

WHY FITNESS IS GOOD FOR YOUR HEART

Inside and Out!

As many of you know (and many have enjoyed) we regularly hold GoodLife Lunches in support of worthwhile Charities. Our last lunch (see pages 36-37) was at the Portsea Hotel in aid of The Heart Foundation's 'Go Red for Women'.

Following is the presentation of one of our guest speakers, Dr Vanessa Cook, so that all our readers, not just our 'ladies who lunch' might benefit from her timely advice.

As a Psychologist and a Personal Trainer, the most important part of my job, and coincidentally, the most difficult part, is to influence people in such a way as to enable them to make positive changes in their health behaviour.

The Heart Foundation is a charity organisation that I have chosen to support since January this year because I think its important to draw attention to the impact of heart health and cardiovascular fitness on our quality of life. So, by training with me, my clients are not only improving their own health, but are also giving back to an organisation that is looking out for the health of others.

In my role as a trainer, I help people get fitter, stronger and leaner, and I help them stay motivated. But of course, the number one reason that people come to see me is because they want to get rid of their excess body fat.

Our bodies contain three types of fat: subcutaneous fat is the stuff we all know about – the fat just under the skin on the outside of our bodies. This is what we all want to get rid of. Then there's Intramuscular fat; the fat that is marbled through our muscle tissue (mostly in our thighs, right girls?!). Finally, there is Visceral fat – this is fat that is packed around and between our organs. As far as your body is concerned, this is the most important to get rid of, because this is the fat that is responsible for putting us at risk of coronary heart disease, stroke, and Type 2 diabetes. Thus, fitness is vital for heart health.

Getting down to a healthy weight is essentially just a matter of having a healthy diet and exercising regularly. But for most people, this is easier said than done. This is where my background in Psychology comes in handy.

One of my favorite quotes that I tell clients is: "Our greatest limitation in life is one that exists in the mind".

What do you think stops people from being fit and leading a healthy lifestyle? More often than not, it's a barrier or limitation that exists in the mind.

Fear of failure; fear of hard work; having a 'poor me' attitude; self-sabotaging beliefs like 'I can't lose weight so why bother' and 'I'll never be a runner'.

LETS SPEND A MINUTE TO DE-BUNK SOME OF THE COMMON BARRIERS.

'I don't have time' – When people say they don't have time to exercise or improve their health, this is what they are trying to say: "I have a really busy lifestyle, and although I'd love to have the luxury of time to spend on my health, I just don't, so unfortunately there's nothing I can do about it". When people say that, this is what I hear: "My health is not a high enough priority to make time for it". Why don't people say that straight up? Because by using a lack of time as an excuse, they are able to push the control, and therefore responsibility, away from themselves.

Now, there will be some people, usually business owners with young families, who literally do not have any un-allocated time between 6am & 9pm on most days. But to them I would ask; are you working to the detriment of your health? What is the point of spending so much time at work if your not around long enough to enjoy the fruits of your labour?

Another barrier I hear from time to time is : **'I'm genetically challenged.** I've never been skinny, and I never will be!' I know that everyone is capable of reaching their best physical potential. Now, that might not be Elle McPherson, but a lean, athletic fit body will make anyone look pretty fantastic, and it has nothing to do with being skinny.

This sort of comment, **'I've never been skinny and I never will be'**, warns me that the person tends to over-generalize and has a negative mindset. They don't really believe they can succeed, or that there is any point trying to pursue fitness. They have given up before they even start. This attitude must be changed before exercise is commenced, otherwise it allows the person to make a half-hearted attempt, fail, and then say to themselves, "see, I knew I couldn't do it".

These psychological barriers are very common, and we have all experienced a time when everything was going wrong and in a moment of depression we decide we'd rather sloth about at home eating biscuits and feeling sorry for ourselves than getting out for a walk and some fresh air. But failure is not about falling off the wagon from time to time – we all have moments like that. No, failure is when we choose not to get back on the wagon. When we decide its over, that's it, we failed, & we stop trying.

Health and fitness is now very much in the spotlight in our community, and big businesses have seen it as an opportunity to make a buck out of us. Have you noticed the "Achieve more by doing less" theme being taken to ridiculous extremes?

I think deep down we all know that we can't get something for nothing, and if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is, right?

The physical benefits of fitness are obvious - we live longer, feel better, have less health problems, we're able to do more, etc. Whereas the psychological benefits of exercise are subtle but more extensive.

Particularly for women, the degree to which we look & feel fit has a huge impact on our confidence & self esteem. Our confidence has a follow on effect to almost every area of life. It effects our relationships; our sex drive & ability to enjoy sexual intimacy; the way we handle criticism at work; & our ability to make friends and set boundaries.

Women who physically challenge their bodies in training are also more likely to set goals and be success focused in their business and personal life. People who exercise are less stressed and cope better with challenge. And, probably one of the most important benefits of all, when we are fit and healthy, we become happier.

The Go Red for Women campaign aims to empower women to improve our heart health so that we live longer and healthier lives. The majority of my clients are women, & I am constantly inspired by the way women are empowered by fitness.

I have seen women who have survived terribly traumatic life events like car accidents, the death of their life partner, miscarriage & breast cancer. These women understand that focusing on their own health and fitness is an important step in their healing process, & I am awed by their ability to soldier on & keep fighting even through the hard times; I think we can all learn a lesson from them.

In any area of life, we can choose to enjoy challenge; we can choose to grow through hard work and persistence; and we can choose to make a commitment to ourselves to be determined, success-oriented and positive.

So I hope that this week, this month, this year, you make it your choice to do something, and be someone, extraordinary.

- Dr Vanessa Cook
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'The Heart Foundation saved my Pop's life. Please help them save others.' Chloe, 13

Give to the Heart Foundation Doorknock Appeal in September

Chloe's grandfather Barry heard a Heart Foundation ad that said if you have any heart attack warning signs, get help immediately. He'd been experiencing some chest pain, so he rushed to hospital. It was a clot. Easily treated but deadly if left. Thanks to the Heart Foundation, he's alive today. That's why Chloe is asking you to donate to the Heart Foundation Doorknock Appeal.

For more information or to make a donation, please call 1800 55 22 55 or visit www.heartfoundation.org.au

