

## MatchFit for Work and Life

Traditionally derived from competitive sport, the term Matchfit means being ready to play and compete at a consistently high level. Translated into the workplace, Matchfit means being able to effectively negate the biological decline of the body and brain post 40 years, and continue performing at your best both on and off the job.

This is the time where many people face a Perfect Storm, comprising 4 major factors:

- 1 **Promotion into more senior roles:** around 40 is a typical age where people are being promoted into more senior management roles which come with expectations of longer hours, corporate travel, and interactions on a global scale operating across multiple time zones. Or, a time when they take on more responsibility at work and expand their portfolio.
- 2 **Relationships and family life:** Around this age, we often have the added pressure of life outside the workplace with permanent relationships and young families to care for, not just in terms of time, but also the financial pressures that come with mortgages, childcare costs and school fees.
- 3 **Reduction in physical activity:** all too frequently people tell themselves that they are “too busy” to play sport or do regular workouts and physical exercise is one of the first activities to be cut out in an attempt to squeeze in their other commitments.
- 4 **Natural biological changes:** increases risk of common health conditions, meaning we have to counterbalance natural decline and the ageing process to keep operating at our peak.

These four factors create a ‘perfect-storm’ where people feel overloaded, fatigued, and distracted. Rising stress levels, coupled with reduced levels of physical activity and a lack of strategic recovery means the body and brain declines at a much faster pace than in normal healthy ageing. If you don’t start to combat this at 40, it makes work and life much harder at 50, 60 and beyond.

### **Physical changes**

From the early 30's, physical abilities begin to decline until a plateau at around 55 to 60 years of age. Some of these changes in physical ability may not be so noticeable until the mid-40s, at which time the rate of decline can be accelerated by lifestyle and psychological stress. Changes that are known to occur include: altered body composition with reduced muscle mass, slower metabolic rate with tendency to store body fat, reduced cardiopulmonary (heart and lung) function with a significant decrease in maximum breathing capacity, reduced nerve conduction speed, reduced bone mass, lower water content of ligaments and tendons contributing to inflexibility, tendonitis and muscular injury. The incidence of depression and anxiety increases, at times triggered by a combination of life stress and a number of these physical body changes.

### **Hormonal changes**

Around the ages of late 30s to early 40s a decline in hormone production occurs, which include the reduction in human growth hormone (HGH), testosterone and dehydroepiandrosterone (DHEA) in men, and oestrogen in women. A decline in HGH is particularly important to note as the reduced production can have a negative impact on metabolism and body composition. Lifestyle factors can promote HGH production in our 40s; HGH is produced in bursts by the body when blood levels rise after exercise and sleep.

### **Genetic changes**

Scientists report that after 40 years of age, brain cells show genetic changes, thought to contribute to cognitive decline<sup>8</sup>. As our brains age the following are also observed:

- Changes in cognition, attention and memory;
- Loss of neural circuits in the brain over time;
- Change in neuronal structures and/or possible neuron or cell death;
- Decrease in brain cerebral volume over time (e.g. decreases in grey and white matter volume) and;
- Decreases in dopamine and serotonin over time.

These factors demonstrate the importance of being Matchfit in order to counteract the natural ageing process, enabling executives to stay at their peak performance through their 40s and beyond.

### **5 ways to increase Productivity to be Matchfit:**

1. Dedicate time to planning the week, ensuring there is enough time between meetings to read and respond to emails, and time to take regular breaks
2. Locking specific time into the diary each week to plan, think, focus on strategy, and batch high level cognitive tasks together and work without distractions
3. Remove unnecessary meetings from the diary, start and finish meetings on time, compress meetings so they don't automatically all run for 60 minutes, aim for at least one walk and talk every day, and talk to people, or at the very least text them, when it is urgent (rather than sending countless emails)
4. Set the 'do not disturb' online status for a set timeframe per day, reducing distractions of IMs, phone calls or email notifications popping up
5. Plan for your personal life and prioritise hobbies and passions, relationships and interests outside of work

### **5 ways to increase Physiology to be Matchfit**

1. Move more. Aim for 10,000 steps each day. Try walking to work, have walking meetings, use a standing desk, take the stairs between meetings. Physical activity doesn't have to be an hour blocked out in the diary.
2. Prioritise and diarise exercise. On top of your 10,000 steps each day, aim for 3 fitness sessions each week and choose a balance between cardio, strength and flexibility. Make fitness fun (disguised fitness) and exercise with family members, friends, colleagues or a Personal Trainer to increase accountability. Resistance training in particular has been shown to stimulate HGH and reverse muscle decline.
3. Nutrition is key. During weekly planning sessions, look through your diary and see how many corporate breakfasts, lunches and dinners are scheduled – consider whether the choice of restaurant will have healthy options available. Choose protein with plenty of vegetables.
4. Invest in a piece of wearable technology that can measure daily activity and sleep levels. Measuring yourself gives the motivation to see results and continue with lifestyle changes.
5. Prepare your food in advance and avoid white sugar and refined carbohydrates which play havoc with energy levels, cholesterol levels, insulin levels, mood and concentration. 5 or 6 different types of fresh seasonal vegetables a day and antioxidant foods should be consumed.