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**HEALTH & SAFETY
NEWSLETTER**

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FEBRUARY 2021

Emailing do's and don'ts

Emails were designed to be quick, simple and clear. Are yours?

It might be time to ask yourself if your emails are sending the wrong message.

Have you ever sent an email in the heat of the moment? Or received an email so long that you stopped reading it halfway through? Avoid unwittingly annoying your colleagues or clients by following these rules of email etiquette.

Do:

1. Pay attention to the subject line. Avoid general words like 'Hi', 'FYI' or 'Touching Base', and instead write a clear concise subject line that reflects the body of the email, such as 'Meeting date changed'.

2. Limit your emails to a few short paragraphs. "If you routinely send long, wordy emails, it's likely that some of your recipients will start tuning out," says workplace adviser

and consultant Alison Green, author of the blog Ask a Manager. "If you need to communicate a large amount of information, email probably isn't the way to do it."

3. Make it clear what you'd like the recipient to do. Most of us receive an enormous number of emails, so help the recipient know exactly what you want them to do, says Green. Do you need information or input? Do you want them to take a particular action? Or are you just updating them, so you don't require any action?

Don't:

1. Hit 'Reply all'. Unless the whole group needs to read your response – such as an ongoing group discussion – avoid using

'Reply All' advises Green. "More than 20 years after email came into popular use, offices are still battling epic reply-all failures that flood people's mailboxes," she says.

2. Use lots of CAPS and exclamation marks!! Using capital letters can be intimidating to the recipient, as it sounds like you're yelling, while lots of exclamation marks at the end of sentences can come across as overly emotional or immature.

3. Get angry or snarky in an email. Email isn't well suited to conflict, as it's easy for your tone to come across much more harshly than it would in person, says Green. If you sense yourself becoming frustrated, it's best that you back away from your email and have a real conversation. ✕



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February 4 is World Cancer Day.

This event empowers communities and individuals across the world to show support and raise the profile of cancer in a positive and inspiring way. The campaign theme for World Cancer Day 2019-2021 is 'I Am and I Will'. Whoever you are, you have the power to reduce the impact of cancer for yourself, the people you love and the world.

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When you're **the only one who can hear it**



It can be distressing, it affects one in three of us, and while there are many treatments, as yet there's no cure.

Tinnitus is often described as “ringing in the ears”, but many people experience it as a whistling, whooshing or buzzing sound in their head.

It can come and go, or for many people it's incessant. As a result, tinnitus can cause significant distress, affecting your ability to socialise, work and sleep.

While there's no cure yet, there are many effective treatments. Here we answer the top questions about this common but deeply frustrating condition.

Who gets tinnitus?

Around one in three people in Australia will suffer from tinnitus at some point in their life, and about one in six will have it constantly. It mostly affects people over 55, but you can get it at any age.

What causes tinnitus?

Tinnitus is not a disease, but it is a symptom of other medical conditions. It can be caused by neurological damage,

vascular disease, high blood pressure, hyperthyroidism and long-term exposure to loud noise.

Short-term tinnitus can be due to wax build-up in the ears, or even a reaction to medication such as aspirin or antibiotics.

What can I do about it?

Although tinnitus can't be seen or heard by others, it can be diagnosed through hearing tests, so see your doctor or an audiologist.

Your doctor may be able to identify the underlying cause of the tinnitus and find ways to manage that. For example, if your tinnitus is caused by medication, they might suggest switching to another type.

You can also try the many proven treatments and therapies. While these therapies can't get rid of tinnitus, they can help reduce the perceived severity and make it easier to deal with. ✕

What are the treatments for tinnitus?

• Hearing aids

Around 90 per cent of people with tinnitus also have hearing loss, but even if you're in the other 10 per cent, a hearing aid can still help.

• Sound therapies

External sounds can help mask, distract or help your brain ignore your particular tinnitus noise.

• Emotional therapies

The psychological impact of tinnitus is significant, and therapies which help you manage the stress and distress it causes can make a huge difference.

• Wellness and lifestyle

Stress, alcohol and caffeine can make tinnitus worse, and many people have found that changes such as healthier diet, exercise, meditation and yoga can help.

Why you **should start your day** with a **coffee**

When to be cautious with coffee

- **If you're pregnant:** Food Standards Australia & New Zealand recommend you have no more than 200mg caffeine (a maximum of two cups of coffee) a day because of a potential higher risk of miscarriage in women who consume too much caffeine. These recommendations are similar to those given by health organisations in most countries.
- **If you have high blood pressure:** don't overdo your coffee habit as caffeine can temporarily increase blood pressure, although the long-term effects are not known.
- **If you have trouble sleeping:** limit coffee drinking to before lunch. The half-life of caffeine – the time it takes your body to eliminate 50 per cent of what's consumed – can vary between people and may last anywhere from two to 10 hours. This means it can still affect you long after you've finished your last cup.

Do you ever wonder if your morning caffeine habit could be harming your health? Maybe it's time to discover the truth about the popular drink.

Many of us love coffee. Its caffeine is a stimulant that helps us feel less tired and more alert, even improving mood, reaction times and general brain function.

For a long time coffee has been the victim of mixed messages. "One day coffee is reported as being good for us, and the next day it is harmful," says nutrition research scientist Dr Tim Crowe on his blog *Thinking Nutrition*.

But in the last few years a number of large studies have reassured us that moderate coffee drinking is not only safe, but might actually be beneficial.

Coffee lowers disease risk

In 2016 a large scientific review looked at over 1200 studies on coffee and disease, including cancer, heart disease, type 2 diabetes, liver disease, neurological disorders and longevity. For most of the health outcomes, the benefits of three to four cups of coffee a day (moderate

consumption) outweighed the risks.

For anyone at risk of developing type 2 diabetes, one of the world's fastest growing chronic conditions, the news about coffee is good. "Regular coffee drinkers have up to a two-thirds reduced risk of developing this condition," says Dr Crowe.

Are you concerned about coffee's supposed links with cancer? In a June 2016 report, the World Health Organisation officially lifted coffee from the list of potentially carcinogenic foods, while the World Cancer Research Fund International concluded that coffee consumption was linked with a lower risk of several types of cancer, including liver and endometrial.

Coffee drinkers live longer

A 2018 study that tracked half a million UK residents, published in the journal *JAMA Internal Medicine*, found those who drank coffee had a lower risk of dying of any cause.

Because this is a correlation study, we can't say for certain that coffee was the cause of the lower risk of death, but other large studies have similar findings.

What's the good stuff in coffee?

While some of its health effects are related to caffeine, coffee is more than simply a stimulant. Both decaf and regular coffee contain a host of antioxidants including plant compounds called phytochemicals, many of which are likely to have health benefits. In fact, one estimate has found that the typical United States diet provides more antioxidants from coffee than from fruit and vegetables combined. Coffee also contains several nutrients including riboflavin, niacin, magnesium and potassium.

These aren't all reasons to start drinking coffee if you don't already, but they do suggest that you can safely enjoy, and benefit from, three to four cups a day. ✕

How meditation can change your life... and how it can't.

It has been heralded as the life-changing remedy for all mental, emotional and physical conditions. Yet for many of us, its benefits remain out of reach. Why?

Is it because it's too hard?

Because we're just not doing it right?

Or because the benefits aren't as big as "they" said?"

Here we explore the proven benefits of meditation along with the challenges that you may find in practising it.

What meditation CAN do

Meditation, along with its offshoot mindfulness, is proven to boost your mental and physical health.

Thousands of studies suggest it can help you reduce stress, improve sleep, increase focus and improve anxiety, depression and insomnia, and even reduce blood pressure.

There are too many studies to go into here, but let's focus on some of the most popular benefits:

• Stress reduction

Meditation is scientifically proven to reduce stress within eight weeks of regular practice.

Sara Lazar, a neuroscientist at Harvard Medical School, found that meditating can change your brain, particularly the parts of the brain linked with stress.

She conducted a study of people who had never meditated before, and put one group through an eight-week mindfulness-based stress reduction program. In the group who learned meditation, she found differences in five areas of the brain, including the parts involved in mind-wandering, in learning, cognition, memory and emotional regulation; in empathy and compassion and in the amygdala, the part for anxiety, fear and stress.

• Focus

Meditation is proven to help you improve your focus, and in today's "attention economy", that's something of a superpower.

Researchers from the University of Washington studied the impact of an eight-week course on mindfulness-based meditation on a group of knowledge workers. They found those who trained in meditation stayed on tasks longer and made fewer task switches, as well as reporting less negative emotion afterwards.

• Anxiety, depression, and insomnia

A 2014 literature review of 47 trials in 3,515 participants suggests that mindfulness meditation programs show moderate evidence of improving anxiety and depression.

Another 2012 review of 36 trials found that 25 of them reported better outcomes for symptoms of anxiety in the meditation groups compared to control groups.

What meditation CAN'T do

While meditation and mindfulness are proven to help deal with the challenges of life, they're not a cure-all.

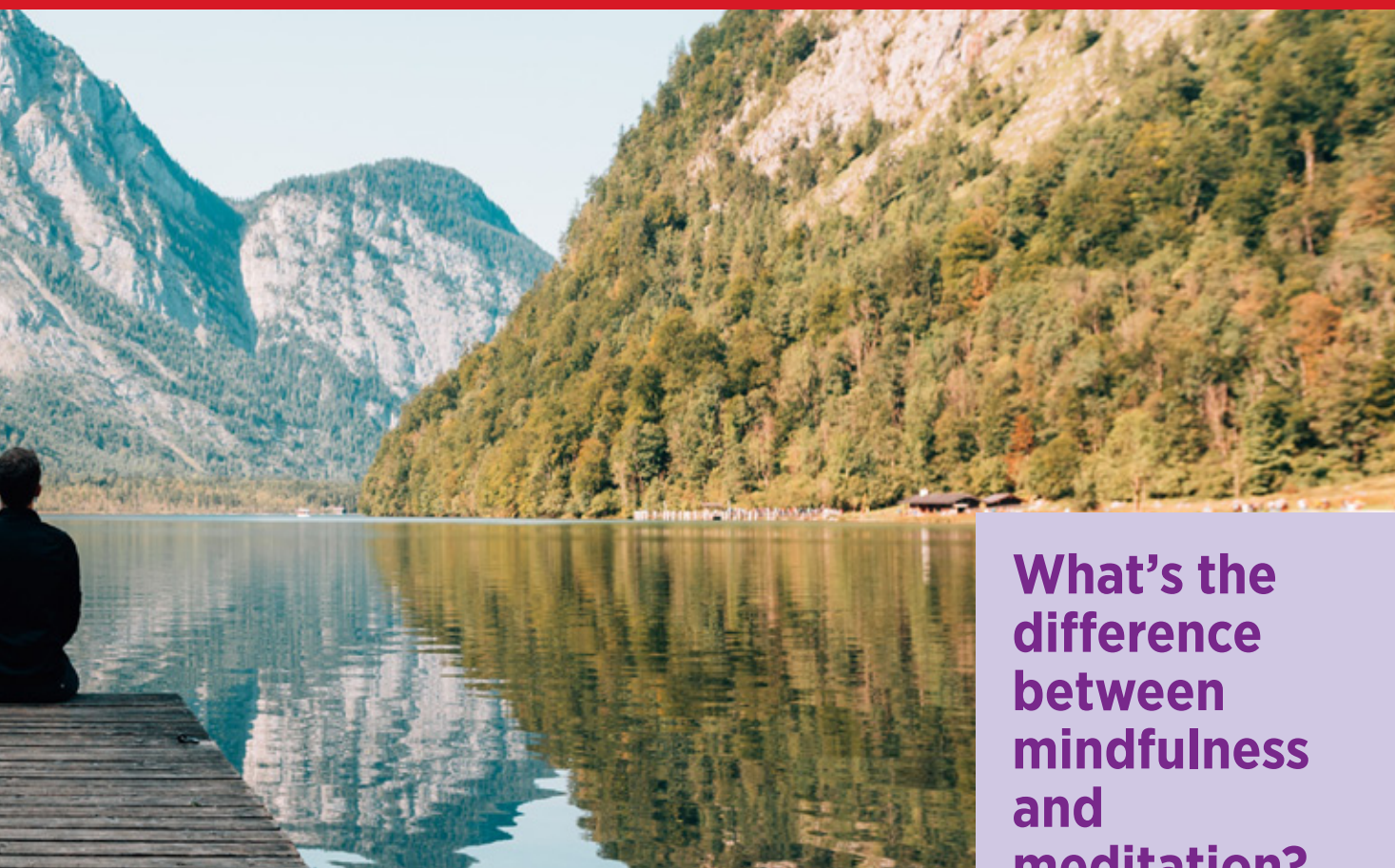
One of the reasons people give up or get frustrated with meditation is the expectation that it will solve all your problems and transform your life.

Recently, numerous psychotherapists and meditation teachers have voiced concern about the commercialisation of mindfulness.

Dr Nicholas Van Dam, Senior Lecturer in Psychological Sciences at the University of Melbourne, was a co-author of a paper called *Mind the Hype: A Critical Evaluation and Prescriptive Agenda for Research on Mindfulness and Meditation*. Along with psychiatrists, psychologists, and mindfulness experts from 15 different institutions, he says we need to be wary of people over-selling the benefits of meditation.

"I think the biggest concern among my co-authors and I is that people will give up on mindfulness and/or meditation because they try it and it doesn't work as promised," says Dr Van Dam.

Another concern is that when people are told they can, and should, ease their stress with mindfulness, it can imply that our stress is caused by us and our inability to control our minds, not by the inequalities of the system we live in.



What's the difference between mindfulness and meditation?

In *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion*, Jeremy Carrette and Richard King say there's a risk that mindfulness is used to "pacify feelings of anxiety and disquiet at the individual level, rather than seeking to challenge the social, political and economic inequalities that cause such distress."

What can you do?

The best approach is to practise mindfulness

"Meditation is not a matter of trying to achieve ecstasy, spiritual bliss, or tranquility, nor is it attempting to be a better person. It is simply the creation of a space in which we are able to expose and undo our neurotic games, our self-deceptions, our hidden fears and hopes."

Chogyam Trungpa

and meditation to help you reduce the impacts of life's challenges.

Don't expect it to transform your thinking or cure your depression or anxiety. Instead, use it as one of several tools to help build your resilience to stress.

You can start by finding an online program or real-life class that guides you until you feel you can do it on your own. Some evidence-based, free or low-cost programs and apps include:

- Headspace | [headspace.com](https://www.headspace.com)
- Calm | [calm.com](https://www.calm.com)
- Insight Timer | [insighttimer.com](https://www.insighttimer.com)
- Aura | www.aurahealth.io

Or, try it now. Mindful.org provides an easy, do-it-yourself start to mindfulness, which is summarised here:

1. Find a place to sit that feels calm and quiet to you.
2. Set a time limit such as 5 or 10 minutes.
3. Notice your body.
4. Feel your breath. Follow the sensation of your breath as it goes out and as it goes in.
5. Notice when your mind has wandered. Simply return your attention to the breath.
6. Be kind to your wandering mind. Don't judge yourself or obsess over the content of your thoughts. Just come back. ✕

The best way to understand the difference between these two terms, which are often used interchangeably, is to think of mindfulness as a way of being, and meditation as a practice.

You take time out to meditate. But you can live your life with mindfulness.

In *Positive Psychology*, author and therapist Dr Joshua Schultz, explains it this way:

"Meditation is a practice, and through this practice, one can develop different qualities, including mindfulness.

"Meditation is one method through which someone may learn to live mindfully. We can also think about meditation as a tool to develop mindfulness."

However, there are many ways to practise mindfulness as a form of meditation. You may have seen the term "mindfulness meditation", or heard about John Kabat-Zinn's popular Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program (MBSR). Mindfulness meditation is the practice of being present in the moment. When we practise this enough, we learn to become more mindful throughout the day, even when doing other things such as walking, washing up or listening in a meeting.

Look after your body at work

Stacking shelves, working on a conveyor line, or entering data into a computer. Most jobs involve some type of manual task and all can become hazardous if they are poorly designed or done incorrectly.

The term manual handling covers a lot more tasks than we usually think. It's not only about lifting heavy loads or working with machinery.

According to Safe Work Australia, a potentially hazardous manual task is one where you have to lift, lower, push, pull, carry, hold or restrain something. It can include:

- repetitive movement
- repetitive or sustained force
- high or sudden force
- sustained or awkward postures
- exposure to vibration.

Not all manual handling tasks are hazardous, but because most jobs involve some form of manual handling, most workers are at some risk of injury.

How to prevent injury

While good posture and lifting techniques are important, there are other ways you can help reduce your risk of injury. Consider the following tips from the Victorian Government's Better Health Channel:

- Change the task. Does it need to be carried out? If so, can it be done in a safer way?
- Change the object. If you have a heavy load, for instance, repack it into smaller parcels.

- Change your workspace, if you can. Use ergonomic furniture, for example, and ensure work benches are at optimum heights to limit bending or stretching.
- Change the environmental conditions. This includes heat, cold and vibration.
- Change the nature of the work. Take frequent breaks or regularly switch to a different task.
- Ask for training. If you're unsure how to perform a task safely, ask your manager for training and/or advice. ✕



Ask an expert about ...

Q Can stress affect your heart?

Heart Research Australia replies:

Stress doesn't just affect your mood and sense of wellbeing, it's also a key risk factor for heart disease because long-term stress has physical effects on your body.

A certain amount of stress can be a good thing. It can help you focus and achieve what you want to do. It brings anticipation and excitement into your life, such as planning a big celebration. Stress also helps you grow and change, avoid danger, and to strive for a goal.

But there's a downside to stress. It can make you feel tense, anxious, fearful, depressed and uncomfortable. Common stressful events include:

- conflict with others
- meeting deadlines
- taking exams
- caring for dependants
- moving house
- relationship problems
- health problems.

Any one of these events can be stressful. If you experience more than one at the same time or in quick succession, you're even more likely to experience the negative effects of stress.

Just because one person doesn't find an event stressful, doesn't mean you'll feel the same way. Managing stress and knowing when to pull back or ask for help is an important part of reducing your risk of heart disease. If you are struggling emotionally, talk to your GP. It's always OK to ask for help.

Get some tips on reducing stress in your life at: <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support/staying-well/reducing-stress> ✕

App of the month

AllTrails: Hike, Bike & Run

You may not be able to go overseas, but you can explore your local outdoors. Use AllTrails to discover bushwalking, biking, backpacking and running tracks in your area and around the world. Find

tracks that are dog friendly, kid friendly, or perfect for your fitness level. Explore national parks, or discover new cycling or running routes. Log your walk, run or bike ride with the GPS activity tracker, and download offline maps.

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

Sleep is the key to good memory

Struggling to remember names, places and important dates? Then make sure you get enough sleep.

According to research presented at a meeting of the Society for Neuroscience, as little as a few hours of lost sleep can impair memory and learning.

After a disturbed night's sleep, volunteers experienced alternations in brain function, but the good news was that the brain connections affected reverted back to normal after a couple of nights of recovery sleep.

Giulio Tononi of the University of Wisconsin in Madison, reviewing findings from animal studies, believes we are compelled to sleep in order to preserve our ability to learn.

In fact the need for the brain to rest is so great that in sleep-deprived individuals, parts of the brain will briefly go to sleep, leading to mistakes. "While we think we are awake, some parts of our brain are asleep," he explained.

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Your brain loves music

Music fans won't need reminding that music can lift your mood and give you energy. A recent online survey in the US found music listeners scored higher for mental wellbeing and experienced reduced levels of anxiety and depression compared to people overall. Active musical engagement, including in those aged over 50, was also associated with higher rates of happiness and good cognitive function.

Although this survey was small, many of its findings are backed up by other research. These have found that music can help keep many pathways in the brain strong, including those related to learning and happiness.

And whether you're actively listening to music, exercising to it or working with it in the background, your brain will reap the benefits. ✕

Sleep apnoea may be linked to depression and anxiety

Sleep apnoea is a potentially serious sleep disorder in which your breathing repeatedly stops and starts during the night. It can leave you feeling fatigued and distracted the next day, and may also increase your risk of heart disease and cognitive decline.

In a recent South Korean study, researchers wanted to find out whether obstructive sleep apnoea also increased the risk of developing a mood disorder – depression or anxiety – in the decade following diagnosis. After comparing 200 people with sleep apnoea with 800 healthy individuals, the researchers found that over the nine years of follow-up, those people with sleep apnoea were almost three times more likely to develop depression compared to the healthy group, and about one-and-a-half times more likely to develop anxiety.

It's another reason to see your GP if you are consistently tired during the day, or your partner reports you're a heavy snorer.

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THING YOU CAN DO TODAY



Climb some stairs

If you're looking for a free but intense workout that builds both fitness and strength, look no further than the nearest flight of stairs.

Stair climbing burns a high amount of calories, and is an excellent lower body workout. It's a great exercise if you have limited time but want an intense workout. And it's an exercise where the heavier you are, the harder you have to work, because of the pull of gravity.

A 2005 study found stair climbing reduces cardiovascular risk factors. In a controlled study of previously sedentary female uni students, researchers found stair climbing increased cardio fitness and decreased LDL or "bad" cholesterol.

The best part is, you can make it as gentle or as easy as you like. From walking up a short stair case, to taking two steps at a time up 50 floors of stairwells, you can gradually build your intensity as your fitness and strength improve.

Be safe!

As with any rigorous exercise, you need to be a bit sensible when you first start. Stair climbing is hardly an adventure sport, but there are things you need to consider:

- Check with your doctor before starting any new exercise regime.
- Make sure you warm up before you start. A bit of walking or slow jogging will do the trick.
- Start out slow and easy. Keep an eye (or finger) on your pulse, and don't let it race up too high too soon. Work out your maximum heart rate at healthlinkbc.ca/health-topics/tx4374.
- Place your whole foot on each step, not just the toe of your foot.
- Never run down stairs. The benefits of this exercise are in the going up, not the down. You're far better off walking down (or for very high flights of stairs, take the lift down!).
- Only use stairs that are well lit and ventilated.

EAT SMARTER

The perfect breakfast smoothie

Lately breakfast has fallen out of favour. With the popularity of intermittent fasting, and the 5:2 and 16:8 diets, breakfast is the meal that often gets the flick. Some people say they don't feel hungry first thing in the morning, but if you're not one of them and need to refuel your body within an hour of getting up, there are some important benefits to eating breakfast – provided you choose the right food.

Eating breakfast can help you maintain a healthy weight and reduce the amount you eat later in the day. Breakfast can also help you learn and concentrate better, which makes sense given your brain needs fuel just like the rest of your body.

Breakfast doesn't have to come from a cardboard box. Ideally you want a combination of healthy carbs for nutrients and fibre, a source of protein, and fruit or vegetables for added nutrition. For those of us who don't have time to start cracking eggs and chopping vegetables, a smoothie can come to the rescue. You can even make it the night before if you're particularly pushed for time in the morning.

Mix and match the following to create your favourite blend:

Protein: Greek yoghurt, milk (dairy or non-dairy), 1 Tbsp peanut butter or chia seeds

Fruit and/or veg: frozen or fresh berries, mango, peach, banana, spinach, kale, avocado

Wholegrains: rolled oats, cooked barley or quinoa

Flavour boosters: fresh ginger, turmeric, vanilla, cinnamon, cocoa powder, lime or lemon juice ✕



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