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**HEALTH & SAFETY  
NEWSLETTER**

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**January 2022**

## Ready for the new you?

**Avoid these two common mistakes when trying to change your habits.**

Are you ready to break bad habits? Do you have big goals planned for 2022? Do you want to make big changes in your life?

You may think you will succeed in making changes to your habits and then find that you eventually lose interest and go back to your old ways. Why?

According to Dr BJ Fogg, Director of the Behaviour Design Lab at Stanford University and author of *Tiny Habits*, people make two mistakes when trying to change their habits:

### **1. They start too big and make it too hard.**

When a change is hard, even if you are motivated and even if you can see how it will benefit you, it's unlikely you'll stick to it when things get tough.

Dr Fogg advises us to think big, but start small. Make your new habit so easy you could do it on your hardest day.

"The easier a behaviour is to do, the more likely the behaviour will become a habit. This applies to habits we consider 'good' and 'bad'," says Dr Fogg.

Make a tiny change that fits with your current life, and celebrate every time you do it.

### **2. They use punishment instead of celebration to motivate themselves.**

"Write this phrase on a small piece of paper: I change best by feeling good, not by feeling bad."

Ever berated yourself for not sticking with a resolution? Or chastised yourself for not having

the will-power to make changes? That's where you're going wrong, says Dr Fogg.

Dr Fogg points out that people don't change through shame or manipulation. We are motivated to change when the new change makes us feel good – either inherently because it feels good while we're doing it, or because of an immediate reward.

"In order to design successful habits and change your behaviours, you should do three things. Stop judging yourself. Take your aspirations and break them down into tiny behaviours. Embrace mistakes as discoveries and use them to move forward." ✕



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"If January is the month of change, February is the month of lasting change. January is for dreamers... February is for doers."

- Marc Parent



# Eat like a Mediterranean

It can reduce your risk of heart disease, diabetes, cancer and dementia, add years to your life and doesn't increase your waistline. It's the Mediterranean diet and you can eat like a Greek no matter where you live.

The Mediterranean diet leaves other diets in the dust, coming in first in 2020 for the third year in a row in the *US News & World Report* annual rankings of best overall diet for health.

It isn't actually a diet plan, at least not like paleo, 5:2 or keto. It's a dietary pattern based on the traditional way of eating in countries bordering the Mediterranean, and its ability to reduce the risk of disease has been closely studied for over 60 years.

## How do I make the switch?

"There are probably about thirty different types of Mediterranean diets, aligned with the many countries that surround the Mediterranean Sea," says Dr Catherine Itsiopoulos, adjunct Professor of Nutrition and Dietetics at La Trobe and Murdoch Universities, and author of *The Mediterranean Diet* and *The Heart Health Guide*.

It doesn't matter what style of cuisine you prefer, you can make it more Mediterranean with the following tips from Dr Itsiopoulos:

- Use extra virgin olive oil as your main added fat
- Eat vegetables with every meal (especially green leafy veg)
- Include at least two legume meals (beans/lentils) per week

- Have at least two servings of fish or seafood per week
- Eat smaller portions of meat (beef, lamb, pork and chicken) and less often (1-2 servings per week)
- Eat fresh fruit every day, and dried fruit and nuts as snacks
- Eat yoghurt every day and cheese in moderation
- Include wholegrains with meals
- If you drink wine, limit it to one to two glasses a day, and always with meals.

What you don't eat matters as well. The traditional Mediterranean diet doesn't contain heavily processed food. Despite its name, the Mediterranean diet is no longer widely consumed across southern Europe, with studies showing many Italians and Greeks instead prefer more Western-style processed foods.

## What will it do for me?

Since the 1950s, studies of the Mediterranean diet have shown us the many ways it can improve our health.

One recent large review from Italy found evidence that this eating pattern reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease, coronary heart disease, diabetes and cancer, and increases life expectancy.

Cardiovascular disease ranks as the world's biggest killer, but Dr Itsiopoulos believes it's often overlooked because there are other health priorities more front and centre.

When it comes to your food choices, she says, the Mediterranean diet is particularly effective in reducing the risk of both primary heart disease and a secondary attack.

Your brain benefits too, with studies telling us that people following a Mediterranean diet have a reduced risk of Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, cognitive decline and depression.

When it comes to weight loss, the Mediterranean diet is a winner. Despite being relatively high in healthy fats, one review study found it was better for weight loss than a low-fat diet and is an especially good option for anyone at risk of heart disease.

## Why is it so effective?

- **Olive oil.** Olive oil has a key role in some of the major health benefits of the Mediterranean diet. High in monounsaturated fatty acids which help maintain HDL (good) cholesterol levels in your blood, olive oil is also rich in naturally occurring anti-inflammatory compounds, polyphenols and other antioxidants that lower the risk of disease. This is particularly true of extra virgin olive oil.





- **Other healthy fats.** Nuts, seeds, and seafood also contain healthy fats, particularly polyunsaturated fats like omega-3s which benefit your heart and brain.
- **Dietary fibre.** Eating wholegrains, fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts and seeds will mean you're never short of dietary fibre which is linked to lower rates of cardiovascular disease, diabetes and certain cancers. Fibre is also essential for keeping your gut microbiome happy, which studies show is linked to better mental and physical health.
- **Vitamins, minerals, antioxidants and polyphenols.** We're familiar with vitamins and minerals and their essential roles in the body. Potassium, magnesium and calcium for instance, can help lower your blood pressure. Other bioactive compounds in plants, including polyphenols such as flavonoids, and carotenoids like lycopene and beta-carotene, have antioxidant effects. This is one reason why the Mediterranean diet is so good for your heart and other chronic diseases, and can improve cognitive function. ✕

## Myth: You can't cook with extra virgin olive oil.

Have you heard that good extra virgin olive oil (EVOO) should only be used cold and never be used for cooking?

It turns out that we've been wrong about this all along. A recent Australian study confirms the findings of earlier research on different oils, concluding that EVOO is the safest and most stable oil to cook with.

But what about its smoke point? Doesn't this mean it isn't safe?

The smoke point is the temperature at which an oil produces a thin, continuous stream of bluish smoke, and was believed to be the best predictor of an oil's safety and suitability for cooking. EVOO has a lower smoke point than many other oils, and led to the belief it wasn't the best for cooking.

The study discovered that what's more important is how many harmful polar compounds the oil produces. Polar compounds are a by-product when oil is exposed to heat and they are considered damaging to your health.

Of all the oils tested, EVOO was the one that produced the lowest level of polar compounds while more refined oils produced more, even though they had higher smoke points.

The conclusion? Use EVOO for sautéing, pan frying, deep frying and oven baking, and not just for drizzling on your salad.



# Can negative emotions be helpful?

## What if tough emotions weren't something to be avoided, but were useful information?

Many of us were brought up to hide our negative feelings.

Sadness, anger, shame – we buried these feelings and hid them from everyone. We now know that's not healthy, but very few of us have learnt how to deal with negative emotions – let alone learn from them.

Mindfulness tells us to let these feelings pass by, without responding to them. "Let your thoughts pass like clouds in the sky," say many various meditations.

### But is that the best way?

Professor of Psychology and leader in positive psychology, Dr Todd Kashdan, says, "Two types of avoidance cause problems for people: avoiding pleasure and avoiding pain."

"...expressing frustration, or even too much sadness, is anathema to most folks. It's as if we expect ourselves to be computers, whose inner processes are largely hidden and divorced from what appears on the screen," he writes in his book, *The Upside of Your Dark Side*, co-authored with Robert Biswas-Diener.

"But it misses the point that emotional

expressions exist for a reason."

He goes on to say, "the cultural message that 'you should feel good and try not to feel bad' is among one of the most toxic processes known to psychology."

Dr Kashdan points out that whenever we try to conceal or ignore unwanted thoughts and feelings, they tend to get louder until we can no longer ignore them.

### So what should we do about negative feelings instead?

Listen to them, says Dr Kashdan. Use them to gather useful information, and then let them pass.

Importantly, remember you don't have to believe your thoughts, as they are not always useful or factual.

### Isn't that the same as ACT?

If you're thinking this sounds a lot like ACT, or Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, you're right. Dr Kashdan's work complements ACT, which is a popular form of mindfulness therapy that encourages us to accept and face any negative feelings – and then move on to focus on what's most important to us.

ACT can be particularly useful if you find you often get "stuck" in negative loops and feel you can't move forward. Find out more about ACT at [www.actmindfully.com.au](http://www.actmindfully.com.au) ✕

## Emotions are useful tools

Dr Kashdan says all his research over many years can be summarised in three key messages:

- First, **emotions are just tools.** Don't make emotions the goal. Research suggests if we take the goal of happiness out of the equation, ironically, that makes us happier in the journey of our lives.
- Second, **train yourself to be better able to clarify, describe and understand what you're feeling,** because that will help you better figure out what to do next.
- And the third message is: you need to **know what you value and what you want your life to look like.** If you're happy, then what? If you're able to get rid of your anxiety, what would you do with your life? If you're able to end self-doubt, what will you do next?





## “Shirking from home”

Let's get this out of the way first: is working from home productive?

Yes, say numerous studies.

For years, many executives fought against employees working from home because they didn't believe it was productive.

“Working from home is shirking from home,” they said.

But now, lockdowns have revealed hidden productivity gains from working from home.

Other experts agree. “On balance working from home can unlock significant gains in terms of flexibility and time for employees and could even increase the nation's productivity,” says the Productivity Commission of Australia.

Stanford University's Nicholas Bloom and team surveyed 22,500 Americans about working from home during COVID lockdowns.

Bloom found the majority of workers reported being more productive while working from home during the pandemic than they were on business premises before the pandemic. And that is despite many pressures and distractions including managing children full time while working full time.

# The hybrid workplace: how to make it work for you

**For years, the argument about working from home versus working onsite for office workers was quite polarised. People were adamantly for or against.**

It seems the COVID pandemic has decided for us: we'll go hybrid.

Hybrid work is a fluid mix of working remotely and working onsite. Fluid, because it depends on the company and industry, and also because it depends on employees' different preferences and changing needs.

## How to manage your wellbeing in a hybrid workplace

Leader of Microsoft 365 and Microsoft Teams, Jared Spataro, has outlined six “common sense principles” for his teams, to help them manage their wellbeing in a hybrid workplace:

### 1. Make OKRs your friend

By embracing a framework that ties together clear objectives and key results (OKRs), you're creating a personal framework that makes it clear which work is most important to yourself and others. You can then say ‘no’ more often.

### 2. Get comfortable with imperfection

“To be crystal clear,” says Spataro, “this is not about lowering the quality threshold for customers. It's about managing priorities, energy, and expectations for each step along the path toward an outcome.

“Ask yourself, ‘Does this need to be good, better, or best?’ And encourage your team to discuss it.”

### 3. Own your boundaries

Each of us needs to define our boundaries based on what we can and can't do.

In practice, this means deciding what time you start work, deciding what time you finish work, and sticking to those commitments while communicating them to your team, whether you're working remotely or in person.

### 4. Plan meetings with purpose

“Showing up to a meeting has become the signal of doing work. It's the 21st-century

version of punching the clock,” Spataro says.

First ask the most basic question: ‘Do you have to have this meeting? No, really, do you have to?’ If the answer is yes, determine whether the meeting is to disclose, discuss, or decide.

### 5. Follow the science

Spataro says, “Science tells us what the world's best athletes have known for years: Peak performance requires cycles of rest and recovery. More and longer hours don't equal higher impact. Create a culture where taking breaks is a mark of intelligence, not of laziness.”

### 6. Lead with empathy

If ever there were a time to give one another grace, it is now, says Spataro. Help ensure that the quietest voices are heard. Make space for fun. Make space for moments of sadness, and moments of joy. ✕

# When water is harmful

**Can you name the most common skin irritant? Your mind may go to chemicals like solvents, paint thinners and harsh detergents, but the answer, surprisingly, is water.**

You wouldn't think something as harmless or necessary as water could cause your skin to become red, dry, itchy, and cracked. But that's exactly what can happen when your work involves frequent hand washing or immersion in water.

If you perform 'wet work' you're most at risk of occupational contact dermatitis (OCD), says Australia's Skin Health Institute. OCD is inflammation of the skin caused by contact with external substances in the workplace. According to Safe Work Australia, it is one of the most commonly reported and underestimated occupational diseases.

As well as water, other occupational irritants include any strongly acidic or alkaline substances, oils, detergents, shampoos, cleaning agents, dust and fibreglass.

## Why is water damaging?

Wetting and drying your hands over and over disrupts the skin's key protective layer (the stratum corneum). Over time, this leads to dry skin, more disruption of the protective barrier, and inflammation.

Frequent contact with water explains in part why people in the healthcare industry are at greater risk of OCD, as well as hairdressers, hospitality workers, cleaners and mechanics. And with handwashing more frequent during the COVID-19 pandemic, more people may be affected.

Your work is considered 'wet work' if your hands are:

- in water for longer than two hours a shift
- handling wet things for more than two hours a shift
- in occlusive (moisture-proof) gloves for longer than two hours a shift, or
- washed more than 20 times a shift.

## How do you prevent occupational dermatitis?

**Gloves.** Gloves can protect your hands, but it's important to use the right ones for the job as otherwise they may provide inadequate protection or further irritate your skin.

**Moisturising creams.** These can help prevent dry skin and dermatitis. Water-based moisturisers may be a better choice, as oil-based ones can affect the protective properties of certain gloves.

**Hand sanitiser.** Alcohol-based hand rubs prevent hands being continually washed and dried and tend to be gentler on the skin, although they are not suitable if your hands are visibly dirty.

If you have any red, dry and itchy areas on your skin, seek help from your doctor or dermatologist.



## Ask an expert about ...

**Q** I often get a feeling of burning pain or discomfort in my chest after eating. What is this and should I be concerned?

### Healthdirect Australia replies:

What you describe sounds like heartburn, but if you experience chest pain and have any doubt about whether it is heartburn or a heart attack, you should call emergency services immediately and ask for an ambulance.

The burning pain and discomfort of heartburn are caused by stomach acid rising up into the oesophagus (the tube connecting your mouth to your stomach) where it can cause pain and irritation.

Normally, a ring of muscle at the lower end of the oesophagus relaxes to let food into your stomach, then tightens to prevent stomach acid escaping. However, if the muscle relaxes when it shouldn't or is weak, the stomach acid can rise up into the oesophagus.

Heartburn can also occur when the stomach is producing a lot of acid, such as when you are stressed.

Even though some people will get heartburn no matter what they eat, food is often the culprit, with common food

triggers including large or spicy meals, coffee and cola drinks, alcohol, chocolate and peppermints.

You are also more at risk if you're pregnant, overweight, take certain medications, or exercise too soon after eating.

Avoiding your trigger foods or taking over-the-counter medications can be effective. If the medications don't work or you rely on them too often, see your doctor. ✕

App  
of the  
month

## Fabulous.

It's the time of the year to set new goals and build new habits. Stop yours from falling by the wayside with Fabulous, an app that uses the science of habit to make goal setting a lot easier.

In just eight weeks Fabulous can help reset your habits by breaking them down into small, attainable steps, such as drinking water as soon as you wake up. Using Fabulous can help increase your energy levels, become more focused, lose weight and sleep better, and the daily reminders will help you retain your new habits.

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

## Move more to live longer, whether or not you lose weight

We associate being slim with being healthy and shedding kilos with living a longer life. But according to a new review of the relationship between fitness, weight, heart health and longevity, exercise beats weight loss for better health and a long lifespan.

The study, published in *iScience*, analysed the results of hundreds of previous studies of weight loss and exercise, and found that obese people typically lower their risks of heart disease and premature death far more by gaining fitness than by dropping weight or dieting.

"Compared head-to-head, the magnitude of benefit was far greater from improving fitness than from losing weight," said lead researcher Professor Glenn Gaesser.

The studies they cite show that sedentary, obese men and women who begin to exercise and improve their fitness can lower their risk of premature death by as much as 30 per cent, even if their weight does not budge. This improvement generally puts them at lower risk of early death than people who are considered to be of normal weight but out of shape, said Dr Gaesser.

## wellatwork™

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## Don't leave food scraps outdoors

When out on a hike or driving down a country road, we often don't think twice about tossing an apple core or orange peel into the bushes or the side of the road. After all, it's biodegradable and not like real littering is it?

Food scraps may break down in a compost bin or facility, but in the wild, items such as orange and banana peels can take up to two years to decompose, say environmentalists. In the meantime, animals can be attracted to them and wander to the side of the road, where they can be struck by cars.

Discarded fruit peels and cores are also not part of their native diet and can cause stomach problems in many animals.

Treat food scraps like any other type of litter and put them in the bin. ✕

## Should you save your drinks for the weekend?

Some of us choose to 'save' our alcohol for the weekend, avoiding drinking during the week. Is this better than drinking just a glass or two of wine each night?

Unfortunately not, Deakin University professor of Addiction Studies Peter Miller told [smh.com.au](http://smh.com.au). Both these scenarios carry risks, he says.

Drinking moderately every day means your body never gets a break from metabolising alcohol, which is a toxin. But drinking heavily for two or three days in a row or a single-day binge puts your body through more extreme stress.

Mathematical modelling shows that the risk of dying from an alcohol-related illness or injury is higher when drinking is concentrated to fewer days compared to being spread more evenly across the week, even if the total number of drinks consumed is the same.

That's why most alcohol guidelines, wherever you are, will recommend healthy adults drink no more than a certain number of drinks a week, and importantly, spread them out over the week.



# 1

## THING YOU CAN DO TODAY



### Learn a new craft

During last year's Tokyo Olympics, UK diver Tom Daley wowed the crowd not only with his incredible diving skills, but also with his knitting talent. The cameras caught him knitting by the pool, in the stands, even on the bus.

Like many people, he turned to learning a craft during the lockdown days of the pandemic. And like knitters before him, he found it incredibly soothing during anxious times.

It doesn't have to be knitting. Even though much of the scientific study around the benefits of craft has focused on knitting, there are positive links between engaging in any creative occupation and physical and mental wellbeing. Benefits include relaxation, stress relief, a sense of accomplishment, and improved memory and concentration.

Crafts such as woodwork, knitting, crochet, and ceramics focus on repetitive actions and a skill level that can always be improved upon. Doing a craft we enjoy allows us to enter a 'flow' state, described as a perfect immersive state of balance between skill and challenge.

Working on your craft can be solitary, but it can also allow you to be social. One survey found knitting in a group improved knitters' happiness, social contact and communication. Organisations like the Men's Shed movement offers men the opportunity to do collective woodworking, repair and other productive activities, with participants reporting reduced levels of depression.

Interested in trying a new craft? Upskill by searching for YouTube tutorials, or look for a local craft community on Facebook or at your local community college. ✂

## EAT SMARTER

### What the **freekeh**?

Tired of dishing up pasta and rice on rotation? Then grab yourself a bag of freekeh.

Freekeh (pronounced free-kah) is not a specific grain, but instead refers to the process of harvesting grains while still soft, young and green, then roasting and drying them. Most of the freekeh you'll find is made from young wheat. The grain is firm and slightly chewy with a flavour that's earthy, nutty and a little smoky.

Harvesting the grain when young gives it nutritional advantages over more mature wheat and other grains. Rich in vitamins and minerals like potassium, zinc and iron, freekeh is also:

- higher in protein and dietary fibre than brown rice or quinoa, and its protein quality is much higher than mature wheat
- lower in carbohydrate compared to other grains, while its low glycaemic index makes it a good choice for people with diabetes
- richer in lutein and zeaxanthin, compared to mature grains. These antioxidants are linked to the prevention of age-related macular degeneration.

You can buy freekeh either as a whole or cracked grain, and use it like you would use rice, bulgur wheat or quinoa. The cracked grain cooks up in about 20-25 minutes and makes a perfect addition to soups or stews.

In summer, use freekeh as the base of a delicious salad. Cook one cup of freekeh in boiling water, then mix with chickpeas, chopped spring onions, feta cheese, finely sliced celery, plenty of fresh mint and parsley and a lemony dressing.



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