

Looking after your physical health by Carl Laidler, Director of Wellbeing at Health Shield

Being physically healthy is particularly important now, during the coronavirus pandemic.

We know that people with the following issues are at increased risk of severe illness from covid-19:

- Cancer
- Chronic Kidney Disease
- COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease)
- Weak Immune system
- Obesity (BMI of 30 or above)
- Serious Heart Conditions
- Sickle Cell Disease
- Type 2 Diabetes



The following might also increase the risk:

- Asthma (Moderate to Severe)
- Cystic Fibrosis
- Hypertension or high blood pressure
- Liver Disease
- Pregnancy
- Pulmonary Fibrosis
- Smoking
- Type 1 Diabetes



The common denominator amongst all the above is that they have an impact on your lymphocytes or T-cells and/or they increase the risk of blood clotting.

Over the last few months there have been improvements to the way covid-19 has been treated. One of the surprises was that whilst we knew it was a respiratory disease, uniquely victims could suffer from blood clotting before needing respiratory treatment.

One of the oddities is that an average healthy person has a blood oxygen level of 97-99% but that sufferers of covid-19 have had sats levels of 60% without feeling any negative effect.

There are also some more obscure risks:

- **Being taller increases the potential of receiving the virus both airborne and via droplets on the surface.**
- **If you have a cold at the time you get covid-19 your risk increases because having a cold automatically reduces your T-cell levels.**

So, being physically healthy or the best version of yourself that you can be - has never been so important!



Know your numbers

The four health numbers that are key to your physical wellbeing are your **blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar** and **body mass index**.

Having a face to face health screen with a nurse isn't going to be easy at the moment so below are a few tests and self-tests that you can do yourself at home.

Your weight

The vast majority of people will know if they are carrying too much weight or not.

If you don't own a set of scales, then you can use the waist to hip ratio. All you need to do is measure your hip at the widest point and your waist at just above the belly button. Then what you do is divide your waist size by your hip size.

- **A ration of 0.95 or below for men is good and 0.80 and below for women.**
- **1.0 or higher for men and 0.85 or higher for women is greater risk of poor health.**



Alternatively you can just measure your waist:

- **The ideal waist size is 35 inches for men and 32.5 inches for women.**
- **A waist size for men of 40 inches (102cm) and 35 inches (88cm) for women increases the risk of diabetes and heart disease significantly.**

Waist size is important because its all about where you store your fat. If you store your fat around the waist then its sitting around your vital organs such as the liver and kidneys, which will increase the chance of diabetes and cholesterol.

Blood pressure

A healthy person should have a resting pulse rate of between 60 to 100 beats per minute.

You can get your blood pressure checked with your GP or you can buy your own machine for around £30 to £40. Your heart responds to virtually everything that happens in your body and you can learn a lot from blood pressure by analysing the readings. Although the most common way is to look at the actual level of the diastolic and systolic readings e.g. 120/80 the other useful analysis is to look at the pulse pressure difference which is the difference between the higher and lower figures.

If the difference is continually above 60 e.g. 140/80 - then it could be an indicator of **arteriosclerosis** or hardening of the arteries. The reason being that the arteries are having to

expand too far and if they do that continually they lose their elasticity.

If you don't have a blood pressure machine, you can simply do pulse testing either manually yourself by counting the number beats from the pulse (against your neck or inside your wrist) or through a free app on your phone.

Your pulse is an important test and it's a good idea to get to understand your pulse. A healthy person should have a resting pulse rate of between 60 to 100 beats per minute.

However, it is possible to have a resting pulse rate as low as 35 if you are extremely fit. If you are not extremely fit and regularly have a heart rate outside of 60-

100 beats per minute then you should visit your G.P.

When you understand your average pulse rate, and for example you know that your pulse is regularly in the low 60's and all of a sudden its 85 - then unless you know why it's changed so radically (85 over the course of 3 days) then again it may be worth calling your G.P.

If you are taking your pulse manually you will start to understand how it feels and if it feels irregular then again it's something that you might raise with you G.P.

One of the causes of high pulse pressure can be stress and it can be improved by doing relaxation breathing exercises.

The other home test you can do, is a urine test, urine analysis sticks can easily be purchased from the chemist.

They are easy to use and can tell you a host of information, particularly around blood glucose, testing for diabetes but also kidney and liver issues. It's important not to misinterpret the results and to take tests over a period of a few days to ensure that the issue wasn't just something passing through for example a cold or virus.

Additionally, it's important to ensure that you are drinking plenty of water and keeping hydrated. A lot of kidney and liver issues are due to dehydration skewing the results.



Temperature testing not surprisingly has become very popular over the last few months. However, outside of covid-19, **taking your temperature is important going forward.** Whilst it might have been acceptable going to work with a temperature previously (assuming you were well enough to work) no-one is going to thank you for passing on a virus in the future.



The increased social distancing, hand cleaning, wearing of face masks, no shaking hands etc might reduce the spread of colds and viruses this winter.

One of the long-term effects of covid-19 has been the drop in the numbers of people that have been visiting their GP about cancer based issues. Fortunately, there are a whole host of self-tests that you can do on yourself.

Everyone should be checking their skin regularly for changes to moles and spots that don't appear to heal. We should all be checking our breasts, testicles, armpits, neck and groin for lumps.

It's recommended that you keep a record of your checking and in the case of skin checks don't be afraid to take photo's so that you have got something to refer back to in the future to assess changes.

Additionally, other symptoms to look out for are blood in the urine and stool, regular pain in the kidneys and stomach without any apparent reason and increased need to go to the toilet at night when you haven't been drinking excessively.

During the pandemic many people haven't been visiting their GP as they feel they may be wasting their time. Many G.P.s appointments are being carried out over the telephone or by a video call, so if you are worried about anything then ensure you make an appointment to see your GP.

How to stay healthy

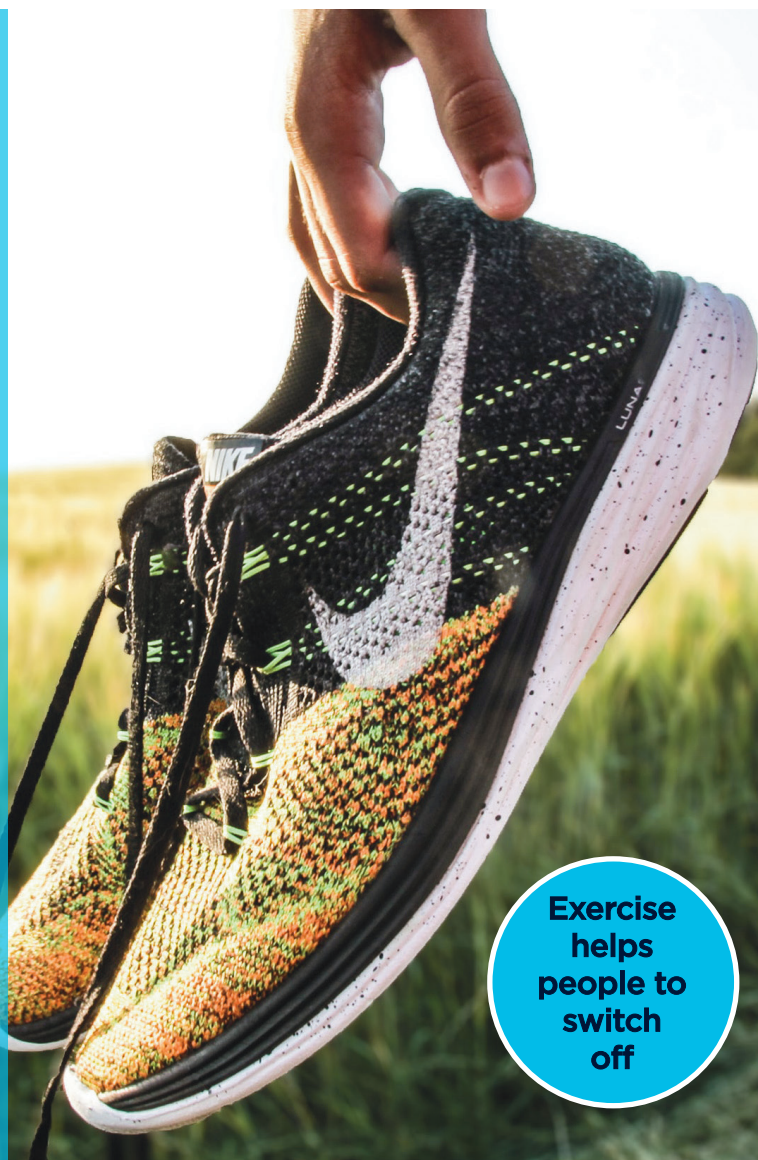
Exercise is the key, if you don't like exercise or don't have a lot of time, then try high intensity training.

For example, use an exercise bike for 10 minutes every day, within this 10 mins, do 30 seconds of sprinting followed by 30 seconds of relaxing riding.

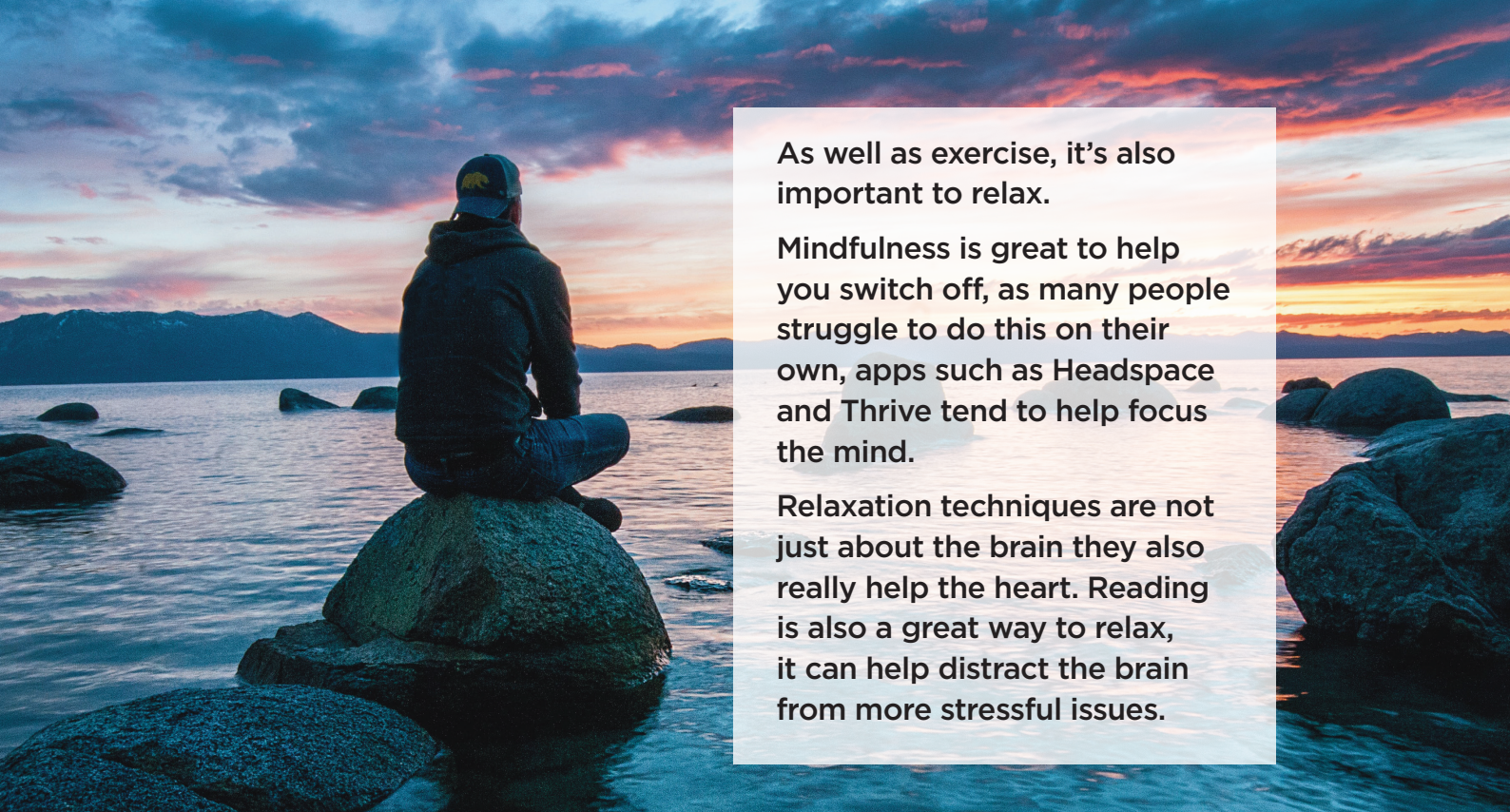
You could also do the same thing by sprinting and walking between lamp posts or on a step box. Or do weight bearing exercise in the same way, using quite light weights, but fast reps. Weight bearing exercise is important because you lose about 1% of muscle every year over the age of 40. Muscle speeds us metabolism and metabolism burns fat.

High intensity exercise was designed by Dr Tabata and research shows that it is a form of exercise that is very good at reducing blood sugar and therefore avoiding diabetes.

Another big reason for increasing exercise is to do with stress. Exercise can work as a distraction for your brain constantly either thinking about work or other issues.



Exercise helps people to switch off



As well as exercise, it's also important to relax.

Mindfulness is great to help you switch off, as many people struggle to do this on their own, apps such as Headspace and Thrive tend to help focus the mind.

Relaxation techniques are not just about the brain they also really help the heart. Reading is also a great way to relax, it can help distract the brain from more stressful issues.

Nutrition is now more important than ever, having a balanced diet help ensure we have the correct nutrients. Dark green leafy vegetables and colourful fruits and especially fruits with red in them are can really make a difference. These will ensure you get vitamin C, vitamin D and Zinc on board.



It's also important to reduce the amount of processed fats you eat, as these types of fat stick around your waste and increase issues such as heart disease. These types of fats are found in many take-aways.



Water is massively undervalued, every organ in the body needs hydrating, water is needed in order for the fat burning process to work, depending on your size and how much exercise you are doing, you need to drink 2-3 litres per day.

All the statistics show that weight or more importantly BMI impacts on our ability to defend ourselves against covid-19. So, now is a good time to make some changes to habits that can help us keep our BMI's down to healthy levels.

The skill going forward is going to be changing our habits, walking to the shops instead of driving, walking upstairs instead of taking the lift etc.

Our bodies were not designed to sit down on chairs, sitting down as much as we do fundamentally squashes our skeleton, which can lead to musculoskeletal problems. What we need to do is move more, the HSE recommend a 10 minute movement break from sitting down every hour. The key is to try to introduce movement into the daily routine e.g take all telephone calls standing up where you can and taking a break for lunch away from the desk and go for a walk.



We also need to learn how to sleep better.

Many people use their mobile phones for alarms and look at them right up until we turn the lights off, without giving their minds time to start to relax. Before going to sleep it's important to be as relaxed as possible, the room to be dark and for it to be the right temperature.

It's also important to have coping skills on how to relax your minds if you do wake up in the middle of the night, in order to maximise the relaxation of the nervous, respiratory and cardiovascular systems.



Boosting your immune system

Having a strong immune system is a good attribute in the defence against covid-19. In order to increase the ability to produce antibodies and ensure that your T-cell levels (lymphocytes) are not reduced you can:

- Increase your level of vitamin D - spend time outside, drink fortified milk, eat fortified cereal, salmon, mackerel and sardines.
- Increase your level of vitamin C - eat plenty of citrus fruits like grapefruit and oranges, Red Bell Peppers (3 times the vit C of an orange), Broccoli, Garlic, Ginger, Spinach, Yoghurt, Almonds, Sunflower Seeds, Tumeric, Green Tea, Papaya, Kiwi, Poultry, Shellfish (it's important to take vit C daily because your body can't store it).
- Reduce the amount of alcohol you drink, as it damages the immune system.
- Ensure you relax, exercise and have good quality sleep as all of these boost the immune system.
- Take an immune busting vitamin tablet every day.



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