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HOW TO TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR HEALTH THIS YEAR.

by Michelle Sanchez - Naturopath, Nutritionist and Medical Herbalist

Taking control of your health and making your wellbeing a priority has never been more important. With so much uncertainty happening in the world, it's important to maintain control of your physical and emotional health, and avoid feelings of overwhelm, stress and anxiety.

So, if you've let your health slide, or you're not feeling as energised and focused as you should be, now is the time to empower yourself and take back the reins.

> **"If you want to make your health a priority this year, then why wait? Get started as soon as possible."**

What factors can compromise your health?

Chronic stress negatively impacts health, and can cause a host of complications and conditions, including depression, infertility, fatigue and heart disease. When you get stressed, your nervous system responds by releasing the hormones cortisol and adrenaline into the bloodstream. This is known as 'the fight or flight response', and it results in certain changes within the body, to enable you to deal with stress accordingly. Constant stress changes the way your body functions, and can affect your hormones, blood pressure and digestive function.

A poor diet that is high in sugar, refined carbohydrates (bread, pastries, pizza, cakes, pasta), fizzy drinks, juices/ cordials, junk food, pasteurised dairy and trans fats promotes inflammation and robs your body of essential nutrients. Sugar (in all its forms including refined carbohydrates and sweetened drinks) spikes your insulin levels, causing weight gain and blood sugar imbalances.

Lack of exercise makes you feel sluggish and can contribute to weight gain. Exercise helps strengthen your muscles, including your heart muscle, which is essential for pumping blood around the body. It also keeps your blood vessels healthy, your cells well oxygenated, and your immune system strong.

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Insufficient sleep changes your body's circadian rhythm, which in turn impacts hormone production, dysregulates blood sugar levels, and contributes to unhealthy eating habits and weight gain.

Smoking floods the body with toxic chemicals, which damages the DNA of cells, increases the formation of clots, and causes irreparable damage to your lungs and blood vessels.

Alcohol and caffeine consumption creates acidity and inflammation in the body, and also increases heart rate and blood pressure.

Eat more nutrient-dense, whole foods such as fruit and vegetables (kale, spinach, broccoli, cauliflower, avocado, sweet potato, blueberries), quinoa, chia seeds, nuts, beans and lentils. Go organic if you can, as organic produce contains more vitamins, minerals and antioxidants than non-organic food.

Widen your knowledge on nutrition and diet by taking a short online nutrition course where you can learn the fundamentals of a healthy diet and the essential nutrients needed to support your body through the life stages. Becoming aware of how to avoid harmful toxins, and boost your gut health and immune system naturally, is also important.

Set realistic health goals that fit in with your lifestyle. One of the issues with goal setting is being able to achieve them long-term. You might have very good intentions to get up at 5 a.m. to exercise every morning, but the reality of actually doing this is a different matter. Don't set yourself up for failure; create achievable goals that you can fit around your family, work and other personal commitments. There is a powerful tool called the Wheel of Life that CNM Health Coaches use, which helps people understand each aspect of their life (health, career, relationships, environment, goals), to see which areas are thriving and which areas may need improvement. When you have a handle on this, you can then set goals to create balance in your life.

Make time for exercise and regular movement. You don't need to do high-intensity training or go for a ten-mile run; a brisk walk or an online yoga class can be just as effective for getting the blood pumping and moving your muscles.

Reduce your stress levels by spending more time outside and making time for relaxation. Stop overcommitting yourself; an excessively busy schedule only creates overwhelm. Self-care is also incredibly important, as it boosts your mood and self-confidence. Treat yourself to a massage, read a book, or take a bath with some relaxing essential oils such as lavender.

Optimise your gut health by eating gut-healing foods like sauerkraut, kimchi, Brussels sprouts and garlic. Your gut houses 70% of your immune system cells and 90% of your serotonin receptors (serotonin is the neurotransmitter which helps stabilise mood and feelings of wellbeing), so a healthy gastrointestinal system is vital for your mental health and immune system.

If you've let your health slip, and you want to make your health a priority this year, then why wait? Get started as soon as possible. Make time for regular exercise and relaxation, eat a nutritious diet and start setting realistic health goals you can achieve. When you feel empowered and in control of your health, anything is possible.

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