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**HEALTH & SAFETY
NEWSLETTER**

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JULY 2020

Take a break **from alcohol**

Many of us enjoy relaxing with a drink, something that might be more tempting when isolated at home. But alcohol has a dark side, and not having any for several weeks will benefit your health, sleep and wallet.

While most of us drink alcohol at levels considered moderate or low risk, many people's drinking habits put them at risk of alcohol-related disease, according to the Dry July Foundation. These diseases are more than just a nasty hangover. Long term excessive drinking increases your risk of a number of cancers, heart disease and liver disease, lowers your immunity, and reduces male and female fertility.

The price we pay is high. More than 3 million people died as a result of harmful use of alcohol in 2016, according to a recent report by the World Health Organization (WHO). Overall, the report outlined that the harmful use of alcohol causes more than 5% of the global disease burden.

What's the benefit from giving up?

If you quit alcohol for five weeks, you can expect the following:

- **Your sleep quality will improve.** Alcohol interferes with the normal sleep process, affecting the quality of your sleep, disrupting sleep cycles, and triggering early morning waking. After a good night's sleep you will feel more alert, and your work performance and concentration will improve.
- **Your cholesterol, blood glucose, blood pressure and liver fat levels will start to fall.** In turn, this will reduce your risk of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and alcohol-related liver disease. And because alcohol contains a significant number of kilojoules, you may begin to lose weight too.
- **Your skin will look better.** Alcohol causes dehydration so abstaining can leave you with hydrated, healthier-looking skin.
- **Your mental health may improve.** Alcohol can trigger or worsen existing symptoms of anxiety and is known as a

depressant. We know that alcohol affects several nerve-chemical systems within our bodies that are important in regulating mood.

The message from health authorities is clear: the less you choose to drink, the lower your risk of alcohol-related harm, and for some people, not drinking at all is the safest option.

There is no global consensus on recommended maximum intake for alcohol so the guidelines for safe drinking depend on where you are. In most cases, it is recommended to consume no more than two standard drinks on any day and to have several alcohol free days in a week. The definition of a 'standard drink' also differs from country to country, although it is generally a drink that contains between 10g and 12g of pure alcohol. ✕



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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.

3 myths about diabetes

It's strongly linked to what you eat and how much you exercise, can eventually lead to blindness, heart disease and kidney failure, and is the one of the fastest growing chronic conditions in the world.

It's type 2 diabetes, and it affects over 463 million adults worldwide.



Most of us know someone with type 2 diabetes. It's the most common type of diabetes, representing 85 to 90 per cent of all cases. The other two types are type 1 – an autoimmune disease which often starts in childhood or early adulthood and is not linked to lifestyle – and gestational diabetes, which affects pregnant women.

What is type 2 diabetes?

Type 2 diabetes is a condition where your body cannot regulate blood sugar levels properly.

After you've eaten a meal it's normal for blood glucose levels to rise. When they do, your pancreas releases a hormone called insulin, which acts like a key to let the glucose pass from your bloodstream into your body's cells, producing energy.

If you have type 2 diabetes, you either don't produce enough insulin or it's not doing its job properly. This means glucose doesn't easily move into your body's cells, and your blood glucose levels stay too high for too long. It's these prolonged high blood glucose levels that can cause damage to blood

vessels throughout the body, including your eyes, kidneys and extremities like your feet.

Diabetes is a complex disease, and there are a number of common misunderstandings surrounding it.

1. You can't reverse type 2 diabetes

We used to think that a diagnosis of type 2 diabetes meant that you had it for life, but studies have now shown otherwise. "There's been some new data that shows that yes, you can reverse type 2 diabetes," says Associate Professor Samantha Hocking, endocrinologist at the University of Sydney's Charles Perkins Centre.

One UK study published in *The Lancet* in 2019 put people diagnosed with diabetes within the last six years on a strict calorie-controlled meal replacement program.

"They were able to show that after a year, almost 50 per cent of participants were able to reverse their diabetes and went back to normal glucose levels without medication," explains Dr Hocking.

When it comes to preventing and treating diabetes, losing weight is the most effective strategy, says Dr Hocking. But if you find this difficult, studies show that losing as little as five per cent of your body weight can make a significant difference, as does increasing exercise and improving your diet – whether you lose weight or not.

2. Sugar causes diabetes

Diabetes is a condition where blood sugar levels are too high, so it can be easy to think that eating too much sugar is the cause. But this is a very simplistic message, says nutrition scientist Dr Joanna McMillan. "It's not that sugar causes diabetes," she explains. "It's true we eat too much sugar, but we also have too much processed food and too many kilojoules. Rather than blaming one single dietary aspect like sugar, we should look at the dietary patterns of the foods we consume."

Sugar is found naturally in fruit and vegetables (as fructose) and dairy foods (as lactose). But it's also added to food and

Check your risk

An estimated 374 million people globally are at high risk of developing type 2 diabetes and there are a number of reasons why.

Diabetes Australia has developed a Risk Calculator based on the Australian Type 2 Diabetes Risk Assessment Tool (AUSDRISK). You can access this to check your risk of developing type 2 diabetes by visiting: diabetesaustralia.com.au/risk-calculator.

Other countries may also have a diabetes risk calculator available that is specific to the country's diabetes criteria. Try conducting a web search for 'diabetes risk calculator' and your country.



drink by food manufacturers, and it's this added sugar – found in confectionary, cakes, biscuits, fruit juices, soft drinks, smoothies, syrups and honey – that we need to cut down on. That's because it's easy to over-consume, often comes in products also high in fat and other refined carbohydrates, and can lead to weight gain, which in turn increases your risk of diabetes.

If you have diabetes, aim to eat plenty of plant foods such as wholegrains, legumes, fruit, vegetables, nuts and seeds, and fewer highly processed foods and refined carbs (sugar, white bread, products made from white flour, white rice and pasta). For tailored advice on what to eat, talk to your doctor who may refer you to a dietitian or other specialist.

3. You can't exercise if you have diabetes

Exercise is beneficial for everyone, whether or not they have diabetes. This myth probably came about because people with type 1 diabetes have to be vigilant about balancing their insulin doses with food and activity, to avoid blood sugar going too high or too low.

But exercise is key to staying healthy whatever type of diabetes you have. It can also help prevent and manage type 2 diabetes. Regular physical activity can:

- Help you maintain a healthy weight.

- Help lower blood pressure and reduce your risk of heart disease.
- Reduce stress.
- Increase your insulin sensitivity. Resistance or strength training is particularly effective at improving your body's ability to use insulin and process glucose, says Diabetes Australia. The ability of your muscles to store glucose increases with your strength, making your body better able to regulate its blood glucose levels.

For good health, you should aim for 30 minutes of exercise every day, and plan to do two sessions of strength or resistance training each week. This can be done at home using your body weight, free weights, or resistance bands, or at a gym. ✕

Save your sight

Diabetes is the leading cause of blindness in working age adults, yet many people with diabetes don't realise how important regular eye checks are.

You should schedule regular annual checks with your optometrist or optometrist.

Early warning signs

Type 2 diabetes can be a silent disease. You may not notice the symptoms, or they may develop very slowly. Some signs include:

- Passing urine more frequently, often noticed at night.
- Dry mouth and being more thirsty than usual.
- Feeling tired, lethargic or irritable, or experiencing mood swings.
- Feeling constantly hungry despite having eaten.
- Cuts, sores or ulcers that heal slowly.
- Thrush or bladder infections.
- Blurred vision.
- Gradual increase in weight.
- Headaches or feeling dizzy.
- Pain or tingling in the lower legs and/or feet.

If you notice one or more of these signs, see your doctor.

How to have **difficult conversations**



Chatting with workmates is the kind of easy interaction we enjoy at work. But at times we also need to have more difficult conversations, and whether these are remote or in person, most of us will do whatever we can to avoid them.

It may be a topic you don't want to talk about, a situation where you're not sure what to say, or a subject where you have conflicting opinions. Speaking up and having uncomfortable discussions are part and parcel of working with other people.

Dealing with issues by having honest conversations gives you an opportunity to resolve conflict quickly, improve relationships with your team or workmates, and if you're a manager, improve employee performance.

Yet most of us would do anything other than talk about a tricky subject, says BBC World Service contributor Alison Green, who has been giving workplace advice for over a decade.

"An awful lot of us are hoping that there will be some sort of magical spell that will let us solve problems without ever having to use our words," she says.

Green quotes real examples from the workplace. "I've heard from people who stew in silence for months rather than asking a colleague to please stop taking all their

calls on speakerphone," she says. "And I've heard from people who spend way too long tolerating physically uncomfortable working conditions – like a painful chair or an air freshener that literally nauseates them – rather than have a quick conversation with the person who could fix it."

How to bring up a tricky subject

1. First consider what the problem is and whether a conversation is necessary. If the problem is trivial or temporary, you may not wish to draw attention to it, advises Australia's Fair Work Ombudsman. You may also not be the best person to initiate the conversation. It may be more appropriate for a human resources officer or someone more senior to get involved.

2. Stop worrying about being liked. This isn't the most important thing. Instead, be respectful – both of the other person and of yourself. Respect their point of view and expect them to respect yours.

3. Avoid speaking in an aggressive or adversarial way, advises Green. Instead, speak calmly and matter-of-factly, in a tone you'd use if you were trying to solve any other work-related problem such as a software issue.

4. Focus on listening, not speaking. Planning what you're going to say is likely to be a waste of time, as conversations rarely

go to plan. Take the pressure off yourself and rather than focusing on talking, concentrate on listening, reflecting and observing. If a team member has missed another deadline, for instance, approach them by asking neutral, supportive questions "I see the project is behind schedule. Tell me about the challenges you're facing." Then listen, get as much detail as you can, and ask follow-up questions. ✕

Our top excuses

According to Australia's Fair Work Ombudsman's guide to difficult conversations, these are the top excuses we have for avoiding tricky conversations:

- I don't want to hurt anyone's feelings
- Now is not the time
- Everyone makes mistakes
- I don't have time
- What's the point? There's never a good outcome
- The problem will fix itself – just give it time.

It's a catastrophe!

Do you automatically assume the worst will happen? Do you expect a disaster around every corner, or see yourself being lonely/in debt/unsuccessful forever?

This kind of thinking has a name— catastrophising – and you can change it.

Thanks to the influx of news alerts, social media notifications and daily updates on the spread of COVID-19, people across the world are experiencing heightened levels of anxiety, no matter what their mental health looks like on a “normal” day. When we're presented with a threat like the one we're dealing with at the moment, it's only natural to imagine the worst case scenario.

“Catastrophising happens when we overestimate the likelihood that our current situation will end in catastrophe, and underestimate our ability to cope,” explains Dr Martina Paglia, clinical and counselling psychologist and clinical director of The International Psychology Clinic. “People who catastrophise are likely to spend time thinking about the worst case scenario – and are convinced that this is what is actually going to happen.”

What catastrophes do people imagine?

A common one is losing control of yourself. Speaking on the SBS TV program, Insight, ‘Karen’ described the anxiety around being in a job that required her to regularly present publicly. She identified her fear as “actually being physically ill during a presentation.” Fortunately this never actually happened, but her ultimate fear was that people would see her and think she wasn't good at her job.

Other common types of catastrophes as imagining yourself plunging into a deep depression, or think you'll be lonely until you die, and equating mild social rejection with being totally shunned by all desirable people. Any of these sound familiar? And of course, the current coronavirus situation has many people anxious, some to the point of catastrophising.

Beating catastrophising

Catastrophising can affect your entire outlook on life. It can limit your opportunities at work and in relationships, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy of failure and disappointment. Feeling hopeless about your future in this way can paralyse you from going any further towards your goals in life, so it's important to identify and then start to treat your tendency to catastrophise. It's possible to halt old, destructive patterns. Try the following steps:

- 1. Recognise what you're doing.** Awareness of what's happening is the first step, so notice and acknowledge when your mind starts spinning with worry about the future. You may want to record your negative thoughts in a small notebook. Write down what happened as objectively as you can, what you thought about the situation, and then what your reaction or behaviour was.
- 2. Be present.** Clinical psychologist Elisha Goldstein recommends focusing on the present moment when you're in the middle of catastrophising an event. He suggests using your breath as an anchor. “Say to yourself ‘in’ as your breath comes in, and ‘out’ as you breathe out. If this doesn't work for you, try closing your eyes and listening to sounds, noticing the pitches and tones rising and falling.”
- 3. Consider other possible outcomes.** What's the worst that can happen? What's the best? Dr Boyes recommends that along with your very negative predictions, you make yourself think about positive outcomes, neutral ones, and the mildly negative.
- 4. Distinguish between very unpleasant and catastrophic.** Using the earlier example of the student, failing an exam is unpleasant, but will not doom you to a life of failure.
- 5. Believe you can cope.** By increasing your perception that you can cope with negative events, your anxiety will be much less of a problem. Gavin Andrews, Professor of Psychiatry at UNSW at St Vincent's Hospital, Sydney, has some sage advice: “It's not the event that causes anxiety. It's what you think about the event. It's the inside of your head that's the enemy.”
- 6. Start exercising.** Getting your heart pumping and body moving will help reduce your anxiety levels. ✕

What about COVID-19?

As the current situation is different to a “normal” one we might encounter, Dr Paglia recommends taking some time to maintain our calm and remind ourselves that the situation is out of our control. Surprisingly, she says, telling ourselves that we're powerless – and accepting that we're unable to control the situation we find ourselves in – is actually a great way to reduce our anxiety levels.

“The first thing we can do to calm ourselves down is pause and remind ourselves that there is nothing we can do to control things,” she explains. “A lot of people have a controlling tendency – they need to plan things ahead and keep things in a certain order – so it's very important for them to take the time to accept that they have no control about what's going on.”

Approaching a situation mindfully is a great way to reduce anxiety levels because it helps you to see the situation for what it actually is – not what your mind is imagining it to be.

Managing fatigue at work

Have you been sleeping poorly, feeling mental or physical strain at work, or experiencing stress or anxiety, particularly due to the COVID-19 pandemic? Any of these factors can lead to fatigue, a major workplace hazard.

It's easy to confuse fatigue with feeling tired, but it's more than that. Everyone feels tired at some point but this is usually resolved with a nap or a few nights of good sleep. According to Safe Work Australia, signs of fatigue include:

- tiredness even after sleep.
- reduced hand-eye coordination or slow reflexes.
- short-term memory problems and an inability to concentrate.
- blurred vision or impaired visual perception.
- a need for extended sleep during days off work.

What causes fatigue?

Fatigue is often a combination of personal and work issues. Personal issues include lifestyle factors, such as poor diet and lack of exercise, and psychological factors, such as depression, anxiety, stress or grief.

Workplace issues that can cause fatigue include:

- Prolonged or intense mental or physical activity. It's not just physical workers who get fatigued – fatigue affects all types of employees.
- Shift work causing disruption to your internal body clock.
- Exceptionally hot or cold working environments.



- Workplace stress, such as organisational change, job dissatisfaction, conflict, or an ongoing stressful situation.
- A strenuous job or excessively long shifts.
- Long commuting times.

Fatigue affects your mental and physical health, but it can also impact the safety of those around you. When your alertness, reaction times and concentration are reduced, your ability to make good decisions is affected. This can increase the risk of incidents and injury at work.

Your responsibilities

Your employer has a responsibility to provide a safe working environment and that includes addressing factors that could contribute to worker fatigue.

But as an employee you also have a duty to take reasonable care for your own safety and health, and to ensure your acts or omissions don't impact the health or safety of others, says Safe Work Australia.

To reduce the risk of being involved in a work incident caused by fatigue:

- **Look after yourself.** Make sure you get enough sleep and recovery time when you're away from work, and seek medical help if you're concerned about your health.
- **Watch for signs of fatigue.** This means monitoring your own (and others') level of alertness and concentration.
- **Talk to your supervisor about managing your fatigue.** This might mean taking a break or shift naps, drinking water, or doing some stretching or physical exercise. ✕



Ask an expert about ...

Q What is glaucoma, and how do I know if I'm at risk?

Glaucoma Australia replies:

Glaucoma is not just one disease, it's the name given to a group of eye diseases where vision is gradually lost due to damage to the optic nerve. The most common cause of optic nerve damage is increased pressure within the eye, known as intraocular pressure.

Unfortunately you can't detect glaucoma yourself, and it's estimated that about 50 per cent of people with glaucoma don't know they have

it. Although it's more common as you get older, it can occur at any age – even babies can get glaucoma. There is no cure for glaucoma, but early detection and treatment can significantly halt or slow its progression. That's why it's important to have your eyes regularly tested, as optometrists have the skills and equipment to screen for glaucoma.

Anyone can develop glaucoma, but you have a higher risk if you have a family history of glaucoma; have high eye pressure; have diabetes; are short- or long-sighted;

have been on a prolonged course of steroid medication; experience migraines; have had an eye operation or injury; have a history of high or low blood pressure; or are of African or Asian descent.

It's recommended you see an optometrist every two years for a comprehensive eye exam if you are aged 50 or older, or from the age of 40 if you are at high risk.

For more information about glaucoma, visit glaucoma.org.au. ✕

App of the month

HASfit

The HASfit (Heart and Soul fit) app and YouTube channel offers a wide variety of workouts to suit all levels of fitness. It includes strength training

workouts – with or without dumbbells or resistance bands – along with low- and high-impact exercise routines, including for people with injuries or limited mobility. The huge variety is hard to beat, with over 500 free workout routines, plus complete 30- to 90-day fitness programs. Available free from the [App Store](#) and [Google Play](#).

Nuts are not so fattening

Nuts are a great snack choice. High in fibre, protein, healthy fats, vitamins and minerals, they are tasty, nutrient-dense filler between meals. The problem is, we've been told for years that nuts are a high kilojoule food so we need to watch how much we eat.

But it looks like we might have been misled. A series of studies conducted by Dr David Baer and others at USDA's Agricultural Research Service on different nuts showed that when you bite into a whole nut and break up into smaller pieces, some of these fragments pass through your digestive system intact, taking the energy they contain with them. They found that almonds, walnuts and cashews contributed 16 to 25 per cent fewer kilojoules than previously thought. This isn't the case for ground nuts or nut butters, as most of the fat is released as available energy. ✕



Does exercise help you fight off infection?

Do you think over-exercising can reduce your immunity and your risk of getting sick? This was a popular theory in the 1980, but since then studies have shown that marathon runners and other endurance athletes tend to have fewer sick days.

"There is no or limited reliable evidence for exercise directly increasing the chance of developing any kind of viral infections," says James Turner, co-author of a 2018 review paper about exercise and immunity. Exercise, in fact, will probably lessen the risk of picking up an infection, he says. That said, if you feel unwell, it's probably best to shorten or skip workouts. ✕

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Immune booster myths

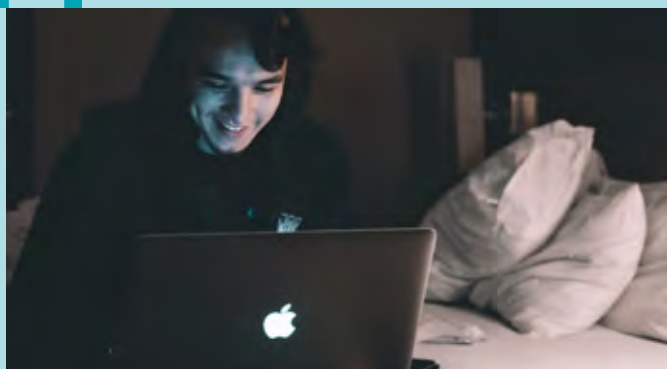
Many people wonder what they can do to 'boost their immune system' at this time of the coronavirus pandemic as well as peak cold and flu season. There's no shortage of answers out there, but few of them will have much of an impact, say public health and infectious disease experts writing in *The Conversation*.

Hot drinks with lemon and honey, vitamin supplements, foods with garlic and ginger, apple cider vinegar, gargling with salt water ... none of these things have any impact on your immune response, and won't eliminate the virus. But if they make you feel calmer and healthier, they won't hurt you.

Other myths include that the coronavirus can't survive above 27°C (80°F). Definitely wrong, say the experts, as the virus can function happily in our bodies at 37.5°C (99.5°F).

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THING YOU CAN DO TODAY



Read a good news website

Do you make a habit of reaching for your phone first thing in the morning to check the news? It's something many of us do, yet in these times of the COVID-19 pandemic that news is often gloomy at best.

Bad news stories grab readers. The sensational will always get our attention, but you've probably noticed that reading bad news has a negative effect on your nervous system, triggering a downward spiral in mood that can increase stress, anxiety and fatigue.

The solution is not to avoid the news, but to also seek out some positive news that gives you a reason to feel more optimistic about the future. Stories about improved living and health conditions are uplifting and encouraging. Reading about how humans help other humans in these difficult times can restore our trust in humankind, while reports about progress being made to help the planet can give us hope that we can make a difference.

You can give your good mood hormones a boost and reduce your stress levels simply by giving yourself a daily dose of good news. There are a number of websites devoted to collating good news stories, and you can also opt to have uplifting stories delivered to your inbox.

Try the #1 for good news. Since 1997 the US based Good News Network has provided an antidote to the barrage of negative news and is the number one site for good news on Google. Visit goodnewsnetwork.org.

Read the original. Founded in 1993, the UK Positive News organisation aims to produce independent positive news stories. Visit positive.news

EAT SMARTER

Spread hummus on your sandwich

An extremely popular dip, hummus is a traditional Middle Eastern spread made with chickpeas, tahini (sesame seed paste), olive oil, lemon and garlic.

But is hummus a healthy choice? Yes – and here's why:

Chickpeas: the main ingredient of hummus is chickpeas, a type of legume that we should all be eating more of. High in protein and dietary fibre, chickpeas are also packed with antioxidants and key nutrients such as folate, magnesium, potassium, and iron.

Sesame seeds: tahini is a paste made from ground sesame seeds. It's a great source of healthy monounsaturated fats, which have anti-inflammatory properties. Sesame seeds are also a good source of calcium – one tablespoon provides nine percent of your daily calcium needs.

Extra virgin olive oil: one of the healthiest oils you can eat, extra virgin olive oil contains heart-healthy monounsaturated fat and is high in antioxidants.

To get the best quality hummus, make your own. It's easy to make by blending cooked or canned chickpeas with lemon, garlic, tahini and olive oil. But if you opt for the convenience of buying hummus, make sure you read the label.

Sodium. Watch for added salt in commercial brands. Look for hummus that contains 400mg of sodium or less per 100g. Too much salt can contribute to raised blood pressure, a risk factor for cardiovascular disease.

Oil that's not olive. Try to find a brand that uses extra virgin olive oil, as many brands will use cheaper oils such as sunflower or canola, which while not harmful, don't have the same health benefits as extra virgin olive oil. ✕



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