



FIT FOR *Life*



THE FOCUS ON GETTING 'GYM FIT' IGNORES THE BIGGER HEALTH PICTURE, WRITES **KAMAHL COGDON**

Forget the gym and gruelling bootcamps. Exercise should be about getting fit for the life you're living or would like to live, according to health expert Jason Smith.

Smith, a physiotherapist and author of *Get Yourself Back in Motion*, says being 'life fit' rather than 'gym fit' should be the goal.

"Fitness creates in everyone's mind the impression of exercise, but actually fitness is about helping you perform at your best in every area of your life: to think better, feel better and live longer," he says.

He says most people see exercise as a means to get faster, bigger, stronger, change their body shape or lose weight.

"All of these benefits that come from exercise have been misunderstood to be equivalent to fitness and therefore health," Smith says.

"But the primary motivation should be to live longer and live optimally.

"I would consider you to be life fit if you can do everything you need to do in a day, based on your choice of lifestyle, and still have enough energy in reserve at the end to be able to commit to healthy relationships, family and recreational activities without being compromised," he explains.

He says the first step to building life

fitness is to decide what you want and need to get out of life. Factors including age, genetics, gender, occupation and also past injuries need to be considered. And while life fitness will vary from person to person, there are four main building blocks from which to start.

Smith suggests using these building blocks to guide two or three small and simple changes every day.

A CAREFUL DIET

There's no need to be overly strict when a sensible diet is part of a healthy lifestyle, Smith says. "Of course we need to be very conscientious about what we put in our mouth and our food can be our medicine," he says. But we can enjoy life with some balance and moderation."

Smith says portion control should be a focus, with many people eating too much and, therefore, consuming more energy than they need.

BALANCED EXERCISE

Two to four hours of intentional exercise each week will help get you on the path to life fitness, according to Smith.

He says the exercise should be a mix of activities which will condition your body for your lifestyle, whether you want to keep up

with the kids, walk the dog, maintain the garden or play your chosen sport.

The mix might include exercises to boost strength, flexibility, agility, core stability, speed, endurance or cardiovascular capacity.

"Be a bit more intentional about what you want to achieve out of it," he suggests.

GOOD SLEEP HABITS

Sleep is a "very understated component of optimal health", Smith says. He says most people are aware they need an average eight hours' sleep each night, but don't realise the extent of the physiological and psychological damage if there's a shortfall.

And he says quality is just as important as quantity. Regular sleep times, allowing 30 to 35 minutes to wind down before bed and having the right pillow and mattress can boost sleep quality.

HEALTHY POSTURE

"Posture is not just that old concept of sitting up straight or holding your chin back," Smith says.

He says it's about ensuring the body can move at its best in everything it does.