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February 2023

How lifting weights can lift your mood

You know strength training is good for your body, but did you know it's also good for your mind?

More and more research studies are showing that resistance exercise has a positive impact on anxiety, depression and overall mental health – but with interesting exceptions.

It's called the anxiolytic effect, and it applies to all types of strength training including lifting weights, using resistance bands or using your body weight for exercises like push-ups.

But not just any kind of strength training, and not just for anyone. Here's what the research found:

1. Firstly, less is more. A 2014 review of studies, published in *Frontiers in Psychology*, found that the anxiolytic effect is higher when you work out at a lower intensity. That is, at less than 70% of your maximum.

And in even better news for people who don't want to "go hard", the review found that exercise performed at low intensities with long rests between sets (50–55% intensity with 90 seconds rest) "produced robust decreases in state anxiety relative to high intensities with short rests".

2. Secondly, the effect is even more marked in women. Research found that women showed "robust decreases" in anxiety after resistance training.

3. And thirdly, resistance training combined with cardio had the best effect of all. A study of women with generalised anxiety disorder found that, "When resistance training was combined with aerobic exercise, which alone failed to decrease anxiety symptoms, robust decreases in anxiety were observed. This effect suggests

Lift your depression

Resistance training is proven to help relieve depression. In a 2018 meta-analysis of 33 clinical trials that included 1877 participants, resistance exercise training was associated with a significant reduction in depressive symptoms.

It was shown to work for all adults, male and female, regardless of fitness, weight or other health status.

It's thought that the weight lifting helps trigger a release of endorphins which in turn lower levels of stress hormones like cortisol and epinephrine.

that resistance exercise may enhance the effects of other modes of exercise, or conversely, other modes of exercise may enhance the effects of resistance training." ✕



WHAT'S INSIDE

5 signs you're not eating enough	2
Is it adrenal fatigue?	3
Busting the biggest myths of anxiety	4
Working the night shift	6



4 February is World Cancer Day. 2023 continues 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

5 signs you're not eating enough

How much energy do you need?

The average adult needs about 8700 kilojoules a day to maintain a healthy weight. But some people need much more and others less. It depends how active you are, how much muscle you have, and your age, gender, height and weight. If you're not sure whether you're eating enough, or want advice on the best foods for you, see an Accredited Practising Dietitian.

We hear a lot about how to eat less and lose weight. What we don't talk about much is not eating enough and how this can impact you physically, mentally and emotionally.

You could be stressed or unwell. Or maybe you want to lose weight and are intentionally restricting food, perhaps through one of the many popular fasting diets. Whatever the reason, prolonged under-eating can lead to some unexpected health issues. Here are five signs that you might not be eating enough.

1. Lack of energy. Are you sleeping enough but still constantly feel exhausted? Then it might be time to re-evaluate your diet, says dietitian McKel Kooienga.

"When we're perpetually undereating, the body isn't able to fuel itself properly," she says, "which may cause you to feel lethargic and sluggish."

Apart from insufficient kilojoules leaving you without enough energy, not eating enough can leave you short of nutrients essential for good energy levels, such as iron and B vitamins.

2. Hair loss. If you're noticing more hair than usual accumulating in your hairbrush, this can be a sign you're not eating enough. When you don't take in enough kilojoules and key nutrients, says Healthline, your body prioritises the health of the essential organs – your heart, brain and lungs – over your hair, skin and nails. A 2013 review found that deficiencies in protein, minerals, essential fatty acids and vitamins can cause hair loss as well as changes to hair colour and structure.

3. Brain fog. We all experience moments of forgetfulness, says Kooienga, but frequent brain fog can be your body's way of telling you to check in with how you're nourishing yourself.

"Brain fog can be a sign of several health challenges," she says, "but it's also one of the key symptoms of not eating enough throughout the day."

"If that 3pm lull hits hard and you realise you haven't had lunch, that's your cue to head to the kitchen or grab a snack."

Kooienga recommend filling up on whole foods as best you can, such as a hearty salad with plenty of fresh veggies, maybe some

sweet potatoes, avocado, grilled chicken or protein of your choice, and a tasty dressing. This will help deliver B vitamins, essential fatty acids, folate and antioxidants, all key to boosting brain function.

4. Irritability. We've even got a name for it – hanger. That feeling you get when you haven't had enough to eat and you're starting to get snappy or moody.

A recent study of college and high school students found that irritability was associated with dieting and restrictive eating patterns, and other studies suggest hanger could be related to low glucose levels. Keep your mood on an even keel by eating regular nourishing meals and snacks.

5. Feeling cold. Do you always need an extra layer of clothing to stay warm? Your body works hard to keep you at a comfortable temperature, and if you constantly feel cold it could be because you're not eating enough. Even mild kilojoule restriction has been shown to lower core body temperature, as well as lower levels of T3 thyroid hormone, which among other functions helps maintain body temperature. ✕

Is it adrenal fatigue?

It's been a stressful time and now you're exhausted. You feel drained. Could it be adrenal fatigue?

Adrenal fatigue has become a controversial topic since the term was first coined by a chiropractor in 1998.

Most medical professionals say adrenal fatigue isn't a real disease; yet alternative health practitioners offer many tests and treatments for it.

Adrenal fatigue makes sense on paper. Your adrenal glands produce cortisol, and they produce lots of it when you're under stress. The theory is that when you're under prolonged stress, your adrenals become fatigued and you run out of cortisol.

This then leads to the classic symptoms: dragging tiredness, brain fog, depressive mood, salt and sweet cravings or nervousness.

Yet these could be symptoms of any number of other issues, including low iron, sleep apnoea, auto immune diseases and mental health conditions. They're also common symptoms of stress in general.

What does the research say?

Harvard Health recently reported on a review of 58 studies which concluded, "there is no scientific basis to associate adrenal impairment as a cause of fatigue." Yet Harvard Health also acknowledged that it's problematic, because there's no formal criteria to define and diagnose adrenal fatigue.

Doctors at the Adrenal Program at Cedars Sinai in the USA are more direct. "Adrenal fatigue is not an actual disease," says endocrinologist Dr Anat Ben-Shlomo.

"Stress can have an impact on our health, but it doesn't affect your adrenals this way. When you're stressed, the adrenal glands actually produce more of the cortisol and other hormones you need. They will give you all that's necessary."

Both Harvard Health and Dr Ben-Shlomo warn against taking cortisol supplements for adrenal fatigue.

Harvard Health gives an important word of caution: "some medical professionals prescribe cortisol analogs to treat adrenal fatigue. Cortisol replacement can be dangerous even in small doses. Unintended consequences can include osteoporosis, diabetes, weight gain, and heart disease."

Dr Ben Shlomo explains further: "the supplement can make you feel good at first because it's a steroid. But over time, it can actually inhibit your adrenal glands."

How to manage the symptoms

The treatments usually offered by alternative health practitioners for adrenal fatigue are sensible, and will probably help, says healthdirect.gov.au. This includes cutting down on coffee and alcohol, eating more fruit and vegetables, doing light exercise and prioritising sleep. ✕

What about adrenal insufficiency?

As opposed to adrenal fatigue, adrenal insufficiency is a medically accepted diagnosis, and occurs when your body doesn't produce enough of the hormone cortisol.

Chronic adrenal insufficiency is measured by a blood test that measures cortisol levels.

Rather than purely a stress response, adrenal insufficiency is most often caused when your immune system attacks your healthy adrenal glands by mistake. Other causes include cancer, tuberculosis and inherited disorders of the endocrine glands.

Primary adrenal insufficiency, also called Addison's disease, occurs when your adrenal glands are damaged. It's quite rare but can occur at any age.

If you're concerned, see your doctor for proper testing.



Busting the biggest myths of anxiety

Anxiety is bewildering, draining, and can appear as a huge range of symptoms, often changing from day to day.

Because the symptoms of anxiety vary so wildly, the advice for how to treat it also varies wildly – and is often conflicting and incorrect. Here we tackle some of the toughest myths around anxiety to help you or someone you know better manage this common mental health issue:

Myth #1: Everyone get anxious, it's no big deal

Chances are you know what it's like to feel anxious, stressed or worried. But that doesn't mean you have anxiety.

Anxiety creates extreme emotional distress that can be felt in your body.

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Health, fifth edition (DSM5), defines generalised anxiety disorder as: excessive anxiety that occurs most days for at least six months." The person finds it difficult to control their worrying to the point that it causes significant stress and impairs their ability to function.

You might feel nervous about a meeting with your boss at work. This kind of worry can be useful if it helps you prepare and focus your efforts.

But someone with anxiety might get so worried that they think they'll faint, and then their anxiety becomes an anxiety

about something that might happen because of their anxiety. They can't sleep or eat out of worry. After the meeting, they may obsess over every word, or their boss's facial expressions, and they go out of their way to avoid their boss in the future. Their beliefs about their performance at the meeting disrupts their life and their career.

Other people might feel that same level of nerves and anxiety when there's no upcoming event at all – it's a constant, non-specific feeling of dread and horror.

Myth #2: It's all in your head

Anxiety is very very real, but it's not always rational.

People with anxiety feel real emotional distress about things that may not be verifiably true. This applies to phobias as well as generalised anxiety. But that doesn't mean their fears and anxiety aren't real – quite the opposite.

Anxiety can produce measurable physical symptoms including shaking, heart palpitations, and gut issues, such as diarrhoea or irritable bowel syndrome. It can also be the cause of seemingly random pains and symptoms such as shooting nerve pain, body jolts, numbness in hands and feet and a stiff jaw.

Myth #3: It'll go away if you ignore it

You can't snap out of anxiety, or "just move on". And while thinking positive thoughts can certainly help, it won't cure anxiety disorder.

In fact, trying to deny or ignore your anxiety can make it worse. It can force the anxiety to mutate into conditions such as insomnia or substance abuse.

Other times you might have heard well-meaning advice such as, "Stop focusing on your worries, and let them float away like a cloud."

Yet anxiety, and the physical sensations that go along with it, are often your body and mind's way of getting your attention, of saying, "things are not OK over here."

The best way to address your anxiety is with a trained professional. Talk to your doctor about a referral to a psychologist to help you acknowledge your anxiety, feel your feelings and work through them by learning how to manage your thoughts and emotions.

Myth #4: Anxiety is a weakness

"If only I could cope better." "If only I was as calm and confident as everyone else." People with anxiety often blame their lack



of resilience for their condition. This is often compounded by loved ones treating them as vulnerable or delicate, and by the stigma still surrounding many mental health issues.

As children, many of us were mocked for showing fear – often by older siblings or bullies at school. We learned it wasn't "tough".

Yet people with anxiety often show immense strength just to get through the day. Despite feeling fear and dread, and despite debilitating physical symptoms, they show up and keep going.

Myth #5:

There are quick fixes

"Just stop drinking coffee." "Deep breathing is all you need." "A weighted blanket/walking barefoot/essential oils fixed my anxiety."

Lifestyle changes can be a huge help in managing anxiety symptoms but they won't fix the cause of the problem. To resolve anxiety, you need to get to the root cause – your patterns of thoughts and beliefs. That said, regular light exercise, cutting down on alcohol and caffeine, and eating and sleeping well and breath-work will definitely help manage the symptoms.

Likewise, some medications can help for some people with anxiety, but they won't work by themselves.

The best treatment involves targeting both the symptoms and the cause of the anxiety, and can include a combination of:

- talk therapy
- meditation and relaxation techniques
- cognitive behavioural therapy or other therapies
- exercise, diet and sleep changes
- medication

Myth #6:

They're not freaking out, so they don't really have anxiety

There are many types of anxiety, from phobias to health anxiety to social anxiety and much in between. A trigger for one person may be perfectly ok for someone else.

Many people with anxiety have become expert at hiding it. They have learnt to avoid situations that trigger their anxiety, or have learnt to internalise it. Neither are ideal coping mechanisms. ✕

8 tips to manage anxiety

Beyond Blue gives expert ways to manage your anxiety symptoms:

- 1. Slow your breathing:** Focus on your breathing and breathe in and out for three counts.
- 2. Progressive muscle relaxation:** Tense then relax each group of muscles from your toes to your head, eg your calves, your thighs, your arms.
- 3. Stay in the present:** Try to notice when you get caught up in your thoughts about the future or past.
- 4. Healthy lifestyle:** Keep active, eat well and do things you enjoy.
- 5. Don't avoid it:** The way through anxiety is by learning that what you fear isn't likely to happen – and if it does, you'll be able to cope with it.
- 6. Challenge your self-talk:** Don't always jump to the worst-case scenario.
- 7. Plan worry time:** Set aside 10 minutes each day to indulge your worries.
- 8. Be kind to yourself:** Remember, you are not your anxiety. You have a mental health condition. It's called anxiety.

Working the **night shift**

Your body is programmed to sleep best overnight and be most alert during the day. But what if you're one of the 15-20 per cent of workers in industrialised countries currently employed in shiftwork?

Industries ranging from health, emergency services and manufacturing to hospitality and mining rely on workers 24/7, meaning many need to work throughout the night, and sleep during the day.

Our preference to sleep at night isn't due to habit or convenience, it's driven by our body clock. Many hormones in the body work to keep us active during daylight hours and to rest at night, and it's not easy to switch this around.

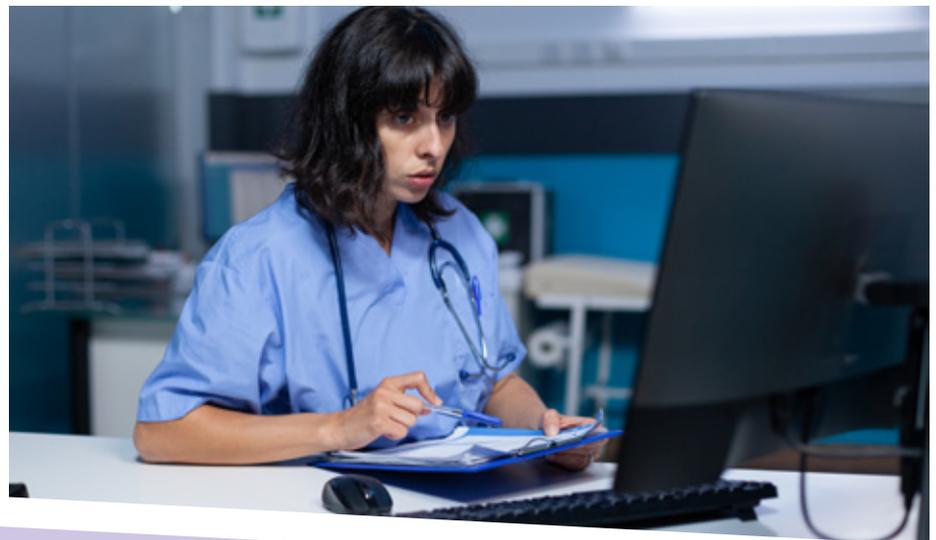
If you regularly work the night shift, it can be difficult to get enough sleep or to sleep well during the day. The average shiftworker sleeps one hour a day less than people who work regular hours, says Australia's Sleep Health Foundation. This can lead to being tired, both on and off the job, making it harder to concentrate and be alert when at work, and increasing the risk of accidents at work and when driving.

What you can do

The Sleep Health Foundation recommends the following:

- Prioritise sleep. You have to sleep when others are awake, so encourage others where you live to respect this.

- Try to go to bed and get up at the same time every day.
- Control noise. You may need to remove the phone from the bedroom and have heavy carpet or curtains to absorb any noise. A fan or 'white noise' machine can also help muffle noise.
- Keep your bedroom cool and dark.
- Avoid caffeine, sleeping pills, alcohol or cigarettes before going to bed.
- If you can, sleep just before going to work. If this isn't possible, taking a nap before going to work may help.
- If you are allowed to take a break during your shift, use it for a short nap. A nap should be no longer than 15 minutes, after which a five minute walk can help you wake up properly.
- If you have any say when it comes to your shifts, rotate them forwards (morning to afternoon to evening to night) rather than backwards. ✕



Ask an expert about ...

Q What are some tips on handling criticism?

While most of us don't experience bullying at work, many of us are the recipients of criticism, knockbacks, rejection or negative feedback, and it's important that we learn to deal with these without taking them to heart.

Psychologist Dr Alice Boyes has some tips on not personalising that we can all embrace.

Don't catastrophise knock backs, she advises. "One rejection doesn't mean you're never going to be successful,"

explains Dr Boyes. "And negative feedback on a piece of work doesn't mean you have no capacity to become better at it or that you're not talented."

She suggests that if you catch yourself personalising, take a step back and ask yourself whether you're catastrophising.

"Be gentler with yourself about your imperfections and mistakes," says Dr Boyes. By learning to be nicer to yourself about your imperfections, she explains, you won't automatically feel attacked when other people make comments.

And don't be afraid to put yourself in situations where rejection is likely (without major negative consequences!).

Dr Boyes believes that learning through doing behavioural experiments is the best way to change thoughts. "Doing things like making requests when you expect to be told 'no' will help you learn that rejection often isn't personal," she says.

App of the month

BrainTrack

BrainTrack is a free app launched by Dementia Australia that helps you monitor and understand changes in your cognitive abilities over time, which you can use to start a conversation with your GP.

The app helps you explore common cognitive concerns and provides brain health information through fun, travel-themed games that have been adapted from validated cognitive testing. Users are prompted to login monthly to play the games. You can generate a pdf report of the results to email to your GP.

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



One hour to a healthier you

Can an extra hour's sleep on top of the average six-and-a-half make a difference to your health? Researchers at the University of Surrey's Sleep Research Centre (UK) wanted to find out.

For one week, volunteers were allocated to sleep for either six-and-a-half or seven-and-a-half hours. Blood tests were taken, and the volunteers switched sleep patterns.

No surprise that most struggled with mental agility tasks when they had less sleep. What was most interesting, however, was that certain genes were switched on or off in the volunteers when they changed their sleep quota.

Cutting back on sleep by one hour caused genes associated with processes like inflammation, immune response and responses to stress to become more active, while the activity of genes associated with diabetes and risk of cancer increased. The reverse happened when volunteers added an hour's sleep.

So if you're short on shut-eye and can manage to get just a little bit more, it could really make you healthier.

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Why mozzies love you

It might be you, a family member or a friend – we all know someone who seems to be a mosquito magnet. Now scientists think they've worked out why – it's down to the amount of a particular acid on your skin.

Researchers at Rockefeller University in New York found people who have higher levels of carboxylic acid on their skin are 100 times more attractive to the type of female mosquito responsible for spreading diseases such as dengue, yellow fever and Zika.

The same people continued to appeal to mozzies over the course of three years, no matter what they ate. The study couldn't explain why some people have more carboxylic acids on their skin than others, but the composition of the skin microbiome is unique in every individual which could explain it.

How to make yourself less of a mozzie magnet? Until scientists have worked out a way of making you less attractive to mosquitoes, they recommend you take a shower to cut down on all the attractive compounds on your skin, especially around your feet. ✕

Low-carb vs keto for diabetes control

Tossing up between low-carb and keto for diabetes control? Turns out they work as well as each other, according to a controlled trial. For 12 weeks, researchers compared a low-carb Mediterranean diet with a well-formulated ketogenic diet. They found both helped people with type 2 diabetes or prediabetes control blood sugar levels and lose weight.

While both diets were low in refined grains and added sugars and high in non-starchy vegetables, the Mediterranean diet also included fruits, legumes and wholegrains, foods avoided on the keto plan.

The investigators concluded that both diets improved glucose control, fasting insulin and HDL (good) cholesterol and led to weight loss, but the Mediterranean-style diet included more health-promoting foods, variety, and higher amounts of beneficial fibre and other nutrients. It was also easier for participants to follow. ✕

1 THING YOU CAN DO TODAY



Start learning a language

More than half the world's people are polyglots – they speak more than one language. Are you one of them, or do they put you to shame?

You're never too old to learn a foreign language. Yes, it might be easier when you're at school, but people who begin language study in their older years can become as fluent as younger learners – and reap the following mental benefits:

- You get smarter. How can you not, when you're challenging your brain to recognise, negotiate meaning and communicate in a different language? This skill boosts your ability in other problem-solving tasks too.
- You delay dementia. Several studies have found that adults who speak two or more languages delay the first signs of dementia by up to five years.
- Your memory improves. Exercising your brain with a new language improves overall memory – studies show bilinguals are better at retaining names, directions and lists.
- You boost observation skills. Multilingual people are better at observing their surroundings, more adept at focusing on relevant information and dismissing the irrelevant.

Learning one language makes it easier to acquire others. And you don't have to go back to school. Download one of the many language apps such as Mondly, Duolingo or Babbel and get started in minutes. ✕

EAT SMARTER

Cheese

You love it with crackers, fruit, olives or bread, sprinkled on pasta or stirred through risotto. For many of us life would be lesser without cheese. But is it actually good for us? What about those dire warnings about it upping our risk of heart disease?

It turns out cheese can be part of a healthy diet – within reason.

Eating cheese boosts your protein, calcium and vitamin B12 intake. Many Australians don't get enough calcium and so risk developing the brittle bone disease osteoporosis. Just 40 grams of cheese (a matchbox size) gives you one of your three servings of calcium a day.

Cheese is a fermented food, with some containing gut beneficial live active microbes. Hard cheeses are treated at a high heat, and are less likely to contain live microbes, whereas softer cheese such as blue cheese, Persian feta and goat's curd cheese are more gut-friendly.

What about the saturated fat in cheese that we're told to avoid? The consensus from large studies, and the Heart Foundation, is that cheese, milk and yoghurt have a 'neutral' effect on your heart health meaning they don't increase or decrease the risk of heart disease.

When to say no to cheese

Cheese is not a low-kiloujoule food, so don't go overboard and add it to already energy dense meals. Resist deep fried camembert, stuffed crust pizza, chips with cheese, cheesy garlic bread and the like. If you're watching your weight there's still room for cheese, with many types lower in kilojoules – ricotta, reduced-fat cheddar, mozzarella and feta for example. ✕



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