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All eyes on health

We rely on our eyes every minute of the day but sometimes we take them for granted. Here we find out how you can best protect one of your greatest assets.

Digital eye strain, tech fatigue or computer vision syndrome are all terms to describe tired, overworked eyes. It's not a serious condition or disease, but anyone who regularly stares at a screen for two or more hours at a time will be familiar with the symptoms. Driving long distances, reading fine print or focusing on detailed work up close for extended periods can also strain our eyes.

Why it happens

Any activity where you tend not to blink as often as you would normally can cause symptoms of eye fatigue. You may also clench the facial muscles around the eyelids, temples and jaw, as your eyes work to stay focused, which adds to the discomfort. Refractive vision problems, due to irregularities in the shape of the

eye, may also lead to eye strain. The good news is that eye strain does not cause any permanent damage.

Looking after your eyes

The best treatment for eye strain is rest, and it will usually ease the discomfort, at least in the short term. You should also:

- Take regular breaks when you're focusing close-up for long periods – when reading, when using electronic devices like computers and smartphones, and when driving.
- Adjust the lighting so that the light is behind you and focused directly on your book, for instance.
- Use lubricating eye drops, which can help to reduce dryness and redness.
- Adjust the contrast, brightness and font size on your screen.
- Adjust the monitor so the top of the screen is just below eye level.
- Keep your screen clean to avoid glare and reflection caused by dust and dirt. ✕

Know the symptoms

- Burning sensation in the eye area.
- Watery or uncomfortably dry eyes.
- Difficulty focusing.
- Sensitivity to light.
- Blurred or double vision.
- Headaches.
- Sore neck, shoulders or back due to muscle tension.

Keep an eye on your vision

See your optometrist for regular eye tests and specific exercises to strengthen your eye muscles.

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The International Day of Friendship is on July 30. The International Day of Friendship is a United Nations day that promotes the role that friendship plays in promoting peace in many cultures.

The International Day of Friendship was created with the idea that friendship between peoples, countries, and cultures can inspire peace efforts and build bridges between communities.

Take a **break** from eating

It's not just what we eat, but when we eat that is important to health, claim fans of time-restricted eating. What is this, and should we all be doing it?

Intermittent fasting for weight loss has been around for many years. Dr Michael Mosley made it popular with his book *The Fast Diet* (also known as the 5:2 Diet) and since then other types of intermittent fasting have emerged on the dieting landscape. Most fasting diets restrict how much food is eaten, and all of them restrict when food is eaten.

One type of intermittent fasting is time-restricted eating. This involves eating only during an eight- to 12-hour period each day. The rest of the time you don't consume anything other than water or kilojoule-free drinks, including black coffee and tea.

Get into the rhythm

According to Dr Satchin Panda, a professor at the Salk Institute, people who use time-restricted eating can lose weight and improve their health without restricting their energy intake.

Panda is an expert on the body's circadian rhythms and believes that this form of eating gives the body a chance to repair itself, something it can't do well if we are constantly snacking and grazing from early morning to late evening.

"The science and the benefits of time-restricted eating are very different from those of other forms of fasting," says Panda. During the fasting period, metabolism switches to rejuvenation, he explains, unwanted chemicals are broken down, stored fat is burned, and damaged cells repaired.

There's plenty of research on time-restricted eating, although most of it has been done on rats and mice. These studies find significant

health and weight-loss benefits in animals eating within an eight- to nine-hour period. One human study on pre-diabetic men found that those who restricted their eating to a six-hour window experienced lower insulin levels, less night-time hunger and significantly lower blood pressure than men eating within a 12-hour window. ✕

Easy does it

Many people struggle with the food restriction of traditional intermittent fasting diets, which can heavily limit food on two to three days of the week. Time-restricted eating can be more sustainable, as your restriction is limited to 12 to 16 hours of the day, a large part of which you'll be asleep.

If you want to try time-restricted eating, you must be monitored by your doctor if you have diabetes, take medications with food, have a history of eating disorders, or are pregnant or breastfeeding.

Start gradually with a shorter fasting period of 12 hours. If that feels comfortable, you can either stick with that or increase it by 30 minutes every three days. Research suggests there are few benefits of extending it beyond 16 hours.





Say goodbye to workout injuries

For many of us, hitting the gym is a weekly ritual. But no matter your experience or fitness level, you can still get injured. Learn how to cut your risk.

Who doesn't want to be stronger and fitter? The benefits of getting fit far outweigh the risk of injury. But overusing or overloading muscles using gym equipment can mean a pulled or strained muscle, injured shoulder or knee, or tendinitis – injuries that can see you out of action for weeks or months.

Stay injury-free in the following ways:

- 1. Know what you're doing.** Make sure a qualified instructor shows you the proper technique for each exercise and how to use the equipment correctly. Let them know if you have previous or current injuries, conditions or weaknesses.
- 2. Warm up.** A pre-workout warm-up helps get your body ready for exercise by gradually increasing your heart rate and loosening your muscles and joints. Warm up by riding an exercise bike, walking on a treadmill or jogging in place for five to 10 minutes.

- 3. Slowly does it.** You may find that you're able to lift only a few kilograms at first. Make sure you gradually build up the intensity, duration and frequency. Launching into a demanding routine too quickly is a sure-fire way to injure yourself.

- 4. Know your limits.** Only lift weights you know you can handle, and slow down or stop if you feel the weight is out of control or too heavy.

- 5. Embrace variety.** Muscle needs time to repair and grow after a workout. If you repeat the same muscle movements too frequently you risk getting overuse and repetitive-use injuries such as shin splints and tendinitis. You can vary your workout by running or walking briskly on day one; lifting weights on day two; and swimming or cycling on day three. Alternatively, you can aim to work your upper body on Mondays

and Fridays, and your lower body on Wednesdays and Sundays.

- 6. Stop if you feel pain.** You might ignore a niggling pain, hoping it will go away, but that niggle can turn into a longstanding injury if you ignore it. If you start to feel pain, stop, rest and seek medical advice. ✕

Safety First

If you're new to an exercise program, particularly if you're overweight, aged over 45, or have a pre-existing condition, check with your doctor first to see if strength training is right for you.

If you repeat the same muscle movements too frequently you risk getting overuse and repetitive-use injuries such as shin splints and tendinitis.

Life in the slow lane



Overscheduled, stressed and rushing towards the next task. If that sounds like you, then it's time to shift into low gear.

We have smaller families than in times past, clever appliances that keep our homes running efficiently, and technology to keep us entertained and make our working lives easier ... but we're busier than ever before. The problem is that we're using the freed-up time to fit even more in but the good news is that slowing down can have a powerful impact on our lives.

Addicted to speed

From fast food to express lanes to super-fast internet, it seems we've become addicted to speed. Thanks to advances in technology, we can carry out a huge number of tasks quickly with a simple click. But doing more things in less time isn't translating into more time to chill. Instead we're filling every moment of our lives with stimulation, which helps explain why as a society we're more stressed than ever.

Where did it all go wrong?

The problem is that we find it very hard to step away from the constant distraction, stimulation and activity, even though our minds are silently begging us for a break. It's like being on a treadmill and the moment it stops we're compelled to jump on another one. Think about how we respond to an internet outage; we frantically try to get the problem sorted because we can't stand a moment of non-connectivity. This constant connectivity means we're losing our relationship with the natural rhythms of life.

Embracing the art of slow

There's been a cultural shift to slowing down the pace of life, which has seen the slow movement take off around the world. Slow food, slow travel, slow cities, slow design, there is even a slow technology movement. Here are a few ways to help you put on the brakes.

1. Slow tech: Going on a digital detox is a way to free up time for reflection and quiet times. Our smartphones are a one-stop shop for entertainment and we enjoy their company a little too much. Separate yourself from your digital device of choice as often as you can – try one day a week, or make evenings or weekends tech free. Resist the temptation to binge-watch and enjoy one episode of your favourite series at a time instead. Sit on the bus or train and keep your phone in your bag. When's the last time you daydreamed as you watched the world go by?

2. Slow stretching: Try doing a gentle five- to-10-minute stretching routine before bed each night and concentrate on your breathing. Not only will it calm you, it will coax you away from your phone or television before bed.

3. Slow walking: Instead of power walking to your favourite beats, switch off and slow down. Look around and notice the trees and flowers in your neighbourhood.

4. Slow weekends: We've developed a fear of responding with anything other than 'busy' for fear of seeming boring when asked how our weekend was. Fight FOMO and

avoid cramming as much as you can into every weekend. Instead schedule in time for reading, sitting and listening to music, having a coffee in the garden ... and simply be.

5. Slow eating: This doesn't mean cooking in your slow cooker. Simply listen to your body and pick up on your natural hunger signals. It's about giving every meal and snack your full attention and savouring each mouthful.

6. Slow gardening: The true definition of 'stop and smell the roses' is enjoying your garden instead of whipping around with the lawn mower and pulling out weeds. Make yourself a cup of tea and sit outside and take in the sights, smells and sounds of the natural world around you.

7. Slow thinking: Make yourself comfortable outside and stare at the clouds, allowing yourself to daydream. You never know what life-changing ideas it could lead to. ✕

Making the connection

The challenge?

Fitting slow living into our busy lives.

The solution?

Slowing down, becoming engaged on a different level, and allowing our minds to switch off and simply be.



Game of life

There's a strong link between heightened levels of anxiety and depression and increased hours of screen exposure. Our children are hooked on digital devices and studies show that gaming activates reward pathways by releasing the feelgood brain chemical dopamine – at similar levels released with cocaine use. When reward pathways are overused, they become less sensitive, meaning increased stimulation is needed to experience pleasure. Dopamine is an essential ingredient for sustained focus and motivation, and even small changes in dopamine sensitivity can wreak havoc on how well a child feels and functions.

The result: Starting life with alterations to brain activity does not bode well for our children's future mental health and experts warn that kids are less resilient and more stressed than ever before. The expert advice is to worry less about upsetting our children by restricting device use and think more about limiting video games to protect their mental health.



7 Ways to drive ergonomically

As anyone who spends a lot of time in a vehicle will testify, driving takes its toll on your body.

Repetitive movements and vibration are two significant factors that negatively impact the body when driving, leading to muscle fatigue and musculoskeletal disorders. General discomfort and lower back pain are frequent complaints reported by drivers as well as foot cramps, stiff neck, and sore shoulders from poor posture, stress, and tension.

Driving woes

On repeat Even though you're in a seated position, you're performing several repetitive movements: your hands are on the steering wheel, forcing your arms into a higher position than, say, if you were working at a desk; and to operate the brake and accelerator pedals, you have to extend your legs forward at regular intervals, with one foot at an angle to operate the accelerator and brake pedals periodically. With a manual vehicle, you have the added movements involved in using the clutch and gear stick.

Feel the vibration When driving a car over uneven or bumpy road surfaces, your body will experience up-and-down vibrations or sideways movements when going around corners. The force on your body will depend on the speed of acceleration or deceleration.

Changing places

Being comfortable and well positioned in a vehicle can help reduce the negative effects of driving and minimise the risk of injury.

1. Raise your seat to allow maximum vision of the road and ensure there is adequate clearance between your head and the roof.
2. Knees should be bent, to comfortably operate the accelerator/clutch and brake. Check that the steering wheel doesn't come into contact with your thighs.
3. Thighs should be supported along the length of the seat while avoiding pressure behind the knees.

4. Invest in a backrest that gives support along the length of the back and allows your shoulders to be positioned slightly behind the hips.

5. The lumbar support, whether adjustable or not, should provide comfort with no pressure points or gaps between the spine and car seat. An S-shape spine is a safe shape.

6. Adjust the steering wheel to ensure elbows and shoulders are in a relaxed position with hands positioned below shoulder level. A good test is when you put your arms straight in front (above the top of the steering wheel), the top of the wheel should sit approximately at wrist level

7. Don't forget your neck. The neck should be in a neutral position, with the headrest positioned at the centre back of the head. ✕

"Do not dwell in the past, do not dream of the future, concentrate the mind on the present moment."

Buddha



Ask an expert about ...

Q Is it worth having DNA testing?

A With most things, there are advantages and disadvantages, and genetic testing is no exception.

Why test? Finding out you have an increased risk of a certain disease could be just the wake-up call you need to clean up your lifestyle, and have regular screening and monitoring by a specialist. In many cases this can help prevent the disease from developing, delay disease onset or reduce the impact.

You can find out loads of information about your health by having your DNA analysed, everything from your predisposition to common conditions to how you'll respond to medication. According to the NSW Government's Health Centre for Genetics Education, although the prospect of finding out more about your health is enticing, you could set yourself up to worry about something you have no control over because

finding out you have a variation in a gene involved in a particular condition doesn't tell you if you'll get it or to what extent. There may not yet be enough research and information to understand your specific genetic variations or what the impact on your health may be and what, if anything, you can do about it.

Also worth knowing is that under Australian law, life insurance applicants have to disclose any known genetic test results if requested and insurers can use results to discriminate against applicants for life, permanent disability, and income protection insurance. Choosing Wisely at choosewisely.org is a good place to start to help you decide if testing is right for you. ✕

App of the month

TrackMySpend

Do you ever get to the end of the month and wonder where all your money has gone? You can get a clear picture of your spending habits with

TrackMySPEND app from ASIC's MoneySmart. You start by entering your weekly, fortnightly, monthly or yearly spending limit, then enter your purchases as you go. You always know how much you've spent, where you've spent it, how close you are tracking to your budget, and when you've reached your limit. Available free from the App Store and Google Play.



Trouble nodding off?

Do you have difficulty getting to sleep at night? Then slip on a pair of socks, say researchers. A Korean study published in the *Journal of Physiological Anthropology* found that wearing socks significantly improved sleep quality. Socks helped participants fall asleep 15 minutes earlier, stay asleep during the night, and sleep for 30 minutes longer. ✕

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News Bites



Top song to reduce stress

Few of us escape stress, and nor should we. In small amounts stress is essential. But chronic stress can be deadly, increasing the risk of health issues such as heart disease, cancer, depression, and more.

It's good to have a number of tips and tricks up your sleeve to help manage daily stress. One of the most powerful techniques is listening to music. After measuring the effect of different songs on brain activity, heart rate, blood pressure and breathing, neuroscientists from the UK have now specified which tunes give you the most bang for your musical buck. One song, *Weightless* by Marconi Union, resulted in a striking 65 per cent reduction in overall anxiety. What's remarkable is that the song was created with this in mind, designed to help slow the listener's heart rate and lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol. A 10-hour version of *Weightless* is available free on YouTube, and a Spotify list of the top 10 songs is available as Most Relaxing Songs Ever. ✕

Vitamin C for diabetes

People with diabetes often find it hard to bring down their blood sugar levels, even with the help of medication. Now a new study from Deakin University suggests that something as simple and inexpensive as taking 500mg of vitamin C twice a day can help lower the typical blood sugar spike after meals by up to 36 per cent. It also found vitamin C was helpful in reducing raised blood pressure.

It's only a small study but the promising results show that vitamin C is worthy of further research, says Diabetes Australia CEO Professor Greg Johnson. "Managing type 2 diabetes is a struggle for hundreds of thousands of Australians," says Professor Johnson. "Every potentially effective addition to the treatment options is welcome, and we encourage people with type 2 diabetes to discuss this with their health professional."

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THING YOU CAN DO TODAY



Keep social media envy in check

At its best social media is a great way to connect with friends and family. At its worst, it sucks up our attention and triggers comparison and envy.

It's perfectly normal to feel envious when reading about someone else's life on social media. Some posts can really touch a nerve – friends having babies when you're struggling to conceive, others getting married when you're newly single, or photos of a party you weren't invited to.

Here are five tips to stop envy eating you up:

1. Remember that many profiles are forms of personal advertisements. Most people post what's positive and what they want others to see, rather than what their lives really are.
2. Recognise when someone else has something that you want but don't have, but also acknowledge that you can survive without it, and that not having it doesn't make you less worthy.
3. Keep a gratitude journal. Social media forces you to compare and you may feel you come out lacking. A gratitude journal reminds you to treasure your real-life moments.
4. Remove what you don't like. If certain posts from particular people bother you, you can block those people while also keeping them as your friends.
5. Log out. You can make a clean break altogether from social media, or decide to only go online once or twice a week.

EAT SMARTER

Red onions

We rarely give them a second thought, chopping them up and throwing them in our curry or bolognese, but hidden in the humble onion are some remarkably healthy compounds that make them worthy of including on your daily menu.

All onions have similar health benefits, but red onions are a stand-out. They contain plant compounds called anthocyanins, powerful antioxidants that give these onions their distinctive colour.

Red onions are particularly rich in a plant pigment called quercetin. This powerful antioxidant is being studied for its potential role in cancer prevention, and also seems to have positive effects on blood pressure, inflammation and the immune system.

Your gut will thank you for including onions in your diet. All onions are a decent source of fibre, particularly soluble fibre known as fructans. Fructans act as prebiotic fibre, which means the beneficial bacteria that live in your gut can use them as fuel. As bacteria thrive on fructans they produce a substance called butyrate, which is believed to reduce inflammation and cut your risk of colon cancer. ✕



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