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July 2023

Are **fitness trackers** healthy?

At first thought, it seems obvious that a fitness tracker would help boost your health. It helps you get fitter, right?

Perhaps, but the devices may also reduce your overall wellness by triggering more obsession and less connection with your body.

The research on whether fitness trackers actually make you move more is inconclusive. In the end, it seems to depend on the person. Some people thrive on setting measurable goals and achieving them. Others have a spike of motivation at the beginning, and then get bored. But others can fall into an unhealthy focus on numbers which turns their life into a calculation.

Mark McKeon is an author, presenter and former AFL coach. Speaking in the *Australian Financial Review*, he says knowing you've only walked 1000 steps by lunchtime might motivate some people, "but it can also make you stressed and set

off a series of physiological changes that are more detrimental than an inactive morning."

When you first set up your tracker, it may ask for your basic details, often telling you how many calories you need to stay the same weight, or lose weight.

For people who are prone to anxiety or disordered thinking about weight and exercise, this can be more detrimental than beneficial. Having a device beep at you because you've only done 9,400 steps that day can turn a good day into a guilt-ridden day.

Alissa Rumsey, author of *Unapologetic Eating*, says fitness trackers can lead to negative obsession for some people.

"They become fixated on the numbers and kind of preoccupied with tracking and

hitting certain numbers and in doing so lose track of what really matters.

"They stop paying attention to how their body feels and if they need rest, if they need movement."

Rumsey suggests mitigating this by regularly checking in with how you feel, and let that guide you.

TIP

Check in with your body BEFORE you check your fitness tracker. Practise listening to your body to see how it feels before and after exercise and move in a way that feels good for you.

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The International Day of Friendship is on July 30.

It is a United Nations day that promotes the role that friendship plays in promoting peace in many cultures. The International Day of Friendship was created with the idea that friendship between peoples, countries, and cultures can inspire peace efforts and build bridges between communities.

3 things we think we know about type 2 diabetes

It's estimated that over 480 million people live with type 2 diabetes, while almost 1 in 2 of those are estimated to have it without knowing. Yet despite how common it is, there's still a lot of myths and misunderstanding.

First, a quick overview. 'Diabetes' isn't just one condition. There are three main types of diabetes, with type 2 by far the most common, affecting 90 per cent of people with diabetes.

The others are type 1, an autoimmune disease that often starts in childhood or adolescence, and gestational diabetes, a type of diabetes that affects pregnant women.

When you have type 2 diabetes, your body can't use insulin properly. Insulin is a hormone produced by your pancreas, and its main role is to act as a kind of passport, allowing glucose (sugar) from your blood vessels to enter your cells, where it can be used for energy.

If your insulin isn't working as it should, then glucose will build up in your blood vessels instead of moving into your cells. This is when the problems start.

Over time, high blood glucose from uncontrolled diabetes can damage your large and small blood vessels, which can lead to heart disease, stroke, and ongoing kidney, nerve, eye and foot problems. This is why treatment for diabetes aims to keep blood glucose levels within a target range.

Why we all need to understand diabetes

Everyone is affected by diabetes, says Justine Cain, Group CEO Diabetes Australia

in the 2022 report, *Reducing the impact of the diabetes epidemic: Unite in the fight for change*. We're either affected directly, she says – as a result of developing the condition or caring for someone who has diabetes – or indirectly through its impact on the health system.

Type 2 diabetes is a complex condition. Misunderstanding diabetes can mean you're more at risk of developing it than you think, but it can also mean more stigma and judgement for people who are living with it. The more you know about type 2 diabetes, the lower your risk – and the easier life will be for people who already have the condition.

Myth 1: Only overweight people develop type 2 diabetes

According to Diabetes Australia's *Heads Up on Diabetes & Stigma* report, more than 50 per cent of people with type 2 diabetes say people assume they are overweight, while 26 per cent reported being told they had brought type 2 diabetes on themselves.

Excess weight is a risk factor for diabetes, but it's not a direct cause – even if you're a healthy weight you can still develop the condition.

Other factors can have an equally strong influence on your risk of developing diabetes:

- a family history of type 2 diabetes
- increasing age

- high blood pressure
- ethnicity – your risk increases if you were born in Asia (including the Indian sub-continent), the Middle East, Southern Europe or North Africa, or if you're of Australian Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, Pacific Islander or Maori descent
- sedentary lifestyle
- poor diet – one high in red and processed meat, refined grains, and sugary drinks (including fruit juice) and low in fruit and vegetables
- smoking or second-hand smoking.

Find out more about your personal risk of developing type 2 diabetes, by visiting diabetesaustralia.com.au/risk-calculator

Myth 2: If you have type 2 diabetes you must cut out sugary fruit

It seems to make sense. When you have type 2 diabetes you want to prevent spikes in your blood glucose. Carbohydrates in foods convert to glucose and all forms of sugar (including the sugar in fruit) are carbohydrates. So cutting out sugary fruit like bananas and watermelon will help control your blood glucose won't it?

It's not that straightforward, says Richard Siegel, MD, co-director of the Diabetes and Lipid Centre at Tufts Medical Centre. All forms of sugar don't spike blood glucose in the same way, he explains.



“Whole fruit contains natural sugars, along with fibre (and a host of other essential nutrients). The fibre slows the absorption of the sugars, so they enter your bloodstream more slowly and are unlikely to spike blood glucose levels.”

He also explains that about half the sugar in fruit is in the form of fructose, which has less effect on blood glucose than other types of carbs.

It's more important to cut down refined carbohydrates like added sugar found in soft drinks, cookies, cakes and other baked goods, table sugar, honey and syrup.

Myth 3: There is a cure for type 2 diabetes.

There's both good and bad news regarding a cure. A cure doesn't exist (yet) but

remission is possible for some people, says Diabetes Australia.

Until very recently type 2 diabetes was considered a progressive condition, one that can't be stopped. However, recent research has shown that remission is possible in the early years after diagnosis. 'Remission' means that your blood glucose levels have remained stable for at least three months, without any medication.

Remission is usually only possible with weight loss. Research from the recent UK DiRECT study found remission was achieved by 57 per cent of people who lost between 10 and 15 kilograms, and 86 per cent of people who lost more than 15 kilos. Diet, exercise and sometimes weight loss surgery have been used to achieve remission.

Remission is not a cure. “Damage to blood vessels and nerves can begin long before your type 2 diabetes was diagnosed,” says Diabetes Australia.

This is why you must still see your doctor and diabetes care team regularly to prevent and manage potential complications.

“Your doctor can check that you remain in remission as there is still the possibility that other factors, such as age, will cause you to progress out of remission back to type 2 diabetes requiring medication,” says Diabetes Australia.

For more information on all types of diabetes, visit the International Diabetes Federation at idf.org.

No warning signs of prediabetes

Don't assume you're not at risk of type 2 diabetes just because you feel healthy. It's estimated between 5 to 9% of the world's population has prediabetes – that is, they have blood glucose levels that are high, but not yet high enough to be diagnosed with type 2 diabetes.

The problem is, there are no symptoms of prediabetes. It's only picked up if your doctor sends you to have your blood glucose levels tested.

Without changes to your lifestyle you are at 10 to 20 times greater risk of developing type 2 diabetes. These changes include: quitting smoking; becoming more physically active; weight loss of five to 10 per cent if needed; and developing healthy eating habits.

Speak to your doctor to see if you need testing for prediabetes.

Is low morning mood a thing?

What to do about it

If you have noticed these symptoms, the first step is to rule out other issues which could be causing your symptoms, such as sleep deficiency, iron deficiency or stress and exhaustion.

Make an appointment with your doctor to talk about your symptoms.

After ruling out other issues, they may suggest a range of treatments such as seeing a psychologist or therapist, medication, meditation, exercise, or changing your eating and drinking habits.

Light therapy, also called phototherapy, might also help.

If you start the day feeling sad or anxious, or have very low energy and find it hard to get out of bed – and you feel this way for two weeks or more – you may have morning depression.

Depression can hit different people at different times of the day; it's rarely a steady state all day long.

Morning depression, also called diurnal mood variation, isn't a separate condition to depression, but it is considered a hallmark symptom of clinical depression.

When you have a tough day ahead, or you're feeling tired from lack of sleep, it's natural to feel a bit down about the day ahead.

Morning depression is different. It tends to occur even when there is no obvious reason for feeling down, and no reason for the ups and downs of mood throughout the day.

"People who are depressed may feel there is no clear reason for the mood changes they experience at certain times of the day. Unlike people who do not have depression, they may feel that they are unable to control the changes," explains

Nancy Schimelpfening from the depression support group, Depression Sanctuary.

What are the symptoms?

Schimelpfening says people who have depression with diurnal mood variation have a low mood and feel that their depression symptoms are at their worst in the morning, but they seem to get better throughout the day.

They are likely to feel the classic depression symptoms of profound sadness and low mood, as well as feeling:

- irritable or easily frustrated
- extremely tired and lethargic upon waking,
- difficulty completing daily tasks
- little or no enthusiasm or interest in the day ahead (even if pleasurable activities are planned)
- it's hard to wake up or getting out of bed.

What causes morning depression?

Morning depression has similar triggers to clinical depression, which is caused by a complex mix of physiological, mental and emotional stressors.

Psychologist Dr Sarah Gundle says this type of depression can also be linked with your sleep and circadian rhythms.

"Your body's natural clock, called the circadian rhythm, regulates everything from heart rate to body temperature. It also affects energy, thinking, alertness, and mood."

Dr Gundle also points out that stress can play a direct role in depression. "Too much cortisol can be linked to anxiety and depression," she explains.

"Normally, cortisol levels spike in the mornings, leaving some people feeling more down. However, when your sleep schedule is off, these hormones will either be irregularly produced or create an imbalance causing morning depression."

Body language in the digital age

Humans are experts at non-verbal communication. It's how we understand what's going on, and how we signal our feelings to others, whether intentionally or unintentionally.

So what happens when we're not in the same room together? How can we read someone's body language when we can't see their body?

Erica Dhawan, author of the book, *Digital Body Language: how to build trust and connection no matter the distance*, says "non-verbal cues (facial expressions, gestures, tone of voice, pitch) comprise nearly three-quarters of how we understand one another in person."

"The loss of non-verbal body cues is among the most overlooked reasons why employees feel so disengaged from others....disengagement happens not because people don't want to be empathetic but because with today's tools, they don't know how."

The end result is that we often assume too much from tiny clues, or misinterpret what we read and see.

"We all need to be aware that our digital body language emits signals, deliberate or not," says Dhawan.

In a digital workspace, your non-verbal communication comes across through your presence on video calls, and your words and punctuation on texts, chats and emails. Let's look at each of these:

Communication via online video

Without the normal cues, people will make assumptions based on small actions.

A 2022 survey of 200 executives showed that 92 per cent believed that employees who turned off their cameras during meetings were less likely to have a long-term future at their company.

Then there's all the cues you are sending out even when you have your camera on.

Research shows that even factors such as your camera angle and your distance from the camera influence how likeable you seem.

Mi Ridell, an expert in body language based in Sweden says,

"In the digital setting we have to think about the set-up, and accept that it's a new way to communicate.

"If a colleague positions their camera below the chin, forcing others to look up at them, we don't like them as much as if they are on the same level."

We need to learn new techniques, such as how to make eye contact on a video call.

"The brain wants to look at the face [on the screen]" says Ridell, "but you have to learn to look in the camera when it's your turn to speak."

Yet at the same time, the usual rules of respect for others' time still applies. When someone is talking, show you're listening. Lean in rather than slouch back, smile when someone makes a joke, nod encouragingly when someone tries to explain something.

Communication via writing

Do you end a text to colleagues with a full stop? It might be seen as aggressive.

And how about exclamation marks. Do they show enthusiasm? Or desperation?

The tiny nuances of how we communicate via text, chat and email can take on great significance.

According to the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, the tone of our emails is misinterpreted 50 per cent of the time.

You can't control how others interpret your punctuation and emojis, but you can apply the basic rules of respect – even when you're busy. Think about the impact of how long you take to respond to someone. Too long and it can feel like you don't value them. Too fast and it can seem you're not putting thought into it.

Gratitude and appreciation are still vital. Take the time to thank people, sincerely and in your own words, for their contribution. You can't pop into their office at the end of the day to thank them, but you can send an email or message at the end of the day to acknowledge their work, before logging off for the evening.

How to make **manual handling** safer at work

You have the right to be safe at work, so if your job involves heavy lifting or pushing and pulling, you can work with your employer to make sure the risks are controlled.

The best way to reduce injuries from manual handling is to plan ahead through workplace design. Each action requiring manual handling should be expected, planned and controlled.

Good posture and techniques can certainly help, but according to Better Health Victoria, making changes to workplace design is the most effective way to prevent manual handling injury.

Better Health Victoria advises the following to reduce workplace hazards:

- Regularly walk through your workplace to look for hazards.
- Discuss risk factors with your colleagues and managers.
- Check through injury records to help pinpoint recurrent problems.

After identifying the hazards, consider the task to be done, and ask yourself:

- Does this task need to be carried out, and if so, does it have to be done this way?
- Can you change the object to be moved, for example by breaking down a big pack into smaller parcels?
- Can you change the workspace, such as changing the height of benches so you don't need to lean over?
- Are there mechanical aids to help you, such as wheelbarrows or trolleys?
- Has everyone been trained in proper manual handling techniques?

Adam Crisp, physiotherapist with Bodycare, finds the **SMART** acronym a helpful reminder before performing a manual handling task.

- **Stable:** make sure that your body is stable before completing a task. This may mean standing with your feet apart, adopting a split stance or using your arm for support.
- **Move:** always move close to the task and move your feet when changing direction.
- **Arms:** make sure that your arms are positioned low and close to your body in order to reduce strain through your shoulders and neck.
- **Recover:** alternate tasks or the way you complete tasks regularly and make sure you are stretching regularly and looking after your body (physically and mentally).
- **Teamwork:** always ask for help if you don't feel comfortable performing a task.



Ask an expert about ...

Q How much do you really have to exercise?

Many people feel that if they can't do the recommended 30-60 minutes of exercise a day, they should not bother at all. On a busy day, it's tempting to just give up and say, "I'll skip exercise today and try again tomorrow".

Yet research shows that just three or four lots of one-minute bursts of activity – during your normal daily tasks – can reduce health risks.

A study led by the University of Sydney's Charles Perkins Centre, and published

in *Nature Medicine*, looked at the benefits of "vigorous intermittent lifestyle physical activity" or VILPA.

VILPA includes day to day things such as running for the bus or playing high energy games with the kids.

Researchers found that three to four one-minute bursts is associated with up to 40 per cent reduction in all causes of death. What's more, it's linked to a 49 per cent reduction in death related to cardiovascular disease.

Lead author and Professor of Physical Activity, Lifestyle and Population Health at Charles Perkins Centre, Emmanuel Stamatakis, says, "Upping the intensity of daily activities requires no time commitment, no preparation, no club memberships, no special skills. It simply involves stepping up the pace while walking or doing the housework with a bit more energy."

App of the month

Endel

Based on scientific research, circadian rhythm and psychoacoustics (the study of sound perception and audiology), Endel takes inputs like location,

environment and heart rate. It then delivers personalised sounds to help you relax, focus, sleep, study and exercise.

Available free with in-app purchases from the [App Store](#) and [Google Play](#).

It's also available with Amazon Alexa, at the Mac App store and on several music platforms. Visit their site [endel.io](#) for more details.

Exercise may counteract sleep problems

Getting enough exercise and healthy sleep are key to a long, healthy life. But many of us sleep poorly, failing to get the recommended seven to eight hours a night. Sleeping too little or sleeping too long is linked with a shorter life, so it's good to hear that scientists have found that exercise can counteract some of the negative effects of poor sleep.

The study in more than 90,000 adults showed "increased physical activity levels weakened the mortality risks associated with short or long sleep duration."

The difference between this study and previous ones is that the participants wore accelerometer wristbands, which measured both physical activity and sleep, rather than relying on self-reported measures.

In people who didn't exercise, both short and long sleep were associated with raised risks of death from all causes, an association that disappeared in people with a high amount of exercise.



wellatwork™

Published by: Healthworks™

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News Bites



Can you 'ommmmmmm' your way to better health?

Meditation is increasingly being used to help treat mental health disorders, but it's not clear if it might also be able to alter the composition of the gut microbiome.

In a bid to find out, researchers in China measured Buddhist monks' tummy bacteria and compared it to their secular neighbours. Despite similarities in diet, they found significant differences in the diversity and volume of microbes between the two.

The kind of gut microbes found in the monks have previously been linked to lower risks of anxiety, depression and heart disease, and the researchers believe that regular, deep meditation, practised over several years, may help regulate your gut bugs.

The team found the monks' tummy bugs indicated several protective, anti-inflammatory pathways, in addition to enhanced metabolism. Additionally, they said the monks' blood had significantly lower levels of markers associated with a heightened risk of heart disease.

We're still happy, despite Covid-19

Covid-19 caused lockdowns, the economic slump and claimed millions of lives. But despite this, it didn't affect humankind's happiness, found an international study reported in the *Guardian* online.

Interviews with more than 100,000 people across 137 countries found significantly higher levels of compassion in all global regions than before the pandemic. When asked to evaluate their lives on a scale of one to 10, people on average gave scores just as high in the 2020-2022 Covid-19 years as in 2017-2019.

Overall, "the undoubted pains were offset by increases in the extent to which respondents had been able to discover and share the capacity to care for each other in difficult times," reported the 10th *World Happiness Report*.

And in case you were wondering, Finland topped the rankings, followed by Denmark and Iceland. Australia came in at number 12, two below New Zealand at number 10.

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THING YOU CAN DO TODAY



Download an audio book

Love reading but a little short on time? Then how about listening to an audiobook while commuting, exercising, cooking or cleaning?

Some avid readers dismiss audiobooks, saying they are just not as good as the real deal (and they mean the proper, paper kind).

But to our brains, there is little difference, says *Discover* magazine.

"In a study published in the *Journal of Neuroscience*, researchers from the Gallant Lab at UC Berkeley scanned the brains of nine participants while they read and listened. . . Looking at the brain scans, the researchers saw that the stories stimulated the same cognitive and emotional areas, regardless of their medium."

Psychology Today also points out the many ways listening to novels and non-fiction can help us to become not only better read, but also improve our mental health too. If you are prone to anxiety or depression it can be hard to focus enough to read. But listening to someone else read aloud can help replace your daily worries and negative thoughts with something else. As an extra boost to your mental health, you can take your audiobook with you on a walk.

Another bonus of audiobooks? They help relax your overworked eyes and take you off screens. Too long spent looking at screens can lead to eyestrain and long-term vision problems like myopia. Ditch the screen at the end of the day and curl up with an audiobook instead.

EAT SMARTER

Frozen peas

Reaching for the frozen peas when your fridge is empty isn't avoiding meal preparation. Despite their image as the vegetable of last resort, here are four reasons why frozen peas deserve a place at your dinner table.

- 1. Protein.** Have you noticed that pea protein now sits alongside other protein powders? Peas are a legume like chickpeas and kidney beans, and so are a rich plant-based source of protein, containing about 5.4g per 80g serving. This is one reason why they're so filling.
- 2. Low GI.** If you need to monitor your blood sugar levels, peas' low glycaemic index and high fibre content will help. They contain a form of starch that slows digestion, releasing glucose slowly into the bloodstream.
- 3. Rich in nutrients.** Like many frozen fruit and vegetables, peas are picked when at the peak of their ripeness and snap frozen within hours. Some studies find that frozen produce may have more antioxidants and vitamins than their fresh counterparts. The nutrients in peas include vitamins A, C, K, thiamine, folate, polyphenol antioxidants, and the minerals iron, manganese and phosphorus.
- 4. Convenient and low cost.** With rising food prices, buying frozen is one way of keeping costs down. And storing them in your freezer drawer means you won't be throwing out veg that aren't used by the end of the week.

