

This week we welcome a new fitness columnist, **Ollie Thompson**, who specialises in helping career-focused professionals get into great shape, build long-term health and perform better in their work. Named as one of *London Evening Standard's* top London Personal Trainers, Ollie works across Cambridge and London and offers both in-person and virtual personal training. With more than 7,500 hours of coaching under his belt, he's been fortunate to work with a variety of industry leading clients, ranging from CEOs and senior executives to stage performers, actors and doctors.

**O**ver the years, I've helped more than 100 individuals over the age of 40 to navigate midlife fitness, boost their energy and build a robust pain-free body for the future. During this time, it has become very clear to me that there are three key areas to place the most focus on when it comes to fitness, which I'm going to share with you today!

### 1 Move well and often with 'exercise snacks'

You'll commonly hear advice telling you to move more and stay active, but what does this really entail?

The human body can move in an almost infinite number of ways. It's crucial to explore a variety of these on a regular basis to stay healthy, pain-free and prevent stiffness. Our modern lifestyles cause us to be very sedentary for much of the week. There are pockets of time when you're on your feet, such as your commute to the office, or perhaps you work from home and take the dog out for a walk a few times each day. While this is excellent and has a host of health benefits, there is more that we can do to really get maximum benefits from a short break away from the desk.

Moving often is incredibly important. When sitting for much of the day uninterrupted, our body can become very accustomed to this position, causing muscle tone to change, impaired circulation and some muscles can become underactive, creating stiffness and discomfort. Standing and walking regularly is an excellent habit to have, but important areas such as our hips, spine and shoulders need specific attention, too.

This is where small movement drills come in useful, or as I call them, 'exercise snacks'. Exercise snacks are intentional 5-10 minute blocks of time where you find a space and move your body, focusing primarily on those areas listed above.

The best approach to exercise snacking is to include both dynamic stretches and some muscle activation exercises. A few of my favourites include cat crows, lying thoracic rotations and a dynamic pigeon pose, followed by some simple muscle activation exercises such as a glute bridge, hollow body hold and lateral lunge.

I recommend spending 5-10 minutes running through some or all of these movements once for every three hours you spend sedentary. It'll instantly make you feel better!

# Three fitness fundamentals to thrive at 40 and beyond

Our new fitness columnist, **Ollie Thompson**, offers key advice to help you stay fit.



Our new fitness columnist Ollie Thompson offers both in-person and virtual personal training

### 2 Follow a well-balanced exercise routine

There are hundreds of ways to exercise. Whether it be a sport, a gym-based routine or casual outdoor activity, you simply cannot go wrong with exercising regularly.

While all exercise is beneficial for your health, you want to ensure your routine is well balanced and works multiple components of your fitness. Following an exercise plan that addresses both your cardiovascular fitness and your muscles will be particularly important as you approach midlife and beyond for a few different reasons.

As you get older, without intervention, your muscles gradually waste away. This is called sarcopenia. Research has shown that a healthy untrained person can lose between 3-8 per cent of their total muscle mass each decade after 30, resulting in a strength loss upwards of 50 per cent between 30 and 80 years old. With muscle playing such an essential role in so many of our bodily functions, from our movement, balance and joint strength to our metabolism, hormones and resilience against disease, it's safe to say holding onto muscle plays a significant role in living healthily for longer.

I recommend you perform at least two resistance training sessions each week, focusing on compound exercises that target muscle muscle groups at one time, such as a squat or row movement. Use a challenging weight and push yourself, while being conscious of maintaining good technique throughout.

The health benefits of cardiovascular training are more widely known, from keeping your heart strong and maintaining good circulation to managing blood pressure and ultimately, lowering the risk of illness.

My cardio advice is quite simple: focus on performing at least 120 minutes of moderate intensity cardio at an intensity where your breathing is elevated enough to sweat but you can still just about maintain a conversation.

This doesn't need to be a specific mode of exercise, you could walk, cycle or even swim. It also doesn't need to be done all at once! These 45-minute sessions tend to suit many of my clients. Take a virtual meeting outside, walk the dog or cycle to the office. You'll be surprised how quickly the minutes add up.

### 3 Take care of your sleep

We've spoken about moving often,

we've also touched on following an exercise routine.

However, to have the energy to move often, to focus on exercise and motivation to adhere to healthy nutritional habits, you must get adequate sleep.

Sleep is the backbone to your health. When sleep is compromised, it'll impact all areas of your life, from physical performance and energy levels to mental clarity, hormone balance and even decreasing your body's ability to fight off illness.

Sleep deprivation affects nearly every physiological function in the body. In fact, research has shown that just four nights in a row of four hours of sleep per night can leave your cognitive function at par with having pulled an all-nighter! You can imagine where that will leave your energy, focus and overall health.

To optimise both your sleep quality and quantity, it's important to maintain good sleep hygiene.

Here are six key components of healthy sleep hygiene:

- **Regularity:** Keep your sleep and wake time as consistent as you can, even on weekends where 'social jetlag' can become an issue.
- **Environment:** Keep your bedroom dark, as quiet as you can and not too warm. A cooler room will be best as



A hollow body hold



A lateral lunge



The cat cow

our core body temperature requires a small drop to drift into sleep.

■ **Caffeine:** Avoid caffeinated drinks after 2pm. High levels of caffeine in your system in the evening will significantly reduce your sleep quality and quantity.

■ **Napping:** If you're going to take a nap, avoid doing so after 5pm to maintain sleep pressure build up.

■ **Lighting:** Avoid using bright overhead lighting after 8pm. Stick to lamps and low warm lighting to prevent disturbances with melatonin production.

■ **Evening routine:** Adopting a short routine to wind down before bed can be really beneficial, especially if you're very 'switched on' in the evenings from work or other stressors. A warm shower followed by a few simple stretches and 10 minutes of reading can work wonders.

There you have it!

Three key fundamentals to ensure that you thrive at 40 and beyond, and optimise your overall well being, long into the future.

■ Look out for Ollie's regular columns each month in the *Cambridge Independent*. Visit [welltolead.com](http://welltolead.com) and follow Ollie on Instagram @[olliethompsonhealth](https://www.instagram.com/olliethompsonhealth).