5 Lifestyle Changes You Can Make to Help Boost Your Productivity

If you're looking for ways to boost your productivity, Christina Burns wants to help. She is the CEO and founder of the Naturna Institute in New York City, a doctor of Eastern medicine, and the creator of Junk Juice, a line of herbs designed to help people look and feel their best. She sat down with Jessica Abo to discuss how to boost your clarity and performance through everyday lifestyle changes.

Jessica Abo: Take us back to the beginning. What inspired you to pursue becoming a doctor of Eastern medicine?

Christina Burns: When I was growing up, I had all sorts of health challenges: acne, recurrent UTIs, insomnia, mood issues, extreme fatigue. I would go to doctors, and they would give me antibiotics, birth-control pills or tell me that it would resolve on its own. When I asked about nutrition, they said that what I ate had nothing to do with what I was encountering. I wasn't finding any solutions, so I lived with these challenges and more for years. It wasn't until I traveled to Asia on a gap year when I was 19 that I saw different approaches to medicine and the inclusion of mindfulness and lifestyle and nutrition. I also saw when I was abroad doctors that would integrate Eastern medical practices and Western medical practices. While away I cleaned up my diet and experienced a dramatic change in my skin, energy and weight. When I returned home, I started studying under an herbalist and doctor of Chinese medicine. And from there forward, I was using mostly natural methods. I finally started

to find solutions for my own health, and then I wanted to do the same for others who were in my position.

What drew you to acupuncture?

I was studying under a martial artist when I was 20, who was a tiny man who could throw someone across the room using barely any force. There was one day that somebody fainted on the floor of the martial arts studio, and he went over and did some acupuncture and revived this guy. And I was like, “What is this method?” So I started trying it for some of my issues. I had acne, and it cleared up my acne. Nothing else had done that. I had this knee pain that was just persistent, and it cleared that up really quickly. I was just astonished. I thought this was this magical approach, and I wanted to learn more about it.

How did you go from that moment to becoming a doctor in Eastern medicine?

First, I enrolled in a three-year acupuncture program. I enrolled in another two years to do a doctorate. So I traveled to Asia and did a residency in hospitals there, and then I traveled into the mountains of China to study under monks who specialized in medicine in the traditional form and also practiced qigong and martial arts. And I spent the next year studying under several mentors, the monks that lived in these monasteries, before I went off to India to serve in rural clinics to help villagers with other doctors in other disciplines.

Did you always see yourself becoming an entrepreneur and creating the Naturna Institute?

I actually never sought to take on the responsibility of managing an entire business, but I really wanted to provide a certain approach that I wasn’t finding elsewhere. What I found was that wellness and healthcare, in general, are fragmented and that people had to go from doctor to doctor, from center

to center to try to get solutions for just maybe an issue. I wanted to offer a very comprehensive approach in one place that tied together all of my training in nutrition, in herbal medicine, in homeopathy, in acupuncture and other Eastern methods so I could provide all of that in one session for patients and they would feel less overwhelmed with all of the appointments they were undergoing. They would have a very comprehensive approach to achieve their health goals.

What are some ways you think people can boost their productivity?

Getting good-quality sleep is crucial. People think that if they get seven, eight hours, that's enough, but it depends on a lot of things. Are you going to bed really late and getting up late? If you are, then it could make you more foggy. Are you eating a big meal before bed? If you are, you're actually probably not getting good sleep because you are processing food the entire time you're sleeping, and then you're going to wake up kind of groggy. If you are really overstimulated before bed, like doing a lot of work or watching an action movie or something or just plugged into your phone until the later hours, this is something that could also keep you a little overstimulated and not let you get into that deep, quality REM sleep. So my advice is to get good-quality sleep, to go to bed preferably before midnight and preferably get out of bed by 8:00 AM and really get a good quality rest.

Next up, calm your nerves. Be careful about rushing. It will make you feel totally frenetic and scatterbrained. Cut down on coffee. Coffee really aggravates anxiety and is usually just a medication that we use to make us feel like we're going to be more productive when we feel groggy in the morning from eating pizza or having a glass of wine before bed the day before. So, try to avoid drinking much coffee, if at all, and maybe switch it out for a lighter form of caffeine, like a green tea or an oolong tea.

Be careful about sugar and refined carb consumption because that can send your nerves on a bit of a roller coaster. You get high off serotonin when you eat the sugar or a carb load, but then you crash. Your body and mind are not focused, and you can't really give the same attention to what you're doing.

Mind your diet. Minding your diet is crucial to clarity and productivity. If you're eating a bunch of heavy, inflammatory foods like fried food and a really carbohydrate-dense diet, you're going to feel heavy and kind of foggy. You have to be careful about your blood sugar and about your microbiome, the balance of your gut, which we hear a lot about, so balancing your blood sugar and balancing your gut are actually very related. Your microbiome gets upset when you feed it a bunch of sugars that makes the bacteria and the fungus get out of order, and then you're going to lead to brain fog. Balancing your blood sugar also involves eating less refined carbs, and maybe starting your day with protein and making sure you're having good healthy proteins and fats throughout the day.

Next up are boosters from natural medicine. Acupuncture is amazing for calming your nerves, for balancing your blood sugar, for enhancing clarity, so I really recommend integrating some acupuncture. It doesn't hurt, and it's very, very effective.

Last but not least, my recommendations include natural medicine enhancements like herbs or supplements. I have developed a line of herbal supplements called Junk Juice that's founded in thousands of years of Eastern medical tradition, herbs that have been shown in many clinical trials to be super effective for enhancing clarity, moderating the stress response, improving digestion, deepening sleep. So I use an evidence-based and a traditional approach to formulating blends to help the busy type A, high-achieving person reach their maximum potential.

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