

LIVE WELL



WORK WELL

Health and wellness tips for your work and life—
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LI Insurance Services

Do Exercise DVDs Really Work?

Exercise DVDs may be a smart alternative to the gym, since they are relatively cheap and you can use them in the privacy of your home. However, despite the convenience and price, exercise DVDs may not only be ineffective, but harmful.

According to a recent study in the US publication, *Sociology of Sport Journal*, exercise DVDs contain an abundance of demotivating comments, such as, 'If you cannot do 20 [sit-ups], you are weak.' This form of 'encouragement' could potentially lead to psychological harm. In addition to the discouraging language, exercise DVDs are unregulated, which means that the validity of the results that they promise are unverified.

In support of the findings, a related study published in another US publication, the *Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research*, revealed that women would prefer to attend live exercise sessions, as they are more engaging and positive. This does not mean that exercise DVDs are completely ineffective, but that some may emphasise physical appearance above fitness.

Poor Sleep May Be Tied to Higher Stroke Risk

A group of researchers from the University of Toronto in Canada recently published a study which claims that poor sleep may increase the risk of arteries hardening in the brain, which may contribute to a greater risk of stroke. The study involved autopsying 315 human brains of individuals who had undergone a week-long sleep quality study at least once before their deaths.

Twenty-nine per cent of the subjects had suffered a stroke, and 61 per cent had moderate to severe damage to blood vessels in their brains. The researchers then compared the subjects' brains with the results from their sleep quality study. They found that the subjects whose sleep was often interrupted during the week-long sleep quality study were 27 per cent more likely to experience hardening of their brains' arteries.

However, the study was not designed to prove that there is a direct cause-and-effect link between poor sleep and the risk of suffering a stroke. The study also did not account for other stroke and heart disease risk factors such as weight, diabetes, smoking and high blood pressure. Yet, what the study does illustrate is that poor sleep can have an adverse effect on the circulation of blood to the brain.

If you are having trouble sleeping at night and are above the age of 45, consider the following four pieces of guidance to improve your sleep and your brain health:

1. Exercise regularly three to four times a week, even if it is for just 20 minutes.
2. Limit the amount of caffeine, alcohol and nicotine that you consume.
3. Take some time before bed to relax and wind down from the day.

(Continued on next page)

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Turkey and Pepper Bake

Few things are as satisfying during the winter as a hot, hearty meal—such as this turkey and pepper bake:

- 1 kilogram of potatoes, chopped
- 25 grams butter
- 300 grams frozen peppers
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 500 grams turkey mince
- 1 red chili, deseeded and chopped
- 1 tablespoon smoked paprika
- 200 millilitres hot chicken stock

Heat the oven to 200 degrees Celsius if it is a fan oven, or to 180 degrees Celsius if it is a gas oven.

Meanwhile, cook the potatoes in a large pan of salted water for 12 to 15 minutes or until tender.

Then, drain the potatoes, return them to the pan and allow them to steam. After three minutes, add salt, pepper and butter, and roughly mash with a fork.

While the potatoes cool, cook the peppers and onion in a large pan for five minutes. Then, stir in the turkey mince, chili and paprika, and cook until the turkey has browned. Then, add the stock and let the mixture bubble for 10 minutes until thickened. Slowly pour the mixture into an ovenproof dish and top it with the mash.

Cook for 30 minutes or until the mixture is golden brown.



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4. Avoid keeping electronic devices—such as smartphones and tablets—close to your bed.

In case none of the above guidance is successful, consider meeting with your GP to discuss whether medication or a sleep study would be beneficial to treat your sleeplessness.

Prevent Night-time Worrying

More than half of Britons are not getting enough sleep, according to the Sleep Council. And, the most common cause of restless nights is an active, worried mind. If a 'racing mind' keeps you up at night, try calming it with these four strategies:

1. Write down your thoughts, or talk them out with your partner, a close family member or friend.
2. Separate productive worries from unproductive worries, such as things that you have control over and things you do not.
3. Schedule time before bed to relax and process the day's events.
4. Exercise during the day, even if it is only for 20 minutes.

If none of these strategies work for you, consider seeing your GP to discuss whether medication would be beneficial for you.

The Top 5 Persistent Thoughts at Night

