



Five key aspects of performance

It's easy to look at performance by what we do on a day to day basis, but how often do we consider our inner health, 'our personal health', and the impact this can have on our performance across all aspects of our life?

There is a growing body of research around getting back to the basics of understanding what our bodies were designed to do from an evolutionary perspective and the relationship of these key aspects associated to the ability to "focus". Focus is a fundamental requirement associated to achieving a performance.

There are five key aspects of "focus" and ultimately performance:



1. Movement

We are designed to move so it is important that we do. Exercise in itself is self-medicating.

However, movement is more than just 'exercise' and does not necessarily require effort, though it does require action. Movement affects everything, from circulation to digestion, to metabolism and immunity.

As mammals we need to play. We enjoy contact and need interaction so find the joy and happiness by playing with each other.

Exercise is great for our brain – it creates growth which in turn allows you to be more adaptable and perform complex movements.

Check out this **video** of why we should exercise.

2. Eating



We're driven to eat – basically we need food for energy so that our bodies will move.

Biologically we are driven to conserve energy. Back in evolutionary times we needed to conserve our energy so that we could hunt and gather. At times there would be long periods when food was scarce, so conservation of energy was a priority and when food was plentiful we ate regularly to store our energy supplies for leaner times.

In modern times food is plentiful so we eat, and we eat regularly which is a good thing, especially if it is quality food. The issue is that we can end up over-eating as we don't burn it off.

The other issue associated to the 'conserving' aspect is that a lot of the foods consumed are high in starch and sugar and these are closely related to the issues associated to 'inflammation'. Inflammation affects gut health. Gut health is important for the control of moods.

As athletes it is important to eat regularly to ensure you are getting the energy you require to do the training loads prescribed.

3. Sleep



Sleep is designed to regulate our body's rhythms – keeping it functioning in the way it should. Quality sleep allows you to relearn what you did during the day; to recover and repair muscle fibres; and to keep inflammation under control.

Good quality sleep also leads to you increasing your melatonin levels. Melatonin is the chemical required to tell the brain to let you go to sleep. Things that affect melatonin generation are exposure to light.

Bad sleep can lead to being overweight, depressed and less intelligent.

Athletes such as Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal, Le Bron James all get up to 12hrs of sleep a day.

Things that can help sleep are:

- i. Staying away from devices two hours before bed – the stimulation to the brain of being on devices affects the activation effect of melatonin to kick in to help you get to sleep.
- ii. Sleep in a dark room. The darker the better, so no light sources. This includes charging phones, laptops etc.



4. Connection

This is the most important aspect for human performance, its an evolutionary imperative where we strive for connection.

By socialising we produce Oxytocin which tends to have a response of caring and mindfulness. Oxytocin is known as the "cuddle" drug.

Value being part of a team or group and use the bonding that comes with it as a way of increasing your performance.

5. Nature



Get outside – it makes you feel happy, alive.

Effectively you are getting little boosts of serotonin and dopamine in your system. Serotonin and dopamine are linked to the pleasures of life. In many ways a can-do attitude ensues.

- i. People's productivity increases when we feel good. A hospital study showed that when you decorate the walls with pictures of nature then the recovery rates of patients is quicker, and they require less pain relief drugs.
- ii. A similar experiment was shown with exam results when students sat in a exam room with pictures of nature on the walls. Their results were significantly higher than when they sat in a room with blank walls.

**“To perform well you really
have to have attention.
There’s no way around it.
You have to be conscience
of what you’re doing.**

— Dr. John Ratey

What steps can you take to ensure
you’re performing at your best in
all aspects of your life?