



The Viridian Dejunk Your Life Report 2024

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VIRIDIAN

Life has become very busy for everyone.

With this has come huge choice and as much convenience as we want. With an increased choice of quick options available at any time, comes compromised decisions that are often made when we are busy or stressed.

We get information overload from social media at every opportunity. Influencers try to convince us about products, exercise tools and ways of living to become healthier and happier. It is getting harder to navigate all the information out there and decide what is fact or fiction. Everyone seems to be an authority on something.

People are living longer but often with a chronic disease, such as diabetes, coronary heart disease and dementia. These chronic diseases have a myriad of causes but often ultra-processed food and diet is talked about as a root cause to many illnesses, both physical and mental.

Cost can play a part in dietary choices as well as time so it's worth spending some time organising what you buy, when you buy and where from. Food labels can blur fact and reality. Yogurts marketed as healthy and high in protein, will often contain trace ingredients that are ultra processed and need a good search, worthy of a biochemist, to reveal what they are.

Food and eating at mealtimes is what creates structure to our day. Breakfast, lunch and dinner. Work breaks are centred around having food. Social gatherings are often centred around food. So, we really need to think carefully about what we eat and whether we are inadvertently, causing harm to ourselves with our food choices. We are choosy about what clothes we buy so its sensible to think about the ingredients in every food item we eat.

As the cost of living crisis continues, it is important to spend wisely. Why work hard,

to fritter money away making ill informed decisions? Food does not need to be more expensive to be more wholesome. Looking at labels carefully or download an app which does this for you, allows you to choose food that will help you to feel well and function well.

A diet high in ultra processed foods will have an obvious impact on your physical and mental health so it's a no brainer to put some time and energy into planning your shopping choices. Think of all the hours you spend scrolling on social media and then use some of it to create time to focus on your diet and what you put into your body.

This brings me to supplements. Adverts are everywhere on social media talking about what to take to feed better and look better. We are often bamboozled with fast-paced talk from a scientist or celebrity, assuring us that a trial of their product will make us feel so much better and faster. It is often difficult to work out what actual benefit you will get, when the selling is so overwhelming. Be aware, dig deeper and use the guidance in this report to understand what's really in the supplements you're buying. I only signpost patients to quality assured products, like Viridian Nutrition which have been made with an ethical model and researched formulations.

We have but a brief time on earth so make it count.

Eat well, feel well, therefore live well.

Dr Siobhan Brennan

NHS GP



Do Less, Achieve More In 2024

Are you ready to make 2024 the year you do less but get better results? As a supplement company that emphasises effectiveness and purity, we want to help you live a simpler life in keeping with your goals.

That's why we've commissioned this report. It features the best experts in their fields and evidence-based advice on how to remove the junk from your life, identify what you really want and take steps to get there.

Expect simple solutions, practical strategies and changes that will stick.

Unprocessing your life

We're all doing the best we can to be healthy. But time, budgets and our 24/7 lives often mean we have to take shortcuts. From eating on-the-go to skipped gym sessions to too much time spent staring at screens, our lives have become more processed than ever.

To understand how truly our lives are entrenched in processed living, we commissioned some research in December 2023 asking 2000 men and women how processed their lives have become and 83% said they eat ultra-processed foods regularly.

In fact, over half the calories in the typical British diet come from ultra-processed foods (UPFs), according to a report published in the British Medical Journal in August last year. UPFs include crisps, sweets and ready meals but also so-called 'healthy' items like brown breads, protein bars and low fat yoghurts.

Then there's our online lives of constant distractions, scrolling and social comparisons that leave us drained and exhausted. Even our homes, which can serve as sanctuaries, are not immune to our fast-paced lives.

But 2024 can be different. From your phone to your fridge – and of course, your supplements – it's easier than you think to reduce the level of clutter and processing in your life. We'll show you how.

As well as helping you to edit different areas of your life so you feel more effective and in control in 2024, this report will help you understand more about Viridian, our manufacturing processes, our values, our ingredients and our commitment. Find out more so you can always feel assured about your supplement choices.

Holly Thallon-Stenson 
Co-owner Viridian Nutrition



No Junk

Here's what to expect

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Welcome To Your Life Edit

Look at all the stuff around you. How does it make you feel? Comfortable and secure or overwhelmed and anxious?

From multiple social media platforms, to diaries brimming with meetings, clothes we don't wear, appliances we don't use and foods filled with chemicals we don't really need, life is brimming with more and more of the unnecessary, more and more junk.

The result is clutter. Not only in our homes but in our inboxes, our diaries, our fridges – and in our heads. And it's making us feel overwhelmed and overloaded like never before.

But what if rather than doing more, getting more or being more, you could be more successful by taking away what's no longer working for you? Whether it's in your diet, your exercise, your work life and even your choice of goals this year, what if doing less could make you more effective? Behavioural scientist Leidy Klotz talks about the incredible power of doing less. 'We collect new-and-improved ideas, but we don't prune the outdated ones,' he says. 'Every day across challenges big and small we neglect a basic way to make things better: we don't subtract.'

So, what if we told you that taking away what's no longer working is the first step toward success?

This report, commissioned by ethical vitamin company, Viridian Nutrition, has gathered leading experts to help you pare down your life to what really matters, what really works and most importantly, what you really want.

Using this guide

Choose the areas where you currently feel most cluttered or overwhelmed and start there. You will get some theory and then simple ways to edit your life from the experts in each field to make that area more effective.

You can choose to read the report from start to finish and then decide where to begin. Or, you can start in the area you are most interested in simplifying and jump straight into that.

The trick is to take it slowly and focus on the area you feel needs the most attention first, before turning to the next. You don't have to do it all at once!

So, before you add anything more to your 2024, come with us on a journey, and discover your best self.



Quiz: Do You Need A Life Edit?



1. Do you often feel overwhelmed by all the things you have to do?

- Always Sometimes Rarely
 Never Don't know

2. Do you consume ultra processed snacks like crisps, sweets or low-fat sweetened yoghurts?

- Always Sometimes Rarely
 Never Don't know

3. Do you eat ready-made foods?

- Always Sometimes Rarely
 Never Don't know

4. Are you confused by the labels and ingredients in the supplements you buy?

- Always Sometimes Rarely
 Never Don't know

5. Do you use more than three social media platforms?

- Always Sometimes Rarely
 Never Don't know

6. Do you sleep with your phone by the bed?

- Always Sometimes Rarely
 Never Don't know

7. Does your home contain piles of papers, clothes and random items that have been there longer than a week?

- Always Sometimes Rarely
 Never Don't know

8. Does your relationship feel stale?

- Always Sometimes Rarely
 Never Don't know

9. Do you find yourself flitting from one task to the next in the course of a day?

- Always Sometimes Rarely
 Never Don't know

10. Do you make long to do lists, only to find that very few items get done?

- Always Sometimes Rarely
 Never Don't know

11. Do you make more than one new year's resolution each year only to find that by the end of February you haven't stuck with it?

- Always Sometimes Rarely
 Never Don't know

12. Do you tend to do more than two hours of work at a time without any breaks?

- Always Sometimes Rarely
 Never Don't know

13. Do you find it hard to give up things like social media or junk food, even when you've tried in the past?

- Always Sometimes Rarely
 Never Don't know

If you answered 'Always' or 'Sometimes' to four questions or more, you could benefit from the practical, expert advice in this guide.

How The Experts Will Dejunk in 2024

To inspire you, we asked some of our Viridian experts to share the one change they will be making in 2024 to dejunk their lives.

ORGANISING MY WORK LIFE

Rob Hobson, nutritionist

'While I feel I have managed to unprocess my diet for the better, my work life could do with a little help. In 2024 I am determined to get more organised which starts with the filing on my computer, clearing up my mails and organising everything into files in my home office instead of multiple piles of paper!

'I also need to get digital to streamline my timekeeping because at the moment I am a pen and paper diary person. I know I would be better organised and time-managed if I kept everything on my phone.'

PRIORITISING MY SLEEP

Carol Granger, nutrition expert and microbiologist

'Good sleep is so important but many of us don't have enough, and it's always been one area of my

life that needs attention. So for the coming year, I'll be looking more carefully at my sleep habits and how to improve not just the quantity, but quality of sleep I get. I'll be closing off my phone and laptop earlier, and winding down with a herbal tea, maybe some lavender essential oil massaged in with my hand cream, and a few drops on my pillow as well.'

DIGGING DEEPER INTO LABELS

Aimee Benbow, nutritionist

I plan to make a more informed effort to double check ingredients for any pre-packaged foods that I purchase. Even simple foods and foods with minimal processing can often have hidden and unnecessary additives, sugars and preservatives to increase the shelf life and taste profile of some foods. These often have negative impacts on our health.

Additionally, I plan to allow more 'me' time in 2024. Balancing work, social, home life can be challenging, and I think it's important to ensure we listen to our bodies when we simply need some down time or additional rest.

DOING LESS EVERY DAY

Dr Heather Mckee, habit change expert

'I'm going to stop giving myself too much to do in a day and start pacing my calendar with tasks/meetings. Yes, I am an ambitious person but as a behavioural scientist, I of all people should know that giving yourself too much to do only makes you end up feeling like you've never achieved anything meaningful.

'To do this I am going to add in the skill of developing priorities by asking myself if I was to do only one thing today what could that be? This can be anything from finding a moment for fun to talk to myself with compassion to getting an app review done for a client. It doesn't matter what it is as long as it's one thing I have chosen with purpose.'

INTRODUCTION

SPENDING LESS TIME ONLINE

Hana Burianova, neuroscientist

'One life edit I am making is reducing my time online, on social media and generally on the internet. Instead, I will be reading more books and going for walks without my phone. This calms my mind, slowing my thoughts and forcing me to focus on one thing at a time. In the long run, that helps me prevent mental fatigue and anxiety.

'In short, my focus for the year will be being more mindful of the present moment and self-reflecting rather than rapidly switching between numerous external stimuli.'

IMPROVE MY SLEEP

Will Duru, personal trainer

'I've made a commitment to focus on improving my sleep in 2024. To help me with this, I've started using a sleep and activity monitor to track both my sleep and training routines. Over the last two months, I've been closely monitoring my sleep patterns and identifying factors that disrupt my rest. Through this, I've discovered ways to ensure a good night's sleep and increase my productivity the next day.

To improve my sleep quality, I've set some personal guidelines for myself:

1. No alcohol from Monday to Thursday.
2. Drinking a calming tea before bed.
3. Dedicating 30 minutes to wind down before sleeping
4. Avoiding social media after 9 PM.
5. Being mindful of my dinner portions and avoiding heavy meals in the evening.

Food. Unprocess Your Diet And Fuel Yourself To Better Health

Even if you eat healthily, the chances are, there will be ultra-processed foods lurking somewhere in your diet. Spot them and find healthy alternatives with this guide from nutritionist Robert Hobson, author of new book *Unprocess Your Life: The new Cookbook to help you break free from ultra-processed foods*

Most of us do our best to make healthy choices. But with little time to cook from scratch we often rely on store-bought foods and on-the-go snacks, hoping they're not doing us too much damage. But most of these foods are not only processed, they're ultra-processed, which means they're made using industrial production methods, additives, preservatives and chemicals.

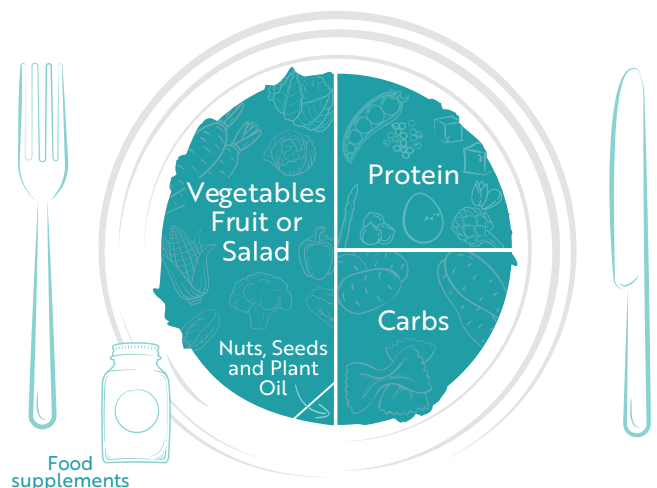
Foods like this – and the volumes we eat them in – have become a major concern for medical experts in the last few years as consuming too many is associated with numerous health risks.

In fact, over half the British diet is made up of ultra-processed foods (UPFs), more than any other country in Europe, according to recent research ¹ in the British Medical Journal (BMJ). It's not always easy to spot a UPF. Mass produced items many of us think of as relatively healthy like breads, fruit-flavoured yoghurts and breakfast cereals are all UPFs, as are our favourite fast snack foods.

In fact, a quarter of us are eating healthy meals but undoing their benefits with unhealthy snacks like crisps, sweets, carbonated drinks and ice-creams, according to research ² published in September in the European Journal of Nutrition

By understanding what UPFs are and how they're processed and formulated by food companies to leave us wanting more, you can take the first steps toward breaking free. I've teamed up with Viridian to bring you this educational guide that will help you identify and weed out the UPFs in your diet.

An example of a healthy plate



1. <https://www.bmj.com/company/newsroom/new-evidence-links-ultra-processed-foods-with-a-range-of-health-risks/>

2. <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/news/quarter-people-unhealthy-snacking>

What's so bad about UPFs?

The last 12 months have seen an explosion of warnings about the health dangers of UPFs from researchers and food experts. Here's why:

- **They're junk** – UPFs are normally junk foods that are high in salt saturated fat and sugar which can increase your risk factors for disease.
- **They mess with your appetite** – consuming UPFs has been shown to disrupt satiety signals that tell us we're full after eating.
- **They're addictive** – UPFs are hyper palatable (in other words, super-tasty) and addictive as well as being marketed in a way that encourages mindless eating so we over consume them. This can encourage weight gain.
- **They replace healthier foods** – the more UPFs you eat in your diet the less space there is for fresh and nutritious food to be included in your diet.
- **They're low quality** – Ultra processing of food has changed the quality of everyday essentials that we buy such as bread and breakfast cereals. This depletes their essential nutrients and increases our intake of potentially harmful additives.
- **They affect your gut microbiome** – diets rich in UPFs are low in fibre which can impact on the diversity of bacteria in the gut. Certain additives like polysorbate 80 have also been shown to impact on the diversity of bacteria in the gut affecting digestion and the uptake of nutrients from food.

UPFs explained

Ultra-processed foods undergo extensive processing, containing ingredients not found in a typical home kitchen. These include extracted substances like processed fats and oils, hydrogenated fats and modified starches, and laboratory-made additives such as artificial flavours, colours, and emulsifiers. Overconsumption of UPFs can impact our weight, risks of type 2 diabetes, heart disease, inflammatory bowel conditions and some cancers (more on that later).

Different levels of processing – not all are unhealthy

Before you start thinking you have to roll your own oats, rest assured not everything that's processed will be a UPF. Foods have different levels of processing, some of which are not unhealthy. For example, frozen vegetables, freshly made real bread like sourdough bought from a bakery and canned legumes are all examples of valuable time savers that are still healthy despite being processed.

You may also worry about processed culinary ingredients like adding salt, sugar, vinegar or soy sauce to your cooking. But these are recognisable ingredients made of one thing and you use them to create homemade dishes, so they're fine.

This can all get confusing. To help you spot UPFs, it's useful to look at the NOVA food classification system developed by researchers at the University of Sao Paulo, Brazil. It puts food into four categories based on how much they have been processed.

Unprocessed or minimally processed foods:

- These are foods in their natural state or with minimal processing including fresh fruits, vegetables, grains, nuts, meats, and milk. Minimal processing might involve cleaning, freezing, or drying.

Processed culinary ingredients:

- These items are used to cook and season food but aren't usually consumed by themselves. They include things like oils, butter, sugar, salt, vinegar.

Processed foods:

- These foods are made by adding salt, oil, sugar, or other substances from group two to foods from group one. Examples include canned vegetables, fruits in syrup, cheeses, and freshly made breads. These foods are still recognisable as versions of their original plant or animal source.

Ultra-processed foods (UPFs):

- These are industrial formulations typically with five or more ingredients, including substances not commonly used in cooking. They often contain additives like colours, sweeteners, emulsifiers, and preservatives. Examples are soft drinks, packaged snacks, processed meats, and ready meals.

How to spot a UPF

76% of people want to avoid ultra processed foods but people are finding it difficult to identify what is and what isn't a UPF. In fact, over 60% of those surveyed by Viridian said this was their biggest challenge. The survey also found people are eating so-called 'healthy' foods, such as fruit flavoured yoghurts without realising these are ultra processed.

UPFs usually contain lots of ingredients, many of which you wouldn't find in an everyday kitchen. Look on the label for additives such as artificial colours, sweeteners, flavour enhancers, preservatives, and emulsifiers.

UPFs may also be fortified with micronutrients like vitamins B and D and the packaging may be brightly coloured and visually appealing perhaps with a few health claims. They will usually be ready to eat or instant types of foods, require very little cooking or be microwavable. They could also have a very long shelf life.

UPFs disguised as healthy

Many foods come with health claims like 'gluten free' or 'high protein' on the label along with marketing and sleek packaging but they're just UPFs in disguise. Check the back of the packet as the ingredient lists are normally long and contain many additives like emulsifiers, sugars and e-numbers. These include:

- Protein powders and bars
- 'Healthy' snack bars
- Pre-packed bread
- Low calorie or reduced fat foods
- High protein wholemeal bagels
- Lean ready cooked meat (usually flavoured)
- Savoury snacks like reduced fat crisps or those made from lentils or chickpeas
- Breakfast cereals
- 'Health' drinks and smoothies.

Protein bars for example, are often made with a lot of ingredients that most nutritionists wouldn't consider healthy. For example, the ingredient that gives them the chewiness that many people love is bovine collagen which comes from the parts of the cow we don't normally eat like tendons, skin and ligaments.

Why it's hard to stop eating UPFs

UPFs can make you even hungrier than before because of their high Glycaemic Index (GI) which means they break down quickly and glucose from them goes into our bloodstream and peaks within 30 minutes. But straight after that you get a drop to lower than your baseline so within less than two hours you're hungrier than you were before. It's that dip that makes you want more of the same that leaves you on a roller coaster of energy highs and lows – and cravings.

We've all heard straplines like the 'Once you pop, you can't stop' associated with popular brands of crisps. That moreishness is no accident – many UPFs have addictive qualities, potentially leading not only to cravings for more but also negative effects on mood and behaviour.

In fact, about 14% of adults across the world are addicted to food and UPFs play the biggest part in this, according to a systematic review of the research in the BMJ. 'The combination of refined carbs and fats found in UPFs seems to have a supra-addictive effect on brain reward systems, which may increase the addictive potential of these foods,' the researchers wrote.

How UPFs can be addictive

If you've ever beaten yourself up over not having enough willpower to resist a whole bag of crisps or packet of biscuits, it's helpful to know that many UPFs are made with specific formulations of sugar, fat and salt that promote their addictive effects.

The Yale Food Addiction Scale (YFAS)³ assesses consumption of foods rich in refined carbohydrates and added fats, such as sweets and salty snacks. These food categories are strongly associated with addictive behaviours, including excessive consumption, loss of control, intense cravings, and continued use despite negative consequences.

That's because that mix of refined carbohydrates and fats can trigger dopamine release in the brain's striatum which governs reward processing, akin to addictive substances like nicotine and alcohol.

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Those who ate the most ultra processed foods were 39% more likely to develop high blood pressure
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Let's look closer at how these foods are made to trigger addiction. UPFs often contain elevated levels of both carbohydrates and fats in relatively equal proportions. For instance, a 100g chocolate bar provides 237 calories from carbohydrates and 266 calories from fat (1:1 ratio). This combination of refined carbohydrates and fats, frequently found in UPFs, may have a synergistic effect on brain reward systems, potentially heightening their addictive nature.

The rapid delivery of carbohydrates and fats to the gut by UPFs may also contribute to their addictiveness. The processing and formulation of UPFs makes them easier and quicker to consume, more bioavailable, and potentially faster-acting on the brain's reward pathways.

3. <https://www.bmj.com/content/383/bmj-2023-075354>

Plus the presence of additives in UPFs, such as flavour enhancers for sweetness and savoury tastes and texturisers for improved mouthfeel, may add to their addictive potential.

What UPFs do to your health

Higher intakes of UPFs are associated with obesity, cardiovascular disease (heart disease and stroke), type 2 diabetes, inflammatory bowel conditions, depression, poor bone and muscle strength, dementia and certain cancers. A review of 43 studies⁴ published in the journal *Nutrients* carried out in 2020 found at least one of these adverse health outcomes associated with the consumption of UPFs in 37 of these research papers.

An occasional UPF here or there is unlikely to affect your long-term health. But when UPFs form a habitual part of your diet, they can cause serious health issues. Studies linking UPFs to poor health outcomes have found that the more you eat, the greater the risk.

One study⁵, carried out by the Fourth Medical Military University in China, involved pooled data from 325,000 people who were then divided into four groups depending on their daily intake of UPFs. Those with the highest intakes of UPFs were 24% more likely to develop heart disease or suffer a stroke or heart attack. Furthermore, for every 10% increase in the proportion of UPFs, there was a 6% increase in heart disease risk.

Another study⁶, carried out by researchers at the University of Sydney, followed 10,000 middle-aged women for 15 years and recorded what they ate. Those who ate the most ultra processed foods were 39% more likely to develop high blood pressure, significantly increasing their heart attack and stroke risk.

What makes these studies so relevant is that they found the risk of disease remained even after adjusting for saturated fat, salt and sugar. That suggests it was the additives and not just the nutrients in the food that were increasing the risk of disease.

7 practical steps to reducing UPFs in your diet

1. Look in your cupboards

Take a good look at what you eat and what's in your kitchen cupboards so you can see what your intake of UPFs is to begin with. From here you can start to plan your strategy.

2. Get prepared

Make sure you have the right equipment. Trying to do any of this without the right equipment could turn you off before you even begin. So, get the right storage containers, muslin cloths to strain sauces and invest in a high-speed blender or food processor to make things easier to prepare. You don't need to spend a fortune on this equipment, but it will make things much easier.

3. Make easy swaps

Replace fizzy drinks with carbonated water infused with fruit, lemon or lime or herbal teas. Opt for homemade vegetable crisps or nuts and seeds instead of crisps. Choose sourdough or homemade wholemeal bread over mass-produced packaged bread. Prepare homemade versions of ready meals and takeaways. Swap sugary breakfast cereals with homemade granola. Make snack bars at home using fruit, nuts, and oats.

4. Identify your weakest point

When during the day would you rely most on a UPF? This may be your work lunch, when you feed the kids or when you come in from work and can't face cooking. Try to work on this part of the

4. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32630022/>

5. <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2023/aug/27/ultra-processed-food-raises-risk-of-heart-attack-and-stroke-two-studies-show>

6. <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2023/aug/27/ultra-processed-food-raises-risk-of-heart-attack-and-stroke-two-studies-show>

day first. You could prepare a lunch for work or think about how to create something using simple ingredients you have bought such as roasted veg, canned pulses, and salad with olive oil and lemon juice that won't take too much time.

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Every 10% increase in UPFs
correlates to a
6% increase in heart disease

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5. Find and replace

Look at some of the UPF meals you cook on a regular basis and think about making your own homemade versions. Start with a couple of recipes and try batch cooking them for convenience and cost saving as cooking from scratch can be more expensive in some cases. This might be a homemade noodle dish, fishcakes, or curry instead of a ready prepared version or take away. Once it becomes second nature to make these yourself, they can become part of your go-to selection that you can whip up quickly. From here you can start exploring more dishes.

6. Make easy condiments

Try to make a few homemade condiments like hot sauce, pesto or tomato ketchup – start with the ones you use on a regular basis so they get eaten fairly quickly rather than sitting in the fridge.

7. Choose the least ingredients

There's no need to make everything from scratch as some shop-bought products are much better than others. Take plant milks for example – some are just the grain, legumes or nuts along with water and possibly a pinch of salt while others contain additives like thickeners and stabilisers. So read

the label and think 'less is more' with ingredients. If it's a sauce or a crisp you can't live without you may need to pick the best of a bad bunch so check the food label for the least UPF foods.

Maximise the nutrient content of what you do eat

Make sure what you choose to eat is as nutritious as possible. UPFs provide calories without nutrition. Your new way of eating will provide maximum nutrition from everything you eat.

Here are some ideas:

1. Throw frozen veggies such as peas or spinach or canned legumes into your dishes. These can increase the fibre value as well as nutrients like iron and magnesium. Keep these key foods in stock at all times.
2. Reduce the cooking time of foods or cook in different ways that retain the nutrients in food such as stir-frying or blanching.
3. Use herbs and spices in your cooking because these can add various nutrients to the dish including iron and calcium as well as other plant compounds with beneficial health effects.
4. Eat more plants. These are the foods that are bursting with nutrients and the more colourful the better.
5. Switch to wholegrain/wholemeal versions of foods like rice, pasta, bread, couscous as these contain higher amounts of fibre and other key nutrients.

Why Take Supplements?

Supplements. Do you need them, what's really in the ingredients and what do you need to avoid on the label?

Cheryl Thallon, Founder and Owner of Viridian explains how supplements can support our diet.

In an ideal world, we'd get all our nutrients from the food we eat but we need to understand three key things – the soil, our lifestyles and, finally, our health and health ambitions.

Firstly, the soil is so depleted of nutrients, food does not have the same value as it did for past generations. At Viridian we absolutely take a food first approach in our training, so in an ideal world you would eat all the nutrients you require to thrive. However, we know this is becoming more and more difficult with the depleted nutrient levels in the soil, meaning our foods are unable to provide the levels we used to be able to get back in the 1940s.

Secondly, while we all know we should eat well – seven fruit and veg a day, limit red meat, avoid processed meats and ultra-processed foods and so on, sadly we don't! There are many shocking statistics about the average diet in the UK, and clearly, huge numbers of people are living high-fat, high-sugar, highly processed lifestyles with little nutritional value. Even those of us who do try to eat well, move our bodies and generally make good choices often struggle with consistency, leaving gaps in our nutritional requirements.

Finally, stress, anxiety, depression, diabetes, heart disease, obesity and cancers are the killers of today and are increasing at alarming rates. Add to this list areas such as menopause, joint pain, eczema, digestive issues, and so much more, and you can easily see that complementary medicine is a lifeline for many who seek preventative supplements and those for natural treatment. Given just how stretched the National Health Service is, the ageing population, and the queues for appointments and treatments, plus the side-effects of pharmaceuticals, it's no wonder that the food supplement sector is in such demand.



What On Earth Goes Into Your Supplements?

Microbiologist and Registered Nutrition Practitioner Dr Carol Granger says not all supplements are created equal. As a consumer, understanding what you're taking will help you make the right choice.

Look on the labels of most supplements, particularly those from the supermarket and you will find a list of ingredients you won't expect, from additives to binders, lubricants to glues (yes, glues). And while about half the British population take supplements, how many of us know what's in them, really?

In fact, many commercial supplements contain a lot more than the active ingredients you're buying them for. Some may even contain foreign substances not listed and others may not contain what they say they do. For example, a 2018 report⁷ conducted in the US analysed three different supplements sold to help memory and found two contained none of the active ingredient. One of them contained unidentifiable chemicals not listed on the label that raised questions about its safety.

It's crucial to know exactly what is in your supplements. By asking some simple questions

before you choose a supplement, you can make sure it's effective, safe, pure and ethically produced. This guide has been created by Dr Carol Granger, a registered nutrition practitioner with a degree in biochemistry and a masters in microbiology to help you understand how supplements are made. Dr Granger has compiled a list of questions to ask yourself before you make a supplement choice.

Is it the right form?

The form of your supplement matters. Whether it's a tablet, capsule, liquid, spray or powder will affect the way your body will absorb it – and it could also signal the presence of not-so-healthy additions.

I have concerns when things are put into tablet form because it's not often the best way for the body to get them. Once in the body, tablets are absorbed more slowly than capsules and they're more likely to break down inconsistently. Capsules may also be more bioavailable, which can make them slightly more effective than tablets.

Tablets need more manufacturing and more ingredients to make them stable. So, in a typical tablet formulation you may also find lactose, colours and binders which are only there to help manufacturing.

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*A lot of added ingredients
in tablets
may be harmful*

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A lot of added ingredients in tablets are not useful to the body and some may be harmful.

7. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-19-23r.pdf>

My preference when I am recommending a supplement is always look for a capsule as the ingredients are more quickly absorbed by the body.

Sometimes a supplement will require something added to it if it's only a small quantity. For example, the amount of daily vitamin D needed is so small, it needs something to carry it. So, it's worth asking, 'is the added ingredient biologically useful, is it inert or has it got questions associated with its safety? That's where it's best carried in a natural compound. Viridian for example, use no tablet forms for their supplements and when making capsules, where the key actives are small, natural compounds such as alfalfa, which can be beneficial, are added.

When choosing a liquid supplement, preservatives, carriers or flavours are sometimes included to maintain product characteristics or shelf life, so whilst they may be convenient, they may not be ideal for all users. These can often be avoided by choosing oil based and alcohol formulations which are stable. Look for natural antioxidants which maintain the quality. Some fish oils for example, have a bit of rosemary oil added to them to help preserve them in a natural way.

As well as scouring supplement labels, consumers should get to know the brands they're buying (see the next section below), question them and find out exactly how their supplements are made and why they've chosen the additives they have.

There are additives found in common supplements that have no nutritive substances. Known as excipients, they have no health benefits and are only used to aid the manufacturing process or reduce the cost. While they're commonly used in the making of supplements, Viridian use none.

In the next section, we have created a guide to all the additives used in supplements today with their health concerns and how they're used. Here, I've chosen three common excipients and explained why they're a particular concern for me.

Magnesium stearate

Some ingredients on labels may sound healthy but they're not. A typical additive used in a lot of tablets is called magnesium stearate which is a white, water-grabbing compound that contains no magnesium, despite its name. It's used as a lubricant and binder because it grabs water from the environment so nutrients flow through machines easily during manufacturing.

There are some concerns about people who are taking a lot of tablets that contain magnesium stearate each day and its effects on their gut microbes in your digestive system. Other effects it has been associated with are allergic reactions in rare cases and reduced nutrient absorption.

Titanium dioxide

This is a common mined compound that gives tablets and capsules a uniform colour and also is used in paint. It helps make food and tablets more visually appealing. It's found in medications like painkillers as well as many foods like cheese, coffee creamer and icing (it can be listed on labels as E171) and it should be avoided.

The European Commission banned titanium dioxide as a food additive in 2022 after the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) looked at the substance and couldn't eliminate concerns about its safety. There are concerns that the particles of titanium dioxide can build up in the body and damage DNA or chromosomes, raising the risk of cancer. But it's not banned in the UK or US so it can still be found in supplements. Make sure you check labels to avoid titanium dioxide or E171.

Carrageenan

Despite being an extract from seaweed (sometimes listed as 'Irish moss') carrageenan, used commonly in the manufacture of capsules, has been shown to trigger inflammation. It negatively impacts digestive health and causes ulcer formation. So, if I had a client with bowel disease I would make sure they weren't taking anything containing

carrageenan. It has also been shown to increase levels of blood sugar and glucose intolerance.

See page 20 for a full list of excipients to look for.

Do you know the brand?

When you're buying supplements, it's critical that you can trust the brand you're buying from. We now know that some supplements may not be listing all the ingredients in their supplements (see above) or saying it's one thing when it's not. So, if you're buying because something is cheap or it has good reviews on Instagram, ask yourself whether you can really trust the company and trace the provenance of the product.

How can we ensure what we're buying is trustworthy? The reputation of the company, whether they adhere to good manufacturing practices, meticulous sourcing of ingredients and use of organic elements where possible are all important factors to consider when choosing a supplement.

5 questions to ask

According to the Viridian survey, over half of people find it confusing when trying to select a supplement. Senior Viridian nutritionist Aimee Benbow has created a detailed list of key questions on production process and ethics that will help you identify a supplement range you can trust and a full guide on what to look for on labels.

It's essential to dig deeper so you can understand if what you're taking is not only effective and safe, but also pure and ethically produced. You should be able to contact any company you're considering buying from by phone or email and ask them questions that will help you understand their production process and the standards they adhere to. Here's what to ask:

1. Where are the products manufactured?

The standards of production in the UK and Europe are a lot higher than most other countries so it's

best to look for products that have been made there. America (USA) has high standards but their organic certifications are a lot lower than The Soil Association, and it's often hard to know where things have been sourced. Also ask if supplements have been formulated by qualified nutritionists at therapeutic doses to ensure they are effective.

2. What quality standards do they follow?

There are manufacturing bodies that regulate and set national standards for companies to follow. Know what these are and make sure the brand you're buying adheres to them. Viridian for example, has been a member of the Health Food Manufacturers Association (HFMA) for 25 years and we adhere to the strict standards of Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) in the UK. When you buy items from other countries, they're not governed by the same rules. Additionally, it's worth asking about supplementary standards a company may work with, for example Soil Association or BRC accreditation.

3. Where and how do they grow and source ingredients?

It's important that a company can trace back all its ingredients and sources to prove that they are free of contamination (e.g. with heavy metals), grown in clean environments and safe. Many cheap ingredients are known to come from China for example, where standards are not always as strict. So, a company sourcing from there (or anywhere) should have a record to show the product's provenance and acknowledges that the requirements for safety have been followed at every stage.

4. Are any GMO ingredients used?

There isn't a specific certification to show that something doesn't use genetically modified (GMO) ingredients right now. So, you will need to ask the company to show you proof that it does everything it can to avoid them.

At Viridian, we have a questionnaire that goes out to every ingredient supplier. All suppliers fill these in so we can make sure that no

genetically modified compound is used at any point (sometimes a finished product could be labelled as GMO free but it has been through a process which used GMO ingredients at some point and we want to avoid this). GMO ingredients may be a particular concern for items sourced from or made in America or China.

5. What ethical standards do they adhere to and who owns the company?

Consumers often want to feel reassured that they're not contributing to less than ethical production processes by buying certain supplements. Many brands are now owned by big corporations or pharmaceutical companies and the ethos of the brand may have changed. An independently owned company will be able to maintain the original ethics and mission, putting these ahead of making profit for shareholders.

There are many facets to ethical operations and looking for certifications can be helpful, for example The Good Shopping Guide. Some of the key areas for Viridian are:

- No Palm Oil. We avoid palm oil because its manufacture contributes to deforestation. Our products all have the worldwide mark for Palm Oil Free Certification (launched in 2017) called POFCAP.
- Avoiding all animal testing at any point in the process. Unfortunately, many raw ingredients for supplements are tested on animals by the growers so you need to dig deep to find out.
- Soil Association certification. Over a third of our products are certified organic by the UK Soil Association.
- Eco packaging. Easy to recycle glass and card
- Donating to charity. Every bottle supports a contribution

So, whether it's sustainability, animal rights or something else, figure out what's important to you and ask the company for proof that they adhere to it.

What to avoid on labels

Many supplements contain additives that may raise questions about their purity and efficacy. Many people are not aware of these excipients, for example more than two thirds of people in the Viridian survey do not know what titanium dioxide or carrageenan are. Even when there is awareness, it's hard for people to avoid the additives. For example, over 40% of people know about flavourings and colourings but don't avoid them despite the potential negative effects. Here's a guide to knowing what to avoid and why from Viridian's senior nutritionist Aimee Benbow.

Whether it's an Instagrammer waxing lyrical about a new 'supernutrient' or sleek marketing designed to lure you in, it's easy to assume something is healthy because it says it is.

But additives like fillers, e-numbers, glues, lubricants and colours are routinely added to many commercial supplements. These substances have no benefits for the body but they make manufacturing easier, so mass production is quicker, cheaper and easier.

But now, just as more people scan food labels for unnatural ingredients, in 2024 we want more consumers to scrutinise their supplement labels – and the companies that make them – to see if what they're buying is a truly pure, healthy product.

At Viridian, our supplements contain ingredients that are 100% active and beneficial for the body.

To help you make smarter supplement choices, I've created this guide to the most common additives you'll find on supplement labels and the main health concerns associated with them.

PART TWO

Look at the labels on the back of your supplements and if you spot any of these, think twice before making the choice to take it.

References for paper trail only

	Manufacturing purpose	Nutritional effects
Magnesium Stearate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acts as a lubricant to increase the efficiency of the production process. • Prevents ingredients from sticking together. • Prevents blockages in the tablet machinery. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cumulative exposure could lead to a laxative effect ⁸. • May impact absorption of capsule or tablet content ⁹.
Ascorbyl Palmitate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Antioxidant food additive. • Preservative. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Derived from palm oil which leads to deforestation and destroying habitat of endangered species ¹⁰.
Aspartame	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sweetener. • Flavour enhancer for other sweeteners, fruits and fruit aromas. • Combination of the amino acids aspartic acid and L-phenylalanine. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A review of studies suggests that aspartame might be responsible for adverse neurobehavioral health outcomes ¹¹. • Disrupt the oxidant/antioxidant balance, induce oxidative stress, and damage cell membrane integrity, potentially leading to systemic inflammation and cellular function deregulation ¹².
Carrageenan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gelling agent. • Stabiliser. • Thickener. • Prevents powder clumping. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has been shown to activate the innate immune pathways of inflammation and negatively alter the gut microbiota composition and the thickness of the mucus barrier ¹³.

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	Manufacturing purpose	Nutritional effects
Croscarmellose sodium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disintegrant to speed release of the active ingredient. Stabiliser. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some people maybe allergic to this substance.¹⁴
Disodium Phosphate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primarily used as an anti-caking and bulking agent. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High levels of this excipient are used as a laxative prior to clinical colonoscopies.¹⁵ This is formulated alongside sodium phosphate as a prescribed laxative.
Methacrylic Acid Copolymer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Film-coating agent. Tablet binder. Eliminates smells (garlic). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An increased risk of colorectal cancer was reported in one group of workers highly exposed to MMA and ethyl acrylate (EA) in the manufacture of acrylic sheet.¹⁶ When exposed in the work environment, surgical staff have been reported to suffer from hypersensitivity, asthmatic reactions, local neurological symptoms, irritations, and local dermatological reactions.¹⁷
Titanium Dioxide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adjusts the colour of the tablet. Protects the active substances from sunlight. Prolongs shelf life. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> European authorities no longer consider it a safe food additive because of its genotoxic effects.¹⁸ Predominantly causes adverse effects via induction of oxidative stress resulting in cell damage, genotoxicity, inflammation and immune response.¹⁹

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	Manufacturing purpose	Nutritional effects
Potassium Sorbate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preservative. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A skin, eye, and respiratory irritant in pure form. It has also been shown to have genotoxic activity in vitro under some conditions, particularly at high concentrations or when combined with nitrates.²⁰ • Could exacerbate the complication of diabetes.²¹

Glues / Binders

Guar Gum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Binder. • Disintegrant. • Thickening agent. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May cause abdominal pain, flatulence, diarrhoea, and cramps. It has also been associated with oesophageal obstruction.²²
Xanthan Gum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emulsifier. • Stabiliser. • Thickener. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High intakes lead to abdominal discomfort.²³ • Associated with pro-inflammatory actions.²⁴
Palm Oil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carrier. • Prevents rancidity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High omega 6 content which disrupts omega 3/ omega 6 balance which associated with pro-inflammatory conditions.²⁵ • Sourcing leads to deforestation and destroying habitat of endangered species.²⁶

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26. 8 things to know about palm oil | WWF

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	Manufacturing purpose	Nutritional effects
Polydextrose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bulking agent. • Stabiliser. • Thickener. • Humectant. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High amounts can cause a laxative effect and lead to gastrointestinal distress.²⁷
Polyvinyl-pyrrolidone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anti-caking agent. • Binder. • Retains flavours and aromas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some people maybe allergic to this substance.²⁸
Lanolin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used as a lubricant. • Used for producing cholecalciferol (vitamin D) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sourced from sheepskin/ wool not vegan. • Some people maybe allergic to this substance.²⁹
Gelatin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used to thicken liquids. • Coating agent. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sourced from skin and bones of pigs or bovine, not vegan or Kosher. • Some people maybe allergic to this substance.³⁰

Colouring

Talc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anti-caking agent. • Makes white tablets white. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential asbestos still being present in talc³¹ and associated with some cancers.³²
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	Manufacturing purpose	Nutritional effects
E numbers – (E-129 (red), E-150c (caramel), E-133 (blue))	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Used to make capsules visually appealing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can cause hyperactivity in sensitive children.³³
Cochineal/ Carmine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Used for colourings of capsules. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Made from crushed insects, not suitable for vegans, vegetarians or those following a Kosher diet. Some people may be allergic to this substance.³⁴

Coating

Polyethylene Glycol 6000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coating agent. Stabiliser. Increases the absorption. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some people maybe allergic to this substance.³⁵ High levels of intake maybe associated with genotoxicity and degenerative changes to both the kidneys and liver.³⁶
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Introducing Viridian: Effective, Ethical, Pure

Viridian's Chief Executive Officer Holly Thallon-Steenson explains Viridian's values and its commitment to delivering the highest quality supplements to its customers.

Viridian was founded 25 years ago on the principles of purity, effectiveness and ethics. Our supplements contain no artificial ingredients whatsoever, they're not tested on animals and they're always made slowly, in small batches to strict manufacturing standards.

We're serious about helping people to improve their health and happiness through lifestyle, diet and appropriate supplementation. We're not a gimmicky, online, faddy brand or owned by a pan-global pharmaceutical company. We're an independent family owned and managed business. That's why our key stockists are specialist health food stores where you can get advice and support from highly trained and experienced staff.

There is a real lack of understanding when it comes to ingredients in supplements. In fact, nearly half the participants in the Viridian survey said they had no idea what certain

ingredients were in the supplements they're taking and 69 per cent said this made it hard to identify good quality supplements.

Much of that confusion comes from labelling. Mass-market supplements often have two ingredient sections on labels – one for the active ingredients you want, for example the nutrient or herb, and another that's a full list by weight of everything in the jar listing all additives, binders etc.

Viridian only has one list because all our ingredients are active and contain none of the substances that you find in mass market supplements.

Common additives in mass market supplements:

- Artificial colours
- Flavourings
- Sugar
- Artificial sweeteners
- Fillers
- Lubricants
- Preservatives
- Anti-caking agents
- Coatings
- Binders/glues.



To give you an idea of how prevalent these additives are, it's estimated that around 50% of a typical commercial tablet will be glues (binders). Additives like these are used to speed up the manufacturing and create consistency in look and taste.

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*Viridian supplements
are made of
100% active ingredients*

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Purity

We have a commitment to 100% active ingredients. That means every ingredient in every Viridian supplement has a positive benefit for the body. We also avoid manufacturing aids – known as excipients – like binders, additives or flowing agents (read more about this on page 19). In a nutshell, Viridian contains no nasties whatsoever. That's why we're the choice of so many nutritional therapists and naturopaths.

Our commitment to traceability goes right back to the fields and laboratories where our farming and extraction processes take place. We do regular audits all over the UK to establish and check the supply chain of ingredients and this also includes visits to Finland, Iceland, Germany, Ireland and America where our ingredients are grown. All our manufacturing is carried out in the UK.

Effectiveness

We base our formulations on ingredients that have peer-reviewed human research behind them showing they work and are safe. That means everything in our supplements has a strong scientific evidence-base to ensure it makes a difference.

We also have a team of highly-qualified in-house nutritionists advising our customers and formulators. Our own trials and studies have assessed the effectiveness of our formulations including products like Clear Skin, Repair 5 and vitamin D. The latter was a trial carried out at the University of Surrey which concluded supplementation with 600IU of Viridian vitamin D resulted in 100% of the participants having sufficient blood plasma levels, even though some were deficient at the start of the study.

Ethics

Ethics are at the heart of everything we do: packaging, organics, sourcing, supplier relationships and the way we care for our staff.

We're a Living Wage Foundation employer, we're committed to no-animal testing and we run the Viridian Charity Donation Programme which has so far donated over £600,000 to ethical causes

As a company we want to ensure we are kind to people and to the planet. We have always avoided palm oil. In fact, Viridian was the first supplement brand to be certified palm-oil free which was important to help us raise awareness of the deforestation that is a consequence of mass palm harvesting. A recent audit by Green Leaf provided accredited environmental certification after examining our operations, facilities supply, distribution, materials and the team.

Manufacturing standards

Viridian has been a member of the Health Food Manufacturers Association (HFMA) for 25 years and we adhere to the strict standards of Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) in the UK. On top of this every supplement in our range goes through a 130-point quality check which covers:

- **Formulation** - To ensure effectiveness
- **Ingredients** - Only the most ethical and effective sources. Never GMO.
- **Suppliers** - Partners who meet our ethical criteria, in particular, no animal testing
- **Manufacturing** - Compliance and safety
- **Purity** - 100% Traceable
- **Packaging** - Protective yet sustainable.
- **Accountability** - Certification and traceability of all batches

Organic Ingredients

Of the 230 supplements and topicals in the Viridian range, more than 70 are certified organic by the Soil Association.

We choose organic ingredients where they're available in the quantities we need (and where we can rely on continued supply) and these numbers are growing all the time.

Our passion for organic comes from a love of the planet. While there are studies that show organic foods are higher in nutrients, this difference is only seen in small doses when it comes to food supplements. For us it's all about ensuring the fields are chemical-free and that we're not encouraging intensive farming through sourcing our ingredients.

The best form for the job

Our range of over 230 supplements began in 1999 with just 24. Each new product is researched by our expert nutritionist team to decide on which form, formulation and presentation it needs. Some will be more available to the body as an oil, others as a capsule or powder.

You may notice that we don't have tablets in our range. While they're a popular way to take supplements and medicines, their manufacture usually needs chemicals, colourants and other artificial ingredients. Our exception is spirulina tablets which need no chemical additives to press into a tablet.

We base all our nutrient and herbal formulations on doses shown to be effective in clinical research and that can often require a dose larger than can be held in a capsule. In these cases, we use a powder form. For example, Viridian's Cherry Night is in powder form so the therapeutic dose is larger than will fit in a capsule. The powder dissolves easily and is convenient to drink before bedtime, rather than consuming several capsules.

Our nutritional oils are free flowing in 200 and 500ml bottles for convenience so you can add them to smoothies, salad dressings and soups.

Value

Viridian is not the cheapest range of supplements on the market and you may be wondering what the price reflects. We want to be completely transparent about this. Supplement ingredients can be purchased through brokers cheaply with little or no provenance.

Cheap items are usually packaged in plastic pots that do not best protect nutrients, low potency with poor quality forms of minerals and unverified or synthetically enhanced herbs. This can pose health risks for consumers and you can read more about this in section 2.

The worldwide raw material supply chain is fiercely competitive and corners are cut to make the cheapest commodities available. So, all the ingredients we source need to be scrutinised and third-party verified. In order to sleep soundly, I need to know that we are selecting the cleanest and purest ingredients with the right potency of actives. This often means longer growing times, more expensive ingredients and an added testing regimen, auditing programme and paperwork trail. Whilst this is reflected in our prices, it's how we ensure quality and why we offer a money back guarantee.

Money back guarantee

To make sure our customers share our confidence in our products, we offer a 100% money-back guarantee across the range. If any supplement fails to meet your expectations, simply return it to the store where you purchased and you will receive a full refund. Our entire range is manufactured in the UK using top ingredients from the four corners of the world. But you can reach out to us anytime by:

- +44 (0)1327 878050
- customer@viridian-nutrition.com
- Viridian Nutrition, 15-17 High March, Daventry, Northamptonshire, NN11 4HB

Test us, call Viridian and ask to speak to the owner (myself) and you'll get put straight through!



Exercise

Smart

Not hard

10 steps to effective exercise – the PT’s golden rules. Before you start an expensive new Instagram fad, get the basics of fitness right and find out what really works from trainer Will Duru

Every year, a wave of new exercise trends flood the fitness landscape, each promising the ultimate solution for weight loss and muscle building. But amid the flashy trends and quick fixes, personal trainers have relied on the same principles to get people into shape for years: effective cardio, mixed with a regular strength training, increased activity and a healthy diet. In this report, leading personal trainer Will Duru explains how to pare down your fitness to what works – minus the fads.

1. Accept there are no shortcuts

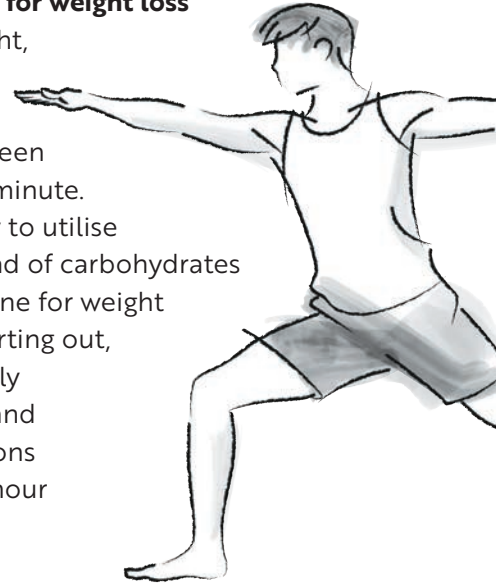
In the ever-evolving world of fitness, you get fads and you get enduring principles. As a personal trainer, people come to me every year wanting to lose weight and build muscle and for that the principles are the same. There are no real secrets and no short cuts, only what science and time have shown to work over and over again. So let’s look here at what works.

2. Identify your goal – then find the right principles and stick to them

The first step on the path to fitness success is identifying your goal. Understanding your objective allows you to choose the exact training principles that have been proven to work to achieve it. For the purposes of this guide, I’m going to imagine your goal is to lose weight and build muscle.

3. Do Zone 2 training for weight loss

In order to lose weight, you need to do cardio that keeps your heart rate between 120 and 150 beats a minute. This trains your body to utilise fats for energy instead of carbohydrates making it an ideal zone for weight loss. If you’re just starting out, begin with two weekly 30-minute sessions and build up to 3-4 sessions of 45 minutes to an hour every week.



4. Get your steps up

In addition to your structured cardio, you will need to get yourself moving more in your everyday life. The best way to do this is to focus on increasing your step count to at least 10,000 steps a day, ideally 15,000.

5. Avoid just focusing on cardio – mix it up for success

While cardio is a crucial component of any fitness routine, you should be including 45 minutes of strength training 2-3 times a week too. This can be weightlifting, working with resistance bands or your own body weight but it’s crucial to building muscle in your body. After the age of 30, you lose 3-8% of your muscle mass per decade. Muscle is essential to burning fat, so the more you can build in your body, the more calories you burn at rest. That reaps benefits for your resting metabolism and means your body is burning energy outside the gym too. This isn’t the case with cardio which only burns calories while you’re doing it.

6. Do compound strength training

Compound strength training is where you choose weightlifting moves that engage more than one muscle, ideally as many as possible. Squats, deadlifts, bench presses and bent over rows are essential examples of compound moves that any weightlifting programme should include as they use multiple muscle groups simultaneously. That

means you can get more muscles worked in a shorter time. The result is more fat burning and the faster development of a lean, toned physique.

7. Keep going for at least four weeks

Consistency is the essential ingredient in any effective fitness regime as it takes time and repeated efforts to really see results. You will have some days where you don't manage it and others where you do, and it's the sum of what you do the most that will count towards your result.

So, stick to any routine for 4-8 weeks before considering any modifications. The initial phase will be about building your comfort in lifting weights and perfecting your technique. After this initial foundation is laid, you can start introducing the idea of progressive training, where you introduce incremental increases in weight and intensity every four weeks. Any effective fitness routine will keep challenging you to lift more weight or do more reps or to progress in some other way so your body will quickly adapt, until a programme becomes easy. That's the time when you have to step it up.

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*There are no secrets,
only what science has shown
to work over and over again*

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8. Track your progress with photos

You need to measure your progress and to do this effectively you should utilise visual cues. Taking regular photos from front, back and side in underwear, swimwear or tight training gear helps track changes in your body composition over time. Additionally, hands-up side photos capture the progress of your obliques (the muscles at the side of your torso) too so you get a full view of

your fitness progress. It beats the scales because your weight may well go up as you gain muscle because muscle weighs twice as much as fat.

9. Notice your confidence increase

Beyond the physical transformations, you can also get motivated by the psychological impact of consistent training. Your increased confidence will be evident from better posture, more eye contact and a sense of increased overall self-assuredness – these are all tangible markers of progress that can keep you going.

10. Ignore Instafads and keep going

It's easy to get lured by 10 minute workouts or 5 minute abs flooding social media. These don't work. They're fads and designed to lure in users in search of a quick fix. Abs for example are not sculpted through isolated ab workouts but through an integrated approach focused on your entire lifestyle and overall body composition.

Achieving a significant shape change requires commitment and consistency to simple principles:

- More everyday movement
- Zone two training 2-4 times a week
- Strength training 2-5 times a week
- A healthy diet high in protein and complex carbs and low in sugar and processed foods.

Will Duru is a personal coach with over 10 years of experience in the health and fitness industry. He has a Bachelor of Applied Science in Sports and Exercise from London South Bank University and a Diploma of Education from Harvard Business School, focusing on the culture of health. He is skilled in sports nutrition, athletic training, and exercise physiology, and he uses his expertise to help clients achieve their wellness goals and potential.



Simplify Your Digital Life

The average person has 80 apps installed on their phone but uses only nine and a quarter of apps are used just once³⁷. If that sounds familiar, you may need a digital declutter, says digital detox expert Tanya Goodin

In our hyper-connected world, the constant influx of technological options we're faced with each day now has a name. Digital clutter is a term now growing in popularity and it refers to the growing stack of apps, emails, social media and other digital distractions that inundate our daily lives – and the Fear Of Missing Out (FOMO) we might feel if we ignore them. Not only is it reducing our productivity, it may also be harming our health.

Digital clutter and you

If you've ever wondered why despite endless meetings and emails, it now feels more and more impossible to get things done at work, you'd be right. A report by management institute McKinsey found that the average executive spent 28% of their day managing emails alone³⁸.

Having a digital declutter is one of the key things people are planning to do to dejunk their

lives in 2024, the Viridian survey found. That includes taking breaks from social media and decluttering their social media and emails with nearly half of people surveyed having started this before the year was out and a quarter saying it would be a big focus for them in 2024. This constant influx has also scuppered our ability to block out distractions, contributing to heightened stress and reduced mental wellbeing.

If you tend to split your attention across devices and platforms you may have also noticed a decline in your focus and concentration. According to research³⁹, published in 2018 on students using two or more digital media concurrently, that negatively impacted their attention, working memory, recall, note-taking and overall efficiency.

This has also meant lower attention spans. In fact, the average time we spend on one screen at a time was around 150 seconds in 2004. By 2023 that had dropped to just 47 seconds, according to psychologist Professor Gloria Mark, author of *Attention Span: A Groundbreaking Way to Restore Balance, Happiness and Productivity* (£22.58 Hanover Square January 2023). Her research also found that as people's attention in the workplace quickly switched from screen to screen so too their stress levels and blood pressure increased.

Why can't we stop? The dopamine effect

When former vice-president of Facebook user growth Chamath Palihaptiya⁴⁰ told a group of students at Stanford University, 'I feel tremendous guilt,' he went on to expose the tricks social media companies use to exploit our psychology and keep us coming back, one like at a time. 'The short-term dopamine-driven feedback loops that we have created are

37. <https://dataprot.net/statistics/how-many-apps-does-the-average-person-have/>

38. <https://hbr.org/2019/01/how-to-spend-way-less-time-on-email-every-day#:~:text=The%20average%20professional%20spends%2028,120%20messages%20received%20per%20day.>

39. <https://educationaltechnologyjournal.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s41239-018-0096-z>

40. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J54k7WrBfMg>

destroying how society works,' he explained.

Dopamine is a brain neurotransmitter that governs pleasure and reward. It's this brain circuitry that's set off when people take cocaine and when they gamble. We also get a spike of it when we get a like, DM or other piece of micro-validation on social media.

Since Pailhaptiya's famous speech in 2016, a growing body of scientific evidence suggests⁴¹ that social media and smartphone use affect our brains in similar ways to cocaine and gambling and that can contribute to loneliness and anxiety. The repetitive nature of checking notifications and the instant gratification received trigger dopamine release and contribute to psychological dependence and potential addiction. So, if you just can't resist one more check of Instagram/TikTok/Snapchat, that's why.

Practical strategies to reduce digital clutter

Unless you go off grid completely, today's world requires the use of technology, from smartphones to social media. But we can strike a balance between using digital tools that enrich our wellbeing and increasing the mindful spaces in our lives.

That's where reducing digital clutter comes in, says Tanya Goodin, a digital detox expert and author of *My Brain Has Too Many Tab Open: Untangle Your Relationship with Tech* (White Lion Aug. 2023 £9.99). You can't cut out your digital devices, but you can make sure what you use really works for you.

Here are Goodin's practical steps for simplifying your digital life.

1. Have regular clear outs

Digital hoarding is now a prevalent issue just like physical hoarding, especially if you're prone to FOMO, 2023 research⁴² in *Social Media & Society* found. We're accumulating files, apps, pictures and other digital 'noise' we never use, thinking we might need it one day. But that is crowding our minds; like living in a cluttered home (see section 6).

In 2024, we'll be maximising our smartphone and social media use with selective digitisation. That means challenging the idea that every aspect of life needs a digital solution and evaluating which areas would flourish using analog – yes analog – methods (see below).

For example, using Google Maps helps you get to where you're going without confusion. Whatever is working for you to actually do what you need to do can stay, what you don't use needs to go. And in some areas like reading, preserving memories and connecting with friends, analog methods might work better (see more below).

Go through your phone and desktop and ask yourself: 'What value is this adding to my life and how often do I use it?' Look at what you're trying to achieve and if it helps, keep it. If it's a time sucker or if it's on your phone or desktop not being used like an old piece of clothing, delete it. Repeat this process at least every 12 weeks and think of it as giving your digital space a regular tidy up.

41. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7246471>

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333774040_A_Research_On_Social_Media_Addiction_and_Dopamine_Driven_Feedback

42. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10447318.2023.2233139>

2. Make digital-free space

Introducing short breaks in digital engagement can improve cognitive wellbeing and help you get a sense of control. It's the constant flitting from one thing to another that impacts the quality of our work and leads you to feeling overwhelmed and chaotic. Make some digital-free space in your life by designating specific areas as tech-free zones.

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Short breaks in digital engagement can improve cognitive wellbeing

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You can start small by leaving your phone four metres or more away during times of focused working so you actually need to get up and check it. Once you have experienced the clarity working phone-free can bring, you can move onto putting it in your bag, another room or even switching it off.

Then, you can introduce specific digitally-focused times into your day. Schedule an hour of digital activity here or there between focused tasks when you can do what you want online from sending messages to posting on social media. Being proactive about your digital time will add to a feeling of control over it.

3. Have an overnight fast

Intermittent fasting (IF) is growing in popularity as an easy diet change that can help get results for weight loss and blood sugar control. There are various models that range from fasting for 12 hours after dinner and eating

for 12 hours (12:12) the next day to fasting for 16 hours and eating for eight (16:8).

Likewise, one of the easiest ways to get a true digital pause is by having an overnight digital fast. You can start by avoiding digital devices for two hours before bed and then waiting until breakfast to get back online.

A study published ⁴³ in 2021 in the journal *Clocks Sleep* found sleepiness decreased at night after using a smartphone. Looking at a phone first thing in the morning spiked unnatural levels of the stress hormone cortisol and that affected users' circadian rhythms, which govern sleep-wake cycles in our bodies.

Once you've experienced the positive benefits, you can extend your fasting window to stopping phone, tablet and laptop use after dinner until just before you start work or later. The key is to schedule in the time and make sure your technology is not the last thing you see at night and the first thing you see in the morning.

4. Go analog with bedtime reading

Ever noticed how reading a real book makes you

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Sleepiness, or the desire to sleep, decreased after using a smartphone

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sleepy? You're not imagining it. In the *Clocks Sleep* research ⁴⁴ above, users' nighttime production of melatonin – a hormone that induces sleep –

43. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7838958/>

44. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8740874/>

was elevated after reading printed material like a real book. It's a good reason to go analogue with reading matter, especially what you read at night. Plus, research from 2021 suggests reading before bed can even improve sleep quality.

Unfortunately reading on tablets has the opposite effect. Light-emitting electronic devices can expose you to stimulating blue light that can disrupt sleep, interfere with your production of melatonin and REM sleep, keep you awake for longer and even reduce your alertness the next day.

5. Make memories with real photos

When you're gone, do you think future generations will have your phone and regularly look at photos to remember you? Try reverting to analog photo albums which offer a more tangible legacy for future generations and are more likely to be remembered.

You can choose to only print limited pictures to save paper, of course. But there's no doubt about the deeper emotional connection people have with photographs and the lasting impact of the physical memories they make.

6. If you need to remember something – write it down

With a pen. Physically writing information down enhances memory retention compared with typing it into your phone or laptop. This is particularly helpful when it comes to information you need to act or recall upon later.

A study done on students tested one group that took laptop notes word for word and another group that listened and took selective notes on what was important with pen and paper. The latter were better at answering questions about

the information and also performed better in tests about the information a week later ⁴⁵.

7. Adopt a balanced social media diet

Why do you primarily use social media? Is it to keep up with ideas and news? Is it to enhance your professional network? Is it to scroll mindlessly and laugh at cat videos to give your mind a break (nothing wrong with that in small doses). Or, is it to get inspiration and how-to advice on things like make-up and beauty.

All of that is okay as long as you have made a choice about the social media you use that isn't just about being worried that you're missing out on something. Once you have decided on 2-3 key reasons you use social media, choose one platform for each and stick with that. Do you really have to be on every single social media option available? If yes, ask yourself whether it's serving your long-term goals or providing hits of instant validation that you could get in a more meaningful ways elsewhere, like from live meet ups with friends or family.

And remember to get proactive about your social media use by delegating time for it, rather than using it as a distraction. What might this look like? You may decide you love scrolling Instagram while you're on the train as it gives your mind a break after a hard day (nothing wrong with that in small doses). You might decide you love using LinkedIn for work, so spend 20 minutes on it over your morning coffee before you start work.

Reducing digital clutter isn't about removing all tech from your life, it's about making conscious choices to use what works for you and control the time in which you do it. And lose the rest.

45. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/a-learning-secret-don-t-take-notes-with-a-laptop/>

Clear Your Space Clear Your Mind

Clutter at home affects our productivity, mood and can even make us eat more, says organisational behaviour expert Dr Libby Sander. Here's a guide on why clearing up is good for you – and how to do it

Look around any room in your house. Is there a pile of papers here, a stack of clothes there or a collection of random things somewhere else that you've been planning to tidy up, repair or throw out for months? Is it making things around you look a little crowded?

Welcome to modern life. Here, the pace is so fast and busy there's no time for tidying and sorting. The casualty has become our living environments, where clutter has become an unavoidable part of our lives. When it's not about lack of time, it might be the 'I'll need it one day' conundrum keeping our spaces packed with things we don't use (or need).

In the aftermath of the pandemic, we're seeing an increase in clutter as people hold onto items they believe they might need in the future. But clutter has a cumulative effect on motivation impacting how we feel about our work, our home environment, and our overall satisfaction with life.

The Viridian 'No Junk' survey found that over a third of people really wanted to have a good 'clear-out' and declutter their homes and this was one

of the key activities people were planning to do to support their mental health in the year ahead.

From overflowing closets to chaotic kitchens, this accumulation of stuff can have a profound impact on our well-being and I have been researching this area for years. For this report, I've teamed with Viridian to bring you a guide on the multifaceted effects of cluttered spaces and the easy, practical strategies you can use to clear up quickly. Even if you're not the tidy type, the simple solutions will help you move into 2024 with more clarity, confidence and comfort in the space around you.

7 ways mess affects your brain

Picture this: you're chilling on the couch with a glass of wine, enjoying Netflix, but your eyes keep wandering to the kitchen table piled with unfolded laundry. It turns out, our brains crave order, and the sight of clutter can elevate stress, mess with your sleep and even influence your eating choices. Let's look at the science.

Increased stress hormones

There's a compelling link between clutter and stress levels especially for the female brain, according to fascinating American research ⁴⁶ that asked women to describe their home environments. It revealed that those who described their homes as 'cluttered' or 'unfinished' had significantly higher levels of cortisol, a stress hormone, in their bodies and more depressed moods throughout the day. Those that said their homes were 'restful' or 'relaxing' had lower cortisol levels and less depressed moods during the day.

Chronic exposure to a disorganised environment creates a persistent low-grade fight-or-flight stress response increasing the risk of long-term health issues such as heart disease and diabetes. The effects extend to sleep, with cluttered bedrooms correlating to difficulties falling and staying asleep.

⁴⁶. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/19934011/>

Unhealthy food choices

Studies have shown a connection between a messy environment and our eating habits, according to 2017 research⁴⁷ published in the journal *Environment and Behaviour*. In a controlled experiment, human participants put under stress ate twice as many cookies in a cluttered, messy kitchen compared to those in a quiet, organised space without disruption, who were more likely to opt for carrots! In fact, people who live in cluttered homes are 77% more likely to be overweight, according to research published in 2015 in *Comparative Psychiatry*.

Brain drain

Here's why when your house is messy, a little voice in your head may hound you with taunts of: 'Tidy up, you slob'. Our brains inherently crave order and logic and the presence of clutter creates cognitive overload and drains your working memory⁴⁸. Not only does it drain our mental energy it also triggers a persistent urge to restore order. This biological mechanism can interfere with relaxation and contribute to a feeling of constant background stress. Multitasking, which neurologically speaking is akin to navigating through clutter, further intensifies the strain on our brains, leading to increased anxiety and depression.

Overwhelm and procrastination

The more it piles up, the bigger the problem feels right? Clutter makes you feel overwhelmed and can also make tasks seem insurmountable the more it gathers. This sense of being physically and mentally exhausted by clutter often leads to procrastination, which hinders productivity and leaves you feeling generally unsatisfied with your life. That constant delay in dealing with clutter can create a negative feedback loop, affecting various aspects of our lives.

Lack of control

Clutter isn't just a visual nuisance; it can also influence our ability to control impulses and regulate emotions. Studies suggest that living in a cluttered space may contribute to irritability and trouble managing your emotions.

Lack of emotional perception

Clutter might even lead you to misinterpret the kind of mood someone is in. A 2016 study⁴⁹ for example, found that people in cluttered environments were less able to interpret the emotional expressions on the faces of characters in a movie.

Dissatisfaction with our lives

Cluttered home environments can make us perceive our homes as not good enough and also decrease our overall satisfaction with our lives, according to research⁵⁰ published in the *Journal of Environmental Psychology* published in 2016 found. The researchers said that's because we view our homes not just as somewhere to live but a 'broader constellation of experiences, meanings and situations that shape us.'

Clutter or hoarding – what's the difference?

We've all seen those programmes where people can't get into a room because of their newspaper or DVD collections. That's hoarding and it's different from clutter in many ways.

47. <https://news.cornell.edu/stories/2016/02/kitchen-mayhem-can-be-diet-killer-study-says>

48. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2711870

49. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4819543/>

50. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0272494416300159>

3 things that happen when you clear up

More positive outlook

Clearing clutter goes beyond mere aesthetics; it has profound effects on mental health. Creating a clear space can alleviate stress, improve focus, and enhance overall well-being. As individuals experience the benefits of a decluttered environment, the positive effects extend to various facets of life, creating a ripple effect of positivity.

Better relationships

A clutter-free environment positively influences how we perceive and interact with others. That means the simple act of creating a harmonious living space can help you foster healthier relationships and reduce unnecessary stressors.

Improved productivity

The removal of visual distractions from your eye line allows for better concentration and cognitive function. The resulting mental clarity means you can approach tasks with more efficiency and a sense of calm, leading to improved productivity.

While clutter might make your living spaces a bit disorderly, hoarding takes it to a whole new level. Hoarders accumulate items to the point where rooms become unusable. Unlike cluttering, hoarding is a diagnosable mental illness, and those affected often find it challenging to recognize the issue.

People with hoarding tendencies often struggle with decision-making related to discarding items. This difficulty arises from a deep emotional attachment to possessions and a perceived inability to part with them. On the other hand, clutter may result from indecision, a lack of storage space, or simply an accumulation of items over time.

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*Studies suggest
that clutter contributes
to irritability*

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So, if your kitchen counter or dining table is a bit crowded, you're dealing with everyday mess; if you can't walk through your living room, it might be time to seek professional help.

5 easy ways to clear clutter that can make a big difference

Need more motivation? Think of decluttering as an investment in future rewards. Reminding yourself of the buzz you'll get from coming home to a neat and organized space can positively impact your daily experiences. So, make these small efforts now to create a more enjoyable living environment later.

1. Start with micro-goals

The best way to declutter is in small steps as doing it all at once can be daunting. Breaking the process into micro-goals makes it more manageable. Instead of attempting to declutter an entire space, focus on small, achievable tasks. For example, start with a five-minute session of cleaning, such as doing the dishes or tidying a specific area like

that pile of washing that's been on the armchair for two weeks. Micro-goals provide a sense of accomplishment and give you hits of satisfaction which helps gradually build momentum.

2. Opt for pleasure-based decluttering

What are you into? Is it make-up or cooking or making model motorbikes? The chances are you have accumulated a bunch of stuff in this area. Start there as it will bring you a sense of accomplishment and usefulness by making it easier to do something you love.

Choosing a decluttering task that brings pleasure can be a powerful motivator. Whether it's organising your makeup, creating an aesthetically pleasing pantry, or revamping a workspace, the enjoyment derived from the process enhances the likelihood that you'll do more decluttering projects. Pleasure-driven decluttering transforms the task from a chore into a rewarding experience that makes your life easier.

3. Use routine-based decluttering

Incorporating small but regular bits of decluttering into your daily routine establishes consistency. The five-minute rule is about dedicating a brief period each day to tidying up and it can indeed be as little as five minutes. Doing it at the same time everyday fosters habit formation so it starts to get easier and more automatic over time, like brushing your teeth. Additionally, establishing designated times for decluttering tasks, such as organising before bedtime, reinforces the routine. That kind of consistency is key to preventing clutter from accumulating over time.

4. Get accountable with before and after pictures

You know that feeling of satisfaction you get after tidying a room? You can maximise that by documenting your decluttering progress through before-and-after photos. It serves a dual purpose. First, it gives you a visual representation of your achievements, reinforcing a sense of accomplishment. Second,

sharing photos within online decluttering groups creates a supportive community where individuals can exchange tips, encouragement, and celebrate each other's successes.

5. Try the 12-12-12 list

The 12-12-12 method simplifies the decision-making process during decluttering. Identify 12 items to throw away, 12 items to donate, and 12 items to find a place for somewhere at home. This approach allows for a focused yet flexible approach to the decluttering process that doesn't overwhelm.

Dr Libby Sanders is assistant professor of organisational behaviour at Bond University, a fellow of the Australian Institute of Management, the founder and director of the Future of Work Project, founder of Rethink, past chair of Goldspaces, an urban renewal and cultural development platform, and an agenda contributor at the World Economic Forum. libbysander.com

Free Up Your Brain Space From Mental Clutter

Even the smartest minds can get crowded and that affects productivity, mood and creativity. Here's an action plan for clearing your mind everyday from cognitive neurologist Professor Hana Burianova

Do you ever feel like you're drowning in a sea of information and responsibilities? The constant buzz of pings and notifications, the pressure to multitask and get things done and the expectation of immediate responses can lead to a phenomenon that neurologists call cognitive overload. It's a bit like having a cluttered home, but it's your mind not your kitchen that's crowded to the brim. That takes its toll on your emotions, your mood, your creativity and more.

In this report, we'll delve into the signs and symptoms of mental clutter, explore how it impacts your brain and behaviour, and reveal the science behind the brain's need for breaks. Then I'll show you easy, practical steps to identify and reduce your mental clutter, allowing you to think more clearly and reclaim space in your mind.

Is your brain overloaded?

Cognitive overload is common, especially in today's multi-platform world where various channels compete for our attention. Often referred to as mental clutter, it manifests in various signs and symptoms. These include:

- **Difficulty concentrating** – struggling to focus on tasks or losing track of information.
- **Memory issues** – challenges with both short-term and long-term memory.
- **Mental fatigue** – feeling excessively tired and drained after short periods of work.
- **Brain fog** – experiencing a sense of haziness and confusion.
- **Emotional disturbances** – increased irritability, anxiety, and feelings of inadequacy.

Look out for any of these signs so you can identify when your mind is approaching the brink of cognitive overload and take some of the steps below to reduce it.

Your limited cognitive space

Your working memory, a crucial aspect of cognitive function, has limited space. This limitation extends to your attention span, your sensory perception (how you experience the world), and even your decision-making processes (which is why you might get indecisive about small things like what to have for lunch during a particularly stressful time). Just like an overloaded computer, your brain needs constant refreshing to prevent a crash.

Taking breaks isn't merely about rest; it's a strategic act of regenerating cognitive resources. Prolonged focus without breaks strains the brain's neural networks, like overworking a single muscle in a workout.

Here's another key reason you need breaks. Your autonomic nervous system has two branches. First, the sympathetic which is about

arousal and focus and uses stimulating stress hormones like adrenaline and cortisol. Second, the parasympathetic which underscores the importance of balancing arousal with regeneration; it's the 'rest and digest' side of your nervous system. Much like you need the post-arousal recovery after physical exertion, real mental regeneration requires intentional breaks throughout the day, not just during prescribed lunch hours.

The length of the ideal focus period without interruption will be different for everyone. While there's no one-size-fits-all answer, recognizing when your brain is getting too full by spotting the cognitive fatigue signals listed above is helpful. This rhythm of break and focus is essential for working in a place of 'flow' where you can do your best work.

How long to take? This will depend on the depth of the task you're working on, according to significant research⁵¹ published in 2022 in the journal PLoS One. The systematic review found that ten minute breaks were helpful for general wellbeing when the task wasn't too demanding for the brain. But when it came to performance, the longer the break, the greater the impact. That means to really recover from a mentally depleting task, your brain needs breaks of longer than ten minutes.

10 practical ways to reduce your mental clutter

Now that you understand cognitive overload and why you need breaks, let's explore practical steps to reduce mental clutter and foster clearer thinking.

1. Clear the junk food from your mind's diet

Social media, negative self-talk, and excessive exposure to distressing news are like cognitive ultra-processed foods, depleting your mental resources without offering substantial nourishment. That can leave

your brain overcrowded and exhausted when you need it for essential focus.

2. Cut back on your social platforms

Do you really need X (Twitter), Facebook, Instagram, Tik-Tok, Whatsapp, Snapchat and LinkedIn, or can you edit these down to 2-3 that really serve your values and goals? According to research published in 2022, the more social media platforms you use, the more you risk cognitive overload.

The study⁵² which appeared in Computers in Human Behaviour found that multiple social media platform use was associated with depression and anxiety and reductions in subjective wellbeing. 'This could be in part because frequent users may replace face-to-face contact with social media interactions,' the researchers said. 'They may also face highly curated, unrealistic portrayals of other people's lives that suggest others are living happier, more connected lives and may make people feel more socially isolated in comparison.' Sound familiar? You know what to do.

3. Set time for specific tasks

Rather than mindlessly consuming information, focus on tasks with clear intentions and slot them into your diary with time frames. There's nothing wrong with a bit of social media, but do it in moderation, for short, set periods and later in the day after you have achieved more important work. For example, schedule 30 minutes at 4pm to catch up on social media, don't interrupt your work on an essential report to check your Instagram likes. Consider setting specific times for checking emails and messages too, allowing uninterrupted periods of focused work.

4. Take regular breaks to refresh your mind

Encourage the establishment of regular breaks during the workday. While the ideal break frequency may vary, the Pomodoro method, a time

51. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9432722/>

52. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0747563216307543>

management technique that gets you working in focus and break sequences throughout the day is a great place to start. Set your timer for 25 minutes, and focus on a single task until the timer rings. When your session ends, mark off one pomodoro and record what you completed. Then enjoy a five-minute break. After four pomodoros, take a longer, more restorative 15-30 minute break. Easy. And it works.

5. Practise mindful unitasking

It's been proven time and again, multitasking doesn't work and can be more mentally taxing and less productive than concentrating on one task before moving on to the next. Embracing cognitive health involves choosing what you're going to do and engaging with it fully, rather than mindlessly consuming information from different sources or switching tasks constantly. Unitasking, or focusing on one task at a time, is an essential practice for cognitive health and can help you perform better, understand and retain information and be more focused.

6. Have micro-breaks

Incorporate micro-breaks into your routine, especially during screen-intensive tasks. This can be as quick as briefly looking away from the computer screen, resting your eyes, and taking a moment to refocus before coming back. But ideally it's getting up and moving around for at least ten minutes, for example with a quick walk. Sometimes these are called 'movement snacks' and they have also been shown⁵³ to curb hunger.

7. Embrace cognitive white space

We all want to maximise productivity. But as a result we may neglect the power of cognitive white space; moments of mental emptiness or daydreaming. Periods of doing nothing much are essential and should be scheduled in too as they allow different cognitive networks to activate, especially those that foster creative thinking or

out-the-box solutions. It's why you might get your best ideas whilst in the shower or out for a walk. Your brain thrives and renews during moments of no pressure reflection so make time for them.

8. Make routine activities mindful

Take the things you have to do as part of your regular routine, brushing your teeth, commuting or cooking dinner and use these moments to be more present. Really focus on doing the activity, and the activity alone. This will train your mental muscle for unitasking and help you clear your mind at regular intervals refreshing you mentally.

9. Use your leisure time to destress

Binge-watching Netflix will have a less renewing effect on your mind, say, than taking a hike in a green environment. So, during leisure times, make sure you opt for activities that engage and relax the mind and really take it elsewhere, like reading, spending time in nature or with animals, engaging in creative pursuits or hobbies that bring you joy or having face-to-face interactions with people you like. Not scrolling social media.

10. Do things that lift your mood

Making sure you choose 'immersive' pursuits that use all your senses will boost your mood too. This is essential to fostering focus when under stress, according to research⁵⁴ published in 2013 in the *Frontiers of Psychology*. The study found that when people who experienced low mood were put under stress, they engaged in more distractions and made more mistakes than those who started in a good mood and were put under the same stress.

Maximise your time by doing less

Almost half the items on our to do lists never get done. By identifying what you don't need to do, you can focus more on things that matter says organisational psychologist Zana Everett.

53. <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/321660>

54. <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2013.00730/full>

Are you known as someone who gets things done? Or, are you stuck in an ever-growing sea of to-be-done actions that most often end up on tomorrow's list?

You're not alone. Research ⁵⁵ by idonethis in 2021 found that while two thirds of us write to do list, over 40% of the tasks don't get done. That suggests that, when it comes to being effective with our time, our trusted to do lists aren't doing their jobs.

What's the alternative? Ironically, few of us have time for elaborate time management systems which are only used by one in eight of us, according to Timewatch. In fact, 88% of us make do with a calendar, our email inbox, a to do list or we make it up as we go along.

That research also concluded that most of our to-do lists were just too long. So, what if the opposite were true – that doing less could help you achieve more every day?

Zena Everett is the author of *The Crazy Busy Cure: A productivity book for people with no time for productivity books* (£10.99 Nicholas Beazley, August 2022) and she believes just that.

Her motto is 'Just don't do it'.

Our days are so drowned in a sea of notifications, messages and endless tasks that we're overwhelmed and perpetually distracted, says Everett, a leadership coach and organisational psychologist. Having too much to do can lead to daily feelings of failure when you don't get through it all.

So, imagine the satisfaction of having fewer tasks, but actually finishing them? Here, Everett shares her insightful wisdom and brings you simple, practical steps for doing less and achieving more.

Have you fallen into the crazy busy trap?

It's the feeling of having so much to do that you never get anything done, or saying yes to so much that you regularly end up exhausted. It feels chaotic. And it may knock your confidence as you may cancel and back out of things you really want to do because of overwhelm and fatigue.

Take this short quiz to see if you've fallen into the crazy busy trap. Tick all that apply to you:

- You have so much to do that you can't get anything done
- You over commit and find it hard to say no
- You are always 'on', connected, but deep down you feel disconnected from the people that matter to you
- Your colleagues, friends and family often say how busy you seem.
- You can barely find time to think, let alone think strategically.
- You feel you fit all your own needs and priorities around those of everyone else.
- You spend the least amount of time on the one priority that would have the greatest potential impact. That really bugs you but you haven't got time to figure it out.
- You also have an idea for something that could be a real game changer but you haven't got time to think it through.
- Your calendar is full of meetings. You haven't got any time to switch from one to the other or prepare properly.

55. <https://app.idonethis.com/docs/The-Busy-Persons-Guide-to-the-Done-List.pdf>

- Email is the bane of your life. Your inbox has become your to do list.
- You have more or less given up getting anything meaningful done during normal working hours because you are interrupted so often.
- You feel guilty when you delegate to busy people.
- You rarely eat lunch at lunchtime and usually graze in front of a screen.
- You like to fix things for other people and make things better. It's important that people like you.
- You get anxious if you don't respond to emails and texts immediately.
- Life feels overwhelming and you have a sense that it is passing you by. It's certainly not as much fun as it used to be.

Ticking any of the above boxes suggests you have challenges with your time management and could benefit from the advice in this article. But if you have ticked ten or more, busyness may have become an addiction for you. Decide the way you work isn't working for you anymore and take some the steps below to change it.

1. Edit your distraction channels

How many times do you check your phone when you're trying to work through a task? Whether it's the Whatsapp group for your child's school, that shopping app having a sale or your relative in Australia saying 'hi' – those pings are like junk food for your brain.

The rise of technology has created so many distracting communication channels for us that focused work – that feeling of flow when you're so steeped in a single task that time flies – becomes almost impossible.

Notifications, emails, what's app, Slack and social media give us the illusion that we're keeping with the entire world – called 'asynchronous working'. But in reality the constant interruption means we rarely get to do the kind of deep work that leads to impactful results.

In fact, constant interruptions impede your progress towards specific goals. The result is constant overwhelm and – because our brains have limited capacity – no cognitive space to do the things that matter.

2. De-prioritise what doesn't matter

If you're overwhelmed with extra tasks at work go back to your job description and let that clarify your priorities. Ask yourself 'What am I being measured on?' and then prioritise those things that get you further in that and remove yourself from social committees or anything that doesn't fit in with your goals.

You can also do that in life too. Think about what stage you are in your life and what one most important area is for you right now. It could be work, social life, family or health – make all of that a priority and you risk spreading yourself too thin and doing none of it well, known as 'four burner syndrome'. Ask yourself which of those areas are most important for you right now and then plan your time to reflect that. For example, if right now getting healthy matters most to you, going to the gym might take priority over other areas.

3. Move your phone away when you're working

In 2023, employees around the world wasted an average of eight hours a week on their mobiles. But just having your phone nearby can lead to a decline in cognitive capacity and make it harder to problem solve and remember things, even if it's turned off or face down, according to research ⁵⁶ from the University of Toronto.

The researchers said the most effective way to reduce phone distraction was to plan to have protected periods of time where your phone is in another room, or at least in your bag.

4. Stop responding immediately

Is it really essential to respond to everything straight away? Most people can accept up to 24 hours without a response.

Train yourself to focus on one task at a time by turning off all notifications. Then, minimise your use of whatsapp groups (or consider muting them) as the constant pings that cut into your work flow can impede working memory, according to research. Then, allocate specific 2-3 30 minute time slots in your diary daily for checking and sending messages. Find out more in section four: Simplify your digital life.

5. If it doesn't serve your goals, don't do it

This is actually an idea taken from property management where a building is considered for the best way it can be used in an environment.

Everytime you get a task – and this especially relates to those daily curveballs we all get – ask yourself, 'Is this the best use of my time?' Go back to what we discussed in number two about what matters most to you. If the answer is yes, then do it but always think 'What is not

getting done because I'm choosing to do this.'

If it's not the best use of your time, an easy way to say no is 'I don't have capacity/bandwidth for that right now I'm afraid.'

6. Let yourself get bored

If we're de-processing our lives, we need to understand the value of doing nothing.

But if you're someone who feels like they always need to be doing, the time in between tasks can feel like a waste. But boredom is essential for creativity, research ⁵⁷ in 2022 looking at people bored during the pandemic found.

There are two types: superficial boredom – the kind when you're waiting for a bus or not engaged in a conversation – and profound boredom, the kind that happens when you've spent time alone with little to do. It's the latter that can lead to more creative thinking and it's not wasted time.

'Profound boredom may sound like an overwhelmingly negative concept but, in fact, it can be intensely positive if people are given the chance for undistracted thinking and development,' said researcher and study co-author Dr Timothy Hill.

For example, take your commute which can often feel boring and useless. It can also be invaluable downtime for mental processing, generating ideas and giving your brain a rest to help you punctuate the boundary between work and home.

So don't pressurise yourself to learn a language, listen to an e-book or proofread that presentation during your commute time or when you've got nothing to do. Staring out the window could be just as beneficial.

56. <https://hbr.org/2018/03/having-your-smartphone-nearby-takes-a-toll-on-your-thinking>

57. <https://www.bath.ac.uk/announcements/social-media-may-prevent-users-from-reaping-creative-rewards-of-profound-boredom-new-research/>

7. Block out tasks not time

One of the most common ways people choose to manage their schedule at work is by blocking focus time in their diaries. But this doesn't work for everyone, because people in their organisations inevitably override it with meetings.

But people fall into two styles of daily organisation: task-focused and time-focused, 2019 research⁵⁸ published in *Current Opinions in Psychology* shows. If blocking out time hasn't worked for you, you could name the specific task or event you're doing as a time window and do this weekly for every task you need to complete that week.

In fact, listing all your tasks on a Sunday evening and then blocking time out for them in the week is one of the key ways time management pioneer Steven R Covey suggests getting more done in his classic *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*.

8. Schedule available time, not focus time

If you find people at work always cut into your focus time by scheduling meetings into it, try another tack and only schedule the times when you are available for meetings. That sends a polite but clear message that the other times are off limits, especially if they're already allocated to completing tasks (see above); a subtle way of saying 'I am actually working on X so back off my diary.' It's hard to argue with that.

9. Do one thing at once

Our brains are not wired for seamless multitasking. Constantly switching between tasks not only hampers efficiency, it also diminishes the joy you can get from deep work and that flow state we mentioned earlier.

Research⁵⁹ published in the journal *Nature* in 2020, found that multi-tasking was associated with forgetfulness and attention lapses and earlier research⁶⁰ has found it can impact our ability to retain information (working memory).

For optimal performance, focus on one thing at a time. If it feels difficult at first, remember focus is like a muscle. The more you use it the stronger it gets.

58. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S2352250X1830040X>

59. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7644608/>

60. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4733435/>

Edit Your Relationship

Like our cupboards, our relationships gather unnecessary stuff. Couples therapists Matt and Sarah Davies explain some of the ways you can restore harmony to your relationship and get back to the basics of what works.

Like junk builds up in your cupboards, grudges and resentments can accumulate in your relationships, causing emotional stagnation and forcing us apart. But just like we refresh our computer browsers, our relationships need a reboot now and again, say Matt and Sarah Davies relationship experts and co-authors of *You, Me and the Space Between Us: How to Rebuild Your Relationship*

Matt and Sarah have put together this guide to the things healthy couples do and don't do as well as the techniques they have found work for their clients to help rebuild the love, desire and bond between people in long-term relationships.

Get vulnerable to clear resentments

Normal day to day resentments can usually be cleared when both partners are able to voice their irritations to each other and respond appropriately, with respect and empathy. But sometimes there are bigger 'never again' moments when one partner feels so let down that they vow to never trust the partner again, harbouring anger and hurt that turns to bitterness. Betrayals and breach of trust, such as affairs and gas-lighting cause what are called 'attachment injuries' by therapists.

These are wounds that cut deep into the betrayed partner's psyche, giving rise to the 'never again' vow. These injuries are much more difficult to heal. The betrayed partner needs to be willing

to express the deep hurt and fear that often accompanies the sense of having your reality shattered by a partner you thought was reliable and trustworthy. The partner that causes the injury needs to be open to the other's anger and sit with the discomfort of hearing their hurt and then empathising with it. Importantly they need to take responsibility for their actions and apologise for causing the hurt. In addition, they also need to show the hurt partner that they have understood the significance of what happened by implementing strategies to assure the hurt partner that the behaviour will not be repeated. This also includes explaining the faulty narratives that the wounding partner was operating under at the time.

For example, one of our clients faced what therapists call an 'attachment injury' when she was rushed to hospital with severe chest pains and her husband prioritised finishing a round of golf. In that moment she feared for her life, alone and abandoned. The healing process involved her expressing her feelings of utter vulnerability and dependence and the overriding fear she faced when she realised the partner she thought would always be there for her did not come when she called. The partner who caused the hurt has to drop defensiveness and empathise with these feelings in his partner and show her his remorse. He has to do his own internal work to understand why he had prioritised golf over her and examine his thought process behind his actions. It is in the real and raw contact between both partner's feelings that they can be validated and soothed. This vulnerability for both people was essential for gradually repairing the hurt and rebuilding trust over time.

Accept the mess

There's no conflict-free relationship. Partnerships are inherently messy and embracing that is crucial for clarity. Many of us think we should have the perfect relationship where fights and misunderstandings don't happen. But it's a fairy tale to imagine there won't be problems when two individuals are navigating their lives together, either

that, or it's likely that issues are being avoided by one or both partners. What can help is to clear the mess fast with the quick resolution of issues. Some of the techniques here can really help with that.

Take a quick 5-point temperature reading

It can be hard to know where to start when it comes to bringing up issues. There's a powerful tool for this from famous family therapist Virginia Satir. Known as the 'Daily Temperature Reading', you run through these five points everyday as a way of taking the relationship's temperature, showing appreciation and dealing with resentments early. Here's how it works:

1. **Appreciations** – something you appreciate about the other person or something that they did.
2. **New information** – something you haven't ever shared with your partner, big or small.
3. **Puzzles** – something that you're struggling with or thinking about.
4. **Complaint** with a request for change – ask for what you need.
5. **Wishes, hopes, and dreams** – something you're looking forward to.

When running through the points, be as specific as possible. Instead of saying 'You look nice today' for number one, try 'I love your hair like that, it really sets off your features.' A structured approach like this can take as little as ten minutes a day and it's a great way to show gratitude and counter the constant criticism that can erode a relationship.

Leave some things alone: the 80/20 rule

One of the ways you can clutter your relationship is by overcommunication. Talking through every minor issue can be exhausting and counter-productive as not every issue needs immediate resolution or any resolution at all. Nutritionists often talk about the 80/20 rule where you follow a good diet for 80% of the time. We recommend the same thing

with relationships. If 80% of the relationship is satisfying, the remaining 20% can be tolerated.

Get away from the idea of 'the one'

Often people that believe in 'the one' can let the dissatisfying things in that 20% be the thing that makes them move on. But the idea of 'the one', 'the twin flame,' the 'soulmate' or whatever is a myth. There are lots of 'ones' but no fairy tale people or relationships and people who expect perfection tend to leave relationships and hop from one relationship to another. Whether you're single, dating or coupled up, this is helpful to keep in mind.

Stay different

Embracing and celebrating your individuality is essential to keeping desire alive. We call this differentiation, where partners embrace their differences instead of striving for complete alignment and it allows for passion and eroticism to thrive.

Think about it. It's our differences that bring us together originally, because we're attracted to this mysterious, amazing person we've met and all their funny, quirky behaviours. But later those are the things that drive us apart because over time we start to go into what therapists call a 'merged' situation. This is where we get closer and closer and want to become one and it's often inevitable as a couple move into a long-term partnership.

But if a relationship can go through that stage of merging then come out the other side as individuals, recognising that each person is different, they can end up stronger. That's when you can say 'Okay, we're different, we have different points of view, we're not going to align on everything, we do different things, we have different pursuits and passions but that's what keeps the fire between us', then you're stronger. That's when desire stays alive – you need space for the spark to fly across!

Get some of your needs met elsewhere

Even in the best relationship, one person can't fulfil all your needs and seeking fulfilment in various aspects of life outside your relationship is healthy. The expectation of finding everything in one person can put undue pressure on the relationship. Besides, having your own interests, friends, and pursuits, promotes a more balanced and fulfilling life.

Refresh your relationship browser

With the busy lives most couples lead, it's easy to get stuck in patterns, perceiving our partners through outdated lenses. Make sure you're giving your relationship a refresh now and then by looking at your partner through fresh eyes. Who are they now? How have they grown?

Swap roles

Lots of us assume our partner understands how we're feeling without explicit communication. Often there's one partner suppressing their emotions, fearing disruption or loss of the relationship and another trying to get them to open up. That dynamic can become a pattern, where it's always one particular person asking the other if they're okay, pushing them to discuss how they're feeling. We call this 'pursuer' – the person asking – and 'pursued' withdrawer – the person keeping quiet.

This can actually work quite well as long as the couple don't get stuck in a rut where the same person is the pursuer and the other is always the withdrawer. What can really work well is when someone can acknowledge the role they usually play and swap. This might mean the pursuer can become the withdrawer by shutting down now and again and the withdrawer can try opening up and enquiring about the other

person's mood or feelings. That's where the Daily Temperature Reading (above) is helpful as it automatically allows people to play both roles.

Forget about a 'right time'

There's rarely a right time to discuss difficult things. So, try and communicate problems and issues as they arise, flagging concerns promptly as part of the daily (or at least regular) clearing process. This sort of open communication doesn't have to be about big, deep talks, it can just be a simple, 'Oh can you not do X as it makes me feel like Y,' and then leaving it alone.

Identify your fight cycle

All relationships will have arguing patterns. There may be a trigger, then a bit of criticism, then it might escalate before one partner shuts down or walks out and another shouts, or both shout or both shut down. Every couple has a particular cycle where they get into the same situation – no matter what the fight is about – and then they start to escalate and escalate. Matt is trained in Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT) which proposes the identifying of these cycles to help couples externalise their problems, instead of constantly blaming each other.

By recognising your cycles, it's easier to interrupt them. Say for example you're a couple in which there's an initial trigger and then that can lead to personal criticisms or dredging up old resentments, before one partner loses their temper and the other walks out. That's your cycle. Acknowledging it can help you understand where an argument will go, notice it and stop it in its tracks. That could be as easy as 'Oh here we go again, in our fight cycle, you're screaming and I'm about to walk out the door. Let's just park it until we can both calm down.'

Avoid using 'always' and 'never'

When it comes to conflict, what the researcher Gottman called the 'four horsemen' can damage relationships. They are criticism, contempt, defensiveness and stonewalling. Using absolute language like 'You always X' or 'You never Y' is a red flag because it's a personal criticism of the other person. It can also lead you to bring up past grievances where you're using previous behaviours or events as a way to prove your criticism is right.

Global statements like these create defensiveness, hindering effective communication. Once again, try to be as specific as you can. Remember too to criticise the behaviour not the person and make sure you try and use 'I feel' statements instead. For example, instead of 'You never call me when you're going to be late, you're always so selfish,' you could try 'When you don't communicate with me that you're going to be late, I feel scared that something has happened to you.'

Create Habits That Stick

Whatever area you're looking to dejunk in, if you want to make lasting changes, secrets from the science of behavioural change can help set you up for success, says habit change expert Dr Heather McKee.

Ever wondered why making lasting changes can be so hard – and why around eight in ten new year's resolutions fail by the first week of February? Well, it's complicated. That's why an entire arm of behavioural psychology is now dedicated to the science of habit change. By stealing their secrets and putting them to work for you, you can increase your chances of making changes that stick this year.

One such behavioural scientist is Dr Heather McKee who has been researching the secrets of what makes people stick to healthy habits for over ten years. Here's her secrets to making effective changes that will enrich your life, at a pace that suits you.

1. Choose one goal at a time

Just like we can gather clutter in our homes and on our phones, we can also get tempted to pile goals onto goals and try to achieve lots of different changes at this time of year. But the research has shown that doesn't work.

In fact, one of the reasons resolutions fail is down to a psychological phenomenon called

'goal dilution' where we try and change too many things at once. That's like trying to declutter your entire house at once instead of focusing on one specific area, like your wardrobe. So, as you make changes, prioritise one area at once and focus on that. By concentrating your efforts, you conserve willpower and increase your likelihood of success.

2. Make it positive and specific

The good news is, some new year's resolutions can actually work, according to research⁶¹ published in 2020 in the journal PLOSOne. The most successful participants in the study chose goals that were 'approach orientated' rather than 'avoidance oriented.' That means, it's more helpful to choose something you will do, rather than something you won't do. For example, if you want to give up eating crisps every afternoon at work, replace 'I want to give up crisps' with 'I will have carrot sticks and hummus [or another healthy snack] instead of crisps every work day when I feel hungry.'

Make sure it's as specific as possible to add another layer of positivity. Giving your goal a specific frame will help you stick with it. The research also found that those who sought support for their resolutions were more likely to stick to them.

3. Be an annoying two year old – ask 'Why?' five times

In establishing your goals, find out why you want to complete them. What contribution will that change make to your life? Why is that good for you? Why do you want it? You need to clearly define the purpose behind the lasting change and the benefits it's going to give you.

This reflective process will help you align your goal with your intrinsic motivation. That's the kind of motivation that comes from inside of you that you're most likely to stick to (as opposed to extrinsic motivation that comes from forces outside you).

61. <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0234097>

There's a psychological technique called the 'five whys' that can help you unravel the layers of your desires and help you figure out why you want something. Simply keep asking why five times! Here's an example:

Goal: In 2024 I'm going to get serious about strength training 3-4 times a week (specific goal).

Why? Because I want to look toned in my bikini by next summer holiday

Why do you want to look toned? Because I want to build confidence in myself

Why do you want more confidence? Because confidence will help me feel strong inside and help me to doubt myself less.

Why do you think strength training will give you that? Because it will also make me feel strong and improve my posture and discipline. It will make me feel prouder of who I am.

Why else? Because I want the confidence I will get from sticking with it, and of really knowing my way around the gym too!

4. What matters most to you now?

Think of the various aspects of your life like the burners on a hob: you've got your friends, your family, your career and your health. You can't keep all of those burning at the same time. So, while some might be turned down, like your social life, others like your career or health (as in the example above) might be turned up. It

doesn't mean other areas have to be completely neglected but the key is about understanding what season of your life you are in right now and putting most of your energy into that. So, while some might be turned down, like your social life, others like your career or health (as in the example above) might be turned up. It doesn't mean other areas have to be completely neglected but the key is about understanding what season of your life you are in right now and putting most of your energy into that.

When we're thinking about unprocessing our lives we have to think, 'to what end? If I'm in a season of health right now that's going to be my main focus. If I'm in a season of career then maybe that is where I need to focus.' That approach gives people a lens through which to approach and take on information and learn new things, knowing that actually it's related to the stage that they're at in life right now.

5. Prioritise foundational habits

When you're deciding what to choose as your focus area, try and pick something that will influence other areas. This is what we call a 'foundational habit'. For example, say you chose a specific sleep related goal, like going to sleep and waking up at the same time each day. That will have an impact on how well you eat, on your motivation to exercise, your productivity at work and your mood in your relationship. That means one habit will have many different returns. It's those returns – the little positive effects you begin to feel in other areas of your life – that help you stick to it.

6. Declutter your goal from outside influences

You become what you consume, so now is the time to do a life audit and be mindful of the media and other influences you're exposed to. All over Instagram there will be people doing things like running marathons or building

their bodies or buying sports cars. But is any of that what you want, really? Using external forces only sets you up for failure, as their intrinsic goals are not aligned with yours.

Having said that, it can be helpful to have role models where their goals align with what you truly want. In either case, the trick is to be mindful and choosy of the information and inspiration you take on, especially on social media.

7. Set your environment up for success

To really make a habit stick, you need to create an environment that makes it easy to do the change you're making. This isn't merely about tidying up but about engineering your surroundings to support your goal. For instance, say you plan to read a book a week in 2024. Are your phone alerts and notifications helping or distracting? Likewise, placing books in your physical space where you are more likely to read them can impact your reading habits. Proximity matters. For example, having books by your bed or in your favourite reading spot can serve as a powerful cue to engage your desired behaviour.

If we use the strength training example above, what changes can you make to your environment to make going to the gym more automatic? You could choose a gym that is a ten minute walk/drive from home or work. You could choose times when you know you have energy, like the mornings. You could take a healthy pre-workout drink with you that gives you energy and make it in advance so you don't forget. You could stack your clothes up by the bed the night before. You could make an amazing playlist that will motivate your lifts. A well organised environment that makes your goal easier means you have to rely less on willpower. Once set up, that environment becomes a reliable support system for change.

8. Keep going until it becomes automatic

When the initial excitement fades is when the real work starts. That's the time to just keep going; to continue doing the behaviour over and over again. Whether you're seeing results or not, the secret is to continue to do it until it starts to feel automatic. That's when you have created a habit and when you might consider making another change.

That automaticity is where behaviours become ingrained and require minimum cognitive effort, like putting on a seat belt or brushing your teeth. But it takes at least 2-3 months of repetitive action before something becomes habitual and it's during this time that patience and self-compassion become critical, especially when you fail to do the behaviour, which you will – just pick it up again tomorrow. Keep thinking about the long game so you alleviate the pressure many people put on themselves for quick results.

9. Decrease friction

You want to make the change as easy as possible. In behavioural terms, that means decreasing friction. So, say your goal is to take a new regime of supplements, how can you make it easier to do it daily? Every obstacle you put in the way is a new layer of friction that makes it harder to do the behaviour.

If you were to keep your supplements in a cupboard that you can't reach, then you're putting two obstacles in the way. If you put them in a place that you can see while you're preparing your breakfast you'll be more likely to take them, because you've decreased the friction associated with the behaviour.

Conversely, if it's a behaviour you want to stop doing, then you need to make it harder for yourself. For example, if you want to stop eating ultra-processed foods, then make a point not to keep them in the house. That means if you really fancy a bag of crisps, you will need to go to the shops and buy them, and that friction you have added will surely make you think twice.

This is where simple changes really work, like just putting it out of reach. In one study⁶², two groups of people were offered bowls of unhealthy snacks (M&Ms), but for one group the bowl was at arm's length while the others had to get up to have some. Significantly fewer people took the snack when it was further away!

10. Make it fun

This sounds obvious, but you would be surprised how many people ignore the idea of choosing goals they might like doing. In fact, joy is a primary driver in intrinsic motivation. Behavioural science studies have shown that people who approach activities with a sense of fun are more likely to stick with them. Whether it's finding joy in a workout (maybe by listening to your favourite music) or making mundane tasks more enjoyable, infusing fun into your habits, increases their sustainability.

11. Set an implementation intention

It's not enough to simply say you're going to do something. You need to be specific about where and when you're going to do it. This is known as an implementation intention and it helps you transform vague intentions into actionable plans, giving you a clear roadmap for the behaviour. Some of the ways you can do this is by scheduling the times when you will be doing the behaviours you're planning. It's turning an intention into an action. In studies, when people ask themselves when and where they will exercise for example, it's much more likely they'll follow through and do it.

12. Use the 3 minute rule

Whether it's going for a run for half an hour or clearing out an entire kitchen, sometimes the thought of doing something is daunting. That's where we advise starting small; laughably small. Making a tiny commitment to do the behaviour for just three minutes reduces the pressure and cognitive load and makes the task more approachable. This makes the habit more accessible but also opens you up to the idea that once you have done the initial three minutes, you might start enjoying it and want to continue.

62. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5768324/>

Putting It All Together

In 2024, the pursuit of a 'No junk life' will become increasingly important.

As more of us choose to cleanse not only our diets but also our homes, exercise routines, supplements, relationships and digital lives, our wellbeing will improve and our nervous systems will get a break from our 'always on' culture. That's transformative.

That's why Viridian's 'No Junk Campaign' is encouraging everyone to approach 2024 with a different mindset. Rather than continuing to opt for processed foods, thinking about what 'more' we need and continuing to accumulate stuff, we're hoping this report has inspired you to take away what is no longer working for you. And, to identify what you really want.

As you embark on this life-changing journey, be kind to yourself. De-junking your life is a long-term project so you don't have to clear everything out at once. Choose one focus area at a time and initiate the changes slowly, before moving on to the next. Here's a reminder:

Dietary detox

Dejunking your diet starts with identifying the ultra processed foods (UPFs) in your current diet (we eat more than we think) and replacing them with healthy alternatives that nourish your body and support your overall health.

Supplement scrutiny

You wouldn't hesitate to read a food label. 2024 will be the year you will also read supplement labels and get to know the brands you're buying. You'll be able to identify common additives

like magnesium stearate and carrageenan that don't need to be there and you'll choose brands whose formulations are not only as pure as possible but also proven to be effective.

Exercise optimisation

No doubt you will be tempted by new get-fit-quick fads in 2024. For that reason, we've brought you the most proven steps to losing weight and building muscle. These are the tried and tested approaches used by trainers who get paid to get results, not gimmicks designed to get clicks.

Digital dejunk

Digital clutter has been identified as a distinct problem as more and more of us accumulate apps we don't use, emails we never open and programmes we don't need. Just as we unpack our wardrobes of clothes that no longer fit, so too do our digital lives need regular clear outs.

Home purge

Extending the declutter process to your living space is an easy win for your wellbeing. Our brains crave order and living in a clutter-free environment is a simple way to give yourself some space to think, literally!

Relationship refresh

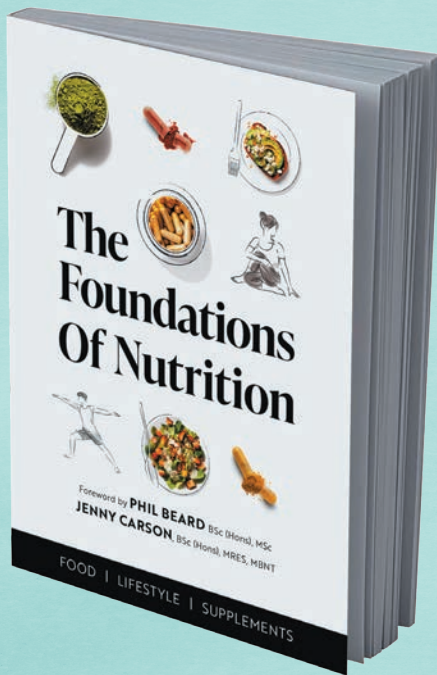
Even the best relationships build up junk in the form of resentments, repetitive arguments and monotony. But there are a few simple steps you can take to press 'renew' on your relationship and identify the seeds of dissatisfaction before they germinate.

Time economy

'Lost time is never found again,' said Benjamin Franklin. But how many hours in your day do you spend on brain-draining, time-sapping tasks like scrolling social media? As more of us become reliant on the dopamine fixes we get from our likes and reposts, we'll use some of the steps in this report to reclaim our time and use it more intentionally on tasks that line up with our goals and values. Are you ready to dejunk? The advice you have received here works, so if you're ready to make real changes, let's get started.

Please do contact us

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Find out more in

The Foundations Of Nutrition

written by qualified nutritionists.

With the right dietary and lifestyle choices, you can fuel your body to a great level of nutrient density that will make you healthier, happier and better able to live the life you want

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OUR EXPERTS

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Dr Libby Sander
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Zana Everett,
Leadership Coach and Author of *The Crazy Busy Cure: A productivity book for people with no time for productivity books*

Aimee Benbow

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Matt and Sarah Davies
Couples Therapists

Will Duru

Personal Coach and Exercise Trainer



Dr Heather Mckee
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Tanya Goodin

Digital Detox Expert



Professor Hana Burianova
Cognitive Neuroscientist Expert



Say no to ultra processed supplements.

Feel good with pure vitamins.



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