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**HEALTH & SAFETY
NEWSLETTER**

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June 2020

Resilience 101

Do you know someone who seems to be able to cope with life's ups and downs and 'bounce back' after a setback? Their resilience is a skill we can all learn.

It could be an unrealistic workload, on-going stress related to the coronavirus pandemic, or job insecurity. Whatever the cause, work-related stress is common and according to Safe Work Australia, accounts for long periods of sick leave.

To cope with the stresses of life it's important to stay as mentally well as possible. Building resilience is one way we can contribute to a more mentally healthy workplace, says Dr Sam Harvey, a psychiatrist with the Black Dog Institute and head of the Workplace Mental Health Research Group.

"We know that resilient people bounce back and don't get ill where others would in the face of psychological stressors," says Dr Harvey.

Resilience is more than coping with life's sudden problems. People who are resilient are also flexible, can adapt to new

situations, learn from experience, tend to be optimists, and are able to ask for help when they need it.

Building your resilience

For a long time, resilience was thought to be inherited or acquired early in life, or perhaps something that was internal, part of your personality. We now know that it's possible to develop resilience.

We have this mistaken image of resilient people as bulletproof, as people who somehow don't feel pain, or can cope without asking for help, says Dr David Westley, head of the psychology department at Middlesex University, UK. In fact, the opposite is true, he says. It's the people who can ask for help, who can express their worries, fears and sadness, that cope with trauma, loss and stress much better, he told the BBC.

Techniques for building resilience include:

1. Staying connected. Whether this is in-person or remotely, aim to maintain good friendships and family relationships, as social interaction and support is vital to good mental health. Being able to ask for help from your family and friends when you need it is also key to managing stressful situations.

2. Taking time to recharge. Make sure you take regular breaks, finish work on time, and plan to take leave when you are able. Even if you physically can't go away anywhere, it's always good to take a break from what you're doing.

3. Practising stress-reducing techniques. This is very personal – mindfulness and meditation may work for you, but they don't for everyone. You may find exercising, reading a book or listening to music is a better tool for reducing your stress. ✕

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The World Health Organization declared 2020 to be the International Year of the Nurse and Midwife. As we approach the halfway point of the year with the world battling the coronavirus pandemic, it's never been clearer just how valuable our nurses are. This year is designed to highlight the challenging conditions they often face, and advocate for increased investments in the nursing and midwifery workforce.

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How to make your lunch count



By the time lunchtime strikes we're usually in a hurry and hungry, a combination that can drive us to convenient but not always healthy options. A little planning can change that.

Many of us plan dinner, but not lunch. Lunch is often a hasty affair, a sandwich grabbed when you have a moment to spare, with little thought given to planning.

A large study published in *The Lancet* in 2019 found poor diet was to blame for one in five deaths – it's linked to diseases like heart disease, type 2 diabetes and certain cancers. This means that every food-related decision you make impacts your health, and that includes what you eat for lunch.

You want lunch to be tasty yet satisfying, to take you through until dinnertime without the dreaded afternoon crash. Whether lunch is a takeaway or you're making it at home, consider the following:

1. Start with a high fibre/low glycaemic index (GI) carbohydrate. Carbohydrates, or 'carbs' are the best fuel for your brain and give you energy. But too many, particularly high GI (refined or white) carbs, can leave you feeling sluggish. If you're making a salad, start with brown rice, barley, quinoa, or high fibre pasta; for a sandwich or wrap, choose wholegrain bread. If you have access to a microwave, cook a potato or sweet potato and stuff

with tuna, vegetables and cheese. How much is enough? Aim for carbs to be about one quarter of your meal.

2. Add protein. Protein can help keep you feeling full for longer – think eggs, cheese, legumes (lentils and beans), nuts and seeds, fish, chicken or meat. Add to your salad, sandwich or wrap.

3. Include vegetables. Increase your vegetable count by adding leftover roasted vegetables, avocado, spinach or salad leaves to your wrap or sandwich; or canned beans, edamame, sweetcorn, diced capsicum, beetroot, or tomatoes to a salad.

Or make a quick soup at home. Search online for quick, healthy recipes – they're an easy way to get your vegetable quota and you can add lentils or beans for extra protein and fibre, quinoa, pasta or rice for added carbs.

4. Add fruit. Fruit adds nutrients and is a useful source of fibre, which is often lacking in our diet. Fresh is best, but canned (in juice) and dried works too. Dried fruit is full of fibre and high in nutrients – try prunes, apricots and figs. Limit your portion to a quarter cup.

For more inspiration, visit the Cancer Council's Healthy Lunch Box at healthylunchbox.com.au ✕

Snack attack fix

Craving a little something sweet and crunchy at mid-morning or mid-afternoon? Rather than reaching for a biscuit or muffin, opt for this healthy mix of nuts, seeds and dried fruit.

- ½ cup pumpkin seeds
- ½ cup sunflower seeds
- ½ cup walnut halves
- ¼ cup raisins
- ¼ cup dried apricots
- ¼ cup chopped dried figs or prunes
- ¼ cup shredded coconut

Mix all of the ingredients together in a bowl and then divide into ¼ cup servings.

Why you mustn't ignore this test

Over 90 per cent of bowel cancer cases can be treated successfully when detected early. That's why once you hit 50, you should consider a bowel cancer screening.

Many countries have a free bowel cancer screening program for citizens over 50, although the age may vary in your region. Even if there is no free screening available to you, and you consider yourself healthy or if you are under 50 but have a family history of bowel cancer, you should still consider getting tested.

"The screening was, for me, a gift for living, the best and most significant gift I have ever been given," says Don, whose bowel cancer was detected very early because he took part in the Australian National Bowel Cancer Screening Program (NBCSP). Before the test Don had no symptoms – no weight loss, no fatigue, no visible blood in his stools.

The fact that bowel cancer is one of the world's most common cancers is one big reason why you should make it a priority.

What is bowel cancer?

The term 'bowel cancer' or colorectal cancer refers to cancers that start in the colon or rectum. It occurs when cells in the bowel lining become abnormal, divide and grow. They usually form a polyp first, which may become a cancer over time.

In 2018, over 1.8 million new cases were diagnosed, making it the second most common cancer for women and the third most common for men. The biggest risk factor is increasing age, but more and more younger people are being diagnosed too.

What is bowel cancer screening?

There are generally two types of tests for bowel cancer. The first is a home testing kit, or Faecal Occult Blood Test (FOBT), which is risk free and looks for very small amounts of blood in your bowel motion that may be a sign of cancer or other conditions. It is easy to do, and may be done at home. You and your doctor get the results within two weeks.

The second is a bowel scope screening or a colonoscopy. This is conducted by a specialist and is generally conducted if results from the FOBT are abnormal, or if due to family history, your doctor has recommended this procedure. ✕

How diet reduces your risk

Eating high amounts of red and processed meat increases your risk of bowel cancer, but foods high in fibre can lower your risk. Fibre is found in plant foods – fruit, vegetables, wholegrains, nuts and seeds.

One type of fibre – resistant starch – may be particularly good at protecting us from bowel cancer. The CSIRO has found that it feeds the 'good bacteria' that live in our large bowel, and in turn the bacteria make substances that protect the cells lining our large intestine.

To get resistant starch, add unprocessed grains, including oats and barley, under-ripe bananas, and pulses such as lentils to your diet. You can also 'create' your own resistant starch by cooling cooked potatoes, pasta and rice – you can then eat them either reheated or cold.

Saving lives

Screening can help detect bowel cancer at an early stage, when it's easier to treat. It can also be used to help check for and remove small growths in the bowel called polyps, which can turn into cancer over time.

In Australia for example, where there is a national screening program with a participation rate of around 40 per cent, the bowel cancer screening program is expected to save 59,000 lives by 2040. If this rose to 60 per cent, 83,000 lives could be saved.

Worried \$ick

Many of us live with huge money worries. The coronavirus has had an enormous economic impact but financial stress can also result from a relationship break-up, physical or mental ill health, addiction, or unexpected expenses. Whatever the cause, financial insecurity can significantly affect your health and wellbeing.



Financial stress doesn't just affect people out of work. Research commissioned by AMP for its 2019 Financial Wellness report found that two in five employees admitted feeling financial stress. This was across all industries, income levels and job roles. Money concerns impact people in many different ways, the report found.

"While many people think money worries are a personal issue, our research shows being financially stressed spills into your working life, increasing absenteeism and impacting productivity," said AMP Director of Workplace Super Ilaine Anderson.

Financial stress, like any form of stress, is also linked to mental and physical health issues, family breakdown and substance abuse, and can lead to feelings of isolation.

Get the help you need

Many people facing financial stress are reluctant to ask for help, feeling ashamed of their situation. But there is free help available and it can make a huge difference.

Talk to a financial or credit counsellor

It's not easy to talk about money difficulties, especially with family and friends, but getting help early means you will have many more options. If you feel overwhelmed by money worries, contact a financial counsellor as soon as possible.

Financial counsellors, also known as credit counsellors in some places, are skilled professionals who offer a free, independent and confidential service through community organisations, community legal centres and some government agencies.

Financial counsellors can help with things like bills or fines, credit card and other debts, gas, electricity or phone disconnection or the threat of eviction. They can also help you work out a repayment plan for debts that can't be waived, and help with planning for big purchases, provide information about managing money, and refer you to other services and schemes.

Don't confuse financial counsellors with

financial advisers. Unlike financial advisers, financial counsellors can't help you with investments and retirement planning.

As well as a financial benefit from talking to a financial counsellor, there's often an emotional benefit too. Along with the advocacy and information, it can help just to have someone who listens and is on your side.

"A problem shared is a problem halved," says Sarah Brown-Shaw, a senior financial counsellor at the National Debt Helpline in Australia. "It can be a huge relief to talk to a financial counsellor. And then, feeling more empowered, to take the next step."

To find a financial counsellor in your area, try a quick web search. Government sites dealing with finance may also have resources available to you.

Tip

You should not have to pay for financial counselling. Businesses that charge fees for this are debt consolidation and refinancing companies.



Money stress and mental health

Losing your financial security can trigger symptoms of grief, says Beyond Blue. Common responses include shock and numbness, disbelief, a huge sense of loss, anger, confusion, guilt and overwhelm. The chronic stress of financial hardship can lead to the development of health conditions including anxiety and depression. It's important to get support from a mental health professional if you are experiencing:

- Severe emotional reactions that persist beyond a usual period of adjustment (usually two or more weeks)
- An inability to function and carry out day-to-day tasks
- Using alcohol or other substances to 'self-medicate' or cope
- Thoughts of self-harm or suicide

Speaking to your doctor is a good start on getting help, or visiting a site like beyondblue.org.au (or a local equivalent). Use their online chat service, join a community forum or email them.

Official government websites for mental health will usually be easily accessible to you and will often provide further resources that are available locally and immediately.

Approach your bank

Asking for help includes approaching your bank, as the banks and financial services groups in many countries have pledged that they are ready to support customers during this time of economic hardship. Assistance will depend on individual circumstances.

If your request for help is denied, you may try contacting your national financial or monetary authority for help or direction.

Other debtors

It is also worthwhile checking if your utilities providers and other organisations to whom you pay regular bills will provide support for customers affected by the coronavirus situation. Always consider any offers carefully though as you may have to end up repaying any extensions to bills.

Talk your situation over with a financial or credit counsellor.

Official government financial websites may also be able to provide direction. ✕

In a little bit of debt?

If you have debts, it's important to find a way to manage them so they don't get out of control. Here are three strategies to keep in mind:

1. **Consolidate "bad" debts.** If you have several credit cards and personal loans you're currently repaying, it may be worth consolidating them into one account. This simplifies your repayments and means you only have to deal with one interest rate. Seek financial advice first as sometimes low interest accounts can be of less value after an introductory period.
2. **Create a budget.** Budgets are a useful tool for seeing what money is coming in and going out of our accounts. This makes them essential for managing your money if you have ongoing debts. Free online budget tools and apps are readily available. Your financial counsellor may also suggest a budgeting tool to fit your needs.
3. **Set up a regular savings account.** Savings are an important part of your household finances, allowing you to pay for larger purchases and acting as a safety net when unexpected costs arise. By contributing to a savings account when you can, you'll increase your wealth without taking on any more debt. Even if it's a tiny amount per month, it can add up over time.

How to work from your laptop

Working from home has become the new normal for many of us. But unless you set up your workstation correctly, you're at risk of developing neck and back problems. Physiotherapist Adam Crisp explains why.

To many people, working from home may sound great. Sleeping in past 6am, no commuting to and from the office and staying in your pyjamas all day. However, this new way of work-life also opens up the door for the potential musculoskeletal complaints.

Many of us are used to working in an office with a monitor (or two if you're lucky), a comfortable office chair, enough space to fit three people, and possibly even a sit-to-stand desk. When you're working from home, this is rarely the case, with many of us forced to work using a laptop at a desk or table that may be too high or too low, and an old office chair or dining chair.

Is working from a laptop bad for us?

When using a laptop, your neck and upper back are often flexed forward. This position increases the effort required by the muscles of the neck and shoulder. For short periods of time (less than one hour), this may not lead to any musculoskeletal complaints. However, if this is your new 'normal', you'll increase the likelihood of developing neck pain, shoulder pain, upper back stiffness and headaches. Here are a few strategies that will help minimise this.

- Sit at a desk (or table) and use a chair that provides good postural support. If the table is too high or the chair doesn't provide enough support, use pillows to assist.
- Place your laptop on some books or a box and get your hands on a separate keyboard and mouse. This will allow you to keep your neck in a more neutral position and reduce the effort required by the muscles. Ensure that your screen is arms-length away.
- Take frequent postural breaks (every 20-30 minutes) and perform regular neck and shoulder stretches.

If you are finding that you are developing pain, and regular stretching and self-management strategies do not help, please contact your nearest physiotherapist for a tailored exercise and stretching program. To find a physiotherapist near you, Google 'physiotherapist' and include your location. ✕



Ask an expert about ...

Q I've been told I have high cholesterol and heard that plant sterols can help reduce this. What are plant sterols and how do I add them to my diet?

The Australian Heart Foundation replies:

Plant sterols (also called phytosterols and phytostanols) are cholesterol-like substances that are found in fruits, vegetables, nuts and cereals. We all consume between 150 and 360mg naturally every day, depending on our diet.

When you eat plant sterols in higher amounts, between two and three grams per day, they can reduce LDL (the 'bad') cholesterol. They do this because, being

cholesterol-like substances, they are absorbed into the blood instead of LDL cholesterol.

It's almost impossible to eat that amount of plant sterols through diet alone. So some food products, including margarines, milk and breakfast cereals, are fortified with plant sterols. The quantity of these foods you need to eat will be clearly labelled on the packet. Don't be tempted to eat more than two to three grams of plant sterols per day, as this won't reduce your cholesterol any further.

Plant sterols are not meant to replace cholesterol-lowering drugs (statins), which you should continue to take if your doctor has prescribed them. Research shows plant sterols work together with statins to have an even greater impact on lowering LDL-cholesterol levels.

As well as the fortified food products, continue to eat plenty of vegetables, fruit, wholegrains, fish, nuts and seeds.

App of the month

Breathe2relax

We never forget to breathe, but we can sometimes forget how to breathe properly, in a way that promotes relaxation and stress relief. Breathe2relax provides instructions for deep breathing using diaphragmatic breathing exercises that can decrease the body's 'fight-or-flight' (stress) response and help with anxiety management.

Available free from the App Store and Google Play.

Is it safe to eat fresh produce?

Are you worried that your lettuce, tomatoes, cucumber and other salad vegetables could be harbouring the coronavirus? Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) says there is no evidence that COVID-19 is transmitted through food, unlike other foodborne gastrointestinal viruses like norovirus. This position is in line with the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) who released a statement saying that food is not a likely source or route of transmission of the virus. The most important transmission is from person to person, mainly via respiratory droplets that people sneeze, cough or exhale.

That said, it's always wise to follow good hygiene practice when preparing and handling food. Always wash your hands before preparation, wash fresh produce before consumption, cook meat thoroughly, and avoid potential cross-contamination between cooked and uncooked foods.

If in doubt about any produce, peel it (if you can) or cook it until it's piping hot, as hot temperatures destroy viruses and other microorganisms. ✕



wellatwork™

Published by: Healthworks®

Suite 3.06, 55 Miller Street Pyrmont NSW 2009 Australia
ACN 624 842 351 **Phone:** 1300 90 10 90

Website: www.healthworks.com.au

Editorial Team:

Editor: Jenny Boss MHumNutr

Subscriptions: Janelle Gibb

Email: well@healthworks.com.au

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News Bites



The myth of male infertility

If you're a man and would like to have kids, you may think that it's only the woman's health that really matters. Not so, says Andrology Australia (healthmale.com.au). For about 20 per cent of infertile couples the problem lies solely with the male partner, and for 30 per cent it's to do with both partners.

Men's fertility generally depends on the quantity and quality of their sperm. As it takes around three months for new sperm to fully develop, aim to work on improving your health for at least three months before you start trying for a baby.

A number of things will harm the production of sperm, including smoking; drinking too much alcohol; sexually transmitted infections (STIs); heat stress from tight-fitting underwear; coming into contact with harmful chemicals; and anabolic steroids taken for body building or sporting purposes.

If you and your partner have been trying to get pregnant for 12 months without success, even if one of you has a child from another relationship, you should be checked by a medical professional.

Men's Health Week is June 15-21. ✕

Aim for six a minute

Breathing. It's something we should all be expert at. After all, most of us breathe around 16 times a minute – or 23,000 times a day.

But recent research has shown that *how* we breathe matters. Quick, shallow and unfocused breathing may contribute to a host of problems, including high blood pressure, whereas practising more focused breathing can bring many health benefits. These include alleviating the symptoms of depression and anxiety, lowering blood pressure and heart rate, relieving insomnia, and helping improve pain management.

Scientists have even found that a particular frequency of breath – around six exhalations a minute – can be especially restorative, as it triggers a relaxation response in the brain and body.

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THING YOU CAN DO TODAY



Get some sun on your skin

Going for a brisk walk is good for you physically and mentally. But make sure you roll up your sleeves and get some sun. Being outdoors can help you get your daily dose of vitamin D, vital for bone and muscle health and a tip-top immune system.

Vitamin D is made when your skin is exposed to ultraviolet B (UVB) light from the sun. The amount of time you need to spend in the sun will vary, depending on where you live, the time of day, the time of year, how dark your skin is, and the amount of skin exposed.

Vitamin D deficiency is very common. It's estimated that about 1 billion people worldwide have low levels of the vitamin in their blood. In many places, this is thanks largely to long hours of office-based work, a decline in outdoor activities and the rise in popularity of video games and computers.

How long is enough?

While in summer, you should be checking the UV levels to ensure you don't get too much sun exposure, in winter UV levels may often be too low to make much vitamin D.

Any time the UV index gets above 3, the Australian Cancer Council recommends using sun protection. Check the UV levels in your area by conducting a web search for UV in your area or using a local weather app that includes a UV section.

If you are concerned about your vitamin D levels, speak to your doctor who may advise supplementation. ✕

EAT SMARTER

Quinoa

There is no healthiest whole grain, just like there's no one vegetable that's better than all the others. But quinoa's many health benefits should see it sitting next to the rice in your pantry.

Quinoa (pronounced keen-wah) is actually a seed but is treated as a grain because it is similar nutritionally to other grains.

Why eat quinoa?

Add quinoa to your meals to get added:

- **Fibre.** One cup of cooked quinoa contains 5g fibre – we should all be aiming for about 30g of fibre per day.
- **Folate.** This B vitamin is essential for DNA, to form red blood cells, and grow and repair cells and tissues. It's also important for the formation of the 'neural tube' in a developing foetus.
- **Minerals.** Quinoa is a good source of magnesium, iron, manganese, copper and potassium.
- **Protein.** Quinoa has about the same amount of protein per gram as wheat, but more than oats or rice. What makes quinoa worthwhile is that it's a complete protein, one of few plant foods that contain all nine of the essential amino acids (building blocks of protein), in particular lysine, which can be lacking in plant foods. But don't rely on quinoa as the main protein source in your meal – make sure you add other protein-rich options, such as lentils, beans, eggs, meat or fish.

How to eat quinoa

Rinse quinoa before cooking. Cook one cup of quinoa in two cups of stock or water for about 15 minutes, then fluff with a fork. You can use it instead of rice (and can cook it in a rice cooker) or make a morning porridge with quinoa instead of oats. Like rice, quinoa is gluten free so can be eaten by people with a gluten intolerance or coeliac disease. ✕



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