

A Monthly 4-Part Focus on Your Health

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When it comes to your health, you really need to implement steps that can ensure that you not only live a longer life, but that you live a happier one, too. Studies have shown that people who take care of their health are often more relaxed, more optimistic and have more energy.

Feeling good on the inside will translate into how you look and behave. If you look at your health and feel overwhelmed at the thought of making a huge change, there's something you can do.

You can break down a focus on your health each week per month and just look at each week's changes to begin improving your health, and improving your overall life.

Week One

The first thing that you want to look at when it comes to your health is making sure that you're active. The reason that you want to start with some type of physical activity is because exercise has the power to boost your endorphin production.

This chemical works as an instant mood improvement technique. So that way, if you're struggling with emotions like anxiety, anger, or depression, getting physically active will help.

If you haven't exercised in a while, you might need a little bit of motivation to keep going - especially if you've been struggling with any kind of emotional situation. When you're going through things in life, sometimes the last thing that you want to do is to get up and get through a workout.

But if you stick with it, you will feel better and each time you do engage in deliberate exercise, you'll notice a difference in the way that you feel. For

some people, this means hitting the gym so they sign up for a membership and are then able to use the equipment.

But for other people, going to the gym isn't an option for different reasons. You might not be able to get to the gym because there's no extra room in the budget. Or you might have small kids at home and there won't be anyone to care for them for you to be able to get to the gym.

Thankfully, there are ways around obstacles like that. First, some gyms do offer child care options. So, if you can afford a gym membership, that might be one direction that you can take.

But you don't have to join a gym in order to make sure that you get the exercise that you need. You can use equipment at home to get fit. The good news is that this equipment doesn't have to be expensive.

Making sure that you're active can be something as simple as an exercise video that leads you through an aerobic routing. If you want to get out of the house but can't or don't want to include a visit to the gym, you can always walk.

Walking is one the easiest and most affordable means of exercise. You can walk alone or with other people and if you have small children, you can take them along in a regular stroller or use a jogging stroller.

The key to making this first week change and sticking with it is to find something that you look forward to doing. Making exercise fun is a great way to make it a habit and you can find ways to reward yourself for each milestone that you pass.

These milestones can be anything from days exercising to pounds lost to inches dropped. By getting involved in a regular exercise routine, you can add years to your life and look and feel better while you're doing it.

Reward yourself with new music or a new book. Take a day trip or buy yourself a ticket to a concert. Do something that appeals to you. When you reward yourself, it creates a feel good sense just like is released when you exercise.

By tapping into the reward center of the brain, you help to create the desire to keep doing the action that makes you feel that happiness. This is what can help lead to your being able to make exercise a steady habit rather than something that's hit and miss.

Once you've worked on developing a routine for your first week, and it might be something as simple as doing 10 minutes a day during month one, add week two to the routine.

Week Two

There's something that not a lot of people realize when it comes to having a focus on health and that is the mental part of being healthy. Just like physical exercise strengthens your body, taking care of your mental health strengthens your mind.

Mental health is the practice of making sure that your emotional and psychological needs are met. You need to address this side of your life in order to have complete health.

No one questions that life can be difficult. From the time that you set foot out of bed in the morning, you're going to face challenges. Some of these challenges are going to be simple ones and they'll fall under the heading of irritants.

Spilling coffee on your shirt is an irritant. Getting cut off in traffic is also one. Ending up arriving at work late to find the boss already hovering by your desk is another.

Taken separately, these issues can be considered minor. The problem occurs when you deal with multiple irritants day in and day out. Because what happens is that these things have a way of being at the back of your mind like a pot waiting to boil over and cause a mess.

When people get angry, it's usually not one thing that causes that anger to rise. It's something that's built over time. This can be a series of irritants, it can be unresolved tensions, grief, anxiety or fears.

What you have to do to make sure that you take care of your mental health is to not let things accumulate. Deal with each issue as it arises. And if it's something that can't be resolved, then you have to make peace with it.

An example of that is a coworker or family member who really gets under your skin. Since this person might be part of your life for the long term, you'll have to make peace with whoever they are and whatever it is that they do.

How to accomplish that might vary. Some people choose to use helps such as having a daily mantra that they recite that helps to keep them calm and focused. Other people will practice a form of exercise like yoga that helps them to relax and find their center.

Having something that you can turn to for inner strength is helpful for all areas of your life. If you're someone who struggles with emotional upsets such as anxiety or depression, then addressing that can help you have better mental health.

Anxiety can be caused for many reasons. You might feel anxious about a home or work situation. You might have anxiety because you worry about the future. Whatever the reason, anxiety can rob you of your peace of mind.

Choosing to address your anxiety can help you achieve mental and physical health because our emotions do impact our bodies. Depression can affect our mental health.

There are two types of depression that people struggle with. One is situational depression and almost everyone has experienced this. This type of depression isn't long term.

It can occur following a breakup, a move, a job loss or as a result of a stressful situation. You can feel afraid, grief-stricken or a sense of hopelessness. Situational depression should be addressed because if it's not, it does have the potential to turn into long term depression.

Long term depression is often referred to as chronic depression. This type of depression has been linked to chemical changes within the brain. Getting treatment is imperative so that you can manage the condition.

Go over a checklist of symptoms to see if you recognize any of these as being present in your life. You're experiencing feelings of helplessness, like you can't change your situation or you can't pull yourself out of what you've thought was a funk.

You don't want to go out with your friends and you don't want to engage in any of the things that you once found enjoyable. You would prefer to stay home and feel as if you want to shut out the world.

Fatigue seems to be something that you're battling all the time. Getting up fills you with dread and as soon as you wake up, you feel a heaviness in your emotions.

You might be experiencing feelings of wanting to sleep all the time - or of being unable to sleep because you have insomnia. You find that you're eating just to eat or that you're unable to eat much at all.

You're either gaining weight or losing it. The thoughts that you think about are negative and even when you try to think positive, the negative thoughts take over.

You feel anxious, angry or fearful. You're looking for ways to numb the pain by checking out with alcohol, drugs or actions that aren't your normal behavior. All of the mental health issues you experience, no matter how small, can be changed with simple tweaks to your routine.

In week two, work on adding stress relief little by little until you find what helps calm you down and lift you up. It could be aromatherapy, relaxation or guided meditation CDs, massages, or avoiding people or things that wear you down.

This is the week where you'll be adding stress relief on to the existing exercise regimen you've developed. You should start feeling better already, but let's add a third level of personal improvement.

Week Three

Nutrition is an important part when it comes to focusing on your health. Whatever it is that you're putting into your body will act as fuel to keep your body running and give you energy.

During week three, you need to begin adding simple tweaks to your diet plan. Each month, during week three, incorporate one more tweak. The foods you eat (or don't eat) can make a big difference in how you feel on a regular basis.

If you eat the wrong kinds of foods, you end up with short bursts of energy and once the fuel has been used up, you end up feeling drained and go on the hunt for more food to give you energy.

It can become a cycle if you don't stop it. You've long heard that eating junk food is bad and that you shouldn't do it. The truth is that you can. The trick is moderation.

You can eat some junk food every now and then. The problem is that too many people have their nutrition backwards. They eat more junk food than they do food that's good for them and the kind that their body needs.

If you try to make your car go when it's out of oil, you're going to end up with major engine trouble. It's the same principle when it comes to nutrition. Your body can run on the wrong kinds of foods for years.

But eventually, this way of eating will take a toll on your body. Eating foods that are high in fat and sugar can lead to things like a fatty liver. It can also lead to clogged arteries, which in turn can cause a heart attack and damage to your heart.

You can end up with high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes and even certain types of cancer if you don't make sure your nutrition is based on what your body needs it to be.

When it comes to nutrition remember that fresh is best. Try to avoid as much processed or packaged foods as you possibly can. Eat in moderation and keep an eye on your portion size.

Eat smaller meals rather than larger ones and fill up on fiber, greens, fruit and lean proteins. For people who struggle with wanting a snack while watching TV, what you're looking for is usually a food that will crunch.

Substitute the chips for cucumbers, broccoli and carrots. If you put a serving size in a baggie, add a tablespoon of low-fat Italian dressing and shake it, you'll end up with a snack that satisfies your crunch craving.

Don't try to implement these changes all at once. Just add one small tweak on the third week of month one, then another in month two, and so on. That way you make permanent changes that last.

Week Four

Focusing on your health means making the changes that you can make to improve what you can. Family health history, however, is something that can be the wild card.

This is due to the fact that your family's genetics are going to determine some of the health positives and negatives that you're going to experience. For example, some people have a gene that's linked to breast cancer.

Many of the women in the family will find that they have to deal with this type of cancer often earlier in life than others would face such a diagnosis. Some people have a gene that causes high blood pressure or high cholesterol and they're more prone to heart attacks in their family than other families are.

You can't erase the genetics that you were born with. But what you can do is make sure that you're not doing things with your health that play into the negative side of those genetics.

If you have a family history of heart attacks caused by high blood pressure, it would be a wise idea to take steps to eliminate factors that cause high blood pressure.

This would be things such as not exercising, not watching what you eat and not seeking medical help if you do have the higher numbers. High blood pressure genetics can be exacerbated by not taking care of yourself now.

If you smoke, you run the risk of raising your blood pressure and contributing to a future heart attack. When you're informed about your family history, then you can be more proactive because you'll know what you're up against.

If you have a family history of diabetes, there are certain steps that you can take to try and stave off a diagnosis for yourself. You can keep your weight at a healthy level, exercise regularly and eat a diet based on low carb foods.

You might even know what your genetic health risk factors are. But you can. You can get tested to see what your genetic makeup is. And by doing that, you can take steps to lower your risk factors.

It can also help soothe any anxiety or fears you might have. For example, if you have family members with a certain condition, getting tested can show you what your risk of getting it is. It can also help you to learn what you can do to minimize or eliminate your chances of getting it.



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