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**HEALTH & SAFETY
NEWSLETTER**

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August 2020

The sweet tooth

Want to keep your teeth cavity-free for as long as possible? Then start paying close attention to sugar, because a healthy diet is as essential for your mouth as it is for the rest of your body.

The good news is we're keeping our teeth for longer. The bad news is that one in three of us is walking around with untreated tooth decay, while one in four has periodontal (gum) disease. In most industrialised countries, the rates are similar.

These are the statistics reported in the adult Oral Health Tracker progress report, released in March 2020. This report gives us an update on how Australian adults' oral health is tracking compared to the previous results in 2018, says the Australian Dental Association's Oral Health Advisor, Dr Mikaela Chinotti.

"The results are in, and for gum disease and tooth decay, they're not good," she says. "These conditions are largely preventable, yet they've increased in prevalence and we continue to get further away from our goal of improving our overall oral health."

Sweet enough

"For many, free sugar consumption is still well above the WHO's recommended six teaspoons (24 grams) a day limit," says Dr Chinotti, "and this is affecting quality of life by causing tooth decay."

Sugar is the enemy of healthy teeth. It feeds the bacteria that live on the surface of your teeth, and they rapidly produce acids that dissolve your protective tooth enamel, leading to decay and cavities. If the bacteria on your teeth spread to the gum line, they can irritate or infect the gums, leading to gingivitis, gum disease and potentially, tooth loss.

The worst offenders are soft drinks and sports drinks. Not only are these full of added sugar, they also contain food acids that can cause further erosion of tooth enamel. And the sugar-free versions should also be consumed

with caution – these contain food acids too, so aren't necessarily much better for your teeth. (Neither is fruit juice, warn dentists, also because of its high acid content.)

Spotting sugar isn't easy

It's not always obvious when food contains lots of sugar. Many foods contain both natural and added sweeteners, yet the food label often doesn't separate the two. The best action is to check nutrition labels and choose foods lowest in sugar, avoid sweet drinks of any type including diet drinks and fruit juice, and drink water or rinse your mouth after any snack or drink. Chewing sugar-free gum for 20 minutes after eating can also help neutralise decay-causing acid attacks.

Make sure you visit your dentist at least once a year for a check-up and advice on how to keep your teeth and mouth healthy. ✕



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Dental Health Week runs from 3 to 9 August. This year, the focus is on sugar. The Australian Dental Association plans to highlight the effects of sugar on oral health, and how to interpret nutrition information panels, all while shedding light on hidden sugars.



Better choices when you're feeling stressed

Our world is filled with things that cause stress. Whether it's money worries, a bad day at work, health anxiety, family conflict, or even boredom, stress causes us to respond in ways that aren't necessarily good for us. What do you do to feel better, and are there more helpful solutions?

Your stress habit: the daily drink

An occasional alcoholic drink to calm your nerves isn't going to do you any harm. But drowning your stress in a bottle of wine isn't doing your body any favours in the long term.

We know that alcohol is linked to a wide range of disease including cancer, liver disease and heart disease. Alcohol can also be damaging to your emotional health, especially if you already experience depression or anxiety, says MensLine Australia.

And if you drink before bed, your sleep quality may not improve, says the Sleep Health Foundation. While you may fall asleep quickly after drinking, alcohol is associated with waking in the night, night sweats, nightmares, and headaches. And without sufficient rest, you're less able to handle stress.

The solution: Tempted to reach for the beer or wine? Get out of the habit and explore non-alcoholic options. If you want the taste of an alcoholic drink, try non-alcoholic wines, distilled spirits and beer. You'd be in good company. According to a DrinkWise study, more and more of us are saying no to alcoholic drinks with 20 per cent of us abstaining from drinking in 2017.

Make a note of when you're reaching for a drink. If it's early evening after a stressful day, taking time out for yourself, even as little as 10 to 15 minutes (for a walk, meditation, quiet read, quick workout or listening to music) can work to calm your mind and reduce your stress.

Your stress habit: comfort eating

There's nothing like a period of stress to throw your good eating intentions out the window. Since we were children, we've known how effective food can be to comfort us during difficult times. The problem of course, is the kinds of foods we turn to. Anxious, worried, lonely or bored? It's easy to reach for sweet or salty snacks or a bowl of ice cream.

But don't be too hard on yourself. Making bad food choices from time to time is something we all do, and it doesn't mean you've abandoned your healthy eating habits. Emotional eating is only really a problem when it's your only coping mechanism. Once you've acknowledged that your choices aren't doing you any favours health-wise, you can start making some switches.

The solution: If it's comfort you're after, sometimes a hot drink can be what you need. A cup of tea, a low-calorie hot chocolate or a miso soup may work as a pick-me-up. Take a brief time-out too if you can – maybe listen to music or a

When you need more help

If you find yourself regularly jeopardising your health or bank balance with unhealthy habits to deal with stress or anxiety, one of the first steps to stopping these behaviours is to understand the emotions behind them. A qualified therapist can help you with this. To find a suitable one for you, start by making an appointment with your doctor.



podcast, go for a short walk, or read a few chapters of a novel.

Are you after the satisfying crunch of salty chips? Opt for a small handful of unsalted nuts instead, and throw in a few tamari almonds or wasabi peas to give you an added flavour hit. Otherwise you could make your own popcorn. Popcorn is a high-fibre healthy snack provided it isn't covered in sugar or salt. You'll find recipes for healthy homemade popcorn online or choose the healthiest option in the supermarket.

Fruit doesn't always hit the spot when you're feeling stressed, but a small bowl of chopped banana mixed with natural yoghurt, a drizzle of honey and a light sprinkling of granola will fill you up and may satisfy your cravings.

Your stress habit: retail therapy

Many of us go shopping to fill a void or to feel happier – in fact the 'shopper's high' has been likened to the endorphin surge of the runner's high. While a little retail therapy is fairly harmless and can lift your spirits, if it becomes a regular habit it can seriously make a mess of your budget and cause you to buy things you don't even need. And with online shopping so accessible, it's easy to get your fix, even if you have to wait for the product to arrive. You don't even have the experience of handing over your money – it's all done with the click of a button.

Buying things on a whim makes us feel good, says Scott Rick, an associate professor of marketing at the University of Michigan, with studies showing it lights up the pleasure centre in the brain. A 2011 study in the *Journal of Psychology and Marketing* supports this, finding that a shopping spree does have a positive effect on mood.

The downside, of course, is that too much spending on non-essentials can lead to debt we can ill afford. According to a survey by Mortgage Choice, 34 per cent of Australian respondents admitted feeling embarrassed by their financial habits, while 42 per cent were uncomfortable with their personal debt levels.

The solution: Wait 24 hours before making an impulse purchase. If you still want the item the next day, and you can afford it, then buy it. But by then you may have forgotten about it or decided to wait until you've saved up. If you recognise you often reach for your credit card or favourite online store to feel better, stop and consider what else can give you the same feeling. Perhaps you can get the same happy endorphins with exercise – whether that's a brisk walk, yoga, or kickboxing. Or you may find satisfaction from cleaning out your wardrobe and giving away unwanted clothes to charity. ✕

Is natural always safer?



Nearly three quarters of us use some form of complementary medicines, including vitamins, minerals, herbs, aromatherapy and homeopathic products. But are these as safe as we think?

The word 'natural' is advertised across packages of food, supplements, herbs and even detergents. That's because when we read 'natural' we tend to think pure, unadulterated, and harmless. But this may not always be the case.

Reviews of studies on widely available complementary medicines have found that while some have been well-studied and found to be effective, many have not and evidence for their effectiveness is often lacking or of poor quality.

Health risks

Like pharmaceutical drugs, complementary medicines can cause harm, even if they are used correctly. The risks include:

Indirect harm: relying on complementary therapies alone could delay your diagnosis and medical treatment. In the case of serious illnesses, such as cancer, a delay can lead to serious complications or death.

Side effects: some supplements and herbs can cause unwanted and potentially dangerous side effects. For example, the herb feverfew can cause uterine contractions and possible miscarriage in pregnant women.

Drug interactions: some complementary medicines can interact with over-the-counter or prescription drugs. These include evening primrose oil, ginkgo, glucosamine, hawthorn, and St John's wort.

When you're prescribed a medication, or start taking a complementary medicine when you're on other medication, it's wise to let your doctor and pharmacist know everything else you are taking. This is particularly important if you are undergoing surgery, as certain herbal medicines and supplements can interfere with anaesthesia and other medication, as well as with blood clotting and blood pressure.

Risky ingredients: some complementary medicines may not contain what they claim. Last year a major research project led by researchers from the University of Adelaide and Western Australia's Murdoch University and Curtin University found many supplements and herbal medicines available to consumers were not exactly what they claimed to be.

More than two thirds of the products tested either had ingredients missing or contained foreign material, including DNA traces of frog, shrew, reindeer, goat and

dog. In a small number of cases, herbal supplements contained levels of lead, arsenic, cadmium or mercury that exceeded the safe maximum dose, while others contained undeclared drugs, including an anti-inflammatory pharmaceutical.

While the traces of heavy metals and pharmaceutical drugs are concerning and potentially dangerous, the researchers suggested contamination from commonly domesticated animals could be inadvertent and due to manufacturing deficiencies or transportation. ✕

Stay safe with complementary medicines

- If you are feeling unwell, first see your doctor for a diagnosis and treatment– don't self-diagnose.
- Choose a complementary therapist who is registered with the appropriate professional association, such as the Australian Traditional Medicine Society. If you are unsure of their qualifications, look them up online or find your region's equivalent to the Natural Therapy Associations or the Complementary Therapists Association.
- Depending on your location, it can be hard to tell what is a good product or not. Some countries, like Australia have a register for approved products. There, supplements and herbs labelled 'Registered Aust R' or 'Listed Aust L' have had a basic assessment of their safety and quality. Your location may have a similar system. It is important to note that even then, there is no guarantee that the product will work for you as advertised.
- Avoid buying online from an overseas retailer, even though they may appear better value. The products could be out-of-date, poor quality or even fake. In Australia, the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) and Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) have strict guidelines on claims made by companies, but these do not extend to products bought overseas. Other countries also have similar guidelines on product claims.

Stay informed. There is plenty of medical misinformation or 'cyberquackery' online. Make sure you seek out reputable websites to get information about complementary medicines and therapies, such as the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health at www.nccih.nih.gov.

The exercise weight loss dilemma

Eat less, move more has been the weight loss mantra for decades. But does exercise really help us lose weight or can it make us want to eat more?

Physical activity consumes kilojoules. We've been told for years that if we burn those kilojoules without replacing them in the form of food, then we'll rid ourselves of excess fat and shrink our waistlines.

It sounds good in theory. Except that past studies have shown it doesn't always work to plan. Most men and women who begin new exercise routines drop just 30 to 40 percent of the weight they would have expected, given how many additional kilojoules they are burning through exercise.

Why would this be the case? Some scientists think many of us compensate for the kilojoules lost by eating more, moving less, or both.

A recent study published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* tracked a large group of previously inactive people who had started exercise programs. Participants in both the shorter- and longer-workout groups lost less weight than would have been expected. The reason? They were eating more food as compensation – but not a lot. However, just an additional 90 to 120 calories (380 to 500 kilojoules) each day was enough to undercut weight loss.

So if you're wanting to lose weight, say the researchers, then along with becoming more active, make sure you don't eat more to compensate.

Being active = better food choices

But there's more to it than that, argue the authors of a recent large review study. The University of Leeds study, published in *Current Obesity Reports*, found that taking

up exercise can affect your food choices – in positive ways.

The researchers discovered that regular exercise helped control appetite and was associated with an increased liking for healthier low-fat/low-energy foods, and a decreased desire for unhealthy high-fat or high-energy foods. Their conclusion? Eating more does not necessarily counteract the benefit of increasing physical activity, because you're likely to seek out healthier foods. ✕

How exercise affects your health

Looking at exercise through the narrow lens of weight loss is problematic, say many experts. That's because being regularly active brings with it a host of health benefits, whether or not you lose weight. Exercise will:

- reduce your risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and some cancers
- lower your blood pressure and cholesterol
- strengthen your bones, muscles and joints, and reduce your risk of falls
- make you feel better – by giving you more energy, lifting your mood, and helping you sleep more soundly.

Whether or not exercise sheds kilos as quickly as we'd like, what we do know is this: exercise helps minimise weight gain as we age and will help you maintain weight loss if you do lose weight.

Your COVID-19 cleaning checklist

It's not over yet, say authorities. We still face the risk of contracting COVID-19, particularly now many of us are returning to work. How can you reduce your risk? Regular cleaning can help.

If someone with COVID-19 coughs or sneezes, they expel droplets that can land on surfaces. If you touch a contaminated surface and then touch your mouth, nose or eyes, you risk contracting the virus too. That's why cleaning and disinfecting surfaces at work is so important, as it reduces the risk of exposure to the COVID 19 virus (as well as other viruses such as the common cold and flu).

If there is a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 at your workplace, you must contact your local health authority for advice on what you need to do. The following Q & A refers to cleaning when there is no suspected case of COVID-19.

Q. Are cleaning and disinfecting the same thing?

No, says Safe Work Australia. Cleaning means physically removing dirt and germs, including viruses, while disinfecting means using chemicals to kill germs on surfaces. You must always clean before you disinfect.

Q. Do I have to regularly clean and disinfect?

You must clean surfaces regularly using a detergent or a 2-in-1 detergent and disinfectant. If the surface is visibly dirty, you need to clean more frequently. Once

clean, surfaces can be disinfected. You may not have to disinfect as regularly as you clean, says Safe Work Australia, but this is advisable if your workplace has a large workforce, or a high number of customers or visitors.

Q. Should I clean every surface?

Only those surfaces that are touched need to be regularly cleaned, so you don't need to clean ceilings, or cracks and crevices in machinery as often.

Q. What areas should I focus on for cleaning/disinfecting?

Frequently touched surfaces carry the highest risk of contamination. These include desks, tabletops, door handles, light switches, lift buttons, handrails, toilets and toilet doors, kettles, taps, kitchen surfaces and cupboard handles. These should be cleaned frequently throughout the day using a detergent, or 2-in-1 detergent and disinfectant.

Q. What about personal property?

Everyone should clean their own mobile phone, glasses and keys, using disinfectant wipes. You should also clean your own workstation, including keyboard and mouse, particularly if they are used by more than one person.



Q. How do I clean safely?

Read the product label and Safety Data Sheet for the cleaning product you're using and ensure you follow all instructions, including requirements for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). The minimum PPE you'll need are gloves, disposable if possible. Always wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water or hand sanitiser before and after wearing gloves, and dry with a disposable towel.

For more information about COVID-19 in the workplace, visit www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/covid-19-information-workplaces. ✕



Ask an expert about ...

Physiotherapist Adam Crisp replies:

It's not unusual to see clients with tight hamstrings, particularly if they have lower back pain. Tight hamstrings can put your pelvis into a position that leads to excessive load through your lower back and sub-optimal position for the vital stabilisers of the area – your abdominals and gluteal muscles. However, for most people, having tight hamstrings doesn't cause any concerns, and in fact, may at times be beneficial.

The amount of tightness and/or flexibility you need in your hamstrings

Q My hamstrings feel tight. Is this a bad thing, and will stretching them help?

will depend largely on the activities you participate in. For example, in a sport that requires explosiveness, power and stability, such as sprinting or weightlifting, a degree of tightness can help with force production and joint stability. In contrast, a gymnast requires a considerable amount of flexibility and mobility to perform their movements.

So, should you stretch your hamstrings or not? Simply put, if you feel like they need to be stretched, then yes, if not, then no. As a physiotherapist, I hear a lot of people say that they need to stretch. However, I

usually ask them why do they think they need to stretch? Often the answer is that stretching feels good, but it doesn't necessarily achieve anything else unless it's done consistently for months.

I don't discourage my clients from stretching and in fact recommend doing so, however I do tell them that the key to reducing injury and ensuring that their bodies function optimally is to strengthen their muscles. Doing so helps to minimise muscular imbalances and reduce the likelihood of tightness developing, which can have implications for injury risk. ✕

App of the month

Happify

How you feel matters! Whether you're feeling sad, anxious, or stressed, Happify brings you effective tools and programs to help you take control of your feelings and thoughts.

The science-based activities and games can help reduce stress, overcome negative thoughts, and build greater resilience by providing effective tools and programs to improve emotional well-being.

The app uses techniques developed by leading scientists and experts in the fields of positive psychology, mindfulness and cognitive behavioral therapy.

Available free with in-app purchases from the [App Store](#) and [Google Play](#).

News Bites



Virtual art

Gazing at a beautiful painting or other artform can help you de-stress, lower blood pressure and improve your brain function and thinking patterns, studies find. Getting lost in a painting is also a chance to switch off and give your brain and body a moment to pause and refresh. With overseas travel restricted and many of the world's galleries and museums closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, thanks to modern technology you can visit them from your living room. Explore London's Natural History Museum via its interactive online guide; marvel at Michelangelo's ceiling inside the Sistine Chapel at the Vatican Museum, Rome; or admire Van Gogh's work at the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam. For a list of these and other famous galleries and museums, visit artsandculture.google.com/partner to kickstart your cultural journey. ✕



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Do you know your heart age?

Australians need to do more to protect their heart health, urges the Heart Foundation's Group CEO, Adjunct Professor John Kelly, with heart disease killing around 48 people every day. A good place to start is heading to the Heart Foundation's website to do the online Heart Age Calculator, which based on your answers to a number of questions will give you a heart age. If your heart age is older than your biological age, you are at increased risk of having a heart attack or stroke.

Analysis of a representative sample of people who have already done the test was worrying, said Professor Kelly. "Close to one in six people who did the test had a heart age at least 10 years higher than their real age, suggesting they have a higher risk of having a heart attack or stroke compared to the average person their age."

Visit heartfoundation.org.au/heart-age-calculator to take the heart age test today. ✕

Is coconut oil's good reputation real?

Many of us think nothing of liberally drizzling coconut oil into our frying pan or muffin mix. After all, we're often told it's a natural, healthful product. But the latest systematic review, published in *Circulation*, found that compared with other vegetable oils, coconut oil increases LDL cholesterol (the 'bad' kind that increases cardiovascular disease risk) while doing little for your weight, blood glucose or inflammation markers. The high saturated fat content of coconut oil is the problem and using it frequently instead of healthier oils, such as olive oil, could put your heart health at risk, warn the study authors.

But what about lauric acid? Lauric acid makes up about half of coconut oil's fatty acid content, and some people argue that because it is a medium-chain fatty acid (MCFAs), it doesn't affect LDL cholesterol. But the evidence suggests otherwise. The study authors say that unlike other MCFAs, rather than bypassing the liver, lauric acid is absorbed in the gut and goes into the liver, much like long-chain saturated fatty acids, and from there can impact cholesterol levels.

The conclusion? Use coconut oil sparingly. ✕

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THING YOU CAN DO TODAY

Do a roll-down

Got a tight, sore back? Sitting in front of a computer, hunched forward with your head pushed out can lead to painful tightness in the spine, neck and back.



One way to get relief is to do a standing roll-down, a Pilates exercise often used as a warm-up exercise to relieve back tension. As well as stretching and increasing mobility in the back, spine and neck, the roll-down can help strengthen your abdominals so they can support your upper body and spine, as well as help improve blood circulation.

How to do a roll-down

If you're a beginner, do the roll-down against a wall. As you progress, you can do the exercise standing on the floor.

- Start standing against a wall, with your head, shoulders and bottom against the wall, and your heels about 20 to 30 centimetres away from the wall. Relax your shoulders and arms.
- Pull your belly button into your spine, pull your chin to your chest, and on an exhale slowly let your head fall down in front of you, peeling your shoulders and back from the wall, vertebra by vertebra. Keep your arms relaxed and dangling like dead weights.
- If your hamstrings are tight, you can slightly bend your knees.
- Using your abdominal muscles, roll-down as far down as you can go without lifting your hips from the wall.
- Inhale, then on an exhale, using your lower abdominal muscles, begin to slowly roll up until you are upright. Repeat a few times as needed. ✕

EAT SMARTER

Swap white bread for wholegrain

It's easy to get into the habit of picking up the familiar white loaf for your daily toast and sandwiches. Maybe it's the bread you've always eaten, or the one your children prefer in their lunchbox.

All types of bread are a good source of carbohydrates, are low in fat, and many are also fortified with added vitamins and minerals. But making a small swap from white to wholemeal or wholegrain bread can deliver a host of added health benefits. Here's why:

- White bread is made from wheat that has had the germ and bran removed, which reduces B vitamins, vitamin E and minerals such as iron, zinc, magnesium and phosphorus.
- Removing the germ and bran also reduces the fibre, which is bad news for our health. According to Australia's CSIRO, 83 per cent of us aren't getting enough fibre in our diets, and as a result we are more likely to have gut problems such as heartburn, pain and discomfort, bloating and irregular bowel habits. Fibre helps us feel fuller for longer, keeps blood sugar levels stable, and is a source of fuel for our gut bacteria.
- Because both wholemeal and wholegrain bread are made from the entire grain, they also naturally contain more protein, unsaturated fat, vitamins and minerals – the ones that are removed in the making of white flour. Wholegrain bread also contains added grains and seeds, which can increase the nutrient and fibre content.

Making the switch from white bread to wholemeal or wholegrain is a simple way of adding more fibre and nutrients to your daily diet. Just make sure to compare brands when you're shopping. Look for 'wholegrain' in the list of ingredients, and choose the bread with the highest wholegrain content. ✕



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