

P85 Flip The Switch

P90 Finding the Right Balance

P92 Fitnation QUIZ

P94 Subs Club

P96 Ultra Team Profile



If you answered YES

to any of the questions, on the right, you might just need to 'flip the switch'. Ultra Fit contributor Andrew May has just released a new book, Flip the Switch, that offers practical advice on mastering new skills to survive in the modern world - helping you be 'on' when you have to and 'off' when you can. Flip the Switch teaches you to play hard and to recover even harder! Ultra Fit Editor, Rosemary Marchese recently grilled Andrew on the keys to sustaining performance.

Flip the Switch

By Andrew May (Fitness Business Consultant)

- > Navigating life's frantically paced, 24/7 digital age has never been more complex or daunting. We're all under constant pressure to perform day in day out – with eventual melt-downs now becoming more common.

Do you:

- Now spend half your day responding to email?
- Race from appointment to appointment?
- Get sick on weekends and holidays?



1. What methods can people use to better organise their working?

To boost work productivity it's important to understand your 'Energy Personality' and practice 'Forced Isolation'.

Understand Your Energy Personality

The latest research shows mental and physical performance can vary by as much as 15 per cent depending on the time of day. Psychologists call this pattern of varying concentration levels our 'concentration curve'.

Gazelles make up 15 to 20 per cent of the population. They're the type that spring out of bed around 6 am without an alarm clock and hit the road running. If you're a morning person, block out uninterrupted time in the morning to do high-end thinking work and creative planning rather than sifting through junk email. You should engage in the necessary routine, low-level mental tasks in the afternoon.

Night owls (or bears) make up about 20 per cent of the population (also called night owls) and function better in the afternoon or night. Clued-up bears keep their morning tasks simple and are most productive around 2 to 6 pm. Bears like to burn the midnight oil, which can be effective as long as they can still get adequate sleep. The mornings are probably the best time to do emails and lower-end thinking tasks – then do the productive activities later, when your energy levels are high.

The tiger personality (50 to 60 per cent of people) strikes a balance between gazelles and bears. It's possible to manage your energy and sleep patterns to switch between the two personalities according to life demands.

Forced Isolation

Have you ever noticed that you're more productive when you work from home? The average worker gets one interruption every eight minutes or seven interruptions per hour. This can pile up to almost 50 per cent of the average work day.

Once or twice a week isolate yourself from all of the distractions and try chunking your tasks together. Chunking involves focusing on completing one task at a time, or working on similar tasks together. For example, locking out two hours to complete a project report, or blocking all your inner-city meetings back-to-back. You can achieve forced isolation by:

- Putting a 'Do not disturb sign' on your door or workstation
- Stick headphones in your ears (even if you're not listening to anything)
- Work in a coffee shop or designated quiet area to avoid the constant daily distractions.

2. Can you offer some immediate tips to help handle the 9 to 5 grind?

Yes! I have three major tips...

Delete the Junk

We grew up learning that all communication deserves a response – that's common courtesy. This is what most people do with emails, faxes and phone calls, spending three hours or more daily just returning correspondence! Today's average worker receives more information on a daily basis than the average person in 1900 received in a lifetime. We need to filter through the daily junk and focus on what's important.

Avoid Multitasking Mania

Don't buy into the myth that multitasking increases productivity. The latest research at an information technology office in California showed that once workers were interrupted, it took a staggering 25 minutes (on average) to return to the original task.

Multitasking is fine for automated activities like tidying the office and talking on the phone at the same time. But when you need high-end thinking, multitasking will cause your thoughts to be interrupted and disjointed. This results in more half-finished projects being added to an already expanding 'To Do' list.

More and more people are showing signs and symptoms of Attention-Deficit Trait (ADT). ADT takes hold when we get so overloaded with incoming messages and unfinished tasks that we're unable to prioritise and complete.

Reactivate the Relaxation Response

The relaxation response is a state of deep relaxation where, unlike sleep or hypnosis, your mind is awake and alert. The relaxation response produces the exact opposite outcomes to the stress response ('fight or flight').

The relaxation response has been demonstrated by researchers around the world and is an inborn set of physiological changes that offset the changes occurred by the stress response. One significant difference between the two responses is that the stress response occurs involuntarily through the autonomic nervous system, whereas the relaxation response normally needs to be practiced.

Countless studies and much anecdotal evidence support the idea that the relaxation response can be controlled. It just takes practice to turn on the Relaxation Response and turn off the Stress Response. Three great strategies to switch off and relax include deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation and visualisation.



3. What would you say are the biggest time-wasters in an office?

According to a recent study by BASEX in New York the five biggest daily interruptions include:

- a colleague stopping by for an impromptu chat
- being called away from the desk or leaving voluntarily
- new email alert – bing!
- switching to another task or document on the computer, and
- phone calls

Sound familiar? The gadgets designed to enlighten your loads actually ensnare you. All the alarms and alerts slam productivity and invade what is left of your private life.

In another revealing study, Gloria Mark and Victor Gonzalez from the University of California tracked thirty-six workers at an investment firm and recorded how they spent their time in an average working day, minute by minute. The researchers found that the average worker spent just eleven minutes on any given task before being interrupted by the dinging of digital devices – the beep of an incoming email, SMS alert, a ringing phone or a knock on the cubicle partition. Once workers were interrupted it took on average twenty-five minutes to return to the original task – if they managed to do so at all! The workers in this study were juggling an average of twelve projects apiece.

4. You talk about being ON when you have to and OFF when you can - what can the average person introduce to help them avoid burnout or overload?

I've been fortunate to spend the past 15 years of my life involved in elite sport. The world's best athletes and sporting teams invest as much time and money on recovery as they do on training and performance. The key is to sustain performance, not just having a great month and then crash the next.

Corporate Recovery Toolbox

David Misson from the Sydney Swans introduced a recovery system where players aim to accumulate 100 points each week to ensure they are recovering properly for the upcoming game. An ice bath or massage might be twenty points, yoga scores twenty-five points, an easy stretch ten points and so on.

I've adapted this model and come up with the Corporate Recovery Toolbox. In the corporate world we try and play a five-day test match every week, a Grand Slam every fortnight, and an AFL Grand Final every day! Is it any wonder why we're continually tired?

The Corporate Recovery Toolbox combines both indoor and outdoor activities, with the total goal being 100 points a week. Why don't you give it a go?

5. In your new book you talk about the need to 'Hurry up and Go Slow!' - What do you really mean by this?

Our modern way of living has taught us that faster is better. Is it any wonder our health, relationships, sex lives and performance begin to suffer?

We're not designed to perform flat out 24 hours per day. Life is meant to be a series of sprints interspersed with periods of rest and recovery. While we regularly need to plough through those 'To-Do' lists, it's equally important to spend time in cruise mode. The challenge is that our culture has conditioned us to think that slow is the enemy of achievement - weak, passive and soft. Not true!

Go Slow Tips

Here are some of my favourite ways to relax and refresh.

- 1. Slow Stretching** – ease into Tai chi or very gentle, rhythmical stretching. Try doing a gentle 5 to 10 minute stretching routine before going to bed and concentrate on diaphragmatic breathing and lowering the heart rate.
- 2. Slow Walking** - emulate my dog, Cougar who stops and sniffs absolutely everything at the start of our early morning run – until I drag his lead and get him to speed up with me!
- 3. Slow Weekends** - stay in bed on a Sunday morning and read the papers – without feeling guilty! Yes, this might be a little more difficult for those of you with young children but you can still try to avoid cramming as much as you can into every weekend. Don't race from event to event to keep up appearances every weekend - practise cruising.
- 4. Slow 'Mini-Breaks'** – try getting away for a three day Bridget Jones 'mini break' and practice as many slow activities as you can. Avoid scheduling every waking hour with site seeing!
- 5. Slow Food** - copy the Italians meals that take a couple of hours to get through, and wash it down with a couple of glasses of hearty vino! A blow-out every now and then forms part a balanced life, as long as you're exercising regularly and eating well on most days.
- 6. Slow Gardening** – potter in the garden and take stock of the beautiful smells and lovely plants. 'Just stop and smell the roses' – it's an old saying but a good one!

7. Slow Sex - James Gleick, author of *Faster*, reports the average time we spend making love in our fast forward society is four minutes. I can hear some of you saying 'Wow – do some people actually last that long?' Tantric sex is not just for hippies and Sting. This 5,000 year old discipline advocates slow, mindful sex as a way to increased awareness and spiritual enlightenment.

8. Slow Thinking - lie down on soft grass and just stare at the clouds, dreaming slow thoughts and allowing time for idleness. It's amazing how often your best ideas come when you turn off conscious chatter and allow your subconscious mind to bubble through to the surface.

6. How can people take a little 'time out' throughout the day to get a mental or physical break?

Get into the habit of regular 'brain breaks'. Children and adults process information and learn more effectively when the information they receive is chunked and given little and often. Expecting anyone to work for hours at a time without a break and stay productive is totally unreasonable. Chronobiologists have found that glucose and blood pressure levels drop around every 90 minutes. By failing to get in tune with these natural rhythms daily productivity decreases, and the bodies natural stress-recovery cycle effectively becomes hijacked. Every 60 to 90 minutes try the following:

- Snack - eat quality foods high in protein to stimulate dopamine to help you think and boost concentration.
- Drink fluids - a hydrated brain is much more efficient.
- Take an energy break – go for a 5 minute walk outside and get some fresh air, natural sunlight will stimulate the pineal gland to release serotonin to help you stay alert.
- Change channels – take a mental break by listening to a favourite song, talk to someone or think about something totally different.

7. Has email positively or negatively affected our lives?

So much time is wasted every day with inefficient use of email and drawn out, pointless meetings.

Go to Email School

When did you ever go to email school? Like most people, I bet never. We didn't learn how to use emails to be productive and efficient so it's probably fair to say that most people have no idea how to use email effectively. If you feel entirely swamped by them you're not alone. Try the following tips

- 'Chunk' checking times – only check emails two or three times during the day.

- Get rid of the 'you have mail' alert - this kills your flow of thought and productivity.
- Avoid email tennis – if any more than two emails go back and forth and you're still unclear, pick up the telephone or organise a meeting.
- Keep email brief - get to the point. It's not a research thesis!
- Stop covering your butt - the cc and bcc is often very unnecessary.
- Delete - get rid of the junk. And do it regularly.
- Respond to what's important.

Flip the Switch

This on-demand society makes it almost impossible to 'switch off' at the end of the day – with email, the internet, wireless connections, laptops and BlackBerrys, we're always connected, always on. Eventually this takes its toll on our energy levels, health and our relationships. Holidays are something we store up and collect rather than use. Weekends are a thing of the past. Too often, they're nothing more than a good time to catch up on all the backlog of work! The word weekend is actually meant to be two separate words – 'week' and 'end'. It's essential to take time out to recharge, refuel and reinvigorate. Practice being 'on' when you have to and 'off' when you can. Good luck! **UFM**

Andrew May

www.andrewmay.com

Andrew May is the best selling author of *Flip the Switch* and is regarded as an expert on performance and productivity. He is one of Australia's leading corporate speakers and is the co-founder of Good Health Solutions, Australia's largest corporate health company. Andrew is the former Physical Performance Manager for the Australian Cricket Team and has also worked with AFL Teams and Olympic Athletes in track and field, swimming, basketball, netball, hockey and tennis. Andrew is a regular voice on 2UE radio and is the resident lifestyle expert on Channel Nine's TODAY show.

