



Health &
Wellbeing

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Dr Gill's Blog

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Dry January, a sleep app and a trainer!

In the spirit (!) of participation I have been doing dry January. I did it last year as some of you may recall.

There is increasing evidence that people who do it drink less through the year and I think that has been true for me. I love doing it in January because there is so much less social pressure to drink and going out with friends who are doing the same thing makes sticking to it really easy. I have noticed this year that it doesn't raise any comment or surprise; it is just becoming very normal. Apparently 3.1 million people declared an intention to do it this year. I am never sure how we get these stats – no one asked me so I can add one to that number.

As last year I am finding my sleep is better and I feel more energised during the day. Hoping for weight loss of course but that is proving slower.

"The stats show 79% of people save money, 62% had better sleep and more energy and 42% lost weight! "

I have also cleaned up my diet for the new year by following a (moderated) clean eating programme. I have never found this difficult so I won't say I find it a hardship and it helps regulate my insulin and blood sugar levels and that in turn really helps with energy and mood. I say moderated because pasteurised milk, milk and gluten products all feature in my diet and I firmly believe excessive exclusion is unhealthy. I avoid processed food and sugar, eat plenty of vegetables and modest amounts of lean protein and I keep it balanced. For me it is very simple: if it is processed don't eat it and keep everything as natural and unrefined as possible.



I have been using the Sleepio app to see whether I can recommend it to my patients. Sleepio is an app available on the app store in which you record your sleep and it provides you with a CBT programme tailored to your needs. It has a very sound clinical research basis and I have to say I am quite impressed by it. A small number of NHS services offer it free but unless you are one of

the lucky ones, it costs £200 a year. I haven't found any other apps that really help teach you how to improve your sleep. There is a wealth of free information on the sleep foundation website which is a fantastic free resource <https://sleepfoundation.org>. Sleepio is more suitable if you are having more persistent problems and you have tried all the brilliant suggestions from the sleep foundation.

I have also started working with a personal trainer. There is a lot of research showing we need strength work as well as aerobic. I am going with a friend to keep the motivation up and committed to twice a week which I think is the minimum to make a difference. The big gain for me here is learning. I exercise quite a lot already, but at a fairly repetitive level. I do hot yoga (no research to say being hot makes any difference to the health benefits at all) and run/cross train but I think we forget about all the other muscles and the big plus of a trainer is teaching me how to bring some new habits into my routine. Really enjoying it.

Last but not least for 2018...Happiness! Action for Happiness have a wonderful January calendar to lift your spirits and those of the people around you at <http://www.actionforhappiness.org/>- the site is full of wonderful ideas and facts. Happiness reduces your risk of heart disease and happy people live longer!!!

Looking after your lifestyle



The Sit / Stand Question

In recent years the health risks of a sedentary lifestyle and sitting for extended periods have received extensive coverage in the press. This has led to the idea that a standing workstation is an antidote to these risks. But to what extent is this true and is standing truly better for your health than sitting?

Sitting vs standing

Studies show that sitting or more precisely, being in a static seated position for long periods, can increase the risk of high blood pressure, cardiovascular events, spinal inflammation and degeneration, slowing of the metabolic rate, reduced bone density and the development of certain chronic diseases.

On the other hand, standing for extended periods can cause the joints to become temporarily immobilised or 'locked' which can later lead to degenerative damage to the tendons and ligaments. When standing, gravity causes fluid to settle in the feet and legs. The ability of the heart to pump these fluids around the body is reduced due to decreased muscle activity (staying still).

It also creates more work for the heart (in particular in men with ischemic heart disease) and can cause swelling in the lower limbs. In addition to this, the increased pressure on the walls of the veins can lead to long term damage and discomfort and increase an employee's chances of developing varicose veins. Potential problems with the knees and feet should also be considered.

" We can now see that standing all day can be just as problematic as sitting."

Variation is Key

While there can be no denying the potential benefits of sit/stand workstations, particularly for those with chronic back conditions, we come back to the traditional idea that variation and education are truly the key to avoiding musculoskeletal injuries.

Current advice from Cornell University recommends that for every 30 minute block we should sit for 20 minutes, stand for 8 minutes and walk or stretch for 2 minutes to provide our bodies with enough movement and variation in posture to maintain good circulation and avoid muscular fatigue.

Sit / Stand Advice -

Every 30 Minutes



Sit for 20 minutes



Stand for 8 minutes



Stretch for 2 minutes

This could increase or decrease slightly depending on the severity of a person's condition or their overall fitness and as such, it is important that a sit/stand user is educated in spotting warning signs such as slumping forward or resting on one leg, which indicate fatigue. They should also be advised of the correct sitting and standing desk heights to avoid bad postures.

So the key message here is not that standing is good for you and sitting is bad, but that any one position for too long is harmful to all of us and that although sit/stand desks are a helpful addition to our armoury against sedentary working habits, they must be used correctly and may not be appropriate for all.

Content provided by Kerry Jennings DSE Manager

Study information compiled and provided by EnricoSmog Consulting

Doctors Corner

Dear Doctor,

How important is handwashing really?

My grandmother used to say “We all need to eat a peck of dirt before we die and she lived to be 103!”

What a fascinating question and yes; a familiar expression from previous generations. You might be interested to know that a ‘peck’ is equivalent to around 9 litres which feels like quite a lot of dirt, but perhaps not if you have 103 years in which to eat it! What isn’t clear is whether eating a peck was thought to be a requirement for healthy living or simply that you would die once you had consumed one.

" There is also some interesting research linking our ‘cleanliness’ and an increase in the development of allergies and asthma."

Dirt eating still has its enthusiasts and there is some suggestion that the lack of exposure to a range of micro-organisms in our modern (relatively clean lives) particularly in childhood may have a negative impact on developing robust immune systems. There is also some interesting research linking our 'cleanliness' and an increase in the development of allergies and asthma. Moreover, there is evidence that a common harmless bacterium found in soil; *Mycobacterium vaccae* may effect serotonin production and that consumption is helpful in improving mood. And of course there has been much interest written recently around the subject of the gut microbiome and how important our healthy bacteria are.



However, we are equally aware that good sanitation and hygiene lie behind the most significant improvements in population health and longevity. We know that many infectious diseases can be spread from person to person by contaminated hands. These include respiratory infections such as influenza, gastrointestinal infections, eye infections and others.

Studies have also shown that faecal contamination is present and living on many surfaces that we touch regularly in everyday life. Researchers have tested items like bank notes, computer keyboards, shopping bags, mobile phones, kitchen taps, bar snacks and ice cubes and found the presence of the faecal bacterium *E.coli*. *E.coli* infections can cause symptoms ranging from mild to very significant gastroenteritis and in severe cases complications can lead to blood poisoning and kidney failure.

It is clear that washing hands properly can help prevent the spread of a number of germs such as bacteria and viruses that cause disease. We should wash our hands, particularly after using

the toilet or changing a nappy and also after handling raw foods like chicken, meat and vegetables or before eating or handling 'ready to eat' food. We should wash hands after contact with any animals including the family pet and most importantly to prevent infection spreading to others after coughing, sneezing or nose blowing.

So what is the best handwashing technique?

The World Health Organization advise washing our hands properly should take about as long as singing "Happy Birthday" twice (around 20 seconds).

Use the following steps while you hum:

1. Wet your hands with water.
2. Apply enough soap to cover all over your hands. You can use alcohol-based hand rub if you don't have immediate access to soap and water.
3. Rub hands palm to palm.
4. Rub the back of your left hand with your right palm with interlaced fingers. Repeat with the other hand.
5. Rub your palms together with fingers interlaced.
6. Rub the backs of your fingers against your palms with fingers interlocked.
7. Clasp your left thumb with your right hand and rub in rotation. Repeat with your left hand and right thumb.
8. Rub the tips of your fingers in the other palm in a circular motion, going backwards and forwards. Repeat with the other hand.
9. Rinse hands with water.
10. Dry thoroughly, ideally with a disposable towel.
11. Use the disposable towel to turn off the tap.

Obviously in our homes we are less likely to use disposable towels but we should be aware that regular towels can contain bacteria left in the water on hands from previous use and are therefore a potential site of recontamination. It is sensible to make sure hand towels are washed and changed frequently and if a family member is unwell it is best for them to use their own towel

and not share.

It's especially important to make sure that hands are washed before and after visiting someone in hospital or another healthcare setting, to help prevent the spread of infection. These days alcohol hand rubs are usually provided.

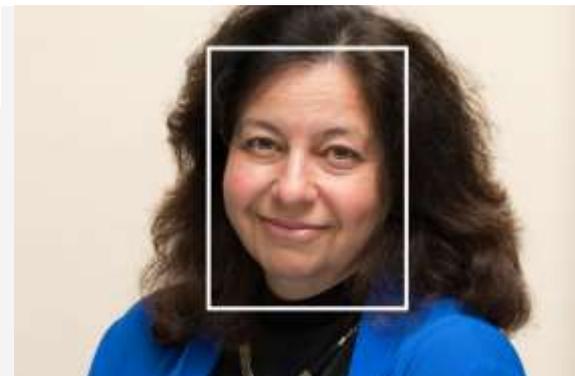


Whilst considering hand rubs and soaps it is worth reflecting that antibacterial soaps appear to offer no extra benefits above normal soap. In fact, there is concern that antibacterial soaps might kill only the weaker bacteria on the skin, leaving more powerful strains to breed. However, it is worth being aware that many modern soaps are designed to be most effective in warm water and so there may be some advantage in using warmer water – not to mention that it is more comfortable.

So what about that 'peck' of dirt? Well the jury is still out. It may well be that there are genuine positives in dirt consumption but perhaps what is needed is a good 'clean' peck of dirt! However, in our population, dense buildings and cities and certainly in health care environments the potential for spread of infection is high and hand washing appears to be one of the simplest yet most effective defences.

Any of our GPs would be pleased to discuss this further if you want to pop in, just please don't be offended if we wash our hands after you go.....

This month's Doctors Corner was kindly provided by . . .



Dr Karen Lindall
Roodlane GP

Do you have a health related question?



Why not try emailing us in confidence and you could see your question answered by a qualified Doctor in our next newsletter!

DoctorsQuestions@roodlane.co.uk

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