



WORKING FROM HOME

HOW TO STAY ON TRACK

THE WORKING-FROM-HOME LIFE CAN BE CHALLENGING. WE STARTED STRONG, BUT AFTER ALL THIS TIME OUR GOOD HABITS HAVE FALLEN BY THE WAYSIDE – IF NOT THE ‘WAIST SIDE’! LUCKILY, OUR EXPERTS ARE HERE TO HELP YOU STAY FOCUSED ON YOUR GOALS.

IT feels like an eternity ago when we were told the country was going into a hard lockdown and we all had to stay at home for our own good. We assumed we’d be back at the office soon...

Fast-forward nearly two years, and many of us are still working remotely. In the beginning we may have been motivated to stick to our health goals and maintain a good work-life balance, but as time passed many of us have gone off-track. Well, no more! Our three experts are here to help you get back and stay on track.

KEEP ON TOP OF HEALTH AND FITNESS GOALS

Last year, we were starting our day with ‘Yoga with Adriene’ and working up a sweat with virtual gym in the afternoon, and we were making our own healthy snacks (because takeaways weren’t an option). Then our motivation slipped. ‘When we put too much pressure on ourselves, we feel like we don’t have time to exercise or eat healthily,’ says Anri van Rooyen, co-owner of Ariani Health Solutions and the Weight Control Clinic (arianihealth.com). And when we stop putting our health first, it’s a slippery slope. Anri shares tips on how to make healthier choices.

1 MANAGE STRESS

Most of us are emotional eaters – now more than ever we're facing an unprecedented amount of stress, so it's a normal reaction. 'When you get cravings, Anri suggests, 'ask yourself: "Is this a hunger response or is it triggered by an emotion?" We need to learn how to recognise harmful emotions or thoughts and then correct them – and know when we need help.'

2 FIND A WORKOUT THAT SUITS YOU

As with healthy eating, there's a misconception that exercise needs to be a punishment, which is why many of us stop exercising. If you're having fun while getting fit, you'll be more likely to stick with it, Anri says. Also keep in mind that over-exercising can actually cause more stress to your body. It's all about balance. 'Practising more mindful exercises, like yoga or dancing, will not only help with stress but also keep you healthy physically.'

3 SET A ROUTINE

We plan out our work activities for the day, so why not also plan healthy habits? 'Many people eat lunch at their desk while continuing to work; it's so important to take the time to disengage, eat and move,' Anri says. 'Set a time for lunch, but also for hourly movement: once an hour, get up and walk around or do a few stretches, stand for a bit, whatever works for you so that you don't remain seated the entire day.'

4 PLAN AHEAD

Preparation is key to success in anything we do. If you aren't prepared, you will



grab a packet of chips instead of a handful of nuts. 'Most of us know when we're going to be under pressure at work, and it's during these high-pressure periods that it's even more important to plan ahead so we aren't tempted to fall back on bad habits.' Spend a bit of time on a Sunday to prep food for the week, and pick foods that are tasty and wholesome.

5 LIMIT TEMPTATIONS

How often have you found yourself wandering into the kitchen because you know there are treats in the pantry? Avoid buying sweets and junk food if you can, and stock up on fresh fruit, berries and vegetables; and sources of healthy fats such as nuts, seeds, avocados and olives. 'I have a tuna melt recipe [on page 19] that is perfect for a snack or a meal, and I love dipping fresh vegetables in a home-made tzatziki,' Anri says.

A healthy lifestyle improves your energy levels, memory and

productivity, which means you won't have to work longer hours. 'The main excuse I get from clients is that they don't have time to make healthy meals or they don't have time to work out,' Anri says. 'I always tell them that, with proper planning, you just need 10 minutes a day.' That's enough time, but it needs to become a habit.

PRESERVE YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

We're often so focused on our physical wellbeing that we tend to neglect our mental wellbeing. The truth is, if you don't take care of your mind, everything else will start to fall apart soon enough. It's important to look after your central nervous system, says clinical psychologist Jeanie Cavé, owner of Impact Therapy Centre (impacttherapy.co.za); if you don't, burnout can happen.

So, what can you do?

WELLNESS

‘A healthy lifestyle improves your energy levels, memory and productivity.’

1 CLEAR OUT YOUR MIND

The first step, Jeanie says, is to understand how the brain deals with information: ‘Think of your brain as a container and information as the water inside it.’ While you’re working, you’re filling up that container with water. As long as it isn’t too full, it has space to create waves, which is how it heals and regulates. The moment it becomes overwhelmed, it can’t make those waves. The water starts to slosh out and your brain goes into fight-or-flight mode, so your heart starts to race and your muscles get ready to leap into action. ‘When this happens, your brain encapsulates all of that information that is about to slosh out and pushes it down into your freeze-or-fold system.’ That capsule... it’s like putting a rock in a bath; it takes up more space and weighs you down. It’s important to clear out your mind so it doesn’t get to that. Rest, movement and diaphragmatic breathing can all help you manage your stress and avoid burnout.

2 BREAK ISOLATION

We all know the benefits of a good w(h)ine session with a girlfriend. There’s a reason you come back feeling better and lighter than before: another way to clear out your mind is to have relational space, and you get this through ‘having meaningful interpersonal interactions where there

is space for you to process your emotions’. So, call your bestie, set up a Zoom session, open a bottle of wine and get it all off your chest.

3 DISENGAGE PSYCHOLOGICALLY

Studies have shown that companies that encourage a play-at-work environment have better staff morale and increased productivity. That’s because by being able to disengage from the stress of work for a bit you clear out your mind, so when you’re back at your desk you’re more productive. This could mean spending your lunch break watching a TV show, listening to a podcast or going outside to read.

4 WORK TO YOUR OWN RHYTHM

If you’re lucky enough to be able to do this, Jeanie recommends working to the rhythm of your own body. ‘Studies have shown different people are genetically programmed to function better at different times of the day, so if you aren’t a morning person but you are forcing yourself to start your day at 4 am, overall, your productivity will be lower.’

5 HAVE A CHECKLIST

The reason it feels so satisfying to cross out a task on a to-do list is that it causes your brain to release dopamine, the neurotransmitter responsible for feelings of pleasure and reward. It helps us to stay engaged and motivated. Divide your to-do list by the amount of time you expect it will take, Jeanie suggests. When you finish a task early you get an added boost, and you can do a quick task in the remaining time – double the reward.

MAINTAIN A HEALTHY WORK-HOME BALANCE

Many of us struggle to keep our personal life separate from work. Life coach Katlego Kolobe, founder of Rise Vuka Thrive Coaching Co. (flow.page/risevukathrive), says this is because of the workplace culture inspired by company execs like Elon Musk, who once said in an interview that he works 120 hours a week on little sleep. ‘Working around the clock comes with costs to relationships. It just cannot be maintained for long periods, even by Musk, who has himself pointed that out.’

1 CREATE NEW RITUALS

If you start the day at the last minute and stay in your PJs, you’re not signalling to your brain that the workday has begun. You need to come up with a new ritual to do that. ‘In the time you would have spent sitting in traffic, take a walk, or put on your casual-Friday clothes and then do some uninterrupted deep work,’ Katlego suggests. ‘When you are finished with your workday, mark it by taking off your wig, bra and heels – make it into a transition ritual that signals your availability or non-availability.’

2 ESTABLISH A WORK ZONE

Have an area of your house that is just for work, and when you leave that area, leave it completely – don’t take work with you. That may mean not responding to work emails after hours. It’s important to have these conversations with your boss, colleagues and family about when you need me-time or do-not-disturb-time, Katlego says. If sticking to a nine-to-five day is unrealistic, discuss it openly and revisit agreements often.

Snack or meal idea

3 FORGET ABOUT MULTITASKING

Don't put pressure on yourself to meet all expectations. 'Instead, learn deep focus and being present with loved ones,' Katlego says. And if there is something you 'need' to get to but you've been putting it off, try to commit the smallest imaginable quantity of time to work on it. 'So, for myself, I promised to work on cleaning my home office for 10 minutes tops. This isn't to trick yourself into doing it for longer than you said, but to give yourself an easy win.'

4 DON'T PUT OFF THE THINGS YOU ENJOY

When you're focused on work, the most important priorities in life are the easiest to put off. But these moments for yourself are important to maintaining a work-home balance, so schedule your priorities. 'Focus on completing at least one important life priority per day or per week, whether that is catching up with your girlfriends or taking evening walks.'

5 YOU ARE NOT TIME-POOR

It's easy to feel that there just isn't enough time in the day to get everything done. For those moments, Katlego proposes finding a meaningful mantra, such as, 'I have enough time,' to repeat to yourself. 'When I feel rushed, I remind myself of this powerful idea and it snaps me back into confidence and decision-making.'

Having boundaries helps you to prioritise what's important in life and in your career. 'We won't be completely balanced all the time, but having a clearer sense of a whole lifestyle is important for peak performance in the long term.' ■



This recipe is from Anri van Rooyen's *FitFoodSMART* recipe e-book.

TUNA MELT MUFFINS

MAKES 6; SERVES 3

KEEP ON TRACK *per serving*

FAT 18 G | CARBS 4 G | PROTEIN 20 G

15 ml (1 tbsp) olive oil
1 onion, diced
1 x 170 g tin shredded tuna in brine
2 eggs, beaten lightly
60 g (½ cup) grated Cheddar
30 g (2 tbsp) cream cheese
seasoning of your choice

1. Preheat the oven to 180°C. Line a 6-cup muffin pan with cupcake liners, or grease it with cooking spray.
2. Heat the oil in a saucepan and fry the onion until translucent. Transfer it to a mixing bowl and add the tuna, egg, cheeses and seasoning. Mix until well combined, then spoon the mixture into the lined muffin cups. Bake for 15–20 minutes or until golden on top. Eat while still hot.