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THE FIT FACTOR

LIFESTYLE CHANGE

Making healthier lifestyle changes in mid-life will promote longevity of life. Positive exercise and diet changes should be number one on your list and are critically important.

FITNESS TIP

As we get older, it's not so much the intensity of the workout, it's the regularity of moving and raising the heart rate along with some resistance work that's important.

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AS we hit middle age, our physical strength starts to diminish. In fact most people lose 1% of their muscle mass every 12 weeks, past the age of 50.

One of the main reasons for the decline is our bodies become less efficient at turning protein into muscle and by the time we hit 80, up to half of us may suffer serious effects from this condition.

The good news is studies show small diet changes along with regular exercise can keep this muscle loss at bay.

This sounds easy, and in reality it is, but it takes discipline as new habits need to be formed and stuck to.

Many British eating habits actually accelerate muscle loss. A three-year study at Newcastle University analysing 750 people's eating habits in the North East found those that consumed high levels of fatty, starchy foods were most at risk because these foods do not provide the fuel needed to build muscle in midlife and beyond.

This is compounded by the fact many people have less muscle to lose when they hit forty due to their unhealthy lifestyles over decades.

Also, we are doing more technology related work rather than manufacturing or other physical jobs.

Trying healthy eating for a few weeks a year will not work, you need to make a conscious effort to form healthier food choices and implement an exercise regime that you can stick to long term.

Eating to promote muscle mass

Latest research shows that two thirds of our bodies' Vitamin C is found in skeletal muscle and is a strong antioxidant therefore helps clear toxins which increase as we age.

Vitamin C is available in vegetables and fruit, making sure these levels are topped up each day links in with your healthy diet.

Following a Mediterranean diet showed the most positive

results in holding onto your muscle mass.

The diet includes a moderate amount of fish, poultry and dairy, adding plenty of vegetables, fruit, olive oil with little red meat and added sugar. The lack of refined sugar was a significant impact on lowering inflammation in the body.

Exercise

Research showed we do not have to exercise hard, it's the regularity that's important. Low impact daily exercise such as gardening or walking briskly would work well. Anything more, involving resistance work and raising the heart rate would be a bonus.

The health and fitness industry is worth billions, but once again we come back to the same basic principle which we learnt from our ancestors. Eat what we are designed to eat - in other words fresh natural foods - and drink plenty of water, stay away from refined sugar and exercise regularly.



> Following a healthy Mediterranean diet could help you hold on to your muscle mass for longer