

Guide to Wellness: Practical Tips for a Healthier Life

By Ondes Wellbeing



INTRODUCTION

In today's fast-paced world, the path towards better health often centres around a balanced diet and regular exercise, and for good reasons. These two factors alone play a crucial role in how we feel physically and psychologically. However, there's more to a healthy lifestyle than just eating well and working out. In this guide, we have decided to explore some often overlooked aspects of living healthily: the importance of good sleep, the benefits of sunlight, taking time for self-reflection, amongst other things. These elements also play a crucial part in our overall well-being. These strategies can help improve the way you feel, give you more energy, and make your body and mind more resilient, making it easier to reach your goals, whatever they might be.



SLEEP: THE THIRD PILLAR OF HEALTH

Often overshadowed by discussions of diet and exercise, sleep is an absolute fundamental component of a wholesome lifestyle. It is easy to dismiss the need for a good night's rest in the modern world. Work deadlines, celebrations or the simple desire to keep the day going, a multitude of factors explain why we convince ourselves to skip on a few extra hours of rest and think, "I'll be alright." However, neglecting sleep extends beyond mere fatigue and is detrimental to our biological needs crucial for our survival and vitality.

It isn't a random fact of our evolution that we sleep. It is a non-negotiable requirement. A typical night's sleep consists of 4 to 5 sleep cycles that last roughly 90 to 110 minutes, and each cycle can be broken down into various phases—each with distinct functions, from tissue repair and muscle growth during the deepest stage of Non-Rapid Eye Movement (NREM) sleep to memory consolidation and mood regulation in Rapid Eye Movement (REM) sleep. You've probably heard the phrase "circadian rhythm". The circadian rhythm is essentially our own body clock that regulates multiple processes in the body, including alertness or sleepiness, appetite and digestion as well as body temperature.



Our circadian rhythms make us diurnal animals, which means we are awake during the day. Ideally, and for most people, the body likes to go to bed at around 10pm and wake and get around 8 hours of sleep. There are individual variabilities, of course, but the idea that some people are night owls and perform better when they call it a day at 2am is getting more and more disputed. Consequently, the quality of our sleep is not only impacted by the duration of our sleep, but also by the time we go to sleep. The phases of sleep we mentioned earlier evolve throughout the night, and the amount of non-rapid eye movement sleep and rapid eye movement sleep change throughout the night. In the first hours of the night, following 10pm or so, NREM sleep phases are longer while REM phases are shorter, and this progressively shifts so that by the early morning, we experience significantly shorter and less profound NREM sleep and more REM sleep.

A myriad of hormonal activities are directly affected by the duration and quality of our sleep. For instance, the release of growth hormone during the initial deep sleep stages is essential for tissue repair and growth, while cortisol, the primary stress hormone influencing our stress response is regulated by adequate shut eye. Our insulin sensitivity and hunger hormones are also tethered to sleep in such a way that the lack of it could play a role in paving the way to obesity and type 2 diabetes. On a broader spectrum, sleep extends its influence to our immune system, where chronic sleep deprivation can hamper immune responses, making us more susceptible to infections. Thus, sleep acts not merely as a passive necessity but as a necessity to maximise health and vitality, and for those struggling to maintain a healthy sleep routine, check out our advice below, or reach out to us for further guidance.



SUNLIGHT: NATURAL WELLBEING REGULATOR

Sunlight doesn't often get considered when we talk about wellness, and to a degree, you could argue it plays a less significant part than sleep, diet or exercise. And yet, it plays a pivotal role in our bone health, immune system function, and mood regulations thanks to the vitamin D it provides us with. Moreover, light helps synchronise our internal body clock, the circadian rhythm, playing a crucial role in promoting better sleep and overall well-being. While artificial light can impact our body-clock also, sunlight has been shown to have a greater and more positive effect on it. Indeed, our eyes have evolved to recognise early morning light due to its angle as the sun rises, and its limited strength, which signals to the body we are starting a new day. Of course, if you miss those early rays, you will still benefit from going out at a later time.

In addition, adequate exposure to sunlight can do wonders for your eye health. Nowadays, we are constantly staring at screens, and their impact on our vision is felt by many. And yet, it seems that time spent outside can protect our eyes against those adverse effects. Even looking at a screen while outside seems to not have the same detrimental results on our vision. Meanwhile, time spent outside allows us to exercise our eyes as we are able to look at objects that are at varying distances from us as well as moving objects.

So, step outside, enjoy the feel of sunlight on your skin, and embrace this gentle nudge towards a more vibrant life. After all, who hasn't felt better after spending a bit of time in the sun?

SELF-REFLECTION: THE INNER JOURNEY

The hustle of daily life often leaves little room for self-reflection. Yet, taking time to focus on oneself is a cornerstone of comprehensive health. Engaging in meditation—even if just for a few minutes each day—maintaining personal routines, and dedicating moments to self-awareness can significantly enhance our mental and emotional well-being. Meditation comes in many styles and means different things to different people. Certain practices come with set codes, and while you can follow specific techniques, you can also explore this space for yourself and discover what works for you.

Meditation often is synonymous with letting your mind wander and not hold on to thoughts, but instead recognise that your thoughts are not you and that you are not limited by them. It allows some to find peace in a chaotic environment. Through the use of a mantra, transcendental meditation might allow you to find inner peace, while mindfulness meditation can promote self-awareness and effective regulation of emotions.

Self-reflection is another meditative practice that can help you find your place in the world and unlock new ideas. Allowing yourself the opportunity to do nothing can do wonders for your wellbeing and your creativity as your best ideas often come when you are not forcing them. Why not turn off the television, put your phone away, and just freely think. With or without music in the background, allow new ideas to come in and sit in your mind for a bit. You might find the answer to a work problem, a personal challenge, or discover new perspectives on life.



Unfortunately, our busy routines means that we rarely simply sit in contemplation, and yet, it's in these moments of introspection that we find clarity, manage stress, regulate emotions and develop new ideas. By nurturing a space for self-reflection, we foster a deeper connection with ourselves, empowering a proactive approach towards a healthier, more contented existence.

HYDRATION: BEYOND JUST WATER

Staying hydrated isn't solely about drinking water; it's about maintaining a balance. Electrolytes, sourced from salts and other minerals, are crucial for ensuring that the body retains and utilises the water efficiently. These electrolytes maintain the fluid balance within and outside our cells, aiding in muscle and nerve function. As we aim for proper hydration, considering the intake of electrolytes, alongside water, is essential to foster a more effective hydration process and, in turn, support our overall well-being.

Fortunately, many mineral waters come with a healthy amount of electrolytes. The issue is that mineral water usually comes in plastic bottles that can leach harmful substances in the water, and tap water might not have the amount you need. Ensuring you have a healthy diet rich in minerals is therefore the most important step towards ensuring your body isn't lacking in these essential nutrients. For those exercising regularly, using the sauna extensively, or simply living in warmer regions, occasionally supplementing with electrolytes might also be a good idea.

TAKEAWAYS AND PRACTICAL TIPS

As you can see, a healthy lifestyle feeds on itself. Diet, sleep, exercise, sunlight, hydration, meditation—the interplay between all of them is incredibly complex, and you can see how any improvement you make in your own life can in turn positively impact other factors, giving rise to what you would call a virtuous circle. Of course, we are not advocating for the strictest of lifestyles, and we all need to find what works for us. Losing on a good night's sleep every once in a while might actually turn out to be a net positive for your wellbeing if it means you have a great time with your friends or family, for instance. Nevertheless, you might consider some of these aspects as a way to boost your energy, enhance your recovery, strengthen your immune system, and to simply feel better.

So what are some changes you could make straight away?

- Improving Sleep:
 - Establish a Routine: Going to bed and waking up at the same time every day, including weekends, can help regulate your body's natural sleep-wake cycle.
 - Trigger your Sleep Hormones: One or two hours prior to bedtime, dim your environment, avoid screens and use blue light filters, allow your body to cool down by lowering the temperature in your environment.
 - Create a Sleep-friendly Environment: Make sure your bedroom is dark, quiet, and cool. Invest in a comfortable mattress and pillows.
- Sunlight Exposure:
 - Morning Sunlight: Aim for a little sunlight exposure in the morning to help reset your circadian rhythm. As little as 10 to 20 minutes can make a difference.
 - Outdoor Activities: Engage in outdoor activities like walking, jogging, or gardening to soak up some sun while also getting exercise.

- Self-Reflection:
 - Journaling: Keeping a daily journal can help with self-reflection. Write down your thoughts, feelings, and experiences to gain insights into your emotions and behavior.
 - Mindfulness Apps: Use mindfulness apps that offer guided sessions for meditation and self-reflection.
 - Set Aside Quiet Time: Dedicate a specific time each day for self-reflection, even if it's just for 10 minutes.
- Hydration:
 - Carry a Water Bottle: Keep a water bottle with you throughout the day to remind you to stay hydrated.
 - Adding a pinch of salt and some fruit to your water can enhance your hydration after exercise or sauna use.

CONCLUSION

In this guide, we've discussed the importance of sleep, sunlight exposure, self-reflection, and hydration for a healthier lifestyle. Has it got you thinking? For more insights, visit Ondes Wellbeing, where we share evidence-based information on health, fitness, and wellbeing. Explore a variety of topics, from supplements to fitness strategies, and join a community keen on discovering the best health and wellbeing solutions. Check out our [blog](#) and [website](#) for more.