

Clear your mind of clutter

In today's fast-paced world, finding tranquility can be a challenge, especially when it's time to unwind and drift into a restful night's sleep. When the hustle of daily life can often lead to stress and mental clutter, learning how to clear the mind is essential.

Here are five techniques that can help you relax and improve your sleep quality:

1. Mindfulness meditation.

Mindfulness meditation is a practice that involves focusing on the present moment without judgment. By paying attention to your breath and gently bringing your focus back when your mind wanders, you can achieve a state of calm. Studies have shown that regular mindfulness practice can reduce stress and improve sleep.

2. Progressive muscle relaxation (PMR).

PMR is a technique that involves tensing and then relaxing different muscle groups in the body. This process helps to release physical tension and mental stress. Starting from your toes and moving upwards, tense each muscle for a few seconds, then release. The contrast between tension and relaxation can help clear your mind and prepare your body for sleep.

3. Guided imagery. Guided imagery involves visualizing a peaceful scene or story to engage your mind and distract it from stressful thoughts.



Whether it's imagining a serene forest, a quiet beach, or a story that takes you on a journey, this technique can help shift your focus away from the day's worries and toward a state of relaxation.

4. Journaling. Writing down your thoughts and feelings can be a therapeutic way to clear your mind. Journaling allows you to express and process your emotions, which can often be the first step in letting them go. This practice can be particularly helpful before bed, as it can prevent racing thoughts from keeping you awake.

5. Digital detox. In our connected world, screens are a significant source

of mental stimulation. Implementing a digital detox, especially in the hour before bedtime, can help your mind wind down. Consider reading a book, listening to calming music, or practicing another relaxation technique instead of scrolling through your phone.

By incorporating these techniques into your daily routine, you can create a mental space that fosters relaxation and sets the stage for a restful night's sleep. Remember, consistency is key, so choose the methods that resonate with you and make them a part of your nightly ritual.

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The heart-mouth connection: What you should know

(NC) Your oral health routine isn't just about pearly whites – it's a critical aspect of your heart health too. Neglecting oral hygiene allows harmful bacteria to flourish, leading to issues such as bad breath, cavities and gingivitis (gum disease), which left untreated can progress to periodontal disease. These bacteria can also travel through your bloodstream, increasing the chances of infections such as endocarditis and contributing to clogged arteries that may lead to heart attacks or strokes.

Recognizing signs of poor oral health is key. Keep an eye out for red, swollen gums, bleeding during brushing or flossing, receding gums, bad breath and signs of infection or decay. Individuals with advanced gingivitis or periodontitis, diagnosed heart disease, high blood-pressure, high cholesterol, obesity or those who smoke are particularly at risk.

Taking proactive steps, such as saying no to cigarettes, adopting a vitamin-rich diet and prioritizing regular exercise, makes an important difference. And to prevent gum issues, oral health professionals recommend that you maintain a daily oral care routine, brush for two minutes twice a day with fluoride toothpaste, clean between your teeth with floss or interdental tools, and rinse with an antibacterial solution.

Even if the direct link between gum and heart disease isn't fully understood, studies show a higher risk for heart problems in those with poor oral health. A consistent oral care routine and regular appointments with your dental hygienist are crucial. Remember to tell them about your health conditions and any medications you are taking.

To learn more about the connection between your heart and oral health visit dentalhygienecanada.ca.



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Intermittent fasting: A balanced perspective

In recent years, intermittent fasting (IF) has emerged as a popular dietary approach among Canadians seeking to improve their health and wellness. IF holds promise as a dietary approach with several potential health benefits. However, it's important to weigh these benefits against the possible downsides and to consider your unique circumstances.

Intermittent fasting involves alternating periods of eating with periods of fasting. It's not just about what you eat, but when you eat. According to massgeneralbrigham.org, IF can help with:

Weight loss: IF can lead to weight loss by reducing calorie intake and boosting metabolism.

Improved heart health: Some studies suggest that IF may lower cholesterol and blood pressure, contributing to better heart health.

Enhanced brain function: Fasting periods might improve brain health and protect against age-related diseases.

Reduced inflammation: IF has been associated with decreased inflammation, a key factor in chronic diseases.

However, despite its possible benefits, intermittent fasting isn't without its drawbacks, and it's not suitable for everyone.

The Kelsey-Sebold clinic points out that IF can lead to:

Hunger and fatigue: Skipping meals can lead to increased hunger, fatigue, and irritability, especially when starting IF.

Potential nutrient deficiencies: Without careful planning, IF could result in nutrient deficiencies.

Social and lifestyle challenges: Adhering to strict eating windows may interfere with social events and family meals.

Not a one-size-fits-all: Individual responses to IF can vary greatly, and it may not be effective or sustainable for everyone.

Before making any significant changes to your diet, such as starting intermittent fasting, it's imperative to consult with a healthcare professional. A dietitian or doctor can help tailor the approach to your individual needs, considering your medical history, current health status, and nutritional requirements. They can also provide guidance on how to maintain a balanced diet and avoid potential risks associated with fasting.

Remember, your primary care physician should be your "health quarterback," helping you navigate through the myriads of dietary options to find what works best for you. Consulting a professional ensures that your journey towards better health is both safe and effective.



Shift thoughts to your body for instant calm

Clarity, relaxation, and wise decision-making are just three benefits of a calm mindset. But if you're like most people, negative self-talk can make you slip into fight or flight mode. You might think it is events that cause damaging self-talk. Happenings, whether falling out with a friend or receiving a huge electricity bill, trigger stress and your thoughts are part of your response to upsetting circumstances. However, the real problem with negative self-talk is how it deepens.

Self-talk that points out the direness of your situation is healthy. However, it becomes unhelpful when it is repetitive and ongoing.

Getting caught in a negative spiral of foreboding and critical thoughts is simple. Just focus on a problem for a while, and you experience panic, otherwise known as fight or flight.

Your palms sweat, your heart races, and your stomach churns while you consider what's wrong, and herein lies the problem. Focusing on an adverse event is like pushing a switch called "high alert," which should be kept for emergencies, and not letting go.

You experience stress when you press the switch. Relief comes from releasing pressure, which is where shifting thoughts to your body comes in handy.

When you focus on an aspect of your body, like your breath entering and leaving, you stop pouring mental energy into whatever ails you.

Concentrating on your body provides a mini vacation from stress, letting you re-balance and clear your head so you can cope better with challenges.

Here's an example of how you can shift thoughts to your body:

First, shut your eyes. Then, pay attention to your body by scanning what's happening. For example, perhaps your heart's beating fast, and you're breathing high in your chest; classic symptoms of fight or flight.

Now you can slow your breathing to a relaxed, comfortable rate. Follow air entering your nose as you inhale, and it travels to your lungs. Repeat the exercise as you exhale, noting air moving up and out of your system.

Slow breathing works twofold; It ignites the relaxation response because it tells your brain everything's okay and you can be calm. Second, focusing on breathing distracts you from negative self-talk. You can't think about two subjects simultaneously, so you stop worrying.

Once you recognize you're relaxing, scan your body again. You'll find your heart rate slower, and you'll experience a growing sense of ease and well-being.

When stress arises, you could get caught in the trap of overthinking about problems. Shift your thoughts to your body, and negative thoughts will ease.

Ways to use less plastic

In a world that's all about reduce, reuse, and recycle, you may be racking your brain on how to actually do that. **Here are a few ways you can try to use less plastic:**

1. Reusable containers

Many of us have been guilty of wrapping leftovers in cellophane. There is a solution that is just as efficient but also eco-friendly. One solution is swapping out the brown lunch bags and plastic wrap or bags for a lunch box and washable sandwich bags.

You can find reusable food storage bags in many stores and online. You can use them, clean them, reuse them, and repeat.

2. Consider a water filter

Another convenience is bottled water. Just imagine how many waters come in an individual pack (6, 12, 24, 30), and imagine how many households worldwide are purchasing them. Suffice to say, there are a lot of plastic water bottles, and many of them never find their way to a recycling bin.

Consider buying a water filter. Some filters come in pitcher form, purifying the water as you pour it into the pitcher; other filters can attach to your sink, purifying it straight from the tap. Filters are cost-effective, only having to be replaced every three to six months (depending on the brand, type, and use frequency).

3. Reuse

You don't have to leave it up to your local recycling plant to get in on all the reusing action. If you have an abundant amount of plastic or have some lying around your home, you can find practical applications for them. With a plastic bottle and a couple of spoons, you can make a bird feeder.

You can also take a larger plastic bottle, poke some holes in the top, and use it as a watering can for your garden. Not every piece of plastic has an added application, but reusing plastics in our own homes is one step closer to a greener household.

Plastics are all around us, and it is nearly impossible to avoid using them in some way. By tweaking our purchasing and daily habits just a little, we can drastically reduce our use of plastic.





Lift your mood with herbal supplements

Depression and anxiety can cause your mood to plummet and interfere with your daily life. Even a mild case of depression can make you feel fatigued, uninterested in activities, and unable to cope with everyday life. If you're looking for an over-the-counter remedy for your low mood, you might want to try one of the following mood-lifting herbal supplements:

St. John's Wort

St. John's Wort has been used as far back as Hippocrates, who used the herb for depression as well as for burns, wounds, and ulcers. The active ingredients in St. John's Wort include flavonoids, hypericin, and hyperforin. The herb also increases serotonin in the brain, a chemical responsible for good moods. It also increases dopamine and norepinephrine, chemicals that are also attributed to raising your mood. St. John's Wort has also been known to lower the stress hormone cortisol.

Reported side effects are stomach upset, fatigue, restlessness, and possible allergic reactions. Do not use this herb if pregnant. Always ask your doctor or pharmacist to ensure any herbal supplement won't interact negatively with your current medications.

Kava Kava

Kava Kava comes from the islands of the South Pacific, where it has been used as a relaxant for centuries. This herb influences GABA (gamma-amino-butyric acid), a neurotransmitter, to promote relaxation. Kava Kava has also been shown to affect the portion of the brain that influences emotions. It also prevents the hormone norepinephrine from inducing a stress response. The only reported side-effect is stomach upset. It is not recommended for pregnant women to use the herb. People with liver disease should also not use this supplement.

Valerian

Valerian was used by the ancient Romans and Greeks for a variety of health issues, including relaxation. Its relaxation properties can lead to feeling less stress, thus calming feelings of depression. Valerian contains GABA neurotransmitters, which help calm the brain.

Side effects include a groggy sensation the day after the herb is taken. Some people have experienced stomach upset. If you are already taking a prescription tranquilizer or antidepressant, consult your doctor first before trying Valerian.

Whether you're experiencing the blues, feeling anxious, or feeling high levels of stress, and it's affecting your mood, it's comforting to know you can find an over-the-counter supplement that can help you feel better. Taken with care, these herbal supplements might be the right cure to lift your mood.

Give sobriety a chance

Sober curious? Here are a few reasons to make a healthy decision and say goodbye to alcohol for good:

1. Your sleep will improve

You might find it easier to fall asleep after a few drinks, but going through the proper sleep cycle is important to feeling rested the next day. The reality is alcohol causes you to spend more time in deep sleep; rather than the restorative stage of Rapid Eye Movement (REM). So, you fall asleep quicker and easier, but when you wake up it'll feel like you've hardly slept.

One of the first things you'll notice when you ditch alcohol is it's much less of a chore getting yourself out of bed. You'll have more energy and motivation to get on with your day.

2. You might lose weight

If you are a heavy or habitual drinker, you'll notice the difference in your waistline once you stop drinking. A large glass of wine has around 225 calories and a pint of beer is over 200 calories. Even a double shot of a spirit (without a mixer) is 100 calories. During a heavy drinking session, you might be consuming thousands of empty calories.

3. You'll have more fun

One of the biggest delusions surrounding drinking is that you won't be able to have fun without

the influence of alcohol. You can still go and have exactly as much fun; remember more of the conversations and make more meaningful connections with the people you're with, without the hangover or crippling anxiety the next day.

4. Your wallet will thank you

This is an easy one. Imagine waking up on a Sunday morning and checking your bank account, to find it exactly how you left it. No unexplained bar tabs after deciding to buy shots for the whole table or no expensive taxi fare.

5. You have so much more time!

This is by far the most important benefit of quitting alcohol. It's not just the couple of hours in the pub or club you're saying goodbye to; more often than not the next day or two is a write-off, plus a few extra days of anxiety or low mood as the chemicals in your brain start balancing out.

Also worth considering is how frequently you've caught yourself watching the clock on a Friday. How often do you wish the day away so that you can have your first drink of the weekend?

When you stop, you'll suddenly find the extra time, drive, money and energy to start living life how you always wanted. You'll stop counting the hours until you can get to the pub and start enjoying life as it comes.



Understanding apron belly: Causes and natural remedies

Many people experience an apron belly, also known as a pannus stomach or mother's apron. This is the name for the extra skin and fat that droops from the stomach, often looking like an apron. This condition can occur in anyone, regardless of gender, and is not only related to being overweight.

Some possible causes of an apron belly are:

Pregnancy: The expansion of the abdomen to accommodate a growing baby can stretch the skin significantly.

Weight fluctuations: Significant weight gain can lead to additional fat deposits in the omentum (A fold of the thin tissue that lines the abdomen and surrounds the stomach and other organs in the abdomen), while rapid weight loss can result in loose, sagging skin.

Age and hormonal changes: As we age, hormonal shifts can alter the distribution of fat in the body, contributing to the formation of an apron belly.

Genetics: Some individuals may be genetically predisposed to store more fat in the abdominal area.

Dietary changes can play a significant role in managing an apron belly. While no diet can target belly fat specifically, certain adjustments can help with overall weight management and may contribute to the reduction of an apron belly.

Here are some suggestions:

Increase protein intake. A diet high in protein can support weight loss efforts by enhancing satiety and preserving lean muscle mass during weight loss.

Eat more non-starchy vegetables. Consuming a variety of non-starchy

vegetables like leafy greens, broccoli, and bell peppers can provide essential nutrients while being low in calories.

Focus on fibre. Foods rich in fibre, such as fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, can help reduce intestinal gas and bloating, contributing to a flatter stomach.

Limit processed foods and sugary drinks. Avoiding foods high in added sugars and saturated fats can help reduce calorie intake and inflammation.

Here are a few other natural methods to address an apron belly:

Core muscle strengthening: Although exercises cannot directly target belly fat, strengthening the core muscles can improve posture and the appearance of the abdominal area.

Proper skincare: Keeping the area clean and dry, along with using anti-chafing creams, can help manage discomfort and prevent skin irritation.

It's important to note that while these methods can help, they may not completely eliminate an apron belly, especially if it's due to significant weight loss or genetic factors. In such cases, talk to your health care professional about surgical options like a panniculectomy.

An apron belly is a natural occurrence for many, resulting from various life changes and conditions. While it can be a source of emotional and physical discomfort, understanding its causes and exploring natural remedies can empower individuals to manage it effectively. Remember, every body is unique, and what works for one person may not work for another. It's always best to consult with a healthcare professional before starting any new health regimen.

Vital vitamins: Unveiling the unsung heroes of nutrition

Good health starts with good nutrition, and sometimes, the most beneficial nutrients are the ones we hear about the least. Some vitamins don't always make the headlines yet play crucial roles in maintaining our health. Three such unsung heroes include Vitamin K2, Choline, and Manganese. These essential nutrients may not share the limelight with their well-known counterparts, but they are just as vital for our well-being.

Vitamin K2: Often overshadowed by Vitamin K1, found abundantly in leafy greens, Vitamin K2 is a fat-soluble vitamin that's pivotal for bone health and blood clotting. Unlike K1, K2 directs calcium to the bones, preventing it from depositing in the arteries. This lesser-known variant is found in fermented foods and animal products. To boost your K2 intake, include natto, a traditional Japanese fermented soybean dish, or hard cheeses like Gouda and Brie in your diet.

Choline: Choline might not have the fame of omega-3 fatty acids, but it's just as important for brain health. This nutrient aids in the formation of cell membranes and plays a significant role in memory and muscle control. It's particularly crucial during pregnancy for fetal brain development. Get your choline fix from eggs, particularly the yolks, milk, and peanuts.

Manganese: Manganese doesn't often feature in nutrition discussions, but it's essential for metabolism, bone formation, and the prevention of oxidative stress. While it's required only in trace amounts, a deficiency can lead to health issues. Whole grains, legumes, and nuts are good sources. Sprinkle some oats on your breakfast or snack on hazelnuts to keep your manganese levels in check.

Incorporating these vitamins into your diet doesn't require a radical overhaul—just a few tweaks and additions. By diversifying your plate with the foods mentioned, you'll not only enjoy a richer palette of flavours but also ensure that your body gets all the nutrients it needs to thrive.



Elevate your cooking with homegrown herbs



(NC) The right seasoning takes a dish from good to great. Fresh herbs are one of the best ways to enrich a recipe with fresh, vibrant flavours. Adding mint to green salads produces refreshing complexity, roasting a chicken with rosemary, sage and thyme adds warm, savoury flavours, and incorporating lavender into your baking creates a delicious, floral taste.

Elevate your meals with fresh, homegrown herbs with these easy gardening tips.

Herbs are easy to grow and can be planted in your backyard, balcony or windowsill. Wherever you grow your herb garden, ensure it receives direct sunlight. Most herbs need at least four hours of sun a day.

Remember to feed your food. Fertilizing your herbs helps them grow faster and increases regrowth so that you can pick and use them more often. Slow-release fertilizers are great for herbs, providing them with a steady supply of nutrients over time. Also, consider fertilizing herbs in a container more often than those planted in the garden, as water will wash away nutrients in the soil faster.

Herbs need to be watered two to three times a week depending on the type, the temperature and the container they are in. It is important to select soil and a planter with good drainage. This helps protect the plant's roots from bacteria, fungus and rot.

How to manage adult acne

Many adults deal with acne, a skin condition that can be hard to treat and affect your self-esteem. It's not only a problem for teenagers; adult acne can affect people in their 20s, 30s, and older.

According to the Mayo Clinic, various factors can contribute to adult acne, often in combination. Some of these are:

Hormonal changes: Hormone levels can shift during pregnancy or menopause, affecting the skin.

Excess oil production: The skin's oil glands may make too much oil, which can plug pores and attract bacteria.

Clogged pores: Oil and dead skin cells can accumulate, blocking pores and leading to pimples.

Stress: It can worsen acne by increasing oil production and inflammation.

Diet: Some people may find that high-glycemic foods and dairy aggravate their acne.

Medications: Some drugs, such as corticosteroids and lithium, can trigger acne.

Cosmetics: Some products for skin and hair care can clog pores and cause breakouts.

To manage adult acne, you need to make some lifestyle changes, use over-the-counter products, and possibly prescription medications.

Here are some tips to help you begin:

Cleanse gently: Use a gentle cleanser twice a day to remove excess oil without drying the skin.

Topical treatments: Over-the-counter products like benzoyl peroxide, salicylic acid, and retinoids can help with mild acne. Prescription medications: For more serious cases, a dermatologist may prescribe oral antibiotics or hormonal treatments.

Healthy diet: Follow a low-glycemic diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and omega-3 fatty acids.

Stress management: Include stress-reducing activities such as yoga, meditation, or regular exercise in your schedule.

Professional treatments: Think about procedures like chemical peels or phototherapy under the supervision of a dermatologist.

Keep in mind, it's important to give any new treatment at least 6 to 8 weeks to see results. If your acne does not improve or is severe, see a dermatologist for a customized treatment plan.

energy zone

Many plants provide a visual clue as to the vitamins they contain. The brighter and more varied your plate, the better! **Here's a brief overview of what the colours represent:**

Red: Fruits and vegetables like tomatoes, watermelon, and red peppers contain lycopene, an antioxidant that may help reduce the risk of cancer and keep the heart healthy.

Orange/Yellow: Foods such as carrots, sweet potatoes, and oranges are rich in carotenoids like beta-carotene, which the body converts to vitamin A, essential for vision and immune function.

Green: Green vegetables like spinach, kale, and broccoli are high in chlorophyll, fibre and folate, which are important for healthy digestion, blood cell formation, and growth.

Blue/Purple: Blueberries, eggplants, and blackberries get their hue from anthocyanins, which may help with memory and support a healthy aging process.

Add colour to your plate!

