I've been following this diet for 1/2/5 years and I've never felt better, had more energy, weighed less, etc.", is interesting information but doesn't prove that either that this diet is actually a good long term option for anyone (maybe the side effects will only become apparent after 10/20/30 years) or even if it is a good option for that individual or group that it is a good option for everyone!

It's really important to remember that human beings are incredibly complex organisms. I doubt there is such a thing as one perfect diet that we all would thrive on, or one perfect approach to exercise that will produce the best results for everyone. Trial and error is probably the best approach to find what works for you. It can be a really long process to figure out the optimum approach to anything for you, and you should view all of these things as journeys rather than destinations.

When it comes to diet for example it's not as simple as the individual foods you are eating, as the way they interact with each other will have a significant effect. Also there can be problems that only develop over time, such as a diet that it is creating an excess of something in your body that could take years to build up to a point that it becomes apparent. In addition your body changes over time, and so you need to be constantly aware of how you are feeling and making changes to your eating and exercise habits as appropriate.

Although large-scale sweeping changes can seem exciting and therefore appealing, in reality smaller, more controlled and evolutionary changes will generally prove easier, and help you more accurately identify problem areas and deal with them.

This isn't just about right and wrong ways to eat and exercise, it's about everything in your life. What causes and relieves stress - is lying on a beach or hiking through nature or visiting a theme park a more relaxing kind of vacation, what colour should you paint your walls - all of these things are subjective, there is no 'one size fits all' right or wrong answer.

Personally I tend to think that when in doubt the best answer is probably the simplest. We've often been brought up to believe that the more complicated something sounds the better it is. But when it comes to caring for your body and mind it seems to me that usually keeping it as simple as possible provides the best solutions.

Eat as simple as possible. The more processed a food is the less likely it offers any real benefit to your body. The human body does evolve over time with changing conditions, but this is a very slow process. If you're eating a food that your great grandparents wouldn't even recognise, then there is a good chance your body is not going to recognise it or be sure what to do with it. In addition, foods lose flavour with processing, so processed foods tend to have flavour added in the form of sugar, salt, fat or artificial flavourings, none of which are likely to be doing your body much good. Eat food in as close to its natural state as possible. The healthiest of foods generally require very little done to them to prepare them for eating.

Exercise as simply as possible. There's no need for expensive gym equipment or gadgets, just get out there and move your body. Walk, run, do push-ups, skip, do yoga; whatever you enjoy and is appropriate to your level of fitness (and do get expert advice to help you figure that out). That's not to say there is necessarily anything wrong with other forms of exercise, but when people start trying to sell you a miracle workout plan that prescribes exactly how and when you must exercise, there's a good chance that it won't work for you in the way you hope even if you do follow it to the letter, and a very high chance that you won't see it through anyway, because events will come along in your life that will interfere with your ability to follow the tightly scripted regiment.

The most valuable and important thing you can do is increase your self-awareness and attention. Listen to your body to find out what does and doesn't work well for you. Monitor your physical and mental health and be conscious of how the choices you are making and the things that are happening in your life contribute to your wellbeing. Remember that sometimes the impacts of things are not felt immediately but can take time to appear, so a long term approach is required. Don't be too quick to draw conclusions, either positive or negative, about the impact something is having on your life. Listen to your 'gut feeling' or intuition. You might not be able to explain the logic of it, but if it feels right for you, or feels wrong for you, it probably is. You don't need to be able to explain or justify your choices to others, you just need to find what is right for you.

Don't let anyone tell you what will make you fit, strong, slim, healthy, and/or happy. Let them provide you with information that will help you figure those things out but take responsibility for evaluating that information and reaching your own conclusions.