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HEALTH

Gym class

Getting active and healthy isn't necessarily about doing more, but streamlining your goals to promote protocols that prove most effective. By Remy Rippon.

Start breathing properly

We generally believe health and fitness goals need to be drastic overhauls but consider this: the way you breathe can be one of the most effective ways to combat stress. Breathing, or more precisely, diaphragmatic breathing – that is, taking deep belly breaths as you often do in yoga and meditation – not only helps you recalibrate in stressful situations, it offers a host of other benefits including decreasing heart rate and blood pressure. Learning how to breathe better is easy. Simply take a deep breath in through the nose (ensuring your stomach expands), and release the breath slowly through the mouth. For best results, start by doing this once or twice a day during your commute or lunch break.

Rethink intermittent fasting

Since the 5:2 diet burst onto the scene in 2012, the health benefits of intermittent fasting have been well documented. Weight loss, lower blood pressure and cholesterol, and improved blood sugar levels are among the many reasons health experts have favoured the popular eating plan. But a study published this year, which analysed the effect of time-restricted eating on weight loss and metabolic health in overweight participants, concluded that time-restricted eating alone wasn't a more effective weight loss strategy than eating at more regular intervals. Moreover, many participants shed muscle, not fat. One study isn't reason enough to reconsider intermittent fasting altogether, but with conflicting evidence of its benefits, the best wellbeing plan remains a balanced one.

Strength and cardio are happy bedfellows

You've probably heard that cardio is king. You've probably also heard that strength training is the most efficient way to build muscle. The truth? They're equally important. "Each training modality places different physiological demands on the body which in turn creates different adaptations and health-related advantages," says F45 chief athletics officer, Nathan Mago. "Strength training is best for burning calories by increasing a person's basal metabolic rate through increases in lean muscle mass, muscular hypertrophy and strength," says Mago, noting that cardio increases the heart rate and improves overall efficiency as well as reducing the risk of cardiovascular disease. If you're training a few times per week, be sure to include an equal split of heart rate-raising and weight-bearing exercises.

Avoid injuries

We've established that lifting weights is important, but it's also the reason many people wind up at the doctor's office. If you're new to weights, master the technique before dialling up the load and to avoid serious injury, increase the weight load gradually. Or better still, forgo the dumbbells altogether to begin with. "Always start any exercise program with just your body weight," recommends personal trainer Ricardo Riskalla. "Imagine you are doing bicep curls with no weights and do it slowly in a controlled manner." Moreover, pay close attention to overhead lifts which are more difficult to master and can easily lead to common back and shoulder injuries.

Walk with purpose

We know an old fashioned walk is good for us, but until now, there's been little discussion on how our surrounding environment when walking may benefit our health. A new US study has confirmed that 'awe walks' – actively taking in the sights around you during a stroll and experiencing awe – can boost our mood and outlook. Author Julia Baird also describes the phenomenon in her book, *Phosphorescence*: "It would be wrong to think of exercise only as something to build muscle and ease anxiety. If we can, we should force ourselves out of gyms and off machines and into the natural world, knowing, or hoping that we may stumble upon awe." To take an 'awe walk' of your own, leave the phone at home and seek out natural surrounds like parks, cliff tops or bush walks. ■