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HAVE A MERRY FIT-MAS

Michelle Bridges provides her tips on how to keep fit this festive season.

In our world, Christmas is on 25 December. But if you live in Armenia apparently it's on 6 January, or in Ethiopia, Russia, Ukraine, Serbia, the birth of Christ is celebrated on 7 January.

The most important thing is that wherever in the world you reside there is one thing in common when it comes to Christmas – it's only one day. Not a week or a month, just one day.

For most of Australians, however, this year Christmas will probably start around lunchtime on Friday the 21 December when the office resonates to the sound of a champagne cork bouncing off the photocopier, and finish celebrations after Australia Day. Of course, next year, our national day falls on a Sunday, so we'll stretch out the 'hoorays' until the Tuesday – just for good measure!

For many, 'Christmas' translates loosely to 'hammer the heck out of yourself for a month or so'. Every opportunity that presents itself for us to socialise is our cue to consume our own bodyweight in alcohol, and to eat enough cheesecake to launch us into glycemic shock.

Now don't get me wrong. Anyone who knows me can attest to the fact that I'm happy to let my hair down on the odd occasion. But let's keep it real – Christmas is actually not a month-long religious holiday, it's only one day (or two if you want to stretch to include Boxing Day!).

There's a paradox here that we should remind ourselves of. We spend most of the year complaining that we a) don't have enough time to exercise; b) it's too cold; c) it's too dark; d) it's too early; or e) your friends are busy so you have to train on your own.

Christmas holidays are the *best* time to be exercising and looking after yourself because most of the above-mentioned roadblocks tend not to apply during the summer holiday period.

If you have a few drinks one night, you don't have to race out of bed the next morning. The weather is generally warm and inviting, and more often than not your friends are available to exercise with you. In this season there's usually a whole lot of outdoor activities on offer, particularly if you are close to a beach or a national park.

And remember, when celebrating it's not *all* cheesecake and pavlova – there's plenty of healthy food on offer, you just have to look for it and make healthy decisions. **OH!**

★ Michelle's Tip

Plan your exercise activities in advance, and don't let unexpected invitations mess up your good intentions.





PAUL BROWN

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EMBRACE THE EXERCISE TRIAD AND START THE NEW YEAR FIT

Paul Brown explains the exercise triad and how it can ensure your new year is kickstarted the right way.

In so many facets of life you'll find the essential ingredients come in threes, or a 'triad' as it is also sometimes called. Chances are when your life is out of balance it's because one of the three is missing or is disproportionate to the others.

In nutrition, for example, you'll often hear of the big three (i.e., proteins, carbohydrates and fats). We'll leave the finer details to our nutrition experts like Dr Joanna McMillan but, as a general rule, proteins and carbs make up the highest volume, with a smaller intake of the right fats, required for optimum health. There are, of course, other important elements to consider, such as minerals and vitamins, but most people will, rightly, focus on the big three first, when attempting to enhance their health.

In exercise, the big three are typically strength/resistance training, aerobic/cardiovascular conditioning and stretching. While additional activities such as relaxation will also contribute to a well-rounded program, it's safe to consider the big three (your 'exercise triad') as an

essential framework that you can effectively build any active lifestyle around. Once again, strength and cardio training should form the bulk of your exercise effort, with stretching a key part (but proportionately less) of your overall time investment.

Many of us celebrate the warmer months by supplementing our gym-based activities with outdoor pursuits, such as cycling, walking, running or swimming, which are all excellent for your cardiovascular fitness and great ways to boost your energy levels and burn calories. If you are someone who likes to do this, keep in mind that it's important to continue your resistance/strength training program as well. This is because this element is necessary in order to maintain muscular/skeletal conditioning (i.e., looking and feeling strong), as well as enhancing your posture. The right resistance program can also keep your body at its optimal fat burning capacity, via an elevated metabolic rate.

What you may not be aware of is that if you fall into the trap of doing all cardio activities and no weight training, then

you can actually lose many of these health benefits and go backwards in your fitness goals, despite your consistent pattern of exercise.

It is possible to get these benefits from an outdoor workout, using exercises that load up the muscles such as push ups, lunges, dips, chin ups, and portable equipment such as workout bands and suspension straps, but a simpler solution is to keep going to your favourite gym a couple of times a week, for your short and sharp weights workouts. Then you can have a blast outdoors with your cardio-based recreation and sports on your other active days.

Remember, a warm up before each workout and a little stretching and focused breathing afterwards will keep your flexibility up and your zen in check. The right mix of all three, coupled with a commitment to your exercise triad, will ensure the festive season and all its temptations have a minimum impact on your health.

Heed these points and you will, indeed, have a merry fitness. **OH!**

PAUL
TAYLOR

THE 80/20 LIFESTYLE:

REPROGRAM YOUR GENES FOR HEALTH, HAPPINESS AND VITALITY

PART 4:

BUILD RESILIENCE TO STRESS



Our stress response has been finely honed over millions of years to cope with a range of survival threats, but in many cases it is inappropriate for the modern world.

Many people are familiar with our flight or fight response, which is driven by our sympathetic nervous system and the hormone adrenaline. This is a very fast acting response that mobilises energy, dumps blood sugar into the bloodstream, and diverts blood to the muscles to enable us to deal with the three minutes of screaming terror of being chased by a lion on the African Savannah. By running away or fighting, we burn up those stress hormones and our body returns to equilibrium.

Nowadays, however, lions have been replaced with chronic low-level stressors of living, such as traffic, work deadlines, relationships issues, money worries, etc. The result is that our stress response system stays switched on. When stress

persists, another system kicks in – the HPA axis. This slower-acting system involves a number of hormones, but ultimately ends up with cortisol being released from the adrenal glands.

To simplify things, think lions for the flight or fight system, and famine for the HPA axis – one of the impacts of chronic cortisol release is that it suppresses our metabolic rate, and encourages us to store fat (especially the dangerous fat around our midsection).

Figure 1 shows what I call ‘the stress cycle’. The first two elements (perception and coping strategy) are largely within our control, so put your focus here to deal with stress. It’s crucial to understand that we are the only species whose thoughts can activate our stress response systems, so if you are having negative thoughts or think something is stressful, it will be.

This is where ‘the catastrophe scale’ comes in, as it is very effective at

changing our perception. Think of what would be close to a 10 in terms of stress, such as your whole family being killed in front of you. With this scale an 8 might be having your house burn down and a 5 or 6 breaking a leg. When we think of it in these terms, most of us get upset about what I call ‘First World Problems’.

Having effective coping strategies also stops stress from impacting on our sleep and subsequently our metabolism (poor sleep quality raises the hunger hormone ghrelin, levels of damaging inflammation and cortisol – making us more stressed the next day).

Exercise is great, as it burns up stress hormones, which is why I’m a fan of sprinting on the spot for 30 seconds, or running up a few flights of stairs several times a day. Likewise, hitting the gym at the end of a stressful day is very effective for stress management, as are other strategies such as meditation, yoga, Tai Chi or deep breathing. **OH!**

FIGURE 1. THE STRESS CYCLE

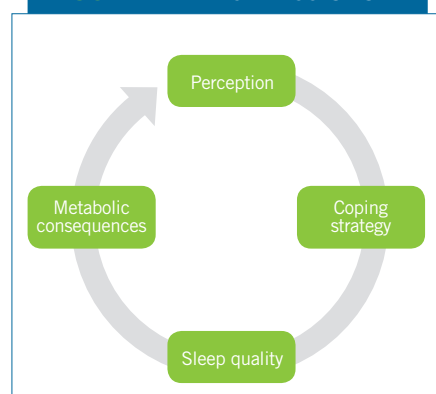
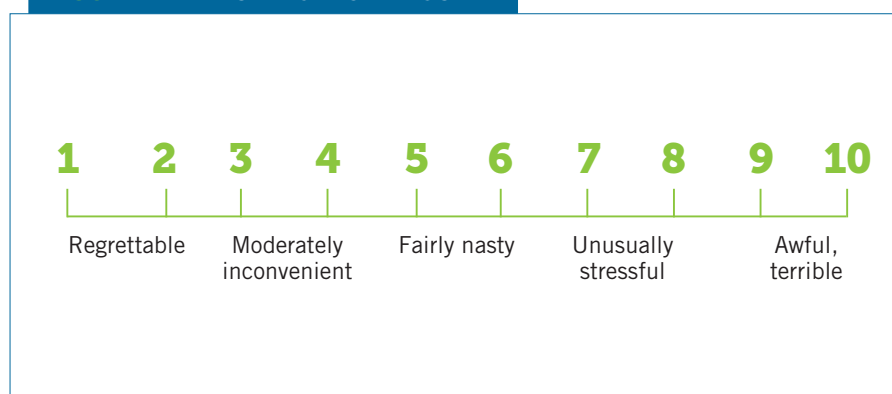


FIGURE 2. THE CATASTROPHE SCALE





KAREN GATELY

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SURVIVING THE FESTIVE SEASON

Specialist HR consultant *Karen Gately* explains how to have fun at the Christmas party without damaging your career.

In January, many of the HR departments we work with are busy dealing with issues stemming from the staff Christmas party. While some may be relatively minor, other issues that arise can have serious consequences for both the individual and their employer. Beyond risks to health and safety, the way some people choose to behave can have very real ramifications on their ability to advance their careers within the organisation.

1 Don't complain about the type of party your employer chooses to throw. It's impossible to keep everyone happy and if they have gone to the trouble of organising an event, then chances are they think it's a good idea. While a valuable opportunity to say thank you to their team, keep in mind your employer is not obligated to provide a party, so be respectful of the gesture and recognise it for what it truly is – a gift.

2 Dress appropriately. The outfit you choose reflects not only your fashion sense but, more importantly, your judgment. Assess what is culturally appropriate for your organisation, assess the dress code and choose an outfit accordingly. For example, you may not enjoy 'dressing up' but if it's a formal event don't dress casually.

3 If Kris Kringle is part of your festive celebrations be careful not to offend anyone with your choice of gift. Although having a laugh is good for team spirit, avoid anything that may be considered inappropriate by either the recipient of your gift or other people. Sexually explicit or suggestive items are not a good idea, and neither are gifts that may be considered offensive by ethnic groups or members of a particular gender.

4 Keep in mind that some people can be easily put off by poor table manners. This could include overloading your plate with too much food, or eating with your hands when cutlery has been provided. While everyone's expectations are different, keep in mind even something as simple as talking with your mouth full can lead to the loss of respect by those who may influence your career progression.

5 Avoid excessive drinking. Feel free to have a few drinks with your colleagues but make sure you remain in control of your behaviour. Some people are affected by alcohol more easily than others, but when inebriated most of us are likely to behave in ways we may later regret. Some of the ways I have seen alcohol impair judgment and impact careers at the Christmas party include:

- Starting arguments
- Telling the boss what you really think
- Over sharing; some aspects of your personal life
- Being sexually overt (and this could include making unwelcome advances, public declarations of lust or dirty dancing).

If you're in a leadership role or work in HR it is especially important that you behave appropriately. Protect the trust you need people to have in both your competence and character. Leading by example is a non-negotiable priority for anyone responsible for managing behaviour and the culture of the organisation.

By all means relax and have fun, but conduct yourself professionally at all times. **OH!**

Karen Gately

*Karen is a highly regarded thought leader in the fields of human performance and leadership. A founder of Ryan Gately, a specialist HR consultancy practice, Karen is also the author of *The People Manager's Toolkit: A Practical guide to getting the best from people*. For more information visit www.karengately.com.au*



FASTING FOR HEALTH AND WEIGHT LOSS?

Dr Joanna McMillan examines the health benefits of fasting.

F here's a new dieting approach getting a lot of attention here in Australia, called the 5&2 Diet. The idea is that for two non-consecutive days of the week you dramatically reduce your kilojoule intake to only ~2,000kJ (500 calories) and then eat pretty much what you like on the other days. Intermittent fasting like this means you only have to 'diet' for want of a better word, on two days and that appeals to many people. Most of us can call on willpower to see us through one day, while slightly reducing kilojoules everyday consistently might be more difficult. So does it work and is it worthy of trying?

The practice of fasting for health or spiritual reasons is as old as the hills. Pretty much every religion and many Eastern teachings, have forms of fasting. In religious teachings fasting is often referred to as a means of discipline and reducing gluttony. Until relatively recently humans had forced periods of fasting due to the availability of food. Cycles of feast and famine would have been



DR JOANNA
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common and our bodies no doubt adapted to cope with this. The whole so-called 'thrifty gene hypothesis' is based on the idea that those with efficient bodies, who wasted little energy and conserved it well in times of famine, are those who have survived to pass on their genes. Today those thrifty genes are contributing to our weight problem in an environment of abundant energy-dense food and little exercise.

So one way of looking at things is that integrating regular fasting into our routine is just emanating the environment we evolved to survive in. But can it help us to get lean?

The truth is we don't really know yet. What we certainly know from animal studies is that kilojoule restriction leads to longer lives and lower risk of many chronic diseases including cancer. There is pretty good evidence that this occurs in humans too. It's just more difficult to test since getting people to survive on lower kilojoule intakes is not easy. There is also some evidence that fasting has benefits from a health perspective. For example, studies of people at the end of Ramadan has shown improvements in markers of heart disease risk, such as blood cholesterol profiles and insulin sensitivity. Whether this translates into long term reductions in risk is not really known. Neither do we know enough about what differences there are between different fasting regimes. And is there any harm from fasting?

What will certainly not work is if you fast on two days, but on the other days overeat and more than make up for the spared kilojoules. I am also concerned with the idea of 'eat whatever you like' on the other days. Nutrient intake matters and, at least to me, is primary over any effect on weight. We need micronutrients and phytochemicals such as antioxidants for optimum health – meaning, what we eat does matter; it's not just about the kilojoules.

I also have some concerns over the long term effects on gene expression. What if, by regularly fasting, we simply ramp up the genes associated with preserving energy and fuel when limited food is coming in, then get really good at storing energy when we do eat, ready to cope with the next fast? If this were to happen you'd have to keep up the fasting routine forever just to remain a stable weight. But should you stop fasting, then you risk gaining extra fat ready for the next fast that never comes. We need to wait for the research to catch up with the popular diet books, to understand more about these effects. Watch this space – at least one group in Adelaide have a study underway and I'm sure many more will follow.

THE PROS

- You learn to feel properly hungry and be OK with that. Sounds funny on first read, but so many people tell me they are rarely hungry, or they are scared of being hungry. We can easily cope with one day of little food.
- Many people say they feel full of energy following a fast day and almost euphoric. That may be from a sense of pride at their restraint, or there may be physiological reasons such as giving the gut a rest.
- Provided you don't go crazy and overeat on the other days, it can be a means of lowering your weekly kilojoule intake and chipping away at your fat stores.
- Unlike most 'diet's, you only have to practice strict restraint on two out of seven days.

So where does that leave us? Well I'm giving you my thoughts and then it's up to you to decide whether it's something you think you want to try.

So the bottom line is, for some people this approach may well be valid, but for others it may just lead to more disordered eating. I await further research results with great interest. If you do want to give it a shot, my advice is to really focus on healthy, balanced eating to boost your nutrient intake on the five normal eating days. Restrain from intense exercise on fast days, and ensure you consume your low GI carbs on the other days to top up glycogen levels – these will easily be used up on the fast day. And be sure to avoid overeating on the days before and after your fast. **OH!**

THE CONS

- We don't know the effect on gene expression – do you just get better at coping with the fast?
- You may feel tired, cranky and dizzy on the fast day, particularly if you are prone to low blood glucose.
- Fasting interrupts normal routines such as family dinner or an invitation out with friends.
- You may find yourself overeating on the day before or after the fast, thereby replenishing the lost kilojoules and potentially overcompensating for the fast.
- I'm yet to be convinced it's a good long term strategy – I have a feeling many people will quickly tire of it and the appeal of a delicious meal will be all too much to restrain from.



ALISHA SMITH

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GRAINY GOODNESS SALAD

Salad is a staple in the fitness business office I work in. So much so that Homer Simpson's catchcry 'You don't make friends with salad' has become an anthem heard far and wide, as yet another staff member forks uninspired lettuce leaves into his/her disinterested mouth. However, with so many delicious and nutritious foods available all year round, salad no longer need be boring. Aside from blending different flavours and textures to create something as yummy as it is healthy, presenting your salad so that it looks appetising as well, can do wonders for it's rating on the appeal-o-meter!

My Grainy Goodness Salad combines healthy fats, low GI grains and loads of crunchy veggies to give your boring workday lunch a wallop! For an added punch of protein add your choice of lean meat, tofu or pulses.



What you'll need

- ¼ cup cooked wild rice
- ¼ cup cooked quinoa
- 1 cup baby spinach leaves
- ¼ capsicum, chopped
- 1 spring onion, chopped
- ¼ avocado, chopped
- 1/3 tomato, chopped
- 2 to 3 lemon slices
- 2 teaspoons lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon macadamia oil
- Handful pecans, chopped

How to make it

- Cook your wild rice and quinoa according to packet directions, rinse and set aside to cool completely.
- Once cool, mix them together and spoon into bottom of a glass jar or other container.
- Mix together the lemon juice and macadamia oil and pour over the rice/quinoa.
- Layer in all other ingredients (placing lemon slices on top of avocado to stop from browning if making in advance) finishing with a good handful of chopped pecans
- Secure lid tightly and store in the fridge. **OH**

Enjoy!



GREEN CUCUMBER GAZPACHIO WITH CAVIAR

This recipe for cold soup is particularly refreshing on a hot day. But this is no ordinary soup. I add something delectable to the soup by sprinkling the surface with plump, flavourful balls of red caviar that pop in the mouth. If you aren't able to buy this caviar, any caviar will do, or add a raw oyster topped with a squeeze of lemon. Use either Lebanese or small cucumber (fewer seeds). I like to serve these in coffee cups or glasses.

What you'll need

2 cups cucumbers, peeled and cubed (remove some of the seeds if there are too many)
 ½ cup pale green centre leaves of green celery
 1 to 2 cloves garlic, minced
 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice or sherry vinegar (less harsh than wine vinegar)
 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil and some extra to drizzle on top
 Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
 Handful of dill, chopped
 50g caviar from Atlantic salmon, to decorate the soup

How to make it

Place all the ingredients, except the dill and caviar, into a food processor and blend the mixture until smooth. Add the dill and stir through. Use a little ice-cold water to thin down the soup, if you wish until you have the preferred consistency. Keep it in the fridge until ready to use. Place into small coffee cups or glasses, and drizzle with a little extra olive oil. Decorate with a sprinkle of caviar or place into a large bowl and sprinkle caviar on top. For this option, include a small ladle and some small bowls. Guests can help themselves. **OH**

Recipe from *Small Fishy Bites*,
 by Marisa Raniolo Wilkins
 (\$29.95, New Holland Publishing)





PUMPKIN CRUSTED FISH ON MASH

Serves 4

What you'll need

300g pumpkin, peeled and cut into cubes
1 orange, quartered with peel left on Sea Salt and pepper
250ml non-fat natural yoghurt
¼ bunch basil, leaves picked and shredded
½ cup raw pepitas (pumpkin seeds)
4 x 160g sea bass fillets (or equivalent firm fleshed fish)
Cooking spray

How to make it

Preheat the oven to 180°C. Place pumpkin and orange into a roasting dish and roast in the oven for 45 minutes or until pumpkin is cooked. Remove half of the pumpkin and set aside.

Squeeze removed orange segments into the pumpkin and mash coarsely with a fork. Season with sea salt and pepper and set aside to keep warm. Squeeze juice from remaining orange segments into yoghurt and add shredded basil. Season to taste.

Crush pepitas in a mortar and pestle until they reach the consistency of coarse breadcrumbs.

Season the fish and press each fillet into the pepita crumbs ensuring it is evenly covered. Spray lightly with cooking spray and cook in a hot non-stick frypan for 2 minutes each side.

Serve the fish on the warm pumpkin mash with a spoonful of the orange and basil yoghurt. Serve with a large green salad on the side. **OH**

This recipe is from *Blood Sugar Quinoa & Healthy Living*, by Michael Moore (\$24.95, New Holland Publishing)



LISA
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TOP TIPS TO REGAIN YOUR PRE-BABY BODY

Physiotherapist *Lisa Westlake* provides her top tips for reclaiming your pre-baby body.

New mums are often anxious to get their body back in shape, but doing too much too soon can result in aches, pains and incontinence.

By listening to your body, taking time to strengthen your foundations, and progressing gradually, you will be able to regain your figure and fitness – safely.

The early weeks of motherhood is a time to recover from pregnancy and delivery, settle into life with your new baby, and enjoy your precious bundle.

How much and what exercise is right for you will depend on your pregnancy, birth and post-natal situation, but as a rule of thumb working on regaining pelvic floor, core strength and core control, as well as walking within comfort, is an ideal target for the first six or so weeks following your delivery. If you have had a caesarean section or have any new/unresolved aches or pains, it may take a little longer.

Your next progression will be to participate in low impact and low load strength exercises, which focus on the pelvic floor, core and posture.



FIVE TIPS FOR HEALTHY NEW MUMS

1. After your delivery, rest up and focus on core and pelvic floor. If you have any concerns seek advice from a women's health physiotherapist. Click here to read Lisa's previously published article on pelvic floor health.
2. Prioritise your posture. The life of a new mum involves plenty of leaning over your baby, which can predispose you to upper back and neck pain. Frequently practice sitting or standing upright, lengthen your spine and settle your shoulders back and down. Each time you feed, make time to ensure your posture is aligned and well supported.
3. When your recovery and energy levels allow, get out and about with your baby in a stroller. Fresh air and gentle activity is good for your body and your soul – and your baby will probably love it too!
4. Whenever you can, exercise for ten minutes here and there, around your baby's sleeping patterns. It's a really great way to get back into action, and you can never underestimate how valuable and realistic, just 10 minutes here and there is for a new mum.
5. When you do head back to gym be sure to speak to the trainers about a sensible post-natal plan for returning to regular exercise, and try not be in a hurry to get back into high impact, heavy load movements, or abdominal curls – just until you are sure your body is 100 per cent recovered and ready. **OH**

JUSTIN
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WHAT STAGE OF CHANGE ARE YOU IN?

Justin Tamsett explains where you need to be, in order for you to achieve permanent change.

The people who receive maximum benefit from their membership, are the ones who want to join a gym and join regardless of any promotion or obstacle. This is because the first step to improving your health or wellbeing, by creating work/life balance, is *wanting* to achieve it!

This is a simple thing to say and yet is a very powerful lever for creating behaviour change.

Let's look at Prochaska's stages of behaviour change for why people cannot achieve work/life balance:

- **Pre-contemplation stage:** Not even considering the behaviour change as they are not ready;
- **Contemplation stage:** Change has now entered their mind and they are getting ready, but not ready to start; you hear people in this stage using the word 'should';
- **Preparation stage:** They are now ready to start and start to tell friends they are 'going to' start the new behaviour;
- **Action stage:** As the word suggests they are doing the new behaviour;

- **Maintenance stage:** The new behaviour is now started and the challenge is to maintain it, so people here now need support.

What we know is that until you are in the 'action' stage of creating a change in your balance you will not be committed to the new behaviour. We also know that to get to that stage a significant emotional event will cause a shift or education.

If you are not in the action stage, then you are simply not ready to create the change. And if you start, there is a good chance you will fail as you are not quite 100 per cent committed.

Sometimes, we are heavily influenced to jump stages and start before our mind is truly ready. This will often lead us into relapse as opposed to maintenance. Relapse means we start the process all over again.

We have to be ready for the commitment in order to successfully change. And when you are, success is imminent.

Are you ready to make a change, or are you still thinking? **OH**



FIONA
COSGROVE

5 STEPS TO MENTAL WELLBEING

Wellness coaching expert *Fiona Cosgrove* explains how to achieve mental wellbeing.

If wellness is the combination of physical and mental wellbeing, then it makes sense that we need to address both in order to really live life to the full.

There is a great deal of available information to help us be physically well. We know that we should eat correctly, exercise regularly, keep stress to manageable levels, get sufficient good quality sleep, and hydrate. Simple? You'd think so. But the truth is that it's not necessarily easy to accomplish, because *knowing* what we have to do is not actually the same as *doing* it. But at least we have an idea of where to start!

So what contributes to mental wellbeing?

The positive psychology movement, where Dr Martin Seligman is at the helm, is all about answering that very question. Five elements of wellbeing have been identified and they include:

1. Positive emotions: you need to experience at least 3:1 positive to negative emotions in a day, in order to experience a sense of

wellbeing and ward off the black dog (i.e., depression).

- 2. Engagement:** you are engaged in whatever you do in your life, and this applies to both personal and professional activities (i.e., you are not bored, switched off or disengaged).
- 3. Relationships:** the most important factor in good mental health is having supportive, positive relationships in your life.
- 4. Meaning:** you understand why you do what you do, and have a sense of meaning around your daily routine.
- 5. Achievement:** everyone receives pleasure and satisfaction from achieving something. No matter how small the achievement, it contributes to your mental wellbeing.

If you read that list above, how do you score on each factor? It can be such a great awareness tool to do this type of 'stocktake' so you can check in and see if there are any areas that need improving. By doing so, you are well on your way to achieving optimum mental wellbeing. **OH**

