

A 'MAGIC PILL' TO GOOD LIVING

Sleep debt solved in 20 minutes and the surprising cure to a broken heart, Luke Coutinho tells all...



Luke Coutinho

A day in the life

Take us through a day in your life — your meals, morning routine and all of the little habits you implement through the day to keep your energy levels up.

I like to wake up early and spend some time to get in aspects of yoga like meditation, asanas that my yoga teacher has taught me. I then wake my daughter up and we spend some time together; have breakfast and I drop her off to school on my way to work.

As for meals, if I am intermittent fasting, I skip my breakfast otherwise it usually starts with warm lemon water or a concoction followed by fruits, eggs and the like. It really depends on my mood and what my body is trying to say. I never follow a diet. I listen to my body and hence every day is different for me.

The little habits that I implement through the day are:

- Meditation in between every two hours.
- Deep breathing as it takes me less than two minutes to do.
- Sitting in *malasana* (garland) position in between my day.
- Workout during the day so I get a break from consults and patients. It also helps me recharge for the next set of my patients that come during the second half of the day.
- I don't compromise on seven to eight hours of good sleep in any case, unless I'm travelling.
- My meal times are sacred. I eat really slow, mindfully and fully extract pleasure from my food.
- My entire day is with the patients and once my daughter is home from school and I home from work, its only family time until she goes to sleep. Then maybe one hour of spending time with family, reading and finally, go to sleep.



LUKE COUTINHO MAKES getting healthy easy enough to do in your sleep. Chew more to prevent acidity, for instance. Who knew? Try a water fast to age slower. Or clear two hours of sleep debt with 20 minutes of a practice called *yoga nidra*. His habit swaps are tactical, simple and fresh. And he has a massive list of 62 of these (habits) that you can browse through in his book *The Magic Weight-Loss Pill* in collaboration with actor and former yoga instructor Anushka Shetty, which came out recently. Ahead of a wellness session in Chennai next week, the holistic lifestyle coach, talks us through everything from hypertension to heartache.

Excerpts from the interview:
We're excited about your session in Chennai! Give us a gist of what you will be covering.

I'm excited about my session in Chennai too. We will be addressing holistic lifestyle and disease, covering topics like immunity, cancer and how poor lifestyle choices is causing most of the health complications today and how can we fix that gap using nutrition, exercise, sleep and emotional detox. This session is mostly from the angle of preventative healthcare.

Give us a quick tour around the chapters of your new book in collaboration with Anushka Shetty.

The book starts with a bit of mine and Anushka's individual journeys as to how we discovered that lifestyle changes are the way forward with regards to health and well-being. There are two parts to the book — part one talks on breaking down lifestyle into four pillars that I always emphasise on, namely Balanced Nutrition, Adequate Exercise, Sleep and Recovery and Emotional Detoxification. Part two talks about the top 62 lifestyle changes that we have observed in our practice that has helped people lose weight and keep it off.

Could you share about five of those 62 life-changing habits in the book with us — that enable people to live happier and healthier lives?

The power of chewing:

The power lies in the chew. There are so many who have lost weight only with making sure they chew their meals well. With proper chewing, acidity reduces, digestion improves, portion sizes reduce and satiety increases.

Acidity: Acidity is the number one root cause of most diseases known today and millions are plagued with it. It can wreak havoc with regards to inflammation, immunity, digestion and everything else. An acidity environment is an oxygen-depleted environment whereas an alkaline environment is an oxy-

gen-rich environment. So, eradicating acidity should be one of the primary steps to a healthier body and life.

Fasting: It is not always about what you can add to your diet. Sometimes it's also about what you can delete from your diet. Just by adopting a simple lifestyle change of water fasting and giving that planned break to your digestive system, we have noticed remarkable changes in the way people felt about themselves — right from immunity inflammation to aging, skin, hair and digestion.

Breath: The power of breath cannot be underestimated. Breath is *prana* and one cannot live without it at all. Most of us are not even breathing to our maximum capacity. Not only does shallow breathing deprive our cells of the vital *prana*, it also tricks our body to believe that it is in a fight and flight mode, which is a stressful mode for our body to be in.

Visualisation: Healing starts from the mind. We are what we imagine to be. So, visualising health and healing also has immense benefits. It helps train our subconscious mind to think positive thoughts and that goes a long way in manifesting that into our physical self.

You talk a lot about the importance of rest and sleep. In fact, it was one of your core messages in an article you wrote on Alzheimer's prevention. In a world where late nights and night shifts are the norms at the office — what are some practical ways to ensure we sleep as much as we need to?

Sleep, like any other process is inbuilt to our body and cells. It is when the real magic of healing, repair, recovery, detoxification, recycle, rebalance occurs. Without that, we cannot function well the next day. It is one of the most important aspects in an Alzheimer's case because sleep is healing to the brain. It is when we sleep that our brain detoxes and repairs.

Most of us, in order to keep up with our social calendars and competitive world want to do more and more during our waking hours and deprioritise sleep. We skimp on sleep over the week thinking that we will make it up for it during the weekend. However, there is nothing called as sleep debt. Our body needs sleep on a daily basis since it also undergoes stress and strain under daily basis. Hormones need to balance, immune system needs to be regenerated, muscles need to repair, body and brain needs to detoxify on a regular basis.

Firstly, it is important that we discipline ourselves because we may have the best of sleeping gadgets, aids and other tools, but with-

out self-discipline, all of this is useless. The others are:

- You should reduce the blue light (artificial light) exposure in the evening and increase bright light during the day.
- Avoid eating heavy meals right before your sleep. Leave a minimum of two hours gap.
- Do not take caffeine late in the day. Wind down with an herbal tea if you wish to have a warm beverage before bed.
- Limit your screen time just before going to bed.
- Exercise regularly but do not exercise just before going to bed.
- Practice deep breathing to shift your body to a relaxed and calm state.

Also, in an age of uncertain work hours and thereby uncertain sleep hours — how does one combat insomnia?

Apart from all of the above, it is necessary to learn time management. Most of us bring home our office work because we haven't been able to complete the tasks within the time frame. If we reflect on a day, we surely do find pockets of time that we might have wasted and could have invested that in something productive.

Secondly, ensure you aim for quality sleep, even if it is 5 hours of sleep. After all it is not about how much you have slept, it is also about how well you have slept. Deep breathing, gratitude practice before bed, praying, decluttering your mind — are powerful ways to ensure deeper quality sleep.

Explore *yoga nidra* which is one of the deepest forms of meditation known. Even a 20 minutes of *yoga nidra* is as powerful as two hours of deep sleep. So, this is help for people who have less time to sleep in hand.

A lot of what has been passed down to us by our parents and grandparents about what is healthy doesn't fully serve us in the world as we know it today. Could you share with us a handful of misconceptions around good food or habits?

Most of the health practices that our parents and grandparents have followed in the past continue to serve us well, if done in a balanced way. In fact, it is time we bring back these rituals because it carried a lot of wisdom. However, there are certain instances where we may go wrong.

For example: Overdoing on carbohydrates.

Rice and *chapatis* were an integral part for our ancestors and they managed to digest it pretty well because their level of physical