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**HEALTH & SAFETY
NEWSLETTER**

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August 2019

5 ways to prevent dementia

Dementia is more feared than cancer, but at least one in three cases can be prevented if we prioritise looking after our brains when we're younger.

There are many different types of dementia, which is a broad term that describes symptoms including loss of memory, intellect, social skills and physical functioning. According to the World Health Organization, the number of people living with dementia worldwide is currently estimated at 47 million and is projected to increase to 75 million by 2030. The number of cases of dementia are estimated to almost triple by 2050.

Dementia is seen as an old person's disease. Yet according to an international study published in the *Lancet*, many of the brain changes can start decades earlier, meaning

our lifestyle when we're young can determine our later risk of dementia. Here are five ways to protect your brain:

1. Get moving.

Physical activity can protect you against cognitive decline. The Caerphilly study from the UK followed nearly 3000 men over 35 years and found that regular exercise (the equivalent of 30 minutes walking five times a week) was the single most important factor in reducing the risk of dementia.

2. Look after your heart.

What is good for your heart is also good for your brain. Watching your blood pressure and cholesterol, managing your weight, eating a healthy diet and not smoking will lower your risk of dementia as well as protect your heart.

3. Take care of your mental health.

Over 300 million people currently live with depression. Getting treatment will not only make you feel better, it may lower your risk of getting dementia later on, according to a number of studies.

4. Stay connected.

Loneliness seems to increase the risk of dementia, while maintaining social contact with friends and family can protect you.

5. Strengthen your brain.

Keep learning throughout life and you will build additional brain reserves that can protect you against dementia, say the authors of the *Lancet* paper. Keep up-to-date with the news, take up a new hobby, start playing cards or take an evening class. ✕



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Tip for improving your sleep:

If you lie awake for more than 20 minutes, get up and switch locations. Go somewhere quiet, keep the lights dim, and do something relaxing, such as reading a book, until you feel drowsy.

How to get **enough** sleep



Sleep is not an optional luxury, it's a biological necessity. For the many of us who struggle with sleep, what can we do to ensure we get enough each night?

The CEO of Netflix, Reed Hastings, claimed that the biggest competitor for Netflix was not another streaming service, YouTube or a traditional broadcaster. It's our need for sleep.

Skimping on sleep to watch the next episode of our favourite series flies in the face of what sleep specialists are telling us. Sleep is one of the most powerful preventive medicines we have, yet today

the average adult sleeps for just 6.1 hours on week nights, rather than the recommended seven to nine hours, says sleep expert Dr Carmel Harrington, managing director of Sleep for Health.

Illness, sleep disorders and work schedules can result in us not getting enough sleep, says Dr Harrington, but increasingly the demands of our modern lifestyle coupled with 24-hour online access mean that we'll give up sleep rather than entertainment or time with family.

What are we risking if we get less than the recommended minimum of seven hours a night?

Sleep specialist Dr Matthew Walker, director of the Center for Human Sleep Science at the University of California, Berkeley, claims no part of our body remains untouched by sleep deprivation. In his book *Why We Sleep* he outlines the powerful effects of sleep loss on, among other things, Alzheimer's disease,

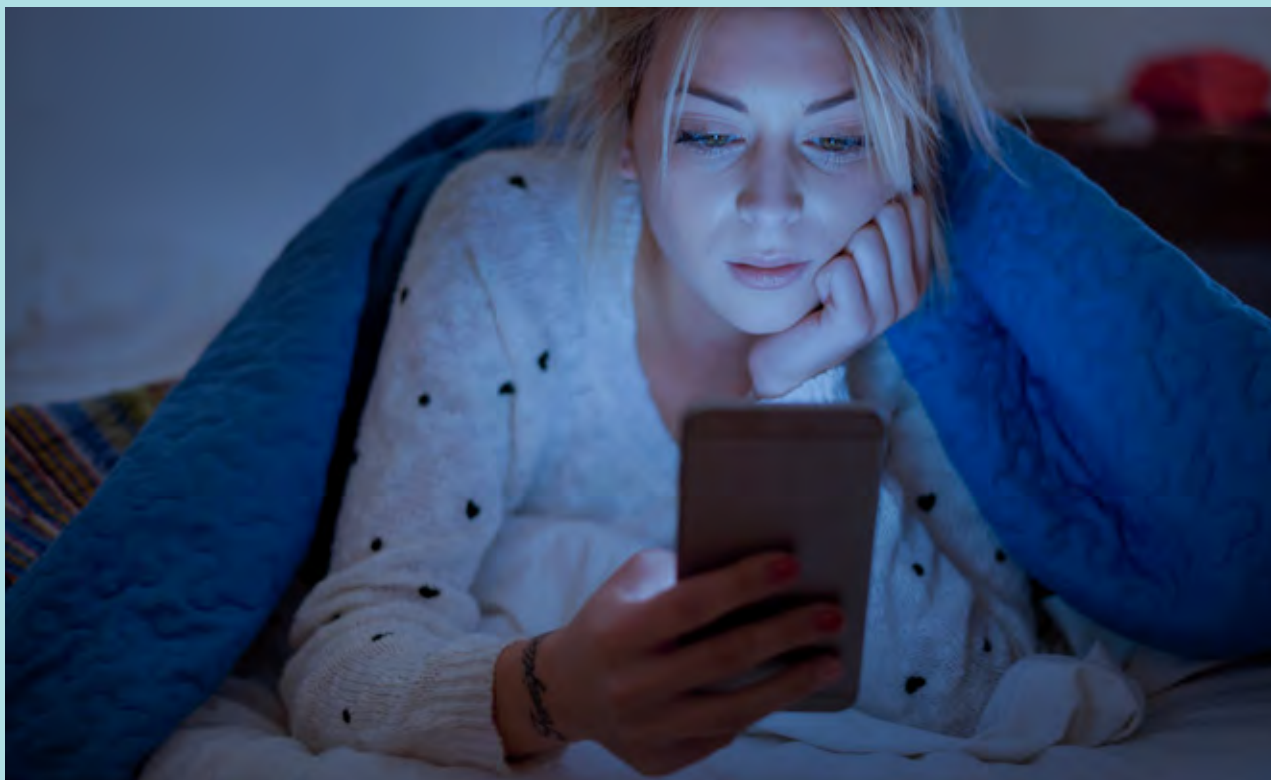
cancer, diabetes, reproductive health, cardiovascular disease, obesity and mental health. That's because sleep restores the immune system, balances hormone levels, lowers blood pressure, cleanses toxins from the brain, and much more.

Sleep, then, seems to be taking its place next to exercise and diet as an essential tool for optimal health and wellbeing. But what if sleep eludes you? What can you do to increase your chances of getting more precious sleep?

1. Prioritise sleep. According to Australia's Sleep Health Foundation, one problem many of us have is taking sleep for granted and feeling that it is a waste of time. Time spent in bed is time well spent as there are many important things your brain must do during sleep. Sleep is vital to preserve new memories, for instance, and future proofs that information in your brain.

2. Stick to a sleep schedule. Dr Walker urges us to go to bed and wake up at the

It's normal to wake up once or twice in the night but if you regularly have trouble getting back to sleep then stress or anxiety could be the cause.



The dark side of blue light

Switch off your laptop, mobile, tablet and other electronic devices an hour or two before bedtime, recommend sleep experts. That's because the blue light emitted from these screens can delay the release of sleep-inducing melatonin, increase alertness and reset the body's internal clock (its circadian rhythm) to a later schedule. (Televisions also emit blue light, but it's not as problematic as screens that we hold closer to our faces.)

Blue light filters are available for mobiles, tablets and computer screens that reduce the amount of blue light emitted. There are also smartphone and computer apps that mask or filter some of the blue light.

same time each day, as people have a hard time adjusting to changes in sleep patterns. Sleeping late on weekends doesn't make up for poor sleep during the week and can contribute to 'social jetlag', which makes us even sleepier on Monday. If necessary, says Dr Walker, set an alarm for bedtime.

3. Skip the caffeine. Caffeine is the most widely used (and abused) psychoactive stimulant in the world and can mask sleep disorders and sleep deprivation. It works by blocking the actions of sleep-related chemicals in the brain, tricking you into feeling alert. This may be helpful for shift workers but can ruin sleep if consumed too close to bedtime. Its effects can also last up to seven hours, meaning a lunchtime coffee could disrupt your sleep that night. Many products containing caffeine can contribute to a restless night, including energy drinks, Cola drinks, black and green tea, hot chocolate, milky iced coffee, and even chocolate ice-cream.

4. Seek out the sun. Sun exposure during the day helps us to regulate sleeping patterns. Try to get outside in natural sunlight for at least 30 minutes a day, advises Dr Walker.

5. Deal with any stress. It's normal to wake up once or twice in the night but if you regularly have trouble getting back to sleep then stress or anxiety could be the cause. Worrying about your sleep can make it worse as it creates a vicious cycle. Exercise can help – even fitting in a 20- to 30-minute walk after work will lower your stress, says Dr Harrington, as will relaxation exercises such as yoga or meditation. Alcohol may appear to take the edge off stress and help you get to sleep but you pay the price later, as it interrupts your sleep during the night and prevents restorative REM sleep. If your mind just can't shut down, see your GP. There are many things you can try and specialists who can help you. ✕

When to get out of bed

If you lie awake for more than 20 minutes, get up and switch locations instead of staying in bed waiting for sleep to come. Go somewhere quiet, keep the lights dim, and do something relaxing, such as reading a book, until you feel drowsy.

Are you being **too hard** on yourself?



“If you can't love yourself, how in the hell you gonna love somebody else?”

RuPaul

Find the real you

Is fear controlling your life? You could be so scared of what might happen if you step out of your comfort zone that you settle for what you don't want. Or you could be afraid of failing or being judged. You might not even be aware of what it is that you fear but by denying yourself what you really want you're disconnecting from the real you.

Fear-based obstacles can stop you from reaching your full potential and Dr Sarah Edelman, author of *Change Your Thinking*, says that avoiding what makes you uncomfortable only further strengthens the belief that you can't handle certain situations. Try gradually exposing yourself to situations that fill you with dread, like applying for a new job or joining the gym. The more you step out of your comfort zone, the more comfortable you will become reaching for what you really want in life.

Self-compassion is ... learning to forgive yourself and recognising that you are only human.

How many times have you punished yourself for making a mistake? But would you be so hard on your child, partner, friend or colleague if they'd done the same thing? Probably not.

According to Buddha: “You can search throughout the entire universe for someone who is more deserving of your love and affection than you are yourself, and that person is not to be found anywhere. You yourself, as much as anybody in the entire universe deserves your love and affection.”

Research has shown consistently that self-compassion and emotional wellbeing go hand in hand. If your inner critic has become your constant companion, it's time to start practising the art of self-compassion.

Go easy on yourself

Be kinder. Stop punishing yourself for your mistakes. Accept that you are not perfect and start being kinder to yourself, particularly when faced with your shortcomings. You are loved by your family and friends because of who you are, not because you are perfect.

Be inspired. Stop comparing yourself negatively to others. With social media dominating our lives, it's more important than ever to tackle feelings of inadequacy. When you find yourself lacking, look for inspiration in the strengths and achievements of others instead of feeling threatened and inadequate.

Practise give and take. Stop giving selflessly to everyone all of the time. Make sure you are aware of your own needs first before giving to others and then give in a way that supports you, not depletes you. Pay attention to how much energy, time and emotion you feel you can give without draining your resources – and don't forget to give to yourself, too. Being generous towards others makes us happy but only if it doesn't leave us with nothing.

Retrain the voice. Our relationship with ourselves involves the voice in our heads. When we fail to meet our own expectations, it will rap us on the knuckles. Learn to accept yourself warts and all. Remember that even if you could have done better, chances are that what you did was more than enough and the voice in your head should be telling you so! ✕



Mind food

Making the connection between your mental health and what you eat can reap rewards.

Although most of us are aware of the importance of good nutrition when it comes to our physical health, that awareness often doesn't extend to our mental health. Yet, numerous studies have shown that a poor diet – one that is high in junk foods, processed meats, and sugary, refined foods – can play a significant role in the onset of depression and anxiety, and its severity and duration. To function well, our brains need an adequate intake of nutrients, such as omega-3s, amino acids, B-vitamins (especially B12 and folate), vitamin D and minerals like zinc, magnesium and iron.

Eat like a Mediterranean

Many studies support the claim that a Mediterranean-style diet offers considerable health benefits, including protection against cardiovascular disease.

A recent study also revealed a link between this way of eating and a lower risk of depression later in life.

The pasta and pizza trap

Mediterranean doesn't mean pasta and pizza eaten with several glasses of red wine. The traditional Mediterranean diet features meals high in vegetables, legumes, nuts, fruit, wholegrains, with some fish, dairy and poultry, and as little red meat as possible, plus plenty of extra virgin olive oil.

Supported by science

Researchers have found that study participants following a Mediterranean diet – specifically one with a high vegetable content, only small amounts of poultry, and low alcohol consumption – had a lower likelihood of developing depression or symptoms associated with depression.

The gut-brain connection

Probiotics or good bacteria are well researched for their positive effects on digestive health, but because of the strong connection between our brain and our gut, scientists also believe they may work to lower the risk of anxiety and depression.

You can start by eating a good quality natural Greek yoghurt or kefir on most days, and introducing fermented foods like sauerkraut, miso, tempeh and kimchi into your diet. Probiotics are also available in supplement form from pharmacies and health food stores.

A diet high in wholefoods, such as wholegrains, legumes, nuts, seeds, fruit and vegetables, also provides plenty of fibre, which 'feeds' the good bacteria already in your gut. ✕

Anxiety buster

One of the most common symptoms of magnesium deficiency is anxiety, so fill up on foods rich in this vital mineral, such as leafy greens, pumpkin seeds, almonds, and natural yoghurt.

Getting back on the workhorse after injury

Returning to work after an injury can make all the difference to your having a swift and successful recovery.

If you've recently suffered an injury or illness (work-related or not) that resulted in extended time off work, the last thing on your mind is probably returning to work. Yet research shows that long-term work absence can have a negative impact on our overall health and wellbeing.

Although we often grumble about it, work is generally good for our health. It gives us a daily structure, keeps us mentally and physically active, gives us the opportunity to socialise with workmates and, of course, helps prevent financial stress. Studies suggest that returning to work after a reasonable period of rest, even though you may not feel quite 100 per cent, can be mentally and physically beneficial.

How soon should you return to work?

This depends on the nature of your injury, but getting back to work can be an important part of your physical and mental recovery. When you are 'doing', you'll recover quicker from illness and injury, gain a sense of accomplishment and strengthen social relationships with work colleagues. Being in a familiar environment can also help you feel as if you're getting back on track and returning to some sort of routine. Not least, it helps prevent the money worries which go with long periods of absence from work and the subsequent stress of this on you and your family. But remember, just because you're back at work doesn't mean you're back to full fitness.

What can you do once you're back at work?

Your Return to Work (RTW) plan should outline any modifications necessary to your usual tasks, any changes to working times, and how your return to work will be monitored and reviewed.

When you return to work after an injury you must take precautions to prevent the injury from returning. With a physical injury, it's essential to watch your posture and use the correct work methods. This is particularly important if your job involves lifting or

using equipment. Keep doing any exercises recommended by your physiotherapist as these will help to maintain and build your strength and fitness.

If your injury is psychological, it's important to recognise potential triggers, such as work stress. Discuss any concerns you may have with your manager who may be able to reallocate some of your workload if necessary. ✕



Ask an expert about ...

Q My partner told me that I grind my teeth at night. What does this mean and what can I do about it?

A According to the Australian Dental Association, teeth grinding or Bruxism is an involuntary clenching, grinding and gnashing of the teeth that you may not notice until someone else points it out. The cause can be physical or psychological, often in response to a period of stress in your life.

Symptoms to look out for include fractured, chipped or loose teeth; a dull

headache, sore jaws or ear pain; aching teeth and stiffness in the face and temples; sore jaw when eating; sensitivity to hot and cold food and drinks; and intense jaw clenching.

Teeth grinding places a lot of pressure on your teeth, and over time can crack the protective enamel, fracturing your teeth and breaking things like crowns and fillings. You might also find your teeth are more sensitive to temperature fluctuations and more painful

to bite down on as the fibre that attaches them to the bone gets inflamed.

Tell your dentist as soon as you suspect something is wrong. They can devise possible treatment options, such as a mouthguard to wear at night. Leaving it untreated can result in worse damage being done.

World Oral Health Day is on March 20 every year.

App of the month

1 Giant Mind

1 Giant Mind is an easy way to give meditation a try. It includes video tutorials, a meditation journal and a 30-day challenge to encourage you to

enjoy the benefits of meditation every day. 1 Giant Mind is free from the App Store and Google Play.

News Bites

Perils of processed foods

In a new study, scientists have discovered that eating ultra-processed foods leads to weight gain in as little as two weeks. These include soft drinks, packaged snacks, meat nuggets, frozen meals, and foods high in additives and low in unprocessed ingredients. Volunteers on the ultra-processed diet ate an average of 2000kJ more each day compared to those on an unprocessed diet. Why? They ate faster. In fact, they consumed an extra 70kJ, or 7.4 grams of food per minute. Experts believe there's something about the texture or other sensory properties of the processed food that made them eat more quickly. ✕

Weight-loss woes

If you're working out to lose weight but not seeing results, you might be making this common mistake: you're moving less throughout the day. It's easy to think you can get away with barely moving a muscle in between workout sessions, but if you reduce the amount of incidental physical activity you would normally do (like taking the stairs instead of the lift), you're effectively cancelling out some of the good work you're doing at the gym. The solution? Keep moving: take the stairs, have as many standing breaks as you can, go for a walk in your lunch break, and get off a stop early and walk the rest of the way.

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Under the weather?

If you're feeling awful and unlikely to be productive at work, it makes sense to stay home, says Michael Tam from the UNSW School of Public Health and Community Medicine. "This might be due to the severity of specific symptoms like sore throat or cough, or an overall sense of tiredness and fatigue," he says. "Secondly, if you are actively having coughing that is difficult to control, or still having vomiting or diarrhoea, it would be worthwhile staying at home to avoid passing on the virus to work colleagues or members of the public." ✕

Q. Does mental illness run in families?

A. Most people with a mental illness have no family history. With some mental disorders, there appears to be no link at all. With others, such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, a predisposition to the illness may be inherited – but even then, it is only one of several factors. The causes are not fully understood but it is likely that a biochemical imbalance is involved that can be triggered by things like stressful life events, drug abuse, hormonal changes or an illness.

1

THING YOU CAN DO TODAY



Get outside even for 10 minutes

Not only will 10 minutes outdoors boost your vitamin D levels, it will do wonders for your mental state, too.

You're more likely to interact with people: Isolation is an important factor in mental health, with a lack of social connections being linked to stress and depression.

You'll get up and moving: Exercise is known to improve mood and alleviate stress and anxiety. Step outside and you're more likely to be moving your body than if you're sitting inside. Physical activity also leads to better sleep and improved focus.

You're getting a break from screens: Tech breaks are essential for your eye health but your brain will welcome them, too. Research shows that people who take regular breaks perform better than those who stay glued to their screen.

You'll sleep better: Exposing yourself to natural light resets your body clock, helping to improve sleep duration and quality. Poor sleep has a negative effect on your mood and quality sleep is linked with reduced depression and anxiety.

Go to the park ... and boost the benefits. UK scientists reported that just five minutes of "green exercise" results in improvements in self-esteem and mood. ✕

EAT SMARTER

Mad about potatoes

Mashed, roasted or steamed – we all love potatoes but when it comes to the health benefits these popular root vegetables don't get the attention they deserve. In fact, they're loaded with essential nutrients but cost a fraction of the price of so-called superfoods.

At a glance

Bones: Potatoes contain iron, phosphorus, calcium, magnesium and zinc, all of which help the body build and maintain bone structure and strength.

Blood pressure: Potassium, calcium and magnesium are all found in potatoes and have been found to decrease blood pressure naturally.

Heart health: Potatoes contain significant amounts of fibre, which helps lower the total amount of cholesterol in the blood and reduces the risk of heart disease.

Inflammation: Choline is an important nutrient found in potatoes. It helps with muscle movement, mood, learning, and memory. One large potato contains 57mg of choline.

Antioxidants: Potatoes contain vitamin C, which acts as an antioxidant. Antioxidants may help prevent cell damage and cancer, and promote cardiovascular health and good digestion. ✕



Skin deep

The vitamin, mineral and fibre content of potatoes is mostly in the skin, so enjoy them skin-on whenever possible.



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