

THE FIVE ESSENTIALS OF WELLBEING

These shouldn't come as a surprise, but do you know what's good for you:

Essential 1: Regular exercise

Exercise is a no-brainer. Try to fit in 30 minutes at least every second day. When I first see a new client, they generally say no when I ask if they're exercising. I tell them to start immediately – the free endorphins will kickstart wellbeing. And the fastest improvement to mental health can come from the physical. It's much harder to change long-held thoughts and low moods, so pick the low hanging fruit. Don't know where to start, start small. And start by putting your gym clothes on – you'll feel a bit silly if you don't do anything!

Essential 2: Sound sleep

A good night's sleep is a must, so your brain can switch off, your body can repair itself and your mind can declutter. Spend time and effort getting this right. Prepare your sleep space by making sure your bed and bedroom are quiet and comfortable for sleeping. A cooler room with enough blankets to stay warm is best. Develop a set of sleep rituals that you perform each night before bed – shower, cup of herbal tea, gentle stretches. Let your body learn from these that it's going to sleep, and don't use your bed for anything other than sleeping and sex, make sure it learns that really well!

Essential 3: Good nutrition

Nutrition is crucial to how we feel within and about ourselves. If the fuel we put in our body is poor, our engine will seize up, and we'll have problems. You don't have to get too fancy, but remember to eat real food. Processed foods don't keep us full and are packed with calories. And when you start eating food without labels, there's no need to count calories. We spend 60% of our time at work, so prepare your own food so you're not tempted by those charismatic vending machines. Remember to eat your lunch alfresco, and not aldesko!

Essential 4: Fewer vices

Reduce or eliminate all the usual suspects: smoking, caffeine, alcohol or drugs. Consider what you actually want from each of these substances (e.g. relaxation, more energy, to forget), and how you might get this from other things – relaxation techniques such as stretching, or progressive muscle relaxation to wind down; walking and exercise to increase energy; mindfulness and slow breathing techniques to settle your thoughts.

Essential 5: Social connection

Getting the right amount of connecting with family and socialising with friends while leaving enough 'me time' is essential for good health. When you're not connected to those around you, your body will naturally go into it's fight or flight response, because you're pre-programmed to look for threats, and thus unable to relax. Get connected to lower feelings of loneliness and set yourself up to thrive.