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**HEALTH & SAFETY
NEWSLETTER**

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January 2021

Here are three proven ways to boost your gratitude:

1. Let yourself feel the bad and the good.

Allow yourself to acknowledge other feelings — of sadness, fear or anger, for example — even while you practise feeling grateful. You can still look for things to be grateful for while admitting that life is hard right now.

2. Make gratitude a habit. Robert Emmons, the gratitude expert mentioned above, recommends setting aside time each week to write in a gratitude journal. He also shares the tip that focusing on people has more impact than focusing on things.

3. Go deep rather than wide. Emmons says focusing in depth on one thing that you're truly grateful for can have more benefit than trying to think of a long list of superficial things.

So grab a piece of paper, or open the notes app on your phone, and find one thing to be grateful for right now!

There are also dedicated gratitude apps that you can use. Try searching for them in the App or Play stores. ✕

Gratitude doesn't have to be hard

Gratitude. It's the secret to health and happiness, and it's free and available any time. So why can it be so hard to do? Why aren't we more grateful? And what can we do about it?

Research tells us that practising gratitude boosts our physical, mental and emotional health.

According to Robert Emmons, founding editor-in-chief of *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, feeling grateful can lower your blood pressure, improve your immunity and help you sleep better. It also reduces your risk of depression and anxiety and boosts resilience.

Yet, when we try to practise gratitude in real life, it often sparks a strange rebellion, like a child told to be grateful for vegetables at dinner.

There are two reasons for this:

1. It can feel invalidating

If we try to be grateful without acknowledging the challenges we're facing or any difficult emotions we're feeling, it can make us feel resentful.

2. We're wired to look for danger

As humans, we've evolved because of our finely attuned ability to identify and overcome threats. Our survival depended on us focusing on things that were wrong, not on those that were right.

So how do we overcome these instinctive blocks to gratitude?



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January 4 is World Braille Day. It's also the birthday of Louise Braille, the inventor of braille, and is a reminder of the importance of accessibility and independence for people who are blind or visually impaired. For more information visit brailleworks.com/what-is-world-braille-day.

Hit pause in your day

Our bodies are designed to move, yet our work often means staying in a position for long periods of time. To avoid injury or fatigued muscles we're told to take a break for at least five minutes every 45 to 60 minutes. But is there any value in taking shorter, 30 to 60-second breaks? It turns out there is.

We all know the benefits of the lunch break. A 30-minute pause in your working day gives your body and brain the chance to recharge. But often we need a little more than a single break in the day. Enter the microbreak – any brief activity that breaks up the monotony of a physically or mentally draining task. Although tiny, microbreaks can make a big difference to your day.

Lasting anywhere from a few seconds to a few minutes, a microbreak is a brief, informal break from your computer screen or workstation. You might find you naturally take microbreaks to chat to a colleague or make a coffee. If you work from home, microbreaks like these might not be such a regular part of your day.

Why microbreaks matter

Research has shown taking microbreaks can increase comfort and reduce muscle fatigue and risk of injuries, particularly when stretches are included in the break. They can help us cope with long periods at

our desks by taking the strain off certain parts of our bodies – such as the neck – that we're using all day.

When your muscles are fatigued, they don't do their job as well, so they need to rest occasionally to recover. Muscles recover very quickly from low levels of fatigue, but they take much longer to recover from high levels of fatigue, when they are tired and sore.

Micropauses of 30 to 60 seconds, every 10 to 20 minutes, will relax your muscles and restore blood flow. These small changes to your working activity allow you to change posture, position and eye focus. Studies show taking microbreaks may also improve concentration, productivity, stress and mood.

Combining microbreaks with viewing green space may be even better, found Australian researchers. Their 2015 study, published in the *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, found that the participants who were given a break looking at a

photo of lush green roof, as compared to a concrete one, made fewer errors and were able to concentrate better. So if you can take time to look at nature through the window, on a walk outside, or even on a screen saver, your performance and attention is likely to benefit.

How to take a microbreak

Give yourself a rest from a repetitive task or position by taking a microbreak of up to 60 seconds every 20 minutes. Try the following:

- **Eye break.** Use the time to look away from your computer to help ease eye strain, symptoms of which include dry, irritated eyes, blurred vision, neck and back pain and headaches. Use the 20/20/20 rule from Optometry Australia: every 20 minutes, shift your eyes to look at an object at least 20 feet away (six metres), for at least 20 seconds.



- **Deep breathing.** Focus on your breath for a few seconds to give your mind a break. Breathe in for four seconds, hold for four seconds and out for four to five seconds. Repeat three times.

- **Shoulder shrug.** Inhale deeply and gently lift your shoulders up to your ears. Hold for a few seconds, then let them slowly fall. Repeat three times.

- **Chin tuck.** Sit up straight with your shoulders back. Now imagine drawing your chin back towards your spine. Hold for 10 seconds, then relax.

- **Back twists.** Sit on the front of your seat, both feet on the floor, with a gap between your back and the back of the chair. Cross your arms lightly in front of your chest and slowly twist your upper body from side to side as far as is comfortable. Repeat a few times each way.

- **Neck stretch.** Start with your head squarely over your shoulders and your back straight. Lower your chin toward your

chest and hold for 10 to 15 seconds. Relax and slowly lift your head back up. Then tilt your chin up to the ceiling, bringing the base of your skull toward your back. Hold for 10 seconds and return to the start position.

- **Side tilt.** You can do this standing or sitting. Gently tilt your head toward your right shoulder until you feel the stretch (don't raise your shoulder). Hold the stretch for 5-10 seconds, then return to the start position and repeat on the other side.

- **Leg extensions.** While you're sitting, pull in your tummy then slowly extend each leg in turn and lower back down.

- **Tennis ball roll.** Give your feet a gentle massage. With your shoes off, roll the arch of your feet over a tennis ball back and forth for about 30 to 60 seconds.

- **Take a stand.** Set a timer to remind you to stand up at least every 30 minutes. While you're standing, place your hands on your waist and gently arch your back, going no further than is comfortable. ✕

Need a bit of fun in your downtime?

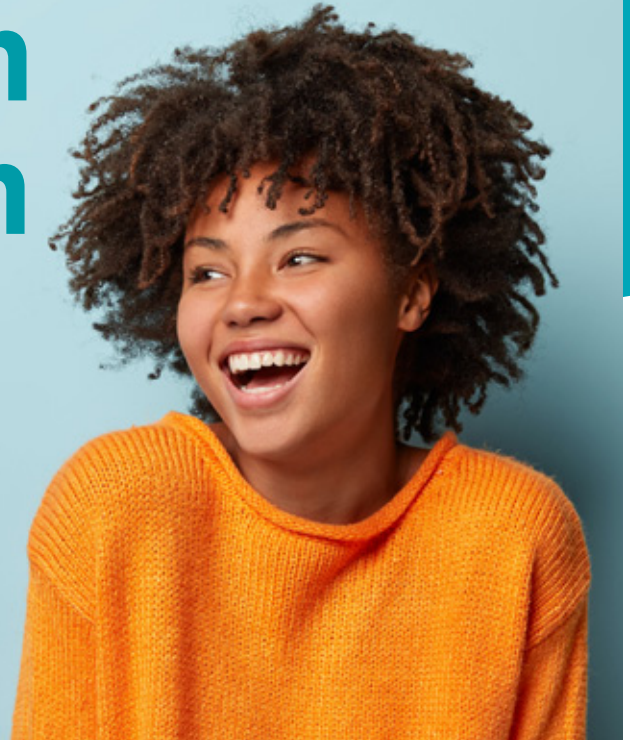
There could be some benefits from watching those funny cat videos you love. While it's best to take a break from the screen to move, one study found that humour can have an energising effect when you're trying to do a complex task.

An Australian study of 124 students found that when they were given a boring task and then exposed to funny videos (in this case an episode of 'Mr Bean') the students worked twice as long as those who watched videos on neutral subjects.

Note: Don't over-extend your stretches. If it hurts, stop.

Can you learn to become an optimist?

“Life inflicts the same setbacks and tragedies on the optimist as on the pessimist, but the optimist weathers them better.” Martin Seligman



“Sure!” answers the optimist in you. “Unlikely”, answers the pessimist. Sorry to disappoint your inner pessimist, but you can rewire your brain to be optimistic, and the benefits are immense.

The pioneer of positive psychology and author of *Learned Optimism*, Dr Martin Seligman, says “Pessimism is one of the personality traits that’s highly heritable, but also modifiable by specific exercises.”

In fact, research on twins found that optimism is only around 25 per cent inherited – the rest is up to us.

Surprisingly, the big difference between pessimists and optimists is not what they think might happen in the future. Instead, the difference is what they see as the cause of the problem.

Seligman explains:

“The defining characteristic of pessimists is that they tend to believe bad events will last a long time, will undermine everything they do, and are their own fault. The optimists, who are confronted with the same hard knocks of this world, think about misfortune in the opposite way. They tend to believe defeat is just a temporary setback, that its causes are confined to this one case.”

In another win for optimists, it turns out that you can learn to be optimistic.

“Pessimism is escapable,” says Seligman.

“Pessimists can in fact learn to be optimists, and not through mindless devices like

whistling a happy tune or mouthing platitudes...but by learning a new set of cognitive skills.”

Learning new cognitive skills might sound difficult, but it’s actually quite fun and not too hard. Here are two exercises you can try right now:

1. Imagine your ideal future

We spend too much time worrying about worst-case scenarios. Take a moment to playfully imagine your future success. See yourself, say ten years in the future, happy, thriving and loving life. Who is with you? What does it feel like? What dreams have come true, and in what way?

This is called the best possible selves (BPS)

activity, and more than 30 studies have shown it can increase optimism, positive emotions, health and wellbeing.

The trick is to do this exercise many times over, such as once a week for eight weeks.

2. Argue with yourself

When you notice you’re having negative thoughts, argue with them. Seligman says, “First recognise them and then treat them as if they were uttered by an external person, a rival whose mission in life was to make you miserable.”

You’ll find that you start standing up for yourself against your own thoughts, in the same way that you’d defend a friend being unfairly accused of wrongdoing. ✕

When positivity becomes negative

If you haven’t heard of the term “toxic positivity”, chances are you’ve seen it in action. It’s that friend who insists on everyone being positive all the time.

Toxic positivity demands that we deny negative feelings and pretend everything is OK, even when it’s not. It’s become more prevalent than ever this last year, as people tried to cope with the challenges that the pandemic has brought.

A tell-tale phrase is “at least.” “At least you’ve still got a roof over your head.” “At least you can work while the kids are home.”

But ignoring negative feelings is like ignoring a physical health symptom: it will fester. It’s vital that we acknowledge and address difficult emotions – in others and in ourselves.

Next time you hear a friend say “gotta stay positive!”, use it as a reminder to embrace your genuine emotions.

How to disagree with colleagues

Disagreements are inevitable, normal, and a sign of a healthy, successful team. Yet many of us want to escape conflict as much as possible, and will try to avoid openly disagreeing with a work colleague, even though we may feel very strongly about our viewpoint.

You may not see eye to eye with a workmate but find it difficult to speak up. Or perhaps in meetings you want to disagree but are concerned about causing offence. Most of us don't want to disagree as it makes us feel uncomfortable. And many of us don't really know how to do it, often fearing being seen as angry, rude or unkind.

It's easier to agree than to confront someone. But learning to openly and respectfully disagree with a workmate can improve your working relationships and give you greater job satisfaction.

Getting comfortable with conflict

1. Focus on respect. It's normal to want people to like us, but it's not always the most important thing. Instead aim for respect – giving it and receiving it. You can give respect by acknowledging that you understand or see why your co-worker feels the way they do, even when you strongly disagree with them. That way the other person is more likely to feel listened to and understood.

2. Don't equate disagreement with unkindness. While there are some people who genuinely don't want to be disagreed with, most people are open to hearing a different perspective if shared thoughtfully, and it's unlikely you will be hurting anyone's feelings.

3. Pick your battles. If you disagree with too much, your co-workers are likely to see you as argumentative and disagreeable. It then makes it harder for you to get heard with any reasonable disagreement you have.

4. Aim for calm. If you're angry, emotional or upset, it's going to affect your professionalism. Get yourself ready for a disagreement with a couple of calming breaths.

5. Avoid personal attacks. Your disagreement must be based on facts, experience, or your intuition, not on the personality of the other person. Once you start using the word 'you' as in "You just don't understand..." you're moving into a more personal attack.

6. Speak only for yourself. Though it might be tempting, avoid phrases such as "Everyone believes this," or "We all feel this way." You can only put forward your point of view. ✕

Communicate in-person

Try not to disagree via email, advises career coach Jill Ozovek, writing in *The Muse*. Talk in person, over the phone or video chat. Why?

"First and foremost, you can both read body language and hear intonations in each other's voices this way, leading to fewer misunderstandings (how many times has something come across as snarky in an email, when you only meant it as explanatory?)," she says.

"Secondly, talking in person also helps you both remember that you're talking to a person – presumably a person you like – not just a computer screen. This will make it easier to be sympathetic and make it more likely that you'll do your best to work together to find a solution, rather than fight against each other."



Step on it (with care!)

Do you ever think about taking care when you approach a stairway? Do you consider that they might present a potential safety risk?

Your answer is likely to be 'very rarely', or even 'huh?' Because despite the statistics showing stairways to be a major cause of falls in and out of the workplace, the fact that we use them every day means that, much like driving a car, we seldom consider the risks beforehand.

Safe Work Australia identifies steps and stairs as a potential hazard, a risk that must be minimised like any other workplace hazard.

With a staircase, hazards can be reduced through engineering controls – slip-resistant floor treatments, matte finishes to avoid glare, good lighting, and clearly marked edges of steps.

Good housekeeping practices, including training staff to use the handrails, cleaning up any spills, removing objects sticking

out of the surface of stairs, and ensuring malfunctioning lighting is immediately repaired, can also do much to help reduce the risk of falls.

Human error

But the fact remains: the main reason people fall on stairs is because of inattention and unsafe behaviour, and it can cost them dearly in terms of twisted or broken ankles, even long term back or head injuries.

By our nature we are often distracted, rushing, not watching our footing. Common distractions that take your attention away from your feet, particularly when descending stairs, include talking on a mobile, checking the time, texting and talking with a colleague.

The most 'at risk' behaviour however, would be carrying a load down stairs. Your attention is focused on balancing the load, your vision is blocked, your eyes are away from your footing, and your hands too full to grip a handrail. ✖

Basic Stair Sense

- Use the handrail: if you slip, trip or fall while descending, grabbing the handrail can break your fall.
- Take extra care on stairs if you are wearing bifocal glasses, as they can affect your depth perception.
- Always make use of the full width of the stair tread – walking on the very end of the tread invites a slip and fall.
- Avoid 'stair hopping': it's a common cause of falls going up and down stairs.
- Watch your clothing: loose clothing such as untied shoelaces or pants and skirts that are too long, can be a trip hazard when going down steps. ✖



Ask an expert about ...

Which exercise is best for burning fat? And what intensity will maximise fat shedding? Does it even matter?

Q Can exercise blast my fat?

When your muscles are resting, you predominantly burn fat as a source of energy. But as you start to exercise, you use up less fat and more carbohydrate. At lower intensity exercise, such as walking, fat and carbohydrate provide equal amounts of energy.

But when you up your rate of exercise, from a slow walk to a fast run for example, fat can't be mobilised from the body's stores quickly enough to provide fuel. Carbohydrates then become more important, so the more intense your exercise, the higher the proportion of carbs you burn.

At the very highest rates of exercise, carbs become the sole source of energy. Your body only has limited stores of carbohydrate, which is why people exercising for prolonged periods need to fuel up with carbs beforehand, and consume some during their exercise.

But does it matter what fuel is burned? Overall it seems that if weight loss is your goal, the calories burned is the main factor, and the higher your exercise intensity, and the longer the duration, the more calories you will use up. ✖

Source: Deakin University

App of the month

WorryTime by ReachOut

Everyone has worries pop into their head from time to time, but sometimes they won't go away and can start to impact your everyday life. Produced in consultation with the Centre of Clinical Interventions, the WorryTime app is based on cognitive behavioural techniques and helps you control anxiety by scheduling worrying so that it is confined to a specific time each day. Setting aside your worries in this way means you don't get caught up in them and can get on with your day. You can then use your WorryTime to review the worries you've added and ditch the ones that no longer matter to you.

Available free on the [App Store](#) and [Google Play](#).

Chew on it for stress relief

A pack of chewing gum could be a valuable thing to keep at work. Chewing on gum may not only freshen your breath, it also seems to improve your mood and lower stress.

Researchers from England found that when agitated people chewed gum, they felt less anxious, more alert and experienced a more positive mood. The study authors believed that chewing increases blood flow to the brain, which helps maintain alertness and may also distract us from stressors. ✕

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News Bites



Healthy diet might outdo weight for longevity

When it comes to predicting health risk, is what you eat or what you weigh more important? According to a large new study from Sweden, published in *PLOS Medicine*, it's your food choices that are most significant to your long-term health

Researchers from Uppsala University, who followed 79,000 people over 20 years, found that people in the 'normal' weight category who didn't stick to the healthy Mediterranean diet had a higher risk of death than people in any weight category who did follow the diet. A Mediterranean-style diet was characterised in the study as one high in fruit, vegetables, legumes, nuts, wholegrains, fermented dairy products, fish and olive oil, and low in red meat and alcohol.

Of those who did follow the diet, even those in the 'obese' category did not have a significantly higher risk of death than those regarded as having a normal body mass index.

Professor Karl Michaelsson, who led the study, says it demonstrates that we focus too much on body size at the expense of what we put into our bodies.

"Our results indicate that a healthy diet is a good measure [of health risk], independent of your body stature." ✕

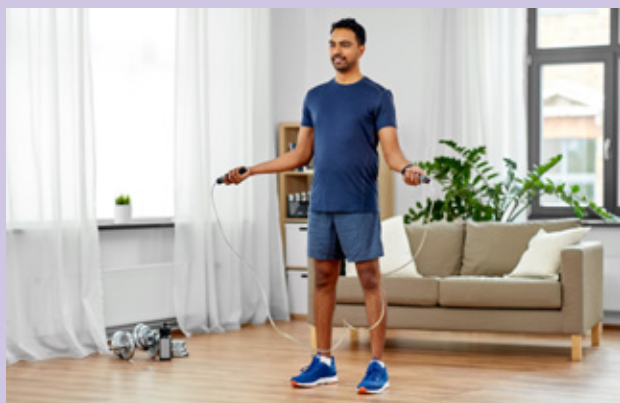
Remove this word and sound more confident

It frequently sneaks into emails, and often in general conversations too. It's the word 'just'. 'Just checking in' 'Just following up' 'Just wanted to see...' The problem is that the word 'just' diminishes the content the follows and softens what you want to achieve, writes Avery Blank in *Forbes* online. "When you say 'I'm just following up on my below email' you are downplaying the importance of your email and why you are reaching out," she says. This can make something that is important to you look unimportant and lessen your authority. Instead, drop the word 'just' and lead with 'I' – 'I'm following up on my below email.' ✕

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THING YOU CAN DO TODAY

Pick up a skipping rope



It's simple, cheap and effective. While we may dismiss it as belonging to the school playground, boxers have known about the training benefits of jumping rope for years. If you're looking for an easy way to boost your fitness, look no further than this simple piece of equipment.

You'll get a full body workout. Even in as little as 10 minutes a day, rope skipping will increase your cardiovascular fitness. A study published in *Research Quarterly For Exercise And Sport* found that skipping for 10 minutes a day delivered the same cardiovascular benefits over six weeks as jogging daily for 30 minutes.

As a bonus, you'll also use your abdominal muscles to stabilise your body, your legs for jumping, and your shoulders and arms for turning the rope.

You'll improve your coordination and motor skills. You have to think when you skip. You need to coordinate to time your jump with the rope, and research has shown that skipping improves coordination, balance and basic movement skills in children. In adults, this will reduce your chance of trips and falls.

You'll strengthen your bones. Skipping is a high impact exercise, which makes it a great choice to lower your risk of developing the brittle bone disease osteoporosis. As your body impacts the ground your bones become stronger, which increases bone density. ✕

EAT SMARTER

Pineapple

A favourite all year round, this spiky tropical fruit originally came from Brazil but is now grown more widely, in many warm climates. Despite being sweet, pineapple is not high in kilojoules, but is high in nutrients.

One cup (165g) provides you with over 100 per cent of your daily vitamin C needs. Vitamin C is essential for many body functions, including your immune system, formation of collagen, absorption of iron, wound healing, and the maintenance of cartilage, bones, and teeth. Your body can't store vitamin C so you have to have some every day.

Pineapple is also rich in the mineral manganese, with a serving providing nearly 80 per cent of your daily needs. Manganese is important for a healthy metabolism and has antioxidant properties.

Pineapples are also loaded with other antioxidants called flavonoids and phenolic compounds, which may reduce your risk of chronic disease including cancer, diabetes and heart disease.

No more tough steak

If you love summer barbecues, pineapples are your friend. They are the only fruit to contain bromelain, an enzyme that can break down proteins and tenderise meat and poultry. (Kiwi and papaya contain similar enzymes). Use the fresh (not pasteurised) juice or finely chopped fresh fruit in a marinade, but don't marinate for too long as the meat will become grainy.

Incidentally, bromelain is the reason why eating pineapple can leave your tongue feeling irritated, but the good news is your tongue soon regenerates the damaged cells.

Looking for creative pineapple recipes?

Visit australianpineapples.com.au/recipes. ✕



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