

March 2010

Bright Ideas

Curb the conflict.

Occupational violence is an ever-present threat for some workers. Are you at risk? See page 3.

Plant for the Planet.

Become part of the Billion Tree Campaign by planting some trees on World Forestry Day. See page 4.

Take the I out of TEAM.

How well does your team function? Find out with these guidelines. See page 6.

Think before you drink.

Alcohol can damage your brain at far lower levels than you would think. So reassess your alcohol habits during Brain Awareness Week. See page 7.

Energy Activators

When you feel like you're running on empty, make a fuel stop with these energy boosting tips.

Do you regularly drag yourself wearily through the day? Constant tiredness deserves your attention, so once you've been checked over for any medical causes of your fatigue, and of course ensured you're getting adequate sleep, consider some of the following pick-me-ups:

Get something done. Take some advice from bestselling writer Gretchen Rubin, author of *The Happiness Project*. "Crossing a nagging chore off your to-do list provides a big rush of energy. For a huge surge, clean out a closet. You'll be amazed at how great you feel afterwards."

Choose your company. People who are positive, empathic, and good listeners will add fuel to your energy stores. Limit time with people who drain your energy, through complaining, criticising, and blaming. You know you've spent time with an 'energy vampire' when you leave feeling depressed, exhausted, empty, or sad.

Top up your fluid. Dehydration can make you feel tired, so buy a re-usable drink bottle, fill it with water, and carry it with you all day. Take regular sips, especially when you feel a little sluggish.

Sniff essential oils. In one US study, drivers on long journeys who were exposed to the refreshing scent of either peppermint or cinnamon felt more alert and less fatigued and irritable. See if it works for you, by burning either oil in a vaporiser at home, or dabbing some on a handkerchief to inhale at work to give your mind and mood a lift.

Take a walk. You don't need a big workout to reap the benefits of exercise. A brisk 10-minute walk during lunch will work wonders to lift your energy levels for up to two hours afterwards.

Snack right. Every few hours, fuel up with a snack that's a good mix of fibre, protein, and fat. Munch on a handful of nuts and a piece of fruit; wholegrain crackers with a small piece of cheese; or baby veggies dipped in hummus.

Press delete. Give yourself a break from technology. Information overload is a modern-day phenomenon that can leave you drained and stressed, so ensure you schedule in daily tech-free time. Explore a hobby, meet friends, or get outside, and make sure you switch off the computer, mobile, laptop, BlackBerry, TV...



One of the most helpful things I've learned in my happiness research is that although we think that we act because of the way we feel, in fact, we often feel because of the way we act.

Gretchen Rubin.

NEWS BITES

Feeling bad? Thank your diet

Low carb, low fat, high protein... which diet to choose? Apart from weight loss, there's now another aspect of your chosen diet to consider – how good it makes you feel.

A recent Australian study published in the *Archives of Internal Medicine* compared a low-carbohydrate diet that was high in fat and protein, with a low-fat diet that was rich in carbs. It found that while both produced similar weight loss, the carb-eaters were much happier in the longer term.

Scientists followed 106 overweight people over the course of a year, dividing them into two groups according to which diet they followed. Along with weight loss, participants were evaluated on their emotional state at weeks eight, 24, 40, and 52.

While both groups initially enjoyed elevated moods, after eight weeks the low-carb crowd reported feeling angry and depressed, while the carb-munchers still felt fine.

One explanation for the mood difference was that it reflected how difficult it was to comply with low-carb eating in Australia, where the typical diet consists of about 50 per cent carbohydrate.

Other experts believed that because carbohydrates are linked to the production of serotonin, a positive mood chemical in the brain, people on the low-carb diet might have experienced a chemically-triggered low-level depression.

Source: smh.com.au; and newser.com.

Value your network

Networking is one of the top three ways of holding on to your job and 'recession proofing' your career, according to a report released by Hudson.

The report maintains that all relationships count, and by keeping up as many contacts as you can, you will have more options of people to turn to should you need work in the future.

Keep in touch with people you really click with at work, because chances are they would be happy to work with you again. Most important, though, is to be sure to maintain contact with all your former managers.

Networking has taken on a whole new lease of life with social media such as Facebook and LinkedIn, and these are good ways of connecting with large groups of people.

Other ways of advancing your career include excelling at what you do, knowing exactly what is expected of you in your role, and focusing on developing new skills.

Source: HR Leader at hrleader.net.au.

New addictions

Just as there are centres specialising in treating alcohol and drug addiction, in a sign of the times, inpatient clinics for computer game addicts are now appearing around the globe. The latest clinic recently opened in Washington state, USA, where for \$14,500, you're promised a 45-day cyber-free retreat.

The treatment includes instructions about life skills, including communication, diet, and exercise, as well as outdoor adventure activities.

While many welcome the treatment, critics of the clinic believe the pathological use of computers is likely to be a symptom

of other problems such as depression and social anxiety disorders, which have their own effective treatments.

Source: Australian Doctor magazine.



Myth UNDERSTOOD

Have you ever been told that you will burn more fat if you work out in your 'fat-burning zone'?

This phrase has been around for about 20 years, and essentially means that when you exercise at a high intensity, you burn more carbohydrates as fuel in relation to fat, but when you work out at an easier pace, you burn more fat in relation to carbs.

Source: Joanna McMillan Price, cited in Life etc magazine and at smh.com.au. Visit Joanna's website at joannamcmillanprice.com.

Does the fat-burning zone exist, and how do you find it?

Great news! It sounds as though by sweating less, you can rid yourself of more fat. Unfortunately, it's not so simple.

According to nutritionist Joanna McMillan Price: "Although it's true you burn a higher percentage of fat as fuel when moving at an easier pace, the overall amount of kilojoules burned is less than if you move at a faster rate. Whatever rate you exercise, you will burn both fat and glucose (carbs)."

Say you walk for 30 minutes and your friend runs for 30 minutes. As a walker, 70 to 80 per cent of the fuel you burn will be fat, but

the total number of kilojoules burned will be less than those of your friend the runner. The runner is likely to end up burning at least the same amount of fat in total.

Another point to consider is that in the post-exercise period following a high intensity workout, you're likely to burn more fat than following a lower intensity workout.

Confused? Joanna advises that the easiest approach is to forget the fat-burning zone altogether. "Work as hard as you can for the time you have, or work at the lower intensity, but do it for longer!"

Throwing punches

Do you work at night, with an unpredictable public, or in a highly stressed environment? Then violence is an ever-present threat.

The nurse in the hospital emergency department on a Saturday night, the bus driver working the New Year's Eve shift, or the security guard delivering cash – all are faced with the risk of physical violence during their regular duties.

Workplace violence tends to be under-reported, with overseas research suggesting at least eight per cent of employees experience a physical attack during their working lives.

Occupational violence is any incident where a worker is physically attacked or threatened, either in the workplace or during workplace activities. This includes words or behaviour that make you think you're in danger of being assaulted, as well as a physical attack. Striking, kicking, throwing objects, pushing, and tripping – all come under the umbrella of physical violence and are unacceptable in the workplace.

Danger Zones

Face-to-face interaction with the general public always carries a risk of violence, particularly when people are unpredictable.

Federal Secretary of the Australian Nursing Federation, Ged Kearney, recently called on the government to help ensure the safety and protection of nurses against drunken and drug-affected patients. She said nurses were being scratched, hit, kicked, bitten, verbally abused, and even spat at during work.

"Nurses just want to care for their patients, and don't want to come under physical or verbal attack while trying to do their job," she explained. "Changes that make workplaces safer could include a panic button, safer car parking areas, alternative exits, and a safe in which to keep drugs and weapons found on patients."

If your clients are distressed, intoxicated, or disturbed, violence can soon follow. Likewise, if your job involves investigating and enforcing specific legal requirements, or if you have to deny someone a service, emotions can run high, sometimes ending in violent actions.

Working with objects of value – whether it's cash, jewellery, or drugs – brings with it the risk of a violent robbery.

Working at night, particularly if you work alone, also has security risks. Many businesses, such as call centres, operate outside normal, daylight hours. Employees then need to walk to cars or public transport at night, with an ever-present threat of assault.

While some occupations carry a permanent risk of violence from outside, violence within the workplace is also a growing trend. Rapid changes at work can lead to fear, frustration, and stress, which can be taken out not only on co-workers, but also on customers and patients.

The risk of violence at work can be lowered with a number of steps, including:

- **Changing the workplace or equipment**, such as widening service desks, installing barriers, and securing worker areas.
- **Changing the system of work**, such as increasing the efficiency of services at peak times to reduce client frustration; limiting valuables stored at work; and training workers in aggression management.

And as individuals, we can start by being less 'individual', and learning how to better handle conflict, respect others, and be effective communicators.

Note: If you are subjected to unacceptable violent behaviour, you have the right to withdraw to safety. Unless you are defending yourself using reasonable force, you don't have the right to retaliate physically or verbally.



Ask The Expert

My father has macular degeneration and needs to see an orthoptist. What is an orthoptist, and how can one help him?

President of the Orthoptic Association of Australia, Associate Professor Zoran Georgievski replies:

"An orthoptist is an eye care professional who specialises in the detection, diagnosis, and treatment of vision and eye disorders.

"You won't see an orthoptist's clinic on the high street, as you will an optometrist's.

"Orthoptists mostly work in specialist eye clinics and public hospitals, where they work alongside ophthalmic surgeons to monitor eye disease and provide treatment. This includes treating children and adults who have strabismus (or 'lazy eye') and other eye movement abnormalities.

"A major part of an orthoptist's work is to assess, monitor, and assist in treating patients who have cataract, glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy, and age-related macular degeneration – the 'big four' major causes of vision impairment in Australia.

"Orthoptists provide the preoperative measurements to enable appropriate selection of an intraocular lens for successful cataract surgery.

"Orthoptists also try to relieve symptoms and enhance vision performance. By providing rehabilitation programs for people with vision impairment, orthoptists can help them to make the best use of the remaining vision they have, in order to maintain independence."

Orthoptic Awareness Week runs from 8th to 12th March 2010. More information can be found at orthoptics.org.au.

👉 I object to violence because when it appears to do good, the good is only temporary; the evil it does is permanent. 👉

Mahatma Gandhi.

Bleeding

For first aid management of external bleeding:

1. Follow DRABCD.
2. Lie the casualty down if the bleeding is severe.
3. Remove or cut clothing to expose the wound.
4. Apply firm direct pressure to the wound – instruct the casualty to do this if possible.
5. If the casualty is unable to apply pressure, apply pressure using a pad or your hands (use gloves if available).
6. Squeeze the wound edges together if possible.
7. Elevate the bleeding part, and restrict movement as much as possible.
8. Apply a pad over the wound if one is not already in place, and secure with a bandage – ensure the pad remains over the wound.
9. If the bleeding is still not controlled, leave the initial pad in place and apply a second pad – again, secure with a bandage.
10. If the bleeding continues through second pad, replace the second pad (only) and bandage.
11. If the bleeding is severe or persistent, give nothing by mouth, and call 000 for an ambulance.



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This information is not a substitute for first aid training. St John recommends that everyone is trained in first aid. For more information on St John first aid training and kits visit www.stjohn.org.au or call toll free 1300 360 455.

👉 In one year, an average tree inhales 12 kilograms of carbon dioxide and exhales enough oxygen for a family of four for a year. 👈

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

Plant for the Planet and join the Billion Tree Campaign

World Forestry Day is celebrated around the world on 21st March, the day of the autumn equinox in the southern hemisphere and the vernal equinox in the Northern Hemisphere. Mark this year's event by taking affirmative action at your workplace and plant a tree or ten!

What started as a seemingly ambitious idea to plant one billion trees around the world has now grown to such an extent that at least one tree has already been planted for every single human on earth – all seven billion of them!

Established in 2006, the Billion Tree Campaign is now intent on reaching the ultimate goal of planting 10 billion trees; that is, one billion trees for every year of the past decade to help repair the damage caused to our environment in that time.

Every new tree planted helps reverse the devastation caused by global deforestation, with the loss of natural forests actually contributing more to global emissions each year than the transport sector.

Deforestation accounts for about one third of global greenhouse gas emissions from human activities, and still continues at an alarming rate. According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), we lose about 13 million hectares of forest per year – that's an area the size of Greece or Nicaragua.

This is largely due to the conversion of forests to agricultural land, to meet the rising needs of the growing population, and increased agricultural and industrial demands.

What's in a tree?

Tropical rainforests have been aptly described as the 'lungs of the earth', providing the oxygen we need to survive. Trees are also the greatest absorbers of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases responsible for climate change. So it stands to reason that by curbing deforestation and planting more trees, we will in turn reduce our carbon emissions.

But forests do far more. They help conserve and regenerate our soil and water, prevent desertification, protect coastal areas, and stabilise sand dunes. They are also the most important reservoirs of land-based plants and animals, housing up to 90 per cent of known terrestrial species.

Furthermore, trees also provide us with timber, fuel, food, animal fodder, essential oils, gums, resins, latex, medicines, and shade.

Anything we can do to help preserve and increase the world's forests will obviously be multi-beneficial for the planet, so see what you and your company can do to help.

Make a pledge to plant some trees

Visit unep.org/billiontreecampaign and make a workplace pledge to plant a set number of trees at your worksite, on employee properties, or at a nearby forest. Once you have completed the plantings, you can then register your trees to be counted as part of the Plant for the Planet: Billion Tree Campaign.

This campaign encourages the planting of trees in four key areas, including:

- degraded natural forests and wilderness areas;
- farms and rural landscapes;
- sustainably managed plantations; and
- urban environments.

It's important to choose trees that are well adapted to local conditions, and to select from mixtures of species rather than concentrating on only one type. You can find more information about what to plant and how at treeday.planetark.org/howto; tree-planting.com; and worldagroforestry.org.

The Australian Association of Bush Regenerators (aabr.org.au), your local council, State Forest Centre, or National Parks and Wildlife Service, and environmental groups like Greening Australia, Landcare, Bushcare, or Dunecare can offer plenty of advice and planting information.

Support a tree-planting organisation

If you can't plant any real trees, it's possible to plant virtual trees via a number of web-based organisations that have established specific tree planting projects around the world.

Check out tree-nation.com to find out how you could help counteract desertification and poverty in Niger, or offset carbon dioxide emissions, reduce soil erosion, and

the planet n Tree Campaign



improve water quality in Nicaragua.

You can buy a single tree, a small tree pack, or enough trees to start your own forest! You choose where to plant your trees on a virtual map, with the real trees planted by Tree-Nation supporters in the same place in the real world. These trees also contribute to the Billion Tree Campaign tally.

Simply joining the organisation (at no cost) will help too, as Tree-Nation plants a tree for every ten new sign-ups. Why not encourage everyone in your workplace to become members, and then hold a social event to raise funds to buy some company trees?

At pattfoundation.org you can support tree-planting efforts in Thailand, India, Indonesia, South America, and Africa. Through the Carbon Free PATT Foundation, you can also buy carbon offset credits, with all donations being used in tree growing projects around the globe.

The Green Belt Movement (greenbeltmovement.org) provides income and sustenance to millions of people in Kenya through the planting of trees. It also contributes to the Billion Trees Campaign, as well as numerous important projects in Africa and internationally.

Support Australia

You may prefer to offset your carbon emissions and support local biodiversity

and landscape restoration projects through an Australian organisation. If so, make carbonoffsetguide.com.au your first port of call. This site lists all known carbon offset providers and developers in Australia, complete with details such as their products, services, accreditation, and project types.

The not-for-profit schemes by Carbon Neutral (carbonneutral.com.au), Greenfleet (greenfleet.com.au), Landcare's CarbonSmart (carbonsmart.com.au), and Greening Australia's Breathe Easy (breatheeasynow.com.au) are just some of the many organisations involved in reforestation projects.

Having an environmental specialist like Greening Australia do the planting on your behalf ensures the right trees will be planted at the right times and in the right places, and will be carefully managed and maintained to ensure they reach maturity.

Encourage your company to offset small business and corporate emissions with a 100 per cent tax-deductible donation to your chosen scheme. Most websites offer tools to help work out the carbon footprint of your workplace, and give you ideas on how to reduce your carbon emissions and offset the rest.

There are also a myriad of ideas on how to encourage your customers, clients, and suppliers to get involved too. If we all Plant for the Planet, we'll reach the ten billion mark in no time!

“ People who will not sustain trees will soon live in a world which cannot sustain people. ”

Bryce Nelson.

Life LESSONS

Love thy neighbour

Neighbour Day is Australia's annual celebration of community, bringing together the people next door, across the street, or on the next farm. Held on the last Sunday in March every year, it's the perfect day to say thanks for being a great neighbour.

Perhaps your neighbours thwarted a would-be thief from breaking into your house, fed your goldfish and watered your plants last holidays, or made you some chicken soup when you had the flu. Whatever the case, make it your mission on March 28th to say thanks!

It's also the perfect day to get to know your neighbours. Maybe you recently moved to a new location and are yet to meet the folks next door, or you just haven't had the time to stop and say hello. If this is you, then make the effort to introduce yourself and your family to those in your immediate surrounds.

Neighbour Day is a wonderful community-building tool. The aims of this annual celebration are to:

1. Strengthen communities and build better relationships with the people who live around us.
2. Create safer, healthier, and more vibrant suburbs and towns.
3. Promote tolerance, respect, and understanding.
4. Break down community barriers.
5. Protect the elderly, the vulnerable, and the disadvantaged.

Australians have been getting to know their neighbours since 2003 in many different ways. Whether it's a cup of tea and a slice of cake with the elderly couple across the road, hosting drinks and nibbles with the people next door, or holding a street party for everyone, participation is that easy!

Source: neighbourday.org.

Address YOUR Stress

Meditation Magic

When you're under a lot of stress, your nervous system can go into overdrive, interfering with your ability to shut off.

Meditation is a time-honoured way of helping your body relax, and is particularly beneficial for those who find it difficult to get a good night's sleep.

Researchers in Chicago, for example, found that people with insomnia who meditated for 15 to 20 minutes twice a day for two months had deeper, longer, and better quality sleep than those who didn't meditate.

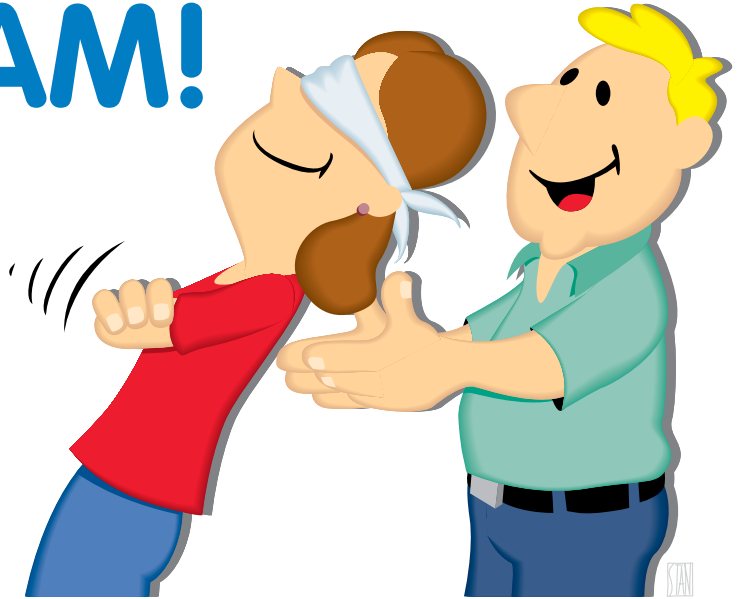
If you've never tried to meditate, it can be a little daunting. Don't let that deter you though, as it's very easy to perform your own simple style of meditation. Here's how:

1. Choose a private place in your home, office, or outdoors, when you can relax without being distracted or interrupted.
2. Sit up straight, either in a chair, or on the floor or ground. Close your eyes, and take slow, deep breaths.
3. Clear your mind and notice each body part, beginning with your feet and moving upward. Consciously tense, and then relax each body part.
4. Choose a path that suits you to reach a meditative state. You can try picking a meaningful word or phrase to repeat throughout your session, or even choose an object in your surroundings to focus on. Visualisation, forming mental images to take you on a journey to a peaceful, calm place is another method you could try.
5. If distracting thoughts intrude, acknowledge them, then turn back to your point of focus or peaceful surrounds.

❖❖ Snowflakes are one of nature's most fragile things, but just look at what they can do when they stick together. ❖❖

Vesta Kelly.

There is no I in TEAM!



How well does your team function at work? Improve your team's productivity and morale with these teamwork guidelines.

Recent research by Microsoft in the UK found that over a third of the people interviewed believed a lack of communication between team members was one of the main causes of time-wasting within the workplace.

Furthermore, the study suggested poor teamwork resulted in unnecessary overtime, reduced overall productivity, and increased employee dissatisfaction.

Clare Barclay, Director of Small Business at Microsoft UK, said the study reminded employers that while individual team members were hired for the value they could add to the business, it was important to not neglect the team as a whole.

"An efficient, capable business is a team effort," she explained, "and employers should put procedures in place that help and encourage employees to work together for the benefit of the whole company."

How well your team functions depends on how many of the following attributes it shares. The most effective teams:

- **Are directed towards the same clear goals.** All members know what the team plans to achieve, how, and by when. If there are any holdups or problems, everyone is informed and makes the necessary adjustments to continue working together to get back on track.
- **Make the most of each member's strengths, and compensate for each other's weaknesses.** Each team member has clearly defined responsibilities, matched to their own particular skills and talents, but they are encouraged also to share their ideas in all areas. If someone struggles with a particular task, another member will offer and provide assistance.

- **Understand what each person's role is within the team, and how each member's job and tasks contributes to the overall success of the team.**

The sales people, for example, know why invoices must be prepared in a particular manner – so that the head of sales can collate the information and order the correct parts, and the accounts department can effectively complete its related tasks.

- **Keep the lines of communication open at all times.** Everyone is kept informed of company changes and developments, with open, honest, and regular reporting. Major decisions are first discussed as a team, with the group brain-storming sessions an important part of the decision making process. Team members regularly attend meetings to bring colleagues and other company teams up to speed.

A World Away from Work

Ensure your team spends some quality time together outside of work. Sharing a group lunch or dinner, or getting together to celebrate a major achievement, for example, are great opportunities for team members to engage in social situations away from their work tasks. The change in atmosphere helps build trust and encourages more open and friendly communication. It's also a great time to give and receive positive feedback!

Sources: Small Business UK at smallbusiness.co.uk; and time-management-guide.com.

The brain drain

Is your daily drink dumbing you down? Brain Awareness Week from 15th to 21st March could be a good time to reassess your alcohol habits.

Alcohol affects your brain. Of course that's why most of us drink it ... to experience reduced inhibition, increased confidence, and to help us relax.

The flip side of this effect is that alcohol also causes brain damage. It's a neurotoxin, which means it can poison the brain, and at levels far lower than most of us like to believe.

Enjoy a glass of wine with your dinner? Then try this experiment: measure 100ml of water and pour it into your usual wine glass. Does it fill it? Probably not. The average restaurant (and home) serve of wine is at least 150ml – that's 1.5 standard drinks if it's white wine, 1.6 if it's the stronger tipples of red. So even though you think you're only drinking one or two serves of alcohol a day, it could easily be three or more.

Current recommendations are for a maximum of two standard drinks a day, for both men and women. Geoff Munro, National Policy Manager at the Australian Drug Foundation, has the following warning: "Long-term drinking at above these levels (or short-term binge drinking) can lead to a range of disorders, among them alcohol-related brain injury, or ARBI. So far-reaching is ARBI that it's estimated 200,000 Australians are living with undiagnosed permanent brain damage, with another two million at serious risk of damaging their memory, concentration, organisational skills, and problem-solving abilities, plus potential difficulties with balance and coordination."

Although you can suffer ARBI without being aware of it, warning signs include short-term memory loss, anxiety, anger, and confusion.

Teen Brains at Risk

As damaging as alcohol is to the adult brain, it's far more potent to the adolescent brain.

With binge drinking becoming almost a rite of passage for many teenagers, experts are alarmed that a whole generation of young people are jeopardising their future potential by suffering permanent alcohol-induced brain damage.

The adolescent brain does not finish developing until the mid-20s. It is designed to learn, but this plasticity also makes it particularly vulnerable to the harmful effects of alcohol. According to ARBIAS (Alcohol Related Brain Injury Australian Services), any level of alcohol consumed by people under 24 is doing more serious damage than to someone over that age.

A recent US study compared the brains of those aged 14 to 21 who drank alcohol, with those who didn't drink. It found that alcohol affected memory, learning, decision-making and reasoning, led to poorer performance in school, and increased the risk of social problems, depression, and violence.

As the parent of a teenager, it's important to model responsible use of alcohol. And contrary to what many believe, research suggests parents who allow their children small amounts of alcohol in an attempt to instil safe drinking habits may, in fact, be setting them on the path to become binge drinkers. Alcohol is harmful, and the latest Australian Alcohol Guidelines advise not to allow children to drink any alcohol until they reach the legal age of 18.



About 17 per cent of 13-year-olds consume four drinks a week, and 30 per cent of 14-year-olds consume six drinks.

National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, cited in *Addictive Behaviours*.

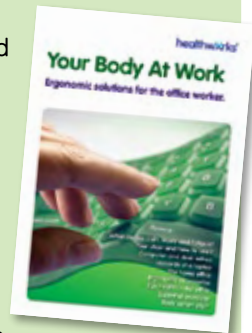
Overhaul Your Body!

- Are you slumping in your chair?
- Is your neck poked forward so you can read the computer screen?
- Are you cradling the phone between your neck and shoulder?

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Spiced prune & fig buttermilk loaf

This delicious spicy loaf contains buttermilk. Despite its name, buttermilk doesn't contain any butter, and is made by adding safe bacterial cultures to low fat milk.

It is an ideal addition to breads, cakes, pancakes, and biscuits as its acid content reacts with the raising agents in the mixture to create a light, airy texture.

½ cup pitted prunes, finely chopped
½ cup dried figs, finely chopped
1 cup buttermilk

80g butter or spread

¾ cup caster sugar

1 tsp vanilla extract

2 eggs

1 ½ cups self-raising flour

½ cup rolled oats

1 tsp baking powder

1 tsp grated nutmeg

1 tsp ground allspice

Combine prunes and figs with ½ cup buttermilk in a bowl, and leave to soak for one hour.

Preheat the oven to 180°C. Line the base and sides of a 10.5cm x 20.5cm loaf pan with baking paper.

Cream the butter (or spread), caster sugar and vanilla in a bowl until pale and creamy. Add the eggs one at a time, beating well.

Sift the flour, cinnamon, baking powder, and allspice and stir into the mixture, along with the oats, remaining buttermilk and prune/fig mixture. Spoon into the prepared loaf pan.

Bake for 55-60 minutes or until a skewer inserted into the centre comes out clean.

Cool the loaf in the pan for 10 minutes before turning out onto a wire rack to cool completely.

Adapted from a recipe that appeared in Super Food Ideas.

Dairy do or don't?

Few foods divide people as much as milk. Followers claim it's a valuable nutrient-rich drink, while detractors dismiss it as unnecessary past infancy, and damaging to our waistlines.

It's true most of the world lives without milk as part of their adult diet, and so it's clear we can survive without it. But that doesn't mean we should ignore this valuable source of bone-building calcium, vitamin D, and phosphorus. After all, one in two women and one in three men over 60 years will have an osteoporotic fracture in Australia, so the more of these bone-protective nutrients we can consume, the better.

So why don't we drink more milk? Part of the problem is that it's perceived as a 'fattening' food. About half the energy from whole milk comes from fat, and of that, almost 70 per cent is saturated fat. Now saturated fat isn't good for either your waistline or your cholesterol levels, and it's for this reason that many of us shun milk and dairy foods.

But not only are we missing out on a useful source of protein and essential nutrients, it looks like we are also turning our backs on an effective weight-loss tool.

Several clinical trials have shown that three serves of reduced-fat dairy a day assist in weight and fat loss when part of an energy-restricted diet. Low-fat dairy foods also appear to help put the brakes on the dreaded middle-age spread.



New research from the University of Minnesota's School of Public Health found that teenagers who drank milk had a significantly lower increase in their Body Mass Index (BMI) than those who rarely or never consumed milk. Interestingly, diet soft drink consumption was associated with BMI gain.

This research is of particular importance, as teenage girls are amongst the group with the lowest intake of dairy, yet with one of the highest needs for calcium. The teenage years are a time of rapid growth, and are crucial for maximising peak bone strength.

Dairy Australia's dietitian, Glenys Kerrins, welcomed the study: "Over 80 per cent of teenage Australian girls do not consume enough dairy foods to meet the dietary guidelines. Unfortunately many of them cut back on dairy when they are watching their weight – this research shows that this is the last thing they should do."

Sources: Dairy Australia at dairyaustralia.com.au; Life etc magazine; and Osteoporosis Australia.

Eggs cracked open

Make tomorrow your day to go to work on an egg – or two.

As well as being nutritional powerhouses, eggs have now joined dairy as a useful weight-loss aid. A Louisiana State University study found that having eggs for breakfast helps you stick to a healthy low-calorie diet. Of two groups of women, the group that had eaten eggs for breakfast lost the most weight, because the eggs helped them feel full for longer than many other foods.

Concerned about your cholesterol? Worry no more, as despite containing some cholesterol, research now shows eating eggs has very little, if any, effect on blood cholesterol levels, with the real culprit being saturated fat.

Main sources: Eggs online at eggs.org.au.

“ To get the same amount of calcium as in one glass of milk, you need to eat 21 cups of raw chopped spinach, 11 cups of diced sweet potato, 5 cups of cooked broccoli, or 1 cup of dry roasted almonds. ”

Dairy Australia.