

A woman in a white tank top and dark shorts is walking away from the camera on a sandy beach. In the background, there are large, white, layered cliffs under a clear blue sky. The ocean waves are visible on the left side of the beach.

# WHAT TO DO WHEN EXERCISE DOESN'T WORK

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BY RAEWYN NG

# WHEN EXERCISE DOESN'T WORK

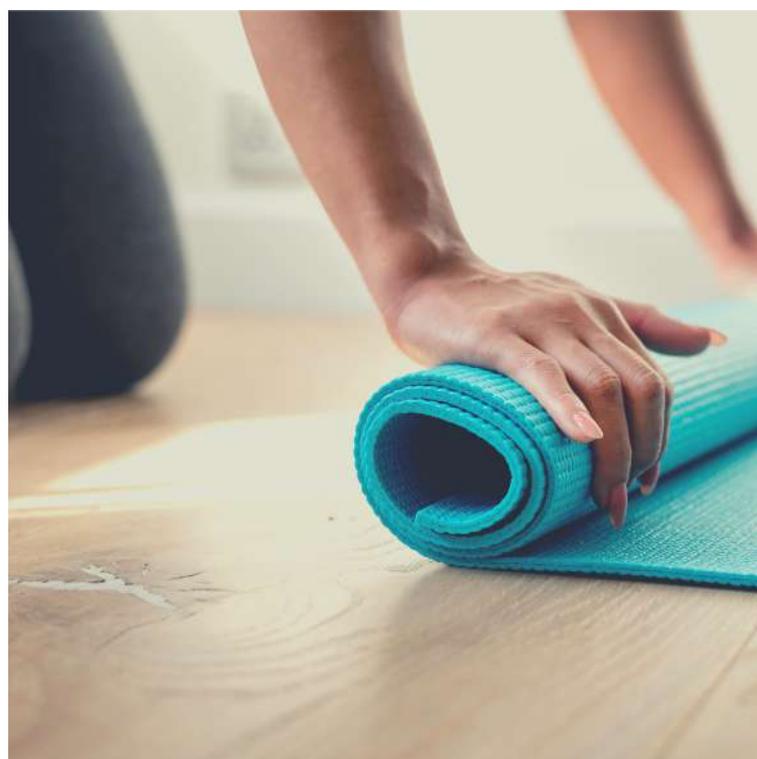
We all know that exercise is great for health, and many of us know it's many benefits, which include:

- Muscle mass preservation
- Improving aerobic and anaerobic fitness
- Reducing disease risk and mortality rates
- Improving cognitive function, sleep, energy and mood

But if you're relying on exercise alone for weight loss, it's just not enough.

In studies by the University of Texas and the University of Oklahoma, participants were supervised for exercise 5 times a week (3 strength sessions and 2 interval sessions a week for 12 weeks in one study and 3 endurance sessions and 2 strength sessions for 10 weeks in the other) with no other lifestyle or nutrition guidance. Fat loss in both studies were negligible – resulting in an average of under 1kg of fat loss over the 10 or 12 weeks.

Without dietary and lifestyle modifications, exercise alone will not be effective if weight loss is the goal.





There's a few reasons for this:

Physical activity only accounts for a small portion of our energy expenditure each day.

60-80% of your total energy expenditure each day is for basic functioning when you're at rest. It's called your Basal Metabolic Rate and its made up of things like regulating heart rate, blood pressure and breathing.

Approximately another 10% is energy used for digesting food.

That leaves only a small amount of total energy expenditure each day (between 10-30%) to be used on physical activity and structured exercise is only one part of that.

Compensatory behaviours creep into our day.

When we start to increase our structured exercise, other compensatory behaviours can also come into play like increased food intake because we're hungrier or reduced incidental activity because of tiredness caused by the increased structured exercise.

When we consider these things, it's apparent that exercise on its own isn't going to be enough for significant weight loss and we should be thinking about other factors that will help us towards success.



# NUTRITION

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The emerging fields of epigenetics and personalised health prove there is no 'one size fits all' diet.

Some people will thrive with 4-6 small regular meals through the day while others only need 2-3. Some will do better with a mostly plant-based diet while others will respond to higher quantity animal-based protein each day.

However, there are a few simple common-sense guidelines that I think will help everyone to improve health and assist with the weight loss journey:

- Drink 8 to 10 glasses (2 litres) of water each day, filtered if possible
- Include all macronutrients (carbohydrate, fat, and protein – whether plant or animal based) in all your meals and snacks
- Focus on unprocessed wholefoods
- Vary your fruit and vegetables from day to day and week to week – try to eat according to the seasons
- Avoid refined, highly processed foods, especially those that include additives like MSG, sugar, white flour, poor quality salt and vegetable oils

It's also important to remember that it's not as simple as calories in/calories out.

While its true that if you consume less calories than you expend, weight loss will occur, remember that calorie calculations (both the number of calories in food and the number of calories expended in exercise) can be imprecise and have been shown to vary up to 50%.



Other factors that affect the calories in/calories out calculations are:

- we don't all absorb or burn calories the same,
- food preparation can make calories more readily absorbable, and
- we often underestimate the calories in our portion sizes and overestimate our calorie expenditure.

**IN THE SHORT-TERM DIET IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EXERCISE FOR WEIGHT LOSS BUT OVER THE LONG TERM, REGULAR EXERCISE IS CRITICAL FOR KEEPING THE WEIGHT OFF AND MAINTAINING FITNESS.**

# SLEEP

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Our body follows a natural rhythm to light. We're meant to slow down, relax and get ready for bed as the sun sets and awaken to get ready for the day as the sun rises.

Our stress hormones and repair hormones also go through a cycle throughout the day and have an inverse relationship. As the sun rises, cortisol rises – this is our wake up hormone and it peaks in the morning. As the day progresses, cortisol drops and melatonin rises. Melatonin release helps us to wind down and get to sleep.

Many things interfere with these rhythms – coffee, sugar, alcohol and other stimulants will elevate cortisol and depress melatonin as will bright lights and electronic devices like television, computers and phones. As we spend more time under a stress response, cortisol is elevated for longer periods and our melatonin is suppressed which in turn interferes with the body's rest and repair mechanisms. If you're not getting adequate rest and repair, the weight will not shift.





Physical repair generally happens between 10pm and 2am and psychological repair between 2am and 6am and we need to be asleep for both.

If you're not getting to sleep before 10 – 10.30pm or you routinely have poor quality sleep, you're eating into your physical repair time, further increasing your stress load and compromising your exercise efforts, ultimately impacting on your weight loss results.

Maximise your rest and recovery time by:

- Avoiding coffee after 12noon
- Starting to wind down for bed 1-2 hours before bedtime. Dim the lights and turn off your electronic devices
- Making sure your bedroom is completely dark and cool. People typically sleep best when there is fresh air in the room and the temperature is between 15-18 degrees
- Waking up at the same time most days

# STRESS

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As discussed, cortisol is one of our stress hormones and is needed to get us going in the mornings. It's also released each time we get stressed. Acute or short-term stress is a good thing, it helps to push us into action and get things done. We're designed to be able to deal with this.

However, when stress becomes chronic and long term, cortisol production is consistently elevated over time and starts to interfere with other body functions including weight regulation.

When we think of stress, we must start thinking of it not just as the mental/emotional kind. Work, family, relationship and financial stressors seem to be the ones that come to mind when stress is discussed. But there are other stressors that promote the same hormonal response which we may not always consider – poor food quality, chemicals (such as ingredients in our toiletries, cosmetics and cleaning products), electromagnetic (laptops and other devices), lack of sleep, under- or over-exercise and negative thought patterns.





All these things also elevate the stress response and if they are constant day after day, our stress levels stay high causing an increased propensity to gather fat around the mid-section as well as several other wider effects:

- Raising blood sugar levels and making your cells less sensitive to insulin
- Increasing fatty liver
- Reducing the ability to burn fat
- Causing hormonal imbalances by disrupting the HPA (hypothalamus, pituitary, adrenal) axis
- Encouraging constant hunger and sugar cravings
- Reducing DHEA (the precursor to repair and sex hormones), testosterone and growth hormone levels



Reduce or manage your chronic stress load:

- Replace your toiletries, cosmetics and cleaning products as you run out with brands with less chemicals and endocrine disruptors
- Minimise your time on electronic devices, especially your 'free' time or downtime
- Implement meditation or mindfulness practices to reduce anxiety and improve mental health
- Find relaxing activities that help to build your energy up and introduce them to your day

**IF WEIGHT LOSS IS YOUR GOAL, TAKE A MORE HOLISTIC APPROACH THAN JUST EXERCISE AND LOOK TO MAKE LIFESTYLE CHANGES TO SUPPORT YOUR EXERCISE ROUTINE AND MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR PHYSICAL EFFORTS.**

# ABOUT YOUR COACH, RAEWYN NG:

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Rae is a Movement and Wellness Coach committed to helping people make sustainable lifestyle changes to improve their health, energy and happiness.

With a background in Law and Politics before moving into the Health and Wellness space in 2003, Rae has a special interest in the impact of stress on mental and physical wellness and weight loss, the interface between personal and environmental health and functional health solutions for chronic health conditions.

**IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO WORK WITH ME TO IMPROVE YOUR HEALTH AND ENERGY, GET IN TOUCH.**

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