

# SYMBIOS HEALTH

Empowering Healthy Working



INTRODUCING...

## THE SYMBIOS SCRIBBLE

Summer 2023 | Issue 2 | Newsletter

## WELCOME

As the year gathers pace, we are delighted to bring you the summer edition of the Symbios Scribble. This issue is packed with tips for futureproofing mind and body to optimise health and wellbeing in an increasingly demanding world.

Features include mindset work, focus on sleep, why thinking like a caveman might be the answer to the stresses of modern life, blood pressure control, smoking cessation and sun safety advice, as well as the Seasonal Symbios Tip, the Wellness Wobble, Symbios team news and much more.

As always, do contact us on [adhoc@Symbios.Health](mailto:adhoc@Symbios.Health) if we can help in any way with your Occupational Health provision.

*The Symbios Team*

## TEAM NEWS



We take our role very seriously, so with each issue, we will introduce you to a Symbios team member, to give you a little insight as to who is responsible for your Occupational Health and their motivation for their role, starting with...

Dr Oli Cooper (Director and Medical Lead):

Oli moved from GP land to Occupational Health because he recognised that we are all going to have to work for longer (he's full of good news!). He reasoned that by focussing on people's health whilst at work, he could contribute towards optimising the wellbeing of people throughout their working life, thus ensuring they can continue to work for as long as they deem necessary.

## IN OTHER NEWS...

- Symbios continues to evolve to meet the changing needs of the workforce, and we are now up and running with First Aid at Work, Mental Health First Aid at Work and DSE assessments.
- We are expanding rapidly with the welcome additions of Rachel in admin support and Elle, our new resident physiotherapist.
- With Covid guidelines this year advising us to return to normal spirometry practice, we have finally used up our supply of plastic filtered mouthpieces, and are very relieved to return to recyclable cardboard mouthpieces, with the associated improved impact on the environment.



## SEASONAL SYMBIOS TIP

With summer (for once) having not only turned up but seemingly here to stay, this is your seasonal reminder to whack on that high factor sunscreen and to look out for skin changes, particularly new moles, or changes to existing blemishes or moles.

Below is a handy A-E guide of skin-related concerns.

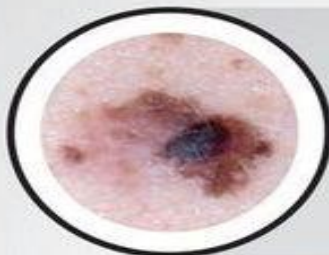
### Top tip:

If you have any concerns, book a GP appointment for a skin check, and in the meantime, take regular photos so you can establish if there are any ongoing changes...

#### EXAMPLE MELANOMA

#### THE ABCDE RULE

#### EXAMPLE HEALTHY MOLES



##### A = ASYMMETRY

When one half of the mole does not match or look like the other half of the mole.



##### B = BORDER

When the borders of the mole are uneven, irregular, ragged or have blurred, undefined edges.



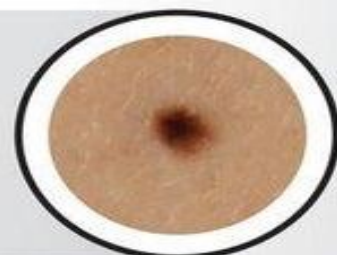
##### C = COLOUR

When the colour changes or varies throughout. Red, blue and black colourations are a particularly bad sign.



##### D = DIAMETER

When the diameter is greater than 6mm (but please be aware that it could be smaller).



##### E = EVOLVING

Changes in a new or existing spot or mole over variable time is the biggest indicator of a melanoma.



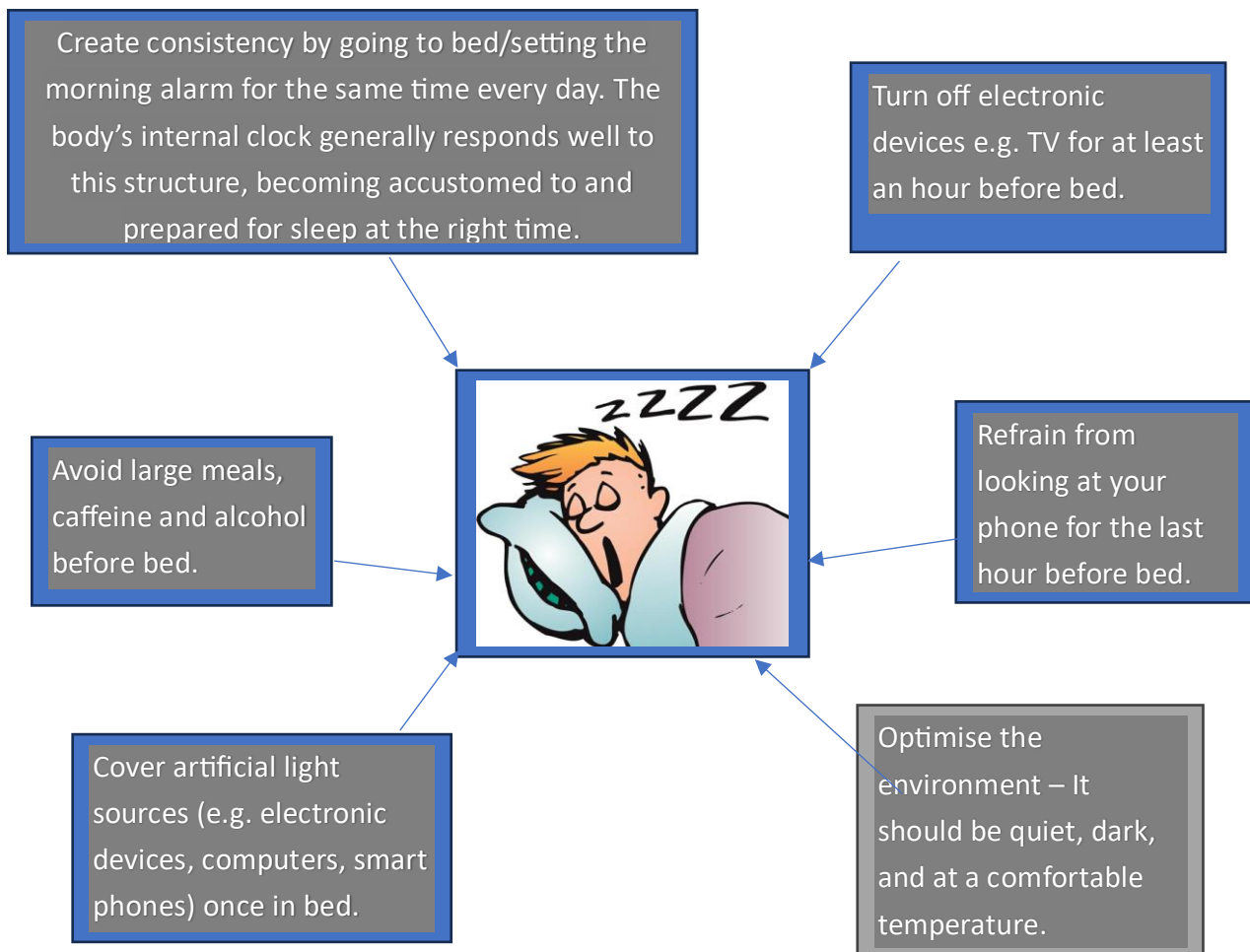
## TO SLEEP OR NOT TO SLEEP...

It is widely considered that better quality sleep is linked with more robust physical and mental health, a more resilient mindset in terms of lifestyle, exercise, dietary choices, and increased concentration and productivity in the workplace.

There is an old saying that 'an hour of sleep before midnight is worth two after'. This started as an old wives' tale but modern Neuroscience has proven that sleep is affected by different timings. If you can get to sleep at 2200 or 2300, the depth and quality of your sleep will likely be much better...so the challenge is to get to sleep before midnight, and you will (hopefully) wake up feeling more refreshed, more productive and more motivated for the day ahead.

## SLEEP HYGIENE FOR THE WIN...

Like most things in life, developing good quality sleep patterns takes practice. 'Sleep hygiene' is a reference tool to make the process easier:



## WELLNESS WOBBLE

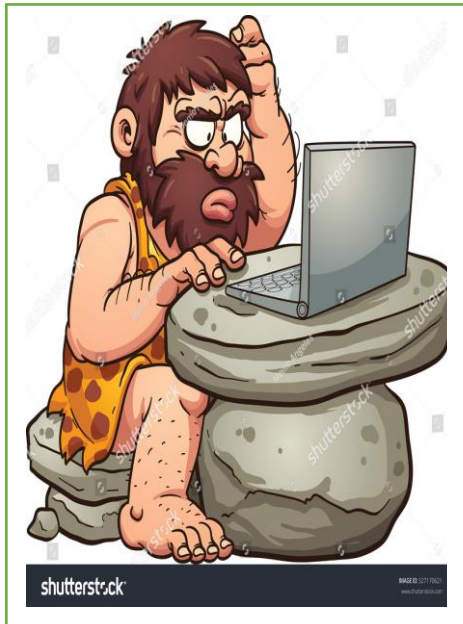
On the subject of sleep...did you know...

Caffeine does NOT give you more energy (it has no calories from which to draw energy)...but blocks tiredness by jumpstarting the brain in the same way as adrenaline, sending messages to the body to perform...

## CAVEMAN CALLING

The modern world is increasingly stressful. The Workplace Health Report indicated that in January 2023, 76% of employees in the UK workplace were experiencing moderate-to-high stress levels. So, whilst we may not be able to change the situation causing stress, maybe we can **change our response** to the situation, resulting in a better response to stress.

Hark back to the caveman era...hunting for food, fleeing from predators, living in hostile environments and extreme temperatures...the human body evolved to thrive under physiological stress, and the 'fight or flight' response was of paramount importance.



By contrast, in 2023, we live a 'comfortable' life, we sit on sofas, food comes from supermarkets, and pre-energy crisis, we even flipped on the heating in the cold weather.

In short, in modern life, our 'fight or flight' response is rarely triggered. Ergo, our lives born out of comfort have resulted in us becoming **underprepared for stress**.

And...the type of stress we face is different. It revolves around technology, social media, communications, finances, work etc (essentially 21<sup>st</sup> century problems).

So can we retrain our 21<sup>st</sup> century human bodies to be more like a caveman, in their incredibly effective response to stress?

Well, endurance athlete Wim Hof and many others are fighting back the tide of 21st century problems with their approach, which is to **'get comfortable being uncomfortable'**.

In practice this means placing your body under physiologically stressful situations to retrain our nervous system to respond effectively to stressful situations. Like an athlete trains for a race, so we can train for a stressful life. A good example is to put ourselves in a cold environment and use our own body to create warmth.

One way is to do this is 'cold water therapy'...the process of getting into cold water and becoming comfortable with how uncomfortable that feels...







Wim Hof takes it to extremes, and can be found swimming under ice covered lakes and climbing snowy mountains barefoot with just a stitch of clothing for modesty.



That isn't necessary for most of us. However, cold water therapy can be applied to any lifestyle or shift pattern.



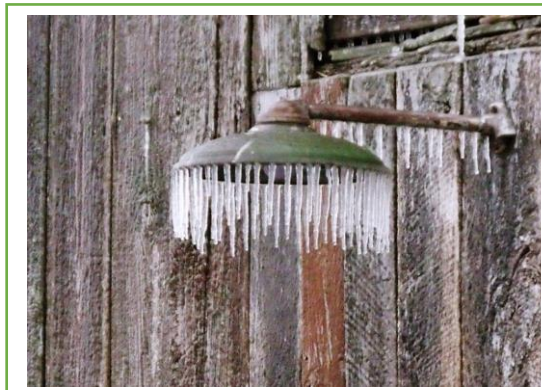
Wild swimming has taken off in recent years, but if you don't fancy a dip in a freezing lido, you could try standing for 30 seconds under a cold shower (there was a reason I saved this feature for the summer issue!).



Similarly, don't let the heating be your first response in the cold...use your body to generate warmth...bang out a few star jumps or go for a brisk walk.



So, on the basis that workplace accidents are (generally) less disastrous than being on the receiving end of a one way chat with a sabre toothed tiger, our life expectancy is considerably higher than that of cavemen, and we have many more years in which to manage and respond to stress...so the caveman approach is food for (freezing) thought...let us know how you get on...



#### TESTIMONIAL

Anna (one of the Symbios Nurses), has been undertaking cold water therapy every day for over 3 years. She noticed that even with just a 30 second blast of cold water on a consistent basis in the shower, she felt noticeably calmer, more alert, and more present for the remainder of the day. Over time she built up to 5+ minutes of cold water, and has enjoyed the process way more than expected.

#### Caveat..

Sudden cold water can be debilitating, with the possibility of rapid onset cold water shock (even for the strongest swimmer), so please exercise caution if wild swimming, and if you get into trouble, use the RNLI's advice, and 'float to live'.

## IF COLD WATER ISN'T YOUR THING...

Well it's not for everyone...and if you're not chomping at the bit to jump headfirst into a lido-ful of freezing water, here are some other options for ways to combat the impact of stress on your body...

What do we do when we feel stressed?



We often seek short term solutions (things that give us a quick rise in energy and morale).



Examples include:

- Eating unhealthily (food high in sugar and fat),
- Drinking excess alcohol,
- Smoking,
- Sitting down to relax (not being physically active).



Short term solution = Long term physiological impact,

including risk of high blood pressure, high cholesterol, type 2 diabetes and heart attack.



So...we can't change the amount of stress we face, and we may not want to jump into cold water to re-train our stress response, so the next step is to decrease the risk behaviours associated with stress and implement alternatives...

### Blood pressure control

Elevated blood pressure over a period of time increases risk..



### TOP TIP: SLOW PROGRESS IS STILL PROGRESS...

Habits take time to form, so cutting out all short term solutions (smoking, unhealthy food, alcohol etc) in a restrictive approach will quickly lead to failure.

Adopting a gradual approach, cutting down by a small amount and sticking to it consistently, will yield long term results. Similarly when adding new behaviours such as increasing exercise, or starting mindfulness, meditation, yoga...build up slowly and try to focus on the process, not just the final outcome.

Advice can be found on [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk), [www.bhf.org.uk](http://www.bhf.org.uk) or speak to your GP surgery about smoking cessation support.

NEXT TIME...Brain health, futureproof focus on functional mobility for the workplace, tips on good DSE practice, creating a self-sufficient value system, and all the usual features including the Wellness Wobble, Symbios Seasonal Tip, Team News and much more...do let us know if there is anything particular you would like featured...

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