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**HEALTH & SAFETY
NEWSLETTER**

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June 2022

How to **manage screen time** when your work is online

We all know too much screen time is bad for us, but what if your job requires long and intensive screen usage?

It's difficult, because most of us are aware of the health issues of too much screen time: the impact on our mental health, our physical health and of course our vision. It disrupts our sleep, our ability to concentrate and increases our risk of chronic disease due to lack of physical movement.

Yet often our work is online, our friends are online, and increasingly our leisure time is online. Even exercise is often through an online class.

It's become harder since the pandemic, when so many of us switched to working from home. Even with breaks, it's become easy and normal to be on screens for 12 or more hours a day. Studies show that on

average, use of digital devices increased by five hours a day for adults, an increase of 60-80 per cent.

So what can we do about it?

The answer is to develop healthy digital habits, says Doreen Dodgen-Magee, PsyD and author of *Devised!: Balancing Life and Technology in a Digital World*.

1. First, measure.

Dodgen-Magee recommends first documenting how you're spending your time. Apps are designed to be addictive, and it can be extremely difficult to pull yourself away from a device and extremely easy to scroll absent-mindedly.

Track every 15 minutes for a few days. Note down what you're doing and what device you're doing it on. It seems like a lot of work, but it will save you hours in the long run.

2. Do what you need to do and get out.

It's tempting to reward yourself for completing a task by allowing yet more screen time. Make sure the breaks you take and rewards you give yourself are off-screen.

3. Take breaks

A five-minute break every 25 minutes is a good guide, with at least two longer breaks every day. And as above, move away from that screen to take your break. Get up and move your body, even if it's just rolling your shoulders or walking around a bit.

4. Create screen free zones.

When working from home, Dodgen-Magee recommends having zones in your homes where tech isn't allowed. This could be the bedroom or the bathroom, for example, or the kitchen. You can then carry this through to after work hours, to give yourself time away from screens in the evening. ✕



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International Men's Health Week runs from 13 to 19 June. This is an opportunity to highlight the importance of men's health and to promote and support the health and wellbeing of men and boys. It is coordinated in Australia by Western Sydney University. For more information visit www.westernsydney.edu.au/mens-health-week



The big dry

You'd think your skin would lose less moisture in winter, compared to the heat of summer. But that's not the case. A combination of drier air and indoor heating can lead to skin that feels dry, tight and itchy.

Whether it's summer or winter though, dry skin is caused by a loss of water. For our skin to feel smooth and supple, the top layer needs to be at least 10 per cent water, a level that helps to repair and maintain the barrier function of the skin and keep it healthy.

As well as being uncomfortable and sore, overly dry skin can also be unsightly, developing small splits or cracks and appearing like the scales of a lizard. It can also lead to skin infections if there's a break in your skin from cracking, and make you more vulnerable to dermatitis.

Prevent and treat dry skin with the following tips:

1 Avoid very hot showers. As tempting as it is to thaw out under hot running water if you are feeling cold, the Australasian College of Dermatologists recommends that you reduce the frequency and length

of baths or showers and use lukewarm water. Overly hot water can strip away the protective surface oils that help your skin retain water.

2 Turn down the thermostat - or turn it off. If you have heating or air conditioning in your home, don't over-do it. Hot air tends to be drier than cooler air. However, air conditioners, cool or warm will dry the air out so try to limit your exposure.

3 Keep drinking water. Your body loses water through your skin all year, not just in the hot summer months. Replenish it through the day.

4 Use soap substitutes. Normal soap can irritate or damage your skin. Ask your pharmacist for advice on soap substitutes.

5 Quit. If you smoke, consider quitting. Smoking will dry out your skin and vaping is likely to have the same effect.

6 Wear gloves. Your hands are often the first place you notice dry skin. Put on gloves before you:

- perform tasks that require you to get your hands wet
- get chemicals, grease, and other substances on your hands
- go outside on a cold day. ❌

How to add moisture

Moisturisers work by providing a seal over your skin to keep water from escaping, and applying one regularly is an effective way of tackling dry skin.

Despite the hype around certain brands, you really can't go very wrong with any moisturiser you choose, so pick one that feels good on your skin. For extremely dry skin you may need a thicker moisturiser – ask your pharmacist for a recommendation.

The best time to apply moisturiser is after showering when your skin is still damp, says the Australasian College of Dermatologists. It also advises that lips and hands may need extra attention. You can apply lip balm multiple times throughout the day. If your hands are particularly dry, always apply hand cream after washing your hands.



Are supplements worth it?

The pandemic has put our health under the microscope like never before, with many of us reaching for dietary supplements in the hope of fending off the COVID-19 virus.

A recent survey in the US found nearly 30 per cent of Americans are now taking more supplements than they were before the pandemic, while in Australia market researchers report sales of vitamins and supplements have soared.

Are supplements perfectly safe or could we be risking our health further every time we pop a pill?

What are dietary supplements?

Natural health products such as vitamins, minerals, amino acids, enzymes and plant extracts all fall under the umbrella term of dietary supplements. They are also known as complementary medicines. Global supplement use is growing at a fast rate and expected to reach a value of almost US\$300 billion by 2027.

Many dietary supplements are beneficial if used safely, says Geraldine Moses, Adjunct Associate Professor of the School of Pharmacy at the University of Queensland. Women who are pregnant or planning to

be are prescribed folic acid and iodine, and deficiencies in certain minerals, such as iron, are corrected with supplements.

What's the evidence?

Some of us take a multivitamin as a kind of health insurance, in case our diet is lacking. Yet the highest-quality evidence, randomised controlled trials, has found no evidence that multivitamins improve your health.

"The trials that have been done of vitamins have not shown benefit in people who are not deficient. We're just seeing it time and time again," Professor Rachel Neale of the QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute, told smh.com.au.

One reason dietary supplements are so popular is the perception that they're harmless, says Professor Moses. But like any other drug, there are potential dangers from taking vitamins and minerals. Unlike other drugs, however, we rarely hear of their potential harms. ❌

What's the harm?

In an article for *Australian Prescriber*, Professor Moses identified some potential dangers of dietary supplements, particularly when you are self-medicating without the supervision of a health professional.

1. Side effects. These can occur from short- or long-term use and usually emerge from doses that are too high. They can also cause new disease or upset existing conditions.

The most commonly used vitamins and minerals that can cause side effects in high doses are vitamins A (retinol), B3 (niacin/nicotinic acid), B6 (pyridoxine), C (ascorbic acid), D (cholecalciferol), E (alpha tocopherol), and calcium, magnesium, zinc and selenium.

An Australian study, which spanned 2009 to 2020, found that liver injuries linked to herbal and dietary supplements were on the rise.

2. Drug interactions. Supplements can interact with other drugs or supplements, making them more toxic or less effective. If you take any medication, you should always tell your doctor or pharmacist if you take supplements too.

3. Cost. Supplements are not cheap, and the cost of them can affect people's finances and ability to afford other treatment or essential items.

4. Delay in getting more effective therapy. The time spent taking ineffective products can delay more effective interventions, allowing a disease to progress.

Are supplements worth your hard-earned dollars? For most of us, the answer is no, they offer little benefit. Experts believe you're much better off focusing on improving your diet by getting plenty of fruit, vegetables and wholegrains.



5 signs of anxiety you might have missed

Although it's a mental health issue, anxiety can often have surprising physical symptoms. These symptoms can appear even when you're not feeling overly anxious.

Anxiety changes the way you think, your hormones and your perceptions, says Micah Abraham, editor of Calm Clinic. It changes the neurochemicals in your brain that tell you how to think and act. It can both cause physical sensations and make you hyperaware of them, which can lead to a huge variety of symptoms.

When Calm Clinic asked its Facebook followers if they had any unusual anxiety symptoms, they received hundreds of responses, ranging from "forgetting how to swallow" to a "loud pop, like a firecracker, in their ear."

"An individual suffering from an anxiety disorder perceives a wide range of feelings and sensations, which are unique, complex, and often difficult to explain," says Abraham.

In fact, it's possible to experience anxiety only as physical symptoms – your mind may feel completely relaxed and clear.

Here are five common anxiety symptoms which you mightn't realise are anxiety:

1. Pain

A sudden pain in your hip. A stomach ache. Chest pain with accompanying sweating so

severe you think it must surely be a heart attack. Anxiety can create sensations of pain that have no physical cause.

Chest pain is one of the most common types of pain created by anxiety. Research in 2018 published in *BMC Medicine* found that Emergency Department providers believe approximately 30 per cent of patients seeking emergency care for chest pain are actually experiencing anxiety.

This kind of chest pain is caused by a stress response (see more information on this in the feature box on page 5). Your heart starts to beat faster to prepare for fight or flight, which causes rapid breathing. This can lead to hypoventilation, which can cause shortness of breath as well as a contraction of blood vessels, which may result in chest pain.

Other times, you might notice random pain anywhere in your body that can stay for weeks, and then disappear. Similarly, you might experience muscle aches, spasms and twitching.

These pains could be caused by rapid breathing, or by holding your muscles tensely

for long period of time, or by hypervigilance.

Abraham explains: "Someone without anxiety may have a knee pain so mild that they don't even notice it, but a person with anxiety feels that knee pain severely because their mind has been altered, making it hypersensitive to the way the body feels."

2. Numbness and tingling

You notice pins and needles in your feet or hands. You Google it, and become convinced you have a neurological disease. Or it's a sign of a heart attack. But could it be... anxiety?

Anxiety Centre says numbness and tingling are common signs of anxiety. It can also feel like part of your skin or body has lost all feeling, or you might even feel a crawly sensation. You might notice it in your arms, hands, fingers, toes, legs, feet, head, face, or it might shift around all over your body.

It can even strike when you're not noticing any other mental anxiety symptoms, for example when you're relaxing watching TV.

The numbness and tingling are caused by



your fight or flight response: your body moves blood away from your extremities such as hands, feet and skin, and redirects it to your heart and muscles.

3. Yawning

Frequent and excessive yawning doesn't necessarily mean you need more sleep. It could mean you're experiencing anxiety.

The need to yawn often – even in important meetings – can sometimes be accompanied by a feeling that you can't breathe deeply enough, or becoming very aware of your breathing.

It's caused by shortness of breath, which in turn is caused by a change in heart rate (see box).

4. Digestive issues

Indigestion, the need to burp all the time, or just a plain old stomach-ache are common physical symptoms of anxiety. In fact, around one third of anxious people experience anxiety-related diarrhea.

It's caused by the fight or flight response, which changes your hormones and digestive enzymes. It can be exacerbated by lack of sleep – another common anxiety symptom.

Plus, emerging research is revealing the powerful link between the brain and the gut, where gastrointestinal issues are triggered or exacerbated by anxiety and

stress, and on the flip side, your gut health can impact your mental health.

5. Hair loss

Your brush your hair and a lot comes out. Are you ageing rapidly, or could it be anxiety?

Hair loss is a common symptom of anxiety in both men and women.

You might notice it just in one part of your head, or all over.

Anxiety Centre says its due to a body-wide hormonal response. For example, stress activates neuroendocrine-immune circuits, which pause hair growth. ✕

What causes these physical symptoms?

According to the Anxiety Centre, these physical symptoms can be traced back to your body's stress response, otherwise called the fight or flight response.

Your body gets the message there is stress or danger, so it releases stress hormones into the bloodstream where they travel to targeted spots to bring about physiological, psychological, and emotional changes.

For example, your body moves blood away from your extremities such as hands, feet and skin, and redirects it to your heart and muscles. At the same time, it increases muscle tension and heightens your senses, all while increasing your heart rate and breathing.

This all serves a purpose, but it's a response that needs sufficient time to recover afterwards. When this doesn't happen, and when we are constantly in a stress state, we end up in a state of semi stress response readiness, often called "stress-response hyperstimulation", "hyperarousal" or "dysregulation."

Your body enters a state where your breathing, heart, and hormones are all disrupted, leading to a whole range of physical sensations.

If you want help dealing with anxiety, visit the Calm Clinic at calmclinic.com, Black Dog Institute at blackdoginstitute.org.au/ or Beyond Blue at beyondblue.org.au/ for more resources.

How to choose ergonomic aids

Back ache, neck ache and eyestrain are all signs of a poor ergonomic set-up at work. Reduce stress on your body by choosing the right ergonomic accessories.

A good chair and desk can go a long way to ensuring you maintain correct posture when you're working. But to get the optimum set-up you may need a few additional supports. Follow this quick accessory guide from Healthworks' *Your Body At Work* to find the best aids for you.

Q. Do you need to raise your monitor to have it at the correct height?

A. A monitor stand can easily fix this. If you use a laptop, a laptop stand can raise the height of the screen and allows you to use an external keyboard and mouse.

Q. Do your feet dangle above the floor, or are you more comfortable with them raised slightly?

A. Forget the awkward crossed legs position, it's time to invest in a footstool. This will allow your thighs to rest comfortably on the seat of the chair and your knees to be bent between 70 and 110 degrees.

Q. When typing, do you tense your wrist or forearms, or are your forearms unsupported?

A. A wrist support will fix this problem.

Q. Do you need to manoeuvre your chair to access items required for work?

A. A slide mat will ensure your chair moves easily across the floor.

Q. Do you rotate your neck to one side when reading documents, or push your keyboard away to fit documents immediately in front of you?

A. A document holder or reading/writing frame (which sits over your keyboard) will fix this.

Q. Do you use the phone frequently, cradle it in your neck, or hunch your shoulders while holding the phone?

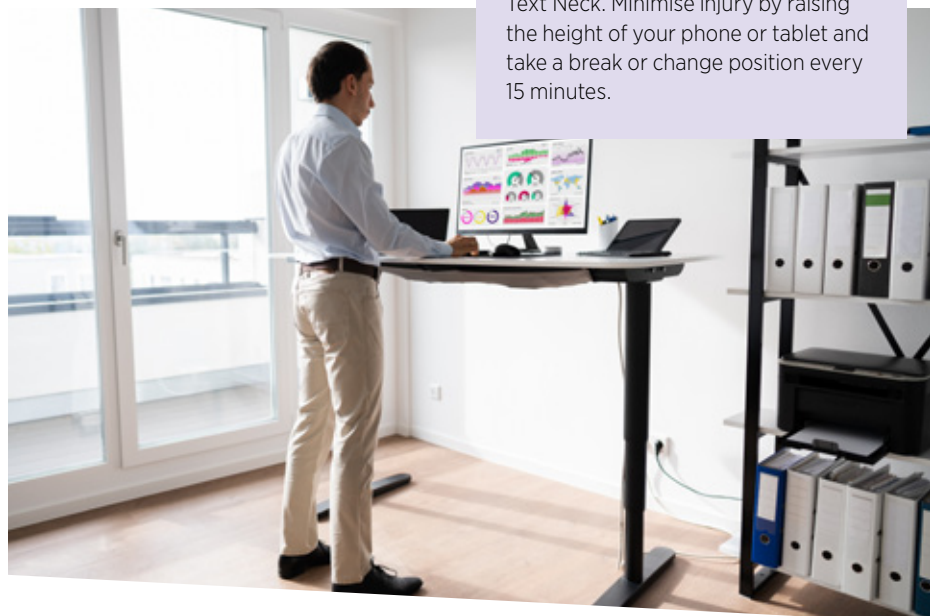
A. A phone headset, Bluetooth headset or speakerphone is essential.

Q. Is your back sore or uncomfortable?

A. Try a back support on your chair. There are a number of types available, depending on your area of discomfort.

Text Neck danger

Bending your neck forward and down for long periods looking at your mobile phone is causing a wave of neck, shoulder and back problems known as Text Neck. Minimise injury by raising the height of your phone or tablet and take a break or change position every 15 minutes.



Ask an expert about ...

Exercise & Sports Science Australia replies:

It's easy to assume that if your job is physically active, you don't require any further exercise during the day. This misconception is believed by many, and it's important to explain that different exercises produce different results within the body.

Being active at work is important and beneficial, but planned moderate/high intensity exercises are fundamental in order to:

Q My job is physically active. Does that mean I don't need to worry too much about exercising?

- Reduce stress levels;
- Keep muscles and joints healthy;
- Manage your cardiovascular risk factors.

If you have a physically demanding job, it's worth doing exercises focusing on muscle strengthening. Resistance training (weights) will improve your muscle and bone strength, reducing your risk of sustaining musculoskeletal injury at work.

If your job is more sedentary, focusing more on your cardiovascular exercises (such as walking, running, riding a bike, rowing etc) is more important. However, a mix of

cardiovascular exercises and resistance training is the ideal recipe for optimum injury prevention amongst white collar workers.

To get the most benefit from exercise, it's important to tailor the exercises to the duties you perform in the workplace. For example:

- If you do physical work using primarily your upper body (lifting, carrying, using power tools etc) consider exercises aimed at upper body strengthening
- If you're an office worker who is sitting for most of your day, exercises aimed at your core and legs will be more beneficial. ✕

App of the month

Map My Walk by Under Armour

A comprehensive free app for tracking your fitness walking. The app offers maps of the area you're walking, elapsed time, distance, pace, speed, elevation and calories burned, as well as audio feedback as your walk. You can break down your performance with easy-to-read graphs and charts, save your routes to use again, or select routes other MapMyWalk users have done in your area.

Available free on the [App Store](#) and [Google Play](#), with premium membership options.

News Bites



Another reason to increase your fibre

We're often told to eat more fibre to help our digestive system, lower cholesterol and maintain a healthy weight. Now there's evidence that fibre is also important for a sharper brain.

A study published in the journal *Nutritional Neuroscience* has found a high-fibre diet is associated with a reduced risk of developing dementia. In a study of over 3500 Japanese adults followed for up to two decades, those who consumed more fibre, particularly soluble fibre (found in foods such as oats and legumes), were less likely to go on to develop dementia.

The researchers believe that soluble fibre is so beneficial because it's the preferred food for our gut bacteria. A healthy mix of gut bacteria can reduce inflammation in the brain, which plays a role in the onset of dementia. It's also possible, say the researchers, that dietary fibre may reduce other dementia risk factors such as body weight, blood pressure and glucose levels. ✕

The costs of weight loss

Weight loss is big business worldwide, with a projected value of almost US\$300 billion by 2027. It seems like lots of us are interested in weight loss. Whether you're tempted by cutting carbs or following a keto plan, a study from the University of South Australia shows that the cost of your diet can vary by up to AUD\$300 a week.

The researchers calculated the costs of popular diets, comparing them to the recommendations within the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating (AGHE) and the Mediterranean Diet.

They found that the most cost-effective diet was based on the AGHE and adapted for weight loss by calorie restriction. It includes a range of affordable staple items such as bread, pasta and legumes, as well as lower amounts of animal products.

The most expensive diet plans were those that restricted multiple food groups and included premium products such as organic produce, protein supplements, low-carb replacements and high protein bread.

The researchers found that weekly costs of seven different meal plans varied between AUD\$345 and AUD\$625, substantially higher than what the average Australian spends on groceries.

"Understanding the costs behind the range of diets on offer is important, as the financial feasibility of sticking to these programs may be questionable for certain people," said lead researcher Associate Professor Karen Murphy.

No matter where you are, check the guidelines for healthy eating and if you plan on starting a weight loss diet, check with your doctor first.

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Does nasal rinsing work?

Hayfever, colds, flu and sinus inflammation. Whether caused by a virus or an allergy, could rinsing your nose with saltwater be an effective way of reducing some of the discomfort?

Nasal rinsing involves rinsing warm, sterile saltwater through your nose – in one nostril and out the other – and it's been used for thousands of years to relieve nasal congestion and inflammation. It may sound strange and is a little scary when you first try it, but not only is it safe and inexpensive, it's also effective and evidence based.

In 2021 an international team of experts concluded that regular rinsing with saltwater was one of the most effective treatments for managing common sinus issues like chronic inflammation of the nasal and sinus passages that can cause runny nose, congestion, impaired sense of smell and facial pressure or pain.

"The risk is so low and the potential benefit so high for rinsers that it's worth giving it a go," said Dr Nyssa Farrell, an assistant professor of otolaryngology at Washington University School of Medicine in St Louis.

If you'd like to try nasal rinsing, ask your pharmacist for advice on the best product for you. And remember to always use sterile water.

1

THING YOU CAN DO TODAY



Make your own frozen dinners

It's not hard to make your own frozen meals – you just need to organise some containers and make room in your freezer.

When you're cooking, make a double or triple batch, and freeze the leftovers in individual packages.

The trick to frozen meals is organisation.

First, decide whether you want to freeze individual portions, or whether you're happy to defrost a whole family-sized meal each time.

Then purchase your containers or bags. Foil containers are economical, or you can buy stacks of plastic takeaway-style containers in most supermarkets. Many people prefer to use ziplock bags as they take up less room in the freezer.

Make sure you label what's in it, the portion size and, importantly, when it was frozen.

The second part of the organisation process is buying enough ingredients – and budgeting for it. While the initial outlay for large quantities of meat or veges might be high, buying in bulk is definitely cheaper when you calculate your price per portion.

Remember that some foods don't freeze well. When planning your weekly meals, it's best to avoid recipes involving these foods:

- dairy & egg based sauces (though cheese in lasagne and pasta dishes is usually fine)
- salads
- hard boiled eggs
- fried foods. ✕

EAT SMARTER

Mussels

Mussels are a treasure trove of nutrients, including protein, iron and omega 3.

They contain all the essential amino acids your body needs, with even more protein than fish. One cup of mussels gives you around a third of your daily protein needs.

Mussels are high in Omega 3, the oil that's so good for your brain and heart. They're particularly high in DHA, the only type of Omega 3 that can reach your brain.

They also contain more iron than steak – twice as much, in fact.

But perhaps their most surprising and powerful benefit is vitamin B12, essential for concentration, memory and mood. Half a cup of mussels gives you 340 per cent of the recommended daily value of vitamin B12.

How to cook mussels

Only buy mussels that are still sealed, not open. Rinse under water, and pull out the string down the side of each mussel.

Using a deep pan, heat butter and olive oil along with garlic or shallots, then add your mussels in their shell and cook for around 10-15 minutes with the lid on until they've opened up.

Then add your flavours: lemon juice and herbs are common, but you can experiment with other flavours such as olives, tomatoes or pesto. Serve in the shell.



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