

HEALTHY FUTURES

LIVE LIFE *Well*

THE
ONLY

MAGAZINE
DEDICATED TO THE
HEALTH COACHING
PROFESSION

SIGNS YOUR MIND IS
UNDER PRESSURE

& YOU DIDN'T EVEN KNOW!

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU
DANCE LIKE NOBODY'S WATCHING?

A NEW APPROACH TO WELLBEING

**60-SECOND
SELF-COMPASSION RESET**

AT HOME HEALTH HACK

**5 REASONS WHY WE
NEED TO PLAY HARDER**

A COUNSELLOR'S PERSPECTIVE ON
THE POWER OF PLAY FOR ADULTS

SATISFY YOUR SWEET TOOTH

HOMEMADE BETTER BALANCED
CHOCOLATE RECIPE

PUBLISHED BY

HCA
Health Coaches Academy

HEALTHY FUTURES

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HCA CO-FOUNDERS: ANN GARRY &
CAROLYN ST JOHN LODER

HEALTHY

A MESSAGE FROM THE FOUNDERS

FUTURES

Welcome to the only magazine dedicated to the growing profession of health coaching. We are thrilled to bring you this publication, a project born from our passion and commitment to transforming lives through health coaching.

Health coaching is an incredibly transformative process designed to prevent and even reverse lifestyle-related chronic diseases. It's about guiding individuals to remodel their lives, creating healthier habits that can lead to positive changes in everything from diet and sleep to energy levels, exercise routines, stress management, and overall wellbeing. By focusing on sustainable lifestyle changes, health coaching has been clinically proven as an effective way to enhance health outcomes, offering hope and healing in various settings: from private practices and wellness retreats to corporate environments and healthcare facilities.

The need for more Health Coaches around the world has never been greater. As non-communicable diseases (NCDs) continue to rise, contributing to the global healthcare crisis, Health Coaches are uniquely positioned to make a profound difference. They empower individuals to take control of their health, educating them on how lifestyle changes can address the root causes of these diseases. By shifting the focus from treatment to prevention, we can collectively impact global health statistics and help make health a priority for everyone.

Health Coaches Academy (HCA) was born out of our personal experiences. In 2002, CEO, Carolyn lost her health and struggled to find the right support. It became clear that there was a significant gap in healthcare - whilst doctors could run tests and dietitians could write plans, no one was there to guide her through the lifestyle changes necessary to reclaim her wellbeing. This realisation set her on a journey to restore her own health and discover the power of health coaching.

For Ann, it was a sense of unfulfillment in her corporate career and the challenges of balancing family life that led her to pursue a degree in Nutritional Therapy. After establishing a successful practice, she felt a deep calling to bring this life-changing work to a broader audience.

Together, we co-founded Health Coaches Academy with the mission to address the global healthcare crisis and help people lead healthier, happier, and longer lives. At HCA, our mission is to create a global movement, raising awareness that everyone has the power to prevent NCDs through simple, sustainable lifestyle changes.

We envision and continue to build a future where health coaching is at the forefront of healthcare, helping people around the world achieve better health and wellbeing and live life well. Health coaching is one of the fastest growing professions of this decade and we are thrilled to be a leader in this global movement.

With warm regards,

Carolyn St John Loder & Ann Garry
Co-Founders, Health Coaches Academy

SIGNS YOUR MIND IS UNDER PRESSURE

(AND YOU DIDN'T EVEN KNOW)

Have you ever felt like your brain was running a marathon while your body was standing still? Maybe you've been snapping at loved ones, struggling to focus, or lying in bed exhausted - yet wide awake. It's easy to put these things down to a rough week or too much coffee. But what if they are actually subtle red flags that your mind is under pressure?

Stress isn't always loud. In fact, some of its most damaging effects whisper beneath the surface, quietly shaping how we think, feel, behave, and connect with others. Let's explore some of the lesser-known ways your mind may be trying to tell you it's overwhelmed:

COGNITIVE STRAIN:

WHEN YOUR MIND FEELS LIKE A BROKEN RECORD

Our thoughts often reveal stress before our bodies do. You might notice more black-and-white thinking - believing things are either a total success or complete failure.

Thoughts like "I must get this right", "I can't handle this", or "Everything is going wrong" are examples of distorted thinking that surface when the brain is under pressure.

These internal scripts can be exhausting. They push us into a cycle of perfectionism, guilt, and frustration.

Over time, this mental rigidity drains our creativity, confidence, and ability to problem-solve, leaving us feeling stuck.

MORE THAN
3 IN 5 say stress has
disrupted their
daily lives.

Source: Ipsos World Mental Health Day report, 2024

EMOTIONAL RED FLAGS:

THE SILENT MOOD SWINGS

You don't need to be in tears to be emotionally overwhelmed. Stress can manifest as irritability, sudden bursts of anger, or a low-level sadness that lingers without explanation. Feelings of shame, embarrassment, or guilt may creep in - even if you've done nothing wrong.

Anxiety tends to show up quietly when stress lingers too long. It might not always look like panic attacks. Sometimes it's that constant hum of worry, a tight chest, or a mind that won't slow down. Over time, this emotional tension wears us down and increases our vulnerability to more serious mental health challenges.

BEHAVIOURAL SHIFTS:

THE HABITS THAT SNEAK UP ON YOU

When the mind is under pressure, your actions often speak louder than words. Have you noticed changes in your sleep—struggling to fall asleep, waking up through the night, or feeling tired no matter how long you slept?

HAS YOUR CAFFEINE INAKE DOUBLED? ARE YOU LEANING ON SUGAR, WINE AND ENDLESS SCROLLING?

Perhaps your caffeine intake has quietly doubled, or you're leaning on sugar, wine, or endless scrolling to self-soothe. You might withdraw from friends without meaning to, find yourself snapping more easily, or feeling too overwhelmed to do things you once enjoyed.

Some people become more compulsive under stress - checking things repeatedly, biting nails, grinding teeth, or eating too quickly. These behaviours are often subconscious ways of trying to gain control in an otherwise chaotic-feeling world.



HEALTHY BRAIN

MENTAL IMAGERY:

THE STORIES STRESS TELLS US

When your mind is under stress, it can start crafting stories that are far more dramatic than the truth. You may find yourself imagining worst-case scenarios, from failure at work to being rejected or left alone. These imagined outcomes can feel so vivid they stir real fear or shame, even when there's no immediate threat.

Recurring dreams, flashbacks to distressing events, or a poor self-image might all be signals that your subconscious is carrying more emotional weight than you realise.

INTERPERSONAL STRESS:

HOW PRESSURE IMPACTS RELATIONSHIPS

Stress doesn't stay in your head - it often leaks into how we relate to others. You might notice yourself becoming more passive or aggressive, struggling to assert your needs, or feeling easily hurt by feedback. Some people become overly accommodating, constantly putting others' needs before their own and feeling burnt out as a result.

Withdrawal is also common. If you're avoiding conversations, skipping social events, or just "not feeling up to it," it might be less about disinterest and more about your emotional energy being completely drained.

LISTENING TO WHAT YOUR MIND NEEDS:

Next time your mind feels off - even if everything seems fine - don't ignore it. These quiet signs might be your brain's way of asking for a little more care, and a little less pressure. It's important to listen.

The beautiful thing about the brain is its ability to adapt and recover. Once you start recognising these subtle signs of mental pressure, you can begin to make meaningful changes. In our next article, we'll be sharing some simple, effective stress-proofing tips to help.

HOW TO STRESS-PROOF YOUR BRAIN.

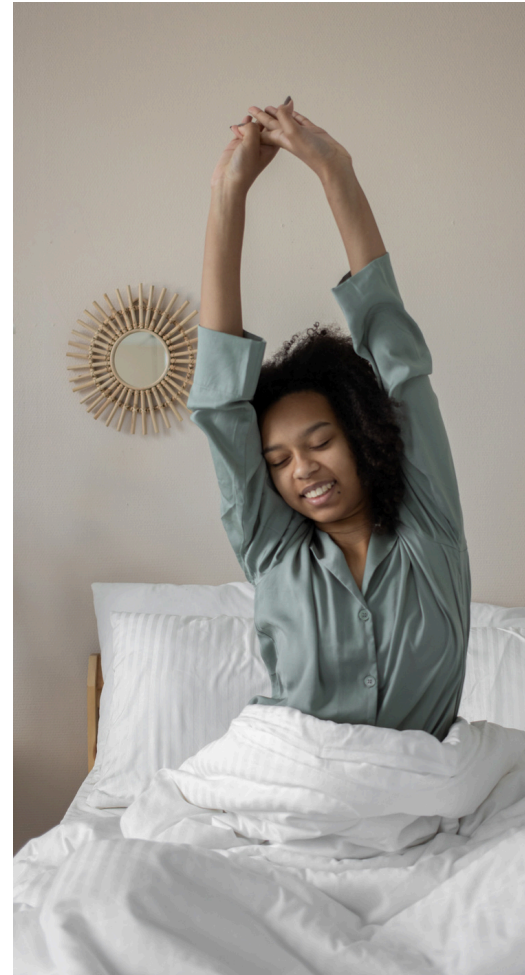
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Spring is most definitely upon us; the daffodils are swaying their heavy heads and blooms abound all around us as we leave the long dark nights of winter behind us. This might be the time where we chose to have a spring clean of our wardrobe, our kitchen cupboards and homes in preparation for summer ahead.

But perhaps, the greatest work we can do is to turn our gaze inwards and spring clean our thoughts, dispelling old habits that do not serve us well?

In this busy, modern world it is all too easy to leap from one stressful situation to another. So much so, in fact, that we may not realise how much time we are spending in a “flight or fight” state.

In this article I will share with you a handful of tips that may serve you, and your most marvellous brain, well.



“You don’t have to do something huge to make a HUGE difference.”

-Mel Robbins

1.

START THE DAY WITH A RAMPAGE OF POSITIVITY.

We are what we think about, and most mornings after hitting the snooze button we may find it all too easy to fill our heads with busy, depleting thoughts.

Perhaps our first habits of the day are to swipe our phone and catch up on news, check out our social media feeds and scan our email, throwing ourselves into our day before we are even fully awake.



Instead, I invite you to commence your day with a rampage of appreciation. The key is to keep it simple. Inevitably I start with my cosy bed, I notice and celebrate the comfort of my mattress, the pillow that envelopes my head, the light comfort of my duvet.

I then might move on to listen out for the early morning bird song, the sound of our central heating clicking in, our dogs padding in to wish us good morning. The list may vary but the intent does not, by focussing on all that surrounds me I am setting my brain up for success and training it to tune into the feel good.

2.

EAT A PROTEIN RICH BREAKFAST

Our brain works well when it has access to nutrient dense foods. However, the modern-day world normalises skipping brekkie, eating on the go or feasting on carbs. This may give us an initial feel-good boost, but as that sugar high dips off we will soon feel our energy depleting and with it our capacity for optimum brain function.

Why not try an alternative protein rich breakfast and observe the impact? This can be as simple as some plain yoghurt topped with berries and a sprinkling of nuts and seeds. Personally I love the crunch of sunflower and pumpkins seeds with Cocoa nibs atop my yoghurt bowl. Or perhaps you might like to make a delicious scrambled egg, topped with avocado alongside a handful of salad leaves.

By increasing our access to whole foods, we will fuel our beautiful brains across the day allowing it access to the nutrients that allow us to focus, problem solve and maintain a healthy perspective.

3. MOVE LIKE YOU MEAN IT!

A 10 minute online yoga session, a walk after lunch, a quick set of squats as the kettle boils, an evening swim – all of these little exercise snacks add up across the day.

The link between brain health and movement is now firmly established, and we know the brain releases feel-good chemicals like endorphins after exercise, which elevate your mood, reduce pain and improve focus amongst many other benefits.

Perhaps pair your movement with a catch up with a friend or colleague and reap the benefits of social connection too?

In the next article, we explore a powerful, unexpected form of movement that's gaining momentum – conscious dance. It's not about choreography or fitness, but about freeing emotion, shifting energy, and reconnecting with yourself in just a few minutes. Curious? Turn the page and step into a whole new way to move.

These are just a few of the many ways in which we can care for our magnificent brain, allowing us to feel good in the here and now whilst also caring for our future selves so that we may live a long, abundant life.

Written By: Pam Clark
Holistic Nutritionist & Wellness Coach

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU DANCE LIKE NO ONE'S WATCHING - *FOR JUST 5 MINUTES?*



HCA STUDENT, LAURA, AT OUR 3-DAY LIVE HEALTH COACH TRAINING EVENT, LONDON

Many of us go through the day feeling tense, tired, or emotionally flat – and often, we don't know why. We push through, disconnected from how we truly feel, stuck in our heads and out of touch with our bodies. But what if something as simple as moving to music, for just a few minutes, could reset your energy and shift your entire mood?

Enter: conscious dance – a gentle yet powerful practice that's less about performance and more about presence. It offers a meaningful shift not through steps or structure, but through free, mindful movement that anyone can access.

A NEW APPROACH TO WELLBEING

For many, traditional models of healthcare often feel rushed and surface-level. The common experience of short appointments, symptom-based treatments, and an over-reliance on pharmaceuticals leaves little room for addressing the root causes of discomfort – whether physical, emotional or energetic.

True wellbeing is multi-dimensional. Our health is shaped not only by the physical body, but also by our mental, emotional and spiritual states – all of which are deeply interconnected. Supporting our overall health means finding ways to nurture each of these aspects.

WHAT IS CONSCIOUS DANCE?

Unlike conventional dance, conscious dance has no steps to follow. There's no pressure to "get it right." It's a meditative, free-flowing experience where the body is allowed to express, release and recalibrate. It is movement as medicine – deeply intuitive and emotionally liberating.

It starts simply: a piece of music, your breath, a gentle invitation to move. With a bit of guidance, even just 5 to 10 minutes can feel like a "light switch moment" – a complete shift in energy and emotional state.

Conscious dance is one powerful way to do that. It offers a chance to tune into the body, connect with the breath, and make space for emotions and sensations that are often overlooked. It's not about performing or looking a certain way. It's about moving however your body wants to move – with presence, intention and awareness.

"Just the thing I didn't know I needed, but absolutely life changing."

Feedback from HCA Health Coach Student after Conscious Dance Movement session with Dr Indika.



HCA STUDENTS DOING A CONSCIOUS DANCE MOVEMENT SESSION LED BY DR INDIKA AT OUR 3-DAY LIVE HEALTH COACH TRAINING EVENT, LONDON

RELEASING WHAT'S HELD WITHIN:

Much of our stress, trauma and emotional pain lives in the body. We talk about “holding tension in the shoulders” or “gut feelings” for a reason – the body remembers. Conscious dance creates a space for those memories to rise to the surface and be released, without needing to be analysed or explained.

Through this practice, you can begin to feel rather than suppress. You might cry. You might laugh. You might roar. All emotions are welcome. By meeting your body where it's at – with breath, music, and movement – healing becomes not only possible, but natural.

FROM DISCONNECTION TO EMBODIMENT

Many of us live disembodied lives, cut off from how we truly feel. This disconnection is often a result of past wounds or trauma – a way to protect ourselves from pain. But in shielding ourselves from discomfort, we also dull our capacity to experience joy, passion and love.

Conscious dance helps us come home to the body. It reminds us that the body knows how to heal – we just need to listen. With regular short practices, even just a few minutes a day, the body becomes familiar with accessing deeper emotional layers. Over time, this builds a foundation of inner resilience, self-awareness, and genuine wellbeing.

A PRACTICE FOR EVERYONE!

You don't need to be a dancer. You don't need a special outfit. All you need is a willingness to show up, breathe, and move. Conscious dance is accessible to all, and its benefits – from reducing stress to reconnecting with your purpose – are profound.

So, can just a few minutes of dance change your mood?

Yes. And quite possibly, it can change your life.

[Try a FREE Funk To Flow
15 minute session](#)



Contributor: Dr Indika, The Dancing Doctor
Instagram: @joyfuldancingdoctor



CRAVINGS, CRASHES & CLARITY

WHAT FOOD IS REALLY DOING TO YOUR MOOD

When life gets challenging, many of us turn to food for comfort. A stressful day at work, relationship issues, or simply feeling down often drive us towards quick, seemingly comforting food choices.

Yet, the foods we instinctively reach for – sugary snacks, processed foods, and refined carbohydrates (e.g. white bread) – can actually worsen our emotional state.

This isn't just anecdotal. Plenty of nutritional psychology/psychiatry research demonstrates a profound link between diet and mental wellbeing. What we eat doesn't just fuel our bodies; it significantly influences our brain chemistry, mood stability, and mental health.

In this article, Nutritional Therapist and HCA Mentor, Nicky Denvir, explores the fascinating science behind the food-mood connection – including how blood sugar, gut health, and key nutrients can play a pivotal role in our mental wellbeing. Read on to discover practical tips and food swaps that can help you feel more balanced, focused and energised.

THE SCIENCE OF FOOD AND MOOD

There are many scientific studies that highlight the intricate relationship between nutrition and mental health with research consistently showing that healthy dietary patterns directly impact mood, stress levels, and even symptoms of anxiety and depression.

Blood sugar levels play a crucial role in mood management. Spikes and crashes can have a real impact on everyone and how we feel emotionally.

There are several ways nutrients can influence the brain – from supporting the production of neurotransmitters like serotonin, to reducing inflammation, balancing blood sugar, and even nourishing the gut microbiome – all of which can impact how we feel day-to-day.

BLOOD SUGAR & EMOTIONAL REGULATION

Blood sugar levels play a crucial role in mood management – though it's something many people overlook or simply associate with diabetes. In reality, blood sugar spikes and crashes can have a real impact on everyone and how we feel emotionally.

A comprehensive review examined the relationship between dietary glycaemic index and mental health outcomes, revealing significant associations between high glycaemic load (i.e. foods that spike your blood glucose) and increased risk of mood disorders. When glucose levels fluctuate rapidly, they trigger hormonal and neurochemical changes that can dramatically affect emotional stability.



BLOOD SUGAR FLUCTUATIONS CAN CAUSE:

SUDDEN MOOD SWINGS

IRRITABILITY

ENERGY CRASHES

INCREASED ANXIETY

THE GUT-BRAIN CONNECTION

Your gut is often referred to as the 'second brain'. The gut microbiome influences inflammation and neurotransmitter production, playing a key role in mood regulation. Research has highlighted how dietary choices impact gut health, which in turn affects mental wellbeing.

When your gut health is compromised – for example, through a poor diet, chronic stress or frequent antibiotic use – it can lead to an imbalance in gut bacteria (dysbiosis), which may contribute to low mood, increased anxiety, brain fog, and even feelings of overwhelm. Supporting your gut means supporting your mental clarity and emotional balance, too – it's all connected.

With all of this in mind, let's look at some of the foods that can help support a stable mood – and the types of foods that might be doing more harm than good.





MOOD-BOOSTING FOODS

Recent research found that a Mediterranean-style or 'anti-inflammatory' diet, rich in monounsaturated fats like olive oil, nuts, vegetables, fruits, plant proteins, whole grains, and fish is associated with lower levels of depression and anxiety. This type of dietary pattern is also linked to decreased cognitive decline and gut microbiome benefits.

Key mood-supporting nutrients include:

- Omega-3 fatty acids (found in oily fish, walnuts, flaxseeds)
- B vitamins (leafy greens, nuts, seeds)
- Zinc and magnesium (pumpkin seeds are a top choice for both minerals!)
- Probiotics in fermented foods (kimchi, sauerkraut, bio-live yoghurt, kefir, miso, hard unpasteurised cheeses)

MOOD-BUSTING FOODS

Conversely, processed foods and refined sugars have been consistently linked to increased risk of mood disorders. Studies have revealed that high consumption of processed foods correlates with higher rates of depression and anxiety.

These types of foods can lead to energy crashes, poor concentration, and sluggishness – especially after a carb-heavy or sugar-laden meal. You may feel a short burst of satisfaction, but it's usually followed by irritability, fatigue, or a 'low' feeling as blood sugar dips. Over time, this cycle can take a toll on your overall emotional resilience.

Those wishing to support mental wellbeing are recommended to minimise:

- Refined sugars and carbohydrates
- Processed and hydrogenated fats (found in ready meals and commercially baked goods)
- Excessive caffeine
- Excessive alcohol



THE BRAIN'S FAT REQUIREMENT:

The brain is approximately 60% fat, so it's not surprising that fats play a vital role in mental health. Omega-3 fatty acids are particularly crucial for brain function and mood regulation (you may have heard of EPA and DHA, which are considered the 2 most important omega 3s).

Research suggests that higher levels of omega-3 fats correlate with increased serotonin levels—the neurotransmitter responsible for feelings of happiness.

Several studies indicate that omega-3s may even be more effective at reducing symptoms of depression than some antidepressants.

To boost your intake of Omega-3s, aim to include oily fish (like salmon, sardines, and mackerel), walnuts, flaxseeds, chia seeds, and algae-based supplements if you're plant-based.

Written By: Nicky Denvir
Nutritional Therapist and HCA Mentor

For more information and nutritional insights visit
Nicky's blog at: nickydenvir.com

MAKING DIETARY CHANGES

The good news is small, simple changes can make a big difference.

There's no universal solution to mental health, but dietary adjustments can make a significant difference. By focusing on whole foods, stabilising blood sugar, and ensuring essential nutrient intake, you can naturally support mental wellbeing.

Here are some practical steps to consider:

- Eat balanced meals with low glycaemic load carbohydrates
- Include protein in every meal
- Consume plenty of soluble fibre (found in lots of plant foods, but especially chia and flax seeds, oat bran and black beans)
- Choose brain-boosting foods like berries, green vegetables, and nuts

THE BOTTOM LINE.

Your diet is a powerful tool for mental health. While nutrition isn't a replacement for professional mental health support, it's a crucial component of holistic emotional wellbeing. Choose foods that nourish not just your body, but your mind.

Many people are so inspired by the impact of food on wellbeing that they go on to train as Health Coaches – supporting others in making sustainable, feel-good lifestyle changes. If you're fascinated by the power of nutrition and want to explore natural ways to feel healthier – physically, emotionally and mentally – visit www.healthcoachesacademy.com to find out more.

AT-HOME HEALTH HACK:



HCA STUDENTS AT OUR 3-DAY LIVE HEALTH COACH TRAINING EVENT, LONDON

THE 60-SECOND SELF-COMPASSION RESET

When was the last time you spoke to yourself with the same kindness you'd offer a close friend?

Most of us are quick to offer compassion to others, yet slow to extend it to ourselves – especially when life gets overwhelming. But research shows that practising self-compassion during times of stress isn't just a feel-good idea; it's a clinically backed way to reduce anxiety, regulate emotions, and build long-term resilience.

Studies report that higher levels of self-compassion are associated with decreased perceived stress, greater positive affect, lower negative affect, and fewer symptoms of anxiety and depression.

We all have moments where we're hard on ourselves – replaying mistakes, doubting our decisions, or feeling stuck in the same emotional patterns. But self-criticism keeps us in a loop, reacting the same way to the same triggers, hoping something will shift.

The good news is: you do have a choice. The simple act of noticing your struggle with a little more warmth and understanding is the first step towards real change – and a calmer, more balanced you.

If you've ever found yourself thinking, "I should be coping better than this," you're not alone. We've all had those internal battles – but this quick, science-supported exercise can help you reset in just one minute.

Ready to shift your mindset and lower your stress levels? Try this simple, yet **powerful 60-second self-compassion practice...**

Take a moment to think about a part of yourself that you have been struggling to accept.

This could be a habit that you want to change, a personality trait that you have been judging yourself about recently, or for a long time, or something about your appearance that you may not have been happy about. There's no right or wrong - just tune in to recognise, what is arising naturally?

Now imagine a close friend came to you and that person was feeling very insecure about that very thing you have chosen - what would you say to that friend? How would you support them?



Take a pen and paper and write down a few kind and encouraging words that you would offer that friend, or say out loud.

Repeat those words back to yourself. Close your eyes if that helps, or look into a mirror and say those words. Notice how it feels to offer yourself that same kindness.



MARY WALKER, MINDFULNESS & SELF-COMPASSION TEACHER
AND HCA HEAD OF LIVE SUPERVISION

Now, exploring self-compassion and thinking back to a time when you were hard on yourself and maybe made a mistake or didn't meet your own expectations - recall how you felt during that time?

Gently ask yourself, "how could I have approached this situation with a little more kindness?" What would you say now? What kinds of support would you offer yourself at that moment?



Write down a promise to yourself - a few lines, not long or elaborate, simply a reminder to yourself that the next time that you face a challenge, you will be kind to yourself - not ignoring mistakes but instead treating yourself with more understanding and care as you learn - write it down.

For example: "I promise I will not be judgemental or hard on you next time we are going through a rough time ... I will listen to you and we will explore possibilities in a compassionate and patient way".

Self-compassion is a simple yet powerful tool. In just 60 seconds, you can shift your mindset and treat yourself with the same kindness you would offer a friend. Practising this reset regularly helps build emotional resilience, reduces stress, and promotes overall wellbeing.

Next time you face a setback, take a moment to pause, offer yourself kind words, and stay true to your commitment to approach life with more self-understanding. Small steps of self-compassion lead to lasting change.

Self-compassion is just one of the many evidence-based skills a Health Coach is trained to foster. On the HCA Level 5 Diploma in Health & Wellness Coaching, students learn how to guide clients through practices like this 60-second reset — alongside nutrition, behaviour-change science, stress management and more —so they can create real, lasting change in their lives and the lives of others. Curious about how these tools could fit into your own career (or personal growth) journey? Visit healthcoachesacademy.com to explore the course and upcoming intakes.

**Written By: Mary Walker,
Mindfulness & Self-Compassion Teacher and HCA
Head of Live Supervision**

5 REASONS WHY WE NEED TO: *PLAY HARDER*

HCA STUDENTS AT 3-DAY LIVE HEALTH COACH
TRAINING EVENT IN LONDON

Can you remember a moment when you really let go and just played?

Not for productivity, not for fitness goals, not because it's "good for you." Just because it felt good.

For many of us, it's been way too long. Somewhere between growing up and growing responsibilities, play got boxed up with our childhood toys and left behind. But the truth is adults need play too.

WHAT IS PLAY FOR ADULTS?

Adult play doesn't have to look like hopscotch or hide and seek (although it absolutely can). It's anything that brings joy, curiosity, or flow.

Instead, think:

- Dancing in the kitchen
- Doodling with no purpose
- Hopscotch in the garden
- Pulling out a dusty board game
- Climbing a tree

The common thread? It's not about the outcome. You're not doing it to improve, impress, or achieve. You're doing it because it lights you up. That's play. And it's something we all need more of.

Elly Dolan, a counsellor with an MA in working therapeutically in nature, has spent years helping people reconnect with themselves through play, creativity, and the healing power of the outdoors. With a background in early years education and nature-based therapy, she's passionate about showing adults how play can help us live better, fuller, and healthier lives.

Drawing on Elly's insights and experiences, here are 5 reasons why, as adults, it might be time for us to start playing harder:

1. PLAY HELPS US RECONNECT WITH OURSELVES

As kids, we learned so much through play—empathy, communication, emotional awareness. But as adults, we often get caught up in roles, routines, and the pressure to be productive. That's where play comes in. It helps us tap back into parts of ourselves that might have been buried under the busyness of everyday life.

Remember those playful moments - when we're fully in the present, curious, and creative - allowing us to reconnect with who we are at our core. It's not childish. It's actually one of the most human things we can do.



HCA STUDENTS AT 3-DAY LIVE HEALTH COACH TRAINING EVENT IN LONDON

2. NATURE + PLAY = INSTANT RESET

Most of us spend our lives indoors, scrolling, scheduling, and sitting still. But stepping outside and playing - climbing, running, building, exploring, can regulate the nervous system, release stress, and help us feel grounded again. Nature offers a reset, and when we bring play into that space, it becomes even more powerful.

3. PLAY BUILDS RESILIENCE

We often think resilience comes from pushing through, but real resilience is built through experimentation, imagination, and safe failure. Play offers all of that. It's where we learn to try again, solve problems, and support one another. In messy, spontaneous moments, we find the kind of strength that spreadsheets can't teach.



ELLY DOLAN

4. OUR BODIES NEED TO PLAY, TOO

Play isn't just mental—it's physical, sensory, and emotional. Whether through dance, movement, creativity, or hands-on art like getting messy with clay, we can process feelings in ways words can't always reach. Physical play helps release tension, shift stuck emotions, and reconnect us with our bodies in ways that feel natural and safe.

5. PLAY BRINGS US BACK TO COMMUNITY

There's something about shared play—especially outdoors—that brings people together in a way nothing else quite does. When people step out of their comfort zones and into playful spaces, they begin to collaborate, empathise, and truly connect.

It's not about team-building exercises or forced fun. It's about real, joyful connection—the kind that reminds us we're not alone, even when life feels heavy.

You don't need permission to play. But if you've been waiting for a sign - this is it. Let yourself be a little silly. Step away from the inbox. Get your hands dirty. Explore something just because it's fun.

As Elly Dolan reminds us, play is more than a break from being a grown-up—it's a powerful way back to your most grounded, connected, and alive self.

Contributor: Elly Dolan, Counsellor
For more information, visit: [Liminalis Therapy](https://liminalis.com)



HEALTH COACHING HAS OPENED
THE DOOR TO SO MANY
DIFFERENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR
ME. IT'S A ROLE THAT I LOVE!

PROFESSIONAL HEALTH & WELLNESS COACH &
HCA GRADUATE, CANDACE VERMAAK

The Endless Possibilities of Health Coaching: An Interview with Candace Vermaak

Becoming a Health Coach opens the door to a world of exciting opportunities — from working in academic settings, running your own business, partnering with communities, to contributing to research and education. The skills you gain allow you to make a real, lasting impact on people's lives in countless ways.

Since graduating as a Professional Health & Wellness Coach with HCA in October 2023, Candace has gone on to do exactly that — using her qualification across a wide range of inspiring projects. We caught up with her to showcase just how diverse and rewarding a career in health coaching can be.

What was it that first drew you to health coaching?

“My own personal journey of struggling with my health and not finding answers the conventional way led me to explore health and wellness differently and more holistically and naturally.

It was a 12 year journey of self learning and discovering. Through this journey many people always asked for advice, and in short I wanted to legitimize my “advice” and started looking at what I could study in order to do this more effectively.

I found a few options such as nutritional therapy and functional medicine but they were still quite prescriptive where you tell someone what to do and they don't have a say in the matter. Whereas through health coaching I am able to walk a journey with people where they're empowered to take ownership about their own health and wellness, without being dependent on a doctor. This is what I LOVE doing.”

Since becoming a Professional Health & Wellness Coach you've been involved in such a wide range of inspiring projects. Can you give us a snapshot of what your current work looks like?

“I work part-time as a lecturer at Stellenbosch University's Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, teaching students deep listening skills, holistic client care, SMARTER goal setting, and the importance of personal health and stress management. I also use health coaching principles when working in low-resource communities, partnering with NPOs to bring education around health, exercise, and lifestyle into areas where healthcare services are limited.

Alongside this, I run my own health coaching business, supporting busy moms with one-on-one coaching and group programmes focused on nutrition, lifestyle habits, and personal development. I co-facilitate retreats with a Wim Hof instructor, write health articles for Momentum Health, and mentor students at Health Coaches Academy (HCA), helping them apply coaching skills practically.

Last but not least, I'm involved in developing research projects investigating lifestyle interventions across different populations, aiming to build data-driven protocols to support clients' health journeys.”

Can you tell us more about how you bring health coaching principles into your work with students and the community through your role at the University?

At Stellenbosch University, I lecture part-time in the Exercise, Sport and Lifestyle Medicine Department. I weave health coaching into my teaching in various ways. For example introducing students to skills like deep listening, identifying client patterns, holistic thinking, SMARTER goal setting, and knowing when to refer to other professionals.

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Through health coaching I am able to walk a journey with people where they're empowered to take ownership about their own health and wellness, without being dependent on a doctor.



PROFESSIONAL HEALTH & WELLNESS COACH &
HCA GRADUATE, CANDACE VERMAAK

I also focus on their personal wellness, helping them explore stress management techniques and sustainable lifestyle habits they can pass on to future clients. Beyond the classroom, I work in low-resource communities, partnering with NPOs to offer health education, basic nutrition advice, and movement sessions.

Since becoming a Health Coach, I've expanded this work to include broader lifestyle interventions — from promoting better sleep and stress management to blood sugar balancing and nutrition. I also do sessions on chronic conditions, explaining what they are and how different lifestyle changes can have a positive impact. This is all part of servicing areas that cannot afford any type of healthcare intervention.

Looking ahead, I'm planning research projects exploring how different lifestyle interventions impact health across various age groups and genders, aiming to create more tailored, evidence-based guidance for clients."

In your own health coaching groups, who do you mostly work with and what changes do you see?

"I primarily support busy moms who've spent years putting everyone else first. Through programmes focused on nutrition and lifestyle shifts, I see them rediscover their energy, prioritise self-care, and reconnect with joy in their lives.

Small, consistent changes — like following BSB (Blood Sugar Balancing) principles — make a huge difference not just for them, but for their entire families."

As a Mentor for HCA, what do you hope to pass on to new, aspiring Health Coaches?

"This is one of my favourite roles! I love combining the educational side with the practical application — showing students how to bring coaching techniques to life. I want them to see the powerful changes that can happen through nutrition and lifestyle shifts, and to understand the importance of small, sustainable steps. Most importantly, I hope to instill the value of truly listening to their clients and meeting their needs, rather than leading with their own assumptions."

"If you're passionate about helping others, there's so much opportunity in this field. However it's important to be proactive — network, experiment with different niches, and stay open to learning."

How do you balance all of the different hats that you wear as a Health Coach?

"It's not always easy, but I've learned to set clear boundaries and focus fully on each role at the right time. Overlapping areas — like community work and university projects — help streamline efforts. I've also invested time in training community leaders and students, which has created a sustainable model that allows the work to grow without requiring me to be present at every step.

For anyone juggling multiple projects: structure your time intentionally, build strong teams, and remember that sustainable change is a marathon, not a sprint."

What would you say to someone considering a career in health coaching?

"If you're passionate about helping others, there's so much opportunity in this field. However it's important to be proactive — network, experiment with different niches, and stay open to learning. I've connected with several people and tried partnerships or ventures that haven't worked out the way I intended, however every challenge is a chance for growth. Health coaching truly does create meaningful change in people's lives, and if you stay committed, the opportunities will come."

Curious about the doors that health coaching could open for you? Join a free introductory webinar to find out more about this fast-growing profession.

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WEBINAR



HOW HEALTH COACHES ARE BRIDGING THE GAP IN PRIMARY CARE

As GP minutes shrink and chronic illness surges, personalised prevention can't wait. Health coaches step in—turning brief consultations into sustained behaviour change. At Clapham's Begg Practice, a new pilot pairs patients at cardiovascular risk with volunteer coaches, proving person-centred care can start right inside primary care.

PERSONALISED PREVENTION MEETS PRIMARY CARE

With growing pressure on the NHS and a rise in long-term health conditions, there is an increasing need for more personalised, preventative care within primary care settings.

GPs are often stretched for time, making it difficult to offer patients the level of ongoing support and lifestyle guidance required to make lasting changes - particularly when it comes to managing or preventing conditions like heart disease and diabetes.

Health coaching offers a practical and impactful solution to this challenge. By empowering individuals to take control of their health through behaviour change and goal setting, Health Coaches can complement clinical care and help improve patient outcomes.

At Clapham's Begg Practice, this approach is now being brought to life through a new pilot project involving four graduates from the Health Coaches Academy. These volunteer coaches are offering one-to-one support to patients over a six-to-eight-week period, with a focus on helping those with cardiovascular or cardiometabolic health concerns. By guiding patients to set achievable lifestyle goals and develop healthier habits, the coaches are bringing a more person-centred, supportive approach to healthcare - right where it's needed most.

“By working alongside GPs as a Health Coach, we can give patients the knowledge and encouragement they need to prevent disease and improve their quality of life.”

HCA Graduate Health Coach, Maria Lati



HCA STUDENTS PRACTISING HEALTH COACHING
AT 3-DAY LIVE TRAINING EVENT IN LONDON

SUPPORTING PATIENTS IN A NEW WAY

Dr. Senthil Jayapakasam, a GP at Begg Practice and member of the World Organisation of Family Doctors (WONCA), is a strong advocate for health coaching. He's seen the impact of lifestyle and behaviour on health outcomes in healthcare systems around the world, and believes that the UK can benefit hugely from placing more emphasis on prevention.

"As a member of WONCA (The World Organisation of Family Doctors), I've been fortunate enough to have witnessed healthcare in a number of different countries. In doing so, I have come to realise how significant an individual's lifestyle can be, and the impact it can have on patient health and the development of chronic disease."

One of the difficulties we encounter daily as doctors is time—we may have enough time to point patients in the right direction, but we lack the time to offer patients a supportive environment to help them create a lasting change that will impact their health and wellbeing," he explains. "Health coaching allows us to offer patients more than just advice—it gives them a practical, supportive way to make real changes in their lives.

"One of the most important goals of our pilot project is to build the evidence base of how health coaching can impact the prevention of chronic disease. NHS resources are scarce, so if we are able to show that utilising health coaches is a cost-effective way to prevent disease progression, then there would be considerable potential for health coaching to play a significant role in the future of primary care. If this were the case, I could envision this rolled out on a much broader scale, and find health coaching much more commonplace in a primary care environment."

Dr. Senthil Jayapakasam
GP at Begg Practice

MEET THE HEALTH COACHES MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Laura Devaney came to health coaching from a science and corporate background. After experiencing burnout in a high-pressure role, she started to explore how behaviour change could help her regain control of her own wellbeing.

"If I could change my own mindset, I believed I could help others do the same," she says. "Volunteering at Begg Practice felt like a great opportunity to give something back to the community and support people who may not otherwise access private coaching."

Caroline Roberts, a trained Nutritional Therapist, was drawn to health coaching to support behaviour change in a more impactful way:

“My goal was always to work in public health. Many people simply don’t have access to quality information about nutrition and lifestyle, and this kind of support could prevent so many common health problems,” she says. “I’ve seen how small changes can make a huge difference—especially for those with cardiometabolic issues.”

For Maria Lati, the motivation was personal. Long working hours and stress had taken a toll on her health, and coaching helped her make permanent changes. Now, she’s committed to helping others do the same:

“It’s a privilege to be part of this project. Working alongside GPs, we can give patients the knowledge and encouragement they need to prevent disease and improve their quality of life.”



WHY HEALTH COACHING, WHY NOW?

With rising rates of chronic disease and increasing demand on NHS services, there’s a growing awareness of the need for preventative healthcare. Health coaching is uniquely placed to meet that need—particularly when it comes to conditions like high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart disease, where lifestyle plays such a crucial role.

“Prevention is not only better for the patient, it’s better for the healthcare system,” says Dr Jayapakasam. “Health Coaches can help identify what’s realistic for each individual and support them to make changes that really matter.”

Dr. Senthil Jayapakasam
GP at Begg Practice

Patients benefit from a more personalised approach—one that listens to their hopes, barriers, and goals—and helps them find solutions that work in the context of their daily lives. Whether it’s building confidence to make dietary changes, developing healthier routines, or simply having someone to talk to, health coaching provides the support many people need to move forward.

Interested in becoming a Health Coach? Visit www.healthcoachesacademy.com to learn more about how you can be part of this growing movement in healthcare — and sign up to the mailing list to be the first to know when our Group Coaching CPD course goes live.

LOOKING AHEAD TO NHS HEALTH COACHING

This pilot placement has clear objectives: to raise awareness of the value of health coaching in a primary care setting, to offer a supported pathway for HCA graduates, and to explore how this model might be adapted for wider NHS use. The team also hopes to build stronger relationships within the Begg Practice, with the potential for group coaching programmes in the future.

Caroline sees great potential in the group model. *“Group coaching can be incredibly powerful - It helps create a supportive community where people learn from one another and stay motivated. It’s a great way to extend the reach of health coaching and build healthier communities.”*

For anyone considering a career in health coaching, this programme highlights just how rewarding and impactful the role can be. Health Coaches not only empower individuals, but also contribute to a broader shift in how we think about healthcare—one that values prevention, education, and collaboration.

As Maria puts it, *“Being part of this pilot has given me insight, confidence, and a real sense of purpose. It’s shown me how health coaching can work hand-in-hand with the NHS to make a real difference.”*

If the success of this placement continues, we may soon see Health Coaches becoming a regular and valued part of the NHS team—bringing their unique skills, empathy, and passion to the heart of primary care. As part of this growing movement, HCA will soon be launching a CPD course in Group Coaching — designed to help Health Coaches deliver impactful group-based programmes and extend their reach even further.



A Better Balanced Homemade

CHOCOLATE RECIPE

Recipe by HCA CEO, Carolyn St John Loder

Do you have a sweet tooth or a love of chocolate but want a healthier, low-sugar option? Get creative and make your own with the following healthier alternative to shop-bought chocolate, created by CEO of Health Coaches Academy, Carolyn St John Loder:

Ingredients:

1 x bar Lindt 70% chocolate
 1 x bar Lindt 85% chocolate
 1 large tablespoon of (solidified) coconut oil
 1 large tablespoon of almond butter
 ½ bag of dried cranberries
 1 large tablespoon of coconut flakes
 1 large tablespoon of toasted almond flakes / toasted hazelnuts / toasted pistachios
 Generous sprinkle of rock salt



Instructions:

1. Melt the chocolate, coconut oil and almond butter together
2. Add dried cranberries, coconut flakes, your choice of toasted nuts and a generous sprinkle of rock salt
3. Pour into small sandwich tin (e.g 7 inch square)
4. Place in fridge until hard then cut into chunky squares

Enjoy!

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When I had a knee replacement in March 2024, I knew I would be immobile for several months as well as pretty inflamed, both from the trauma and all the post operative pain killers. I was determined to not put on any weight and so I followed a strict (but delicious) anti-inflammatory diet to help the healing process.

I love good quality chocolate and wanted to find a way to still get my chocolate fix but to make it a healthier one.

So I started to play around with different ingredients to make my own very low sugar chocolate recipes; sugar is inflammatory as well as being destabilising for blood sugar, generally full of 'unhealthy' fats, and far more likely to lead to weight gain. So as part of my rehab, the shop-bought chocolate had to go.

I used different combinations of toasted nuts, coconut flakes, nut butters, low sugar dried berries and good quality dark chocolate melted and mixed with the other ingredients and Voila - I developed a range of different chocolate treats that everyone agreed tasted better than any other shop bought chocolate but with a fraction of the sugar content. One trick I learnt is that if you added some Himalayan rock salt to the mix, the chocolate actually tasted sweeter without the need for added sugar.

*And an important trick to avoid gorging (for those of you who can down a large bar of Cadbury's in just one sitting) is using solidified coconut oil - 1 large tablespoon melted and added to the recipe and your body feels satiated with just a few squares rather than a whole bar. **Magic!***

-Health Coaches Academy, CEO, Carolyn St John Loder



WHAT'S ON AT HCA?



**FREE
HEALTH
COACH
WEBINARS**

THE HCA SENIOR TRAINING TEAM

At Health Coaches Academy, we are passionate about helping you to take control of your own health and inspiring others to do the same.

To help you get started, we run regular online webinars. Join HCA's Senior Training Team for an introduction to this fast-growing profession and learn about key aspects of health coaching including essential coaching tools, nutrition, and how to set up a successful health coaching practice.

HCA TALKS Health



Stay updated with the latest in wellbeing through our fortnightly **podcast** too!

HCA Talks Health is hosted by health journalist Zena le Roux with each episode diving into diverse health topics including:

- Sleep strategies
- Weight loss
- Emotional resilience
- Workplace wellbeing
- Mindful eating
- Alzheimer's

Discover the MAGIC of Health Coaching



Would you like to take control of your own health and create a life you love? Are you looking to improve the health and habits of others? Wondering how to sustain those 'healthy' changes?

Join our CEO Carolyn St John Loder for an introduction to the fast-growing health coaching profession and how it has the power to completely transform lives.

Transform your lifestyle & nutrition as a Health Coach



Would you like to find out how health coaching can help you completely transform your lifestyle and eating habits, as well as empower those around you? Join our CEO and Director of Nutrition

Training, Ann Garry to discover practical strategies to boost your health and nutrition and hear inspiring success stories from HCA students and graduates who have transformed their lives through health coaching.

Earning potential & Health Coach career opportunities



Are you curious about the job opportunities and earning potential that's available for Health Coaches? Would you love to learn how others have built successful practices?

Join Professional Health & Wellness Coaches to explore the diverse work opportunities available in the health coaching world and how to make a successful living in this fast-growing profession.

Your Essential Guide to Becoming a Health Coach



Join Alison Jones, our Director, for an in-depth look at the HCA Diploma in Health & Wellness Coaching. This session will cover our comprehensive syllabus, course structure, postgraduate support, plus

how we equip you with the skills needed to build and launch your own successful health coaching practice.



To register, scan here or visit our [Free Events page here](#).





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