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HEALTH & SAFETY
NEWSLETTER

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How to manage The Great Return to the office

Many of us may have mixed feelings about leaving behind the comfort of working from home. Yet there's much to gain from working together with our colleagues.

Early on in the pandemic, many of us were asked to work from home. It was a huge change, but it gradually became our new 'normal' and we began to appreciate the benefits of flexible working. Now workplaces are opening up again, and we're being asked to return to the office. Here's how to manage your mixed feelings.

Why we might resist going back to 'normal'.

- **You might feel anxious or uncertain about returning to the office.** Remind yourself this is understandable as it's another change in a time of great upheaval. Take some time to read your employer's return to work plan, particularly the physical distancing, cleaning and hygiene measures they have in place to minimise risk. This can help alleviate concerns about your physical safety. And look

after yourself physically and mentally. Switch off from work at the end of each day, sleep well, exercise, and take regular breaks at work.

- **You worry you'll miss the freedoms and work-life balance of remote working.**

Hybrid working may be a possibility in your workplace, which means you can still enjoy some of the flexibility you've enjoyed. Even if it isn't, you can still aim to keep new routines you've developed in place, such as engaging with a new hobby or a regular morning walk.

Think about the benefits of the physical workplace, such as:

- **Social connection.** For some people, working from home felt isolating and lonely without the daily informal chats with colleagues and the sense of community that

the workplace can bring. Younger and newer employees in particular have felt more cut off from their teams.

An Australian survey found three out of four Generation Z workers – those aged 18 to 26 – said they relied on the workplace for social connection. Being present together releases oxytocin, which is a feel-good chemical in our brains.

- **Professional development.** Being with colleagues in person gives you the ability to make connections, collaborate, network, and learn from others – all important for your career development. Technology has helped us connect, but we can't read nonverbal cues as well as we can in person, and we're often limited by delays and technical glitches. ✕



WHAT'S INSIDE

Is it safe to vape?	2
Yes, you can build muscle as you age	3
Worried about climate change?	4
Happy feet	6



4 February is World Cancer Day. 2022 is the first year of the 'Close the Care Gap' campaign and is about understanding and recognising the inequities in cancer care around the globe. For more information, and to learn how you can take action, visit www.worldcancerday.org



Is it safe to vape?

Some people consider it harmless fun, while others warn of its dangers. Is vaping set to take over from smoking, and if so, at what cost?

What is vaping?

Vaping is smoking electronic cigarettes, also called e-cigarettes or vapes. These are battery-operated devices that heat a liquid, called 'e-juice' or 'vape juice' into a vapour that users inhale. The liquid is a concoction of chemicals, including solvents and flavouring agents, with flavours such as blueberry, chocolate and bubble gum. Some vape juice also contains nicotine.

Who is vaping?

People wanting to stop smoking often turn to vaping in the hope it will help them quit. Others are attracted by the flavours and design of the products, particularly younger people (even though it's illegal to sell them to anyone under 18).

School principals in Australia report seeing children as young as Year 7 vaping, while it's described as an epidemic among teenagers by the US Food and Drug Administration. Flavoured, non-nicotine vapes are the most popular among teens, but they also use those containing nicotine and THC (the active ingredient in cannabis).

Is vaping harmful?

- **Addiction to nicotine.** Nicotine is highly addictive, whether it's in cigarettes or vapes. In Australia you can't legally access nicotine for use in e-cigarettes unless you have a doctor's prescription.

- **Lung damage.** Even without nicotine, there are risks. Research from the US has found the flavouring agents can become chemically unstable when heated, forming new chemicals that can irritate the airways, cause inflammation of the lung tissue and may have other toxic effects on the lung cells.

While all the chemicals used are considered safe for consumption in food, this doesn't mean they are safe for inhaling, according to Quit Victoria. There also isn't enough data to say what the long-term health effects of vaping are.

- **Pregnancy.** A 2017 study on animals from the University of Technology Sydney found vaping to be just as dangerous as smoking during pregnancy.
- **The 'gateway' effect.** There are concerns that vaping can lead to people smoking tobacco cigarettes, particularly if they get hooked on nicotine-containing vapes.

Can vaping help you quit?

The biggest argument made for vaping is that it's an effective way of quitting tobacco without all the health risks of tobacco smoking. So far the evidence is mixed, and there is disagreement among experts.

Some say that smokers risk becoming 'dual users' of both nicotine vapes and tobacco cigarettes, while others argue that nicotine e-cigarettes are more effective at

helping people quit than traditional nicotine replacement therapy. If you want to quit, it's best to consult your doctor. ✕

What's legal and what's not?

Depending on where you are, vaping itself may be illegal. If you vape, you should become familiar with your local laws on vaping.

- In Singapore it's illegal to possess, purchase and use vaporisers, which includes e-cigarettes.
- In Australia it's illegal to sell or buy nicotine for use in e-cigarettes unless you have a doctor's prescription.
- In the UK, vapers must be over 18 to legally purchase and use vaping products, including ones containing nicotine.
- In the United States, laws regarding the use and sales of e-cigarettes and vaping products vary from state to state, with some states banning all e-cigarette flavours except for tobacco flavour, and other banning all vaping products.
- In the UAE, it is illegal to vape in places where you can't smoke.

Yes, you CAN build muscle as you age.



When you're young you take muscle strength for granted. If you eat the right foods and do some exercise, your muscles respond by working well and staying strong.

Things change as we get older. From the age of 30, you can naturally lose up to five per cent of muscle mass per decade, a rate that increases after age 50. By the time you're 70, you may have lost up to half your muscle mass.

How important are your muscles? We like them to look toned and strong, but aesthetics aside, muscles are vital for movement, posture and breathing, as well as for metabolic functions such as regulating blood glucose levels.

Unless you take steps to slow down the loss of muscle, you risk developing the muscle wasting disease sarcopenia.

Sarcopenia is defined as a progressive loss of skeletal muscle mass associated with ageing. According to a 2017 report published in the *Journal of Diabetes & Metabolic Disorders*, sarcopenia is estimated to affect one in ten people aged over 60 worldwide.

Lose muscle mass and you lose strength and function too, says Professor Robin Daly, Chair in Exercise and Ageing within the Institute for Physical Activity and Nutrition at Deakin University, writing in *MJA InSight*.

"The alarming fact is many are unaware that they are experiencing sarcopenia and mistakenly dismiss symptoms as a normal part of ageing," he says.

"Because of this, they rarely discuss the difficulties they are having with mobility or other common activities of daily living, such as walking up a flight of stairs, getting out of a chair, or opening a jar, with their health care provider." ✕

What you can do

We are all getting older. Paying attention to exercise and diet now can make a big difference to your rate of muscle loss.

Resistance or strength training.

Your muscles can adapt and regenerate when you load them up, even if you already have sarcopenia. Studies have found that you can gain five to 10 per cent of muscle mass after 12 weeks of resistance training, no matter your age. Aim to work out with weights, or your own body weight, at least twice a week.

Enough protein. Along with resistance training, you'll also need to have sufficient protein in your diet. Most of us eat enough, says Marion Nestle, professor emeritus of nutrition, food studies and public health at New York University. "People are very concerned about protein, but it's a nonissue," she said. "It's in grains, it's in vegetables, it's everywhere. It will find you."

Make sure you eat some protein at every meal. Good sources include lean meat, legumes, eggs and Greek yoghurt.

Once we reach the age of 65, we need more protein than when we were younger, with some experts advising up to 1.3g per kilo of body weight per day.

Always check with your doctor before increasing your protein intake, particularly if you have kidney problems.

Worried about **climate change?**

Eco-anxiety: it's a real thing, and a normal and understandable stress response, but the problem mightn't be as bad as you think.



With all the doom and gloom in the media about the devastating effects of climate change, it's completely natural to feel worried.

In a way, it would be strange not to be concerned about the state of our planet and the future of humanity.

Climate change has been a major global issue for decades, but for many Aussies it was an abstract concept until the fires of 2019/2020. These catastrophic and seeming uncontrollable fires destroyed more than a billion animals and turned lives upside down.

Then we became distracted by COVID, but even while the pandemic raged, we saw news about climate change destruction around the world: floods, droughts, unusually severe storms.

As soon as the media on COVID calmed down, it was replaced by fear-inducing articles about climate change. The big COP26 Climate Change Conference in Glasgow in late 2021 also put climate change on the top of everyone's worry list. "This is our last chance to save the planet" was the main theme. "We must act now or everything will be destroyed."

Climate change makes many people more anxious than COVID does

Not surprisingly, this news has made many people extremely anxious.

A study undertaken in Australia during the initial COVID outbreak in 2020 found, "Even in the midst of the uncertainty of a public health pandemic, concern about climate change significantly exceeded COVID-19."

The study found that while those surveyed were concerned about COVID-19, they were almost three times more concerned about climate change. Study respondents said climate change was their most significant personal problem.

Australians are not alone in this fear. A 2021 study surveyed 10,000 young people aged 16-25 years across ten countries on their feelings about climate change. More than half said "humanity was doomed"; three-quarters said the future was frightening; 55 percent said they would have less opportunities than their parents; and 39 percent were hesitant to have children as a result.

The study authors said, "These attitudes were consistent across countries rich and poor, big and small: from the United States and the United Kingdom to Brazil, the Philippines, India, and Nigeria."

This fear has a name: eco-anxiety.

The American Psychological Association defines eco-anxiety as: "the chronic fear of environmental cataclysm that comes from observing the seemingly irrevocable impact of climate change and the associated concern for one's future and that of next generations".

But is it as bad as we fear?

Dr Hannah Ritchie, Senior Research Fellow at Oxford University, says no.

In her article, *Stop Telling Kids They Will Die From Climate Change*, Ritchie points out the gap between the data and the fear-mongering.

"Let's be clear: Climate change is one of the biggest problems we face," says Ritchie. "It comes with many risks—some certain, some uncertain—and we're not moving anywhere near fast enough to reduce emissions. But there seems to have been a breakdown in communication of what our future entails."

She says things aren't as bad as we think, and that the media messaging of certain death is making things worse. Too many people are claiming that humanity will be wiped out and annihilation is locked in, says Ritchie. "The worst thing about this



message is that, rather than inspiring action, it resigns us to the falsehood that we are already too late. There is now nothing we can do.”

Ritchie points out a few key truths:

- Although government action on climate change is moving slowly, at least it's moving, and “at an increasing pace.”
- “Politicians might be slow, but technological change is not.” Renewable energy such as solar and wind power is now cheaper than coal.

- Death rates from disasters have fallen significantly over the past century. We have better technology and higher resilience to natural disasters.

So what can we do about our own eco-anxiety?

Ecotherapist Phoenix Smith says the first step is to acknowledge your feelings of fear and despair. These are a normal response to this sense of crisis, and there's no point trying to inject optimism and brush aside your negative feelings.

These feelings may be complex and intense, but only by recognising them can you begin to address them.

Then, work on balancing your over-activated nervous system. Try deep breathing meditation or yoga, and if you can, getting out into nature.

See the box below for more strategies on dealing with eco-anxiety. ✕

Tips to manage your anxiety around climate change

In the booklet, *Coping with Climate Change Distress*, the Australian Psychological Society recommends a number of behavioural, emotional and mental strategies:

- Take action. Join a local action group, or write to your elected leader, or do what you can to reduce your own environmental footprint, for example using public transport.
- Take a break. Stop yourself doomscrolling the news or social media, and make sure you allow time to enjoy life's simple pleasures.
- Talk to others. Share your concerns with friends who understand, or find online groups of people who feel the same as you.
- Allow and recognise your feelings and treat yourself with compassion. Acknowledge how you feel by labelling the emotion (“I'm feeling shame, guilt, anger, hurt, pain, overwhelm, apathy...”). Putting feelings into words will activate the part of the brain that enables regulation.

Happy feet

Today's technology has drastically changed how much time we spend sitting at work, at home or while commuting each day. This change has been directly linked to an increase in certain health issues.

Research into office-based, call centre, and retail employee behaviours has revealed that more than two thirds of the working day is spent sitting. Sedentary workers also tended to spend their non-working days sitting as well, increasing the risk of health issues such as cardiovascular disease, obesity, and diabetes. Another study published in the *American Journal of Epidemiology* estimated that the average American spends 55 per cent of their waking time (7.7 hours per day) in sedentary behaviours such as sitting.

Physiologist and Professor Marc Hamilton says that the cure for too much sitting isn't exercising more, it's spending more time on your feet and out of your chair. Of course exercising is desirable, but the average person could not do enough to counteract the effect of hours of sitting.

It's also important not to confuse regular exercise with being active warns Doctor Peter Katzmarzyk from the Pennington Obesity Research Centre, US. You may go to the gym every day for an hour, but if you spend a good amount of time sitting each day, you are probably not leading an overall active lifestyle, and your excessive sitting could undo the benefits of your daily exercise.

On the other hand, spending too much time standing can also impact on your health.

One third of the working population spend their working days – up to 12 hours – on their feet, coming home with tired and aching feet, varicose veins, poor circulation and swelling in the legs, back pain, joint damage, and heart and circulatory issues. Thousands of work-related foot injuries are reported every year, with workers including teachers, nurses,

production line, construction, and bank workers, retail staff, florists, engineers, hairdressers, police officers, and flight attendants taking sick days because of leg or foot disorders. ✕

Foot Care Tips

If you have a sedentary job, follow these strategies to be more active:

- stand up while talking on the phone
- schedule mini breaks in your calendar every 20-30 minutes to stand up and stretch
- organise standing or walking meetings (even if you are working from home)
- walk to your colleagues' desk instead of calling or emailing them
- stand up while reading this article.

If you work on your feet all day, follow these tips to prevent leg and foot injuries:

- buy proper footwear that fits your feet, preferably with leather uppers, and allow your toes to have plenty of room to wiggle and move
- get off your feet as often as possible, and during your breaks elevate them if you can
- if possible, alternate shoes each day
- soak your tired feet in water to soothe them after a long day at work.



Ask an expert about ...

Q Is it true that there are no symptoms of ovarian cancer?

Ovarian cancer is the seventh most common cancer among women. It also has the worst prognosis and the highest mortality rate. Although ovarian cancer is less common than breast cancer, it is three times more lethal, and it is predicted that, by the year 2040, the mortality rate of this cancer will rise significantly.

Jean Hailes, the Australian digital gateway for women's health and wellbeing, says one of the problems is that ovarian cancer is difficult to detect in the early stages. There are often no symptoms until the cancer is quite advanced.

However, they say, if the cancer is diagnosed

early, while the cancer is localised (Stage 1), survival rate is over 90 percent.

"The symptoms of ovarian cancer are often vague and non-specific. Almost every woman will experience these symptoms at various times and in most cases the symptoms will not be caused by ovarian cancer."

That said, Jean Hailes advises you should visit your doctor if you notice:

- increased abdominal size or persistent abdominal bloating
- abdominal or pelvic (lower tummy) pain
- feeling full after eating a small amount
- needing to urinate often or urgently.

and these symptoms

- are a change from what is normal for you
- and persist for more than two weeks
- and there is no other explanation for you having these symptoms.

Although ovarian cancer is more common in older women over 65, it can occur at any age, even teenagers. There's no screening program for ovarian cancer, so visit your doctor if you have any concerns.

World Ovarian Cancer Day is May 8. Visit worldovariancancercoalition.org for more information. ✕

App of the month

White Noise

If you like a soothing continuous sound to send you to sleep or distract you from annoying noises, this free white

noise app offers 50+ sounds for you to choose from.

You can choose your frequency, timing and create your own mixes. There is also an alarm feature that can be set to wake you gradually.

Types of sounds include rain and water, fans, nature and transport. Other sounds available include crowded rooms, heartbeat and more.

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

Psychological treatment relieves chronic back pain

A new study from the University of Colorado Boulder, published in *JAMA Psychiatry*, provides hope for the one in ten people worldwide who live with chronic pain.

Two thirds of chronic back pain patients who underwent a four-week psychological treatment called Pain Reprocessing Therapy (PRT) were pain-free or nearly pain-free after treatment, with most maintaining relief for one year.

The findings provide some of the strongest evidence yet that a psychological treatment can provide potent and durable relief for chronic pain.

"For a long time we have thought that chronic pain is due primarily to problems in the body, and most treatments to date have targeted that," says lead author Yoni Ashar.

"This treatment is based on the premise that the brain can generate pain in the absence of injury or after an injury has healed, and that people can unlearn that pain. Our study shows it works."

Before and after treatment, participants also underwent functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) scans to measure how their brains reacted to a mild pain stimulus. These scans showed that post-treatment, when the people who had received PRT were exposed to pain, they showed much less activity in the brain regions associated with pain processing than the placebo group who hadn't received PRT. ✕

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News Bites



Swapping your salt may save your life

Sodium is the problematic half of sodium chloride, more familiar to us as salt. It's a problem because of its ability to raise blood pressure, a significant risk factor for heart disease, stroke, and chronic kidney disease.

It's estimated that 26 per cent of the world's population has high blood pressure, and in many countries, the amount of sodium in the typical diet is about double the daily recommended amount of five grams, or one teaspoon.

Even modestly reducing sodium in your diet can have a big impact on your risk of cardiovascular disease and death, found a recent large study.

Led by Professor Bruce Neal, Executive Director of Australia's George Institute for Global Health, the study found that substituting reduced-sodium salt for regular table salt significantly decreased the rate of cardiovascular events and associated deaths over a follow-up period of almost five years.

Protection occurred in households that used modified table salt, which had 30 per cent of its sodium chloride replaced with potassium chloride.

Professor Neal said that because salt substitutes are relatively cheap, they are likely to be very cost-effective.

"If salt was switched for salt substitutes worldwide, there would be several million premature deaths prevented every year," he said.

Reduced-sodium salt substitutes are available at major supermarkets, and George Institute researchers encourage everyone to cook, season and preserve foods with salt substitutes. ✕

Waiting for the kettle to boil?

Use the time to make a habit of doing squats, wall push-ups or calf raises. It's a great way to add some activity to your day and help prevent the negative health effects of too much uninterrupted sitting.

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THING YOU CAN DO TODAY



Clean your phone

The pandemic has brought hand hygiene to our attention like never before. Keeping your hands clean and off your face can protect you from all sorts of infections, including coronavirus, the flu and norovirus.

But clean hands can quickly become germy if you touch a dirty surface. Which brings us to mobile phones. How many times a day do you pick up your phone to check the time, send a message, keep up with the news, read a book, listen to podcasts, book a gym class, or order groceries?

Unless you keep your phone clean too, you risk contaminating your hands every time you want to check Instagram.

A 2017 study published in the journal *Germs* found that mobiles can carry a host of bacteria, viruses and pathogens, some of which can survive for days. Norovirus, for instance, which causes vomiting and diarrhoea, is a born survivor and can live on hard or soft surfaces for about two weeks.

Experts recommend washing your hands several times a day and cleaning your phone most days if you use it a lot. Here's how:

- Moisture can interfere with your phone's function, so avoid spray cleaners or heavy-duty products.
- Wash your hands before and after cleaning. Wipe gently with a product that has 70 per cent isopropyl alcohol or any product recommended by your phone's manufacturer.
- Don't forget the phone case. Remove it and wipe it down, in and out. Allow to dry before replacing your phone in it. ✕

EAT SMARTER

Figs

Fresh figs have a short season, so grab them while you can. This lusciously sweet fruit has a distinctive flavour and soft, chewy texture, and is packed with tiny edible seeds.

Are they good for you too?

1. Figs are one of the highest-fibre fruits you can eat. All those tiny seeds benefit your digestive health and feed your gut bacteria.
2. Ripe figs are particularly rich in polyphenols. These are protective plant compounds that act as antioxidants in your body and are also thought to reduce inflammation and promote the growth of friendly gut bacteria.
3. They benefit your bones. Figs contain more calcium than other fruits. Calcium is an essential bone-building mineral that may help prevent osteoporosis later in life.
4. They may help reduce blood pressure. Sodium can raise blood pressure, while the mineral potassium found in figs can help lower it.

Choose fresh figs carefully. Test them by picking one up to see if it has just a little 'give'. The colour of the skin doesn't indicate ripeness, as this can range from green through to purple or brown. Store in the fridge but bring to room temperature before eating. Slice and serve in a salad with blue cheese and rocket, or grill lightly and serve with Greek yoghurt and honey.

Once figs are out of season, you can buy dried ones to eat as a snack or add to baking or salads. They retain many of the nutritional benefits of the fresh fruit, but don't eat too many, as they are naturally high in sugar. ✕



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