



Keeping Health Simple; a Guide

By Dr Sally Norton MB ChB MD FRCS





We all know we need to look after our health, but what is the best way to do it?

It's confusing. Every time we open a magazine or switch on the TV we are given a new piece of advice. Often at odds with the advice we were given yesterday. It can get so complicated that many of us just give up and head for the sofa!

But actually, it doesn't have to be difficult. The trick is to keep it simple and make a few small changes at a time. There is no miracle diet – just a healthy balance of real, unprocessed food. You don't need an expensive gym membership or complicated routine – just move more whenever you can. And look after your mental wellbeing too – avoid negative stress where possible and get adequate sleep.

But whatever you do has to be sustainable. If you can't keep it up for more than a few weeks, it won't do you much good in the long term.

So where do we start?

There are three things we can focus on now that will help towards a healthy and happy life.



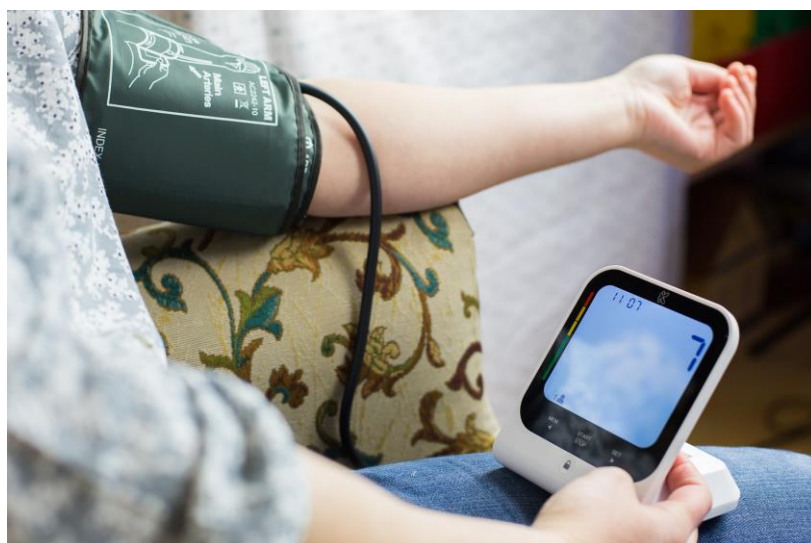
1. Weight

Whilst weight isn't always an accurate measure of our health it is a good place to start. Two thirds of the UK population is overweight and that usually comes with an increased risk of health problems. But tackling our weight is easier said than done.



2. Blood pressure

High blood pressure affects one in four adults, putting their health at risk. The scary thing is, over 5 million of us In the UK don't know about it as it doesn't always cause symptoms initially. Do you know your blood pressure and how best to keep it under control?



3. Activity

Science shows that the more we move, the healthier we are likely to be. But life often seems too busy to fit in exercise. How can we make sure we are proactively active?



WEIGHT CONTROL

As a nation we are getting heavier and heavier, despite decades of yo-yo dieting. As our weight increases, so does our risk of diabetes, heart disease, arthritis, breathing problems, infertility and much more.

So face the facts – are you 'tripping the light fantastic' or 'packing a hefty punch'?

Jumping on the scales gives us an important measure of our health – but it has its limitations. To get the most from your scales, here's the low down on weighing.

BEST WAY TO WEIGH

As serial dieters know, the weighing scales can be both friend and foe. Instead of a wake-up call to kick us into losing weight, scales can often be counter-productive. When we are desperately trying to shift body weight, denying ourselves our favourite foods for days, and then jumping on the scales only to find that our weight hasn't dropped at all, we may feel like saying 'stuff-it' and then soothe our disappointment with a large doughnut!

The fact is we can place too much importance on the numbers on the scales.

They don't just measure our fat levels (those that claim to, usually do it very inaccurately), they also measure weight relating to muscle, water and more besides.

Muscle weighs more than fat – so you can be 12 stone of perfectly toned, healthy, muscular perfection, or 12 stone of belly fat and struggling to fasten the button on your trousers.

Dehydration or a day of eating rubbish, calorie-dense food with no fibre can also leave you lighter temporarily, but your fat levels are unlikely to have decreased.





Finally, some fluctuation in our weight is natural, due to hormonal changes, or during the year when our activity levels may vary with the seasons.

So, should we chuck the scales out of the bathroom window? No, not at all.

Without them it's all too easy to fool ourselves into thinking we are just the same size as we were 10 years ago. Studies show that people who monitor their weight are more likely to keep it under control. It's just a question of how best to monitor it.

There is no right or wrong answer, it depends on what motivates you best. However, here are some general tips that should prove helpful.

- **Don't obsess about the number on the scales.** For all of the reasons above it is not an accurate measure of your health or even of your fat levels, so use it as a guide to your progress.
- **Get the big picture.** Use your weight measurement alongside other indicators of fat-loss to provide a better overall picture. Waist measurement is a really good one, as fat stored around the middle is more likely to be associated with health problems, such as diabetes and heart disease. A waist to hip ratio of less than 1 for men or less than 0.85 for women is what you should be aiming for.
- **Decide when and how often you want to weigh yourself, and stick to it.** Perhaps once a week or once a month – at the same time of day and the same day of the week so you get the best and most accurate idea of which way you are heading.
- **Don't be disheartened if the scales don't show a downward trend.** Of course, a huge leap up is not great – but a stable weight is fine at the outset. If you are starting to eat more healthily and





building up activity levels and muscle, it is likely that your fat levels are decreasing, which you won't necessarily see on the scales.

- **And finally, set yourself goals - alongside weight loss.** After all, weight on it's own means very little – it's the improved health, self-confidence and general happiness that goes with it that we should be striving for. So, set yourself a fitness challenge, develop a new skill or volunteer to help others. Make sure you look your best, at whatever weight you are, so you can get out there with confidence! That way the scales will have less power over you and become your ally rather than your enemy!





MY TOP 5 TIPS FOR WEIGHT CONTROL

1. Avoid processed food where possible

If you have to study a label to find out how much sugar, salt, unhealthy fats and other additives there are – it is best avoided. Processed food is often stripped of fibre, low in vitamins and minerals and packed full of nutrient-poor calories. If you cook and prepare real food from scratch, you are likely to be providing your body with premium fuel and it will function far better as a result.

2. Beat portion distortion

Portions are out of control – we are consuming larger quantities of food every year. Super-size high street drinks and buckets of popcorn are now the norm. Simply eating from a smaller plate and getting portions back into perspective will help you shed the pounds with minimal effort.

3. Ditch the sugar

Full of calories but totally lacking in nutritional value, we are eating more and more of the 'white stuff'. It can be addictive with effects on our brain similar to hard drugs and may contribute to diabetes as well as obesity. Ditch it completely or at least try to keep to the recommended limit of 6 teaspoons of added sugar per day.

4. Keep hydrated

A glass of water before meals has been shown to reduce the amount of calories we consume. What's more, we sometimes think we are hungry, when in fact we are thirsty. But don't reach for a fizzy drink or juice, which are both high in sugar. Instead, get a taste for pure water and your body will thank you for it.



5. Sleep well

Studies show we are more likely to reach for high-sugar, high-fat foods when tired. So, a good night's sleep is an easy way to help your weight-loss efforts.



UNDER PRESSURE

High blood pressure can affect our health by increasing our risk of stroke, heart disease and more. Yet we may be unaware that we have high blood pressure, as it may not cause us any symptoms. For that reason, the NHS recommends we get our blood pressure checked, particularly if you are overweight, smoke, have relatives with a history of high blood pressure, or if you are worried about health in other ways.

What is a high blood pressure?

The top number relates to the highest pressure of your blood when being pumped through the arteries around your body and should ideally be around 120. The lower number is the pressure when your heart is resting between beats and should ideally be around 80 or even less. However, if you are hitting 140/90 or above, this is regarded as high and needs checking out by a healthcare professional. Low blood pressure of 90/60 or less can also be a problem and cause faintness – it needs checking out too.

However, blood pressure can go up for a number of reasons. It's not unusual for it to be temporarily raised if we have been rushing around, emotional or are feeling stressed and anxious. And for some people, there is nothing that provokes stress and anxiety as much as going to the doctor for a health check! It's so well recognised that us medics have even given it a name - 'white-coat hypertension'. This can make it difficult to know whether we need our blood pressure treated, as it may be the sight of the doctor that has caused it to go up in the first place!

An inaccurate diagnosis of high blood pressure could mean people are given drugs they don't need, which can cause side effects.

An alternative to a medical check and gaining in popularity, is home-monitoring, with easy-to-use blood pressure measuring devices that allow





you to check your own blood pressure at different times of day or night, in different circumstances – exercising, stressed, relaxed, standing or lying.

What are the benefits of checking our own blood pressure?

- Doing it yourself rather than at the GP surgery ensures that a raised blood-pressure isn't simply 'white-coat hypertension'.
- It allows a range of measurements at different times and circumstances to give a comprehensive view
- We can see the improvement in our blood pressure as we lose weight, increase exercise and eat more healthily – keeping us motivated
- It may allow earlier detection of health risks, leading to earlier treatment

A word of caution though – don't get obsessive about monitoring, as blood pressure may fluctuate for many reasons, including stress! And don't think that if your blood pressure is OK you don't need to continue to monitor, and not bother with exercise / healthy eating / weight-loss etc.

The effects of a poor lifestyle will soon catch up with you.

After all, it's you who has to live with the consequences of poor health. So, look after yourself and lower the pressure.



MY TOP 5 TIPS FOR LOWERING BLOOD PRESSURE

If your blood pressure is on the high side, or you are keen to reduce the risk of high blood pressure in the future, there are a few things you can do.

1. Weight control

Keep your weight in the healthy range – and your waist to hip ratio < 1 (or < 0.85 for women)

2. Keep active

If you are fit and get plenty of exercise, your blood pressure is likely to benefit too.

3. Eat a healthy diet without too much salt

A healthy diet is likely to help weight control, with the added benefit of being low in salt. Salt is one of the greatest influences on our blood pressure and reducing salt is one of the quickest ways to reduce blood pressure. But remember, 75% of the salt we eat is already in foods like ready meals, bread, breakfast cereal, sauces and processed meats. So if you have to go for a processed product, read the label carefully. Of course, making your own meals using fresh ingredients means you are much more in control of the amount of salt.

4. Stop smoking and cut right back on alcohol

Both of these affect our blood pressure – and much more besides – so binning the fags and slashing the alcohol consumption will do us a lot of good.

5. Get help

Finally, if your blood pressure is high, take advice from your doctor as further treatment may be needed.



PRO-ACTIVE

'Sitting is the new smoking', we are told.

Why? More and more evidence is suggesting that too much sitting is bad for our health. We weren't designed to spend long periods of every day slumped on the sofa or hunched over our desks, gazing at computer screens.

Studies have shown that compared to more active people, the risk of early death is 15 per cent greater for people who sit more than eight hours a day. Long periods of inactivity can increase your risk of heart and cardiovascular disease, weight gain and type 2 diabetes, as well as some cancers.

You may also become prone to headaches, visual fatigue, neck and low back pain.

So what can you do?

Researchers say the only sure way to address the problem is to sit less and change position every 20 to 30 minutes, even for 30 seconds or so.

Standing and walking increases blood flow in the legs, burns more calories by speeding up your metabolism, and can help get the creative juices flowing.

Changes in posture also reduce strain on our joints, spinal discs and nerves.

You don't have to sign up for an expensive gym membership to increase your activity – just walking more has huge health benefits. However, the average Brit only takes around 3,000 to 4,000 steps per day. **We need to be hitting 10,000 a day** or more to benefit from walking.

A pedometer is a great way to measure your steps and ensure you are reaching that target. A review of multiple studies found that people who





wore pedometers, increased their step count per day by over 2000, and showed improvements in weight and blood pressure.

With activity trackers now incorporating pedometers alongside calorie counters, sleep monitors and much more, we can no longer pretend we are healthier than we are!





MY TOP 5 TIPS FOR KEEPING ACTIVE

1. Make moving a priority

The problem with exercise is that we don't always see it as an essential part of our day, in the same way that we might see things like picking up kids up from school, or getting to work on time. But the fact remains; moving is incredibly important for our health and makes us more efficient anyway. So instead of seeing it as an optional extra, we should see it as something that is vital to keeping us healthy. That way, we won't just drop it at the first opportunity; instead, we'll do our best to find the time, the energy, and the ways to fit it in.

2. Find an activity that works for you

Take a look at your lifestyle, likes and dislikes and find an activity that is going to work best for you. Choose something that you'll be able to find the time for, that you'll enjoy and that you can easily incorporate into your life (e.g. brisk walking). Then you are more likely to maintain it long-term.

3. Be prepared

When you've got a busy lifestyle, every minute counts, so make sure that when you plan to get active, you're fully prepared. It could be as simple as keeping your exercise kit at the bottom of your bed ready to chuck on in the morning, or your walking boots by the door, for a stroll at lunchtime. If you are prepared, you have fewer excuses.

4. A few minutes is better than nothing

In our opinion, moving is better than staying still - even just a few minutes can make a difference. No matter how busy we are, we can always find a few spare minutes to get our heart rate up and blood pumping. So squeeze in whatever time you can find and it'll make all the difference when it comes to your health.



5. Make it a part of your day

Busy at work? Why not have a walking meeting. It will also get the creative juices flowing!

Daily commute? Use your journey to work as a chance to inject some fitness into your day – ditch the car and cycle to work, or park a little further away and walk in.

Meeting up with friends? Combine your socialising with some exercise rather than a coffee and cake.

And what on earth possesses people to pay for the step machine at the gym but then use the escalator or lift rather than the stairs?!

So if you really want to improve your health, just focus on the big three – **weight, **blood pressure** and **activity levels**. The good news is that they are all closely linked – so tackling any one of these will help the others. Sort out all three and you are on the fast track to a long and healthy life.**

Good luck!





About Dr Sally Norton MB ChB MD FRCS

Dr Sally Norton is a renowned weight loss surgeon and wellbeing expert, and is regularly featured in high profile media outlets.

For more information please visit: <http://www.sallynorton.co.uk>

About Kinetik Wellbeing

Kinetik Wellbeing deliver a wide range of quality, great value products, focused on monitoring & maintaining good health.

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