

APP OF THE WEEK

A guide for all walks of life

Katie McGregor
healthpost@scmp.com

Enjoy Hiking
Free
Rating 9/10

Just like the app, hiking in Hong Kong is free and there are few better things for your body and mind. Besides the benefits of a slow, steady calorie burn and a steady pace of exercise in your own rhythm, hiking awakens a sense of adventure.

I like hiking and Enjoy Hiking is full of new possibilities. This bilingual app is produced by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department.

The trails can be searched by type – family walks, nature trails, country trails, long trails and others – or by region. The “others” category includes a War Relics Trail and the Lung Fu Shan Fitness Trail, which runs up The Peak near Pinewood Battery. Because the trails are cross-referenced I’m uncertain how many are mentioned, but there are enough to keep you busy.

Pick a trail and you get a simple map showing the route and landmarks along the way together with the option to see a hybrid satellite/map view. Tap for trail information, which includes the basics such as starting and finishing points, distance and estimated time to complete the trail, plus a full description. Possible bus numbers to take you to and from the hike are also provided, but this information



is only useful if you know where you are going; it doesn't tell you where to get off.

The notes give a detailed description of the trail, including historic points of interest, and observations about the views you might expect. The style in which these sections are written suggests that it was done by someone who also enjoys hiking.

As this is a government-sponsored app, you can be assured that there is a useful information section covering everything from how to walk, to what to pack in your bag: sewing kit, map packed in a plastic bag, a whistle, compass, emergency food, notebook and much more.

One thing I can now dispense with is my old faithful hiking book.

ASK THE DOCTORS
DR MICHAEL SOON

Q: I have a terrible posture and slump at my computer all day. Other than trying to sit straighter, what can I do to improve the resulting back pain?

A: Sitting on a chair is an activity that only humans do – no other animals do that. Research has shown that the pressure on the spine (specifically on the discs) is the highest when seated, compared with lying down and standing. This can lead to low back pain. With the stooped posture associated with computer or, worse, laptop use, the neck is also brought into a poor position and the shoulders hunched, leading to neck and upper shoulder aches and pains.

With increased stresses on the spine, the core muscles maintaining the posture and alignment of the spine become important. Unfortunately in city living, there are a significant number of people who do not exercise sufficiently to maintain good muscle tone. As much as we do not want to admit it, muscle atrophy is a factor that predisposes us to back pain.

Doing sufficient exercise, especially for core strength is important. This can be either through gym work, Pilates or

similar. If this is not sufficient, seeing a physiotherapist can be very helpful in re-educating the body to maintain good control of the posture and gait.

Sitting straighter is an option, but what is more important is examining your work ergonomics. You should see if your chair is too low or too high for your desk and adjust it to a comfortable height. Using a lumbar support or rest with your chair can be useful in reminding you to maintain good posture.

I tell my patients with such issues to exercise for two minutes every hour. This means you stop your work on the hour, get up and stretch your neck, shoulders and back. If you are embarrassed, view it like a toilet break. Prevention is better than cure.

Having stronger muscles and awareness of a good posture, will lead to a good posture. Half the battle is won at this stage.

Continue with these regular strengthening exercises and you will not need to see a doctor for such conditions.

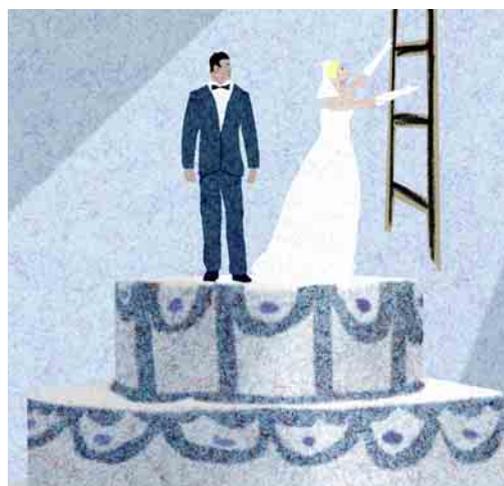
Dr Michael Soon is a consultant orthopaedic surgeon at the Centre for Orthopaedics in Singapore

HEALTH BITES

Jeanette Wang
jeanette.wang@scmp.com

Science makes light work of drugs

Could it be magic? Scientists at the US Department of Energy's Argonne National Laboratory near Chicago are using levitation to improve the drug development process. "One of the biggest challenges when it comes to drug development is in reducing the amount of the drug needed to attain the therapeutic benefit, whatever it is," says Argonne X-ray physicist Dr Chris Benmore, who led the study. The scientists have found a way to manipulate sound waves to create an acoustic pressure that cancels gravity, thereby allowing light objects – in this case, droplets of drug solutions – to be levitated. The result: the ability to create amorphous (liquid) drugs, which are both more highly soluble and have a higher bioavailability than solid drugs. This means a lower dose can produce the desired effect, thus reducing the side effects. The researchers are now working on identifying on which drugs the levitation will have the best results.



When in doubt, run away

Sometimes it's good to listen to that inner voice. Brides-to-be who get cold feet are likelier to have an unhappy marriage and divorce, according to a new study by University of California, Los Angeles psychologists published in the *Journal of Family Psychology*. Among 232 couples in Los Angeles tracked regularly over four years, women who had doubts about getting married before their weddings were 2½ times likelier to divorce within four years than wives without these doubts. Among couples still married after four years, couples with doubts were significantly less satisfied with their marriages than those without doubts. At the time of marriages, the average age of the husbands was 27 and the wives 25. The researchers say premarital doubts are "common but not benign". However, they are not advising women with doubts to necessarily end their relationships. "Talk about it and try to work through it," says Professor Thomas Bradbury, the study's co-author. "You hope that the big issues have been addressed before the wedding."

Coconut water hits the trails

Coconut water mania is truly sweeping through Hong Kong. Not only has it invaded supermarket shelves all over town, but it has also made its way to the trails. The Jax Challenge, a new running race to be held on October 7 at Tai Tam Country Park, will feature coconut water at aid stations along the route in place of traditional sports drinks. Participants can choose between the 12-kilometre "family friendly" race or the hillier 14-kilometre loop. Both start and finish at Hong Kong International School on Tai Tam Reservoir Road. Besides the entry fee, participants are required to raise funds for the race's chosen charities, Kids4kids and the Animals Asia Foundation. For more details, go to jaxcoco.com/jaxchallenge.



A well-rounded workshop

A new workshop aims to empower expectant mothers to manage, enjoy and thrive through the challenging pregnancy process. Jointly organised by maternity services company A Mother's Touch and health coaching provider Inspire Health, Bump 4 Joy is a 2½-hour workshop that offers tips, tools and ideas related to mental, physical, emotional and spiritual wellness. The first workshop will be on Saturday and costs HK\$800. For more information, contact Liz Purnell-Webb on 9769 2701 or Martike de Grip on 6341 3858, e-mail program@bump4joy.com, or visit bump4joy.com