



Healthy Living Series

HEALTHY HABITS

52 ways to better health

Dr CRIS BEER

ROCKPOOL
PUBLISHING

Healthy Habits - 52 Ways to Better Health is dedicated to all my patients and those I have had the privilege of helping over the years. You have all taught me so much! I have been humbled by your vulnerability to share your life experiences and challenges, and have been proud to share in your triumphs and joys.

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introduction

Healing is a matter of time, but it is sometimes also a matter of opportunity.

Hippocrates 485 BCE

Have you ever longed to be healthy, have lots of energy, and be comfortable with your body weight? Well, then, this book is for you. *Healthy Habits* was written with you in mind and countless other individuals I have had the pleasure of professionally helping over the years. Their stories, perhaps much like yours, are marked by confusion and frustration at the myriad of conflicting health messages and advice available. None of which appear to be achievable in the busy lives that we all lead.

Healthy Habits is a book based on truthful and no-fuss health principles. This book is based on evidence and the principles should be easy to implement into our everyday lives. Although not appearing to be 'rocket science', when put into practice consistently true healing and health will be the result. After all, our bodies are remarkably complex but living healthily should not be. I have found quite the opposite. The simpler we keep things, the more likely we are to stick with any changes we make.

Aside from a professional call to write this book, I have a personal drive to write down what I have learnt from my studies as well as my experience. You see I too found myself in a place of frustration with my health in the early days of my career. Around 15 years ago I was diagnosed with high blood pressure and high cholesterol. After consulting a heart specialist it was suggested that I attempt to change my lifestyle or face having to take medication for the rest of my life in order to control my significant health risk factors. Feeling bewildered and terrified I decided to start learning all that I could about healthy living. This book is the culmination of many of the principles I have learnt through my studies in medicine, biomedical science, nutritional medicine, personal training and health coaching. It is also what I have found works with my patients as the principles are tried and tested many times over.

Healthy Habits offers a rare opportunity to discover all you need to know about how to be healthy, and have a waistline to match, in one book. By following the week-by-week advice within these pages you will see health emerge that you and your body deserve. You will start to regain the energy and vitality you thought you had lost, or had never previously attained. Your appetite and body weight will align with what is healthy for your frame. In essence, you will regain your health and, with it, your life.

your prescription

So how do you get the most out of *Healthy Habits*? Well, if you can humour me for a moment and allow me to use some 'doctor jargon', let me put it to you that this book is now your 'prescription'. It is your prescription to the great health, energy and waistline you have been searching for. If you follow this book like a prescription written from me, your doctor, to you, then those results will be your reality. But if you do not follow these tried and true principles, just like a prescription that is never filled, you will not achieve, or only partly achieve, the best results.

Healthy Habits is a week-by-week guide to improving all areas of your health including your mind, attitude and, of course, your body. You cannot separate, in my opinion, a healthy mind and attitude from a healthy body. They all go together. This book will essentially allow you to give yourself a check-up not just from the 'neck up', as the saying goes, but from the 'ground up'. There will be no part of you not overhauled in a positive way by *Healthy Habits*. Yes, fifty-two habits might seem like a lot but do not forget that you have a lifetime of habits to overcome and one year of your life to achieve great health is a short time in comparison to living a whole life not knowing what it is like to really feel and look good.

Consider perhaps taking a year to challenge yourself. Make this *your* year to really take control of your health again, or for the first time. Perhaps even ask a friend or loved one to join you in this challenge. This creates some camaraderie, perhaps some friendly competition, as well as, most importantly, some accountability. If you can be accountable to someone else you are less likely to give up because you do not want to let someone else down. Consider starting an online forum or blog to document your health changes. This is another way to create accountability.

As a way to visually record your progress consider using the week-by-week goal tracker labelled 'Your 52 Simple Habits Prescription' in Appendix A of this book. Tick off each habit as you work through *Healthy Habits* and as you start implementing those habits into your lifestyle. Remember to build on the habits from previous weeks by not neglecting those habits you have already established but add to them with additional positive habits. You may find some habits harder to implement than others. We will discuss more about why this might be in the next chapter on Habit Formation. You might also find you need more than just one week to implement a habit into your lifestyle. There is no problem with this, take as much time as you need. After all, life is a marathon not a sprint and just like a marathon you sometimes need to slow down to conserve your energy for the long journey ahead.

habit formation: the key to getting & staying healthy is found in your habits

When was the last time you did something for the first time? According to Townsend and Bever¹, 'Most of the time, what we do is what we do *most* of the time.' That is, most of our behaviour is habit driven. We truly are creatures of habit. The good news is that if we can change our habits to be more positive we will find that our health drastically improves in turn. So what exactly is a habit?

What Is a Habit?

Habits are routine, usually unconscious behaviours performed on a regular basis. We start forming habits from birth. In fact, habits are adaptive behaviours, meaning they allow us to learn how to do something with the goal being to eventually be able to perform that behavior without having to think about it. A good example of this is driving a car. Initially, when we are learning to drive a car, we are very careful about every move we make. We may find that we are unable to concentrate on anything else except what gear to put the car in, or how far away we are from the car in front of us. But eventually, with practice, we no longer have to think about how to drive. In fact many of us probably drive to and from work and don't really remember the trip because we have engaged our subconscious mind to do the driving whilst our conscious mind is thinking about other things.

According to behavioural psychologists there are usually three components to a habit:

- **Repetitive** - meaning the action is something we do on a regular basis e.g. brushing our teeth before bed;
- **Automatic** - usually something we do without thinking too much about how or when we should do it e.g. driving a car; and
- **Situational** - situation-specific, meaning that we usually perform particular habits under particular circumstances e.g. eating snack food when watching TV (even though we might not be hungry, we are driven to eat in this situation).

So how exactly do we form a habit?

How Do I Form a Habit?

Habit formation is the process by which new behaviours become automatic. If you instinctively reach for a cigarette the moment you wake up in the morning, you have a habit. By the same token, if you feel inclined to lace up your running shoes and hit the streets as soon as you get home, you have acquired a habit. Old habits are hard to break and new habits are hard to form. That is because the behavioural patterns we repeat most often are literally etched into the neural pathways in our brains. Neural pathways are like highways - the more we repeat a habit the more 'worn' a highway becomes and the more difficult it is to break that habit. Changing our behaviour can be difficult and new behaviours might feel strange or unusual to us initially. This is because we are not used to doing them.

The good news is that through repetition it is possible to form positive new habits (and maintain them as well). This really is the key to creating a habit - practise it often. This starts the process of creating a new brain pathway. It takes around 21-40 days to form a new habit, so do not give up if the habit seems like hard work initially to maintain. Over time that habit will become an automatic behaviour and eventually a new lifestyle. This is the key to a healthier, happier you. You will be developing a lifestyle full of positive habits that will eventually be second nature and your new way of living.

A Word on Willpower

Willpower was never meant to sustain us. Consider willpower like the petrol in your tank. When you initially start on a long journey of change you may be determined to reach your destination. But as the journey progresses, you discover that the journey is actually a lot longer and sometimes a lot more uphill than you realised. Sooner or later you run out of petrol and have to stop. Sometimes we never return back to our journey of change to better health because the first time we tried it, it took too much effort. This is the problem with relying on willpower for long-term positive change.

The easier approach is to form good habits. Good habits are much like autopilot on a car. Once you have established them, which initially requires a short-term investment in energy and willpower, you do not have to concentrate so hard on the journey to good health. My advice is to stick with a habit until you have established it. Once this happens you move on to forming another positive habit in your life. Sooner or later you'll find you have established a whole new way of living; all without burning out in the meantime.

You may find you have developed a lifetime of bad habits by not exercising your will power in the short-term to redirect your behaviour towards choosing a more positive habit. So how do we break these bad habits in our lives?

How Do I Break Bad Habits?

Just like repeating a behaviour etches that behaviour into an established neural pathway, not practising a behaviour will start to cause that neural pathway to fade. It may never completely go away but it becomes less obvious. This means you are less likely to want to do that behaviour automatically. So to break a bad habit you first need to try and not do that behaviour at all (or as often). This involves removing yourself or avoiding a situation where you feel tempted to engage in that behaviour. If, for example, you find it impossible to avoid stopping at the local shop on the way home for a chocolate bar then one strategy might be to drive a different way home so that you are not tempted to stop.

Breaking bad habits also interestingly involves replacing them with better habits. If we simply aim to stop our bad habits and do not in their place add a better habit we will find we relapse. For example, if we stop spending our time in front of the television but do not find another enjoyable activity to replace the time spent watching TV then we will find ourselves tuning back in to our favourite shows.

Lastly, sometimes bad habits are filling a need of ours that is not being met. I have helped many people who eat emotionally because they are bored, lonely or feel unfulfilled. Seek to evaluate whether that bad habit is an attempt by our subconscious to meet a need, albeit in a not-so-productive way. Sometimes we need some professional help to break a habit. Consider speaking with your local doctor, counsellor or health coach if you feel this is the case.

So now on to some positive habits we can add to our lifestyles. These are laid out from habit 1 to 52, according to the weeks of the year, but are not in any particular order of importance. If you feel you have mastered some habits, gloss over these and focus on incorporating them into your lifestyle for 2-3 weeks before moving on to the next habit. At the end of each chapter is a breakout box titled 'Your Weekly Challenge'. This is what you need to actually do that week and can be easily referred to if you need to come back to a chapter later on.

know your motivators

When embarking on any change in your lifestyle it is helpful if you first identify what keeps you motivated. Everyone has different motivators for wanting to modify behaviours, and recognising what your reasons are will help to keep you focussed, especially when you face barriers or begin to feel resistant to change. The first part of this self-analysis process starts with defining what health means to you.

Health FACT

Only 50 per cent of people with chronic health conditions take the necessary steps to alter their lifestyle¹.

What Is Your Definition of Health?

No two people view health the same way. For some health might mean being free of aches and pains so that they can enjoy life to the full, for others it is about having enough energy to get through the day, and for others still it is about not dying young from something preventable. It is often useful to write your definition of health down and remember this when you are faced with having to make a decision about your behaviours.

Perhaps try finishing this sentence: 'Good health to me means ...' (e.g. that I feel fit and am able to play with my children without feeling discomfort or pain).

Be careful not to write down specific weight goals as weight in itself does not determine good health, as explained in Simple Health Habit #21, which talks about being healthy at any size.

Strengthen Your 'Why?'

Once you have defined what good health means to you the next step is to strengthen your reasons for wanting to be healthy. These reasons will serve as powerful motivators for keeping you focussed. The stronger your 'why?' the stronger your resolve to stay the course to living a healthier lifestyle. Examples of what might constitute your top five reasons for why you wish to live a healthier lifestyle may include:

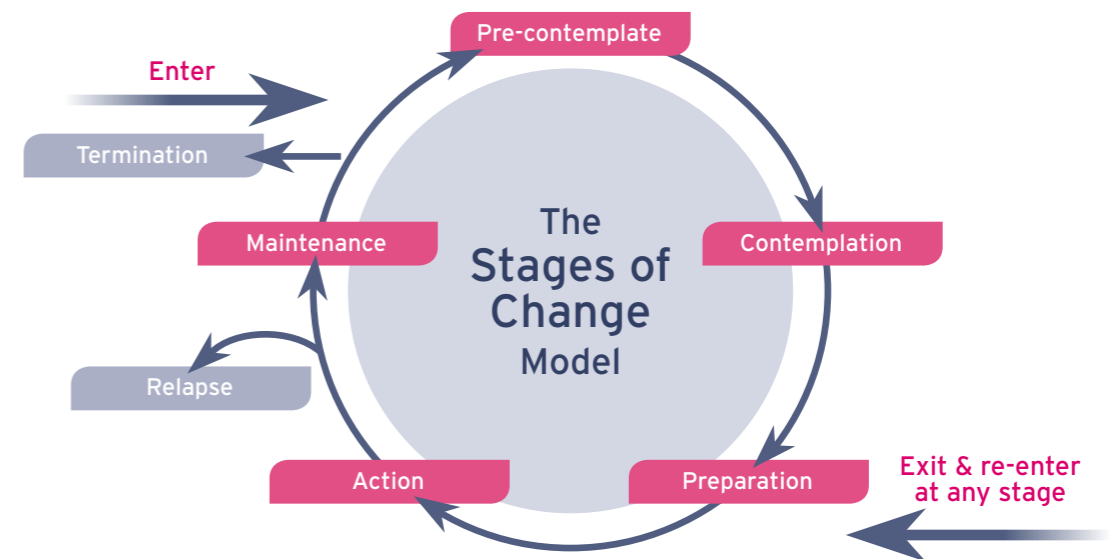
- To improve your energy levels so that you can fully enjoy travelling with your partner
- To improve your sex life
- To be able to enjoy exercise without experiencing pain
- To feel vital and youthful
- To be a positive role model to your children

Consider whether there have been reasons why you have continued with your current pattern of negative or not-so-beneficial health behaviours. In order to motivate you to shift what you are doing, your *reasons for wanting to change* need to be greater than your *reasons to stay the same*.

Along with defining 'health' and strengthening your underlying reasons for wanting to change it is also important to identify if you are truly ready for change.

Are You Really Ready?

Modifying any aspect of our health involves transitioning through what behavioural psychologists believe is six stages of change², as the schematic below indicates.



The first stage of change is where we **pre-contemplate** altering our behaviour. We may have thought about making some modifications to our lifestyle but have not made any specific plans to do so. It may not be the best time to change due to too many other distractions or disruptions in our life at that moment. If this is the case consider waiting until the dust settles a little and then re-evaluate whether you are ready. The next stage is where we have **contemplated** changing a little more seriously and may have started to gather information about what to do. This can often lead to determining that we want to change and being **prepared** to go for it. Following from this is deciding to take **action** and making specific plans and putting this into place. Along the way, once we have put in place some specific measures, we may find that we **relapse** back into our old behaviours. This is a normal part of the process and should not be considered a failure. Once we have established some new behaviours in place of old behaviours we have reached the **maintenance** stage of change, where these behaviours start to become our new normal.

By reading this book I am assuming that you are either in the **contemplation, action** or **determination** stage of change and are well on your way to making some positive new habits.

Rate Your Current Health

Once you have defined what health means to you, strengthened your reasons for wanting to make adjustments to your behaviours, and then identified where you are on the stage of change model and if it really is a good time to start changing, then you can rate where your health currently measures up. Consider the following six areas of your current health and rate each one from one to ten, with one being poor and ten being fantastic.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Eating Habits	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Physical Fitness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Energy Levels	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Stress Coping	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Emotional Health	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Health in General	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you are not where you would like to be on the scale for each of these areas then consider what it would take for you to move up just one point. After all, it would be too

much of an effort to move from, say, rating one to rating ten in one go. Small, progressive steps eventually get you there. An example might be if you are at rating five for energy levels, what would it take for you to get to rating six? It might be that you cut caffeine from 4 p.m. to avoid disrupting your sleep. Small changes make a big difference in determining whether we move up to the next level. Consider evaluating where you are on the scale once a month and writing down one or two things that you could try to help you move up one rating for each of the different areas of your health.

Know What Keeps You Motivated

Knowing what keeps you motivated will help you to stay focussed. Some people, for example, are motivated by rewards and others are motivated by recognition from others. If rewards are something that motivates you make sure you treat yourself after every achievement. Keep in mind that rewards, should be non-food based in order to avoid emotional eating. If recognition from others is your primary motivator then join a network where constant support will be available. Be careful, however, that you are not motivated to alter your behaviours in order to please someone else. Positively transforming your lifestyle should be about you and your health and not about appeasing someone else's wishes or desires.

What Is Holding You Back?

We all have reasons for why we may not have altered our behaviours already. We may have all the intentions in the world to change, but if there are obstacles preventing us then these need to be dealt with first before we can break free of negative habits. Some common obstacles include:

- Lack of time
- Lack of resources
- Lack of support
- Too busy at work
- Too many responsibilities
- Too tired or in too much pain
- Not knowing where to start
- Negative thinking

Identifying obstacles and then working to overcome them is a necessary step. There may be times where our responsibilities at work or home override our own needs. This is okay for a short period of time, but if we continue putting others first we will feel frustrated, resentful, worn out and eventually sick.

Identify Your Strengths

The next part of putting into practice positive health habits and overcoming barriers to change is to draw on your strengths. I meet so many patients, particularly women, who downplay their strengths and therefore feel powerless to make a start. Consider answering the following questions as a way to empower you to move forward in being able to make positive changes.

My strengths and what I have going for me include. (E.g. my ability to be organised and think rationally or my physical stamina.)

My strengths have assisted me in succeeding in an area of my life that required effort. (E.g. my ability to be organised means that I run a busy household whilst still holding down a part-time job; or, my physical stamina has helped me to keep going with long hours at work in order to meet a deadline.)

These same strengths can be harnessed and used in order to make positive changes to my health. (E.g. I can use my ability to be organised by working out a schedule that incorporates exercise and healthy meal planning; or, my physical stamina means that I can plan to exercise at the end of my day because I know I will still have enough energy.)

Be Prepared for Resistance

Any positive changes that we want to make in our lives *will* be met with resistance, so being prepared for this can help to keep you focussed. This resistance might be from external sources; for example, from friends who do not understand why you want to make healthy changes. This type of resistance is often a reflection of their own insecurities and guilt for not prioritising their own health.

The second type of resistance can come from ourselves in the form of excuses and self-sabotage. Making excuses is common and can be a normal part of change. Make a list ahead of time of the excuses you are likely to use, and come up with a list of reasons why those excuses will not hold. For example, an excuse might be that you cannot exercise because it is raining. An easy solution to this problem would be to have an indoor Pilates routine recorded or saved to your YouTube favourites.

Self-sabotage, on the other hand, tends to be more subconscious and can be related to feelings of low self-worth. If you find you always give up just when you are doing so well then this might be self-sabotage at work. If recognition of and steps to make adjustments to this behaviour do not work, then talking to a trained counsellor, psychologist and/or hypnotherapist might be necessary.

Make Your Plan

Once you have done the above exercises and identified your key motivators, strengths and barriers to change, it is then time to write down a plan for action. Use this book as a guide for areas you feel you need to work on. Write a very specific plan of the how, what, when, where and why for each of the areas you know you need to change. When you have mastered these areas then you can move on to others. Update your list regularly as you master new habits.

Take Home Points

In order to stay motivated when making positive health changes, define what good health really means to you.

- Identify your reasons for wanting to change. When the reasons to change are more compelling than the reasons for staying the same, you will find it easier to stay focussed.
- Recognise where you are on The Stages of Change model. This can help put some perspective on what to expect if you decide to embark on truly wanting to change.
- Rating current aspects of your health can provide an objective and measurable way to track your progress, which can help to keep you motivated.
- Many people find regular rewards and positive feedback from others two things that help to keep them motivated with making positive changes.
- Knowing what your strengths are and how you can apply these to the areas that you know need modifying is also an effective strategy for staying focussed.
- Be prepared to face obstacles and resistance to change. This is normal, and if you identify what these obstacles might be ahead of time, you will find the strength to overcome them.

YOUR *Weekly* CHALLENGE

This week your challenge is to identify your motivators, write down your strengths and your obstacles to change, and to make a specific plan to stay motivated. Use the exercises in this chapter as a guide on how to do this.

simple health habit #2

drink to good health

Water is the single most important nutrient that our bodies need and it is involved in almost every bodily function. With around 60 per cent of our body composed of water it is essential for life¹. Even our bones are made up of about 30 per cent water¹.

Amazingly we can live for no more than 5 days without water as opposed to 30-40 days without food². Yet many of us don't drink enough of this precious liquid. Most of us live in a state of mild to moderate dehydration and don't even realise it.

A recent patient of mine who is a plumber and works long hours outdoors was always suffering from muscle cramps and headaches. When I asked him how much water he drank per day he said the recommended 2-3 L. But when we undertook some general blood tests his results indicated that he was suffering from a state of dehydration with an alteration in his kidney function. I advised him to trial doubling his water intake. Within a matter of days his symptoms had improved. I recently saw him again and he mentioned that his symptoms have abated just by making sure he is drinking plenty of water to compensate his losses through sweat.

So what are some of the signs and symptoms that you may be suffering from dehydration? Some of these may surprise you!

Signs That You Are Dehydrated

- Fatigue³
- Headaches³
- Reduced concentration⁴
- Dark circles under the eyes³
- Muscle cramps⁵
- Dry skin³

- Joint pains⁴
- Dry, sticky mouth (late symptom)³
- Constipation³
- Dizziness or light-headedness³
- Inability to lose weight⁴
- Digestion problems⁴
- Decreased urine output (passing urine less than 4 times per day)³
- Dark-coloured urine⁶

Given these symptoms, how much water should we be drinking?

How Much Water Do You Need?

Although research isn't clear on exactly how much water to drink per day the general recommendation is 2-3 L per day or 6-8 glasses⁶. I generally make a more specific recommendation and say drink 1 L for every 25 kg that you weigh.

Keep in mind, however, that if you are engaging in heavy exercise or are sweating heavily then you need to add an extra 1-1.5 L for every hour of heavy exercise or heavy sweating⁷.

You know that you have drunk enough water throughout the day if your urine is straw-coloured or clear.

Too Much of a Good Thing?

Sometimes when I am presenting a workshop on the importance of staying hydrated I am asked if it is possible to drink too much water. The answer is yes, you can have too much of a good thing.

There exists a psychological condition called psychogenic polydipsia where individuals are compelled to drink excessive amounts of water - sometimes reaching up to 20 L per day. At this level the body's electrolytes are diluted so much that there is a risk of seizures and brain swelling⁷. So you *can* drink too much water but, in reality, many of us are unable to drink the amount needed to be harmful. If you stick to the recommended quota you will be well within safe limits.

Homemade ELECTROLYTE SOLUTION⁸

1 L water • ½ level tsp salt • 6 level tsps dextrose powder

What About Electrolytes?

I am often asked whether it is important to supplement drinking water with electrolytes. The current research suggests that this is only important if you are undertaking heavy exercise for about 60 minutes or more or are sweating profusely⁷. In this case adding a few scoops of electrolyte solution to plain water is reasonable, or make your own by using the formula on page 19.

For the everyday individual who works indoors and undertakes light to moderate amounts of exercise plain water is the best option.

What If You Do Not Like Water?

Every now and then I meet individuals who do not like drinking water because they find it too bland. This is often the case if someone's taste buds are used to sweet or caffeinated drinks. As mentioned earlier in this book our bodies really only want what they are used to. If you are used to drinking anything but plain water that is what your body will crave.

As a personal example I remember a time when I used to drink diet cordial instead of water all day long. I was addicted to the taste and couldn't stand to drink plain water. When I came to the realisation that all that cordial was not good for my body and that I needed to switch to plain water I had a real mental challenge on my hands. I had to re-train my taste buds to crave plain water - which took me around a month to do. Now I can't imagine drinking anything other than plain water. My tastebuds have adjusted.

So what I say to individuals who are in the same situation is to keep at it. Continue drinking plain water until you are able to re-train your taste buds.

Some healthy additions to water are sparkling mineral water with lemon or lime juice or even some ginger and mint. On the topic of mineral water, some people find that they suffer from bloating and indigestion from drinking carbonated water - that is often because the water has been artificially carbonated rather than carbonated via a natural process. In this case try drinking naturally carbonated water such as Vittoria or San Pellegrino.

To Filter or Not to Filter?

To date there is no absolute evidence pointing to the benefits of filtered or bottled water over tap water in developed countries. Saying that, there is some preliminary evidence to suggest that the amount of chlorine and fluoride added to our water-purifying systems is harmful to our health and can be attributing to a number of health problems ranging from cancer and allergies to abdominal pains and headaches⁴.

Tank water is prone to being contaminated with bacteria and other organisms⁹. I recall a patient who came to see me to seek help for abdominal pains and diarrhoea

of three months duration. When we undertook stool testing she in fact had a parasite infection called cryptosporidium from drinking contaminated water. Tank water must be regularly checked to ensure it is not contaminated.

If you want to ensure that the water you are drinking is uncontaminated the best filtration system is reverse osmosis⁴. Make sure you purchase this from a reputable source. Many people choose to have a reverse osmosis filtration system installed under the sink. There is some evidence to suggest that choosing to add an alkaline filter to your system replenishes essential minerals in the body⁴. As an alternative to alkaline filters you can add a few drops of alkaline solution to each glass of water. Alkaline solution can be bought from most health food stores. Often bottled water is actually tap water filtered in this way and not 'bottled at the source' as marketing would have you believe.

Chilled, Warm or Room Temperature?

This is another common query. Should our water be drunk at room temperature, slightly warmed or drunk cold? The theory behind drinking warm water or room temperature over chilled is that chilled water is too much of a 'shock' to our body, which typically sits at around 37 degrees. To date, however, there is no supporting evidence to suggest warm is better than chilled. In reality, most of us are able to drink more water if it is at room temperature simply because chilled water is often too cold to drink at once.

Should You Wait Until You Are Thirsty?

By the time we actually feel thirsty we are already dehydrated. This is due to the delay in response from brain osmoreceptors - an area of brain tissue that literally detects when we are running low on water. The best approach is to be proactive about drinking water and to drink it regularly throughout the day.

Drinking your entire water intake at the end of the day because you have realised you haven't drunk enough unfortunately won't be of much benefit. This is because the body filters water at a certain rate, leading you to pass the excess water as urine. Waiting till the end of the day will most likely lead to disturbed sleep when you have to keep getting up to go to the bathroom! A better approach is to pace yourself and drink a glass or about 200 mL every 1.5-2 hours. If you find that you have to go to the bathroom more than once throughout the night try limiting fluids three hours before bed.

Lastly, an interesting phenomenon occurs when we become dehydrated. Our body confuses thirst with hunger. So the next time you are feeling hungry try drinking a glass of water to see if your appetite can be curbed.

Strategies to Increase Your Water Intake

Some ways to ensure adequate water intake are:

- Take a large 1 L water bottle to work and ensure you refill it at least once.
- Keep a jug of water on your desk and drink a glass every 1.5-2 hours.
- Choose water over juice or soft drinks at lunch.
- Choose sparkling mineral water at restaurants rather than another glass of wine.
- Add a little lemon/lime juice and mint to water for flavour.

Take Home Points

You need water to survive and thrive.

- You need on average 2-3 L of water a day or about 1 L for every 25 kg that we weigh.
- You know you have drunk enough when your urine is straw-coloured or clear.
- Dehydration can occur even when you are not thirsty. The most common signs and symptoms are fatigue, headaches, muscle cramps, constipation and light-headedness.
- Only add electrolytes to your water if you are undertaking heavy exercise for at least an hour.
- Our body tends to want what we normally give it. Over time, with consistent water drinking, our bodies will learn to love this vital liquid.
- If you choose to filter your water the best water filtration system is reverse osmosis with or without an alkaline filter.
- You can often drink more water if it is at room temperature.
- Try to drink consistently throughout the day by always keeping a bottle or jug filled with water near by.

YOUR *Weekly* CHALLENGE

This week your challenge is to increase your water consumption to 6-8 glasses a day or 2-3 L. If you are not used to drinking this much water, start by adding one extra glass a day until you build up to the recommended amount. Remember to spread out your water drinking throughout the day.





about Dr Cris Beer

**BBioMedSci, MBBS (hons), FRACGP,
member ACNEM, member AIMA,
Cert IV in Fitness**

As an expert in nutritional medicine Dr Cris specialises not just in the prevention and treatment of illnesses, but in the attaining of optimum health. By employing simple lifestyle and holistic medicine strategies, Dr Cris believes that restoration of health and vitality can be achieved by anyone. Dr Cris holds qualifications in medicine, biomedical science, integrative and nutritional medicine, health coaching, as well as personal fitness training. She was the health consultant for The Biggest Loser Retreat and is sought by the media for regular commentary on radio, TV, newspaper columns, as well as print magazines. She currently practises at The Medical Sanctuary on the Gold Coast as a registered medical doctor helping patients every day. For more information go to drcris.com.au