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It's true: friends are good for your heart

Your social life has a direct impact on your heart health, according to a new Australian study.

It's now clear: loneliness is bad for your heart, and social connection is good for your heart.

Researchers from Monash University and Curtin University looked at the link between social health and 12 risk factors for cardiovascular disease (CVD) in 11,498 Australian men and women over the age of 70.

They found that loneliness and social isolation was associated with a greater risk of cardiovascular disease.

Conversely, they found that those with good social connections were less likely to have multiple risk factors for heart disease, lowering their risk of having a heart attack or stroke within 10 years.

This Australian study gives extra scientific strength to previous studies with similar findings.

In a 2016 review published in *Heart* journal, researchers examined 23 studies that involved 181,000 adults. The data showed that loneliness, social isolation, or both were associated with a 29 per cent increased risk of heart attack and 32 per cent greater risk of stroke.

To put these statistics into perspective, the figures show that loneliness or isolation is as bad for your heart as light smoking or obesity.

The mind-heart-body link is official

Last year, the American Heart Association released a scientific statement on the mind-heart-body connection. The statement included the following:

- "The mind, heart, and body are interconnected and interdependent"

- "There is good data showing clear associations between psychological health and CVD risk"
- "Interventions to improve psychological health can have a beneficial impact on cardiovascular health."

Boost your social connections to boost your heart health

Does this mean that it's OK to skip the gym and hang out with friends instead? Well, within reason. These studies prove that feeling socially connected is more than a nice-to-have. It's essential for your physical health.

Think of socialising as being as important for your health as exercise or nutritious food, and prioritise it accordingly. It doesn't mean you have to go out every night or have a huge group of friends, especially if you're an introvert.

It's how you feel that matters: if you feel connected and supported, your heart health will benefit. ☺



MAY 19 May is World IBD Day. This day aims to raise awareness about Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis, known as Inflammatory Bowel Disease, and to show support to the ten million people worldwide who live with IBD. For more information about IBD in Australia, visit crohnsandcolitis.com.au

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How iodine is the humble hero that's essential to your health

Ever noticed iodised salt on the shop shelves and wondered why salt has iodine added to it? There's a good reason for it. Without enough iodine in our diets we risk some serious health issues.



If you don't get enough iodine, you're in trouble. Iodine is a micronutrient that's essential for your thyroid gland to work properly and produce thyroid hormones.

"Having the right amount of thyroid hormone is critical literally from the time of conception to the time you depart this earth," Professor Creswell Eastman, the chief medical adviser for the Australian Thyroid Foundation, told abc.net.au.

To understand why iodine is so important, you need to understand your thyroid gland.

What is the thyroid and what does it do?

The thyroid is a butterfly-shaped gland in your neck and it's vitally important to how well you feel. Thyroid hormones influence almost every bodily function and tissue in your body, from the way you burn and store energy, to your heart rate, carbohydrate and fat metabolism, body temperature and thought processes and concentration.

If your thyroid gland is not functioning properly and is overactive or sluggish, you can experience a variety of symptoms.

An overactive thyroid (hyperthyroidism) means your thyroid gland is producing too much thyroid hormone. This will cause your metabolism to speed up too much.

Hyperthyroidism can come on slowly. Professor Eastman explains that you can feel hyped up, lose weight, feel sweaty, have a high pulse rate, and notice your muscle strength is decreased. You may also feel fatigued, or overly anxious or agitated. If left untreated, hyperthyroidism can lead to liver damage and heart failure.

The most common cause of an overactive thyroid is an autoimmune condition called Graves' disease, in which antibodies stimulate the thyroid uncontrollably.

An underactive thyroid (hypothyroidism) means your thyroid gland is producing too little thyroid hormone. This causes the metabolism to slow down too much. Symptoms can be subtle, says Professor Eastman. "It may well be that you're just more tired than usual, you're putting on weight, you're lethargic, you don't think as well, or you're not performing as well at work or university."

Symptoms include fatigue, feeling cold, unusual weight gain, depression, brain fog, hair loss, dry skin, and goitre (an enlarged thyroid gland).

The most common cause of an underactive thyroid is an autoimmune condition called Hashimoto's disease, in which white blood cells and antibodies attack the thyroid gland.

How are these treated?

If you are feeling out of sorts, see your doctor and explain your symptoms. A simple blood test is all that's needed to diagnose problems with thyroid hormone levels, and medication can treat most causes.

Even though autoimmune disorders can explain the common thyroid disorders, thyroid problems can occur if you don't get enough iodine in your diet. After all, the most common cause of thyroid disorders worldwide is iodine deficiency, so your doctor may investigate this too.

Who is at risk?

Iodine is found naturally in seawater and soil. However, in many parts of the world, there is too little iodine in the soil, putting



"Optimal iodine nutrition for mothers, infants and children has the potential to improve health and lift the collective IQ of the next generation of children."

Australian Centre for the Control of Iodine Deficiency Disorders

people who live there at greater risk of deficiency.

In some places, lack of iodine wasn't an issue thanks to the dairy industry. Dairy foods contained high levels of iodine due to the sanitisers used in dairy processing. Since these have been phased out in many places, iodine deficiency has re-emerged in some areas.

Babies, children and pregnant women are most at risk.

Within the first few weeks after conception, a baby's brain will need thyroid hormones to start developing. If a mother doesn't have enough iodine to produce adequate thyroid hormones, her baby risks cognitive impairment, and in severe cases, damage to speech and hearing.

Young children also need to have enough iodine in their diet for their brains to continue to grow and develop, and children who don't get enough iodine may experience difficulties with learning.

May 25 is World Thyroid Day. ✎

How much iodine do I need and where do I find it?

You don't need a lot of iodine – in fact over your lifetime you'll only need around one teaspoonful.

Iodine is a nutrient that's measured in micrograms (one millionth of a gram) and most adults need 150 micrograms a day, although pregnant and breastfeeding women need much more.

The Australian National Health and Medical Research Council recommends that all women who plan to get pregnant, are pregnant or are breastfeeding take an iodine supplement of 150 micrograms a day. It's best to talk to your doctor about this for specific recommendations. Don't exceed the recommended dose, as too much iodine can also cause thyroid problems.

The richest source of iodine is seafood, with foods such as lean fish, tinned salmon and seaweed (kelp) containing lots of iodine. Eggs, milk and milk products also contain iodine.

The next time you need to shop for salt, skip the 'designer' or sea salts and head straight for the pack of iodised salt. Even though iodine is found in seawater, sea salt is not a good source of iodine unless it has been fortified.

Wanna play?

Why play is essential to our health



What if there was a way to feel happier, more energised, more creative AND be even smarter? And what if that way was actually fun, and pretty much free? Would you do it?

It's not a new drug or expensive treatment, it's play.

In essence, play is something you want to do for the sake of it, not for any outcome or result. It is purposeless, all-consuming, and fun.

Humans are wired for play. And when we deny ourselves the chance to play, things go, well... haywire.

In fact, there is such thing as "play deprivation", and it has serious, even fatal, consequences.

Psychologist and researcher Dr Stuart Brown is one of the leading authorities on play.

He began with researching the background and childhoods people convicted of murder, and found many had severe play deprivation.

He subsequently did research on rats. (He says funding for play research on humans is hard to come by; too few Universities will give a grant for "play" over more serious topics.)

He took two groups of juvenile rats. One group was allowed to play, the other was not. The groups were then presented with a collar saturated with cat odour: fear and danger. Both groups ran and hid. But, here's what happened next:

"The non-players never come out – they die. The players slowly explore the environment, and begin again to test things out. That says to me, at least in rats – and I think they have the same neurotransmitters that we do and a similar cortical architecture – that play may be pretty important for our survival."

Infuse your life with play

"The opposite of play is not work, it's depression," says Dr Brown. "Think about life without play – no humour, no flirtation, no movies, no games, no fantasy. The thing that's so unique about our species is that we're really designed to play through our whole lifetime."

At the end of his popular TED Talk, Dr Brown says, "So I would encourage you all to engage not in the work-play differential – where you set aside time to play – but where your life becomes infused minute by minute, hour by hour, with body, object, social, fantasy, transformational kinds of play. And I think you'll have a better and more empowered life." ☀

How to play as an adult

As adults, we tend to avoid risk of failure. We don't want to try something new in case we're bad at it. Play removes that pressure. It doesn't matter if you're not "good at it" – it's the doing of it that matters.

Here's how to start:

1. Think back to the play you enjoyed most as a child, and then find similar activities. If you enjoyed climbing trees, you could try rock climbing. If you loved play dough, you could find a pottery class, or, as a cheaper option, start making bread at home.

2. Make time to be spontaneous. You might need to schedule blocks of time where you allow yourself to play. Make an appointment in your calendar to act as a reminder.

3. Don't post about it. When you share your play on social media, you're giving it a result. Try doing it just for you.

How healthy is your self-talk?

Our self-talk can often be brutal. The things you say to yourself can keep you feeling small and deflated.

But in the busy-ness of our day, it's hard to tune in to all the mean things we tell ourselves. Instead, look out for these warning phrases and words, and use them as an alert that your self-talk is taking a dive:

1. "Should"

Whenever you catch yourself saying you should, take note and question it. "Should" usually indicates you're feeling inadequate, or are caught up in or perfectionism or comparing yourself to others.

Common examples include:

- "I should be able to do this quicker."
- "I should get more exercise."
- "I should be able to cope better, everyone else can."

Instead, ask yourself: Is that true? And do I really want to?

Try switching to: "I will" or "I can." Or even, "I choose not to."

2. "I don't have time"

We're all busy. In fact, we're all often overwhelmed by the expectations of society. But is it true you don't have time? Or is it true that you only have time for what really matters to you?

Ask yourself: Do I want to make time for this thing? Or do I choose (see above) to invest my time in something that matters more to me?

3. "I'm not good at that"

Have you ever told yourself, "I won't be good at that"? It's very common.

You say it like it's a fact, and it gives you a way out.

When you hear yourself saying this phrase, ask yourself:

- Is it true?
- According to whom? Who says? You? Your old teacher? The part of you that's scared of failure?
- And even if it is true, so what? Do you have to be brilliant at it to do it? What if you practiced? Or, what if you did it just because you want to?

4. "I'm not smart enough/funny enough/good enough."

Here's a secret: none of us feel "good enough". Many people go through their entire lives building evidence for why they're not good enough. Others go through their lives trying to cover it up, hoping no-one will ever find out.

Yet the truth is that being smart/ funny/ good is purely subjective. Remember that Walt Disney was fired from the Kansas City Star because his editor felt he "lacked imagination and had no good ideas."

When you hear yourself saying any combination of "I'm not [adjective] enough", tune in and question it.

5. "If only"

This is usually spoken from a feeling of unfairness or helplessness.

- "If only I was born richer."
- "If only I was more confident/more good-looking/more [anything]."
- "If only had I saved more money in my 20s."

You can't change the past, but you can reframe it.

When you catch yourself saying "If only", make an effort to look at what you can do, what you have achieved, and what you do have. ✕



Managing stress at work

Some jobs are more stressful than others. Who hasn't sympathised with health and care workers during the pandemic? But whatever your job, you can experience work-related stress.

In short bursts, stress can help you stay alert and perform at your best. But once stress becomes ongoing or excessive, your mental health can suffer.

So too, can organisational performance. Workplace stress can lead to reduced productivity and job satisfaction and increased absenteeism, accidents and staff turnover.

SafeWork Australia defines work-related stress as the physical, mental and emotional reactions of workers who feel the demands of their work exceed their abilities and/or their resources (such as time, help or support) to complete the work.

You may start to feel excessively stressed if you:

- work long hours, work through breaks or take work home
- have low control over how you do your work
- don't receive enough support from managers and/or co-workers
- are poorly managed, subject to bullying or discrimination, or have poor relationships with colleagues or bosses
- have job insecurity.

Signs of work-related stress

According to Beyond Blue's headsups.org.au, prolonged or excessive stress contributes to the development of anxiety and depression, or may cause an existing condition to worsen.

Would you know if you were stressed? Look out for the following signs:

- physical signs such as chest pain, fatigue, high blood pressure, headaches, nausea, muscle pains, appetite changes, sleeping problems, and slow reactions
- non-physical signs, such as difficulty making decisions, forgetfulness, irritability, excessive worrying, feelings of worthlessness, anxiety, defensiveness, anger, mood swings, and social withdrawal.

What you can do

Identifying what is contributing to your stress can help you find the right strategies to manage it.

Talk over your concerns with your employer or human resources manager and think about the changes you need to make. Some you'll be able to manage yourself; others will need cooperation from workmates or your boss. Other things that may be helpful:

- **Learn to identify your triggers.** Once you know what these are, you can aim to avoid them or calm yourself down beforehand.

These might include late nights, deadlines, seeing particular people, or hunger.

• **Establish routines.** Predictable rhythms and routines can be calming and reassuring, says the Australian Psychological Society (APS). These can include regular times for exercise and relaxation. Exercise can reduce the level of your stress hormones, such as adrenaline and cortisol, as well as stimulate endorphins, which are natural mood elevators.

• **Spend time with friends and family.** Don't take out your stress on loved ones, instead, tell them about your work problems and ask for their support.

• **Seek help** from a psychologist or counsellor. ✎



Ask an expert about ...

The Australian Institute of Food Safety says:

Many of us consider it our right to take home any food leftover after a restaurant meal. After all, we've paid for it, so why shouldn't we? But many of us may not know all the facts about doggy-bagging laws and the potential threat to food safety of taking home leftovers.

The term 'doggy bag' refers to leftovers taken home for the family pet, although it's common for customers to consume the food themselves.

Q Is it legal or even safe to take food home from a restaurant to eat the next day?

Some restaurants no longer allow diners to take home uneaten food, although there's currently no law that would prevent it. It's up to the restaurant to decide if they are willing to offer their customers take-away containers for leftover food – and up to you if you're willing to run the risk of food poisoning.

If you do decide to take home leftovers, food safety and health experts warn that lukewarm food acts as an ideal habitat for the rapid growth of bacteria, which can then lead to food poisoning. To reduce this risk:

- Make sure you refrigerate the food within two hours of it being served to you
- Throw away any leftovers that have been out of the fridge longer than two hours
- Reheat food to a temperature of at least 75°C (170°F)
- Throw away food which is not eaten within 24 hours
- If in doubt, throw it out.

App of the month

Headspace

Meditation can help you stress less, focus more, improve your mood and even sleep better. The Headspace app features an extensive library of digital mindfulness and meditation exercises led by meditation experts. Choose from hundreds of guided meditations on everything from managing stress and everyday anxiety to sleep, focus, and mind-body health. There are meditations for every experience level and lifestyle, plus at-home workouts and a library of focus playlists.

Limited free version and paid version available from the [App Store](#) and [Google Play](#).

Can fruit and vegetables **improve** **your memory?**

If you want another reason to eat colourful fruits and vegetables, a large study published in the journal *Neurology* has found they may help boost your brain health.

Analysing data from two large continuing studies spanning over 20 years, scientists found that flavonoids – chemicals responsible for the bright colours in plants – may help to fight off the forgetfulness and mild confusion that many people notice as they age.

The scientists calculated intake of over 20 commonly consumed flavonoids, including beta carotene in carrots, flavone in strawberries, anthocyanin in apples, and others found in a variety of fruits and vegetables. The higher the intake of flavonoids, the less likely study participants were to report forgetfulness or confusion.

The researchers also looked at about three dozen specific flavonoid-containing foods. Top marks went to Brussels sprouts, strawberries, pumpkin and raw spinach. These were most highly associated with better scores on the test of cognitive decline.

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News **Bites**



Which nut is **highest in protein?**

The answer might surprise you. Edging out almonds, pistachios and cashews, peanuts top the list, with 9.5 grams of protein per ¼ cup (37g) serve. OK, so peanuts are legumes rather than nuts, but we consume and use them like a nut. ✅

Education can help recovery from chronic pain

A three-pronged approach to learning about pain could improve the lives of the one in five Australians who experience chronic pain, according to new research from the University of South Australia.

Conducted by PhD candidate and 2021 Australian Survivor champion, Hayley Leake, the research explored the value of pain science education among 97 participants. It showed that adults who recover from chronic pain value learning three pain concepts:

1. Pain does not mean that my body is damaged
2. Thoughts, emotions and experiences affect pain
3. I can retrain my overprotective pain system.

“Modern pain science suggests that pain is a protective output from the brain in response to threat. Threat may take many forms, not just what’s happening in your body, but also your thoughts, emotions and context,” says Leake.

“By reframing knowledge of pain, I’m hopeful that we can make a positive difference to the lives of people challenged by chronic pain.”

1 THING YOU CAN DO TODAY



Slow down

What goes through your mind when you hear that it's healthy to slow down? Do you think, "that's fine for others, but I'm barely keeping up as it is"? Or "if I slow down I'll realise how tired I am and won't be able to keep going"? Or "slowing down is weak and lazy"?

If you're worried about losing productivity, consider this: slowing down makes you more productive.

"It sounds crazy, but slowing down can be the difference between success or failure, or between thriving and burning out," writes The Mindful Entrepreneur, Andrew Thomas, in *Inc.* magazine.

Thomas suggests: "Schedule an hour every week to check in. Reflect on your intentions and observe the challenges or opportunities showing up in front of you."

Slowing down also helps you make wiser decisions.

"If success requires making good decisions, and slowing down helps you make better decisions, then consider how you can invest more time in slowing down," says Thomas.

When you slow down, you free up your brain, listen to your gut and make better decisions.

So next time you find yourself feeling guilty for resting or taking things slowly, remind yourself of the many health benefits of slowing down. It's good for you!

EAT SMARTER

Pears

Autumn is pear season, and pears are great news for your gut health, heart health and immunity.

Pears are a wonderful source of fibre, especially with the skin on. One medium-sized pear gives you 22 per cent of your daily fibre needs. In fact, they're a prebiotic, and feed the healthy bacteria in your gut which improves your immunity.

They're full of polyphenol antioxidants, which in turn have huge health benefits, including boosting your brain health, and protecting against diseases. Once again, the skin has the most benefits with up to six times more polyphenols than the flesh, so eat the pear whole.

Pears are also full of flavonoid antioxidants, which help fight inflammation and may decrease your risk of disease.

As an added bonus, they're high in copper and vitamins C and K.

Wondering which type of pear is the healthiest? All of them. They're all good for you, but keep in mind the bosc pear has the most sugar.

To get more pears into your day, add them to your porridge or cereal in the morning (remember to keep the skin on), or chop up into a salad: mix pears with any type of green leaves such as baby spinach or rocket, add some parmesan and walnuts and mix with a splash of balsamic vinegar. ✕



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