**Healthy habits with Vitality**

We believe in small steps to big change, starting with simple habits that can make a significant difference to how well you live your life.

Our goal at Vitality is to help nudge you in the right direction, through fun and easy access to healthy activities. From eating and sleeping well to exercising and caring for your overall health, we’ve got the tips, tools (and of course rewards!) to keep you motivated.

Our theme this month is ‘healthy habits’ – helping you to set a health or wellbeing goal and complete small micro-actions to achieve it.

**Small habits = big goals**

So, what is a habit and why are they so influential in shaping our lives? Dr Mosima Mabunda, Head of Wellness for Vitality South Africa, says that habits are “automatic actions that are deeply ingrained in us and affect what we do, what decisions we make and our overall lifestyle”. She explains that once we repeat an action often enough, we create a ‘habit loop’ which makes the action much more likely to continue happening.

“When the habit is good (like brushing our teeth twice daily),” Dr Mabunda adds, “this is helpful. However, when the habit is bad for us (like smoking), we need to work doubly hard to change our environment to break the patterns of this habit”.

In new behavioural research published in partnership with the London School of Economics, Vitality shows that you’re more likely to be successful with adopting a new health habit if you slice it into smaller bite-sized habits. Then, over time, you can increase or improve on this.

The research report, called the Vitality Habit Index, uses data from over half a million Vitality members over a 7-year time period.

Insights from this Index suggest the following steps when it comes to positive behavioural change and habit formation:

1. **Set a target** – this should be based on where you are in your health journey and what kind of health benefit you hope to get.
2. **Be practical** - if you are just starting to exercise, pick an easy intensity exercise that does not feel too demanding.
3. **Focus first on consistency then intensity** – first repeat the habit for between 4-6 weeks and then when it’s more entrenched in your life you can start to increase intensity.

**Here, the Vitality programme can help.**

“No matter what health goal you have in mind, we have a benefit, a brand partner or a reward to help you,” says Dr Mabunda. “Added to this, as a Vitality member you’re part of a global community of millions and millions of people so you can connect and get the support you need from a fellow member”.

**Daily habits, made easy**

We asked our Vitality members to share some of their health goals. Here are the most popular goals – plus the habit laddering to help you get there.

**GOAL 1: “I want to lose weight”**

1. Put a glass of water on your bedside table and have it as soon as you wake up.
2. Practise mindful eating by chewing each bite slowly.
3. For one of your meals a day, slightly reduce the portion size.

**GOAL 2: “I want to get fitter”**

1. If you drive to work or the shops, park your car a little further from the entrance than you usually do.
2. Commuting? Get off the train/tram/bus one stop before your destination.
3. Lay your workout clothes out in your bedroom at night so you wake up to them ready for you.

**GOAL 3: “I want to reduce my stress at work”**

1. Block out an extra hour in the day to schedule focused work sessions.
2. Start your day by writing a short to-do list.
3. Use the “2-minute-rule”: if something will take you less than 2 minutes, do it straight away.

**GOAL 4: “I want to sleep better at night”**

1. Stop screen-time 15 minutes before you usually do at night.
2. Have a book on your bedside table to encourage reading rather than using your phone (challenge yourself to start with reading just a few pages).
3. Opt for decaffeinated teas and coffees once it’s past lunchtime.

“Setting big goals is exciting but it can also be quite daunting when you start out,” concludes Dr Mabunda. “By breaking down your objectives into manageable, daily actions, you will start to build a solid foundation for long-term goal success. And always remember that Vitality is right by your side – good luck!”