Inside this edition

- Should you wear socks to bed?
- Ways to minimize your food waste
- Try intermittent fasting in a healthy way
- Clean house, healthy house
- Ways to keep our lungs healthy
- Can wood buildings reduce stress?
- Tips to calm your mind
- Help fight climate change
- Watch out for your sweet tooth
- Weighted blankets and better sleep
- Energy Zone: Smoothie goodness

Most of us have been on virtual lockdown since mid-March. How are you holding up? The first few days were ones of adjustment, especially if working remotely was an unheard-of concept in your universe, and slacks were what you put on in the morning. Suddenly there you are, having a video conferences with the boss and your co-workers using Slack. A world turned upside down for sure.

But now that we have been at it for a while, and it looks as if we may have to continue this way for some time, maybe it’s time we review how you are working and if it is the most efficient way to do it.

Let’s start with your workspace. Are you still working on your laptop perched at the edge of your kitchen island or on your dining room table? What kind of chair are you sitting on? Is it causing your back to feel like it’s in a vice? Let’s fix this. Try to find a space in your house or apartment that you can designate as your “home office”. Set it up in a way that reminds you of your office at work, and if you can, locate it away from your living room and your bedroom. These places should be off limits. They are areas where you rest and relax. Keep it that way.

How about your morning routine? Have you reverted to rolling out of bed and logging on without dragging a comb through your hair or brushing your teeth?

Time to put a stop to that. Get up at the time you always do on a weekday. Since you save time because you don’t need to get to the office, drink an extra cup of coffee, scroll through the latest news or read your paper while eating a little breakfast. Then head to the shower, get clean and get dressed. You will feel more prepared and mentally ready to tackle a day at work.

And you don’t need to stay hunched at your computer all day long. Think about it. Did you do that at the office? Get up every hour and walk around. Get that cup of coffee from the kitchen, or do a chore or two, like a load of laundry or unload the dishwasher. Just make sure you meet your work obligations and that you are available when required.

Take your lunch breaks and your coffee breaks and when your work day ends, shut down that computer and go home. Some people have shared that they actually leave the house and walk around the block just to decompress and feel like they are on their way home. Remember your social distancing, or if you have a backyard, head out there and take a couple turns around your property.

These are tips contributed from our staff who are also working remotely. They have helped us get into a better workday routine. Remember, you are not alone out there.
Should you wear socks to bed?

Wearing your socks to bed, is it a good thing or bad thing? According to sleep.org, keeping your feet warm at night has been proved to actually make a difference in your sleeping patterns.

Keeping your feet warm in bed helps you have less restless nights. It also results in falling asleep at a quicker rate. A study published in the International Weekly Journal of Science says hitting the hay with socks on actually helps you fall asleep fifteen minutes sooner than usual. Wearing socks to bed is also useful in aiding hot flashes and improving dry feet.

Wearing socks to bed isn’t the only secret to keeping your feet warm in bed helps you have less restless nights. It also results in falling asleep at a quicker rate. A study published in the International Weekly Journal of Science says hitting the hay with socks on actually helps you fall asleep fifteen minutes sooner than usual. Wearing socks to bed is also useful in aiding hot flashes and improving dry feet.

Try to stay awake: If you want to fall asleep faster, think about staying awake. It sounds counterintuitive, but for those who find it difficult to sleep because they keep worrying about not falling asleep, do the opposite according to the director of Duke University’s Sleep Medicine program. Most of the time falling asleep is an involuntary process that takes virtually no effort, but if we’re anxious, we do things like looking at the clock and calculating how little sleep we’re going to get, which then causes sleep performance anxiety. Instead of worrying about falling asleep, think about staying awake instead. This often lessens anxiety and gives your mind a chance to relax enough to fall asleep.

Do a body scan: According to the author of Meditate Your Weight, body scanning is a simple technique that brings awareness to the body one point at a time, to bring the body back to a more coherent and relaxed state. Close your eyes and turn your attention to the natural movement of your breath. Feel yourself relax there for a moment. Then begin by noticing the sensations at the top of the head, the face, scalp, and then the neck. Then, bring your attention to the right shoulder, arm, and then hand and repeat on the left side. Next notice your upper chest, abdomen, upper back, and mid- and low-back in that order. Lastly notice the right hip, leg, and foot; then repeat on the left side. End with your awareness in both feet and then on the body as a whole.

Ways to minimize your food waste

Every year, billions of tons of food are being discarded in landfills where they sit, decompose and produce methane gas. By choosing not to waste food, you can make a positive difference to the environment. If you want to minimize your food waste but aren’t sure where to start, here are a few easy and helpful tips to get you started.

Properly store your produce

Unfortunately, many people purchase food without understanding the proper way to store it. Purchasing a bunch of fruits and veggies while you’re shopping only to come home and store them improperly, is essentially like throwing money in the trash. A common mistake people make is to put all their fruits and veggies inside the refrigerator. While some fruits and veggies require refrigeration, for others it’s simply too cold. Tomatoes, garlic, onions, and potatoes for instance, should never see the inside of your fridge.

Eat leftovers

When you store your leftovers, store them in a transparent container, where you can see them when you first open the fridge. You’re more likely to eat the leftovers instead of fixing something new if they’re the first thing you see when searching for a meal or snack. Cover leftovers, wrap them in airtight packaging, or seal them in storage containers. These practices help keep bacteria out, retain moisture, and prevent leftovers from picking up odours from other food in the refrigerator. Leftovers can be kept for three to four days in the refrigerator. Be sure to eat them within that time. After that, the risk of food poisoning increases. If you don’t think you’ll be able to eat leftovers within four days, freeze them immediately.

Utilize Your Freezer

If you have excess produce you know you won’t use before it spoils, freeze it. You can use it for smoothies later down the line. You should also freeze foods like soup, which is normally made in bulk and therefore more likely to get discarded. Not only will freezing your meals or veggies cut back on waste, but you’ll have convenient, healthy meals at the ready whenever you need them.
Clean house, healthy house

When sickness such as a cold or influenza enters your household, most will agree the best course of action is to disinfect your home.

Your first step will be cleaning all available and frequently used surfaces with soap and water. Cleaning them is going to remove the germs and dirt from the surfaces, which can then be disinfected.

When considering which surfaces need to be cleaned, think about everything you or your family members touch in a day. Examples include light switches, remotes, keyboards, game controllers, toys, door handles, cupboard handles, kitchen appliances, such as coffee pots and toasters, as well as counter tops, table tops, chairs, faucets and taps, stove tops, toilets, laundry hampers, and garbage lids.

Germs love to hide behind and cling to dirt, so it is important that those germs lose their hiding places before taking the next step so that you can rest assured that the stronger chemicals will finish off the pesky germs that might have managed to survive the cleaning process.

Next, you need to consider all of the surfaces in your home that might not be so easy to wash with soap and water, such as couches, clothing, and bedding. If possible, these surfaces should be washed with soap and hot water.

In the case of your couches and chairs, however, this may not be feasible, so take extra care to vacuum these areas well to reduce the chance of germs or bacteria hiding behind things like loose dirt and pet hair. After the cleaning process is completed, spray with fabric disinfectant.

While cleaning and disinfecting your home may not stop you from getting sick, it will help to protect you and your family from illnesses you unintentionally bring into your safe place.

Whether attending school, work, or doing something as simple as shopping at the local grocery store, you come into contact with a variety of possible contagions which can easily be eradicated from your life before they cause illness to bloom in your personal space.

Try intermittent fasting in a healthy way

Intermittent fasting (IF) has recently become a popular weight loss tool, although it has not been proven that IF is any more effective than any other diet. However, scientific evidence is suggesting that IF, when combined with a healthy diet and lifestyle, can be a particularly effective approach to weight loss, especially for people at risk for diabetes.

According to Harvard Health Publishing, a growing body of research suggests that the timing of the fast is key, and can make IF a more realistic, sustainable, and effective approach for weight loss. Researchers from the University of Alabama conducted a study with a small group of obese men with prediabetes. They compared a form of intermittent fasting called “early time-restricted feeding,” where all meals were fit into an early eight-hour period of the day (7 am to 3 pm), or spread out over 12 hours (between 7 am and 7 pm). Both groups maintained their weight (did not gain or lose) but after five weeks, the eight-hours group had dramatically lower insulin levels and significantly improved insulin sensitivity, as well as significantly lower blood pressure.

Just changing the timing of meals, by eating earlier in the day and extending the overnight fast, significantly benefited metabolism even in people who didn’t lose a single pound.

If you would like to give IF a try, talk with your health care professional first. People with advanced diabetes or who are on medications for diabetes, people with a history of eating disorders like anorexia and bulimia, and pregnant or breastfeeding women should not attempt intermittent fasting unless under the close supervision of your doctor.

Armed with this information about IF, consider the following tips:

- Avoid sugars and refined grains. Instead, eat fruits, vegetables, beans, lentils, whole grains, lean proteins, and healthy fats.
- Let your body burn fat between meals. Don’t snack. Be active throughout your day. Build muscle tone.
- Consider a simple form of intermittent fasting. Limit the hours of the day when you eat, and for best effect, make it earlier in the day (between 7 am to 3 pm, or even 10 am to 6 pm, but definitely not in the evening before bed).
- Avoid snacking or eating at nighttime, all the time.

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Sometimes situations can overwhelm us and even if we don’t want to keep thinking about it, we do. Our thoughts keep racing and racing, until we have thought of every bad scenario possible. There does not seem to be any escape. Can we get out of this vicious cycle?

According to the expert panel at Psychology Today repressing anxious thoughts won’t work; they will just come back, sometimes with more intensity. But there are more effective techniques you can borrow from mindfulness-based stress reduction and cognitive-behavioural therapies:

**Attempt Cognitive Distancing**
We have been hearing about social distancing strategies, why not try cognitive distancing? Try to see your anxious thoughts as guesses, not as facts. Your mind is trying to protect you by predicting what could happen—but just because something could happen doesn’t mean it will. Look at objective evidence: How likely is it that the negative outcome will actually happen? Is there anything good that might happen instead?

**Practice Mindfulness**
Practice observing your thoughts, rather than reacting automatically to them. Think of your thoughts as clouds floating by. Which draw you in and which make you want to run away? Is there a way you can untangle yourself and just observe your thoughts, rather than reacting?

**Get Up and Get Going**
Worrying over an issue without creating a solution will not help you solve the problem. It may, in fact, make you less likely to act by feeding your anxiety. When your mind is stuck in a loop, you can interrupt it by getting up and moving around or doing a different task or activity. When you sit back down, you should have a different perspective.

**Decide Whether a Thought Is Helpful**
Just because a thought is true doesn’t mean that it is helpful to focus on—at least not all the time. If, for example, only 1 in 10 people will get the job you want to study for, and you keep thinking about those odds, you may become demotivated and not even bother studying. This is an example of a thought that is true but not helpful. Focus your attention on what is helpful and let the rest go.
Ways to keep our lungs healthy

Our lungs are getting all of our attention these days. If you are one of the many lucky ones who have never had issues with your lungs and with your breathing, knock on wood that your lungs remain healthy.

Genetics, air pollution, cleaning solutions, smoking, and sleep disorders put our lungs at risk. Some risk factors may be unavoidable, but some basic knowledge and prevention tips can help limit these threats. Here are a few things to keep in mind from lung.ca:

If you smoke, now is the time to quit. Smokers, you know this, but it bears repeating. Smoking damages your lungs and increases your risk for a number of diseases including lung cancer and COPD. This is because combustion of materials releases harmful substances into your lungs. If you have never smoked, don’t start. Learn more about how to quit including the many effective medications and smoking cessation programs that work.

Don’t allow smoking in your home, in the car, or at work. Also stay away from third-hand smoke—residual tobacco fumes that adhere to walls and furniture that—along with indoor pollutants to form lung-damaging compounds.

Wash your hands. We all know how important this is by now. Wash thoroughly with soap and water several times a day to keep germs at bay and avoid most of the common infectious diseases that are spread by hand.

Clean house. Air fresheners, mold, pet dander, and construction materials all pose a potential problem. Turn on the exhaust fan when you cook and avoid using aerosol products like hair spray. Change your furnace air filter seasonally. Learn about indoor air pollution and what you can do to reduce your exposure.

Take the stairs. Do something active for 30 minutes each day to lighten the load on your lungs and increase the efficiency of oxygen transportation and metabolism. Walk around the building, bike around your neighbourhood, or even run in place for a bit.

Be aware of the air. People with lung diseases such as asthma and COPD need to pay particular attention to the levels of air pollution called particulates—tiny solid or liquid particles—in the environment and limit their outdoor exposure when levels are high. Visit Environment Canada, weather.gc.ca/airquality to check the air quality in your area.

Can wood buildings reduce stress?

(3C) An increasing number of studies suggest exposure to nature can lower blood pressure, heart rate and stress levels. Also, cognitive performance, concentration skills and even creativity can improve.

No indoor environment can replace the benefits of getting outside, but research shows that incorporating nature—whether in the form of sunlight and fresh ventilation, plants or organic materials—can positively impact well-being.

This is why wood, long admired for its beautiful aesthetic qualities, is a particularly smart choice for our homes, schools, offices and health care facilities.

Here are some of the top ways that wood can boost your health:

Better air quality. Wood naturally improves indoor air quality due to its hypoallergenic characteristics, from easy-to-clean surfaces to humidity moderation.

Stress reduction. The presence of exposed wood is linked to lower sympathetic nervous system activation—the body’s response to stress—and improvements in concentration and performance on tests.

Other natural benefits. Wood can serve as a natural insulator giving occupants added satisfaction and well-being. In fact, research has shown the mere appearance of wood alone is linked to thermal comfort. And when designed right, timber buildings can offer natural sound-dampening capabilities, one more way to create a pleasant and calm environment.

While more research is needed, science is beginning to confirm what folk wisdom has taught us—that wood, and nature, is good for our health.
Watch out for that sweet tooth

(NC) Dental hygienists encourage us to maintain a balanced, nutritious diet so that teeth and gums receive the nutrients that are essential to maintaining good oral health.

Sugar-rich foods and drinks increase the risks of tooth decay, obesity and type 2 diabetes. Carbonated soft drinks — high in both sugar and acid — contribute to the erosion of tooth enamel.

Even Canada’s revised food guide echoes what dental hygienists, essential health professionals, have been saying for years: The more sugar we eat, the worse off our teeth and body will be.

Fortunately, just a few adjustments to your diet and dental hygiene routines can make a huge difference:

- Make water your beverage of choice.
- Eat a variety of vegetables, fruit, whole grains and protein daily.
- Avoid sugary snacks, soft drinks, fruit juices, and chewy, sticky foods.
- Brush twice a day for two minutes each time.
- Clean between your teeth and use an antiseptic mouthwash daily.
- Ask your dental hygienist about healthy food and beverage choices at your next appointment.

Together, you can keep your smile bright for a lifetime. Find more information at dentalhygienecanada.ca.

The term “smoothie” has been around since the early 20th century, but it wasn’t until 1930 that it was used to describe a drink. Early smoothies were simply fruit, fruit juice and ice, and they were an obscure concept until the natural food craze of the 1960s and 1970s.

Just about anything can be made into a smoothie. Some smoothie makers add vegetables such as spinach, carrots, seaweed and even hot peppers to make their smoothies extra healthy. For the most part, smoothies contain healthy ingredients, such as vitamins and protein powder, and are often lower in fat than other creamy drinks.

Here are some ingredients for a great superfood smoothie:

- **Kale** - low in calories, powerful antioxidant with anti-inflammatory properties.
- **Blueberries** - one of the highest antioxidant capacities of all fruit which helps to combat free radicals in your body.
- **Greek yogurt** - double the protein and half the carbs as regular yogurt.
- **Chia + Flaxseeds** - rich in Omega-3 and fibre.

Over the last few years, weighted blankets have become one of the most publicized trends in self-care. While some have been quick to show skepticism, and not much research is available to irrefutably prove their effectiveness, many people have integrated weighted blankets into their nightly routines.

However, rather than simply being a sleeping aid, some users claim weighted blankets are effective in improving their sleep cycle. But does this claim hold weight?

In simple terms, weighted blankets are blankets filled with evenly distributed materials such as plastic poly pellets, micro glass beads, or even sand and grains. Their weight varies depending on the intended user. For instance, weighted blankets are ideally a tenth of an adult’s weight so as not to be counter-productive.

In 2015, a research article titled “Positive Effects of a Weighted Blanket on Insomnia” was published in the Journal of Sleep Medicine & Disorders. As part of the study, researchers measured the effects of weighted blankets on 31 subjects who suffered from chronic insomnia for a week.

Ultimately, the results pointed to a decrease in the participants’ movements while asleep. Conversely, the length of their sleep cycle increased and participants reported feeling more refreshed after waking up.

But what is it that makes weighted blankets so comforting? By applying deep pressure, weighted blankets relax the nervous system in the same manner a hug does. Therefore, allowing the Parasympathetic Nervous System (PNS) to secrete endorphins, hormones that produce analgesic like-effects. This translates into a decrease in heart rate, increase in muscle relaxation, and improved blood circulation.

Although the effects of weighted blankets might vary from user to user, as long as your quality of sleep is improved, you can expect the quality of your waking-life to follow suit.