

The key to keeping up your energy to run a small business during COVID



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The way many small businesses operate is fast evolving. The pandemic has sped up the adoption of digital technologies and, according to research by McKinsey, transformed business forever.

While the changes are happening quickly, and businesses must adapt accordingly, in order to prevent burnout, operators must approach the current circumstances as a marathon, not a sprint.

Given COVID-19 has increased the risk of burnout and small businesses have copped the full force of lockdown and changes to the way we live and work, this is important. Staying the course for the long haul means managing your energy so you can effectively recover and keep turning up at full capacity.

While sleep, exercise and good nutrition are often the first things to go out the door during times of stress, these are the foundations that help to sustain us during times of adversity. They also give us the stamina and good health to go the distance.

In the most basic sense, human beings are designed to use and then replenish their energy stores. When you get this balance right, your body is fit, vital and healthy. When you mess around with it, you get fatigue, inflammation and the onset of disease.

The key to supplying the body with sustained energy is movement and healthy mitochondria.

Mitochondria are referred to as the powerhouses of our cells and their main function is to convert energy from the food we eat into energy for our cells to use. Mitochondria are like miniature batteries providing energy to our cells when needed.

As we age, our mitochondria become damaged and are less efficient at powering our cells. But, and this is an exciting 'but', we can significantly reverse the damage and by taking care of our mitochondria, we are providing our bodies and brains with sustained energy to run a business.

Here are six ways to boost your mitochondria.

- 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. That said, they do like antioxidants, so if you must, opt for dark chocolate, which some research suggests won't hurt your mitochondria.
- 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. The Physical Activity Guidelines recommend strength training at least two days a week.
- 5. Move throughout the day.** Research shows our mitochondria regenerate in response to even a few days of exercise. In the Harvard Business Review, psychologist Ron Friedman put it like this, "Instead of viewing exercise as something we do for ourselves, a personal indulgence that takes us away from our work, it's time we started considering physical activity as part of the work itself. The alternative, which involves processing information more slowly, forgetting more often, and getting easily frustrated, makes us less effective at our jobs and harder to get along with for our colleagues."
- 6. Manage stress.** Both acute and chronic stress influence mitochondrial function. Finding healthy coping strategies is key. These include practicing mindfulness or meditation; keeping a thought journal; getting out in nature regularly; breaking down challenges into small, bite-sized tasks; celebrating small wins and achieving goals; incorporating fun, laughter and play into your life; exercise, gardening and cooking.

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