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HEALTH & SAFETY
NEWSLETTER

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JULY 2021

Do sugar and carbs **cause diabetes?**

Diabetes is considered the fastest growing chronic condition in the world, with someone diagnosed every five minutes. Can we prevent it by cutting out sugar and carbohydrates?

The logic seems simple enough. Because diabetes is a disease of high blood glucose levels, and because carbohydrates are converted to glucose in the body, many people think eating sugar and other carbohydrates can cause diabetes.

But there's a problem with focusing on one particular nutrient like this.

Plant foods are carbohydrate foods, explains Dr David Katz, founding director of Yale University's Yale-Griffin Prevention Research Centre, and co-author of *How to Eat*.

"But carbohydrates come to us not only in the form of plants in nature, but in many forms made in factories. They can be anything from lentils to lollipops, pinto beans to jelly beans," he says. "Some carbs are the stuff of life; some are the stuff of disease."

Carbohydrates become a problem when they are highly refined. A product like white flour, for instance, has had all the good stuff stripped out of it, leaving you with a flour that's low in fibre and nutrients. In your body it acts much more like refined sugar than a wholegrain, which means it's rapidly digested and quickly raises your blood sugar.

How wholegrains are different

A grain with its fibre intact acts very differently. When you eat wholegrain bread or rolled oats, the fibre slows down digestion, preventing the dangerous insulin and glucose spikes we see after eating refined carbs.

"Large-scale studies consistently find a relation between routine wholegrain consumption and lower risk of all chronic disease and cardiovascular disease... and

improved glycemic control (the fluctuations in blood sugar levels)," explains Dr Katz.

Fibre is the reason we shouldn't worry about the sugar in fruit but should be far more concerned about the amount of refined sugar we consume, particularly when we drink it. Studies have found that people who regularly drink sugar-sweetened drinks (whether that's soft drinks, sports drink or cordial) have a roughly 25 per cent greater risk of developing type 2 diabetes.

A diabetes diagnosis is serious. Reduce your risk by choosing healthy foods, watching your weight and exercising regularly.

Assess your risk of developing type 2 diabetes using the Diabetes Australia risk calculator at diabetesaustralia.com.au/risk-calculator ✕



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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.

How pain is connected to your brain

Pain isn't just a signal of damage to your body. Pain is your brain's perception of how much danger you're in, and chronic pain in particular is far more complex than we once believed. The latest pain science shows us that the more we understand about pain, the less we will hurt.

"Pain is real no matter what's causing it."

Professor Lorimer Moseley

Have you ever been in pain? Unless you're one of the few people in the world with a congenital insensitivity to pain, you'll answer yes. Pain is your body's way of telling you to be careful. Put your hand on something hot and pain protects you by signalling you to quickly pull your hand away before it's damaged.

Not all pain is the same

Twisting your ankle, injuring your back, or burning yourself are examples of acute pain, an alarm system that tells you to stop doing things that cause harm to your body. Acute pain normally fades as the injury or damage heals and lasts from a few moments to days or weeks.

Persistent or chronic pain is different. It's pain that's been present for more than three months, such as chronic back pain. At least one in ten people live with chronic or persistent pain, and it comes at a great cost, financially and personally. Pain can stop you doing the things you love, which can feel extremely isolating. Being in constant pain can lead to anxiety, depression, loneliness, relationship problems, and withdrawal from social situations.

Does pain always indicate damage?

For a long time we've understood that pain is a signal of harm to our bodies. So, if we

are in persistent pain, we believe we must have serious tissue damage. It turns out pain is far more complex than this.

Pain scientists now know that pain – both acute and persistent – is 100 per cent produced by the brain and is more a warning of danger rather than damage. This doesn't mean you don't have any tissue damage, or that the pain isn't real. But it does mean that the treatments for long-term pain shouldn't focus solely on repairing damage to your body. It also means that understanding how pain works is key to finding relief.

Lorimer Moseley is Professor of Clinical Neurosciences at the University of South Australia and is an expert in the treatment of persistent pain.

"Contemporary pain science has revolutionised how we understand pain and persisting pain in particular," he says. "Our data clearly show that when people actually do learn a contemporary understanding of pain, they tend to have better outcomes."

If you drop a book on your foot your brain weighs up whether to send pain signals from the cues it receives and the context you are in – your environment, memories, thoughts, feelings and beliefs all influence how much pain you will feel. You will tend to feel more pain at times of fear, stress or anxiety, for instance.

"Pain is real no matter what's causing it," says Professor Moseley. To illustrate just how powerful our brains can be, he tells the story of a builder who stepped on a nail that went straight into his boot. He was in so much pain he was sedated with powerful pain killers. Eventually the builder's boot was removed to reveal that the nail had gone between his toes and hadn't damaged his body at all. He had no injury but was in agony because of the danger messages sent by his brain.

Pain is your nervous system in overdrive

When you have persistent pain, your brain keeps producing pain even after your body tissues have healed and are out of danger. Persistent pain is generally caused by an overprotective pain system, with your body doing too good a job of protecting itself – a little like a burglar alarm that keeps going off even though there's no intruder.

As pain persists, your brain starts to 'learn' the pain and it often gets stronger, is triggered more easily and lasts longer. This is called pain sensitisation. Things like stress, anxiety, fear of injury, poor sleep, and worry about returning to work can often make the pain feel even worse.

But wait, you might say. I have had X-rays and MRIs that show damage to my back. Don't these explain my pain?



Where to learn more

Decreasing pain begins with understanding pain. These resources are a good place to start.

- Pain Revolution – painrevolution.org
- Tame the Beast – tamethebeast.org (an animation narrated by Professor Lorimer Moseley)
- Hunter Integrated Pain Service – hnehealth.nsw.gov.au/Pain/Pages/Understanding-Pain.aspx
- Brainman videos – www.hnehealth.nsw.gov.au/Pain/Pages/Brainman-Videos.aspx
- Pain Management Network – aci.health.nsw.gov.au/chronic-pain
- Retrain Pain Foundation – retrainpain.org
- Curable Health – curablehealth.com. Curable is an App that explores the science behind pain and offers education, meditation and brain training exercises.

What's interesting about this, says Professor Moseley, is that degenerative changes to the spine are inevitable as we age. In fact, 90 per cent of people without back pain have degeneration of the spine. These problems may play a much smaller role in your pain than you realise.

What does this mean for pain treatment?

Recovery or reduction of pain is possible, but it takes time as it involves retraining your pain system to be less vigilant. New pain treatments aim to help you not only reduce your pain, but also lessen the impact of pain on your life.

Dr Chris Hayes is the Director of Hunter Integrated Pain Service at the John Hunter Hospital in Newcastle. He says that rather than focusing solely on medical treatments such as strong pain killers, the focus now is on the whole person – the biopsychosocial approach.

This includes:

- **Medical treatment.** Depending on your situation, medication and surgery can be

useful, but these are no longer the main focus, says Dr Hayes.

- **The mind body connection.** Strong emotions such as sadness, depression, anger and frustration can amplify your pain. A mental health practitioner can help you manage these, as well as recommend other strategies to manage your pain.

- **Movement.** People in pain often fear that becoming more active will worsen their pain. In fact, the opposite is true. Exercise is hypoalgesic, which means it makes the pain go down. Any form of movement will also boost your mood. Even when movement is extremely painful, just imagining it is helpful, says Professor Moseley.

Getting the help you need

See your doctor if you want to explore new treatments for your pain. They can refer you to a multidisciplinary pain clinic if one is nearby, or to clinicians that specialise in pain management. ✕

Dreams and your wellbeing: what does it mean?

Dreaming about honey means you're about to be more productive or prosperous. If you dream about your teeth falling out it means you're worried about money. But does it? Really?

35 billion dreams

On average, we each have five dream episodes each night (or, for shift workers, each time we sleep deeply).

Each episode generally goes for 15 to 40 minutes, which means we each dream for around two hours each night.

With a global population of seven billion, that means we, as humankind, are producing 35 billion dreams every 24 hours.

Interestingly, many of these dreams share common characteristics.

These are the 10 most common dreams. How many have you had?

1. Being chased
2. Exams, tests or auditions (including not being ready, not being able to get there)
3. Flying
4. Driving (including going too fast or out of control)
5. Teeth falling out
6. Can't find the toilet
7. Being naked in public (particularly at school or work)
8. Falling
9. Seeing someone famous
10. Death.

And if not, do our dreams have any meaning? Or are they just a random firing of neurons? And most of all, what do our dreams mean for our mental wellbeing?

Here's what we know:

1. You won't have decent dreams unless you get enough sleep. We dream during the "rapid eye movement" or REM stage in sleep, which is the last stage of the sleep cycle. On a typical night, most of us go through four to six cycles of each of these stages of sleep. It usually takes around 90 minutes of sleep before we reach REM sleep and start dreaming.

2. Research shows that dreams are good for our mental health. REM sleep helps with emotional regulation and helps us process our experiences. Studies have found that people whose REM sleep was disturbed had more problems dealing with emotional distress.

REM sleep is essential for our mental function, especially for memory, learning, and creativity. During REM sleep, our neurotransmitters are replenished and our brains are almost as active as when we're awake.

3. Your dreams can be a useful problem-solving tool. Dr Deirdre Barrett,

a psychologist and dream scholar at Harvard Medical School, says dreaming is "our brain thinking in a different biochemical state."

Dr Barrett says our dreams can indicate our emotional state. Many of us have had a dream about finding ourselves naked or underdressed in a public situation, which can indicate we're feeling a sense of shame or social disapproval. Or then there's that "test" dream, where we dream of a big upcoming exam or audition, but something is stopping us from getting there or doing it well. According to Dr Barrett, this indicates we're worried about measuring up in some way.

4. Dreaming about scary stuff can be a good thing. A 2019 study found that fear-ridden dreams helped us deal with fear in real life. Participants wrote down their feelings when they woke up, including whether they were afraid. They were then shown emotionally-jarring images. Those who had scary dreams were more likely to respond to emotional stress in a healthier way.

However, if you're having ongoing nightmares about something that really happened to you, this could be a sign of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and you should talk to your GP or seek support. ✕

Do you see **exercise** as **punishment** for **enjoying life**?

Your roadmap to becoming more active

1. Look for ways to allow physical activity to play a bigger role in your life.

Don't think about durations or intensities. Instead, find an activity that suits you by thinking about what you already love. If you enjoy spending time with friends or family, go to gym class together or arrange a weekly walk. If you love dancing, go to a dance-based class or try out ballroom dancing.

2. Make your first goal achievable.

If you're new to exercise, start small – even 10 minutes of exercise is beneficial, but the more you do, the greater the physical and mental benefits.

3. Move outdoors. Many people report an immediate boost from exercising outdoors. Any green space will do, it doesn't have to be a long bushwalk.



"Every decade, adults lose up to 13 per cent of the dopamine receptors in the reward system. This leads to less enjoyment of everyday pleasures, but physical activity can prevent the decline."

Kelly McGonigal

What makes you put on your running shoes or active wear? Is it wanting to stay healthy? The satisfaction of seeing your step count increase? A desire to drop some kilos or build more muscle?

Perhaps for you exercise is more of an obligation, something you know you should do but don't particularly love. As Kelly McGonigal, research psychologist and author of *The Joy of Movement* puts it, you see exercise as "punishment for enjoying life."

Mindset reset

McGonigal believes many of us have developed the wrong attitude to exercise and movement. "Movement is a fundamental part of being human," she says, so "don't exercise from a place of shame or fear."

She argues that rather than a chore, exercise is integral to enjoying your life. People who are physically active report

being more satisfied with their lives and experience more gratitude, love and hope and less loneliness and depression.

The powerful effect of exercise on the brain leads to a wide range of psychological benefits. Here are three of them:

• You connect more to others.

Exercising with others is one way to increase a feeling of connection – and not only because you are spending time with each other.

It's all down to brain chemistry. Research shows that the 'exercise high' is linked to a class of brain chemicals called endocannabinoids (the chemicals mimicked by cannabis), which can reduce anxiety and increase feelings of optimism. They also increase the pleasure we get from being around other people, helping to strengthen relationships.

• You become more sensitive to joy.

"When you exercise, you provide a low-dose jolt to the brain's reward centres – the system of the brain that helps you anticipate pleasure, feel motivated, and maintain hope," says McGonigal. Over time, regular exercise leads to higher circulating levels of the brain chemical dopamine, which relieves depression, helps you become more resilient to stress and expands your capacity for joy.

• You can transform your self-image.

If you have a voice in your head telling you that you're too old, too unfit, or too weak to exercise, the sensations you feel when you move can provide a powerful counterargument. Moving with power, grace or strength can change how you feel about yourself and what you are capable of, a feeling that can transfer to your daily life. ✕

Is your First Aid up to date?

If you have a First Aid certificate, or are thinking of getting one, you need to commit to doing a regular refresher. Here's why:

1. Guidelines and procedures can change

A significant example is the change to CPR protocols. Many of us were taught to do 15 compressions and then two breaths. The new rule is to do 30 compressions followed by two breaths.

The difference could be the difference between life and death.

2. It's easy to forget details

If you're not using your first aid skills regularly (especially if your workplace has a good safety record), you're likely to forget some parts. Research shows that healthcare providers' skill retention declines as soon as three months after training.

It's vital that your knowledge and skills are front of mind in an emergency, so you don't need to doubt – or Google – anything.

Regular refreshers help you remember the important details and keep your skills sharp.

3. It boosts your confidence

Your confidence in first aid matters almost as much as the information. When you know your skills are fresh and up to date, you'll have more confidence in making quick decisions. Your confidence will be felt by any bystanders or colleagues who need to follow your instructions – and of course, by your patient.

What are the regulations for renewal?

Workplace first aid is covered by government regulations.

Although your First Aid Certificate doesn't expire as such, your workplace needs to follow the regulations.

For example, in Australia and many other countries, the recommendation is that:

- CPR training should be refreshed every year.
- First Aid Qualifications should be renewed every three years.

What are the overall regulations for first aid in the workplace?

SafeWork Australia states that: "All workplaces must provide first aid equipment, facilities and in some circumstances, trained first aiders."

Further, a workplace must ensure:

- first aid equipment is provided for the workplace
- each worker at the workplace has access to the first aid equipment
- access to facilities for the administration of first aid are provided
- an adequate number of workers are trained to provide first aid at the workplace, or
- workers have access to other persons who have been trained to provide first aid treatment.

If you are unsure where to find first aid equipment, or how to contact a trained First Aider at work, talk to your manager. ✕



Ask an expert about ...

Q When should you see a GP about the flu?

The flu might make you feel awful, but there's usually little your doctor can do.

The flu, like a cold, is a virus and doesn't respond to antibiotics. And like a cold, while you are more likely to catch it in winter, you can catch the flu at any time of the year.

Dr Paul Kivela, MD, MBA, FACEP, president of the American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP) says most people with the flu will recover on their own without medical care.

However, there are some instances where you should see your doctor.

In fact, there are certain symptoms which indicate you should go straight to the

emergency department. The flu can be fatal, and can also lead to major complications.

Dr Kivela says signs that the flu requires emergency care for adults include:

- difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- chest pain or abdominal pain
- sudden dizziness
- confusion
- severe or persistent vomiting
- flu-like symptoms that appear to get better, but then return with a fever and worse cough
- swelling in the mouth or throat.

Dr Kivela warns that if you do not have these emergency symptoms, you should not go to

hospital, as you're at more risk of catching the flu in the waiting room in the hospital.

However, it's a good idea to see your doctor about your flu if:

- your fever is high and doesn't come down with paracetamol or ibuprofen
- your fever gets better then suddenly worsens
- your pain is concentrated in a single area, such as your ear or sinuses
- your symptoms don't improve within two weeks.

Note: COVID-19 and the flu share similar symptoms, so make sure you get a COVID-19 test, and let your doctor know beforehand about your symptoms. ✕

News Bites

App
of the
month

Medito

Medito is a free meditation app for anyone who wants to learn to meditate or to continue their meditation practice. Meditation and mindfulness can greatly improve mental wellbeing and can

have a transformative effect on all of us as individuals and on society as a whole. Medito's aim is to ensure that mindfulness and meditation resources are available to everyone, for free.

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



Hearing loss linked to dementia

Untreated hearing loss is responsible for more dementia among older adults than other risk factors, including alcohol overconsumption, traumatic brain injury, obesity and hypertension combined. This is according to a new white paper commissioned by the Hearing Care Industry Association.

Based on 90 publications, the white paper reveals how addressing hearing loss early can have a positive impact on the prevention of dementia.

The white paper says that deferring hearing care treatment until well into old age is often too late, and the benefit of reducing the symptoms of dementia is thirty times greater than the total cost of hearing aids.

It's another reason not to postpone hearing checks if you, a friend, or a family member think your hearing is declining.

Visit Hearing Australia at hearing.com.au for more information on hearing checks, including an online hearing assessment.

You can also see your doctor for information on how to get a hearing test in your area.

More protein may not mean more strength

Want to build muscle to reverse the decline in muscle mass as you age? The common wisdom is that you need to combine resistance training with lots of protein. Not according to a recent study from the University of Illinois.

Published in the *American Journal of Physiology: Endocrinology and Metabolism*, the study investigated the health effects of diet and resistance training in 50 middle-aged adults (aged 40 to 64). The group received either a moderate-protein (1.2g protein per kg body weight) or high-protein diet (1.6g protein per kg body weight).

After 10 weeks of a standard strength-training program, with sessions three times per week, the study team were surprised to find no significant difference in muscle growth or strength between the groups. Their gains in strength, their body fat, lean body mass, glucose tolerance and other biomarkers of health were roughly the same.

The best way to get your protein is to eat small amounts throughout the day from lean meat, poultry, fish, eggs, tofu, nuts and seeds, legumes/beans and milk, yoghurt and cheese (or their non-dairy alternatives). ✕

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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

Deputy Editor: Kylie Singh

Subscriptions: Janelle Gibb

Email: well@healthworks.com.au

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What stress does to your teeth

Dentists everywhere have seen an increase in patients with broken fillings and cracked teeth during the pandemic, reports smh.com.au. Much of the damage was a result of tooth grinding (bruxism).

"Everybody grinds their teeth a little bit at night, it's normal and we do it subconsciously," says Dr Tami Yap, a lecturer in oral medicine at Melbourne University. Fragmented sleep or an extended period of stress can lead to further grinding.

This becomes a problem if your teeth become worn down or broken, or if it causes sore facial muscles.

Think you may be grinding your teeth? Indications include temperature sensitivity, a sore jaw, tension headaches and broken teeth.

See your dentist for treatment. This may involve jaw exercises, relaxation techniques, or a custom-made dental appliance to decrease pressure on teeth.

1

THING YOU CAN DO TODAY



Declutter one area of your home

When you're feeling overwhelmed, annoyed or simply stuck, decluttering can be a super simple yet super effective way to shift your energy.

Decluttering is not a fix-all, and despite what those Instagram stories will try to tell you, it won't change your life. But it really can help your mental health.

Decluttering simply means sorting through your stuff, and getting rid of things that are no longer useful. Or, as the queen of decluttering, Marie Kondo says, things that no longer "spark joy".

Today, spend a few moments decluttering just one area of your home. In a small but meaningful way, it will help you:

- focus on what's important to you.

Choosing what to keep and what to remove is a powerful exercise in figuring out your values, your preferences and what you really need and want in your life.

- feel more organised

"A place for everything and everything in its place". Whether this was first said by Ben Franklin or Mary Poppins, they were both very wise. The act of decluttering often helps you streamline your morning and evening routines, with everything you need all lined up and within easy reach.

- clean faster

Less stuff means less stuff to tidy. With more space, and more organised spaces, you'll find it easier and quicker to do routine cleaning such as vacuuming and tidying up.

EAT SMARTER

Eat more sweet potato

They're not only a delicious comfort food that fills your body and your soul, but they're also good for you.

While most sweet potatoes are orange, you can find purple, yellow, white, pink, and red versions.

Sweet potatoes (which are not actually a potato), are a great source of fibre, vitamins, and minerals.

Fibre: 100g of sweet potato gives you around 3g of fibre, which makes it quite a high fibre food, with six times more fibre than pumpkin. This in turn makes it good for your gut health, as all that fibre feeds your gut bacteria.

Vitamins: Sweet potato is high in vitamin A, essential for eye health, immunity and reproduction. One cup of cooked sweet potato gives you 769% of the recommended daily amount of vitamin A.

The orange and purple types are particularly high in antioxidants that protect your body from free radicals, especially beta-carotene which converts to vitamin A in your body.

Sweet potatoes are also a great source of B vitamins and vitamin C.

Minerals: You can get good amount of potassium from sweet potato, which helps control your blood pressure, as well as manganese and magnesium.

A simple but utterly delicious recipe is to peel your sweet potatoes then chop them into 2cm pieces. Coat them in olive oil and season with salt and pepper. In a 220°C oven, bake for around 40 minutes. ✕



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