

Vegan health

Fit for life

Cath Short shares a few of the lesser known benefits of staying active as we age and explains how we can support this with a plant-based diet

When you think about exercise what are the first health benefits that come to mind? Fitness? Weight management? Mental health? These are all at the top of the list. But what about gut health, digestion, metabolism and muscle strength?

Digestive health

As a result of working from home and a sedentary lifestyle, many of us are failing to move our bodies at regular intervals throughout the day, which can have a negative impact on our ability to digest food, regulate blood sugar and burn fat for fuel. Sitting for long periods compresses the stomach, intestines and other organs in the abdomen and can promote constipation and poor digestive health.

The intestinal tract has the critical role of digesting food, absorbing nutrients and excreting waste. When this chain of events slows down, and in worse cases comes to a grinding halt, then not only does the body become less efficient at extracting nutrients, but unwanted estrogen that should be excreted from the body gets reabsorbed and stored in fat cells. Eating a variety of foods each day can improve gut health as well as nutrient absorption.

How does exercise have a positive impact on digestive health? Well, it may only play a small part in the process, but exercise and movement not only improve circulation, but massage the abdomen area including core muscles, encouraging food to keep moving through the intestines.

Metabolism and ageing

As we age, and as women approach menopause, our metabolism can start to slow down and, as a result, we notice how

Right You can help your body to more efficiently process calories with a range of metabolism boosting foods. These include caffeine from drinking tea and coffee, cinnamon, turmeric and cumin.



LET'S GET PHYSICAL

Types of exercise to improve digestion

- **Power walking** – to stimulate muscle contractions in your intestines.
- **Lying knee hug (yoga name – apanasana)** – to ease constipation, indigestion and eliminate toxins.
- **Pelvic floor exercises** – supporting the base of your core area, they help to move stools through the colon.
- **Core exercises** – to strengthen bowel movements and reduce bloating.
- **Spinal twists** (pictured right) – to massage and stimulate the abdominals and colon and encourage waste removal.



Left *The Game Changers* tells us: A six-month study on rugby players — where calories and fat were matched between two groups — showed that those eating a more plant-based diet with ample carbohydrates, gained five pounds of muscle while those eating an animal-based diet with more protein in place of carbohydrates gained only one.

to know is that loss of muscle has a direct impact on our metabolic health. When we increase muscle mass, we increase the amount of calories we burn, even at rest, and our resting metabolism accounts for more than half our daily caloric expenditure.

- **Hydration** is an important factor to help the metabolism. Studies show that drinking at least eight glasses of water during the day to prevent dehydration helps the body process calories. We can also eat more fruit and vegetables, which are naturally high in water content.
- **Eating spicy foods** is one my favourite life hacks to speed up your metabolism. Spices such as cinnamon turmeric, chilli pepper and cumin can give your metabolism a boost and even regulate hunger hormones.



Left Spicy foods like these chilli peppers can help to give your metabolism a boost.



- **Drinking caffeine** while fasting (before we eat our first meal of the day) is a great way to increase your metabolic rate. It can also give you a boost in energy for your daily workout, so it's a win-win!

Hypertrophy

When we create regular, minor, physical stress on muscle fibres through resistance training, the body responds by creating more muscle cells. Over time, and with consistency and a gradual increase in resistance, our strength improves and we start to see more muscle definition. Keeping in mind that improving muscle mass (hypertrophy) is one of the most effective ways to boost the metabolism, we should aim to optimise this process.

Diet and improving muscle mass

Our diet plays an important role in assisting hypertrophy. Many of my clients turn vegetarian before going vegan and often they replace meat and fish with dairy products, which can cause inflammation and increase calorie intake.

Switching meat for legumes and other natural plant-based sources of high protein (and less calorie dense) foods enable muscles and bones to repair and grow.

Unrefined sources of carbohydrates, such as fruit, veg, brown rice and whole grain oats, play a critical role too and with them comes heart-healthy and gut-friendly fibre. If you eat sufficient calories on a whole food plant-based diet you will get enough protein, healthy fats and clean carbs to fuel, build and repair! ❤️

Above
Resistance training is the key to maintaining muscle mass.

easy it is to gain a few pounds, yet how hard it is to lose them. Metabolism is the chemical process by which the body converts food into energy, and we want this to be as efficient as possible. The good news is with a few simple daily lifestyle habits we can boost our ageing metabolism and limit the unwanted weight gain. Here are some easy ways to help boost metabolism...

- At the top of our list should be **resistance training**. As we age it becomes harder to maintain muscle mass – a natural ageing process known as sarcopenia. Harvard Health Publishing tells us that, “After age 30, you begin to lose as much as 3% to 5% per decade.” That’s a significant amount! But what is important



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