

Why health truly is wealth for farmers

Farmers need to make sleep, a healthy diet and exercise a priority according to a new study by DCU which reports that half of Irish farmers have problems sleeping and close to a quarter have experienced burnout.

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Farmers require energy and vibrancy to thrive. Being tired or 'below par' leads to poor decision-making and work becoming a grind.

A recent study of Irish farmers, conducted by Dublin City University,

found that almost one in four (24%) reported burnout and half (50%) had sleep issues.

Burnout and poor sleep are associated with numerous poor health outcomes.

With spring in the air, now is the time of year to renew your focus on health and become fit for farming.

Workload

Workload is a key driver of lifestyle. We need work, rest and leisure in about equal proportions to have a



healthy lifestyle in the longer term. In addition, getting a regular break away from work is crucial.

A range of studies show that many farmers work excessively long hours and seldom take a break from the farm.

The early part of the year, around now, after the busy spring season, is the best time to review where your farm work time is going and to plan changes for the remainder of the year. It is also a good time to plan regular breaks from farming.

Sleep

Are you getting enough sleep? Sleep is essential for the physical and mental wellbeing required to carry out your everyday tasks effectively and safely. You should be aiming to get at least seven to eight hours of sleep per night.

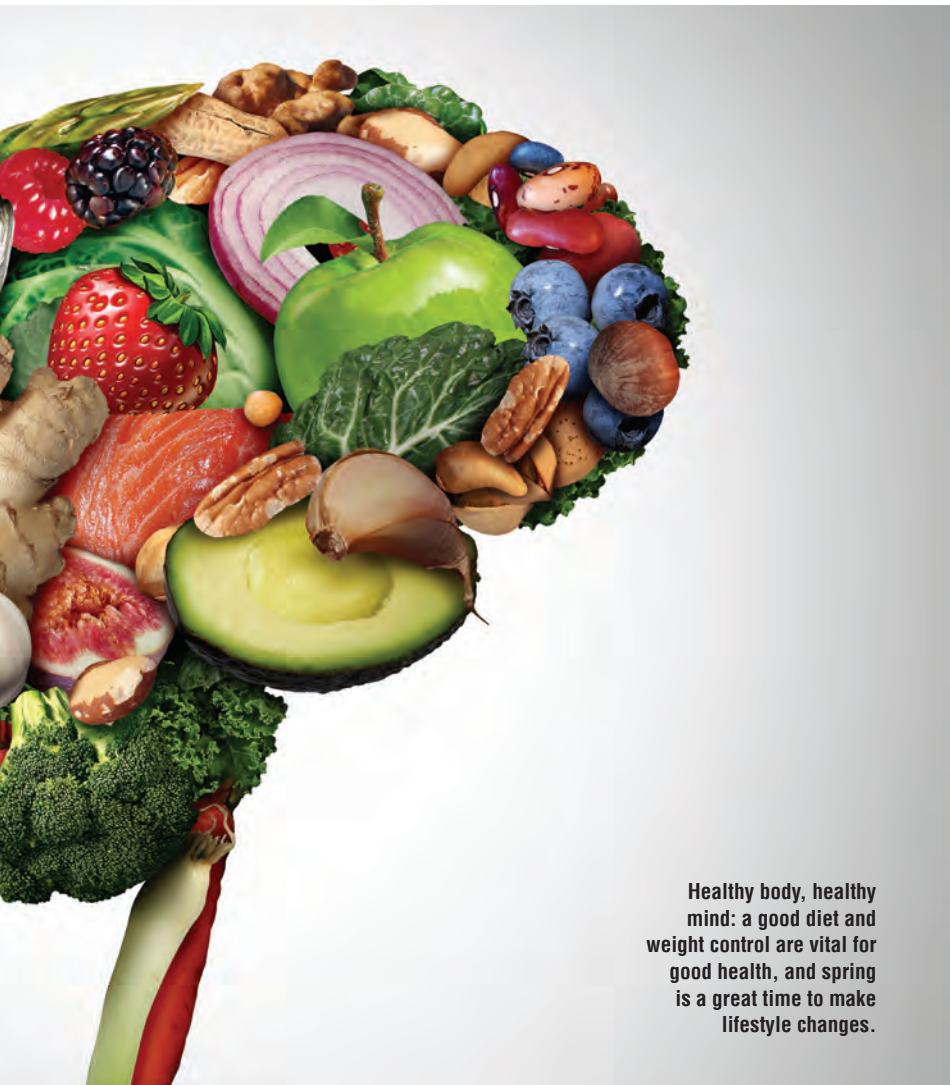
Make sure you set a routine that works for you and stick to it.

Create an environment that promotes good quality sleep – keep your room dark, cool (between 18 – 22C) and, where possible, quiet.

If you do wake in the night, keep the lights in your sleep environment



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Healthy body, healthy mind: a good diet and weight control are vital for good health, and spring is a great time to make lifestyle changes.

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Physical health, mental health, farming practices, farm safety, and lifestyle are all connected. Farmers in poor health are more likely to suffer accidents. Disability associated with poor health or the results of an injury leads to reduced farm incomes

dim. And try to limit light exposure (especially blue light such as from mobile phones, laptops, and TVs) for up to one-hour prior to bed as this can interfere with sleep.

This time of the year is particularly busy for many farmers, and you may be up all hours of the night.

Instead of sacrificing your sleep, try and fit in times for sleep and rest between tasks or in the evening if you know you will be up later in the night.

Diet

Diet and weight control is vital for health and spring is a great time to make a change. Findings of an Irish study indicate that these are areas needing attention to prevent cardiovascular disease and cancers in the long term.

This study showed that almost two-thirds (62%) of participants were overweight or obese.

Regarding diet it showed that 60% of farmers reported consuming fried food more than once per week; almost half of farmers (46%) ate red meat most days of the week, while one in six (17%) reported consuming

processed meats most days of the week.

Fruit and vegetable consumption was low. Most (94%) reported eating less than five portions and consumption of sugary or salty snacks between meals was high (60%).

The HSE Healthy Eating Guidelines on the Web provide excellent guidance on making dietary changes.

Several Irish studies have shown that farmers get more than the internationally recommended 10,000 steps per day but also that they have a high sitting time of over eight hours per day.

A study by a Cardiology team at University of Galway has shown that farmers do not get enough moderate-to vigorous-intensity physical activity (MVPA) – the kind of exercise that provides cardiovascular disease protection.

You should be aiming for at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity activity five days per week (or 150 minutes per week).

Moderate-intensity activities include brisk walking, cycling, or swimming – activities that cause your breathing to quicken, but you're

not out of breath, although you may sweat a little.

Alternatively, you can aim for 20 minutes of vigorous-intensity activity three days per week. These activities include running, heavy yard work, or competitive sport – activities that will have you breathing deep and heavy and unable to maintain a conversation.

Health and farming

Physical health, mental health, farming practices, farm safety and lifestyle are all inter-connected. For instance, farmers in poor health are more likely to suffer accidents. Disability associated with poor health or the results of an injury leads to reduced farm income.

Controlling the workload, taking breaks, adequate exercise, diet and weight control are all associated with positive mental health.

The challenge lies in making the changes to reap the benefits. Connect with some person or group who can assist in making positive changes. And before making changes, always consult your GP for a check-up and advice.