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November 2022

Is caffeine **messing** with your sleep?

It's not like you drink a cup of coffee just before bed, so surely caffeine isn't affecting your sleep, right?

Caffeine can stay in your body for up to 24 hours, so even that cup of coffee in the morning could be affecting your sleep. Plus, some people are more sensitive to caffeine than others, and there are some surprising factors that can make you more sensitive, including oral contraceptives for women.

What does caffeine do to me?

Caffeine blocks adenosine receptors in your brain. Adenosine is a sleep-promoting chemical – the more adenosine we have, the sleepier we become. When adenosine is blocked, we stay more alert.

Caffeine also interferes with your circadian melatonin rhythms, your natural

sleep-wake cycle that's usually determined by day and night.

Even if you do get to sleep, caffeine affects your slow-wave sleep, that essential deep, restful sleep.

How long does caffeine take to hit – and leave?

Your body absorbs caffeine pretty quickly, and it usually reaches peak levels within 30-70 minutes.

The half-life of caffeine (how long it lasts) is around four to six hours, but it may take up to 24 hours to fully leave your bloodstream. That means that a coffee or tea at 4pm will still affect your sleepiness in the evening.

If you find it hard to sleep, try limiting all forms of caffeine, including chocolate, for at least six hours before bed.

What contains caffeine?

The Sleep Health Foundation gives the following guide:

1 small coffee | instant: 65-100mg

1 small coffee | brewed: 80-350mg

1 small tea | black (even with milk): 50-70 mg

1 small tea | green: 30-60mg

Can of Coca Cola or Pepsi: 35-45mg

Can of Red Bull: 80mg

Cocoa and hot chocolate: 7-70mg

How much caffeine is too much?

The Australian Sleep Health Foundation says you should aim for no more than 400mg of caffeine a day, and only 200mg per serve. This is around five cups of regular strength black tea or two cups of brewed coffee (not too strong) per day. ☒



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November is the month of Movember. This annual international event invites men to grow moustaches to raise awareness of men's health issues, such as prostate cancer, testicular cancer, and men's mental health. Find out how you can take part and donate at movember.com



Top 5 tips for men to improve your health

November is Movember, the perfect time for men to pay more attention to their health. It can be hard to know where to start, so here are five positive and practical ways men can boost their health, starting today.

1. Reach out to others

According to a new report from The Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS), there's a strong association between depression and social support among men. The less social support a man had, the more depressive symptoms he was likely to experience.

The report, which forms part of AIFS' long-term study, Ten to Men, says that 25 per cent of men will be diagnosed with a mental health condition over the course of their life, and 15 per cent in any one year. Anxiety and depression are the most commonly experienced mental health conditions.

Yet the study also found only one quarter of men experiencing mental ill health would seek help from a professional.

Lead researcher Dr Brendan Quinn said social support is important for all men, all the time.

"Social support can improve resilience to stress, enhance your quality of life and help you work through challenging life events.

When someone is experiencing depression, this can be of particular importance," Dr Quinn said.

"Some people with depression might withdraw from their family, friends and other support networks, which could possibly worsen the severity of their depressive symptoms.

"For a variety of reasons, many men have smaller social networks than women. Having someone who you can trust to share your thoughts and feelings with can be incredibly important to improve and maintain quality of life and mental wellbeing," said Dr Quinn.

Reaching out to a friend or family member is a great step if you're noticing your mood is spiralling, but it's also important to see your doctor or chat to a professional counsellor.

2. Eat more vegetables

"Getting more fruit and vegetables into your diet is probably the single best thing you can do for your health," says Dr Sandro Demaiio, CEO of VicHealth.

"Evidence links a diverse diet rich in fruit and vegetables to better mental, gut, heart, skin, brain and even reproductive health."

A simple tip is to eat as many different colours as you can, and make sure that fresh vegetables take up at least half of your dinner plate.

3. Skip the alcohol on most days

Many of us enjoy an occasional drink. For example, the Ten to Men report found nine in ten Australian men aged 18 and over had consumed alcohol in the past 12 months.

One third of men who drink are drinking at levels associated with medium or high risk of harm, including accidents, injuries and chronic diseases such as cancer, stroke and heart disease.

The safest level of drinking is none at all, but this can be unrealistic for many people. There are guidelines around consuming alcohol in all countries all with the same goal - to reduce the risk of alcohol-related harm. The less you drink, the lower your risk of harm from alcohol.



4. Buy a blood pressure monitor

It's called the silent killer for good reason. With no obvious symptoms, high blood pressure ages the lining of your blood vessels and increases your risk of stroke, heart attack, kidney problems and an early death. According to a 2021 study published in *The Lancet*, one in three people worldwide have high blood pressure, with men slightly more likely than women to experience it.

When it comes to blood pressure, it's actually better to take a measurement at home. This is due to the 'white coat' effect, where a doctor's presence can lead to your blood pressure and heart rate rising.

Your local pharmacy should stock home blood pressure monitors, so ask for their recommendation about the best one for you.

5. Swap exercise you hate for movement you enjoy

Being physically inactive is really bad for us. It's associated with a 30-40% increased risk of colon cancer, a 20-60% increased risk of type 2 diabetes, and a 30-50% higher risk of premature death, compared with being physically active.

You may know being a inactive is bad, but what if you just don't enjoy the gym and dislike the idea of running? You can increase your chances of continuing with exercise by doing an activity you enjoy.

If you hate running? Don't do it. Go for a long walk instead, preferably in nature. Listening to up-beat music can also help with your motivation and reduce how hard the exercise feels, while exercising with a friend also adds to the enjoyment. ✕

Seek support for prostate cancer

Prostate cancer is one of the most commonly diagnosed cancer in men. Your risk of developing it increases with age, but this doesn't mean it only affects old men.

If you're 50 (45 if you have certain risk factors) you should be talking to your doctor about whether PSA testing is right for you. This simple routine blood test measures Prostate Specific Antigen concentrations in the blood.

If you are diagnosed with prostate cancer it's important to get as much information and support as you can.

True North is a global prostate cancer program developed by Movember to help improve outcomes and quality of life for men diagnosed with prostate cancer.

With the help of clinicians, researchers, health organisations and user feedback, True North aims to provide information, resources and support to help men navigate the prostate cancer journey.

Visit truenorth.movember.com/en-au for more information.

Optimism bias: why we believe things are good even when they're not



Ever met someone so optimistic you think they're deluded? It turns out most of us are unrealistically optimistic — and that can be a good thing.

Why are we so optimistic as humans, even in the face of hard facts to the contrary?

Optimism is the engine that helps us plan ahead and endure hard work for a future reward, and to keep on going when we hit setbacks.

It's what got humans through evolution, helping us leave the cave, go after the woolly mammoth, or try sowing seeds and waiting for them to grow.

But you'd think that these days, with all our rationality and logic, and all our access to accurate data and forecasts, we'd be more realistic in our thinking. It turns out, nearly all of us have a bias towards optimism. In other words, we're often quite deluded.

What is optimism bias?

Optimism bias is a tendency towards optimism. It's a spectrum, and most of us fall somewhere along the spectrum from "dubiously hopeful" to "blinded by the light".

Neuroscientist, Tali Sharot, author of *Optimism Bias*, says our brains are hardwired to look on the bright side.

"We like to think of ourselves as rational creatures. We watch our backs, weigh the odds, pack an umbrella. But both neuroscience and social science suggest that we are more optimistic than realistic. On average, we expect things to turn out better than they wind up being," says Sharot.

She says people underestimate their chance of problems like divorce, job loss or cancer, and overestimate the likelihood their child is gifted. We even overestimate our likely life span - sometimes by 20 years or more.

"When it comes to predicting what will happen to us tomorrow, next week, or fifty years from now, we overestimate the likelihood of positive events, and underestimate the likelihood of negative events."

On the flipside, people tend to underestimate how long a project will take to complete and how much it will cost.

Optimism bias exists in every culture and age group. Studies consistently report that a large majority of the population (up to 80 percent) have an optimism bias.

Our optimism is irrational

Sharot says that even when we are pessimistic about the state of the world, we remain optimistic about our own little worlds.

For example, we might have felt

So should we stay optimistic?

If our optimism is irrational, and goes against logic and facts, should we still go along with believing things will be ok?

Optimistic people live longer, save more and get more promotions at work. They mightn't be "right", but they seem to be happy.

Sharot suggests striking a balance: "to believe we will stay healthy, but get medical insurance anyway; to be certain the sun will shine, but grab an umbrella on our way out — just in case."

pessimistic about the COVID stats, but we were optimistic about the chances of our family staying safe.

"It seems that our brain possesses the philosopher's stone that enables us to turn lead into gold and helps us bounce back to normal levels of wellbeing," says Sharot.

It's a two-edged sword. While optimism bias might stop us from taking precautions, such as wearing a mask or applying sunscreen, it does help us keep on going even when things are tough.

Researchers studying heart disease patients found that optimists were more likely than non-optimistic patients to take vitamins, eat low-fat diets and exercise, thereby reducing their overall coronary risk.

Without optimism, we'd be depressed

Sharot says the only people who are relatively accurate when predicting future events are people with mild depression.

Healthy people expect the future to be slightly better than it ends up being. People with severe depression expect things to be worse than they end up being. People with mild depression "see the world as it is". ✕

Empathy and sympathy are not the same – and it matters

“Empathy has no script. There is no right way or wrong way to do it. It’s simply listening, holding space, withholding judgment, emotionally connecting, and communicating that incredibly healing message of ‘You’re not alone.’”

When you feel for someone’s suffering, do you feel empathy or sympathy? And surely both are good? Scholar, author and presenter, Brene Brown, says they have a very different effect on the person we want to help.

“Empathy fuels connection while sympathy drives disconnection,” says Brown.

“Empathy is I’m feeling with you. Sympathy, I’m feeling for you.”

Brene Brown first talked about empathy and sympathy in her hugely popular video, ‘The Power of Vulnerability’. She has since written more about them in her new book, *Atlas of the Heart*.

In ‘The Power of Vulnerability’ video, she says: “I always think of empathy as this kind of sacred space when someone is kind of in a deep hole, and they shout out from the bottom and they say, ‘I’m stuck. It’s dark. I’m overwhelmed’. And then we look and we say, ‘Hey, I’m coming down. I know what it’s like down here, and you’re not alone’.

“Sympathy is, ‘Oh, it’s bad, uh-huh. Do you want a sandwich?’”

What is empathy?

She says empathy is the ability to understand and echo what someone else feels. It’s like being with someone in their hard times, side by side with them. You can understand their pain, you can communicate that you understand and that you are there for them.

You understand and accept the other person’s feelings, even if they might not be the same feelings you’d have in their place.

Brown says empathy is a choice, and is often a hard choice. To feel empathy, we have to tap into our own difficult feelings such as vulnerability, frustration and failure. We have to feel these again, and communicate them to the other person. She adds that compassion is empathy plus action: It’s the practice of relating to others and, as a result, acting to ease their suffering.

What is sympathy?

Sympathy, says Brown, draws a clear line between the person suffering and ourselves. It’s feeling bad for someone, but being unable (or unwilling) to relate to that person.

She adds that pity is sympathy with a sense of hierarchy: We don’t just feel bad for the person suffering, we feel like they are somehow “less than” we are. It’s less active than compassion – we don’t feel obligated to help people we pity.

Sympathy often involves the words “at least”. We try to find the silver lining for the other person.

Brown gives the example:

“I think my marriage is falling apart” - “At least you have a marriage.”

“John’s getting kicked out of school” - “At least Sarah is an A student.” ✕

How to do empathy

Brown gives four qualities of empathy. Use these as steps to be more empathetic and less sympathetic to people who are struggling.

- 1. Take perspective:** understand their perspective, even if it’s not how you would see it or how you would feel in the same situation.
- 2. Stay out of judgment:** “not easy when you enjoy it as much as many of us do,” says Brown.
- 3. Recognise emotion** in other people: again, even if you feel differently.
- 4. Communicate** the fact that you understand and you are there for them without judgement.

Keeping your eyes safe

Your eyes are extremely delicate, and even a minor injury can cause serious damage, even permanent vision loss.

At work – and at home – always think about how a task or environment might affect your eyes, and plan accordingly.

Remember, just wearing normal glasses or sunglasses will NOT protect your eyes. In fact, these can make injuries worse.

According to Better Health, jobs that pose a high risk for eye injury include those that involve:

- chemicals
- dusty environments
- excessively bright lights or UV lights
- compressed air
- machines or tools that chip, chisel, cut, drill, grind, hammer, sand, smelt, spray or weld.

Plus, you need to watch out for factors in your workplace that can increase the risk of eye injury, such as:

- workers not wearing supplied eye protection
- not enough training on eye protection equipment
- badly fitting eye protection, for example, the glasses are loose and allow particles to enter from the sides
- only the operator of the machine wears

eye protection, so anyone in the vicinity who is not wearing eye protection is at risk from flying particles.

How to protect your eyes

Always use eye protection that complies with your national Standards, and choose protection that fits the situation:

- Low impact protection – for tasks including chipping, riveting, spalling, hammering and managing a strap under tension. Recommended protection includes safety glasses, safety glasses with side shields, safety clip-ons, eye cup goggles, wide vision goggles, eye shields and face shields.
- Medium impact protection – for tasks including scaling, grinding and machining metals, some woodworking

tasks, stone dressing, wire handling and brick cutting. Choose items appropriate for medium impact protection.

- High impact protection – for tasks including explosive power tools and nail guns. Recommended protection includes face shields marked as appropriate for high impact protection.
- For chemicals, use protection designed specifically for dealing with chemicals – the protection may differ depending on the chemicals in use.
- For dust, choose protection designed for dealing with dust and fine particles.

All protection should conform to national or international standards.



Ask an expert about ...

Q What foods are safe on a picnic?

You've packed a feast, and it's been sitting in the car and the sun for three hours. What could go wrong?

A lot, say Australian National University researchers Martyn Kirk, Emily Fearnley and Kathryn Glass writing for *The Conversation*.

They outline some of the biggest culprits of food poisoning:

Meat

For picnics and meals outdoors, meats need to be kept refrigerated or in a portable insulated container with ice before they are cooked.

"If you are using a coolbox or portable fridge, it is important to make sure that you change the ice regularly. Definitely don't let meats and their juices come into contact with other foods that are eaten without cooking."

Utensils for cooking meat

If you touch raw meat with tongs, for example, you can't use those tongs for other foods. Keep them separate. Plus, once the meat is cooked, don't put it back on the same tray or plate you used for raw meat.

Dishes made with raw or undercooked eggs and soft cheeses

For picnics, it's best to avoid dishes containing raw eggs, such as aioli and mayonnaise.

Fresh fruits and salad vegetables

While these are a great addition, they need to be washed before eating, as they may be contaminated with bacteria or viruses.

Don't be tempted to save leftovers of food that has been sitting out at room temperature all day. If food has been left out for more than two hours, you should dispose of any leftovers. ✘

App of the month

Paprika Recipe Manager

Want to easily store and access recipes you treasure? With Paprika Recipe Manager you can find recipes from the

best cooking websites and save them to the app in whatever category you choose (chicken, vegetarian, chocolate etc). You can then edit your downloaded recipes to show any tweaks you've made, and interact with the recipes while cooking, crossing off items, highlighting your current step, and even inserting bold or italic text. Paprika also gives you the tools to plan meals, create organised shopping lists, start a timer and convert measurements.

Available for a small one-off fee from the [App Store](#) and [Google Play](#).

News Bites



Thunderstorm asthma a real risk

Thunderstorm asthma describes an asthma attack that starts or worsens after a thunderstorm and can occur in anyone with asthma or seasonal allergic rhinitis (commonly called hayfever).

Just after severe thunderstorms passed through Melbourne, Australia in 2016 more than 9000 people sought urgent medical care for asthma, and at least eight people died.

Thunderstorms make asthma worse because of a unique sequence of events that break up pollen and mould particles to a size that can readily enter the nose, sinuses and lungs.

According to a new study in *the Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology*, a whopping 144 out of 228 people with seasonal allergies reported experiencing thunderstorm asthma – that's 65 per cent. Many of the asthma attacks triggered by thunderstorms weren't mild, with nearly half of those affected seeking emergency hospital treatment.

It's important to keep an eye on the forecast if you have poorly controlled asthma or hayfever symptoms so you can be prepared with your medications.

Fitness trackers improve health

New findings from University of South Australia researchers have confirmed what millions of people around the world believe: fitness trackers, pedometers and smartwatches motivate us to exercise more and lose weight.

Wearable activity trackers (WATs) encourage us to walk up to 40 minutes more each day, reported the study, resulting in an average one kilogram weight loss over five months.

Lead researcher, PhD candidate Ty Ferguson, says despite the popularity of WATs, there is widespread scepticism about their effectiveness, accuracy, and whether they fuel obsessive behaviours and eating disorders, but the evidence is overwhelmingly positive.

"The overall results from the studies we reviewed shows that wearable activity trackers are effective across all age groups and for long periods of time," Ferguson says. "They encourage people to exercise on a regular basis, to make it part of their routine and to set goals to lose weight." ❌

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Diet fights antimicrobial resistance

Antibiotics save millions of lives, but resistance to them is increasing worldwide. We can carry antibiotic resistance in the bacteria that live in and on our bodies, so researchers from the University of California wanted to find out if there was a relationship between diet and antimicrobial resistance.

They found that people who consumed the most dietary fibre and the greatest diversity of minimally processed plant foods had the fewest antimicrobial resistant genes in their gut microbiome. They also had more beneficial bacteria in their guts.

The findings give us another reason to eat a variety of minimally processed plant-based foods, including fibre-rich fruits, vegetables, legumes, wholegrains, nuts and seeds.

World Antimicrobial Awareness Week is 18 - 24 November.

1

THING YOU CAN DO TODAY



Start a budget

Rising interest rates, higher fuel and power bills and increased food costs. These can all add up to a hole in your wallet and a lot more stress. It might be time to do what you've been putting off and prepare a budget.

"Learning to budget and create a plan for my money has been a revelation, and one that has greatly improved my quality of life," says Jessica Irving, author of *Money with Jess: Your Ultimate Guide to Household Budgeting*.

She says drawing up a budget can give you a rough road map to help you navigate the expenses you're likely to encounter through the years, and identify where you can cut back as living costs rise.

ASIC's Moneysmart recommends using how often you get paid as the timeframe for your budget. If you get paid weekly, then you need a weekly budget.

Choose from one of the many budget guides available, such as the simple money manager at moneysmart.gov.au/budgeting/simple-money-manager. This is an Australian guide but can be applied to any household.

As a rough guide, your budget should include:

- Income: how much, where from and when
- Housing: your rent or mortgage, rates and utility bills, phone and internet
- Loans and credit cards
- Insurance: home, contents, health, care and any other type
- Food and groceries
- Personal: clothes, shoes, hairdresser, gifts, pet costs etc
- Medical: doctor, dentist, glasses, medicines and other costs
- Entertainment: takeaway food, drinks, coffee, movie tickets
- Transport: public transport and car costs
- Children: textbooks, uniform and other school expenses ✕

EAT SMARTER

Switch to olive oil

Just a teaspoon of olive oil a day is all you need. That's what Harvard nutritionists said when reporting their research findings on the benefits of olive oil in the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*. They found that this small amount is associated with a 12 per cent reduced risk of death from all causes, compared with people who rarely or never consumed olive oil.

A little more was even better. Consuming just half a tablespoon (7 grams) or more daily was associated with:

- a 29 per cent reduced risk of early death from neurodegenerative disorders such as Alzheimer's disease and Parkinson's disease
- a 19 per cent lower risk of cardiovascular disease mortality
- a 17 per cent lower death risk from cancer
- an 18 per cent lower death risk from respiratory disease.

Why is olive oil so good for us?

Olive oil contains mainly monounsaturated fatty acids (MUFAs). These are known to reduce inflammation in the body – which is associated with diseases ranging from heart disease and Alzheimer's to cancer and type 2 diabetes. MUFAs can also lower your unhealthy cholesterol levels.

Olive oil is also packed with antioxidants and polyphenols, plant compounds that benefit your health and help fight disease.

Extra virgin olive oil contains more of the beneficial chemicals than virgin or regular, as it's the least processed. It's also the most expensive, so save it for drizzling on salads and vegetables, and for adding to mashed potatoes instead of butter.



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