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**HEALTH & SAFETY
NEWSLETTER**

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October 2023

Can you pass this 10 second test?

It will give you clues on your longevity and future quality of life.

This test is a powerful predictor of mortality, according to its creator, Dr Jonathan Myers, a professor at Stanford University, USA.

One in five people can't do it.

The test? Stand on one leg for 10 seconds.

You have three tries to achieve it.

Why does balance matter?

Many people take their balance for granted, until it's taken away by eye or ear conditions, or general ageing.

Yet it turns out it's a vitally important clue to your health, now and into the future.

In 2022, a team of researchers from Brazil, Finland, USA, UK and Australia published research in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine*.

They reported that inability to pass the 10 second balance test was associated with a twofold risk of death from any cause within 10 years.

Without good balance, you are more prone to falls. And falls are the second leading cause of unintentional injury deaths worldwide.

How to improve your balance

If you tried the test and found it hard, don't worry. Balance can be improved through simple and low-cost balance training.

Balance is strongly related to strength. The stronger your muscles, particularly big muscles like your legs and core, the better your balance is likely to be.

Physiotherapists from Get Active Victoria in Australia recommend these exercises to work on your balance:

1. **Start by changing your "base of support"**. That is, the surface you're standing on, for example:

- balance on one leg
- balance with your feet one in front of the other, like you are standing on a tightrope
- stand on something unstable, such as cushions, a foam mat or wobble board.

2. Add a change to your visual input

While trying any movement from point 1, try closing your eyes, turning your head or moving your eyes from side to side or up and down. This will challenge your vestibular system or inner ear.

3. Add dynamic movement

While doing 1 and 2, try movement such as:

- moving your arms, legs or torso
- holding weights in your hands or as ankle weights
- combine more complicated movements like walking along an imaginary tightrope



WHAT'S INSIDE

What are electrolytes and do I really need them? 2

When you eat matters more than you think 3

They studied happiness for 85 years. This is what they found 4

What about emotional and mental hazards? 6



10 October is World Mental Health Day. This year, the theme is "Our minds, our rights". The goal is to promote and protect everyone's mental health as a universal human right. Visit who.int/campaigns/world-mental-health-day/2023

What are electrolytes and do I really need them?



Walk into any service station and you'll see rows and rows of sports drinks or "electrolyte beverages". You can't help but wonder, do I need more electrolytes? Is that why I feel tired after a workout? Not because of poor sleep or diet or fitness?

In science, an electrolyte is a chemical that conducts electrical current. It's used in batteries. But it also works in our bodies.

In our bodies, electrolytes are a universal term for all the essential minerals we need. Sodium, potassium, calcium and magnesium are all electrolytes.

Electrolytes play an important role in keeping us hydrated. They also help regulate important functions like muscle contraction—including your heart muscles.

What do electrolytes have to do with exercise?

It's mostly—but not all—about sweat.

When you exercise, you tend to sweat. Some people sweat more than others, but most of us perspire during intense exercise.

Sweat contains quite a bit of sodium and chloride, followed by potassium, calcium, and magnesium in smaller amounts. So when we sweat, we lose these vital minerals.

What's more, when we exercise, our muscles need more minerals than when we are at rest.

Where can I get electrolytes?

The most common source is sports drinks. Think Gatorade®, Powerade® and so on.

However, many foods are high in electrolytes, especially fruits and vegetables. Think leafy greens like spinach and kale, nuts and soybeans, strawberries, watermelon, oranges and bananas, and dairy.

You can also make your own electrolyte drink (see side box).

Nutrition publisher, Verywell Fit, says:

"Two tablespoons of lemon juice contain almost exactly the amount of potassium in 8 ounces of a typical sports drink. A pinch of salt supplies 110 milligrams of sodium, the same amount in 8 ounces of a sports drink."

In metric, eight ounces is 236mls, or a bit under one cup.

So how many electrolytes do I need?

It depends on how hard you're exercising.

The Victorian Government's Better Health Channel says, "Sports drinks may be useful if your activity is moderate to vigorous in intensity for more than 60 minutes." That's more than an hour of quite intense exercise.

If you're "just" going for a 5km run or a brisk walk, or if you're doing a weights session at the gym, you're unlikely to need extra electrolytes. You do, however, need to stay hydrated and also make sure you eat plenty of fruit and veg throughout the day, which give you natural electrolytes.

Can't I just drink water?

Absolutely. The more you exercise, the more water you need to drink. Your breathing and perspiration will dehydrate you.

But if you're exercising vigorously for a long time, simply drinking water may not be enough to replace the lost electrolytes.

Make your own electrolyte drink

The core ingredients for a home-made electrolyte drink are water, salt, lemon juice and a sweetener to help replace the glucose your body uses during exercise. Sugar is a good choice as it provides both glucose and fructose. You can also add flavour such as fresh or frozen berries.

Try this basic recipe:

- 1 litre of water
- 1/2 tsp unrefined salt
- 1 – 2 tbsp sugar
- Juice of 1 – 2 lemons or oranges to taste

When you eat matters more than you think



Making it work for you

It's not practical for many of us to eat our largest meal in the morning, so how can you optimise your health without too much disruption?

- **Don't skip breakfast.** This doesn't mean you have to eat as soon as you get up, but try to eat the majority of your calories during the morning and afternoon.
- **Aim to eat dinner earlier in the evening.** Avoid sitting down at 10pm to eat. Instead, if you're a late eater, start by moving your meal at least one hour earlier than usual, aiming to eat dinner no later than two to three hours before bed.
- **Lighten the load.** Make dinner a meal that's chock full of vegetables rather than carbohydrates, and switch to eating most of your carbs (bread, pasta etc) to earlier in the day when you are more sensitive to insulin. You'll still gain benefits even if you can only do this for four or five days a week.

What you eat is important, no question. But what about when you eat? We shine a light on how the timing of your meals can affect your health.

The time of the day you eat most of your food can affect your weight, appetite, chronic disease risk and your body's ability to burn and store fat.

It's called "chrononutrition", and it's an emerging area of research that looks at how the timing of your meals affects your natural circadian rhythm.

Don't eat too much, too late

People whose largest meal is in the evening may be heavier and have higher blood fats and blood sugar after eating, found a 2020 review of studies published in the *Journal of Neurochemistry*.

But before you get too alarmed, this doesn't mean you have to skip dinner or go to bed hungry.

"Nothing bad is going to happen if you eat a balanced dinner earlier in the evening, or have a small protein-rich snack to quell hunger pangs before you go to bed," says dietitian Abby Langer.

"Your body knows what to do with the food you consume in the dark, trust me."


Alan Flanagan, author of the 2020 study, agrees, saying it's more about thinking about total energy distribution throughout the whole day.

"In people with impaired glucose control [higher than normal blood sugar levels] the evidence is overwhelmingly in favour of greater distribution of total daily energy earlier in the day," he says.

"When over 35 per cent of energy comes later in the day, that's pretty consistently associated with increased BMI, body fat percentage, and cardiometabolic risk, in particular diabetes risk."

Other studies from 2022 supported these conclusions, finding:

- People were significantly hungrier when they had a late-eating compared to early-eating schedule.
- Later eating caused people to burn less fat and fewer calories, and pushed their fat cells to store more fat.
- Earlier eaters had greater improvements in their blood sugar, cholesterol levels and insulin sensitivity (a marker of diabetes risk) and lost more weight than later eaters.



They studied happiness for 85 years. This is what they found.

“If you had to make one life choice, right now, to set yourself on the path to future health and happiness, what would it be?”

This is the opening of a new book by the directors of the world's most comprehensive study on happiness.

The book is called *The Good Life: Lessons from The World's Longest Scientific Study of Happiness*. The authors and directors are Professors Robert Waldinger and Marc Schulz, and the study is the 'Harvard Study of Adult Development.'

The study has been running for 85 years and is still going. It is designed to answer the question: “What actually makes us happy?”

What is the Harvard Study of Adult Development?

It's the longest study of human life ever done, and especially the longest study of the same people going through their entire adult lives.

It has recorded the daily, yearly and lifelong ups and downs of participants' lives as they were happening, from childhood troubles, to teenage angst, through their careers, families, loves and losses, to final their days.

So far, it has covered more than 2000 people in immense depth, over three generations, all with the goal of understanding what it really means to live a good life.

So what did the study find?

The answer to life, the universe and happiness? Relationships. Or to be more precise, quality relationships.

Study director, Prof Robert Waldinger explains:

“The people who were happiest, who stayed healthiest as they grew old, and who lived the longest were the people who had the warmest connections with other people. In fact, good relationships were the strongest predictor of who was going to be happy and healthy as they grew old.

“High-quality relationships are one of the biggest predictors of happiness, health and longevity and, therefore, prioritising how and with whom you spend your time may just be one of the most important things you can do for your mental and physical health.”

Relationships? Really?

For some, it can be confronting to hear that the key to happiness is relationships. After all, for many people, relationships are a primary source of pain. Unrequited love. People who hurt us. People who still don't understand.

Yet the study is clear in its findings, based on vast swathes of qualitative and quantitative data.

It turns out that relationships protect us against the rigours of life.

Think about the last time you had a bad day, but were able to talk to someone about it, perhaps with your partner at home, or a friend on the phone. After being heard and understood, you were able to get back to balance. Your stress went down. You could sleep better that night, and cope better the next day.

Prof Waldinger says, “If you don't have people to help you weather the inevitable stresses that come along, the body stays in a low-level fight-or-flight mode, with higher levels of circulating stress hormones and higher levels of inflammation, and we know that those things gradually wear away many different body systems.”

Also, everybody struggles

Prof Waldinger says another fascinating finding of the study is that everybody's life contains hardship.

“Nobody is happy all the time. No life is free of difficulty and challenge.”

He points out how social media makes us all think that everyone else has it better.



Boost your social fitness

Another way of looking at relationships is to think in terms of social fitness.

Just like physical fitness, social fitness requires ongoing attention. Prof Waldinger explains, “Physical fitness is an ongoing practice: I don’t go to the gym today and then come home and say, ‘Good. I’m done. I don’t ever have to do that again.’ The same is true with relationships.

“What we see when we follow these lives over decades is that perfectly good friendships wither away from neglect. What we ask people to think about is how to be active, even in small ways every day or week, to nurture those relationships and keep them alive.

“Social fitness requires taking stock of our relationships.”

“It’s easy to watch these Instagram feeds, these curated lives, and say, ‘Well, everybody else seems to have life figured out, and I’m the only one who doesn’t. If I’m not happy all the time, then I’m not doing the right things.’

“What we find from studying thousands of lives...is that no life is without twists and turns and challenges. That’s not the truth of life for anybody.”

Prof Waldinger says the study has shown that a “good life” is complicated, messy and challenging. Full of love and full of pain.

“The other thing I would say is that it’s never too late for good things to happen.”

“People find love in their 70s and 80s, when they don’t expect to. I want to leave people with the fact that, at least from our data, if you think you know it’s too late for you, think again: you don’t know.”

How to take stock of your relationships

Prof Waldinger outlines “seven keystones of support” that help us thrive. Use this list to identify any gaps in your relationship needs. Remember, different people can fulfil different needs.

- 1. Safety and security:** Who would you call if you woke up scared in the middle of the night? Who would you turn to in a moment of crisis?
- 2. Learning and growth:** Who encourages you to try new things, to take chances, to pursue your life’s goals?
- 3. Emotional closeness and confiding:** Who knows everything (or most things) about you? Who can you call on when you’re feeling low and be honest with about how you’re feeling?
- 4. Identity affirmation and shared experience:** Is there someone in your life who has shared many experiences with you and who helps you strengthen your sense of who you are?
- 5. Romantic intimacy:** Do you feel satisfied with the amount of romantic intimacy in your life?
- 6. Help (both informational and practical):** Who do you turn to if you need some expertise or help solving a practical problem (e.g., planting a tree, fixing your WiFi connection).
- 7. Fun and relaxation:** Who makes you laugh? Who do you call to see a movie or go on a road trip with who makes you feel connected and at ease?

But many of us won’t be able to tick all these boxes, for various reasons. If you feel there’s a big gap in your relationships and you’d like some emotional support, reach out to your doctor or a mental health professional.

What about emotional and mental hazards?

You know to look for physical hazards at work, but what about psychosocial hazards? Knowing how to identify and manage emotional and social risks can help you create a healthier and happier work environment.

Top psychosocial hazards to look out for

Excessive workload: When you feel overwhelmed by tasks and deadlines, or when your workload is more than you can realistically get through in a day, even when performing efficiently, it's an indication of an excessive workload. This can take a toll on your mental and physical health.

Lack of support: Are you feeling isolated or unsupported at work? Do you feel your manager doesn't understand? Not having someone to turn to for guidance or assistance can lead to stress.

Workplace bullying: Safework Australia defines workplace bullying as repeated, unreasonable behaviour directed at a worker or group of workers. It can be verbal, physical, or psychological in nature and is often intended to belittle or isolate. It can cause serious mental and emotional injury.

Inadequate communication: Important information that's withheld or unclear can lead to conflict and stress.

High demand and low control: Feeling like you have no say in your work or decisions can be stressful. Balancing big expectations and pressure, with little control over your work can create a sense of powerlessness.

Managing psychosocial hazards

Speak up: If you're struggling with your workload or feeling unsupported, share your concerns with your supervisor or a trusted co-worker. This helps identify issues early on and prevents them from escalating.

Set boundaries: Practise responding assertively when you're overloaded with work. You mightn't feel you can "just say no", but you can use respectful, assertive communication to explain what you can and can't do.

Get involved in decision-making: Where possible, put your hand up to be part of decision-making processes that affect your work. Having a voice and some control over your tasks can lead to increased job satisfaction.

Create connections: Take the time to build positive relationships with co-workers. This enhances teamwork and creates a sense of belonging and support.

Take regular breaks: Give your mind and body a breather by taking short breaks throughout the day. If you work at a desk, step away for a few minutes to reduce stress and increase productivity.

Report bullying: If you experience or witness workplace bullying, report it to your supervisor or HR department. There are set policies in place to address the issue and protect you. If it's available, you can also contact your workplace Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for support.



Ask an expert about ...



How to talk about candy with your children

It's Halloween at the end of this month, and for anyone with children, that can mean candy. Lots and lots of candy.

It's a tricky situation: you don't want your children eating too much sugar (and all those artificial additives). And yet you want your children to grow up seeing food as a source of joy, not shame.

You know from experience that if you deny yourself a certain food, you end up craving it. We tend to want what we can't have.

So how should you handle it?

Registered dietitian and producer of *Nutrition for Littlies*, Alyssa Miller, says there's nothing wrong with sweet food. It's just an intense source of instant energy.

"In the end, we want to raise conscious eaters, who know how foods affect their body and how to eat all foods in a way that makes them feel good," says Miller.

She says to keep focusing on how foods make us feel. Instead of warning your

children they'll be sick if they eat too many Halloween lollies, say something like, "My belly gets a little upset when I eat too much candy, I think I'll have a few tonight and save some for another day."

If—or when you eat candy, stop yourself from saying things like "I'm being bad tonight" or "I'm going to have to go to the gym tomorrow."

Remember: no food is "bad", and eating is not something that should ever be punished.

App of the month

Yuka

Yuka is an app that allows you to scan the barcodes of food and personal care products and instantly see their impact on your health. A rating and detailed information for each ingredient

helps you understand the analysis of each product. If a product is likely to have a negative impact on your health, Yuka also recommends similar but healthier alternative products. Yuka is a 100% independent project not influenced by any brand or manufacturer.

Available free, with a Premium subscription option, from the [App Store](#) and [Google Play](#).

Light weights **build muscle** as effectively as **heavy weights**

In traditional weight training programs, we're asked to find the heaviest weight we can possibly lift at one time. We then use this to shape the rest of the program by lifting 80 to 90 per cent of that amount eight to 10 times, until our muscles shake with fatigue.

But many people find lifting such weights daunting and unpleasant, putting them off resistance training.

Previous studies found lighter weights to be just as beneficial, but these were small studies and featured volunteers new to the gym. They were likely to see benefits whatever weight they lifted. A new study, published in the *Journal of Applied Physiology*, used young male volunteers who had been weight training for 12 months.

One half used the standard regime as described above. The others followed the lighter routine, using weights of between 30 and 50 per cent of the maximum that they could lift one time. These were lifted as many as 25 times until muscle exhaustion.

After 12 weeks there were no significant differences between the two groups, with muscle strength and size gains almost identical.

The key to getting stronger, in both groups, was to tire the muscles. Both groups had to attain almost total muscular fatigue in order to increase their muscles' size and strength.

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News Bites



Popular diets **not heart friendly**

Keto and paleo diets may be trending, but they don't do your heart any favours concluded a report from the American Heart Association, which ranked the most popular diets based on the best and worst for your heart.

One of the aims of the report was to counter widespread misinformation about nutrition on social media, where posts promoting keto and paleo eating plans have surged.

Bottom rankings were given to the lowest carb regimens such as Atkins, keto and paleo, diets widely promoted for weight loss. While these have some beneficial features, such as restricting sugar and refined grains, they limit a lot of 'healthy' carbs like legumes, wholegrains, starchy vegetables and many fruits. They also typically include a high intake of fatty meats and foods rich in saturated fat.

The top scoring diets were those emphasising vegetables, fruit, wholegrains, legumes, nuts, and seeds, including the Mediterranean, pescatarian (plant based including seafood) and vegetarian diets.

No need for the **magic 10,000 steps**

10,000 steps a day is both an ambitious goal and an unnecessary one, says the latest science. For many people, fewer daily steps can be the sweet spot.

There is nothing evidence-based about aiming for 10,000 steps a day—in fact it comes from a marketing plan from the 1964 Tokyo Olympics.

Data from 15 step-count studies that covered over 47,000 adults showed that for people under age 60, the greatest reductions in the risk of dying prematurely came with daily step counts between 8,000 and 10,000. If you're over 60, the threshold is a little lower—between 6,000 and 8,000 daily steps.

Other studies found walking at least 8,000 steps a day substantially lowered risks for heart disease, type 2 diabetes, dementia, depression, many types of cancer, and sleep apnoea.

And if 8,000 steps are out of reach for now, even small daily increases—of around 500 steps—will benefit your health.

1

THING YOU CAN DO TODAY



Shed a tear or two

When you're watching a sad movie, listening to a sad song, or remembering a sad event, how easy is it for you to have a good cry? If you rarely cry because you're uncomfortable, seeing it as a weakness or a loss of control, you could be missing out. Crying, it turns out, is a healthy response, and can benefit you in many ways:

- **Releases stress.** We carry around a lot of stress and when we cry in response to this, our tears contain a number of stress hormones and other chemicals. Researchers think crying can reduce the levels of these chemicals in the body, which in turn may reduce stress.
- **Can improve mood.** A surprising finding, but crying may lift your spirits and help you feel better. It's all down to the hormone oxytocin and feel-good chemicals called endorphins that are released when you cry, which, incidentally, can also help reduce pain.
- **Soothes your emotions.** One study found that crying can have a self-soothing effect. Self-soothing is when you are able to regulate your own emotions and calm yourself. The study explained that crying activates the parasympathetic nervous system, which helps people relax.

While crying can be a healthy response, if continuing sad thoughts are causing you distress, seek support from your doctor or mental health professional, or check out beyondblue.org.au.

EAT SMARTER

Prunes

Prunes have suffered something of an image problem in the past, due to their well-known role in treating constipation. But the benefits of prunes, or dried plums, go way beyond your digestive health.

- **Bone strength.** A 2022 study published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* found that eating five or six prunes a day helped women past menopause to preserve bone mineral density in their hips, which could translate to a lower risk of osteoporosis and fewer bone breaks. And it's not because of calcium. The researchers speculated that the daily handful of prunes lowered inflammatory chemicals that contribute to bone breakdown.
- **Blood sugar.** Despite being fairly high in carbs, prunes don't cause a substantial rise in blood sugar levels. The fibre in prunes slows the rate your body absorbs carbs after a meal, and prunes also appear to increase levels of adiponectin, a hormone that plays a role in blood sugar regulation.
- **Heart health.** A number of studies have found that prunes benefit your heart. Eating prunes and drinking prune juice improved levels of HDL or 'good' cholesterol, decreased 'bad' or LDL cholesterol and lowered blood pressure. It's thought that the combination of fibre, potassium and antioxidants is what makes prunes heart protective.

World Osteoporosis Day is 20 October. For more information on bone health visit worldosteoporosisday.org

