

Be a well woman

Your health is in your hands. Charmaine Yabsley taps the best holistic health experts for their top tips on making yourself your number one priority.

Tone your pelvic floor

"Urinary leakage while exercising might be common, but it's not normal," warns personal trainer Michelle Wright. "A women's health physiotherapist can check if your pelvic floor is too tight or weak – both cause bladder leakage. Learning skills to keep your insides on the inside will help you to avoid incontinence and bladder, bowel, or uterine prolapse. When exercising, exhale and contract your pelvic floor muscles at the hardest part of the movement. Choose an exercise professional who understands training women, especially if you are postnatal or menopausal.

Love your guts

"Research is constantly drawing links between good gut health and better mental health and decreased risk of disease," says nutritionist Zoe Bingley-Pullin. "Prebiotics – carbohydrate-containing foods like psyllium, leeks, asparagus, garlic, onion, and oats that resist digestion in the small intestine and therefore reach the colon, where they are fermented by gut flora – are vital for healthy digestion, as they favourably alter the composition of gut bacteria, especially the two beneficial probiotic strains, Bifidobacteria and Lactobacilli. Prebiotics also curtail bad gut bacteria, and increase uptake of calcium."

Meditate anywhere, any time

"Meditation gives you a feeling of calm, clarity, and connection," says Meditones composer Tahlee Rouillon. "It doesn't have to be difficult - many apps and tools can ease you into a state of deep bliss. Try this quick meditation while you're waiting for the lights to change. Sit upright; inhale deeply, letting

your belly expand, and relax as you exhale. Count the breaths: one on the inhale, two on the exhale, three on the next inhale, up to 10."

Let it go

Yoga instructor Charlotte Dodson suggests the Wood Chopping pose (Kashtha takshanasana) to release tension after a day of running around, to refocus and energise. "Stand with feet one leg-distance apart, toes slightly in, and knees bent. Clasp your hands in a fist and inhale, raising your arms high above your head, then swing your arms down through your legs like you're chopping wood, making a loud 'Arrrrrh!' sound on the exhale. Repeat."

Wake up to yourself

"If you change your mind, you change your life," says Teisha Lowry. "Being mindful is about waking up, and an easy way to do that is to focus on what you are doing, thinking and feeling – this is the key to calming internal chatter and to making the present moment more enjoyable and productive."

Be the force

"Whether you're dealing with self-destructive thoughts, menstruation challenges, or health or relationship problems, learning to discipline your emotions and establishing a strong mindset will act like a force field, protecting you from negativity, both internal and external in origin," says functional wellness practitioner Darren Cox. "The saying, 'You are what you think' is so true – and it can take a toll on your wellbeing and how you treat yourself, and therefore treat others."



ILLUSTRATION: CLAIRE SHORROCK

Meet our experts



Michelle Wright,
personal trainer.
www.mishfit.
com.au



Zoe Bingley-Pullin,
nutritionist and chef.
www.zoebingleypullin.
com



Tahlee Rouillon,
Meditones
composer. www.
sonesence.com



Charlotte Dodson,
yoga instructor.
www.charlotte
dodson.tv



Teisha Lowry, natural
therapist and founder
of INDIAH. www.indah.
com.au



Darren Cox, functional
wellness practitioner,
Total Reformation. www.
totalreformation.com



Anthea Amore, vegan
chef and yoga teacher.
www.organicpassion
catering.com



Shannon McNeill,
naturopath, Gwinganna
Retreat. www.
gwinganna.com



Sharon Kolkka,
Wellness Director,
Gwinganna Retreat.
www.gwinganna.com



Corinne Bett, technical
writer, BioCeuticals.
www.bioceuticals.
com.au



Katherine Maslen,
naturopath.
www.katherine
maslen.com



Anne Clark, life coach,
Envision Empower
Succeed. www.
envisionem
powersucceed.com.au

Long working days increase levels of cortisol, which negatively impacts sleep patterns and emotional health – nothing ages us more than stress.



Add happy extras

Vegan chef Anthea Amore says, "Don't take things away – just add more good stuff! Swap a cake or pastry for a punnet of strawberries. Add a side salad to every meal. Add a fresh juice or smoothie as a morning or afternoon pick-me-up. Go beyond diet: add more healthy elements to your life, doing things you like to do. Remember, no pressure – stress doesn't help.

Create sleep rituals

"Adequate sleep is essential for recovery, energy, detoxification, and optimal hormone production," says naturopath Shannon McNeill. "Being able to fall asleep, stay asleep, and wake refreshed are all influenced by hormones. Progesterone is sedative, and a reduction in levels can affect NREM sleep, whole oestrogen improves REM sleep. Go to bed eight hours before you have to get up, ideally no later than 10 p.m. Remove technology from the bedroom, and create rituals that calm the nervous system – an Epsom salts bath with lavender oil, gentle stretching exercises, and meditation.

Change channels

"Imagine if you had two speakers wired to your brain that broadcast all thoughts for everyone to hear – horrific!" says Gwinganna Wellness Director Sharon Kolkka. "Yet our internal dialogue is often unproductive, even destructive, creating internal pressure and producing stress hormones that interfere with sleep and digestion, accelerate ageing, and trigger weight gain and depression. Learn to notice when you have self-critical thoughts; then interrupt yourself and adjust the thought. Over time, this will become easier and a new thought pattern will emerge."

Try a tonic

"The herb vitex agnus-castus, or vitex, has been used since ancient times as a tonic for the female reproductive system," says Corinne Bett. "Vitex acts on hormonal receptors to balance prolactin, oestrogen, and progesterone, which helps symptoms of premenstrual syndrome (PMS) like mood changes, fluid retention, breast tenderness and food cravings, as well as menstrual irregularities. Take as liquid or capsules, first thing in the morning."

Snack on seaweed

"Iodine is essential for two key areas of women's health – thyroid and breast health," says naturopath Katherine Maslen. "A deficiency causes hypothyroidism, triggering weight gain, depression, anxiety, dry skin, and foggy-headedness; it also increases your risk of breast disease and breast cancer. Eating seaweed three times a week will optimise your levels of this important trace mineral. Nori, wakame, and red dulse have the mildest flavour – add them to salads, stir-fries or soups."

Go on a digital detox

"We are too busy trying to do, and juggle, everything – we never switch off," says life coach Anne Clark. "Turn off your devices at least one hour before bed and for at least one whole day a week. This will increase your creativity, calm your mind, let your energy flow, and allow you to completely relax."

Say thank you

"The concept of gratitude is powerful, as the very act of thinking about what is good in your world resets your thinking to positive, rather than negative," says psychologist Merryn Snare. "Write down three good things about your world every day. These can be small and simple – flowers in the garden, coffee with a friend, or hot water in the shower – and you can use the same good thing repeatedly if you want."

Clean up your act

"Avoid chemical antiperspirant deodorants," says Biome Eco Stores founder, Tracey Bailey. "A Journal of Applied Toxicology study found chemicals used in deodorants were showing up in breast cancer tumours, and although the findings are not definitive, the authors suspect they may play some role in the development of the disease. Most commercial antiperspirants contain aluminium to prevent perspiration, and aluminium is a recognised neurotoxin which has been linked to neurological disorders and changes to oestrogen receptors in breast cells. Natural deodorants, made from plant and mineral extracts, are a non-toxic alternative that are free from petrochemicals, synthetic fragrances, and aluminium."



Get rubbed the right way

"Long working days increase levels of the stress hormone cortisol, which negatively impacts sleep patterns and emotional health – nothing ages us more than stress!" says co-founder of ZenNow Melissa Rohlfs. "Remedial massage decreases the physical and emotional effects of stress and counters PMS symptoms like headaches and food cravings. Even a simple self-massage can work wonders. Using your index and middle fingers, start by making small circles over your temples and up your hairlines, then move down to the middle of your forehead and back out to your temples. Another de-stressing move is to use your thumb and forefinger to massage the soft part between the thumb and index finger of the opposite hand – then repeat on the other side."

Check your neck

"Hunching over phones and tablets has a dire effect on posture – we call it 'text neck' – causing back pain, spinal and joint degeneration, and poor circulation," warns osteopath Dr Claire Richardson. "Check your posture: if you imagine a broomstick on your back, it should make contact with your head, upper back, and bottom. Our balance is also compromised by the amount of sedentary time we spend at our desks. Practise standing on one leg for 60 seconds, and then the other, while brushing your teeth."

Follow the 30:30 rule

"For every 30 minutes of being sedentary, get up and move for 30 seconds," says osteopath Dr Geetha Soosay. "Staying in the same posture leads to muscle tension and reduced blood flow. Set a reminder on your phone, and when it goes off, do some gentle squats or over-arm stretches. The best tip is to move in the opposite way to what you were just doing: if you were standing, then sit; if you were sitting, then walk or jog on the spot. Your muscles will love the change!"

Eat for your age

"It's important to acknowledge that different life stages have different metabolic needs," says Dr Jason Boublik. "Younger women need more protein for muscle development, and a higher calorie intake to support higher activity levels. In mid-life, good nutrition is more important than ever, and it is often a time to reset habits."

Grab opportunities

"Busy women have little time, so something short but effective is key," says fitness expert Ali Cavill. "Aim for 30 minutes of rigorous physical activity three to five times a week, and at least 30 minutes of light incidental activity daily – this is any activity that can be built up in small amounts, such as taking the stairs, walking the dog, or vacuuming the house. It all counts to your daily total."

Make a plan

"Women often put themselves last because they make sure everyone else is taken care of first," says naturopath Chantelle Bell. "Then they wonder why they are so exhausted! An easy way to get more time is to meal-plan. Sitting down for 10 minutes once a week and listing ingredients and recipes gives you one less thing to worry about when you are standing in the supermarket at 5.30 p.m. wondering what to eat. And cook double, so you have lunch or dinner for another day."

Do six things

"It's often hard to find time purely for yourself, for feeling connected to who you are and how you want to feel," says rest and renewal coach Kate Cashman. "This morning ritual is powerful and transformative. Set your alarm 30 minutes earlier and, with conscious intention, use the time to meditate, journal, read, look at your vision board, read aloud personal affirmations, and stretch. These six luxurious actions will change how you feel and think every day."

Meet our experts



Merryn Snare
is a psychologist.



Tracey Bailey,
founder, Biome Eco
Stores. www.biome.com.au



Melissa Rohlfs,
co-founder,
ZenNow. www.zennow.com.au



Dr Claire Richardson is an
osteopath. www.osteopathy.org.au



Dr Geetha Soosay
is an osteopath.
www.osteopathy.org.au



Dr Jason Boublik,
nutritional chemist and
chief science officer at
Activated Nutrients.



Ali Cavill,
health and fitness
expert at Fit Fantastic.



Chantelle Bell
is a naturopath.
www.chantellebell.com.au



Kate Cashman
is a rest and renewal
coach. www.katecashman.com