

The Sunday Telegraph
Edition 1SUN 30 MAY 2004, Page S04
Body and Soul
THE NEW PYRAMID
By Debra Taylor

Want to live forever? Follow these health tips and you're going to get mighty close, says Debra Taylor.

We all want to feel good. We all want to look good. But few of us want to make too much of an effort. Well, you can breathe a sigh of relief, because there's a new pyramid on the health scene, and it's everything you've ever dreamed of. Instead of obsessing about how many workouts we should be squeezing in, it focuses on simple, holistic, steps that we can take every day, week, and year to feel fabulous. Roll on new day.

DAILY DOSES

Do something you enjoy - even if it's going to eat your lunch in the park. "There's a good deal of evidence that doing things that give us positive emotions can help our immune system," says Sydney psychologist Dr Lissa Johnson. So set aside time when you are in the moment to tackle feel-good activities such as taking a long hot bath or walking your dog. "We all get stressed about working so many things into the day that we find we're mentally in the past or in the future rather than in the now," says Dr Johnson. One good way of reminding yourself where you are and what's important is by finding something to laugh at. "If you can see the funny side of things, you'll be less stressed," she says.

Get active every day. Many health experts are now more likely to stress the importance of incidental exercise - the little bolts of movement that add up over the course of day-to-day living - as opposed to the mammoth work-out. That means taking the stairs instead of the lift, actually getting up and changing the TV channel instead of using the remote... every bit counts and will help you to get fit.

Don't forget the basics. Remember to cover up in the sun - not just during the summer. If you use a computer daily at work, give your eyes a regular break by focusing on something further away periodically, and keep a least an arm's length between you and your computer screen. Brush your teeth twice a day for at least two minutes at a time.

The fun bits of the old food pyramid still stand of course, with red wine (in moderation) as great for you as ever (all those antioxidants). (For the record though the Australian Guide To Healthy Eating still recommends five serves of veggies, two to three of fruit, five of bread and cereals, two to three of milk and dairy and one to two of meat or a meat alternative.)

WEEK TO WEEK

First and foremost, allow yourself one tasty treat a week. "The key is preventing a blow-out," says Queensland-based dietician Maree Garside. So allow yourself a little bit of something that you like - such as chocolate - regularly rather than having a big binge. Eating out once a week will also break the monotony, as long as you don't choose something too fattening off the menu and keep to at least two alcohol-free days a week.

Aim for 30 minutes of moderate-to-intense activity three to four times a week. The 30 minutes needn't be taken up with one activity - why not try 20 minutes walking and 10 minutes of climbing the stairs? Follow this rule, says The National Heart Foundation of Australia, and you will have a healthy heart and blood pressure, increased levels of "good" cholesterol (HDL, or high density lipoprotein), and regularly burn fat. If your goal is to get really fit, add vigorous exercise for 30 minutes, three to four times a week.

On the emotional front, you should, once a week, sit down and really think about how someone close to you feels right now. "Try to have empathy for someone else," says Dr Johnson. "Evidence shows that it's one of the healthiest things for our relationships, and keeps them strong."

MONTHLY MAINTENANCE

if you are keeping an eye on your weight, **pop on the scales once a month**, not every day, as you will be able to track changes properly.

healthwise, get into the habit of giving yourself a **regular breast or testicle examination**, become familiar with your skin and check it for any changes. See your GP asap if you notice anything different.

Set aside time to reward yourself for what you've achieved. "Treat yourself to a massage, buy yourself some flowers or do something you really enjoy," says Dr Johnson. "People who are able to take credit for what they do are more optimistic, and studies have shown links between optimism and a healthy immune system."

Focus on one of your close relationships by spending some quality time. Take your partner out for dinner or for a picnic, invite a good friend around. "The more robust your relationships, the better your mental well-being," says Dr Johnson.

YEAR AFTER YEAR

"**An annual check** means your doctor can create a snapshot of you," says Dr Mukesh Haikerwal, vice president of the Australian Medical Association. Have a cholesterol test and ask your doctor what other exams you may need. For example, middle-aged men might need a prostate cancer check, middle-aged women may consider a breast cancer check, and anyone over 50 should think about a bowel cancer test. Annual dental and eye exams should be scheduled in too, and always ask your GP to check your skin for possible melanomas.

Last but definitely not least - plan a holiday you really want. "Whatever you choose," says Dr Johnson, "make sure it's restorative for you, not stressful."