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**HEALTH & SAFETY
NEWSLETTER**

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Breaking habits is hard to do – or is it?

It's time for a change but how can you keep those new healthy habits?

We've all promised to give up our bad habits and replace them with new and healthier behaviours. And it works for a week or two, and then slowly but surely we start sliding back into old, familiar ways. What's going on and what can you do to make those changes last?

Plan for change: We plan what we're going to wear to work and cook for the week. Planning also works when it comes to implementing change. Pick those important goals and schedule time to achieve them – whether that's regular exercise or shopping for healthier foods – you'll be surprised how much easier it will be to make healthy habits a part of your everyday life.

Start small: Patience is the key to success when it comes to implementing change.

Choose one or two goals that are most important to you and decide what healthy habits are needed to achieve them. Sometimes changing one thing will lead to a shift in other areas. For instance, if you improve your diet and start eating more healthy foods you may find that you have more energy to exercise.

Think long term: Quick fixes simply don't work. Studies have shown that without long-term guidance quick fixes like fad diets for weight loss, for instance, don't have lasting benefits. Habits – good or bad – emerge through repeated actions over time. "We find patterns of behaviour that allow us to reach goals. We repeat what works, and when actions are repeated in a stable context, we form associations between

cues and response," says US research psychologist Wendy Wood.

Think beyond motivation: Of course, motivation is essential when we want to work towards implementing change, but for most of us motivation comes and goes. So you have to be prepared for those times when you don't feel motivated by setting in place strategies to keep you on track. Ask for support from family and friends to get you through periods of low motivation – for example, arrange to exercise with a friend. Put reminders in your phone and tell yourself that even though there will be times when you just can't motivate yourself, you won't criticise yourself but will simply start again tomorrow. ✕

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January is International Walk your Dog Month. Walk off some of that festive food and drink with your best pal. Dog owners enjoy many health and social benefits of daily walks – improved fitness, lower blood pressure, stronger muscles and bones and decreased stress. Your pets will thank you too.

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7 solutions to the afternoon slump



Overcome with fatigue at 3 or 4pm? The afternoon slump can affect us all but unless you take a nap, what can you do to ensure you power on for the rest of the day?

The clock hits 3pm and you start yawning. You feel sleepy, might notice you're becoming more irritable or short-tempered, and often crave starchy carbs such as bread or chips or something sweet.

The afternoon dip in energy and focus many of us experience can lead to careless mistakes and a loss of productivity at work. Having a nap is the ideal solution. A 20- or even 10-minute snooze can boost alertness, productivity and creativity but is not possible in most workplaces.

Our energy naturally waxes and wanes during the day. According to Australia's Sleep Health Foundation we are least alert in the early hours of the morning between 2am and 4am, but also between 2pm and 4pm, a time that's not so convenient.

Here are some ways you can minimise your slump and help pick up your energy again.

1 Eat a healthy lunch. Refined carbs and sugar can cause a spike in blood sugar that gives you a quick pick-me-up followed too soon by a crash that can leave you tired and hungry. Base your lunch around high quality protein – meat, fish, chicken, eggs

or legumes – combined with fibre-rich wholegrains, vegetables and fruit. Don't forget to include some healthy, unsaturated fat – olive oil, avocado, nuts or seeds. Calories count too, as research published in the journal *Physiology & Behaviour* found drowsiness to be a bigger problem after a heavy meal than a light one.

2 Stretch your legs. A quick burst of energy will get your blood flowing and help your muscles use glucose and fats, says Professor David Dunstan from the Baker Heart and Diabetes Institute. Even a three-minute burst of activity – such as walking around the office or walking up and down the stairwell – can help combat mid-afternoon fatigue, he says. If that's not possible, try body exercises such as squats, lunges or calf raises.

3 Step outside. Taking your walk outside will bring double benefits. Having a deliberate break from work outside can help your end-of-day concentration, stress and fatigue, found one study published in the *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*.

4 Sit in the sun. Being out in the sun for a few minutes can help reset your internal clock, and reduce the amount of melatonin (sleep hormone) your body produces. Just be sure to wear sunscreen if the UV index is three or above.

5 Plug in your headphones. Music can boost your mood by releasing dopamine – a neurotransmitter linked to reinforcement and motivation – giving you a mini escape.

6 Chug back some water. Mild dehydration can contribute to sleepiness, but opt for plain water rather than anything sweet and carbonated. As for caffeine – well, it's true that it will help reduce sleepiness but because it's a stimulant, drinking too much in the afternoon is likely to affect your sleep at night.

7 Munch on a healthy snack. Combine protein, fibre and wholegrain carbs in a healthy snack such as wholegrain crackers and cheese, fresh fruit, raw vegetables and trail mix with nuts, to increase your blood sugar levels. If you crave something sweet, have a square or two of dark chocolate as it has high levels of antioxidant polyphenols. ✕



Feeling forgetful? Don't blame ageing

It's recommended that adults get seven to eight hours' sleep a night but research shows that four out of 10 of us try to survive on much less.

Specialists at the Sleep Health Foundation are concerned that many of us don't understand how much our sleep at night can affect daytime functioning, particularly our memory and mood.

"It's very common to hear people pass off their forgetfulness and their distraction as the result of getting old," says Sleep Health Foundation Chair Professor Dorothy Bruck. "What many fail to recognise is that sleep – or lack of it – is playing a pivotal role in memory and mood," she explains. "Age is a factor too, but improve your sleep and you'll be surprised at the brain boost that follows."

Sleep helps learning and memory in two important ways. It prepares our brain for learning, explains Professor Bruck, allowing us to pay better attention to new information. Sleep also helps make new information 'stick' by making the brain's neural connections stronger and consolidating memories.

Make sleep a priority by setting an alarm for bedtime as well as wake time.

Believe it or not – it's good to feel sad sometimes

Feeling happy is wonderful but sadness deserves some attention too.

As humans we experience a wide range of emotions including happiness, fear, anger and sadness. But we also live in a culture that holds positive emotions in high regard and avoids from expressing sadness. Feeling unhappy from time to time, however, is a normal part of being human and, more importantly, it has a purpose.

- A 2014 study found that experiencing a range of positive and negative emotions “predicts increased positive mental health outcomes”. While other study findings show that “the pursuit of happiness may lead to maladaptive outcomes because it sets people up for disappointment.” Giving yourself permission to feel the whole spectrum of emotions is liberating and helps you accept yourself, flaws and all.
- When we feel sad we're learning about ourselves and what we do and don't like. It allows us to recognise the contrast between feeling happy and sad so we are able to be thankful for the good times and good people in our lives. Paying attention to what's going on when we feel sad rather than pushing uncomfortable feelings

aside is an opportunity to take better care of ourselves and live life to the full as a complete person with a range of emotions.

- When you can acknowledge and even embrace your own sadness, you'll be better able to support loved ones and encourage them to open up. It works both ways too as they will be more likely to be there for you when you need them, without dismissing your feelings and telling you to “cheer up, it might never happen”.

- Sadness often pops up as a result of another feeling, such as anger, stress, guilt, anxiety or a sense of hopelessness. When you dismiss unhappy thoughts, you're missing an opportunity to discover what's really going on inside you. Being sad doesn't mean you are not coping. In fact, it can help you come to terms with a distressing situation and move on. ✕

Know your feelings

Feeling sad doesn't mean you're suffering from depression. According to Beyond Blue: “We feel sad when something happens that we wish didn't. Sadness is tied to a specific situation. In response we might feel upset, flat, teary, or even in pain, depending on what's caused it. When you're sad about one thing, you can usually still feel happy about other things. Depression is very different. Sadness is a response to a particular situation but depression throws itself over every situation.” Knowing the difference is important. Feeling unhappy at times is a part of life, but depression is something that can be managed and/or treated. For support, contact your GP, a counsellor, psychologist or psychiatrist.



Make it a **good news week**

Constant exposure to bad news can increase stress and anxiety. While good news stories rarely make the headlines, they can be a powerful antidote to the bad news cycle.

Crime, refugee crises, unprecedented extreme weather events, violence, war, political unrest – gloom and doom makes up much of the ‘news’ that we see 24/7.

Negative news can affect our mental wellbeing. A survey from the American Psychological Association found that more than half of Americans say the news causes them stress, with many reporting anxiety, fatigue or sleep loss as a result.

According to Graham Davey, professor emeritus of psychology at the University of Sussex, UK, the way that news is presented and the way that we access news has changed significantly over the past 15 to 20 years. It’s hard to escape the news cycle, and its visual nature, often recorded on personal smartphones, can be shocking and trigger symptoms of stress.

Not only that, says Davey. The change in mood caused by news stories can make your own personal worries feel worse, even when they are not directly relevant to the news stories being broadcast. We now know that stress and anxiety have physical symptoms too, such as headaches, aches and pains,

insomnia and frequent colds and infections. Long-term stress and anxiety can also increase inflammation, which is associated with health concerns such as cardiovascular disease, some cancers and arthritis.

Should we switch off the news?

It’s not realistic to avoid all news. But if you find your news habit is affecting your mental health or relationships, you can change how you interact with it.

First, limit your news consumption to one block of time per day. At the very least, avoid watching or reading the news before bed and switch off news updates on your phone which can pull on your attention and stoke anxiety.

Second, write yourself a prescription for a daily dose of good news. Just as reading bad news stirs up hormones and sparks neurotransmitters that change mood, so does reading good news. Hearing stories about progress, possibilities and solutions to problems can reduce your stress levels and strengthen your faith in humanity, benefiting you physically and mentally. ✕

Where to find good news

Professor Tal Ben-Shahar leads a class in positive psychology at Harvard University, and encourages everyone to make it a habit to seek a source of good news, every day. He recommends the Good News Network (goodnewsnetwork.org), which you can also download as a free app for iOS and Android. Other good news sites include Beautiful News (informationisbeautiful.net/beautifulnews) and the UK’s Positive News (positive.news), while many news outlets now include good news sections on their websites, including Australia’s ABC.

Foot and ankle pain

Our feet and legs do a great job of carrying us through life and they deserve the best of care.

If you have a job that requires you to be on your feet for long periods you've probably experienced more than your fair share of pain in your feet and ankles. It's important that any pain is resolved to prevent it from developing into a long-term condition. Here's what you can do to protect your precious feet.

Choose footwear carefully

It's tempting to choose form over function when it comes to footwear but spending the day in shoes that are not right for your feet leads to trouble. Podiatrist Patrick Rafferty says many workers make the simple mistake of choosing shoes that look good but are inappropriate for their job. He has the following six shoe-buying tips:

1. Choose well-fastened, enclosed footwear.
2. Avoid slip-on shoes.
3. A wide heel with a firm back for ankle support is best.
4. Look for shoes with a cushioned inner-lining for comfort.
5. A non-slip sole with grip to protect from slips that can cause ankle sprains. An oil-resistant sole may be necessary for work environments like kitchens.
6. Sturdy steel-capped boots are required in some workplaces.

Stretch it out

Muscles can become stiff and painful if you stand or walk all day. Stop every hour or so to stretch them out and relax and lengthen

tight muscles. Calf raises will help pump back blood that has pooled in the foot from hours of standing into the rest of the body.

Massage well

Simply massaging your ankles and feet during your lunch break and after work can go a long way to easing pain. Keep a tennis ball handy and roll your foot from heel to toe over it to relieve sore feet. The gentle massage on your feet and arches will stretch tight foot muscles and help your feet recover more quickly.

Leave it to the experts

If you have ongoing problems with your feet, make an appointment to see a podiatrist. A registered podiatrist can help you give your feet the love and care they deserve to keep them in good shape. ✕



Ask an expert about ...

Q Will donating blood affect my health?

A Donating blood is a very safe process, according to the Australian Red Cross Blood Service. Each donor's blood is collected through a new, sterile needle that is used once and then discarded. Most people have between 4.5 and 5L of blood in their body, so a blood donation is usually less than just 10 per cent of that. Your body restores the lost blood volume

quickly. This is because, whether you give blood or not, your body constantly makes new blood to replace the old. Over time, however, iron levels may drop in some donors, which could lead to iron deficiency and/or low haemoglobin (anaemia). So each donor's haemoglobin is checked before every donation and if the level is below the acceptable range you will not be able to give blood. Very rarely, some

people can feel unwell during or after a donation but you're closely monitored to ensure all symptoms are recorded to provide information for future donations. Having plenty to eat and drink before and after giving blood, helps make the process even safer. For more information visit donateblood.com.au or google "donate blood" in your country. ✕

App of the month

8700

Everyone has an ideal daily kilojoule figure they need to stick with to maintain a healthy weight. This simple-to-use app will help you find

out what yours is, as well as help you calculate how much energy you burn through everyday activities, exercise and sports. You can also search over 3000 fast foods from larger Australian fast food and snack chains to see how many kilojoules are found in coffees, smoothies, fried chicken, pies, fries and more. Available free from the App Store and Google Play.

News Bites



Tempted by a detox diet?

Don't bother. Detox diets reflect the current 'clean eating' obsession and they commonly limit foods to plant-based juices with a supplement or two thrown in, promising to kickstart your journey to better health. There is no evidence that detox diets cleanse you of any so-called 'toxins', although being low in kilojoules they are likely to result in quick – but not sustainable – weight loss.

Even when you've ingested a substance that is toxic, a 'detox diet' isn't going to help. An acute toxicity is a medical emergency, while chronic toxicity can be better handled by a well-nourished body, not one weakened by a restrictive detox diet. Your liver, kidneys, lungs and other organs work around the clock to remove harmful substances and excrete the waste products of metabolism. Rather than a detox diet, focus on sustainable healthy habits that support this process, such as eating nutritious foods on a daily basis. ✕



Walk fast, live longer

Research recently published in *Mayo Clinic Proceedings* reveals that your walking speed may affect your lifespan. Following nearly 475,000 participants for close to seven years, the researchers found that regardless of their body mass index, brisk walkers enjoyed a longer life than the slower walkers.

Brisk walking was defined as over four miles (6.4km) per hour and people who walked at this pace enjoyed a life-expectancy boost of between 15 and 20 years more than their slower walking counterparts, said the researchers.

Planning on going for a walk? Then aim for at least 100 steps per minute. ✕

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Seek help for migraine headaches

For people who don't experience migraine it's easy to misunderstand or trivialise it, likening it to a severe headache. But according to Dr Stephanie Goodhew from Australian National University's Research School of Psychology, it's a relatively serious neurological condition that includes light and sound sensitivity, a one-sided headache, nausea, and visual disturbances.

Dr Goodhew recently surveyed students and found that even among migraine sufferers there were significant gaps in knowledge about the condition.

"One in five didn't know they could go to their doctor and get preventative treatment for their migraine," she recently told the *Sydney Morning Herald*. "People are sort of suffering in silence, suffering unnecessarily, when there are treatment options available."

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THING YOU CAN DO TODAY



Stamp out single-use plastics

Environmental pollution is a popular news topic so you're probably already doing something to reduce it. But have you thought about single-use plastics?

Plastic water bottles. These are the most harmful plastic product because a huge amount of energy is required to make plastic bottles, and most of them end up in our waterways and parks. Get a reusable stainless steel or glass bottle and fill it up before leaving the house and refill from the water filter at work during the day.

Coffee cups. Using your own cup is a popular choice but not everyone uses them. Takeaway coffee cups are estimated to be the second-largest contributor to litter waste after plastic bottles. It's estimated that 500 billion coffee cups are produced globally each year, to be used just once and then thrown away. And according to the University of Melbourne, most disposable cups are no longer able to be recycled and end up as landfill. Coffee cups might look like cardboard but many of them are lined with plastic.

Takeaway utensils. Meal delivery services such as Uber Eats and Zomato are becoming more and more popular, and with each delivery, you usually will get several plastic knives and forks. Some of us wash and reuse them but most of them will end up in the bin. The good news? More restaurants now offer an option to request utensils rather than automatically supplying them with each order.

Plastic straws. Enjoy a juice or smoothie each week? In a year, that's a lot of straws! Start by phasing out plastic straws at home by not replacing them when they run out. Many juice places now only offer paper straws, which are not ideal as they tend to fall apart before the drink is finished. Solution? Purchase stainless-steel or silicone straws and keep one in the car, one at work and one in your bag. Remember to clean them well after using them!

EAT SMARTER

Bananas

Over 114 million tonnes of bananas are produced annually. Enjoyed in their natural state, thrown into smoothies and smoothie bowls or sliced on cereal or porridge, bananas are very convenient. There are plenty of good reasons to keep a good supply of bananas on hand because they're not only a convenient snack, they're full of goodness, too.

- They're a good source of vitamins C, B6 and folate.
- They contain minerals such as potassium, manganese (involved in the regulation of brain and nerve function) and complex carbohydrates.
- They contain dietary fibre, which is important for digestive health.

Best for bananas

Bananas should be stored at room temperature and, unlike other fruits, the ripening process of bananas does not slow down after they are picked. Need a banana in a hurry? To encourage faster ripening, place the banana in a brown paper bag at room temperature.

What a pain!

Bananas may trigger migraines in some people. If you experience migraines it's recommended that you eat no more than half a banana every day.

Good news

A survey published in the *European Respiratory Journal* found that bananas may decrease wheezing in children with asthma. Most likely due to the fruit's antioxidant and potassium content, which may help to improve lung function. ✕



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