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Healthy Office Habits

BY JAY GARCIA

WHETHER IT'S DIET, EXERCISE OR SIMPLE TIPS AND TRICKS TO REMEMBER, *THE CEO MAGAZINE* LOOKS AT HOW TO BECOME HEALTHIER, HAPPIER, AND MORE PRODUCTIVE AT WORK.



In July 2011, Medibank Private published a definitive report called *Sick at Work*. This research paper looked at the cost of 'presenteeism', which was described as "the productivity that is lost when employees come to work but, as a consequence of illness or other medical conditions, are not fully productive". The report went on to explain that presenteeism is costing \$34 billion per year, representing 2.7 per cent of GDP, and is set to increase in the future, making it a greater economic cost than absenteeism and sick days. This is an alarming trend as it all stems from unhealthy lifestyle choices, poor work-life balance, and high stress levels—all of which can be changed through a better understanding and some simple lifestyle changes.

Timo Topp is a personal trainer who has recently launched Well for Work. "Well for Work is a corporate health education service where I go in and empower people with very simple, down-to-earth strategies that help them feel good, have more energy, and feel less stressed," Timo explains. "The overall feature of the service is not just individual, but the corporate culture in the sense that when the business is operating with healthier people, productivity is improved and costs are reduced from things like absenteeism and presenteeism.

"My mission goes beyond just exercise and diet to look at more awareness concerning decisions that people make during the day—for example, just being aware of sitting up straight or getting up every couple of hours to move around. Often you have people who are chained to their desk for eight hours. When you don't move your body, the simple fact is that your body actually contributes to fatigue and tiredness.

"Think about when you do a workout and how invigorated you feel. Even getting up every now and then for a walk around the office, picking up a glass of water, and having a bit of a stretch helps. I educate people about basic stretches they can do at their desk, encourage them to drink more water and less caffeine and soft drinks, and ensure people are aware of their breathing. I've been a personal fitness coach for 20 years. Even working with people in fitness, their breathing is terrible, so when they're sitting at a desk it's going to be terrible as well. Inefficient breathing is just one way that makes people feel tired and lethargic."

The premise of Timo's organisation is to keep things simple. "The reality is that if they keep it simple, people are more likely to do it," Timo says. "For example, body weight is a great way to work out because you don't have to get yourself off to the gym. Whether it's the Sydney CBD or other major cities, there are plenty of parks around and people can do push-ups, bench dips off a bench, step-ups on a wall, squats, lunges on a path, lying down and doing sit-ups. They can do a circuit of about five or six exercises and repeat that three times, and then back it up with a couple of laps around the park. That's a basic workout."

Whether at the office or the gym, one of the most important means of working out productively and efficiently is to manage your time effectively. "I've written a book called *Get Real*, and that's all about a down-to-earth approach to fitness and health. In that book, I talk about two concepts perfect for

time-poor people, which is essentially everyone, but particularly 'corporates,'" Timo explains.

"The two strategies that people can use for effective workouts with less time are interval training and circuit workouts. When people go to the gym, they traditionally do an exercise and fluff around for a couple of minutes before they have a rest. With circuit training, if you did all your exercises back to back with no rest, it's going to be a lot harder and a lot tougher; therefore, it's more effective and you're saving yourself a lot of time. If you're a busy city professional, that's right up your alley because you're saving time and getting a better result.

"The same thing goes with interval training. Again, people typically go for a jog at a nice, comfortable rate. But instead of working at 60 per cent of your capacity, if you sprint at 80 to 90 per cent for two or three minutes, take water and a quick rest, and repeat that five times, that would probably take you →

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15 or 20 minutes and would probably be more effective than most people’s average 30- or 40-minute run.”

Working in an office environment can be stressful and tiring, meaning there’s always a steady supply of caffeine available to keep workers wired. “When you’re at work and you’ve got pressure, there are things to do and it’s stressful,” Timo says. “The thing with caffeine is that it’s a stimulant. So stress causes your pulse rate to be elevated, your respiratory rate goes up, and it makes you feel overwhelmed. If you’re in that state daily, why would you drink something that is only going to exacerbate the feeling of stress? But the reality is people do enjoy coffee. If you’re after a guideline, I would say no more than one or two cups per day.

“Herbal teas can be a much better choice for the busy corporate worker because they don’t have that stimulant kick and they’re more hydrating, so your body can actually take more of the water out of the drink—whereas one thing to note with coffee is that it’s a diuretic in that it causes you to urinate and lose water. Chances are most people don’t drink enough water during the day as it is; then they drink a lot of coffee, which dehydrates them further and exacerbates this cycle of low energy and dehydration.”

Regardless of whether you prepare your lunches at home or buy them at work, it comes down to making healthier, smarter choices. “Food seems to be a battling subject for most people and, quite frankly, it’s extraordinarily simple,” Timo explains. “All you have to do is eat real food and avoid all the processed man-made stuff and things that come in packets. At the end of the day, what you eat should be recognisable as something that’s come straight from nature. For example, an apple has come straight from a tree, a fish

has come straight from the ocean, and lettuce has come from the ground. All these heat-up meals, packaged and processed foods are crap because they have no nutrients and are high in all the things we don’t need, like sugar, salt and fat.

“When your body doesn’t get enough nutrients, it keeps you hungry, so you end up needing more because the rubbish food you ate didn’t give you anything that you needed, so you’re still hungry. If people would eat fresh, healthy food with the correct balance of proteins, carbs and fats, they wouldn’t get hungry and wouldn’t need to snack on chips and chocolate bars. When you eat well, you won’t be hungry.

“Nowadays I think a lot of people don’t have time or the forethought to take their own lunch, but in the city there are a lot of places where you can buy healthier choices: big salads and better-made sandwiches and wraps. It’s just about having more diligence, so that if you can’t be bothered to prepare your lunch, seek out places where you can buy fresher food.”

Developing healthy food habits at work can seem difficult, particularly with the stress and monotony that come with an office environment. But, as Timo has highlighted, it’s all about keeping things simple and sticking to goals. Don’t get overly ambitious with your health and fitness plans; it’s a matter of making little changes and remaining diligent. The small lifestyle changes you implement can make a world of difference to your performance, both personally and professionally. ●

For more information on how to incorporate these lessons and more into your business, visit Timo’s website at wellforwork.com or timotopp.com.