5 health practices that will improve your productivity today.

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WELCOME!

I wrote this small booklet to illustrate how taking care of your body during a typical working week, will improve both your effectiveness at work, as well as your health. So often we think that taking time to care for ourselves will prevent us from getting stuff done - but health and productivity really are two sides of the same coin.

You will find here selected research findings as well as practical ideas to help you translate your desire to feel and function better, into everyday actions.

If you would like to learn more about the coaching and consulting services I offer, or receive regular updates related to this topic, you can sign up for Health Bites at thea.com.au.

Enjoy! *Thea*

Firstly, what do I mean by productivity?

When I talk about productivity I'm not talking about squeezing more out of yourself and your employees, in order to simply gain more profit.

I'm talking about a fundamental aspect of human nature, which is our true desire to give rather than gain – to be of service and make a difference to the people around us and the world we live in. This can express itself in many ways, through our profession, our community work or our family roles.

So, whatever your life role, wouldn't it be great to be able to bring more energy and focus and less stress to your pursuits?

Here are my top 5 practices that will help you do so.

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1. Take Well Timed Breaks

Drive along any major highway and you'll see signs urging you to take a short break. "Every 2 hours: Stop, Revive, Survive." If you ignore these signs and drive on despite fatigue, your life is at stake.

In the workplace, when you push on despite signs of tiredness or brain fog, you are putting your heath and your quality of work at risk.

Every system in our body is based on rhythms and cycles. We function at our best when we work in accordance with these rhythms. In my presentations I explain these rhythms in more detail, but for now, consider how you can punctuate your day with short breaks that will allow you to refocus and recharge.

So what does a 'well-timed' break mean?

Ask your body and listen to the signals that indicate it's time to stop or time to change pace: a wandering mind, loss of focus, muscle tension or a slump in energy.

Meanwhile, here are some suggestions:

Mini-breaks @10 minutes:

A 30 second break from intensive computer work every 10 minutes can reduce keyboard error rates by up to 60 % and protect you against repetition strain injuries, research from Cornell University shows. This could be a simple wrist stretch, standing up, a minute or two of relaxed, abdominal breathing, or simply changing tasks to give your most used muscles a rest.

Standing or Stretch Breaks @ 60 minutes:

If you don't have a standing desk, stand up at least every hour (ideally every 30 minutes, ergonomists say). Or if you are on your feet most of the time, change posture by doing some stretches. They key is to change posture often.

Productivity Breaks @1.5 to 2 hours:

This time frame is based on the idea that after one and a half to two hours, our attention and energy wane due to the cycling of various biological processes. Step outside. Take a short walk. Go and talk to a colleague. Get a glass of water and nutritious snack if hungry.

Workers who do break about every 90 minutes report:

- nearly 30 per cent higher level of **focus** across the day,
- 48 per cent greater ability to **think creatively**, and
- 46 per cent higher level of **health and wellbeing.**

(survey of nearly 14,000 employees around the world conducted by the Harvard Business Review and The Energy Project.)

Fuel Break @ Lunch:

Midday is for re-fueling, not more multi-masking. So leave your work-station behind and take all of your allocated lunch time - to eat (slowly) and get some fresh air. Keep your lunch light but satisfying including a moderate serve of a high protein food (such as meat, chicken, fish, eggs, nuts or legumes) with salad or vegetables. Eat only small amounts of high carbohydrate foods, such as bread, rice or pasta, as large amounts can induce sleepiness.

Recharge @ 2 to 3 pm:

Many people experience a slump in energy after lunch around this time. This post-lunch dip is a natural effect of our circadian rhythms, and occurs even if you've had a good night's sleep, causing reduced alertness. So rather than plough on, or have yet another coffee or sugar hit, try taking a 10 to 15 minute 'renewable energy' break: Move, Meditate, Practice gentle abdominal Breathing, or Powernap.

Remember

Taking a few minutes out to restore your energy and balance is not a lazy thing to do,
but an intelligent and responsible act.

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CHAPTER 2

Stop Sleeping with your Phone

PEOPLE WHO USE THEIR SMART PHONE AFTER 9 PM ARE MORE DEPLETED AND LESS ENGAGED THE FOLLOWING DAY.

(ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR AND HUMAN DECISION PROCESSES 124 (2014) 11–23)

Sleep is the most important break of all – you won't find a single behaviour that has such an immediate and strong effect on the way you feel and function. Yet sleep is often the first thing to go when we want to get more done.

It's not just the physical rest that is important. Psychological detachment, or mentally switching off from work during off-job time, is critical for sustaining employees' wellbeing and performance capabilities. *(Journal of Occupational Health Psychology in 2011, (16:4; 457– 467).*

That's why you need to get control over the 'off' button on your technology at night time. The blue-light behind computer and phone screens interferes with the release of melatonin, a natural sleep inducer. Smartphone use for work at night can also trigger active thinking about ongoing work tasks and impending deadlines, preventing good quality sleep.

Avoid the effects of 'light pollution' (too much artificial light at night) and establish a switch-off routine at night.

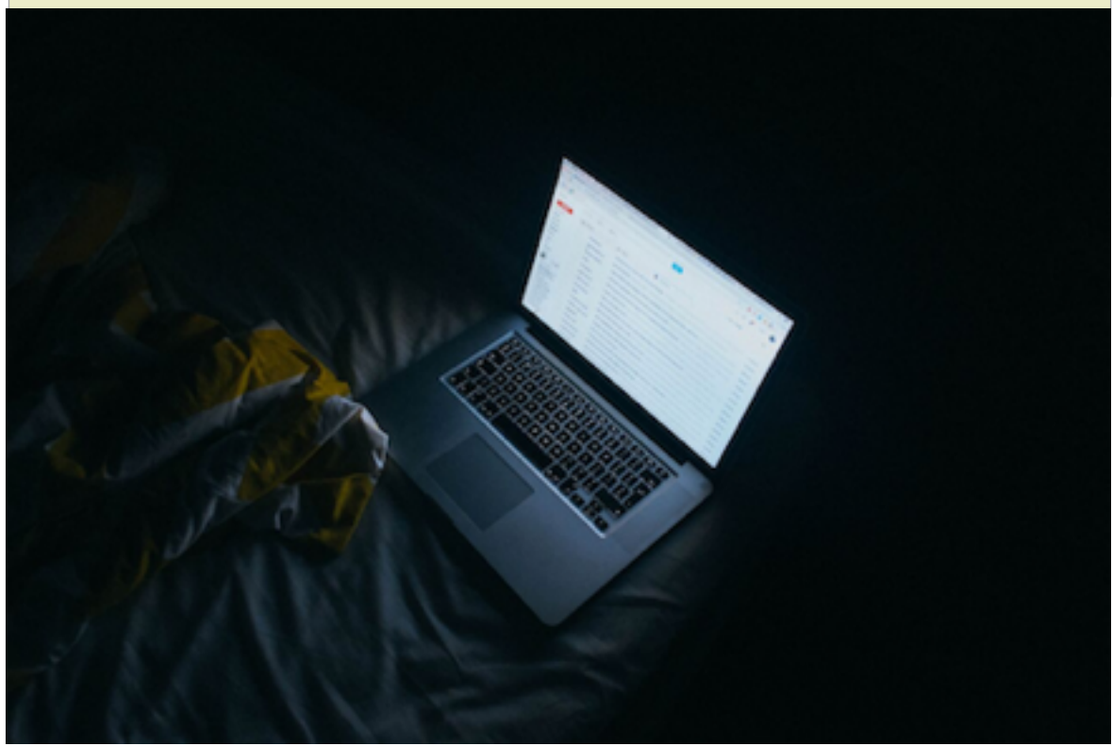
- Plug in your phone to recharge overnight, outside of the bedroom.
- Give yourself a good 30 minutes of tech-free time before going to bed.
- Use this time to wind down: stretch, meditate, journal, read.
- If you must work at night, install the app f.lux on your computer to take the blue light our of your screen, or select the 'night shift' setting on your iphone.

DID YOU KNOW?

IF YOU ARE WORKING AWAY AT 11 PM AFTER A 6 AM RISE, YOU WILL BE FUNCTIONALLY DRUNK?

AFTER 17 HOURS OF WAKEFULNESS YOUR REACTION TIME AND COGNITIVE PERFORMANCE IS EQUIVALENT TO SOMEONE WITH A BLOOD ALCOHOL LEVEL OF 0.05.

(NATURE 388, 235 (17 JULY 1997))



Further reading: Losing Sleep Over Work?

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CHAPTER 3

Learn How to PowerNap

"After a nap I feel much more focused and energised and I get through a lot more at work in much less time. In my personal life it has definitely reduced stress and I don't get that burnt out feeling."

NIGEL HOBBS, CEO WELNIS LABS, SYDNEY

JUST 10 MINUTES OF SLEEP GIVES YOU ANOTHER 3 HOURS OF AFTERNOON ENERGY WITHOUT INTERFERING WITH A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP.

(SLEEP 2006; 29(6):831-840)

IN PRACTICE THIS MEANS LYING DOWN FOR ABOUT 20 TO 25 MINUTES, AS IT TAKES ON AVERAGE 13 MINUTES TO DRIFT OFF INTO LIGHT SLEEP.

"Napping is a great idea. It's a kind of traffic control that slows down your brain."

HARRY MILLER, AUSTRALIAN PROMOTER & MEDIA MANAGER.

Famous high-achievers such as Brahams, Napolean and Churchill all demonstrated that the secret to work success isn't just about whether you can go long and hard, but whether you can also let up.

They all had a habit of taking an afternoon nap.

Today even athletes are incorporating the short nap into their training routines as it improves recovery and performance.

Mastering the art of the nap is a great life skill that you can use in so many situations where you find yourself short on sleep or simply slumping: you had a bad night's sleep, you have young children who wake in the night, your partner snores, you suffer insomnia, you have a cold or have a work or travel schedule that involves late nights.

Even if you don't have any sleep problems, it's normal for a whole range of biological processes to dip after lunch, resulting in slower reaction time through to slower mental processing speed. So you might choose to power-nap in order to face the afternoon as fresh as you do the morning.

If you don't have a pro-napping workplace, you can always use your breaks to lie down in a park, in your car or in a chill out room at work.

Who else is napping? Check out how professors, business owners, teenagers, mums and professionals have embraced the habit.

Humour Break: Read a great 'caught napping' story here.

2 Golden Rules for a Work-a-Day Nap.

1. Don't nap for more than 30 minutes, otherwise you will enter deep sleep which will leave you feeling groggy. (set the alarm for 20 to 25 minutes which should allow for 10 minutes of light sleep.)

2. Don't nap too late in the day, else it will interfere with a good night's sleep. Ideally nap about 7 hours before you normally go to bed.

How to take a Nap

* Gather your napping aids, such as a mat or blanket to put on the floor, a small pillow, eye mask, ear plugs, do not disturb sign and a soft alarm set to wake you after about 20 minutes.

* Turn all phones OFF or on airplane mode.

* Find a place where you can nap without being interrupted. The park, a car, a couch, a chill out or meditation room, or a sleeping pod.

* Wind down with some simple stretches and yawns to release mind-body tension. Gently close your eyes. Bring your attention to your body and your breathing.

* Don't worry if you don't fall asleep – you will still gain benefit from stopping, changing posture and closing your eyes.

For more information about powernaps visit napnow.net.au

CHAPTER 4

Move - just a little bit more.

If there's one thing the body is designed to do, it's to move.

Historians estimate that hunter gatherers walked about 16 kilometres a day without even trying.

Today we are slowly dying from 'sedentary death syndrome.'

THE GOOD NEWS?

You can get significant benefits from surprisingly small amounts of movement:

* Simply standing up can increased your ability to learn by 10 per cent.

* Just 12 minutes of moderate exercise is enough to stimulate the release of feel good-hormones, leaving you more alert and in a better mood.

* 20 minutes of resistance training, if working to your upper limit, twice a week is enough to significantly reduce symptoms of depression.

* Even a few minutes of high intensity interval training a week can have benefits. Learn more here.

When we move our bodies, we experience a cascade of mental, physical and emotional benefits. Physical activity or more structured exercise not only makes us fitter, stronger and inoculates us against many diseases.

It also reduces procrastination and boosts brain function.

EXERCISE FLOODS THE BRAIN WITH A PROTEIN CALLED BRAIN DERIVED NEUROTROPHIC FACTOR (BDNF) WHICH ACTS LIKE A FERTILIZER TO THE BRAIN, INCREASING MENTAL SHARPNESS AND OUR ABILITY TO MEMORISE, THUS INCREASING OUR ABILITY TO LEARN.

(HOPKINS ET AL, NEUROSCIENCE. 2012 JUL 26; 215: 59–68. ON PROCESSES 124 (2014) 11–23)

That's why some researchers say that promoting physical activity at work is one of the best ways to reduce present-eeism.

As well as making time for structured exercise, don't dismiss the **small** opportunities to move during a working day.

✻ Feeling rushed in the morning? Just do 5 salutes to the sun before you leave home.

✻ Fitness 101: stand up every half an hour. Simply standing stimulates certain enzymes in your muscles that help with the metabolism of fats and sugars, reducing the risk of metabolic problems.

✻ Go for a walk or run at lunch time, or use the time for a 20 minute work out.

✻ Try walking meetings - they don't drag on as long.

✻ Take the stairs whenever you can.

✻ Get off public transport one stop earlier so you can enjoy a short walk before starting work. Could you ride to work?

✻ If you drive to work, park your car at a distance from your workplace, so you can get in a short walk at the start and end of the day.

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Chapter 5

Consume Less Stimulants

This is the least popular suggestion so I've left it until last. I'm not talking about party drugs but everyday stimulants such as caffeine found in tea, coffee, energy drinks and chocolate, and refined sugars added to food.

Take a look at any city centre in the morning when people are walking to work. How many are clutching their takeaway 'hit' for the morning, unable to function without it?

Caffeine

IS OUR CAFFEINE CULTURE MASKNG AN UNSUSTAINABLE WAY OF WORKNG & LIVING?

We tend to go for coffee to give us more energy, but the reality is, caffeine and sweets are 'non-renewable' forms of energy. They borrow from the future and ultimately undermine our inherent energy stores.

Stimulants cause the release of stress hormones the in the body, which give us a short term burst of energy, but then dump us, drained, afterwards.

It might sound counter-intuitive, but when you cut down on substances like caffeine, you will:

1. have more energy, longer term.

2. experience more stable energy through-out the day rather than big highs and lows.

RESEARCH COMPARING THE EFFECT OF DRINKING COFFEE WITH TAKING A NAP, **FOUND THAT COFFEE MADE MEMORY WORSE ON 2 OUT OF 3 MEASURES,** AND RESULTED IN ERRATIC FLUCTUATIONS IN ENERGY AFTERWARDS.

IN CONTRAST NAPPING IMPROVED MEMORY ON ALL 3 MEASURES WHILE RESULTING IN A SUSTAINED ENERGY LIFT THROUGHOUT THE AFTERNOON.

(DR SARA MEDNICK, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA)

So when faced with the choice of having another caffeine hit, or taking a healthy energy break,
the question to ask yourself is …

'Do I want to be wired, or do I want to be smart?'

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TIPS FOR REDUCING CAFFEINE

It can be challenging to come off caffeine and all the associated rituals that go along with it.

* You could start by cutting down. Reducing the amount of caffeine you drink in the morning can help reduce the size of the afternoon slump.

* Experiment with other drinks - de-caffeinated coffee tastes pretty good these days. Or you could try a strong dandelion if you like the bitter taste of coffee, or liquorice tea if you are a sweet tooth.

* Explore other ways to energise, de-stress or kick start your working day.

* Sometimes it's not always the caffeine we are after but simply the permission to stop during a busy working day - a cuppa legitimises our break. Start authorising yourself to take short renewable energy breaks (eg a 5-minute walk outside) , without needing a mug in your hand.

Sugar

Australians consume an average of 60g of sugars each day, or the equivalent of 14 teaspoons of white sugar, according to the Australian Health Survey 2011-2012.

The World Health Organisation says we only need about 25 gms per day - not counting naturally occurring sugars found in whole fresh fruit, vegetables or milk.

Just one tub of sweetened fruit yoghurt will give you that.

What are the effects of consuming to much sugar? As well as tooth decay, excess consumption is associated with obesity and metabolic problems such as diabetes. Emerging research also suggests it causes inflammation. (Listen here to a lecture by Dr Fettke if interested)

On a day to day basis, it can lead to erratic, rather than steady energy levels, where you are constantly seeking out sugar to pep you up.

Like caffeine, sugar is an addictive stimulant, so it can be a hard substance to wean yourself off.

> "Sugar repeatedly elevates dopamine levels which control the brain's reward and pleasure centres in a way that is similar to many drugs including tobacco, cocaine and morphine.
>
> After long-term consumption, this results in the opposite - a reduction in dopamine levels. This leads to higher consumption of sugar to get the same level of reward."
>
> *(Neuroscientist Professor Selena Bartlett of Queensland University of Technology)*

This means you can't leave cutting down sugar to chance.

You will need to plan it carefully and hold a strong intention.

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TIPS FOR REDUCING SUGAR

✻ Cutting down sugar slowly is the most sustainable approach for most people - it gives your tastebuds time to adjust.

✻ Start by targeting the highly refined sweet foods that really don't have any nutritional value at all, such as soft drink and lollies. Try sparkling mineral water with a squeeze of lemon or herbal chewing gum instead.

✻ Select lower sugar versions of your favourite foods, such as 85% cocoa chocolate, (with much less sugar, you won't overeat it).

✻ Get organised and bring healthy snacks to work so you have something available when you go searching for a pick-me-up. A slice of apple, or a few dried apricots spread with almond butter is delicious and can help satisfy your sweet tooth. Or you could have savoury snacks such as nuts or avocado and crackers.

✻ What about fruit? The Australian Dietary Guidelines recommends 2 pieces of fruit per day. This will help limit your fructose (fruit sugar) intake. Remember that half a cup of juice, or 1.5 tablespoons of dried fruit counts as one serve.

✻ Start reading labels – you'll be amazed at how many different names and types of sugar there is foods, including so called savoury foods like peanut butter or baked beans. Select the low or no sugar varieties.

✻ Don't use artificial sweeteners. New research is showing they actually make you hungrier and increase insulin levels which can impair blood sugar control. Try the plant stevia if you really need something.

✻ Remember that cravings only actually last a few minutes, so when you get the urge, see if you can distract yourself by doing something else for a short time. Write up list of 5 to 10 minute jobs you can do.

BECOME A SUGAR SLEUTH
The many names &types of sugar

Glucose	Dextrose
Fructose	Lactose (milk sugar)
Maltose	Sucrose
Agave	
Barley malt syrup	Birch syrup
Brown rice syrup	Coconut sugar
Date sugar	Honey
Invert sugar	Malt extract
Maple syrup	Palm sugar
Rice malt syrup	Dextrose (another name for glucose)
Cane juice	Cane sugarCane sugar extract
Golden syrup	Fruit sugar
Invert sugar	Panela
Molasses	Rapadura
Treacle	Turbinado sugar
White sugar	Corn sugar
Gluco-malt	Glucose syrup

High fructose corn syrup

Fruit juice concentrates

Blackstrap molasses

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CHAPTER 6

Where to from here?

So there are 5 behaviours that will improve your health as well as your workplace effectiveness. Where would you like to Start?

- I suggest that you **chose just one behavior** that will either deliver the greatest benefit to you, or will be the easiest to start with.

- Then **start small.** For example: I will take a 10-minute energy break mid afternoon, 3 times a week, or I will drink one less cup of coffee a day.

Dreamstime Free Stock Photo

Taking Action

Which area do you want to focus on?

_____

You might like to capture your intention in a simple planner to help keep you on track, like the example below. For more ideas on how to create a health action plan that will work, visit my blog at thea.com.au/blog and read these entries:

- Be a small winner rather than the Biggest Loser
- Can you be honest with yourself about your daily health habits?
- Stop talking yourself out of it.
- Don't go it alone.
- How to stop a slip-up become a slide

MY HEALTH TRACKER

	GOAL: 3 CAFFEINE FREE DAYS, MON, WED, FRI	NOTES
Monday	yes	
Tuesday		
Wednesday	yes	
Thursday		
Friday	no	
Saturday		trigger was going to a cafe, need to decide b4 what I will order
Sunday		
% Achieved	2/3 = 66%	

Good luck and please get in touch if you would like some support, more information, or to share how you might be applying any of these ideas. enquiries@thea.com.au

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