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**HEALTH & SAFETY  
NEWSLETTER**

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**September 2023**

## Lacking energy? Low iron may be to blame

**You're tired. That's not unusual in our fast-paced world. But don't ignore persistent fatigue as it could be a sign you're low in the essential mineral, iron.**

Without enough iron, you're going to feel below par. Fatigue is often the first thing you notice because when you're low in iron, less oxygen reaches your tissues, thanks to iron's role in helping red blood cells carry oxygen around the body.

Iron is also necessary for energy production and fighting off infection. So along with fatigue, you might start to experience shortness of breath, frequent infections, headaches, dizziness, and cold hands and feet.

### How common is iron deficiency?

Iron deficiency is the most common nutritional disorder in the world, says nutrition researcher Dr Tim Crowe on his

blog [thinkingnutrition.com.au](http://thinkingnutrition.com.au). "As well as affecting many women and children in developing countries, it is the only nutrient deficiency that is also significantly prevalent in developed industrialised countries too."

Iron deficiency is estimated to affect over 1.2 billion people worldwide, particularly young women after they have started menstruating. Women lose iron in blood every month, and if their intake of iron-rich foods doesn't compensate for this loss, they risk becoming deficient.

### Is iron deficiency the same as anaemia?

"Iron deficiency is not a black and white thing. It develops in stages with anaemia being the final result," says Dr Crowe. Anaemia is when your blood lacks adequate healthy red blood cells, and you can be low in iron but not yet have anaemia. Blood tests ordered by your doctor can tell you what stage you're at.

Don't be tempted to take an iron supplement 'just in case' unless your doctor recommends it, as they can cause side effects and can be toxic in high doses.

### Do I have to eat meat to get enough iron?

You're less likely to be low in iron if you eat meat because the iron in animal foods is more easily absorbed by our bodies. Liver is the richest source, followed by red meat (lamb, beef and kangaroo), then pork, chicken, shellfish, fish and eggs.

Plants contain iron too, just in a form not so well absorbed. But you can increase how much you absorb by including a source of vitamin C with a plant-based meal. This might be a glass of orange juice, a salad of raw tomatoes and red capsicum, or fruit such as kiwifruit, citrus fruit or berries.

Good plant sources of iron include nuts, dried fruit, legumes and tofu, and dark leafy green vegetables.



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10 September is World Suicide Prevention Day.

One in every 100 deaths worldwide is the result of suicide. Each and every suicide is devastating and has a profound impact on those around them. **World Suicide Prevention Day** is an opportunity to raise awareness of suicide and to promote action through proven means that will reduce the number of suicides and suicide attempts globally. Visit [www.iasp.info/wspd](http://www.iasp.info/wspd) for more information.

# Every move counts — even when it's a snack

## It doesn't matter where you are or what you're wearing, you can get fitter by exercise 'snacking'.

Exercise is good for us. It can reduce the risk of disease, keep the kilo creep at bay, and improve the strength of bones and muscles. But with work and family commitments, hitting the gym or pounding the pavement can slip down the list of priorities.

One solution is to turn your exercise into short bursts or 'snacks', say researchers, allowing you to reap the benefits of regular movement even when you have a busy schedule.

### What is an exercise snack?

Exercise snacks are brief spurts of exertion spread throughout the day, usually lasting a minute or two but done often enough so that they add up.

According to a 2022 review, exercise snacks are "a feasible, well-tolerated, and time-efficient approach" to working out, improving heart and lung health and reducing the negative impact of a sedentary lifestyle.

Your exercise snacks can be anything from stair climbing, a brisk walk around the block, marching or jogging on the spot, push ups, jumping jacks, chair squats in your office, lunges, and wall push ups—whatever suits you and is comfortable to do.

"We need to rethink the way we look at activity and exercise and get creative," says Dr Matthew Stork, a health research postdoctoral fellow at the University of British Columbia's School of Health and Exercise Sciences.

The advantage over a traditional exercise session is that you can have an exercise snack whenever it works for you.

"Work with what you've got," says Dr Stork. "You're not restructuring your day around exercise. You're restructuring exercise into your day."

### The benefits of exercise snacking

**Increases aerobic fitness.** All those exercise snacks add up and can improve your metabolic health, benefit your heart and lungs and are comparable to longer exercise sessions such as brisk walking or other traditional workouts.

Research has shown that one or two minutes of vigorous exercise spaced throughout the day—that briefly raise your heart rate and breathing—can improve your heart health by boosting your cardiovascular fitness.

In one study, healthy college students rapidly climbed and descended three flights of stairs, three times a day for three days a week. After six weeks, they had gained significant aerobic fitness and leg strength compared to a group who didn't do the training.

**Breaks up sedentary time.** Many occupations demand we sit at a computer or desk for hours on end, and it isn't good for us.

"Sedentary behaviour itself is linked to chronic health risks," points out Dr Stork. It increases the risk of obesity, heart disease and type 2 diabetes, and is associated with cognitive decline and even certain cancers.

Being inactive for long periods is also hard on your muscles. One study showed that it reduces the muscles' ability to absorb and use amino acids, the building blocks of protein that are used to repair and build muscle.



In another study, breaking up sitting every 30 minutes—by either walking for two minutes or doing a brief set of chair squats—helped muscles better absorb amino acids from the bloodstream.

Moving more throughout the day not only helps your body feel better, it can improve productivity, concentration and creativity, can help relieve stress and can support your immune system.

#### How to get motivated

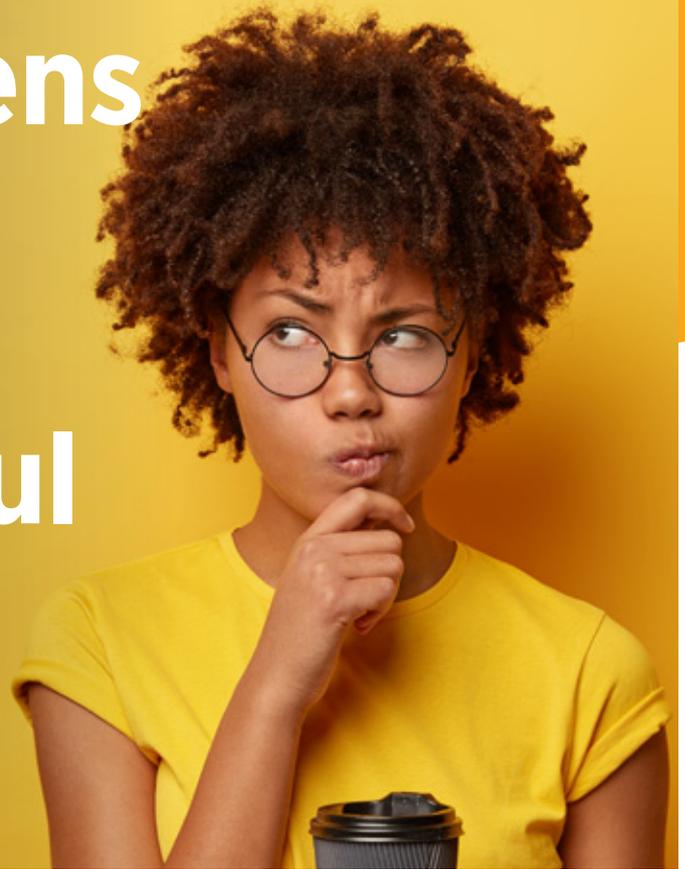
- Commit to frequent and short movement breaks through the day.
- Encourage a workmate or two to join you on your exercise breaks.
- Organise regular prompts on your phone or smartwatch to remind yourself you've been sitting for an hour.
- Download an app such as [Stand Up!](#) or [Work Break](#) to help remind you and track your progress.
- When you get up to have a break for coffee, food or the bathroom, have an exercise snack too.

## Exercise snacks to try today

- **Stand up.** Take a standing break every 30 minutes if you sit a lot. Or raise your work surface to create a standing desk.
- **Use the wall.** Do eight to ten wall squats or wall push-ups.
- **Take the stairs.** If you have the opportunity, do some vigorous stair climbing through the day. Walk up escalators or use stairs instead of the lift if you can.
- **Practise balance.** Stand on each foot for 10 seconds a few times a day.
- **Chair squats.** Rise from your chair, stand on tip toes, then sit back down. See how many chair squats you can fit into 30 seconds.
- **Take a walk.** Around the block, to a bus stop further away, to the nearest park and back, around a supermarket or shopping centre.
- **Jump rope.** A fun way to get your heart rate up while improving your cardiovascular health is to pick up a skipping rope. Jump for three to five rounds of one minute each, playing around either with the intensity or variety of jumping.
- **Use weights.** Lifting weights will increase your heart rate and build muscle. If you don't have weights, fill an empty milk container with water and use that.
- **Move at home.** Vacuum, mop, dust, garden, sweep; get up and move between streaming shows or during commercials – anything that gets you moving.
- **Do some stretches.** Any movement is good to break up a long period of sitting. Try some simple standing backbends, a stretch such as [cat/cow](#), or some side stretches.

Always check with your doctor, particularly if you have physical limitations, before starting any new movements.

# What happens when your thoughts aren't helpful



**We all have habitual, automatic ways of thinking, and we're often so used to these thoughts that it never occurs to us to challenge them. Yet for many of us, these ways of thinking are making us miserable.**

You probably don't realise you're doing it. But chances are that at some point today, you've had thoughts or made assumptions that are deeply unhelpful – and probably incorrect.

You're not alone. It turns out many of us share the same unhelpful thinking styles. Here we outline the four most common patterns, with advice from a clinical psychologist on how to overcome them.

- **All-or-nothing thinking**

Also called black-and-white thinking, this thinking style only allows one extreme or another, with nothing in between. You are either good or bad, perfect or a failure. You don't allow yourself the compassion to see yourself as a flawed but wonderful human.

Clinical Psychologist Dr Gemma Healey advises: "Try catching these thoughts and saying 'Ah, there's the 'I'm not good enough' story', or 'Ah, there's the 'I'm a failure' story'."

- **Catastrophising**

When you take a small problem and imagine the worst outcome possible, you're catastrophising. You might make a mistake in your job, and then imagine that you'll

lose your job, lose your home and lose your family because of your failure.

Dr Healey says: try allowing your thoughts to come and go on their own without hooking into them. You can do this by imagining your thoughts as leaves floating by on a stream, as cars travelling on the freeway, or as clouds floating in the sky.

- **Shoulding and musting**

Whenever you notice yourself saying "I should" or "must", it's a sign you could be setting yourself unfair expectations.

While sometimes it can be helpful, such as "I should wear safety equipment for this job", it's more usually associated with blame and guilt. "I should be less emotional", or "I shouldn't eat so much."

Dr Healey says: "When you notice yourself *should*-ing or *must*-ing try and bring some flexibility into the rule by softening it to something like 'It would be nice if....', or 'I would prefer it if...'"

- **Overgeneralising**

If you've even grabbed onto one negative thing that happened in the past, and assumed it will always keep happening over and over, you're overgeneralising. It's the classic, "this always happens to me" type of thinking, similar to "I never get things right", or "people always misunderstand me". Words like "always" and "never" are strong clues.

Dr Healey's advice is to notice and challenge the thought. Ask yourself, "Is it true that I never...? Can I think of situations where this hasn't applied?"

## How to catch your thoughts

The problem with thought patterns like unhelpful thinking is that we often don't realise we're doing it.

The key to overcoming unhelpful thinking is to start to tune in and notice the thoughts. This takes practice.

Each day, take 5-10 minutes to practice noticing your thoughts. Go somewhere you won't be disturbed and take some deep breaths to quieten your mind. Then start noticing the thoughts that go through your mind. Try not to judge them or get caught up in them. Simply notice. Then you can start to recognise some of the styles listed here.

This helps you separate yourself from negative thoughts, so you have more choice in how you respond to each thought.

If your automatic thoughts are causing you distress, you don't have to suffer in silence. Check out [beyondblue.org.au](http://beyondblue.org.au) and make an appointment with your doctor or mental health professional to discuss what's going on.

# Do you suffer from comparisonitis?

It can mentally derail you with a one-two punch of envy and shame. And yet it's surprisingly common. Learn how to recognise comparisonitis, and how to manage it.



"All it takes is the hint of someone doing or having something you perceive as 'better' than you, and it hits. A feeling takes over—intense, blinding, gutting. Your brain starts spinning with toxic thoughts about yourself (or others), and you're left feeling ashamed, guilty, and even worthless.

"It's called comparisonitis. And if you've suffered from it, you're NOT alone." – Melissa Ambrosini, in *Comparisonitis*.

## Why do we compare ourselves?

Comparison starts out as a positive technique.

Looking at what other people do has been essential to our survival. As children, we learnt by observing those around us. And hundreds of thousands of years ago, our ancestors learnt how to avoid danger by watching who survived, why and how.

Yet too often, we turn it from a positive into a debilitating negative.

Social media doesn't help. We see everyone's highlights reel—the best moments of their holiday, the most stylish shots of their lounge room, their children's achievements—and we compare it to the worst of our lives. As the saying goes, you're comparing your insides to everyone else's outsides.

Social Comparison Theory is a psychological theory that says there are two kinds of comparison:

1. Upwards: we compare ourselves to those we think are better than us.
2. Downwards: we compare ourselves to those we think are worse off than us, to try to make ourselves feel better.

## How to manage it

In her book, *Comparisonitis*, author and podcaster Melissa Ambrosini provides a four-step formula for freeing yourself from the cycle of negative comparison. She uses the acronym ACES.

- **A is for awareness:** become aware that you're comparing. Sometimes you might notice the feeling, before you realise what you're thinking.
- **C is for choose:** choose a different path. Ask yourself, what do you want to feel instead? You don't have to get stuck in the feelings of unworthiness.
- **E is for eliminate, or exit or exhale:** eliminate the trigger that caused your spiral into comparison. If it was Instagram for example, then log out and move onto something else. It's not about avoiding difficult situations or feelings, but instead noticing them and managing them.
- **S is for shift your state:** take action to change your energy. Get up and do something that lifts your spirits, such as dancing or listening to upbeat music.

## How to use comparison as a gift

Ontological Coach and founder of Being: the Change, Chyonne Kreltshheim, suggests that the process of comparing yourself to others can be turned into a power for good.

She says, "The gift of comparisonitis is that it tells us what is important to us. It is a marker of our needs, values and priorities. It is like a signal being sent up from the depths of our subconscious mind to remind us that something we care about is at stake."

The trick, she says, is to stay curious and ask questions so we can learn from the feelings, and not get caught up in them.

For example, if you're feeling unsettled by a friend's recent promotion, ask yourself, "Why is this bothering me?"

If it's highlighting your own frustration in your current role, you could use it as motivation to take your job to the next level.

"Use the comparisonitis to find out what you really want and invest your energy in moving towards that," says Kreltshheim.

# “It’s in the air”: how indoor air quality affects your health

**Have you ever noticed headaches or an itchy throat when you were in a building, but you felt better a few hours after you left? It might have been the air quality.**

Many people spend more than 90 per cent of their time indoors, at work and at home.

If you’re just visiting the building, the effects tend to fade quickly. But if you live or work in a space with poor indoor air quality, you could end up with chronic symptoms, or Sick Building Syndrome (SBS).

At work, you are likely to be protected by certain environmental standards for the workplace. But there are no controls for residential buildings, so it’s up to you to manage indoor air quality in your own home.

*Your Home*, a website and book produced by the Australian Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, provides a list of the most common problems in homes, and what to do about it. Here are the top three:

## Dust and pet dander

Found in soft carpet, bedding and furniture, dust and dander can aggravate hay fever, asthma, nasal inflammation and eczema.

*Your Home* recommends vacuuming often with a high-quality vacuum cleaner. “Wash

bedding and other soft furnishings frequently, and replace pillows and cushions regularly.”

## Mould

Mould loves damp areas such as bathrooms and windowsills and can aggravate asthma and other respiratory diseases, and can occasionally cause more severe health issues.

*Your Home* says strategies to prevent mould include:

- fixing sources of moisture such as leaks in plumbing or roofing
- venting moisture to the outside (for example, use exhaust fans in kitchens and bathrooms)
- removing condensation and mould as soon as possible.

## Smoke and combustion products

Look out for ash and gases from fireplaces and heaters, gas cookers, fumes from frying, exhaust from cars in adjoining garages, and smoking.

*Your Home* says combustion particles are so small they behave almost like a gas and can enter your home very easily. “When you breathe them in, they travel into the deepest parts of the lungs.”

*Your Home* recommends you:

- ensure plenty of fresh outdoor air is coming into the room
- vent to the outdoors (via a flue, chimney, exhaust fan or range hood)
- keep flues and chimneys clean, and make sure any permanent ventilation openings are not blocked
- ensure doors connecting garages to the house are tightly sealed
- do not use barbecues or camp stoves indoors and never use a gas oven or gas cooker to heat a room.



## Ask an expert about ...

### Q What to do about tension headaches?

The pain runs up your shoulders, your neck and into your temples. It can derail your day and seriously disrupt your focus.

Tension headaches might be very common, but that doesn’t make them any easier to deal with.

So what can you do about them, especially if pain relief like paracetamol doesn’t seem to work?

Migraine & Headache Australia, a division of the Brain Foundation, says to start by addressing what triggered your headache.

“For example, drink water if you are dehydrated, or try relaxation techniques if you are stressed.”

Most tension headaches are caused by stress or fatigue, and while it can be unrealistic to remove stress from your life, you can use stress-management techniques to change how you react to stress.

Try going for a walk in fresh air, or do some neck and shoulder rolls to release the tension.

“Other non-pharmaceutical treatments include applying a heat pack or a neck massage,” says Migraine & Headache Australia.

Try these strategies first, before turning to over-the-counter painkillers.

Migraine & Headache Australia says studies have found aspirin to be most effective, but ibuprofen and paracetamol are also recommended.

A note of warning though: even common medications like ibuprofen and paracetamol can cause problems if overused. “Medication overuse headache can increase the frequency and severity of your headache disorder, and make it less responsive to treatment.”

**18-22 September is Headache and Migraine week**

## App of the month

### Curable

If you've tried everything for your pain but it still remains, the Curable app offers a different approach. By

retraining the brain to process pain differently, it can help you reduce symptoms and gain more control. You can get started for free by chatting with the virtual coach, who will design a custom program tailored to your symptoms and preferences. You'll learn about the latest pain science through bite-sized audio lessons, then apply what you've learned using 100+ science-backed exercises for relief. Depending on your needs, Curable can help you to overcome fear of movement, reduce health anxiety, relax the nervous system, navigate flare-ups, and more.

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

## Sourdough or sourfaux?

New research from the University of New South Wales shows that sourdough may not be the healthiest choice in the bread aisle—unless it's wholegrain.

Sourdough has become increasingly popular of late, partly due to perceptions that it's a healthier choice. With a long fermentation process and small number of additive ingredients this is true—to a point.

The researchers found that in supermarkets, 83 per cent of sourdough products contained ingredients not traditionally found in sourdough, including yeast, emulsifiers, preservatives and stabilisers. Whether or not a product was sourdough didn't make it healthier. The more important factor was the type of flour used, with wholegrain breads being more nutritious than white breads.

"Don't be taken in by the sourdough health halo," said researcher Associate Professor Sara Grafenauer. "If someone is confused about what bread to choose, wholegrain is the best choice."



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## News Bites



## The right way to recycle coffee cups

Garbage or recycling? Where should your takeaway coffee cups go?

Many of us don't get it right with coffee cups.

The general rule is that the plastic lid is generally recyclable everywhere, but not the cups. That's because most disposable paper coffee cups have a plastic liner, making it difficult for recyclers to treat. They also can't be placed in a food organic and garden organic bin.

There are exceptions. Some places have arranged a solution so that cups can be placed in the recycling. It's best to check directly with your local council to see if you can recycle yours at home or through specialised recycling programs.

The best option is the more sustainable one—a reusable cup.

## One in five could have sleep apnoea

Dangerous snoring could affect one in five people, but most sufferers don't know they have a problem. That's the conclusion of a large study on Obstructive Sleep Apnoea (OSA) published in the *European Respiratory Journal Open Research*.

People with OSA often snore loudly, their breathing starts and stops during the night, and they may wake up several times. Not only does this cause tiredness, but it can also increase the risk of high blood pressure, stroke, heart disease and type 2 diabetes.

If you experience daytime sleepiness and snoring, don't ignore it. Book an appointment with your GP who can arrange a test for OSA. If you're diagnosed with the condition, there are treatments and advice that can reduce the health risks and help you get a better night's sleep.

# 1

## THING YOU CAN DO TODAY



### Do a social media cleanse

Like any addictive substance, social media can start to take over your life. Studies show that prolonged use of social media is associated with depression and anxiety. Apart from creating feelings of envy, it can make us feel even more lonely and disconnected—the opposite of what we set out to achieve.

If the idea of going without social media makes you feel uneasy, remember it doesn't have to be an all-or-nothing approach. Instead, try a "cleanse" rather than a "ban", to help you reset your relationship with the platforms.

- Step 1:** Choose the amount of time you'll commit to. This could be a month, or a week, or simply one day.
- Step 2:** Tell people. This helps you stay accountable, and means if close friends and family need you, they can call you.
- Step 3:** Delete all apps from your phone and other devices. Don't just tell yourself you won't look at them. Delete them to prevent you going there out of mindless habit.
- Step 4:** Block the websites too. Don't let yourself login manually via websites.
- Step 5:** Figure out what you'll do instead. Have a game-plan for when you're feeling the itch. Will you go for a walk? Do a breathing exercise? You'll start to realise how much you mindlessly reach for social media, and you'll find healthier alternatives.

## EAT SMARTER

### Eat in season

Do you know which fruits and vegetables are in season right now? Or do you tend to choose the same ones all year round?

In our urban societies, we've lost touch with the natural seasons. We can now get apples, bananas and tomatoes all year round and we never question their availability. Yet we evolved to eat what was seasonal—and it worked.

Before winter, trees would deliver crops of vitamin-C rich food like oranges and lemons, and the ground would be full of nutritious and warming beets and sweet potatoes.

As summer hit, we'd get hydrating melons and juicy berries.

Food that's in season tends to be cheaper, due to supply and demand. It's also better for the environment, because you're not flying or shipping products all the way from the other side of the world hemisphere. But most of all, it's good for your health.

Many fruits and vegetables will have overlapping growing seasons or varieties that are in season at different times. Keep an eye out for signs saying 'local product'.

So what to eat and when?

**Spring:** mandarins, paw paw, apples (spring varieties), beans and peas, onions (especially spring or salad onions), bok choy and choy sum

**Summer:** apples (summer varieties), mangoes, pineapple, bananas, watermelon, asparagus, silverbeet, tomato, corn

**Autumn:** avocado, rhubarb, plums, pomegranates, brussels sprouts, eggplant, celery

**Winter:** kiwifruit, pear, oranges, grapefruit, broccoli, cauliflower, carrots, leek, swede




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