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November 2023

The problem with salt

You need it to survive, but too much and you risk major health issues. We look at where salt is, and how to use less.

Salt is made up of sodium and chloride. Of these two elements, it's the sodium that's the problem. We need a small amount of sodium to stay alive—to conduct nerve impulses, contract and relax muscles, and maintain the proper balance of water and minerals.

But because most of us eat twice the recommended amount of salt, we end up with too much sodium in our blood. The body then holds onto water to dilute the sodium, increasing the volume of blood in the bloodstream. This can lead to high blood pressure, a major risk factor for heart disease, stroke, kidney disease and premature death.

"High blood pressure is the biggest cause of death in the world," said

Graham MacGregor, a UK professor of cardiovascular medicine and chair of the campaigning group Action on Salt, in the *Guardian* online.

"Sixty per cent of strokes are due to high blood pressure, and 50 per cent of all heart disease is due to raised blood pressure."

Even if high blood pressure isn't a concern for you, MacGregor explains that a high salt diet can cause you to excrete more calcium. This makes it more likely that your bones will thin as you age, putting you at risk of osteoporosis.

How to eat less salt

- **Cut back on overly processed and packaged foods.** This is where you'll find 75 per cent of the salt we consume. The worst offenders are salty snack foods, packaged 'ready meals', burgers and pizza, processed meats such as ham and bacon, and certain sauces and condiments.

- **Read labels.** Surprisingly, foods we don't think of as salty can contain high amounts too, such as bread and breakfast cereals, so it pays to compare products. Food labels in many countries list total sodium content, so choose products with less than 400mg sodium per 100g, ideally less than 120mg per 100g.
- **Cook your own meals.** Cooking with fresh, unprocessed ingredients means you can control the amount of salt you use, and eating fewer takeaway and pre-packaged meals will automatically lower your salt intake.
- **Use salt alternatives.** Herbs, spices, lemon juice and vinegars in your cooking can add flavour with less sodium. You can also buy low-sodium versions of traditional high-salt products, like soy sauce. Over time your tastebuds adapt to less salt, and food starts to taste better.



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November is the month for Movember. This annual international event invites men to grow moustaches to raise awareness of men's health issues, such as prostate cancer, testicular cancer, and men's mental health. Find out how you can take part and donate at [movember.com](https://www.movember.com).



How long before I see the **benefits** of exercise?

You've found your motivation. You're going to exercise more! You're determined this time. You have your goals written down, you even have a realistic plan! So you get started. You change your whole day to fit it in. You sacrifice other things. And at the end of the week you step on the scales, or flex your muscles in the mirror—and see nothing has changed.

Were you doing it wrong, you ask yourself? Was it not enough? Or were your expectations not realistic?

If you ask an exercise physiologist how long it takes to see results, a good one will answer, "it depends".

Firstly, it depends on what your goals are. Do you want to lose fat? Gain muscle? Are you training for something specific like a half marathon? Or do you want to lower your risk of type 2 diabetes and other chronic diseases?

Secondly, it depends on what you do. How often are you exercising, and how rigorously, and what kind of movement are you doing?

Thirdly, but equally important, it depends on your current state of health.

Paradoxically, if you're a beginner, you're more likely to see results early, compared to someone who already exercises but wants to boost their results. That's because they're already doing the basics, and your baseline level of fitness is lower.

"But can I have an answer?" you say.

On average, it takes around eight to 12 weeks to see results, says Chris Gagliardi, an American Council on Exercise (ACE)-certified personal trainer.

"When performed appropriately, exercise can lead to physiological changes in about eight to 12 weeks for most people," Gagliardi says. "This does not mean that everyone will respond to exercise in the same way."

Beginners might start seeing changes even earlier, at two to four weeks.

The first changes: how you feel

The first results you'll get are less on how you look, and more on how you feel.

1. Energy: within days

According to Harvard Health, exercising more actually increases your energy levels. Here's why: exertion tells your body to produce more mitochondria inside your muscle cells. "Mitochondria are known as the powerhouses of cells, because they create fuel out of glucose from the food you eat and oxygen from the air you breathe. Having more of them increases your body's energy supply," says Harvard Health.

Plus, exercise boosts oxygen circulation in your body, which in turn supports more mitochondrial energy production, and a boost in energising hormones.

2. Mood: straight away

Ever experienced a runner's high? This is the spike in feel-good endorphins which can

come from a workout. A 2017 study suggests that the best mood booster comes from high-intensity training. However, any form of exercise, such as a brisk walk, gardening or an impromptu dance at home, can help boost your mood straight away.

The second change: your inner workings

The second changes happen behind the scenes, inside you. You can't see it in the mirror, but exercise is changing your whole physiology.

Harry Beresford, an ACE-certified physiologist, explains the inner workings.

3. Blood pressure: a few weeks

Your blood pressure could improve within a few weeks of regular sessions of just 30 minutes exercise, says Beresford.

However, this mostly applies to people with high blood pressure. If your blood pressure is already in the normal range, you may not notice much change.

4. Heart rate: a couple of weeks

For most people, your heart rate goal is to reduce your resting heart rate. This is a good indication of your overall fitness.

Beresford says: "Resting heart rate can



What determines your muscle growth?

Whether or not you “get swole” from a few weeks of workouts depends on a number of factors, including:

Age: It’s true, it is harder after 40. This is when your body starts to lose muscle mass (but that’s all the more reason to build your muscles!).

Sex: It’s not just about hormones (see below); males and females differ in their metabolism, types of muscle fibres, and speed of muscle contractions.

Hormones: Insulin, testosterone and cortisol all play a role. Insulin helps build new muscle and burn fat, while testosterone helps repair muscle proteins.

decrease by up to one beat per minute in sedentary individuals with each week of aerobic training, at least for a few weeks. Other studies have shown smaller reductions with fewer than five beats following up to 20 weeks of aerobic training.”

Your maximum heart rate is unlikely to change. That’s usually based on your age (simply subtract your age from 220 to find your maximum heart rate).

The third changes: the visible ones

5. Weight loss: within weeks

Beresford says that if you want to lose weight, you should aim to be physically active for 60+ minutes per day at a moderate intensity to notice any significant changes.

Keep it mind that weight loss often happens as a percentage of your current body weight. If you have a lot of weight to lose, you’ll see changes faster. If you’re down to your last three to five kilos of target weight loss, it can be a lot harder.

Age is also a factor, along with hormonal influences such as the menopause.

Exercise induced weight loss has been well studied. A 2000 study published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* found that daily

physical activity substantially reduced obesity in a group of 52 men, even without change in diet.

6. Muscle fitness: unpredictable

Beresford says that with regular resistance training, you could expect a 25 to 100 per cent improvement in your muscular fitness within three to six months.

But that’s “fitness”, not size.

Changes in size can vary a lot from person to person, even with the same workout.

“Changes in muscle size from resistance training are highly variable—from no change at all up to roughly 60 per cent increases with a long-term resistance program,” says Beresford.

How to build more muscle

Advice on strength training can be confusing. There’s a lot of talk around supersets and pre-training supplements. In the end though, the key to building muscle is progressive overload. In other words, keep challenging your muscles.

Muscle and Fitness magazine puts it this way:

“The principle is about continuously increasing the demands on the musculoskeletal system so that you can make gains in muscle size, strength, and endurance. In simplest terms: to get bigger and stronger, you must lift more weight and add more volume — making your muscles work harder than what they’re used to.”

To do this, you gradually increase the weight, frequency, or number of repetitions in your strength training routine.

In fact, the same works for increasing your cardiovascular fitness. Keep gradually increasing the intensity or length or difficulty of your run/swim/workout.

It means you need to avoid falling into a routine. If you want to build muscle, you can’t do the same workout week in week out.



How to support a struggling mate

When you notice a friend is going through a tough time, it can be hard to know how to help them. What do you say? What if it opens up a whole can of worms that you can't cope with? What if they get offended?

Here are two expert tools you can use:

1. ALEC

ALEC was developed by R U OK? Day, and is recommended by Movember.

It's a four-step process to help you navigate a conversation with a friend who might be doing it tough.

This explanation of ALEC comes from Movember.

A stands for Ask

Start by asking how he's feeling. It's worth mentioning any changes you've picked up on.

Use a prompt like, "You haven't seemed yourself lately—are you feeling OK?"

You might have to ask twice. People often say "I'm fine" when they're not, so don't be afraid to ask twice. You can use something specific you've noticed, like, "It's just that you haven't been replying to my texts, and that's not like you."

L is for listen

Give him your full attention. Let him know you're hearing what he's saying and you're not judging. You don't have to diagnose problems or offer solutions.

Ask questions along the way, such as, "That can't be easy—how long have you felt this way?"

R U OK? adds this suggestion: Remind them whilst the distress they are feeling at this point in time may be overwhelming, it won't be permanent, and having a plan and support network is a great way of handling the distress.

E is for encourage action

Help him focus on simple things that might improve how he feels. Is he getting enough sleep? Is he exercising and eating well? Maybe there's something that's helped him in the past—it's worth asking.

Suggest that he share how he's feeling with others he trusts, including his GP or a mental health professional. This will make things easier for both of you.

C is for check in

Suggest you catch up soon—in person if you can. If you can't manage a meet-up, make time for a call, or drop him a message. This helps to show that you care; plus, you'll get a feel for whether he's feeling any better.

2. The conversation practice tool

On their website, conversations.movember.com, Movember offer a tool that allows you to practise a conversation ahead of time. You can use suggested prompts, or practise conversations for particular situations such as a relationship breakup.



November is Movember: a month to raise awareness of men's health including mental health and suicide prevention, prostate cancer and testicular cancer.

7 ways to sleep better in the heat



Don't expect the best night's sleep

Sleep is naturally a rollercoaster of light and deep sleep, and short periods of being awake are perfectly normal, says Australia's Sleep Health Foundation. Sleep disruption is even more common during the heat of summer, so don't expect to sleep as well as you do when it's cooler.

Being hot makes you more restless, meaning it's harder to get back to sleep if you do wake up. But don't keep checking the clock as this will cause more concern about how much sleep you're getting.

"Keep your thoughts positive and neutral," says the Sleep Health Foundation. "Don't dwell on things that may make you emotional or make your mind too busy. Breathe slowly and more deeply."

"The key is to stay calm and relaxed and try to achieve a 'dozy' state where you may move gently between sleep and wake."

Try not to get anxious about how you will cope the next day with reduced sleep. You have coped with disrupted sleep before, you may just be doing things in a less than perfect way. And when it's hot, you won't be the only one.

Hot, humid nights don't have to spell disaster for your sleep.

To get deep, restorative sleep your body needs to cool down before bedtime and stay cool. But hot temperatures make this much harder, leaving you waking unrefreshed and irritable. Here are some simple tips to help you beat the heat.

1. Keep curtains and blinds closed. Stop your bedroom getting too hot during the day by closing your curtains or blinds when it's forecast to be hot.

2. Don't exercise close to bedtime. Exercising during the morning or day can benefit your sleep, as it expends energy, which helps you feel more tired in the evening. But exercise too close to bedtime and it can cause your body temperature to spike, making it more difficult to fall asleep when you need to.

3. Take a shower. Cool your body with a cool or tepid shower before bed. If you wake in the night and can't fall back asleep, have another cool shower, advises Australia's Sleep Health Foundation.

4. Use a fan. The ideal sleeping temperature is around 17 to 19 degrees Celsius, says the Sleep Health Foundation. Unless you have air-conditioning, this is hard to achieve, so you'll need to have air flowing over your skin to offload heat from your body. Ceiling fans are useful here, but

any type of small or pedestal fan will make a difference.

5. Open a window. An open window can help circulate the air as it cools overnight, but unless you have a flyscreen it can also let in mosquitoes and flies. Hanging a wet sheet in front of an open window will cool the air entering your bedroom (and may prevent mozzies from entering too).

6. Reduce bedding and bed clothes. Expose as much of your skin to the air as possible with light clothing such as sleeveless tops, loose-fitting shorts, underwear or nothing at all if that's comfortable.

Invest in sheets and pillowcases made from natural fibres like cotton, linen or bamboo, which are more breathable than those made from synthetic fabric.

If you like sleeping with a sheet, have it loosely draped over the bed so you can stick your feet out in the middle of the night—this can actually cool you down! Your temperature reaches a low point between 3 and 5am, so keep a light blanket close by.

7. Stay hydrated. If you can't lower the temperature of your room your body will cool you down through sweating. Make sure you go to bed well hydrated, and keep some water near your bed to make sure you can replenish the liquid you're losing.

Your food safety questions answered

Food poisoning is an awful experience, one that affects an estimated 600 million people worldwide every year. How do you avoid becoming one of them? We answer some common concerns.

Food poisoning isn't that dangerous, is it?

Don't be fooled. In most cases symptoms are unpleasant but mild, usually stomach cramps, vomiting and/or diarrhoea. But in extreme cases, food poisoning can cause reactive arthritis, kidney or nerve damage, hepatitis and even death. In Australia it causes an estimated 47, The World Health Organization estimates that it causes 420 000 deaths every year.

According to the NSW Food Authority some people are affected more by the symptoms of food poisoning, including pregnant women, people older than 65 with underlying health conditions, and people with compromised immune systems.

Which foods are likely to cause food poisoning?

Most food poisoning is caused by harmful bugs (pathogens) getting into your food. Some foods are more problematic than others—raw or undercooked meat, poultry, eggs, and seafood are high risk foods and often the first things you think of when you cast your mind back to what you've eaten.

But bean or seed sprouts, such as alfalfa, have also been implicated in food poisoning outbreaks. Cooked rice is a food poisoning risk too, especially when it's left unrefrigerated for more than two hours, as is common with rice salads for instance.

Any type of food can get contaminated with pathogens from dirty water, while being prepared by someone who is ill or has poor hand hygiene, or from cross contamination where bacteria is spread between food surfaces, utensils and equipment.

I hate using the fridge at work. Am I being too cautious?

No, says the Australian Food Safety Information Council. "Workplace fridges are a food safety risk. They are often badly packed, rarely cleaned and the wrong temperature."

To be safe, fridges should be kept at or below 5°C (41°F). It's common that they are

warmer than this, so ask your OH&S officer to purchase a fridge thermometer to check the temperature.

All items in the fridge should be kept covered, in separate containers and anything which may drip should be on the bottom shelf. Spills should be wiped up immediately and the entire fridge cleaned often. Make sure you use any perishable leftovers stored in the fridge within two to three days.

Add fridge sorting and cleaning to kitchen duties. Someone needs to be responsible, otherwise food is forgotten, can quickly spoil, and food poisoning bacteria can grow.



Ask an expert about ...

Q. How do I keep foods safe?

According to the Australian Food Safety Information Council, there are four things to remember: Clean, Chill, Cook and Separate.

Clean: Before cooking, wash your hands and all utensils and cutting boards in warm soapy water and thoroughly dry.

Chill: refrigerate meat, poultry, dairy foods, vegetables, salad ingredients etc as soon as possible after purchase. Refrigerate leftovers promptly, and store cooked food in covered containers before putting in the fridge to cool. You ideally want the main

compartment to be around 4 or 5°C or about 40°F (buy a fridge thermometer to check). The door is usually the warmest part of the fridge, and the top shelf the warmest shelf. If in any doubt about the safety of a food, throw it out.

Cook: Properly cooking food minimises the risk of food poisoning. Cook chicken, minced meats, hamburgers, stuffed meats and sausages right through until they reach 75°C using a meat thermometer.

Keep and serve hot food at 60°C (140°F) or hotter. If you're keeping it warm for someone put it in the oven at 60°C or 100°C (210°F) if that's as low as your oven

will go. If you're using frozen meat, always defrost it in the fridge before cooking.

Separate: to avoid cross contamination, keep raw and cooked foods separate when storing and preparing. Put raw meats and poultry in the bottom of the fridge so the juices don't contaminate foods on lower shelves and never put cooked meat back on the plate the raw meat was on.

You can download food safety posters [here](https://foodsafety.asn.au/resources-to-download)

foodsafety.asn.au/resources-to-download

App of the month

November

Kick off your Movember journey with the official app, designed so you get more from the month formerly known as November. Support your fundraising efforts with social interactions and closer connection to the Mo community. User friendly for all newcomers.

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

News Bites

The good news or the bad?

Positive news can provide an emotional buffer against negative news, according to a study published in the open-access journal *PLOS ONE*.

In the study, people were split into different groups. The group only given the bad news report about a terrorist attack or similar showed significant increases in negative emotion and decreases in positive emotion, as well as more negative perceptions of humanity and society.

By contrast, those people in the group who saw news about human kindness after consuming the bad news felt fewer negative emotions and retained more belief in the goodness of humanity.

The study authors hope their results will push the media to incorporate more positive coverage.

"News stories featuring the best of humanity take the sting out of items exploring the worst of humanity. This allows people to maintain a core belief that is crucial for good mental health: that the world and the people in it are fundamentally good."



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Website: www.healthworks.com.au

Editorial Team:

Editor: Jenny Boss MHumNutr

Deputy Editor: Kylie Singh

Subscriptions: Janelle Gibb

Email: well@healthworks.com.au

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The best exercise for reducing blood pressure

If you're looking to reduce your blood pressure, the traditional guidance has been to take up walking, running, cycling or other forms of aerobic exercise. But this advice is based on old data, so researchers analysed 270 clinical trials reporting the effects of exercise lasting two or more weeks on resting blood pressure.

The result? They found that while cardio, squats, press-ups and high-intensity interval (HIIT) training exercises are indeed effective in reducing blood pressure, static isometric exercises which involve engaging muscles without moving, such as wall sits and planks, were the best.

Is plant-based always better?

Limiting or avoiding animal food products is a popular dietary pattern, often chosen for the health benefits. But just because a food is made from plants doesn't make it healthy.

A study that analysed the reported dietary intake of over 126,000 participants found that a diet based on whole or minimally processed plant foods (wholegrains, fruit, vegetables, nuts, legumes) was associated with a lower risk of death, cancer and cardiovascular disease.

On the other hand, a diet based on plant foods that were highly processed (including refined grains, processed potatoes, sugary drinks, fruit juices, confectionery and desserts) was associated with a higher risk. These foods may be plant-based, but the sugar, salt and other additives made them not so healthy. Plants or not, the degree of processing is what really counts.

1

THING YOU CAN DO TODAY

Swap Netflix for a book



When was the last time you read a book? If you're like many adults, the answer is "more than a year ago" according to the 2021 Australian National Reading Survey.

This means many people are missing out on the immense emotional, mental and even physical health benefits of reading. Here are just three reasons to swap Netflix for a book this week:

1. Reading reduces stress

A 2009 study found reading for pleasure for just 30 minutes a day can reduce the physical and emotional signs of stress.

2. Reading strengthens connections in your brain

Reading creates more neurons in the brain, through a process called neurogenesis.

3. Reading helps you stay sharp as you age

According to the findings of a 14 year study that concluded in 2020, people who read one or more times a week are less likely to have cognitive decline.

And if you're choosing between reading or watching a screen, consider this: Studies show that binge watching TV is associated with reduced brain function in mid-life. Plus, it's associated with lower sperm count and higher risk of type 2 diabetes.

EAT SMARTER

Capsicum: which colour is better?

You're in the produce aisle and you're faced with a choice of red, yellow or green capsicums—possibly even orange too. Which one gives you the most nutritional bang for your buck?

Firstly, it's good to know that these are all the same vegetable: red, yellow and orange capsicums are just riper versions of green capsicums. They all have the same macronutrients, as in fibre, protein, carbohydrates.

However, the micronutrients do vary.

In a battle of the capsicums, red would win on phytonutrients and vitamins. Compared to green capsicums, red capsicums have almost 11 times more beta-carotene and one and a half times more vitamin C.

The yellow ones still have more vitamin C than the green ones, but less than the red version.

In short, red, yellow and orange capsicums have higher levels of vitamins and antioxidants, but they are often more expensive. Green capsicums are still a very good source of fibre along with vitamins A, C and E, plus iron and zinc.

Not sure what a capsicum is? They're also known as bell peppers, sweet peppers or peppers in many places

