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**HEALTH & SAFETY
NEWSLETTER**

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September 2022

Is there anything you can do to reduce your risk of dementia?

In a word: Yes! Research has found 12 modifiable risk factors that are responsible for 40 per cent of dementias.

What does modifiable risk factors mean? It means if we can reduce these factors, we can potentially reduce the risk of dementia.

What is dementia?

Dementia is not a normal part of ageing, nor is it a disease. It's a group of symptoms that affect your memory, thought processes and social abilities. Several diseases can cause dementia and Alzheimer's disease is the most common.

Dementia affects almost 55 million people worldwide and there are nearly 10 million new cases every year.

People with dementia often become forgetful and confused. They can sometimes feel angry when they don't understand why they've forgotten something, or why things seem to be changing around them. It can be extremely difficult for their loved ones.

What are the risk factors we can control?

The 12 risk factors cover a person's lifetime, from early childhood into late age. While several of the factors are outside of our personal control, such as air pollution, others are within our control. Here are the risk factors that you can personally do something about:

- alcohol use in mid-life - from 45 to 64 (above the guidelines of 10 standard drinks a week and 4 drinks on any one day)
- obesity in mid-life
- high blood pressure (hypertension) in mid-life
- smoking in later life - from age 64
- physical inactivity in later life
- social isolation in later life

The other factors are:

- hearing loss
- traumatic brain injury
- depression
- air pollution
- diabetes.

Start now

The good news is that it's never too late to start making changes. With so many risk factors coming into play in mid-life and later life, the changes you make today can have an impact on your risk of dementia.

These lifestyle changes will also reduce your risk of other chronic disease such as heart disease. By reducing alcohol and smoking, and increasing physical activity and social connections, you can have a profound impact on your future health and happiness. ✕

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Observed on September 10th every year, World Suicide Prevention Day (WSPD) provides the opportunity for people across the globe, to raise awareness of suicide and suicide prevention. Visit iasp.info for more information.

What you think you know about metabolism may be wrong

“Metabolism declines as you age”.

“You can boost your metabolism with exercise and the right foods.”

“A sluggish metabolism is the reason you can’t lose weight.”

We believe many things about our metabolism. How true are they?

Dr Herman Pontzer is associate professor of evolutionary anthropology at Duke University, North Carolina, and author of the book *Burn: New Research Blows the Lid Off How We Really Burn Calories, Lose Weight, and Stay Healthy*. He says there’s a lack of understanding about metabolism and how much it’s within our control.

The simplest definition of metabolism is the process of converting what we eat and drink into energy. This energy is used by our 37 trillion cells to keep us alive and to accomplish all the physiological tasks of our body. It includes the energy needed to keep us breathing, thinking, and digesting food, and all types of physical activity.

“We think about metabolism as just being about exercise, but it’s so much more than that,” says Dr Pontzer. “It’s literally the running total of how busy your cells are throughout the day.”

Why our assumptions may be wrong

‘Middle-aged spread’ is an unflattering term to describe the tendency to gain weight as we age. The difficulty we face post-45 in getting rid of belly fat with diet or exercise is often blamed on a declining metabolism.

This assumption is one of the many around metabolism that has been questioned following a recent study published in the journal *Science*.

This high-calibre study led by scientists at Duke University pooled evidence of over 6600 people, aged from eight days to 95 years, across 29 countries. It looked at the effects of age, body composition and sex on energy expenditure, or metabolic rate, over the course of a lifetime.

The researchers found that:

1. Metabolism remains steady between the ages of 20 and 60, debunking the myth that getting older is a key factor behind weight gain. You burn calories as efficiently at 55 as you did at 25. Even women who were pregnant showed a stable metabolic rate.

“There are lots of physiological changes that come with growing up and getting older – puberty, menopause, other phases of life,” said Dr Pontzer, a co-author of the study. He said that while “several factors” could explain thickening waistlines with ageing, the study findings suggest a changing metabolism isn’t one of them. It’s more likely to be related to genetics, hormones, and lifestyle factors such as stress, sleep, and, of course, diet.

2. You have the highest metabolic rate of your lifetime not when you’re a teenager, as we have believed, but when you’re a one-year-old, when you use up kilojoules 50 per cent faster for your body size than adults. All that growth and development requires lots of energy.

3. There’s a decline in metabolism with age, but not until you hit 60, with a drop of around 0.7 per cent per year. If you get to age 90+, your metabolism is around 26 per cent less than in middle age.

It’s true that we all have different metabolic rates depending on our body size and amount of muscle, but the researchers were looking at the life cycle rather than individual rates. They found that most of us have the same ups and downs through our lives, at around the same time.

Can you boost your metabolism?

Intentional exercise is only a small part of our energy expenditure. Yet we’ve often heard that we can speed up metabolism through vigorous exercise, like high intensity interval training.

Dr Pontzer made a surprising discovery when he studied the Hadza, the traditional hunter-gatherer community in Tanzania. They are physically very active, about five to 10 times more active than the typical American or Australian. Dr Pontzer and his team were sure that the Hadza would have elevated metabolic rates and would burn lots of calories every day compared to the typical American. But that’s not what they found.

“We were shocked. Because even though they are much more physically active than



us, the Hadza don't burn any more calories than we do," said Dr Pontzer.

We tend to focus on activity when we think about energy expenditure. "But actually, even for someone in the Hadza community, most of the calories burned every day are burned on other stuff. They're burned on the immune system and on just the basic processes of keeping your cells alive, the reproductive system, the nervous system."

Studies of other, similar groups have confirmed the findings. Pontzer believes that the Hadza adjust for more activity by spending fewer calories on other unseen tasks, such as inflammation and stress responses.

"Instead of increasing the calories burned per day, the Hadza's physical activity was changing the way they spend their calories," he says.

But, he says, exercise is still essential for good health, even though it may not be burning up the number of calories we once thought. The Hadza are fit and active well into their 70s and 80s, and don't get diabetes and heart disease. Exercise, Pontzer maintains, helps keeps them this way. It tamps down the stress response, reduces inflammation, and prevents you from getting sick. ✕

Can food increase fat burning?

Celery juice, lemon water, apple cider vinegar, chilli, cold water, protein shakes – at some point, we've been told these can boost our metabolism to make us fat-burning machines.

Save your money, advises Canadian dietitian, Abby Langer.

"Our bodies are so complicated," she says, "and this is why I always go after people who claim to 'fix' metabolism. Researchers are just starting to figure this stuff out now. Stick with the science."

Some of the most popular 'metabolism boosting' foods have absolutely no evidence behind the claims, says Langer. Chillies have a little more evidence, she says, with some research finding that hot chillies raise metabolic rate, but only by a small amount, around eight per cent, and only for a very short time.

Then there are a number of commercial fat-burning supplements you can buy. Many contain some variation of hot chillies, some with chromium, green tea, caffeine, and green coffee bean – all with no or poor evidence to back them up, claims Langer. If they worked, they would be tightly regulated and prescribed as medicine to help lower obesity.

How to have difficult conversations at work



Performance reviews. Giving feedback. Talking with an angry client. These are emotionally triggering conversations, and too often, we waste precious energy dreading them or trying to avoid them.

We worry we'll hurt their feelings, or we'll make things worse, or we'll show ourselves up as being incompetent.

Yet we know from experience that prolonging the situation only makes it worse.

Fortunately, there are ways to handle difficult conversations which not only make things ok, but can actually improve your working relationship.

Author, speaker, and conflict coach, Judy Ringer, says the key is to be crystal clear on the purpose of your conversation. Ask yourself what would be an ideal outcome?

Then, when things get too emotional, you can keep coming back to that core purpose.

Ringer also suggests shifting your attitude. "If you think this is going to be horribly difficult, it probably will be. If you truly believe that whatever happens, some good will come of it, that will likely be the case. Try to adjust your attitude for maximum effectiveness."

She says an attitude of curiosity is essential. "Pretend you don't know anything (you really don't), and try to learn as much as possible about your partner and (their) point of view."

Your step-by-step guide

Fair Work Australia has developed a step-by-step guide for holding difficult conversations. It's written for managers, but is useful for anyone in a work situation:

Step 1 State the problem and provide examples. State the impact that the problem is having on the business.

Step 2 Listen and question. Let the employee explain their side of the story and motives. Try to understand their point of view.

Step 3 Acknowledge the employee's feelings and view of the situation. Confirm and clarify your understanding of what they have said.

Step 4 Reassess your position. After the employee has put forward their point of view, it is your turn to clarify your position without minimising theirs. What can you see from your perspective that they've missed? Has your position changed?

Step 5 Look for solutions. Work together to develop solutions and agree on a way forward.

Step 6 Close the conversation. Clarify and document the agreed actions and next steps, then thank the employee. ✕

How do I begin?

One of the hardest parts to having a difficult conversation is knowing how to start. Judy Ringer suggests using one of these openers:

- I have something I'd like to discuss with you that I think will help us work together more effectively.
- I'd like to talk about _____ with you, but first I'd like to get your point of view.
- I need your help with what just happened. Do you have a few minutes to talk?
- I need your help with something. Can we talk about it (soon)? If the person says, "Sure, let me get back to you," follow up with them.
- I think we have different perceptions about _____. I'd like to hear your thinking on this.
- I'd like to talk about _____. I think we may have different ideas about how to _____.
- I'd like to see if we might reach a better understanding about _____. I really want to hear your feelings about this and share my perspective as well.

What self-care really is – and is not

Self-care has become associated with luxury bubble baths, pampering spa days and a perhaps an evening enjoying some wine. But is it really about that? We delve into some myths around self-care and give tips on how to make it work for you.

True self-care is the answer to the question, “how do you take care of yourself?”

The answer goes beyond day-to-day functioning – eating well, moving your body, washing your hair – and reaches into emotional and mental care. How do you take care of your mind? Your emotions? Your nervous system?

And while you may think of self-care as a concern for women, it is important for everyone.

Self-care is not selfish

Many of us are conditioned to focus our energy on productive activities like work, or fitness or helping others. It can feel strange to actively set aside time and energy to focus on ourselves – especially when it’s an activity with no monetary outcome.

It takes a shift to see self-care as an essential part of being able to cope, function and yes, thrive.

Dr Kelly McGonigal, health psychologist and lecturer at Stanford University, says “It’s about refuelling yourself in order to engage with life.”

She says it can help to ask yourself: “What can you experience today that is going to fill you with the positive emotions you need to do the most important things in your life?”

Self-care does not mean buying more stuff

“We’ve been sold a lie that self-care comes in the tube of the latest lipstick or is at the bottom of a glass of wine. It has become exclusive, elusive, and so expensive,” says psychotherapist Whitney Goodman, writing in *Psychology Today*.

“All that ‘stuff’ we’re buying, it isn’t the real deal. Sadly, it will only make you feel good temporarily.

“Real self-care requires practice, commitment, and introspection. It requires putting yourself first and getting in touch with what you really need, not just what you really want,” says Goodman.

Self-care is not another “should”

“So tell me about your self-care,” asks your kindly doctor near the end of your check up. “Oh, I never have the time for things like that,” you admit, feeling bad for not doing enough.

The worst self-care is the kind you feel you should do, but are failing at.

Whitney Goodman explains, “Self-care has become another item on our to-do list, something we have to do in order to feel loved, worthy, healthy, or respected. Sometimes this item doesn’t get checked off, and then the shame cycle begins.

“Self-care is supposed to make us better in the long-term. It’s not supposed to be a quick fix or a punishment.” ✕

Your self-care starter list

Not sure where to start? Goodman provides five categories of self-care. Pick and choose which ones feel good for you today.

- **Cognitive reframing.** Quieting the inner toxic critic; practising self-compassion.
- **Lifestyle medicine.** Sleep, nutrition, hydration, exercise habits.
- **Community.** Spending time with loved ones; having a support system.
- **Leisure and fun.** Finding time to relax and take part in activities in which you get lost in time and space and can really enjoy the moment.
- **Quiet space.** A place away from distractions, screens, and duties.

“Self-care is not a to-do list item. It is a necessary long-term survival skill.”

When work gives you a headache

Around 15 per cent of us take painkillers for headaches at any given time. Headaches cost workplaces dearly in absenteeism and lost productivity. What can you do to prevent them?

Do you find you're more prone to headaches at work? There could be a number of reasons why.

Stress is a common headache trigger. Mounting deadlines, challenging co-workers or customers, and difficult tasks – work is often a source of mental stress. Stress is believed to cause a headache by tightening the muscles of your upper back, shoulders, neck and head while at the same time reducing the levels of endorphins, your body's natural pain-relieving chemicals.

Workplace headaches can also result from lifestyle triggers, such as poor sleep, caffeine withdrawal (if you drink less or no coffee one day), dehydration, and hunger from skipping meals.

Is there light or glare from your computer screen that makes it hard to see it clearly? Anything that causes eyestrain can trigger headaches.

A less than ideal ergonomic setup can also trigger headaches. Sitting for long periods of time in a 'goose-neck' pose – head jutting

forward, shoulders hunched – increases the curve in the mid back, straining the upper neck and causing pain that reaches into your head. Poor posture when you're standing, particularly hunching over, can also cause headaches.

What you can do to help prevent headaches:

- Take regular breaks, especially if your work is repetitive or you use computers. While on a break, practise relaxation techniques to help deal with any stress and tension, such as taking a walk, doing a short meditation or taking slow, deliberate breaths.
- Vary your physical position to avoid stiffness and tension, standing and moving to stretch your back and shoulders.

- Make your work environment as physically comfortable as possible – check that the position of your chair, desk and computer screen follow ergonomic guidelines.
- If you find your eyes strain to see the screen, ask your optometrist if you'd benefit from computer glasses.
- Ensure you have good lighting that imitates natural daylight and avoid glare from natural lighting, highly polished surfaces, or bright walls.
- Drink water regularly to avoid dehydration. ✕



Ask an expert about ...

Q Why do my joints pop and crack, and is it dangerous?

Joints can make a variety of noises, says Arthritis and Osteoporosis WA. Those popping, snapping, clicking, grinding, grating and clunking noises have a technical name – crepitus – from the Latin 'to rattle'.

We all experience crepitus, but it does get more common with age. Many people experience it in their knees, while others may have clicking sounds in their hips, shoulders, neck and spine.

Air bubbles that pop in joint spaces are the most common cause of crepitus. The

noise occurs at joints where there is a layer of fluid separating the two bones. Joints can be forced apart through natural everyday movements, or deliberately, such as at the hands of an osteopath and this movement causes the air bubbles to pop. The noises this makes can be alarming, but are seldom a sign that something is wrong.

People with joint hypermobility, the ability to extend joints outside the normal range of movement, often experience crepitus. Their joints can easily stretch further apart, allowing an air cavity to form.

You may have heard in childhood that cracking your joints will lead to arthritis. Several studies have shown that this is not true.

However, noisy joints should be investigated if the sensation is painful. In osteoarthritis, for instance, the protective cartilage that covers joints is worn away, allowing bones to directly contact one another. If you experience any joint pain, see your doctor.

App of the month

Lumosity

Lumosity is a brain game app that focuses on training your memory, making decisions and paying attention to details. The memory exercises are quick yet challenging at the same time.

The activities in Lumosity Brain Trainer were designed by neuroscientists to improve players' Brain Performance Index (BPI). The simple games tap into cognitive processes like speed, attention, memory, flexibility, and problem solving.

Available free from the [App Store](#) and [Google Play](#).

News Bites



Why are we stressed? And what can we do about it?

New research from Medibank has found that as we emerge from the pandemic, many of us are still struggling to manage stress.

Finance and money were reported at the main causes of stress, followed by personal health, relationships, the pandemic in general, work, reading the news and scrolling through social media.

Other triggers included people losing their phone (32%), with nearly half of Gen Z and a third of Millennials citing it as their number one trigger. Other primary triggers included crowded places (23%) and being stuck in traffic (19%).

Unfortunately, many of us have taken up unhealthy habits to de-stress: binge watching (57% report this), stress eating (43%), excessive drinking (22%) and online shopping (15%).

Medibank Chief Medical Officer Dr Linda Swan says: "When it comes to decreasing stress, the benefits of physical activity are undeniable. Regular exercise – even for just 20 minutes, three times a week – can be highly beneficial for stress management. The key is to find an exercise that works with your lifestyle and most importantly, is one you enjoy."

Will magnesium help me sleep better?

We often hear that taking a magnesium supplement can improve sleep because of the role it plays in helping us relax.

A recent review study investigated whether a person's magnesium status is associated with sleep quality, and whether magnesium supplements had a positive benefit in trials that used a placebo.

Observational studies found a positive link, with an association between higher magnesium intake (from diet and supplements) and better sleep quality. However, these are observational studies, explained Dr Tim Crowe, on a recent episode of his 'Thinking Nutrition' podcast. This means there could be other unknown factors, unrelated to magnesium, explaining the link.

Gold standard, randomised controlled trials produced mixed and inconsistent results, said Dr Crowe. Some studies found that people who took magnesium supplements enjoyed increased sleep time and quality, while others found little evidence of a link.

This doesn't mean there isn't any benefit, and for many people it may be a placebo effect. But if you're lying awake struggling with insomnia then it may be worth trying a supplement.

The best food sources of magnesium are green leafy vegetables, wholegrains, legumes, seeds and nuts. ✕

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Chicken: wash or not?

We are washing raw chicken less, says Cathy Moir of Australia's Food Safety Information Council. And in case you're wondering, that's a good thing.

A recent Australian consumer survey found 49 per cent of cooks were still taking a food poisoning risk by washing raw whole chicken before cooking, down from 60 per cent in 2012. This is a risky practice, as washing any raw poultry can spread bacteria to your hands, surfaces and other foods that may not be cooked. Washing is also unnecessary as cooking poultry to 75°C (167°F) in the centre of a fillet or thickest part of the thigh will kill any bacteria on surfaces.

Food poisoning bacteria found in raw chicken include Salmonella and Campylobacter. The World Health Organization (WHO) says that an estimated 600 million – almost 1 in 10 people in the world – fall ill after eating contaminated food and 420,000 die every year. ✕

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THING YOU CAN DO TODAY



Call a friend (with a real phone call)

If a phone call with a friend came in pill form, doctors would prescribe it to everyone. A real phone call – not a text – can give you comfort, energy, fulfilment and deep connection. Here's why:

1. Phone calls reduce stress

Once you get over the anxiety of making an actual call, you'll find that phone calls give you one thing texts don't: immediate human response. When you ask a question, or make a slightly awkward statement, you don't have to watch those three dots of doom "<Someone is typing>".

2. Phone calls create stronger bonds

A 2020 study published in *Journal of Experimental Psychology* asked 200 people to make predictions about what it would be like to reconnect with an old friend by email versus phone.

People worried a phone call would be too awkward, but when they did actually call, people felt more connected. "When it came to actual experience, people reported they did form a significantly stronger bond with their old friend on the phone versus email, and they did not feel more awkward," explains co-author Amit Kumar.

If you're worried about disturbing your friend at the wrong time, then set up the phone call via text first. Simply ask, "are you up for a phone call?" or "Let's arrange a phone call tonight." ✕

EAT SMARTER

Prunes

Prunes are so much more than bowel-cleansers. These dried plums offer a surprising number of health benefits:

Digestive health: Let's get this one over first. Yes, prunes are great for helping with constipation. One prune gives you one gram of insoluble fibre. Prunes also contain a substance called sorbitol which works as a laxative. But be careful, prunes are so effective that if you eat too many you might get diarrhoea.

Reduced inflammation: prunes are higher in polyphenol antioxidants than similar fruits such as peaches and nectarines. Polyphenols reduce inflammation which in turn lowers your risk of chronic disease such as heart disease and diabetes.

Bones: studies show that as little as six prunes a day can help reduce bone loss and increase bone density, particularly in women with osteoporosis.

Heart health: prunes can help lower your blood pressure and cholesterol. In a controlled clinical trial, one group drank prune juice and ate three or six prunes each morning for eight weeks. The other group drank only a glass of water each morning. The prune group had significantly lower blood pressure levels, total cholesterol and "bad" LDL cholesterol than the group that drank water.

An easy and versatile recipe is stewed prunes: add 20 pitted prunes to 1 ½ cups water, add some cinnamon and vanilla and simmer over low heat for 15 minutes, then refrigerate to thicken. Great on porridge, cereal or as a snack. ✕



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