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**HEALTH & SAFETY
NEWSLETTER**

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April 2024

When should you really **call in sick?**

You wake up with a cough and a work deadline. What should you do? Early in the pandemic, the guidelines were clear. Now it's a little trickier to know when you should stay in bed and rest, log on to work from home or come into the office.

What are the problems with showing up to work sick?

The biggest issue is spreading your illness to your co-workers. A mild infection for you may lead to a significant illness for a colleague. You may also be less productive than usual and by 'pushing through', you might prolong your illness.

When should I rest vs work from home?

If you can work remotely and only have a mild viral illness, you can often complete some work at home. It's important to balance your capacity to perform some work tasks versus your need for rest. If

you have a headache, fever or 'brain fog', you are better off taking a sick day. Rest is vital to recovery; it helps your immune system fight infection and will shorten your recovery time.

Generally, you are most infectious early in your illness. Experts recommend staying home until you no longer have symptoms and feel well. Measures that were in place during the pandemic still help curb the spread of illnesses: social distancing, hand washing, virtual meetings, covering coughs and sneezes, wearing a mask, and vaccinating (for COVID-19 and the flu) will help keep us all healthy.

Tips to help you decide when to work and when to rest

- 1.** If you have a fever, cough or cold symptoms, stay home. Pushing through at work is NOT a badge of honour!
- 2.** If you feel well enough to login remotely to complete some work, go ahead!
- 3.** If you have a headache, fever, fatigue or brain fog, rest.
- 4.** Supporting peers who may be coming into work despite being unwell is also important. Ask them, 'What can I help with so you can go home and rest?'



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April is Parkinson's Awareness month, and World Parkinson's Day takes place on 11 April every year, to raise awareness of Parkinson's. Parkinson's is the fastest growing neurological condition in the world. Everyone has their own set of symptoms and deals with them in different ways. For more information about Parkinson's disease, visit Parkinson's Australia at parkinsons.org.au or Parkinson's Foundation at parkinson.org.

Are you a morning mover or afternoon shaker?



There is boundless research on the best type, duration, intensity and frequency of exercise, but until now, not so much on the timing of it. What is clear though is that whatever time of day we get moving, exercise is good for us. Here's a quick refresher on just some of the benefits.

1. Heart health

Exercise improves overall cardiovascular health and reduces your risk of heart disease. It strengthens your heart muscle, lowers blood pressure, and improves circulation.

2. Chronic illness management

Regular physical activity is key to managing chronic conditions such as diabetes and osteoporosis.

3. Mood booster

Exercise releases endorphins—your body's natural stress relievers. Studies have shown a clear benefit of regular exercise in mild anxiety and depression.

4. Strength and endurance

Consistent exercise will strengthen your muscles and bones as well as improve your endurance—all vital for healthy ageing.

Morning movers

One clear advantage of exercising in the morning is that you are less likely to skip a workout. At the start of the day, the usual post-work excuses just don't hold. Help to limit other possible reasons for skipping a morning workout by getting an early night, laying out your exercise clothes the night before and making sure you choose an exercise you enjoy for your early morning workouts.

Many people worry they aren't natural early risers, but regular morning exercise can help adjust your circadian rhythm, helping you with that early wake-up.

Studies suggest that morning exercisers may experience a post-exercise reduction in blood pressure that may continue throughout the day.

And as a bonus, starting the day on a positive note with a workout can boost your mood and productivity.

Afternoon activators

Research suggests that physical performance indicators, such as strength and endurance, might peak in the afternoon. If you're training with personal bests in mind, shifting to afternoon workouts might be for you.

Afternoon exercise can serve as an effective stress relief valve, especially

Unlocking the consistency code

Whether it be morning 'sun salutations' or an evening jog, there are ways to build a consistent exercise routine. Here are some tips:

- 1. Set realistic goals.** Becoming an Olympic swimmer might be a fun idea, but it isn't a reasonable expectation for most. Stay realistic to avoid discouragement.
- 2. Start slow and build up.** Want to start running? Great! Start with a short walk-run, not a long-distance dash.
- 3. Consider your personal style.** Are you a lone wolf or do you prefer to be part of a pack?
- 4. Remember rest and recovery.** You are not a machine. Rest and recovery are essential to avoid your gains being undone by sickness or injury.
- 5. Ditch perfectionism.** We all have that friend who eagerly starts something, misses a day and then gives it up altogether. You are human—you will miss days and have days where you don't hit personal bests. That's OK. Keep going!

after a hard day. If you're looking to switch out some of your less healthy coping mechanisms, an end-of-day workout could be a game-changer.

Consistency is the winner

When it comes to exercise, the real winner is consistency. The important thing is to find the time that suits your schedule and lifestyle and stick to it. The benefits of exercise are not limited to a specific time of day, so get out there, get moving and step into a healthier you!

Is it worth tracking your glucose levels?



Your smartwatch can tell you your step count, blood pressure and heart rate, even your blood oxygen. Do you need a device that monitors your blood sugar too?

If you have diabetes, the answer is clear. You need to keep an eye on your blood glucose levels to ensure they don't go too high or too low. One way to do this is with a continuous glucose monitor (CGM), a small device inserted under your skin that works with an app on your phone to measure your glucose levels throughout the day and night.

CGMs reduce the frequency of daily finger prick blood glucose checks and provide valuable information if you have diabetes. But do people without diabetes need to be as vigilant about their blood sugar levels?

Many manufacturers think so, and are marketing their devices to the general public with the promise that users can enjoy sustainable weight loss and improved wellbeing by seeing how their bodies respond to different foods. In Australia, one company says it already has 4000 users.

For people without diabetes, the evidence is patchy.

One study found that among 153 people who didn't have diabetes, about 96 per cent of the time blood sugar levels were normal or nearly so.

"Many companies that sell CGMs and the apps are taking data from their customers and making generalisations, and that's just inappropriate," says Danielle Omar, a registered dietitian.

One example is eating oats. Some people were seeing data that showed their blood sugar spiked after eating oatmeal. "But that's just the way your body works; you just ate a carbohydrate," says Omar. Your blood sugar level will also depend what kind of oats you ate (steel cut, rolled or instant) and what you added to them. There are many factors that could spike your blood sugar, she explains.

Your body has a number of checks and balances to deal with blood glucose levels that go up and down, releasing various hormones that either trigger uptake of glucose into your cells, or the release of glucose from your liver.

Detecting prediabetes

Even though most of us handle blood glucose fluctuations just fine, there are some of us who don't.

About 9 percent of the world's population is estimated to have impaired glucose tolerance (prediabetes) and are at higher risk of developing type 2 diabetes. If you have prediabetes, your blood glucose is slightly high, but not high enough to be defined as diabetes. It's recommended that you have your blood sugar tested every three years or so, more frequently if you are considered at high risk of diabetes.

Using a CGM might allow earlier diagnosis of prediabetes or diabetes, which could be helpful if you are at higher risk due to family history or other factors. But at the moment, many experts believe the technology needs to be a little more reliable. Readings differ between CGM devices and there is the danger of false low readings. They can also be tricky to use and are expensive.

In the meantime, you can help keep your blood glucose within a healthy range by choosing low GI (glycaemic index) foods and sticking to a diet that's low in ultra-processed foods.

Why do we resist rest?

Rest is sleep's poor cousin. Something to fit in when we can but rarely a priority. Yet taking time out for ourselves every day brings many health benefits of its own.

Busyness, or having lots of demands on your time, has become something of badge of honour.

Asked how we are, we're as likely to answer 'busy' as we are 'good' or 'fine'—almost like we're assuring ourselves we're in demand and important, says psychologist and BBC radio presenter Claudia Hammond, author of *The Art of Rest: how to find respite in the modern age*.

And research led by Columbia marketing professor Silvia Bellezza shows that people perceive others who are busy—and who use products indicating they're busy (like a Bluetooth headset for multitasking)—to be important and impressive.

This cult of busyness has a downside, says Hammond, and it's that we struggle to fit in rest.

What exactly is rest?

Rest is anything that helps you to relax, switch off from worrying, take a break, and take a pause, says Hammond on the CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Company) radio show *Tapestry*. Rest can be different for everyone. It can be active (going for a walk or run) or passive (reading or listening to music).

Rest isn't the same as sleep. Sleep is an essential function. Without it, every system of your body is affected, from your cognitive function to your immunity. When you're sleep deprived, your body will eventually force you to sleep.

Resting, on the other hand, isn't valued nearly as much as sleep. It's often something we fit in at the end of the day if we can, when everything else is done.

Yet 'waking restfulness' is good for us – physically, by reducing blood pressure and heart rate, and mentally and cognitively, through boosting mood, memory and our ability to concentrate. Rest allows you to take a break when you are awake to let your mind shut off.

What's stopping us resting?

Rest doesn't always come easily. You may put up barriers that prevent you from taking time out, says PsychCentral. Some common ones include:

- Believing rest is the same as being lazy, and feeling guilty about it.
- Being a perfectionist and setting yourself impossibly hard goals.

"Even though we may not recognise it as perfectionism, at times we are desperately trying so hard to be perfect by doing, accomplishing, and achieving everything we set our minds to," says psychologist Dr Kelly Vincent. This may affect your ability to rest, she says, because of a fear that your life will spin out of control if you engage in a period of mental rest.

- Being uncomfortable or afraid to rest. You may find you get bored when resting, or that having a rest means you have to stop doing whatever it is you're doing and fear this will set you back.
- Having invasive thoughts. Ruminating and worrying can stop you fully resting. You may worry about getting all your work done, what you're going to have for dinner, even what others think about you resting!

The Rest Test

Claudia Hammond led a team in a 2019 study called *The Rest Test*, the largest global survey on rest ever conducted. The online study of 18,000 people from 135 countries found that regardless of income, two-thirds of people said they wanted more rest.



Hammond says that while often we are very busy and have too much to do, there is pressure to be achieving all the time. We live in an era with information at the touch of a button, and our social media feeds are full of people doing amazing things.

For many people in *The Rest Test* survey, the prospect of switching off and resting was associated with anxiety and guilt.

“We set ourselves high standards,” says Hammond. “We want to be fit, look a certain way, or cook amazing meals for our guests.”

Even during the pandemic there was almost a pressure to do lockdown well, she says. “Pressure to learn new things, make amazing sourdough bread—you needed some sort of achievement. Whereas the second time we had lockdown it was enough to just get through.

“And I think the other thing is that the boundaries between work or not working have become really blurred, because technology has allowed them to do that,” says Hammond. “With so many people working from home during the pandemic, that’s only increased.”

How much rest?

If you’re thinking to yourself “well, I can’t fit in any time to rest because I’m too busy,” Hammond says that we all have wasted moments in our day that we could reframe as resting.

This could be time commuting on a train or bus, time spent in a queue, or minutes spent waiting for someone or something. Hammond says she now reframes wasted time as rest by thinking “yeah, I’m going to rest now for 10 minutes, I’ve got a gift now of a break.”

When you’re working and caring—whether for children or older relatives—carving out rest time is difficult, Hammond admits. She recommends prescribing yourself at least 15 minutes a day of something you find restful. This could be having a coffee in your garden or balcony, going for a walk, reading, or watching a favourite TV show.

Top 10 most restful activities

According to *The Rest Test* these are the top 10 activities people find the most restful:

1. Reading
2. Being in a natural environment
3. Being alone
4. Listening to music
5. Doing nothing in particular
6. Walking
7. Taking a shower or bath
8. Daydreaming
9. Watching TV
10. Meditation or practising mindfulness

Stepping safely: smarter ways to prevent slips, trips and falls

Slips, trips and falls are some of the most common workplace hazards and can result in serious injuries.

To keep you and your colleagues safe, here are some tips to minimise the risk of accidents at work.

1. Beware of spills

Whether it's your morning green juice or a rogue plastic bag, unexpected spills on the floor are common causes of slips. Where possible, clean up small spills immediately to prevent accidents, otherwise let someone know so the cleaning crew can be called.

2. Keep your space tidy

Not only does keeping your desk drawers closed look neat, it also stops them becoming trip hazards. Keep things like handbags off the floor as well.

3. Mind the cords

Always use the power point closest to you and avoid trailing cables across walkways to prevent tripping hazards.

4. Pick up after yourself

A moment spent to scoop up stray pens can save you and your co-workers from potential slips or trips.

5. Use handrails on stairs

This is not a suggestion to slide down the handrails, fun as it may be! Always use handrails when going up or down stairs.

It helps keep your balance and you're less likely to fall.

6. Maintain clear sightlines

Also known as watch where you are going! When carrying anything large, if you can't see past your load, find another way to move it.

7. Furniture is not a ladder

Don't be tempted to save time and climb on the shelves or other furniture to reach high shelves. Do yourself a favour, get a ladder!

8. Mind your load

Be careful on stairs and uneven surfaces, especially if you're carrying something.

9. Watch your step

Keep hallways and walkways free from clutter. In rainy weather, take extra care

entering the workplace as slips are more likely. Don't rush. We are all busier than ever before, but try and slow down—hurrying and frustration are big human factors in slips, trips and falls. Always use appropriate footwear with slip-resistant soles for added grip.

10. Don't get distracted!

Mobile phones make it easy to use the time moving between spaces to catch up on emails or make phone calls, but distraction is a significant contributor to slips, trips and falls. Remember that when you're tired, you're more easily distracted and prone to accidents.

These simple actions don't take much time or effort but they make a big difference when it comes to keeping you and your colleagues safe.



Ask an expert about ...

How can I prepare for extreme weather at work?

Our changing climate is causing more severe and unpredictable weather, including storms and flooding.

Australian organisation WorkSafe Northern Territory (NT WorkSafe) provides expert advice on how to prepare for and manage extreme weather.

Firstly, find out what plans your organisation has in place.

"All work sites must have adequate resources, facilities and procedures in place to maintain effective emergency

management before, during and after a severe weather events," says NT WorkSafe.

"Remember the time to prepare is not when an event strikes and being unprepared can pose a safety risk and threatens your organisation as a whole. Having strategies in place to help cope with these events will make it easier for your work site to minimise losses, maintain business continuity and recover quickly."

Even if you're not a manager, you may be consulted on plans and assessments, and it's likely there is opportunity for you to be involved in discussions about emergency management.

Start by identifying the events and situations that may occur in your region, so you can determine the right site preparation and response.

NT WorkSafe says, "Using a team approach (i.e. consult with workers) to review your Emergency Plan will ensure that a majority of the risks are identified and controlled. Don't forget you will need to assign responsibilities for actions to individuals and ensure that completed actions are tracked."

28 April is World Day for Safety and Health at Work. This year, the theme is the impacts of climate change on occupational safety and health

App of the month

Body by Blogilates

The Blogilates App offers free workouts, challenges, a social community and a place to log your fitness and wellness journey. You

can access the workouts without creating an account, and the app contains various levels of workouts that lean toward Pilates moves and calisthenics, although there are also exercises that mix in weights and some cardio. You can sign up for challenges and try to complete a series of workouts over several days, find healthy recipes and more, all for free.

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

You're never too old to lift weights

Building muscle isn't just for the young, says a new study. Contrary to what we might think, people in their 60s, 70s and beyond can safely start lifting weights and rapidly build substantial muscle mass, strength and mobility.

The study found that even people in their 80s and 90s who hadn't weight trained before could gain significant muscle after a supervised program of lifting weights three times a week.

"It is often assumed that the oldest old, or, say, people past the age of 80, are less likely to be able to gain muscle mass and strength," said Luc van Loon, a professor of human biology at Maastricht University, and senior author of the new study. "But muscle tissue is constantly turning over as long as we live," he said.

It may be unrealistic for some older people with serious illnesses or disabilities to begin weight training. If you're older and would like to start any exercise routine, talk with your doctor.

The key takeaway from the study though is that "You are never too old to start exercising," said van Loon.



News Bites



How love scrambles the brain

Love is blind, the saying goes, and thanks to an Australian study we are a step closer to understanding why.

We know that romantic love causes the release of the so-called 'love hormone' oxytocin, which is responsible for the euphoria we feel when falling in love. Researchers from the Australian National University, the University of Canberra and the University of South Australia have now measured how a part of the brain works to put our loved one on a pedestal in that first flush of romance.

The study found that romantic love is linked to changes in behaviour as well as emotion. "The way that loved ones take on special importance is due to oxytocin combining with dopamine, a chemical that our brain releases during romantic love," says University of Canberra academic and UniSA Adjunct Associate Professor Dr Phil Kavanagh. "Essentially love activates pathways in the brain associated with positive feelings."

The next stage of the research will investigate the differences between men and women in their approach to love, and a worldwide survey on the different types of romantic lovers.

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Being in nature saves on health dollars

What are the health benefits of being in nature worth in monetary terms? A study from the UK calculated it at £356 (AU\$680) an adult in 2020, when people spent more time in nature during the first year of lockdown than they have since.

The Office for National Statistics calculated the associated health benefits and the monetary value of these in terms of how much it would cost the National Health Service to provide the equivalent health benefits.

"There are health and wellbeing benefits to spending time in nature," said Dom Higgins of The Wildlife Trusts, with one study suggesting that people who spend an average of two hours or more a week in nature over the course of a year were more likely to report being in good, or very good, health.

1 THING YOU CAN DO TODAY

Make a meal plan



Combine decision fatigue with the cost of living crisis and it's easy to see how your stress levels peak around mealtimes. Making a meal plan might help.

Meal planning involves creating your weekly food menu ahead of time. Whilst there are plenty of people offering templates and 'hacks' at a cost, getting started can be as simple as using a pencil and the back of an envelope.

What are the benefits of meal planning?

Meal planning reduces the mental load of keeping yourself and your family fed, it lessens food waste and overall saves you time and money (no more after-work trips to the supermarket!).

Meal planning has also been shown to increase the diversity and quality of food people eat.

Easy ways to get started

- 1. Tackle dinners first.** These are the meals that often end up as take-away if you leave the decision to the last minute.
- 2. If planning for a family,** choose several meals you know are well received, then ask the kids or your partner to suggest something for the other nights.
- 3. Make your shopping list as you go.** Online orders will save you even more time and reduce impulse buys.
- 4. Try doubling recipes.** Leftovers can make great lunches or can be labelled and put in the freezer for another night. 'Future you' will thank you!
- 5. Don't expect perfection, you're human!** If you skip a day, don't worry. Just pick up where you left off and keep on going.

EAT SMARTER

Apples

There's a certain pleasure in biting into a crisp apple, juice spraying. It's a childhood memory for many of us.

We now know the skin and those juices contain antioxidants and fibre that fight many diseases of the modern world.

Apples contain antioxidants called polyphenols, along with pectin which is a fibre and a prebiotic..

What do these things do?

Heart health:

The polyphenols in apples are thought to reduce both total and LDL (or 'bad') cholesterol. They improve blood vessel health, which may reduce high blood pressure and lower the risk of stroke and heart disease.

Appetite

It was previously thought that the high water and fibre content helped us feel satiated after eating an apple. It's now thought that polyphenols also play a role in appetite suppression.

Gut microbiome

Recent research has shown the importance of the gut microbiome in overall health. Pectin is a prebiotic; it fosters growth of 'good' gut bacteria. A healthy microbiome is associated with a lower cancer risk, reduced risk of some inflammatory diseases and improved mental wellbeing.

Get those benefits!!

Leave the skin on! Half the fibre and nearly all the polyphenols are contained in the skin. Eat the skin to get the most out of your snack.



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