**The Big Five Health Factors**

Tip Sheet #15 from *Doing the Right Things Right* by Laura Stack

Good health doesn't automatically produce productivity, but it prepares you for it. You can't do your best work when you feel bad. You've noticed how sluggishly your brain works after a poor night's sleep or a missed meal, how distracting a growly stomach can be, and how low self-esteem can create nagging anxiety. Now compare all that to workdays when you felt in tip-top condition, bursting with energy and good health. I'll bet you performed extremely well on those days.

You can't control all the factors contributing to good health, but you *can* control most of them. I find these five most im­portant to me:

1. **Sleep.**The typical adult requires seven to nine hours of restful sleep per night. Among other things, sleep helps you fend off infection and illness, because your body does most of its cellular repairs while sleeping. Sleep also forces you to stay in one spot while your muscles rest and recover. It lets your mind clear the slate and process what you've learned or experienced during the day. REM sleep helps you absorb new motor skills and gives your body the time to manufacture DHEA, a steroid that keeps the wakefulness steroid, cortisol, in check. Good sleep may even help you maintain a desired weight. Sleep deprivation produces a natural appetite stimulant called ghrelin, while depressing the production of leptin, an appetite suppressant. So the less you sleep, the hungrier you'll be.
2. **Eat Well.**Maintaining a good diet is all about ensuring you get the nutrients needed to keep your personal productivity machine working without adding weight that will drain your energy. Don't just count calories; balance protein, fats, and carbs, and get all the vitamins and minerals you need. *How* you eat is as important as *what* you eat. While you don't have to limit your diet to lettuce and carrots at every meal, exercise portion control to control your weight, especially as you age and your metabolism slows.
3. **Hydrate.**The human body consists mostly of water, so be sure to drink liquids throughout the day. But take care. Coffee, tea, and soda contain caffeine—a diuretic that pulls water out of your system. To avoid calories, steer clear of sugary drinks as well. Keep a bottle of water on hand and take an occasional swallow throughout the day to make sure you're getting the water you need. Drink at least a quart daily.
4. **Exercise.**Ironically, the more active you are, the more energy you have. That's because exercise helps you keep your weight down and gets your blood pumping. Set an exercise routine you can stick to, whether it involves ten laps in the pool each morning, a brisk walk twice a day, or visiting the gym three times a week. Otherwise, sneak in subversive exercise: walk upstairs to the next floor to go to the restroom, do squats or leg lunges while talking on your hands-free phone, walk on your treadmill while you watch TV, park at the far end of the parking lot, and so on.
5. **Maintain Your Mental Health.**Though some researchers argue you're more likely to succeed if your self-esteem isn't *too* high (thereby forcing you to constantly prove yourself), life is easier when you're happy. Add pleasant things to your environment: an ego wall, pictures of family and pets, optimistic sayings, funny cartoons, plants, whatever it takes to keep your spirits high.

**It's All Connected**

The Big Five are inextricably interrelated: sleep impacts weight as well as mental health, as do exercise and good diet; too much weight from poor diet and lack of exercise can contrib­ute to self-esteem issues; happiness can convince you to take better care of yourself… you get the picture. Strive to get each of these factors under control, and your productivity will scale upward.

Laura Stack, MBA, CSP, CPAE, aka The Productivity Pro®, gives speeches and seminars on sales and leadership productivity. For over 25 years, she’s worked with Fortune 1000 clients to reduce inefficiencies, execute more quickly, improve output, and increase profitability. Laura is the author of seven books, including *Doing the Right Things Right: How the Effective Executive Spends Time*. See [www.3TLeadership.com](http://www.3TLeadership.com).