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HEALTH & SAFETY
NEWSLETTER

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March 2023

3 tips for the best packed lunches

You may carefully plan your evening meals, but lunch can become something of an afterthought – a hasty sandwich from the supermarket, or a burger grabbed from the local café. The best way to guarantee a healthy lunch? Make it yourself.

A healthy, balanced lunch can help you get all the energy, fibre, fat, vitamins and minerals you need to power through the day. Here are a few pointers.

Prepare in advance. Don't waste that precious shopping, prepping and cooking time on just one meal. Make sure you have plenty of leftovers that can be packed in portion-sized containers ready for lunches the following day. If you won't be able to re-heat food, you can mix any vegetables, protein and/or grains from your dinner plate and toss with some greens and dressing to make a salad. Leftover brown rice? Mix with chicken, corn, baby spinach and black beans.

If you feel inspired, you can also cook up meals in advance at the weekend. Casseroles, chilli, pasta dishes, soups and

stir-fries can be doubled, divided and stored, suggests the *Tufts Health & Nutrition Letter*. In the warmer weather, substantial salads based on grains like barley, quinoa or freekeh can also be divvied up for lunches.

Stock up on staples. No leftovers? Keep some of your favourite lunch items ready to go. Some ideas you can pack in a bento-style box: fruit, hard boiled eggs, falafel, small cans of tuna, pre-cut veggies like carrots, celery, cherry tomatoes and cauliflower, rice/corn cakes, sliced or cubed cheese, and small servings of trail mix, seeds or nuts.

You can portion out bean dips, nut butters and plain yoghurt, or purchase them pre-packaged. *Tufts Health & Nutrition Letter* recommends you aim for a lunch that

is half vegetables and fruit, one quarter wholegrain, and one quarter protein.

Chill! To keep your food safe from harmful bacteria make sure you pack an ice block in your insulated lunch bag – more than one if your lunch won't be refrigerated when you get to work. ❌

Sandwiches don't have to be boring

Stuck for ideas? Cancer Council Healthy Lunch Box have plenty of ideas for creative sandwiches and inspiring lunches. Visit healthylunchbox.com.au



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World Glaucoma Week runs from March 12-18. This initiative of the World Glaucoma Association aims to raise awareness of one of the leading causes of irreversible blindness. With early treatment the damage can be limited. As there are few warning signals, book a glaucoma test with your optometrist. For more information visit worldglaucomaweek.org

How accurate are food sensitivity tests?

A growing number of people believe they have a food allergy or intolerance, and there are many tests that promise to identify the culprit foods. But could these tests cause more problems than they cure?

Let's start with a few definitions. A food intolerance is not the same as an allergy. An allergy is an abnormal response to a food (or other substances like pollen, bee stings or medication), triggered by the body's immune system. Symptoms occur within minutes of eating the tiniest amount of the food, and can include itching, wheezing, swelling, vomiting and rashes, and at its most severe, life-threatening anaphylaxis. If you suspect you have an allergy it's important to see your doctor who can organise allergy testing at a specialist clinic.

A food intolerance is different.

A food intolerance takes place in the digestive system and happens when you're not able to break down food you eat. This can be caused by enzyme deficiencies (as in the case of lactose intolerance), sensitivity to a food, or a reaction to naturally-occurring food chemicals. People with an intolerance or sensitivity can usually eat these foods in small amounts without experiencing problems.

"Food intolerances lack a clear definition, and symptoms (abdominal pain, diarrhoea, nausea) can be delayed by as much as 48 hours, making them difficult to diagnose," says Tim Spector, professor of genetic epidemiology at King's College London and author of the book *Spoon Fed*.

Because it can take time to identify the food that caused the problem, people start to look elsewhere to have their diagnoses confirmed, says Professor Spector. And they don't have to look far to find many

tests that promise swift answers.

"Browsing the internet, you can now find many ways to solve your problem by sending back a blood spot, saliva or hair analysis," he explains. "Whether you use the internet, a store-based test or a local allergy nutritionist, you can now get a personalised list of foods to avoid."

Professor Spector regards most of these tests as worthless and they can end up giving you a long list of 'dangerous' foods.

Different food sensitivity tests can come up with different results, giving you a long list of foods to avoid but with no agreement between the tests. Many of them sound scientific because they test a type of antibody called IgG (Immunoglobulin-G), which is important in fighting infections.

But if you have elevated IgG, this reflects no more than exposure to a compound, explains Professor Spector. Studies have



What should I do if I suspect a food intolerance?

If you suspect you have a food intolerance, Duker Freuman recommends keeping a detailed food and symptom log for two full weeks. This should include the time of everything you eat and the time of any adverse symptoms.

Then visit your doctor, who if necessary, can arrange tests to eliminate certain conditions, such as coeliac disease. Following this, see an Accredited Practising Dietitian, ideally one who specialises in food allergy or gastrointestinal issues. You can then try a supervised, manageable elimination and rechallenge diet that will help identify the problem food.

shown that these antibodies are not related in any way to food allergy or intolerance, yet some blood tests will show that you are 'allergic' or 'intolerant' to whatever you eat regularly or have eaten recently, which can be normal, healthy foods.

Still, it's true that several small studies, mostly in people with irritable bowel syndrome (and funded by companies that sell the tests) have reported positive results when patients eliminated foods highlighted by IgG testing. While the results are intriguing and warrant further investigation, says the American College of Gastroenterology, none of the tests marketed to diagnose food intolerances have been validated or subjected to large clinical trials.

ASCIA (the Australian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy) agrees, and strongly recommends against online allergy testing and non-evidence-based unproven

allergy 'tests' and 'treatments' which can result in adverse outcomes.

Are there any downsides to doing the tests?

Tamara Duker Freuman, author of *The Bloated Belly Whisperer*, is a Registered Dietitian who works in a gastroenterology practice. She sees many patients who end up on restrictive diets – avoiding up to two dozen foods or more – in an effort to eliminate foods indicated as problematic by online food sensitivity test kits.

"I have come to believe what a confusing distraction such tests have become in the pursuit of actually helpful and actionable answers," she says. "In my experience, the results invariably suggest a sensitivity to gluten, dairy, and soy – I can't remember seeing or being told about results that didn't."

Avoiding a long list of foods can mean you miss out on those you enjoy and may potentially lead to nutrient deficiencies. Your

gut bacteria also thrive on variety, so overly restricting foods can do a lot more harm than good. It's also very difficult to maintain.

"Regardless of how they feel, they soon realise they can't keep up this highly restricted diet," says Duker Freuman, "and that's when they arrive at my office. They're confused about which of these foods – if any – is actually bothering them, and have no idea how to figure that out."

Self-administered online tests can also leave people anxious about eating, says Duker Freuman.

"When I'm unsuccessful at convincing my patient that these tests can't be relied on to identify their problems, I've watched helplessly as my patient disappears down a rabbit hole of food restriction and avoidance that can, for some people, lead to disordered eating." ❌



Does emotional stress affect your skin?

How to reduce the impact of stress on your skin

You've been feeling stressed, and now you've got another rash. Which makes you more stressed. What's going on?

It's true: what you're feeling inside will eventually show outside. Stress can cause all sorts of skin problems as well as exacerbate existing conditions.

We often don't realise our stress and our skin breakouts are related, but think about the last time your skin flared up. Were you under stress?

Perhaps it was a new job that caused a red rash around your chin.

Or a relationship breakdown that made you break out in hives.

You might even remember when you were a teenager, stressed about an upcoming performance or party, then horrified to discover your acne had flared up.

It seems like an unfair double whammy; for our skin to betray us when we're down. Why does it happen?

The inflammation pathway

Stress can cause a chemical reaction that affects your skin.

Dr Neera Nathan, writing for *Harvard Health*, explains:

"The brain-skin axis is an interconnected, bidirectional pathway that can translate

psychological stress from the brain to the skin and vice versa."

Dr Nathan says stress triggers glands which release more cortisol and other hormones called catecholamines, which in turn cause inflammation. Stress can also cause inflammation through the gut-skin connection. Stress impacts the balance of bacteria in your gut, which can lead to inflammation.

The inflammation is intended to help you: it's to heal the wounds that your body is anticipating from the stressful situation. But in our modern world, the inflammation is more likely to cause redness and itching, and trigger conditions such as psoriasis, rosacea, and eczema.

It's psychodermatological

The study of the connection between skin and mind is called psychodermatology.

A 2020 review of research studies by the University of Messina in Italy found that people affected by a skin disorder often have a related psychological problem.

They cite numerous studies which showed that people with depression and anxiety often have skin conditions, and vice versa. Interestingly, they also found a link in skin problems with people who reported high levels of anger and disgust. ✕

The best way to manage stress-induced skin flare ups is to manage stress. Dial-up all your stress management tactics such as:

- Practise mindfulness or meditation
- Reduce screens and social media in your leisure time and get more sleep
- Move your body as much as you can with activities you find enjoyable
- Eat more anti-inflammatory foods, including foods high in vitamin B, magnesium and fatty acids such as fish, whole grains and fruit and vegetables
- Stay hydrated
- Take time for yourself as much as possible. Do what makes you feel good, even if it's not "productive"

And don't forget to keep up your skin care routine.

Important: Never self-diagnose. If you notice a rash or new skin problem – even if you've been stressed – see your doctor for a proper diagnosis. Different skin issues require different treatment.

4 surprising ways sleep affects how you feel

Improve your sleep, improve your mood

If you struggle with sleep and stress, the last thing you want to hear is that insomnia can exacerbate depression and anxiety. But it can help to know what you're dealing with, and to know there are many proven tactics and strategies you can use to improve your sleep.

If you're worried about your sleep, Harvard Medical School advises you first look at your sleep habits. Their recommendations include:

- maintaining a regular sleep-wake schedule
- avoiding caffeine, alcohol, nicotine, and other chemicals that interfere with sleep
- making your bedroom a comfortable sleep environment
- establishing a calming pre-sleep routine
- going to sleep when you're truly tired
- not watching the clock at night
- not napping too close to your regular bedtime
- eating and drinking enough—but not too much or too soon before bedtime
- exercising regularly—but not too soon before bedtime

Chances are you know how awful you feel when you're not getting enough sleep, but on the flipside, have you ever had run of good sleep, and felt amazing? Sleep makes you feel good in a surprising number of ways:

1. So creative!

You go to sleep worrying over a problem, and when you wake up, the answer seems obvious.

According to Professor Penny Lewis from Cardiff University, the two main phases of sleep—REM and non-REM—work together to help us find out-of-the-box solutions to problems.

During non-REM sleep, millions of neurons fire simultaneously and strongly while your brain replays memories. As your brain reruns the memories, it makes links and connections to make sense of patterns.

During REM sleep, it all gets more chaotic, says Lewis. Different parts of your brain become activated, seemingly at random. Lewis suggests this allows your brain to search for similarities between seemingly unrelated concepts, so you can see a problem in a different way.

2. Better reaction times

Like a superhero in a movie, you'll find your reflexes and reactions are sharper. Even if your job doesn't involve split-second decisions, your reaction times can still be a matter of life and death. Every time you get behind the wheel of a car, your reflexes matter.

According to the Sleep Foundation, if you skip a night's sleep, your impairment is equivalent to a blood alcohol content of 0.1% - that's double the legal limit.

3. Laser sharp memory

When you get enough sleep, you'll find you retain information more easily. You read it once, and you remember it. You no longer have that mental blank trying to remember that password - or forgetting why you walked into the kitchen.

Harvard Health says both animal and human studies suggest that the quantity and quality of sleep have a profound impact on learning and memory. Sleep helps you focus and learn, and it helps you consolidate memories.

4. Brighter mood

Sleep affects your mood, and your mood can affect how well you sleep.

Disturbed sleep is one of the first symptoms of depression. Conversely, chronically poor sleep can lead to depression. A study

published in *Sleep Journal* in 2007 found that out of 10,000 adults, people with insomnia were five times more likely to develop depression.

Another study by the University of Pennsylvania found that subjects who were limited to only 4.5 hours of sleep a night for one week reported feeling more stressed, angry, sad, and mentally exhausted. When the subjects resumed normal sleep, they reported a dramatic improvement in mood.

17 March is World Sleep Day ✕

Protecting your hearing at work

While it's difficult to estimate how many people go deaf from noise pollution, the World Health Organization reports that around 1.1 billion people worldwide are exposed to hazardous noise levels from occupational and environmental sources. Are you one of them?

"People often ask 'what's too loud?'," says audiologist, Karen Hirschausen, Hearing Australia's Principal Audiologist. Essentially, if you're in a situation where you need to raise your voice to be understood at conversational distance (1-2 metres), then the noise is probably too loud.

"Repeated or lengthy exposure to sounds above 85 decibels, which is approximately the level of a forklift or front-end loader, can cause permanent damage," says Hirschausen.

Who's at risk?

SafeWork Australia says that while construction and manufacturing are known to have the highest noise issues, people working in other industries are also at risk, including emergency responders, DJs and musicians, farmers and teachers.'

If you work in a noisy environment, it's vital that you take action to protect your ears. Talk to your employer about hearing protection and other personal protective equipment (PPE).

Many hearing protection devices now connect with two-way radio or other PPE so you can still hear instructions and communication without removing your ear protection.

Note: noise-cancelling headphones, such as those you'd use at home or on the train, are not enough to protect your hearing from workplace noise. Always use the proper PPE provided by your workplace. ✕

World Hearing Day

Did you know that by 2050 nearly 2.5 billion people are projected to have some degree of hearing loss?

World Hearing Day is held on 3 March each year to raise awareness on how to prevent deafness and hearing loss and promote ear and hearing care across the world. Visit who.int/campaigns/world-hearing-day/ for more information.



Ask an expert about ...

Q Can strength training burn fat?

We're often told that if we want to reduce our body fat, we should do more cardio such as running or walking.

But exercise physiologist and senior lecturer at the University of NSW Medicine and Health, Dr Mandy Hagstrom, says otherwise.

"Our findings show that even when strength training is done on its own, it still causes a favourable loss of body fat without having to consciously diet or go running."

Dr Hagstrom was senior author of a systematic review and meta-analysis that

reviewed and analysed existing evidence about strength training and fat loss. She says that until recently, studies that proved a link were too small to find statistically significant results.

"But when we add all of these studies together, we effectively create one large study, and can get a much clearer idea of what's going on."

Dr Hagstrom and her team looked at findings from 58 research papers that covered 3000 participants.

They found that on average, participants lost 1.4 per cent of their total body fat after

their training programs, which went for about five months. While all the studies were slightly different, on average the participants worked out for roughly 45-60 minutes each session for an average of 2.7 times per week.

"Resistance training does so many fantastic things to the body that other forms of exercise don't, like improving bone mineral density, lean mass and muscle quality. Now, we know it also gives you a benefit we previously thought only came from aerobics," says Dr Hagstrom.

App of the month

WakeOut

If you work at a desk all day, WakeOut is the perfect app for you. WakeOut offers a variety of different 30-second

workouts that are designed for your setting, whether that's at the office, in your living room, at the park with the kids, or even on a plane. It has over 1500 different exercises, demonstrated by people from all walks of life as well as water reminders, posture checks, breathing breaks and fun movement breaks.

Available for a small monthly fee from the [App Store](#). A similar app for Android users is [Work Break](#).

Hidden sugars impossible to spot

Two thirds of all packaged foods on supermarket shelves contain added sugars, found the annual *Food Switch: State of the Food Supply* report from Sydney's George Institute for Global Health. The sugars are hard to identify, says the report, because there are more than 400 different names for added sugars.

George Institute Dietitian Dr Daisy Coyle said that this 'added sugar by stealth' meant some people were consuming up to 22 teaspoons per day – nearly twice the maximum limit recommended by the World Health Organisation.

"Too much sugar is contributing to spiralling rates of obesity and associated chronic diseases such as heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes," she said.

"But while most of us know it's bad for us, cutting back is hard when you can't tell how much is in the food you are buying – right now, manufacturers are only required to list total sugars on the product's nutrition information panel."

Until the situation changes, find out how much added sugar is in a product by downloading the [Food Switch App](#) for your country (if available) and scanning the barcode, says Dr Coyle, which gives an estimate of added sugar content, as well as suggesting healthier alternatives.

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News Bites



Social media dental trends to ignore

Don't be tempted to follow dental advice from TikTok, warns Dr Stephen Liew, president of the Australian Dental Association. Teeth bleaching and straightening 'hacks' using pantry items can cause damage and end up costing thousands of dollars to correct.

Viral social media videos feature influencers recommending acidic fruits such as lemons and kiwi fruit to whiten teeth. Other make abrasive 'toothpastes' with charcoal and sand. All these pantry remedies are far too abrasive or acidic for teeth, Dr Liew told smh.com.au.

Liew said he was also concerned photo and video filters had created a warped perception of how normal teeth looked, particularly when it comes to whiteness.

He says the colour of teeth don't necessarily indicate their health, and methods being touted as 'teeth whitening hacks' by content creators online could lead to enamel and gum damage which costs thousands to correct.

Want whiter or straighter teeth? Leave it to the professionals. ✕

Reasons to be cheerful

Just like famous song lyrics promised, putting on a happy face really can make you feel brighter. Scientists at the University of South Australia have shown that changing your facial expression can change your mood. Mimicking a photo of someone smiling – or simply using your facial muscles to move the corners of your mouth towards your ears – can result in a notable increase in happiness, the study found.

Researchers have long debated whether something as simple as moving our facial muscles can influence our emotions. UniSA researcher, Dr Fernando Marmolejo-Ramos, believes this study, which involved nearly 4000 participants across 19 countries, provides reliable evidence that human emotions are linked to muscle movements.

"Knowing that we can somewhat 'fake it 'til we make it', is definitely a reassuring proposal," says Dr Marmolejo-Ramos.

1

THING YOU CAN DO TODAY



Get photos off your phone and into a photo book

When was the last time you sorted through the photos on your phone? The average smartphone user has a whopping 2,100 photos on their phone. Lose your phone, and all those memories are gone. You can upload them onto your computer, but then what? Never look at them again?

Instead, why not get them off your phone and into a photo book?

A photo book isn't just a great gift or centrepiece on the coffee table, it's also an instant mood-lifter. It triggers feelings of joy, hope and gratitude, which are like medicine for your mood.

You can use one of the many photo sticks, little devices which gather all your photos from your phone and computers and tablets and make it easier to sort through duplicates and dates.

Then you can choose from many different online photobook shops. Most allow you to send photos digitally and then have your fully produced book delivered to you. There are various levels of sophistication, so you can decide if you want total control over layout, or whether you prefer a 'done-for-you' template.

Google "photo book" to get started now.

EAT SMARTER

Make your own energy balls

Want a burst of energy? One that won't cause your energy to plunge minutes later, like you get from chocolate or lollies? What about a hit of energy, protein, healthy fats and nutrients, that you can eat in a few seconds – no mess no fuss?

Yes? Then it's time to make your own energy balls.

Despite the name, energy balls aren't necessarily high in calories. A good energy ball will give you around 80-200 calories. It's the pick-me-up without the let-you-down.

They're simple to make and you don't need a food processor. Simply blend ingredients together until they form a paste, and then roll into balls with wet hands.

The basic ingredients are oats, a nut butter (eg peanut butter) and a sweetener such as honey or mashed banana.

Chocolate Banana Energy Balls

- 2 bananas
- 2 tsp chia seeds
- 30g rolled oats
- 20g almond or peanut butter
- A handful of chocolate chips

Mix together, refrigerate if it's a little sticky, and then roll into balls.



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