

How your physical health impacts your business and what to do about it

ANDREW MAY - FEBRUARY 23, 2021

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Unless you work in a physically demanding job – say as a personal trainer, a landscaper, a labourer or a firefighter – your physical health is pretty irrelevant, at least as far as work goes, right? asks Andrew May is founder and CEO of StriveStronger.

Wrong. It is increasingly clear that it doesn't matter what industry you work in or what your role is: physical health matters. It matters for you personally. It matters for your ability to function well at work. And it matters for your psychological wellbeing.

Absenteeism due to ill health is costing the Australian workplace **about \$35 billion** a year with presenteeism (the inability to fully function at work) costing a **similar amount**. Small business owners, in particular, **are struggling** to meet the substantial cost of employee ill health.

Our mental horsepower at work, our energy and our resilience in the face of stress – and let's face it, many small business owners are experiencing **heightened levels of stress** right now – are all directly related to our physical health.

Studies **have found** a plethora of evidence that physical exercise “induces structural and functional changes in the brain, determining enormous benefit on both cognitive functioning and wellbeing”.

This includes our concentration, memory, mood, learning speed, mental stamina, creativity and lower levels of stress. It is also a protective factor for neurodegeneration.

Although many **business owners may not feel they have the time for exercise** or to take care of themselves properly, it is an investment that ultimately gives us more time, as we become more efficient and effective at work.

Physical health and fitness levels give us the energy or ‘the capacity to work’ at our optimum each day. Energy in the human body is derived from burning carbohydrates with oxygen. So, to ensure energy is readily available throughout the day, you need to fuel for high performance and combine this with bouts of movement throughout the day, regular physical activity and a strategic recovery plan.

Healthy circulation is the key to supplying the body with sustained energy, and the key to improving circulation is movement and healthy mitochondria. Just like computers have an energy-saving or sleep mode when they aren't being used, so too does the human body. Though the consequences of switching into sleep mode in the human body have much more severe consequences than on your computer.”

One of the simplest ways to care for our physical health is to start small – with our cells. That's right, our cells. Specifically, our mitochondria – whose main function is to convert energy from the food we eat into energy for our cells to use.

5 ways to keep your mitochondria in tip-top condition.

1. Restorative sleep

Sleep deprivation causes mitochondrial stress. In fact, one study found that getting less than 7 hours a night on a regular basis reduced mitochondrial function to the level of someone 10 years older.

2. Eat less sugar

Research shows that our mitochondria don't like eating sugar for breakfast, lunch or tea.

3. Eat more veggies (and good fats)

Mitochondria might not like sugar, but they do love vegetables – particularly leafy greens and sulfurous ones like garlic, onion and mushrooms – and they really love good fats, like olive oil, avocado, nuts and fatty fish

4. Start lifting

Lift light or lift heavy, both high and low-load resistance training stimulates mitochondria production and function

5. Move throughout the day

Research shows our mitochondria regenerate in response to even a few days of exercise.

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