DAY 28: Musculoskeletal health, exercise 'snacking' and diary writing

Hello Take Fivers,

Today marks four weeks of this challenge - four weeks of an action that is great for your health, that's a big deal and we hope you are enjoying it. The month may have had its ups and downs and that's OK. That's life. Try to focus on the positives and any progress you've made. We hope by taking part, you've found your foundation for ageing better with **eat, drink, move, connect and engage** and **think** to guide you through the changes you want to make.

Today, we're revisiting **strength, balance and bone health** which are so essential for staying independent and confident as we age. Why are we coming back to this? All the evidence tells us that staying strong is one of the best ways to stay out of hospital and carry on doing the things we love. Most people want to age in their homes, taking care of themselves and living independently and keeping strong is one of the best ways to do this. Have a look at Hillingdon Musculoskeletal Service webpage for more information on local support.

Take a moment to consider your life - how important is staying independent to you? What are your motivations for staying independent - this could be loving where you live or wanting to take care of grandchildren or even knowing that you like living alone and having your own space. Whatever it is, tune in and channel that into the actions below to keep you strong and independent.

Summary:

- **Eating for strength** means prioritising protein, calcium and vitamin D; think lean meats, fish, beans, pulses, dairy or fortified plant foods. These foods support muscle, bone health and long-term independence. Remember, supplements can help if intake is low.
- **Milk** is a hydrating, nutrient-rich drink that contains calcium, high-quality protein and essential vitamins.
- Have you tried "**exercise snacking**" - short bursts of movement throughout the day? This is an accessible way to build activity into everyday life, add bursts of movement into your day.
- **Neighbourly connection** strengthens wellbeing and community belonging. Try saying hello to your neighbours or stopping for a chat. Age UK Hillingdon also offers a **Good Neighbours programme**; supporting local residents with activities like shopping, light gardening or collecting prescriptions.
- **Journalling** offers emotional and brain benefits, from processing worries to noticing positives. Try starting a diary if you don't have one already.

- Think about your vitamin D intake, especially in winter; should you be taking a supplement to keep your bones strong?

For more information...

Eat

We've covered what to eat for strength so here's a quick **recap** of key points:

- **Pack in the protein**: lean meat, fish or plant based protein. We love the British Heart Foundation's guide that explains how much protein you need and where to find it. Importantly, we aren't just talking about meat - research has found there may be health benefits of eating less meat for some people, providing you can get enough protein from other sources. This could be a great time to get those **beans and pulses** out of the cupboard and try a new high protein, vegetarian recipe!
- **Calcium and vitamin D:** These protect bones and support strength and mobility. Vitamin D rich foods include oily fish, red meat, egg yolks and some fortified foods such as cereals. Calcium rish foods include; dairy (milk, cheese, yogurt), fortified plant milks, leafy greens (kale, okra), bony fish (sardines) and fortified breads. If you are concerned you might not be getting enough vitamin D or calcium, it's worth considering whether a simple **supplement** (widely available in supermarkets) would help boost your intake.

For more information, check out this article from the Association of UK Dietitians. There's also an Eat Well page on the Hillingdon Council website.

Eating for strength is eating for independence.

Drink

On day 7 we talked about **milk as a good source of calcium.** As well as being a great source of calcium for bone health, milk is also very hydrating and rich in protein so it's a great drink.

A glass of milk provides nearly a third of the recommended daily calcium intake as well as eight grams of high-quality protein and many vitamins. Why not start your day with a glass of milk.

Move

We're talking about snacking today, but not the food kind. Have you ever heard of "**exercise snacking"**? In other words, it's raising your heart rate for just a few minutes, a few times a day and it could be as simple as climbing the stairs.

Research shows that this approach can help you increase your overall activity levels and could bring other benefits such as lowering blood sugar. You can find out more about the research on this Just One Thing podcast episode.

Taking away the barrier of time, or feeling daunted by longer bouts of physical activity, “exercise snacking” could be a great approach to try this week.

If you have limited mobility, seated exercises are great “snacks”. There’s also chairobics groups locally. As long as you feel a bit warmer and are breathing more heavily, the exercise will be doing you good!

Connect and Engage

Do you know your neighbours? We sometimes overlook our neighbours but these relationships can be great for our wellbeing and can provide a support network in challenging times. There is strong evidence that feeling a sense of community and belonging in your neighbourhood is important for health and wellbeing. Today, we urge you to **say hello to your neighbours and perhaps even stop for a quick chat**. Notice how saying hello feels and the response you get - these small interactions are good for us and more widely our community.

If you are someone that is struggling to get out of the house or finding certain jobs difficult, Age UK Hillingdon’s **Good Neighbours Scheme** might be able to help. The scheme offers local residents companionship, practical help with jobs like shopping, gardening and collecting prescriptions. Have a look if you think you could benefit from the service or if you might want to volunteer to help others living near you.

Think

Did you ever write a diary when you were younger? Physically putting pen to paper may seem like a dying art, but there’s a new wave of enthusiasm for ‘journalling’, with wellbeing experts advocating the benefits of regularly writing down our thoughts, worries and hopes for the future.

Research shows that writing by hand rather than typing could be beneficial in terms of cognitive stimulation.

So, grab a notebook and give it a go. There are no hard and fast rules, and it might take a few attempts to find out what works for you, but if you need help to get started you could try:

- Writing down your worries and anything within your control you can do to reduce them.
- Note down positive things in your life, or ways to introduce things that make you happy.

- Write about a good friend or family member – why do you like spending time with them? Do you have any plans to see them or catch up over the phone?
- You could even kick off your journal by writing about your Take Five To Age Well experience. What went well and what do you want to continue doing when the month of action draws to a close?

Tip of the day!

As our final tip, we're sharing 'Ask Sara' - Hillingdon Council's AI powered self assessment tool. With over 90 topics to choose from, Ask Sara offers advice and recommendations to make daily living easier. It's definitely worth checking out if you haven't already.

Thank you for still being here with us, you're a champion!

Bye for now, we'll be back in a couple of days for DAY 30!

The Take Five Team.

Reminder: This information is general guidance and if you have any concerns over your own health please speak to your medical professional.