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**HEALTH & SAFETY
NEWSLETTER**

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May 2020

Why **healthy** doesn't mean **slim**

We live in a society where if you're slim, you're considered healthy, and if you're not, you're unhealthy. The truth is that we shouldn't rely on weight as an indication of health.

Losing weight isn't easy. Weight loss diets often require so much restriction of calories, carbs or fat that it's natural to start feeling deprived. Even when you have lost weight, there's a good amount of research showing that you're likely to gain it back over the next few years.

Many experts now believe that focusing on weight loss as the ultimate goal isn't helpful, and that promoting healthy behaviours is more achievable and may have better outcomes.

With this approach, "if a person loses weight through changing their health behaviours, weight loss is a beneficial side effect, not the primary goal," says accredited practising dietitian Zoe Nicholson in the RACGP's *newsGP*.

Don't focus on weight

There are a number of problems with making weight loss your only goal, believes

Nicholson. While you can actively take steps to improve eating and exercise habits, you may not lose the desired amount of weight. And without the visible change on the scales, you may not be motivated to continue.

Reduced body weight tends to get the credit for improved health, but this is often also the result of changes such as eating better and exercising more.

Healthy behaviour and longer life

There are a number of studies that link a higher Body Mass Index (BMI) with a shorter lifespan. Fewer have investigated healthy behaviours and longevity, independent of body weight. One large-scale study of over 11,000 people, published in the *Journal of the American Board of Family Medicine*, examined the impact of four behaviours on death rates: eating more

fruits and vegetables; exercising regularly; moderate alcohol intake; and not smoking. The researchers then crunched the numbers according to people's body weight.

The results? Size mattered, to a point. Being thinner was protective – but only if you didn't have a healthy lifestyle. Having a BMI over 30 increased your risk of dying early – but only if you weren't following the four healthy behaviours.

What the study did show was that the association between body weight and dying early dropped away almost completely once behaviours were taken into account.

What can we take away from research such as this? Changing your eating patterns and increasing your activity may or may not lead to the desired drop in kilos. But no matter the shift on the scales, your health is going to benefit. ✕



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May 5 is World Hand Hygiene Day.

Each year the SAVE LIVES: Clean Your Hands campaign aims to progress the goal of maintaining a global profile on the importance of hand hygiene in health care and to 'bring people together' in support of hand hygiene improvement globally. Now more than ever, it's important to remember that Clean Hands Save Lives.

Strike a pose: 4 reasons to embrace yoga



More popular than soccer, cricket, tennis and golf, it gets one in 10 of us regularly rolling out our mat. It's yoga, and it's one of the world's fastest growing fitness activities. And with the current social distancing rules, it's also a perfect exercise to do on your own. Many yoga studios offer classes online, either at set times or as an 'anytime' option.

From alleviating anxiety to helping your heart, yoga's many benefits might tempt even the most ardent gym goers to swap their dumbbells for the yoga mat.

Tame your stress

We can't escape stress, and small amounts are both normal and beneficial. But that's not the case with ongoing, daily stress, which the World Health Organisation has called 'the health epidemic of the 21st century'. It can lead to conditions such as cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, insomnia, anxiety and depression.

A number of studies have found that yoga can help us switch off from stress, as well as reduce anxiety and help with mild depression. The 2012 National Survey of Yoga in Australia found that while people commonly started practising yoga for health and fitness, they often continued practising after experiencing its positive effects on their stress levels.

Stretch it out

Struggling to touch your toes? Flexibility is an important component of fitness, but one we often overlook in our quest to be faster and stronger. Being flexible improves mobility and posture and reduces the risk of injuries, and a regular yoga practice will help lengthen and stretch muscles in a safe, effective way.

As we get older we tend to lose flexibility. One study of older people assigned to either practise yoga or calisthenics (a type of body weight exercise) found that the flexibility of the yoga group was nearly four times that of the calisthenics group.

Help your heart

Exercise that makes you huff and puff isn't the only kind that benefits your heart. Many studies show that yoga can improve cardiovascular health too. One way it does this is through its ability to relax your body and mind – emotional stress is known to increase your risk of heart problems. Yoga has been shown to help lower blood pressure, blood cholesterol and blood glucose levels too, which when elevated can increase your risk for heart disease.

Ouch! My back!

As many as 90 per cent of us will experience lower back pain at some point, estimates the Australian Bureau of Statistics. When you have persistent back pain it's common to seek out alternative treatments, and yoga is a good place to start. One large review of studies found yoga to be particularly beneficial for easing lower back pain. It can help by stretching and strengthening the muscles that support your back and spine.

It is important to note that if you're not careful, yoga can also be the source of

back-related injuries. You should always follow proper form that slowly lengthens and stretches your body. ✕

Where to start?

If you'd like to try yoga, there are a number of different styles to choose from, some more vigorous than others. These include Hatha, Vinyasa, Bikram, Iyengar and Yin. Do some research beforehand to find a suitable beginner class for you.

Yoga may be gentle, but you can still injure yourself if you try to force yourself into a pose. Joints like knees and hips are particularly at risk. Like any new activity, you need to pace yourself and allow time for your body to accommodate to changes.

Want to find an online class near you? Just do a web search for "yoga online" or, if you usually attend yoga classes in person, ask your studio if they have an online option.

Remember to do your research and look for good reviews and if you have any questions, always ask the teachers. Never overexert yourself to reach a pose.



Is red meat still safe to eat?

Red meat has been under the spotlight again, with conflicting studies around its safety. Should we be swapping beef for beans, or happily tucking into our lamb chops?

Every so often a nutrition study comes along that contradicts the prevailing wisdom about what we should and shouldn't eat. In September 2019 a controversial review study (a study of studies), published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, concluded that cutting down on red and processed meat was unnecessary for most people.

Given that the World Health Organisation has classified red meat as 'probably carcinogenic', a view supported by

Australia's Cancer Council, experts were quick to comment on the study. They pointed out that some studies included in the review were flawed, others were left out, while some researchers had conflicts of interest that may have skewed their interpretation.

Time to ditch the steak?

So, where does that leave us? Is there still room for a roast on Sunday?

Proving cause and effect in nutritional science is incredibly difficult, and nutritionists

believe that focusing on individual foods is both problematic and impractical. It is far better to look at dietary patterns, says nutrition scientist Dr Joana McMillan.

"Someone who consumes meat along with lots of vegetables, whole grains, legumes, nuts, seeds and fruit is entirely different from another who consumes lots of bacon, burgers and sausages with few plant foods and a high intake of refined grain foods such as burger buns," Dr McMillan told the *Sydney Morning Herald*. ✕

Eat for your heart

Heart disease is responsible for an estimated 17 million deaths annually. It's the leading cause of death worldwide for both men and women of all races.

In 2019 the Australian Heart Foundation updated its guidelines on meat, dairy and eggs, based on a substantial review of current evidence. To help Australians reduce their heart disease risk, here's what it recommends:

- Given the link between red meat and cardiovascular disease, we should limit the

amount of unprocessed red meat we eat (beef, lamb and pork) to less than 350g a week. This means between one and three red meat-based meals each week, such as a Sunday roast and beef stir-fry.

"Instead, we suggest people get most of their heart-healthy protein from plant sources such as beans, lentils and tofu, as well as fish and seafood," said Heart Foundation Chief Medical Advisor, cardiologist Professor Garry Jennings.

- Processed or deli meats should be limited, as they have been consistently linked to a higher risk of heart disease and

other chronic conditions.

- There was insufficient evidence to support restricting eggs, full-fat milk, yoghurt and cheese for healthy people, said Dr Jennings. Evidence found that dairy fat in milk, cheese and yoghurt had a neutral effect, and neither increasing or decreasing your risk for heart disease or stroke.
- If you have high cholesterol or heart disease, reduced fat dairy is still recommended, as is eating a maximum of seven eggs per week.



AND YOU

Anxiety is one of the most common health conditions in the world, and while more women than men are affected, men are far less likely to seek out support. It is important to know in this age of COVID-19, that help is always available.

If you have an upcoming interview, approaching deadline, or are about to speak in public, then it's normal to feel anxious. These feelings are similar to the mental health condition of anxiety, which is debilitating, disabling, and can increase the risk for depression and suicide. The difference is simply the duration and severity of your symptoms.

For people with an anxiety disorder, their experience goes beyond sweaty palms and butterflies in their stomach. Their anxious feelings don't go away, can happen for no apparent reason and make it hard to cope with work, maintain relationships, or get a decent night's sleep.

Globally, one in 13 adults are affected by an anxiety disorder. For men, anxiety is even more common than depression, says Beyond Blue, with one in five men experiencing it at some point. But men are much less likely to talk about their anxiety than women, which increases the risk that it will go unrecognised and untreated.

Would I know if I had anxiety?

Because we all experience anxiety about upcoming events, it can be hard to know what's normal and what's not.

Robert Edelmann, emeritus professor of forensic and clinical psychology at the University of Roehampton, says a simple

test would be how much the condition is impacting on your life. "The basic premise for an anxiety disorder, or when anxiety becomes a clinical problem, is when anxiety controls our life, rather than us being able to control our anxiety," he explains.

It's easy to assume your inner world is just the way it is and cannot be changed. And a Beyond Blue survey found that people may be reluctant to acknowledge that there is a problem or that it's treatable.

"People told us they thought their issues weren't serious enough to warrant treatment, and some did not think that what they were experiencing may, in fact, be an anxiety condition," said Beyond Blue CEO Georgie Harman.

Some people surveyed were reluctant to seek support because they thought they could solve the problem on their own or disliked discussing feelings, emotions and thoughts. Men in particular may put off having a chat with their mates or partner, or resist seeing a GP, says Beyond Blue, perhaps because of the social norms around masculinity that say 'being a man' means being silent and strong. These can be particularly damaging when it comes to your mental health.

Common signs of anxiety include:

- Excessive worrying about things that could go wrong
- A racing mind that won't calm down
- Feeling tense or on edge
- A racing heart or dizziness
- Sleeping problems
- Anger or irritability (especially in men) ✕

Treatment for anxiety

A range of health professionals and services offer information, treatment and support for anxiety conditions, as well as a number of things you can do to help yourself.

Sources that offer information include:

- Your doctor
- [BeyondBlue](#)
- [Black Dog Institute](#)
- [Anxiety & Depression Association of America \(ADAA\)](#)



“Anxiety can take many forms and it’s important to understand that with the right support, recovery is possible, and these issues can be managed.”

Georgie Harman, Beyond Blue CEO

Taking action when you have anxiety

Forget ‘snapping out of it’ or trying to ‘pull yourself together’. Just like any other medical condition, you need an action plan to help manage your anxiety and get better.

- **Talk it through.** Talking about your feelings isn’t easy but keeping silent can make recovery very difficult. A good place to start is your GP. He or she can assess whether your feelings are symptoms of anxiety and can help find a mental health professional to support you. Treatments including cognitive behaviour therapy are effective in treating anxiety and are often recommended first, before medication.
- **Stay healthy.** Healthy eating, limiting alcohol and caffeine, exercise and reducing stress can help fight anxiety, as can spending time with family and friends and doing things that you enjoy.
- **Small acts of bravery.** Avoiding what makes you anxious only provides short-term relief and can make you more anxious in the long term. Approach something that makes you anxious, with professional support if necessary, even if it’s in a small way.
- **Make sleep a priority.** Anxiety can make it difficult to get a good night’s sleep, but when you’re stressed your body needs sleep more than ever. Aim to practise good sleep hygiene and get some helpful sleeping tips from sleephealthfoundation.org.au.



Look after your skin

If you are washing your hands frequently or you work with detergents, solvents, oils or acids, you're at risk of contact dermatitis.

And in today's environment, when you are encouraged to wash your hands thoroughly for at least 20 seconds every time you handle objects others might also have touched, you are likely to be washing your hands much more frequently than you normally would.

Even before the current encouragement to thoroughly wash your hands, if you worked in the health care industry, handled food, or worked with your hands, you are, according to Safe Work Australia, most at risk of occupational contact dermatitis (OCD).

It is important to note that OCD can affect people from any type of work, including office work. Or indeed, it can affect you even if you're working from home.

So how do I know if I have OCD?

If you've got skin that's red, dry, swollen, itchy and sore, these are all signs of OCD, and it can have a significant impact on

your ability to do your job. Safe Work Australia says that OCD is one of the most commonly reported and underestimated occupational diseases. Worldwide, it's estimated there are between 50 and 190 cases per 100,000 workers each year.

The two most common types of OCD are irritant contact dermatitis and allergic contact dermatitis.

Irritant contact dermatitis:

Approximately 75 per cent of OCD cases are irritant contact dermatitis (ICD). ICD can develop quickly, from accidental exposure to a strong irritant. Most cases, however, are caused by frequent exposure to a weak irritant, such as water, soap or detergent, so anyone who regularly washes their hands is at risk. These can dry and irritate the skin, eventually causing an inflammatory reaction. Contact with a mild irritant may initially only cause your skin to redden, but after continued exposure you may notice

small lesions or sores appearing on the reddened area. If you think the ICD is being caused by the soap you are using at home, you may be able to reduce the recurrence by changing your brand of soap.

Allergic contact dermatitis:

About 25 per cent of OCD cases are allergic contact dermatitis (ACD). This is different from ICD as it involves your immune system responding to a substance you're working with. This allergic response can take days, weeks or even years to develop. Allergens that commonly cause ACD include cosmetic ingredients such as fragrances, metals in jewellery (like nickel), latex, some textiles, and strong glues.

Treatment for OCD includes avoiding the cause where possible, using protective clothing and gloves, and applying moisturising treatments that cover your skin with a protective film. ✕

Look out for dermatitis

Make sure you regularly check your skin for early signs of dermatitis: dryness, itching and redness. This may develop into flaking, scaling, cracks, swelling and blisters. If you're at work, report any cases of dermatitis to your employer who may refer you to an Occupational Health Doctor or Nurse. If you're at home, consult your doctor.

28 April is World Day for Safety and Health at Work.



Ask an expert about ...

BreastScreen NSW replies:

Most women who develop breast cancer are aged over 50, which is why medical authorities recommend regular screening mammograms for women aged 50 to 74. A screening mammogram is a routine breast X-ray for women without any breast cancer symptoms and it can find changes too small to be felt during a physical examination. Screening is still available to women aged between 40

Q Should you have a screening mammogram before the age of 40?

and 49 if they wish, but the latest evidence doesn't justify a national mammogram screening program for this age group.

Breast cancer is harder to detect in younger women, particularly those under 40. The tissue of young women's breasts tends to be more dense than that of older women, due to the influence of hormones. On a screening mammogram, dense breast tissue shows up as a white area. Breast cancers also appear white and are therefore more difficult to find on young women's screening mammograms.

If you are under 40 and have a family history of breast cancer, discuss this with your doctor. Screening mammograms for younger women with a proven family history of breast cancer are available on referral by a doctor.

Whatever your age, it's important to be breast aware. Get to know the normal look and feel of your breasts and see your doctor immediately if you notice any unusual changes such as a lump, skin dimpling, or bloody or clear nipple discharge. ✕

App of the month

My Quit Buddy

Quitting smoking can be difficult, but My QuitBuddy is an app that can help you get, and stay, smoke-free. It's designed to deliver you support in a way best suited to you, providing

helpful tips and distractions to overcome cravings, tracking systems to chart your progress, plus facts that help you understand the impact smoking has on your health. Available free from the App Store and Google Play.

Apples are a top superfood

You don't need to fork out your hard-earned dollars for expensive 'superfoods'.

In a US study funded by the Department of Agriculture, apples have been found to be remarkably effective at decreasing LDL ('bad') cholesterol.

In the study, those women who consumed 75g of dried apple daily experienced a significant 23 per cent decrease in LDL over six months, as well as an average weight loss of 1.5 kilos.

The fruit's pectin, known to have a satiety effect, could partly explain this benefit, say the authors.

Source: Australian Doctor.



They may be natural, but they can still be toxic

Pharmacists are warning that more people are reporting being poisoned by essential oils such as eucalyptus oil and tea tree oil, products that should never be ingested.

Between 2014 and 2018, calls to the NSW Poisons Information Centre about essential oil poisoning increased by roughly five per cent each year, according to a University of Sydney analysis published in the *Medical Journal of Australia*.

Many cases were accidental, but about one in 20 were through intentional use, possibly following recipes posted by online wellness bloggers. While some essential oils are promoted as being able to relieve stress, assist sleep and have antibacterial effect, they are not designed to be ingested unless under the supervision of a qualified health practitioner. The highly concentrated oils can cause symptoms ranging from drowsiness to nausea and seizures. ✕

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Suite 3.06, 55 Miller Street Pyrmont NSW 2009 Australia
ACN 624 842 351 **Phone:** 1300 90 10 90

Website: www.healthworks.com.au

Editorial Team:

Editor: Jenny BOSS MHumNutr

Subscriptions: Janelle Gibb

Email: well@healthworks.com.au

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Small daily habits can help with stress

Faced with ongoing stress, it's easy to reach for unhealthy foods or alcohol to cope. But researchers believe that we can teach our brains to become more resilient to stress by doing small things every day.

According to Queensland University of Technology researcher, neuroscientist Dr Selena Bartlett, it starts by becoming aware of your automatic, often unhealthy, responses to stress, then taking small steps to do something different.

"You can actually physically change the brain by doing small things every day, like how you wake up in the morning, what you eat, the exercise that you do, and how much you sleep," says Bartlett.

Bartlett recommends morning habits such as writing in a gratitude journal and doing some form of exercise. Both these things act as 'brain dumps', stopping the brain from automatically focusing on stressful events.

1 THING YOU CAN DO TODAY



Start with silence

How often is silence your only companion? No mobile, TV, or radio. No distractions from children, co-workers, family or friends. There are many benefits of spending time alone with your thoughts. It can:

- Relieve tension in the body and brain in just two minutes, found a 2006 study in the journal *Heart*. It can lower blood pressure and increase blood flow to the brain, more so than listening to music.
- Decrease stress by lowering blood cortisol levels and adrenaline.
- Help with insomnia. A 2015 study published in *JAMA Internal Medicine* found improved sleep quality after a 6-week mindfulness meditation intervention.
- Encourage creativity and reflection. Without distractions, your brain can access a different form of thinking, offering creative ideas or solutions to problems.

How to add silence to your day

- Start your day with silence. This must be intentional – it doesn't mean eating breakfast without talking to anyone. Aim to remain in bed an extra five minutes before getting up, spending that time in silence. Silence doesn't mean no mental chatter – it's impossible for most of us to stop the mind chattering. Instead, notice the chatter but aim to not get caught up in it and instead focus on your breathing.
- Walk in silence. If silence at home is difficult to achieve, try going for a solitary walk without your mobile or radio. While it might be tempting to listen to music or a podcast, you may find the silence relaxing.

EAT SMARTER

Snack on peanuts

Peanuts have been the poor cousin of the nut world for too long, but along with their affordable price tag there are many reasons to add them to our diet.

- **To reduce our risk of dying.** One study of more than 200,000 people from around the globe found those who regularly ate peanuts and other nuts were substantially less likely to have died of any cause – particularly heart disease – than those who rarely ate nuts.
- **To increase our intake of healthy fats.** Around half the peanut is fat, of the heart-healthy mono- and polyunsaturated kind.
- **To up our protein intake.** Like other nuts peanuts are rich in protein – up to 30 per cent of its total kilojoules. It's the protein element of peanuts that can be severely allergenic to some people.
- **To give us essential nutrients.** Peanuts contain many nutrients, including vitamins B and E, copper, manganese, magnesium and phosphorus. They are also a rich source of antioxidants (particularly if you eat the skin) and compounds such as phytosterols, which can reduce cholesterol absorption.

Some people argue that peanuts aren't really nuts at all. This is true. Botanically peanuts are legumes, and as such are related to beans, lentils and soy. But nutritionally they are very similar to tree nuts and can be eaten as a healthy snack or ingredient in salads and other dishes. Always choose unsalted peanuts, as too much salt can raise blood pressure, a risk factor for heart disease. ✕



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