

Spring cleaning your lifestyle

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Finally! It's time to emerge from the heft and sluggishness of winter, and tune into the bright, clean energy of spring. It is the season for clearing out the old and slow, and kicking up our heels to livelier, sunnier rhythms. Springtime brings the perfect opportunities to reboot our immune systems after the cold-and-flu blues; use the extra daylight hours to boost our Vitamin D and swap stodgy comfort food for the juicy buoyancy of the new season's bounty.



There are many potential benefits to responding to the effervescent energy of Spring; however, specialist healthcare professionals such as Registered Dietitian and ADSA ([The Association for Dietetics in South Africa](#)) spokesperson, Retha Harmse, cautions against getting caught up in making lifestyle changes that are too sweeping. "Trying to make too many changes, or really big changes overnight doesn't always stick," she says. "A great approach to the new season is to just aim to be the better person than you were the day before. When you begin with small steps, it is far easier for the changes you make to improve your health and well-being to be sustainable."

Go with the season

Keeping your focus on the in-season fruit and vegetables is an easy way to usher in small daily changes that can make a big difference. Swapping out soups and stews for fresh and delicious salads and plant-based bowls helps you to increase both the amount and variety of fruit and veg you eat. Jade Seeliger, also a Registered Dietitian and ADSA spokesperson points out that Spring produce can have restorative effect on the body. "After a long, cold winter, our immune systems take a knock and many of us turn to antibiotics to help us recover. Antibiotics wipe out both the bad, and good microbiota living in our gut. Certain fruit and vegetables are known as prebiotics provide food for your gut bacteria and help them to flourish once more. Prebiotic-containing fruit and vegetables in season in Spring include artichokes, apples and asparagus." Keep your attention also on the versatile cruciferous veg such as broccoli and cauliflower; and stock up on the Spring avocados, tomatoes and berries.

Experience an awakening

Much of our less than healthy eating is rooted in being on auto-pilot when it comes to choosing what we eat and how we eat it. Spring invites us to wake up to our habits, and there's no better way to do this than by exercising our mindfulness.

"Mindful eating is an ancient, mindfulness-based practice with profound implications and applications for resolving problematic eating behaviors and troubled relationships with food," says Retha. "It also fosters the development of self-care

practices that support optimal health.

Here are five ideas to you get started with mindful eating:

- Start with a favourite: Choose a favourite food or a dish you really enjoy and have eaten often.
- Sense it: Observe the look, touch, texture, and smell. Appreciate the appearance and scent of your food and begin to perceive any sensations happening in your body, particularly stomach and mouth.
- Observe before you chew: Once you take a bite, observe the sensation of food in your mouth without chewing. Carefully think about the taste of the food.
- Go slow and think: Chew slowly and pause briefly. Think about the location of the food in your mouth, as well as the taste and texture. Concentrate on how the taste and texture changes as you continue chewing.
- Pause: Before you swallow, pay attention to the urge to swallow. Do so consciously and notice the sensation of the food traveling down the oesophagus to the stomach. Pay attention to any physical sensation.”

Lighten up!

More sunshine and warmth, new green shoots and coloured blossoms all give Spring its quintessential lightness that lifts the spirits and invigorates the body. It's an ideal time to choose a few new habits that feel good. Jade suggests:

Cut the Cuppas! – “Caffeine has always created a buzz, and cappuccinos are always a perennial favourite. Unfortunately, when it comes to kilojoules, these milky drinks come at a cost. A ‘short’, ‘tall’ or ‘grande’ cappuccino is approximately 500, 700 and 900 kilojoules respectively (based on low fat milk and no sugar), which are kilojoule equivalents to 1.7, 2.7 and 3.7 slices of bread.” If you find it too difficult to cut out your daily caffeine-fix, replace your cappuccino with an Americano or filter coffee with a splash of milk, which will help reduce the energy to approximately 150 kilojoules per serving.

Eat your water – “Thankfully, this does not mean crunching away on ice cubes to help shut down the hunger, rather pile your plate high with vegetables and salad. Most vegetables are between 90–95% water, this paired with fibre, vitamins, minerals and anti-oxidants makes them the perfect accompaniment for every meal. Try to ensure that at least half of your plate is vegetables and/or salad, and that they represent all colours of the rainbow, from purple eggplants, yellow peppers, red radishes, orange butternut to green spinach.”

Bring back balance – “Extremes have always held so much appeal, from fasting to carb-free to fat-full to fun-less. Diets seem to be a collection of short-term restrictions that never reach the pot of gold at the end of that ‘goal weight’ rainbow. When it comes to meals and snacks, and eating in general, it is worth bringing back some balance which will help you to not only achieving those health goals, but also being happy at the same time.”

Get an energy boost

Take inspiration from all the joys of spring to boost both your physical and mental well-being.

Get outside and get more Vitamin D – Find your Instagram moments outside. Nature has a calming effect on us and spending time outdoors is so good for that extra Vitamin D. Embrace walks in the park and picnics; think about taking up gardening, especially growing your own salad leaves and edible flowers, Spring veg and herbs.

Find the ways to make healthy fun - Spring offers an opportunity of starting a-fresh; it's worth using this new season to approach your health journey differently. Embark on a healthy cooking class or actually use the recipe books that adorn your shelves; ditch the gym if you don't like it and find a new exercise you actually enjoy. Make health your new wellness goal, not deprivation and dieting, which is often the case leading up to summer holidays.

Spring clean your sleep - Our bodies and minds need enough sleep to recover and be sharp for the next day. Sleep hygiene refers to your pre- and bedtime habits that help you to get the rest you really need. Ensure that you remove distractions close to bedtime to fully wind down and fall asleep quicker and more easily.

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