



TheAlfred

Healthy men

2015 The Alfred talks about men's health

Be a healthy hero
– by following
The Alfred's
clinicians tips
and advice on
how to improve
your wellbeing

**BASIC
BUILDING
BLOCKS
OF MEN'S
HEALTH:**

The heart of the matter



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INTRODUCTION



BE A HEALTHY HERO

When you ask a child who they look up to – who they see as their hero – it's common for them to turn to a parent or guardian.

While characters from film, television or sports can inspire young minds, many children see their parents as the ultimate heroes – those taller, wise individuals who care for them, support them, and attend to their basic needs each day.

The reality is that even heroes can become unwell, and for carers to remain healthy it's important to take an active position on maintaining that wellbeing.

At The Alfred, we often see men who haven't acted on the warning signs of ill-health. Our role, as doctors, is not only to repair the health issues we find in our patients, but to encourage proactive lifestyle changes to avoid getting sick at all.

A report by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare showed that about two-thirds of Australians have health issues caused by lack of exercise, poor diet or smoking. The risks from this modern, sedentary lifestyle are significant and can lead to obesity, heart attacks, or diabetes.

This booklet offers a rounded look at men's health – complete with tips on how to improve your wellbeing and stay in shape.

Be a real hero – keep yourself well.

A/Prof Harvey Newnham
Director of General Medicine
The Alfred



AMBASSADOR'S INSPIRATIONAL RECOVERY

When Jason McCartney returned from Bali in 2002, he was fighting for his life. Caught in the blasts that shocked the nation, he emerged from the wreckage of the Bali bombings with burns to more than 50 per cent of his body.

Flown in a coma to The Alfred in Melbourne, Jason was given a second chance. Not only did he survive his injuries, but he fought to return to AFL football just eight months later – playing an inspirational last game for the Kangaroos on 6 June 2003 and helping his team to capture a win with just seconds remaining.

This year, Jason joins our men's health campaign as a 'Healthy Hero' ambassador. He worked hard to recover from his injuries, and is proof, that a commitment to better health, while sometimes a challenge, is well worth it.

"As a father of two I work hard to stay fit and healthy. My children inspire me every day and I do everything I can to maintain my health," Jason said.

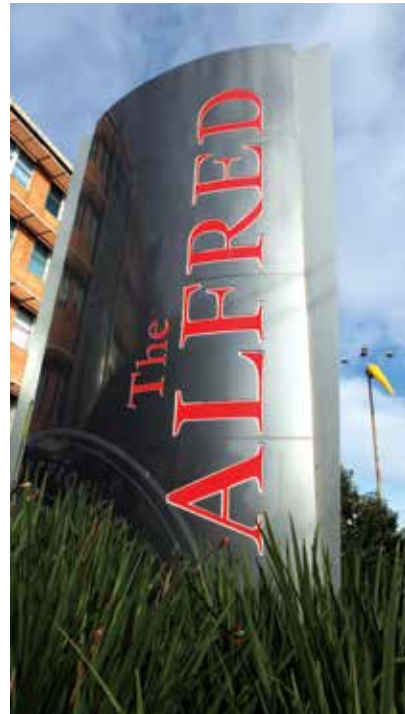
"Join me in the steps to better health and, if you feel something isn't quite right, don't ignore the warning signs. See a doctor.

"Eat well, exercise and look after yourself, so you can enjoy each day to the fullest."

Jason McCartney
Healthy Hero Ambassador

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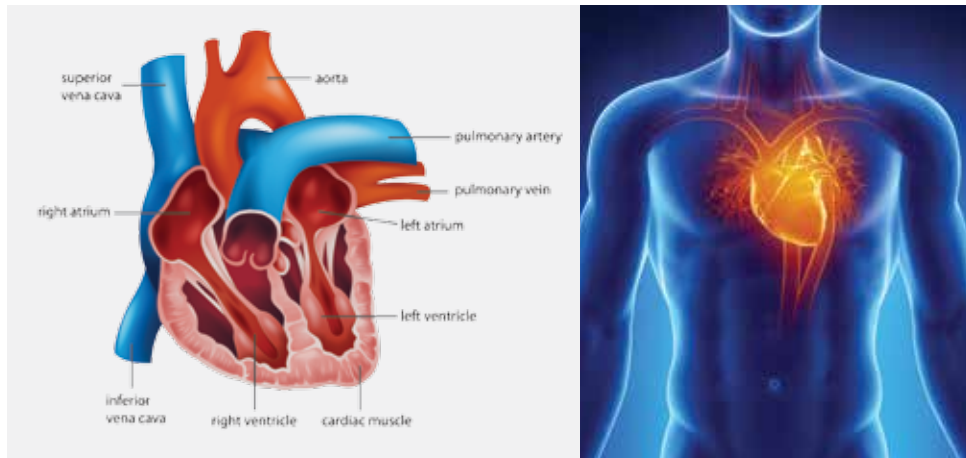


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HEART

*"I love you with all of my heart."
This catch phrase sums up a common view. The heart has long been considered not only an essential organ in keeping you alive, but part of your very soul.*

HOW THE HEART WORKS



The heart is one of the body's amazing wonders. It beats up to 100,000 times a day, making it our hardest-working organ. Its job is to circulate blood throughout the body.

Roughly the size of a clenched fist, the heart delivers blood to the tissues through a huge branching network of blood vessels. Having delivered oxygen and nutrients to the tissues, blood returns to the heart by larger channels called veins.

The heart's two pumps circulate blood to all parts of the body. When the body is at rest, the heart pumps about four to six litres of blood each minute; even more is pumped when the body is active.

Sadly, cardiovascular disease remains Australia's number one cause of death, affecting one in six Australians (3.7 million people).

Every day, 98 Australian men have a heart attack and one in seven will die.

On the left – blood collects oxygen in the lungs and flows into the left side of the heart. This blood is pumped out of the left side to all parts of the body.

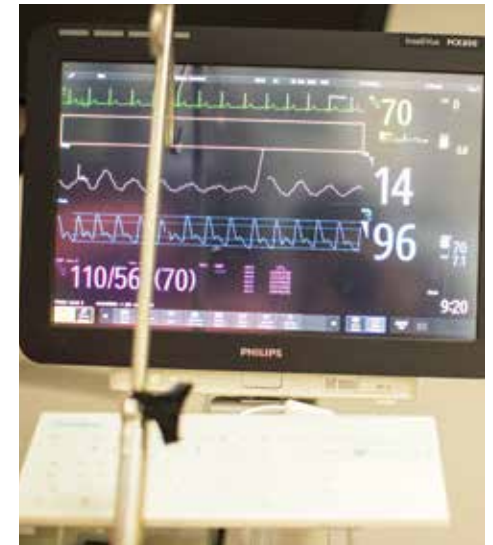
On the right – the right pump receives blood returning to the heart from the body. This blood, which is low in oxygen, is then pumped out of the right side to the lungs. Here the blood collects more oxygen and gets rid of carbon dioxide and other waste. The blood then flows back to the pump on the left side.

THE ELECTRICS

The heart has its own electrical system, which controls the timing of the heartbeat by regulating the heart rate (the number of times the heart beats per minute) and rhythm (the synchronised pumping of the four heart chambers).

An electrical signal is sent through the heart muscle's tiny cells to control the timing. This signal also enables the heart chambers to contract.

At rest, your heart rate should be 60–100 beats per minute. This will increase during activity and lower during sleep.



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WHAT'S WHAT?

Cardiovascular disease: Is the collective term given to diseases of the heart and blood vessels. It includes coronary heart disease, heart failure, stroke, cardiomyopathy and congenital heart disease.

Coronary artery disease: Is the underlying cause of a heart attack, which occurs due to a blockage of an artery. It is the build-up of fats, cholesterol and other substances in the inner lining of the arteries of the heart that leads to cardiovascular disease. If blood supply to the heart is severely reduced, a heart attack may occur. After a heart attack, the damaged area is scarred and not able to contribute to the pumping action.

Heart failure: Is diagnosed when the heart is not pumping well enough to meet the body's needs, especially during exercise. Changes occur to the weakened heart and, over time, the heart muscle tires, pumping with less power and efficiency.

RISK FACTORS

Your risk of cardiovascular disease increases if you smoke or are obese; if you have diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol or a family history of cardiovascular disease. Your risk also increases as you age.

- **Age:** As you age, the overall performance of your heart diminishes. A 70-year-old heart simply won't have the capacity of a 30-year-old heart. Also, as you get older, the heart muscle stiffens, reducing its pumping efficiency. This is one cause of heart failure, which is the biggest cardiac problem in the elderly.

- **High blood pressure (or hypertension):** Can be one of the first warning signs of ill health and is a major risk of heart disease. High blood pressure means that blood is being pumped with more force than normal, overworking the heart. The extra pressure damages the arteries, leading to premature blockage, heart attack, stroke or poor blood supply to the legs. Your blood pressure changes constantly, depending on stress levels, exercise, diet and body weight, and smoking.
- **Cholesterol:** Is a fatty substance produced by the liver and carried in your blood to the rest of the body. Your body makes its own cholesterol, and you get it from some foods. While a small amount of blood cholesterol is important for health, high blood cholesterol is a major risk factor for heart disease. Too much 'bad' cholesterol causes fat to build up gradually in blood vessels, leading to artery-clogging plaque that can trigger heart attacks, angina or stroke.



WHAT CAN I DO?

- Have regular check-ups – blood pressure and cholesterol should be checked every two years if it's normal and more frequently if your readings are borderline or high
- Quit smoking
- Eat well (see page 25) and limit salt intake
- Limit alcohol (two standard drinks daily for men and at least two alcohol-free days). Excess alcohol can damage the heart, leading to heart failure, and can upset the electrical rhythm of the heart
- Be physically active
- Achieve and maintain a healthy body weight
- Maintain your social and emotional health – stress can diminish your heart health
- Talk to your doctor about whether your blood pressure or other risk factors need to be treated.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

During the last two years, there have been great advances in treatments for heart disease. These include the use of biodegradable stents to open up blockages of the arteries (the stents dissolve into the body after some time). These are not suitable for everyone.

There is also now a drug replacement for warfarin (a blood thinner), which is a fixed dose and does not require testing of the blood.



HEART AND EXERCISE

Being active can protect your heart. Lack of exercise is a major risk factor for heart disease.

Regular exercise results in a boost to 'good' (HDL) cholesterol and a decrease in unhealthy triglycerides (a common type of fat), reducing your risk of cardiovascular disease.

Exercise also delivers oxygen and nutrients to organs and improves circulation. This helps the cardiovascular system to work more efficiently, and increases your stores of energy.

If you are carrying extra weight, you are increasing pressure on the heart. By exercising for 30 minutes or more on most days, you are likely to lose weight, improve your cholesterol levels and lower your blood pressure.

WHAT CAN I DO?

- Consult with your doctor before starting an exercise program, especially if you have high blood pressure, angina or a current heart problem
- Start slowly with regular walks, then progress to jogging as you get fitter. Take the stairs, park the car further away, keep moving
- Your exercise regime should include a mix of aerobic exercise (like jogging, swimming or cycling), stretching (at the beginning and end of exercise) and strength training using weights or resistance bands. Weightlifting also helps counteract muscle loss associated with ageing
- Turn exercise into a habit – it takes at least three weeks for a habit to form.

HEART AND SLEEP

While lack of sleep doesn't cause heart disease, it does increase your risk factors for heart disease.

If you don't get enough sleep (more than six hours a night), you're at an increased risk for heart attacks, angina, irregular heartbeat and high blood pressure. Insomnia, sleep apnoea and waking frequently during the night may also be related to heart disease, diabetes and obesity.

Research has shown that those who sleep less than six hours have higher blood pressure, high cholesterol and greater clogging of the arteries (atherosclerosis) than those who sleep seven–eight hours.

Cardiovascular problems are also related to sleep apnoea (see page 21 for more).

HEART AND NUTRITION



DO NOT SMOKE

This is the most significant single piece of advice that Alfred cardiologists can offer. Other than that, eat lean meat, fish, fruit and vegetables, and avoid extra saturated fats and salt.

Mediterranean diet for a healthy heart

The Mediterranean diet has long been promoted as a good one for a healthy heart. This diet follows the traditional cooking style of countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea and has been shown to reduce the risk of heart disease, cancer, Parkinson's and Alzheimer's diseases. It incorporates healthy eating with a splash of olive oil and the odd glass of red wine.

The emphasis is on eating fruits and vegetables, whole grains, legumes and a handful of nuts. Instead of butter, use olive oil; and use herbs and spices instead of salt. Eat fish and poultry at least twice a week. Fish is a rich source of omega-3 fatty acids, which are shown to decrease blood clotting and the incidence of sudden heart attacks, and to moderate blood pressure.

This diet recommends that red meat be eaten no more than a few times a month, though Alfred cardiologists advise that the principal consideration is that red meat be lean – this is more important than focusing on the amount eaten.

Olive oil is the primary source of fat – extra virgin and virgin olive oils are the least processed forms and contain the highest levels of protective plant compounds that have antioxidant effects.

While the debate about the benefits of red wine continue, some research studies have shown red wine in moderation to be associated with a reduced risk of heart disease.

Obesity and your heart

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WHAT CAN I DO?

- **Eat less salt:** Salt increases your thirst and fluid retention. Your heart must then work harder to pump the extra fluid around your body, increasing your blood pressure and putting you at risk of heart failure. The bulk of salt we eat is already in the foods we buy. Adults should eat no more than 6g of salt. Instead of salt, use fresh or dried herbs, spices, garlic, onions or lemon juice to add flavour and select salt-free or low-in-salt packaged goods
- **Focus on fish:** Eating fish regularly is beneficial. But contrary to previous thought, fish oils are not helpful in preventing cardiac events, though they are beneficial in reducing triglycerides (a type of fat in your blood that can increase your risk of heart disease). If you regularly eat more calories than you burn, particularly carbohydrates and fats, you may have high triglycerides
- **Supplements:** Vitamins are best for those who are vitamin deficient. There is no evidence that vitamins or supplements are useful for preventing heart disease
- **Exercise and avoid a sedentary lifestyle:** Both to improve your cardiac health and to maintain a healthy weight. Stand rather than sit – this may have a beneficial effect on blood pressure.

“By focusing 80 per cent of your effort on the following three things you are likely to bring about a dramatic effect: don’t smoke, keep your blood pressure stable and cholesterol down.”

– Prof. Tony Dart



FOODS THAT ARE SURPRISINGLY HIGH IN SALT INCLUDE:

- Canned soup
- Tomato juice
- Commercial sauces
- Regular bread
- Most dry biscuits
- Hard cheese
- Sausages
- Tinned fish
- Some mineral waters
- Many breakfast cereals

* Look at the nutrition label – try to avoid foods that contain more than 300mg sodium per 100g of food.

Don't be fooled

If the ingredients list vegetable salt, sodium, sea salt, rock salt, garlic salt, celery salt, flavour enhancer, MSG (monosodium glutamate) – it's still salt.

Did you know?

Caffeine can make your blood pressure go up for a short time. In most people, caffeine has no long-term effect on blood pressure. But if you have irregular heart rhythms, caffeine may make your heart work harder. If you have high blood pressure or heart-related problems, ask your doctor if caffeine is safe for you.

HEART AND MENTAL HEALTH

The power of the mind: stress

The mind and body are so interlinked that an episode of acute stress could trigger a heart attack. This has been proven – a sympathetic nervous system can react to tragic news, for example, by inducing a heart attack.

It is harder to prove a definite link between ongoing, chronic stress and heart attacks, but Alfred cardiologists believe there is probably a connection.

Depression

There is a strong link between depression and heart disease, but this mental health condition may be due to other factors as well. Depressed people tend to exercise half as much as people without depression, and a sedentary lifestyle can increase the risk of depression and heart disease.

After a heart attack, it's not uncommon to feel a sense of powerlessness, or not feeling in control of your circumstances. This may contribute to negative thoughts or depression.

What can I do?

- Maintain a healthy diet
- Commit to a regular activity like running, yoga or swimming – something that helps you feel calm
- Talk to your doctor to devise an action plan if you are feeling depressed.

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PATIENT STORY – HEART TO HEART



A life-threatening illness came 'out of nowhere' for Victorian man Igor Pelka.

In 2013, Igor, 34, had a busy life, a stressful job and two children. He worked long hours as director of a drilling company. Then he started to struggle with his health.

'I had a bad flu that I couldn't shake off. I was working ridiculous hours in a demanding job and was trying to push through,' he said.

On top of the flu, Igor experienced upper abdominal pains and shortness of breath for over a week before the nagging pain began to feel more serious and he couldn't manage to lift his kids.

'If I had not gone to the doctor that Saturday afternoon, it might have ended a bit differently. While I was in the GP surgery, the pain ramped up and the breathing difficulties amplified.'

Igor was sent to hospital and an x-ray revealed he had a heart condition – dilated cardiomyopathy (a disease of the heart muscle).

'It was really out of left field. I had no idea it was related to my heart. I thought I'd pulled a muscle. I had no other signs, no pains in the left arm or anything. It was all a bit of a shock.'

Although the details are now blurry, Igor says he spent a bad night in his local hospital.

'I went downhill that night and my whole body started shutting down. In the morning I was admitted to ICU.'

Igor's partner, Lauren, who was eight-and-a-half months pregnant, was called in to speak with doctors, who told her Igor was critically ill. So serious was his condition that Igor was transferred to The Alfred.

"We went from having everything as normal as it could be to being told I may not make it. My partner was beside herself."

'She was facing the prospect of losing me while I was just trying to breathe and stay with it.'

Igor spent five days in The Alfred's ICU and five days on the ward. His condition was stabilised with the use of strong medication, and an implantable cardioverter defibrillator (ICD) was inserted in his chest. An ICD uses electrical pulses or shocks to help control life-threatening arrhythmias.

The cause of Igor's condition is unknown, but doctors believe he may have been living with it for some months, due to scarring on his heart.

'The flu probably had a part to play. Stress and the flu together was a bad combination,' Igor said.

Igor was discharged from hospital five days before his new baby girl was born. His children, two girls and a boy, are now aged six, five and two.

These days life is much calmer. Following the medical crisis, the family decided on a major lifestyle change.

'We've moved to the country, like we always wanted. I have no stress now. I have a much clearer head and the kids are loving it. We have a relaxed lifestyle, big open spaces, a massive veggie garden and chooks.'



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SLEEP

There is no question that sleep is under-valued in today's busy world. And yet the body needs sleep just as much as it needs to breathe and eat.

HOW MUCH?

less than 6 hours
BAD

7-8 hours
SATISFACTORY

9 hours
IDEAL

Asking how much sleep you should have is a bit like asking how much you should eat – each person is different. Nine hours is ideal but most people cope well with seven or eight hours a night.

Age makes a difference too: younger people generally need more sleep than older people, mainly because they are more active.

SLEEP'S PURPOSE

It was only two years ago that sleep's function was clearly defined. Researchers found that sleep activates the glymphatic system inside the brain, which turns on and off with sleep.

The glymphatic system washes the toxic proteins from the brain into the body, where they are removed, like other waste, by the kidney and liver.

“Sleep is like a dishwasher that turns on and cleans the plates and cutlery. It's the same in the brain – it switches on and removes all the toxic proteins from the brain.”

An early sign of this build-up of toxins can sometimes be obvious, with a resulting 'stress headache' or fatigue.

If it's not switched on, this build-up can contribute to memory loss, personality change and dementia.”

While you are sleeping

Sleep deprivation leaves the brain exhausted and unable to perform as well. During sleep, the brain rests busy neurons, forms new neural pathways and produces proteins that help cells repair damage. It also produces infection-fighting antibodies and cells to fight off bacteria and viruses.

– **Prof. Matthew Naughton,**
Head General Respiratory &
Sleep – Allergy, Immunology and
Respiratory Medicine, The Alfred.

SLEEP

SLEEP CYCLES

The quantity of sleep is one matter; its quality is another – sound, constant sleep is vital.

Over a nine-hour sleeping period, you will go through four to five cycles of sleep (four non-REM and one REM).

1. Rapid Eye Movement (REM) sleep is characterised by paralysis of muscles and by high mental activity. REM sleep is important for brain development (learning, memory, ongoing functionality). It's also said to contribute to your emotional health.
2. Non-REM sleep is important for growth and repair to your body, which helps your immune function as well as muscle and bone development.

Uninterrupted sleep is important to ensure you have appropriate sleep cycles.



SLEEP DEPRIVATION AND HEALTH PROBLEMS

An ongoing lack of sleep can lead to serious health problems, affecting everything from your general health to very specific areas of your mental and emotional wellbeing. In fact, the bulk of people with insomnia have another health condition.

While we realise that a poor night's sleep can cause grumpiness, it may be less well known that diminished sleep can lead to weakened immunity, making us more susceptible to viruses like colds and flu.

Sleep deprivation can lead to:

- An increase in accidents – as a consequence of reduced alertness
- A lowering of cognitive ability – you're unable to think, learn or problem solve as effectively while tired
- Forgetfulness. We process information and store memories while we sleep
- Poor judgement/decision making. Without adequate sleep, you have less ability to assess situations accurately and then act wisely. Studies have shown that the sleep-poor perform relatively poorly in tests of mental alertness.

SHIFT WORK

Working and being awake throughout the night can seriously compromise our wellbeing. Significant challenges are posed by constantly changing rosters and the need to sleep at varying times.

Like shift workers, people who regularly travel internationally for work may suffer sleep deprivation, as it takes three to five days for the body to adjust to a new time zone.

WHAT CAN I DO?

For some people, shift work is unavoidable. But there are ways to protect your health when working unusual hours:

- Maintain a healthy diet, be well hydrated and do some exercise
- Use alcohol with extreme caution, as effects will be magnified
- Where possible, have a forward-rotating roster – where you go from morning to afternoon to overnight shifts then back to morning
- Avoid extremely long work hours (more than 70 per week). While you may be tempted to work longer shift-work hours for financial reasons, your health will suffer

- Sleeping in the day is difficult. Keep the room dark, quiet and cool, and use ear plugs and eye shades.
- To adjust to a new time zone, try brisk walking during daylight hours.

NAPPING

If you are suffering from sleep deprivation, a nap may help. But keep it short. Long naps may make you too groggy or affect your night-time sleep.

- Nap for 20–30 minutes only
- Best time is usually mid-afternoon
- Choose a quiet, dark place for your nap.

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WIDE AWAKE

Sometimes the answer can be simple – one US researcher is using nothing but exercise, fresh air and no electricity to improve the sleep of a group of insomniac teenagers.

WHAT CAN I DO?

You can improve your chances of a good night's sleep by practising good 'sleep hygiene'.

- Sleep regular hours, going to bed at the same time each night, where possible
- Sleep in a cool, quiet environment
- Avoid sedatives like pills or alcohol and stimulants like caffeine and nicotine
- Exercise regularly in bright light
- Avoid strenuous exercise just prior to sleep
- Avoid going to sleep with the TV or radio on
- Treat underlying conditions – such as asthma, anxiety, stress and heartburn – that may disturb your sleep.



SLEEP AND HEART

Snoring is very common, particularly among men. Some may also suffer from sleep apnoea – which is characterised by pauses in breathing while sleeping.

This condition causes poor-quality sleep, tends to result in raised blood pressure and also raises the risk of heart disease.

Snoring: when to worry

Alcohol, body weight and sleeping position can lead to intermittent snoring.

You should seek treatment if:

- Your snoring is not resolved by sleeping on your side or by minimising alcohol
- Your snoring is disturbing other people or is audible from other rooms
- You have significant cardiovascular disease, use blood-pressure pills, have an irregular heartbeat or heart failure, have had a mini-stroke or have unstable type 2 diabetes
- You have uncontrolled sleepiness and are unable to perform cognitively at your maximum level
- You have upcoming major surgery, particularly an operation of the chest or abdomen that will require you to stay overnight in hospital. There is an increased risk of post-operative complications, such as respiratory failure or pneumonia, in untreated sleep apnoea
- You have a receding chin or small mouth, which could predispose you to snoring or sleep apnoea.

Treatments

There have been some advances in treatments for snoring and sleep apnoea in recent years.

These include:

- Nasal dilator strips or nasal expiratory valves – small 'bandaid-like' devices attach over each nostril and a small valve allows almost unrestricted airflow into the nostril but limits the flow of air out
- Nasal steroids – generally used for hayfever, but can also be useful for snoring
- CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure) machines, which use mild air pressure to keep the airways open
- Positional therapy – devices to help you sleep on your side or a slight raising of the bed to reduce body fluid coming up around the neck
- Nasal, throat or tongue surgery
- Jaw surgery
- Weight loss
- Dental devices – similar to mouthguards.

The future

Scientists have been exploring other avenues to solve this very common problem. There is hope on the horizon with options including a tongue pacemaker, surfactant mouth sprays or tablets designed to stop waking arousals that contribute to cyclic snoring and apnoea.



SLEEP AND EXERCISE

Professor Mark Fitzgerald is The Alfred's Director of Trauma Services and, currently, the Director of the National Trauma Research Institute. He's a busy man, overseeing the care of the state's most critically injured patients.



It's not unusual for Prof. Fitzgerald to have long days – waking early, for example, to answer emails or to take part in tele-lectures at 2am. Yet he's not tired or stressed – he says the answer is exercise.

Prof. Fitzgerald is a runner; he says running is time for himself, to sort out his thoughts, get fit, build stamina and – as a bonus – sleep well.

"I run three to four times a week – you sleep really deeply when you run. I sleep like a log. It's quality sleep," he explained.

SLEEP AND NUTRITION

Losing sleep, gaining weight

There seems to be a link between lack of sleep and increase in appetite. And those who regularly sleep less than six hours a day are more likely to become obese than those who sleep seven to nine hours.

Some research shows that brain chemicals telling us we've had enough food are lacking in those who sleep less. To compensate, we try to increase those levels with sugary foods – which doesn't help your waistline.

Added to this, without sufficient sleep your body releases higher levels of insulin after you eat. This results in greater fat storage, increasing your risk of type 2 diabetes.

People who consistently sleep well have a much easier time managing their weight, partly because their endocrine regulation is not disrupted and partly because they are less likely to snack between meals.

Adequate sleep may be a good first step for those wanting to lose weight.



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SLEEP AND MENTAL HEALTH

Not surprisingly, a lack of sleep affects your mind.

If you have less than six hours of sleep at night, your sleepiness can lead to anger, irritability, anxiety and depression. You will be more easily stressed, feel more fragile and on edge, and your relationships will deteriorate.

The most common sleep disorder, insomnia, is often one of the first symptoms of depression – the two conditions feed off one another. When you're depressed, it's often more difficult to fall asleep. However, when normal sleep is restored, feelings of anxiety and depression can disappear.



Dual treatment

In The Alfred sleep lab, we regularly screen for cardiovascular issues, diabetes and mental health conditions.

Of the patients referred to us for snoring, we know that one-third have a significant health issue and that half of those (one in six) have unrecognised mental health problems. There is a strong connection between sleep apnoea and depression or anxiety.

You don't sleep well, you eat poorly and gain weight – and the apnoea and mental health worsen.



Chicken or egg?

Sleep problems are particularly common in people with anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

However, there is renewed discussion about whether depressive disorders precede or follow the experience of chronic sleep deprivation. It's certainly common for people who don't get enough sleep to be depressed. It's also important to note that many people with sleep problems have obesity, itself a risk factor for depression.

While the chicken-or-egg argument over sleep and mental health has not been solved, it's accepted that a good night's sleep helps with mental and emotional resilience. Sleep disruption wreaks havoc in the brain, affecting stress hormones and emotional regulation. So insomnia may amplify the effects of psychiatric disorders.

To help keep your mental health strong, follow good sleep hygiene (outlined at page 20).

The old advice for good health – eat two serves of fruit and five serves of vegetables each day – is not being followed by the vast majority of Australians. It all seems too hard in this day of fast food, drive-throughs and busy lives. Our diets are full of processed and packaged foods. Convenience has led to a spike in obesity.

Let's take it back to basics. What you put in your belly affects your whole body, not just the size of your waistline. A good diet leads to more energy and a higher chance of preventing chronic diseases like type 2 diabetes, bowel cancer, heart disease and osteoporosis.

WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

Nowadays a vast array of information is available on nutrition, some of it mutually contradictory. No wonder people get confused.

Here's a quick rundown on how to 'translate' claims in the light of nutrition panels on the back of products:

- 'Light' and 'lite' do not mean low in fat or energy
- Ingredients are usually listed from most to least in quantity
- Low-fat diet – look for less than 10g fat per 100g
- Low-salt diet – look for less than 120mg sodium per 100g
- A product advertised as '80 per cent fat free' means that it is 20 per cent fat
- 'No added sugar' means that a product does not contain added sugar – but may contain natural sugars
- 'Reduced fat' or 'reduced salt' claims simply mean that the advertised product has at least 25 per cent less fat than the original product (so take care to read the nutrition panel).

OUR TOP PICKS

Some foods are described as 'super'. Not all are what they are cracked up to be, and they often come with a hefty price tag. Here are our top (and economical) picks for a healthy diet:

- Blueberries
- Yoghurt
- Broccoli
- Oats/barley
- Salmon
- Spinach/kale/silverbeet
- Lentils/legumes
- Sweet potatoes.





TIPS AND TRICKS – TRY THESE:

Life is busy. You may not have time to cook a fresh meal every day. There are good ways to ‘cheat’ and still eat healthy foods.

- Minimise drinks high in sugar, such as soft drinks, flavoured milk and smoothies, as these can contain as much energy as a snack or small meal. Try having a small tub of yoghurt or a piece of fruit as a snack instead. This will provide you with more nutrition and keep you more satisfied.
- Keep it simple – aim for five serves of vegetables per day. You’ll have less space for ‘extras’/foods high in fat, sugar and energy
 - 1 serve of vegetables = 1 cup salad vegetables or ½ cup cooked veg
 - Frozen vegetables are just as good nutritionally as fresh vegies. Use a mixed variety to add to a simple stir fry
- Look at your portions – aim for half of your plate to be filled with vegetables, one-quarter for protein (meat/fish/tofu) and one-quarter for carbohydrate (pasta/rice/potato/bread)
- Swap white for wholegrain varieties wherever possible to boost your fibre intake
- **Eat every colour** – different colours often indicate different nutrients. So if you have a dinner plate full of bright colours (e.g. orange (carrot), green (broccoli), yellow (corn) and white (chicken), you’re doing pretty well. Aim for three to five different colours on your plate.

NUTRITION AND HEART

Rates of obesity have doubled in Australia over the last two decades. The latest national health survey found that more than 62 per cent of Australian adults are overweight or obese. A US study found that severe obesity can take at least a decade off a person’s life.

Obesity: what is it?

Obesity is measured by your Body Mass Index (BMI), which is calculated by dividing weight in kilograms by height in metres squared. Adults are considered overweight with a BMI between 25.0 and 30.0. Obesity is defined as a BMI over 30.0.

Heart trouble

Being overweight increases your risk of coronary heart disease (CHD), as well as type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, bowel cancer and stroke.

Extra fat, especially stored around your stomach, has a significant impact on your metabolism, affects your blood pressure and interferes with your ability to use insulin effectively. Fat around the stomach is considerably more dangerous for your heart than weight stored in other parts of the body.

As your BMI rises, so does your risk for CHD, a condition in which plaque builds up inside the coronary arteries. Plaque can narrow or block the coronary arteries and reduce blood flow to the heart muscle. This can cause angina (chest pain) or a heart attack.

Obesity can also lead to heart failure – meaning that your heart can’t pump enough blood to meet your body’s needs.

Weight loss – how to do it

The truth is simple – what we eat largely determines our weight. You may be enthusiastic about a new diet for a while, but the best approach is a commitment to a healthy lifestyle. There is no easy pill, no solution that does not require effort.



What can I do?

- Ask your GP periodically to assess your BMI and weight circumference. The Department of Health has an online BMI calculator – log onto www.healthyactive.gov.au
- GPs can also help devise an appropriate weight management program if required and can refer you to a dietitian
- Swap screen time for physical activities
- Set goals – even small amounts of weight loss improve health and wellbeing
- Pay attention to your diet and focus on eating healthy foods.

Fad diets

Each year there seems to be a new diet, lauded by celebrities and your peers alike, that promises instant weight loss, greater health and a new you.

Buyer beware: fad diets can be dangerous and result in yo-yo dieting or, worse, put your health at risk.

DIET	PROs	CONs
Paleo – the primal diet – eating as our ancestors did.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Includes plenty of protein (meat), vegetables and fruits - Reduced intake of processed or 'junk' foods. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Excludes breads and cereals, dairy and legumes – leading to omission of major nutrients, which can lead to deficiencies and/or ketosis - Can be high in saturated fats – linked to elevated 'bad' cholesterol and cardiovascular disease risk - One size does not fit all when it comes to diets.
5:2 – fasting two days of the week and eating normally for the other five.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Some have experienced weight loss and find it easier to watch their diet for two days rather than seven - May lessen chance of getting diabetes or high blood pressure. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fasting not advisable for those with diabetes and some other health conditions - Fasting can lead to nausea, irritability, poor concentration and difficulty sleeping - Fasting may encourage over-eating or bingeing on the 'normal' days, potentially leading to a negative dieting cycle and relationship with food.
No sugar – cutting out all added and processed sugars.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduction in refined or added sugar may assist in weight management - May lead to reduction in intake of processed foods and more fresh produce - Adults who consume less sugars have lower body weight - Can still eat foods that have natural sugars – like fruit. 	<p>People often confuse 'sugar' with 'carbohydrate' (an essential energy source), leading to exclusion of entire food groups such as breads/cereals, dairy, fruit.</p>

FAST FACTS

- The best diet is one that has very few processed foods
- Any diet that excludes any essential food groups leaves you at risk of nutrient deficiencies
- Water should be drunk regularly – if your urine isn't almost totally clear, you're probably not drinking enough.



NUTRITION AND SLEEP

When to eat so you can sleep

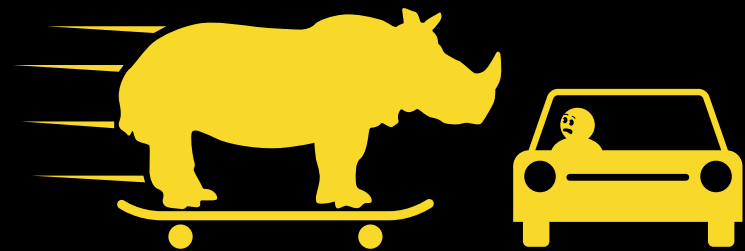
It is not a good idea to eat just prior to bedtime – if you eat foods high in sugar, it is digested into the bloodstream very quickly, and if you don't then expend any more energy the sugar will be stored in the body, usually as fat. Sugar may also keep you awake.

What foods affect sleep?

- **Fatty fried or spicy foods:** Can cause heartburn, especially when lying down. Spicy foods have been found to increase core body temperature, which is linked to poor-quality sleep.

- **Alcohol:** Will make you drowsy but less likely to sleep deeply. It reduces your quality REM sleep, making a nightcap a bad idea
- **Caffeine:** A stimulant that can affect the body for many hours. Best to not drink coffee after mid-afternoon, depending on your tolerance. Other caffeine-containing drinks include energy drinks, cola flavoured soft drinks and tea.

DRIVERS BEWARE



**Stay clear of the yellow line.
Always check for trams before turning.**

NUTRITION AND EXERCISE

Drinking and exercising

When exercising, fluids (preferably water) are most important. You need to drink before, during and after exercise to prevent dehydration. Sports drinks, which are full of calories and sugar, should only be used by people exercising at a high level for long periods of time.

Eating and exercising

You should eat within 30 minutes of completing exercise, when your body is most able to use the nutrients. Carbohydrates are best to help you replace the fuels you use during exercise. Avoid foods high in fat or fibre, which slow digestion.

You can help recovery by eating a meal that contains protein and carbohydrates within two hours of exercising.

Recommended foods are chicken with brown rice, pasta with meatballs or a peanut butter sandwich.

Some general rules to follow:

- Always have breakfast – **eat** one hour before your workout. Bananas and juice or wholegrain bread and cereals are a good pre-workout foods
- Meal sizes – eating too much can make you feel sluggish and eating too little can result in not enough energy.

What impacts your metabolism?

Metabolism is the body's process for converting food and drink into energy. The amount of energy your body burns is affected by your metabolism. Thus, if you eat more than required for metabolism, the extra food is stored as fat.

NUTRITION AND MENTAL HEALTH

Food and mood

International studies have found lower rates of depression, anxiety and bipolar disorder among those who consumed a staple diet of meat and vegetables than among people who followed a modern Western diet, heavy with processed and fast foods.

The traditional Norwegian diet of fish, shellfish, game, root vegetables, dairy products and whole-wheat bread, and the traditional Japanese diet of fish, tofu and rice, appear to be just as protective of mental health.

However, it's still not clear what comes first – good diet and thus good mental health or stable mental health and then a tendency to eat well.

Caffeine, Alcohol and mood

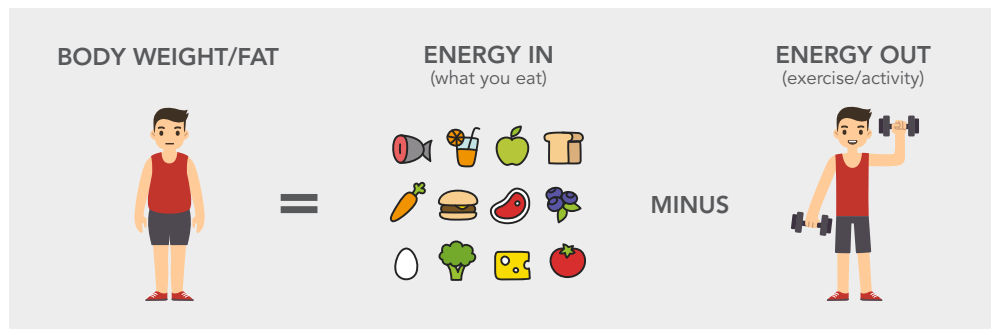
Caffeine, particularly, can have negative effects. It can make you feel more alert but can also lead to anxiety and difficulty sleeping.

As you drink more caffeine, your body can develop a tolerance and withdrawals may worsen – and may include headaches. Generally speaking (if you don't already suffer from anxiety), three or four cups of coffee daily are considered an acceptable dose of caffeine.

Alcohol, a depressant, can exacerbate many mental health conditions. Alcohol can disrupt sleep, act as a diuretic and cause anxiety. Highly addictive, alcohol may seem to relieve stress but is likely over time to worsen stress-related symptoms.

What can I do?

- Eat regular meals to maintain blood sugar levels – this will stave off low energy and low mood and irritability associated with a high-sugar diet
- Limit caffeine intake
- Monitor alcohol intake
- Minimise intake of high-sugar foods
- Choose fruit and nuts for healthy snacks between meals, if hungry
- Choose lean red meat and fish – both are good sources of vitamin B12, which seems to be associated with emotional wellbeing.
- Maintain a healthy weight – excessive weight gain/loss can negatively impact mood.



Your metabolic rate is determined by several factors, including body size, gender and age. As you get older, your muscle mass tends to decrease and fat accounts for a larger percentage of your weight, which results in a slowing down of calorie burning.

Physical activity then becomes even more important – the more active you are, the greater the benefits.

There is little evidence that particular foods speed up metabolism – and if they do, the impact is minimal.



EXERCISE

You've heard it a million times, no doubt: exercise is good for you.

HOW EXERCISE CHANGES OUR BODIES

Regular movement of any kind will keep you limber, helping you move with ease and keeping muscles working as they should. Other benefits are harder to see. Exercise can help to maintain a healthy heart and blood vessels, and even improve mood and memory.

HEALTH BENEFITS OF EXERCISE

Exercise can be considered a form of medicine: it helps to keep you well, no matter your age or ability. Engaging in physical activity reduces your risk of heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and some cancers.

Importantly, gaining the full benefits of exercise requires commitment and a certain mindset. If you're just exercising to lose weight, odds are you won't keep it up and your weight will continue to yo-yo. Take on a healthy, active lifestyle and you'll have better weight control and reduced risk of chronic diseases.

Exercise is beneficial in several other, unexpected ways:

- Energy levels can be boosted by regular activity
- Exercise can put the spark back into your sex life – men who exercise regularly are less likely to have problems with erectile dysfunction than men who don't exercise
- Fun and socialising can be the result of physical activity.

WHAT CONSTITUTES EXERCISE?

You don't need to commit to formal exercise programs. Even lifestyle activities like gardening are beneficial – the key is to partake in *regular* activity, no matter what that activity is.



Incidental activity like walking instead of driving counts just as much as a formal exercise class.

What can I do?

- If possible, set aside time, several times a week, for exercise. Make it a habit
- Commit to being active or on your feet. All physical activity helps
- Download an app that counts your steps or tracks your walks – keeping a record can boost motivation and encourage you to improve your performance.

HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH?

It is recommended that you do at least 150 minutes of moderate activity (like walking or swimming) each week (or 30 minutes five days a week).

But if you can't commit to this, great benefits can still be had with under an hour per week, even if you are not travelling fast – your focus should really be on exercising every day and being as active as possible throughout the day.

Reducing sitting time is becoming increasingly recognised as an important way to lower the risk of obesity and chronic disease.

What can I do?

- Build up your exercise each day/week. Start with 10 minutes and go from there until you reach your goal
- Household activities count towards exercise – anything that gets the heart pumping or results in sweating
- Try getting off the bus one stop early and walking the rest of the way
- If you want to lose weight, you'll probably need to exercise more. Check with your doctor before starting a new exercise program, especially if you haven't exercised for a long time or have chronic health problems like diabetes or heart disease.

INACTIVITY IS HARMING OUR HEALTH

The downside to technology has been a massive rise in inactivity. Those with desk jobs are most at risk of poor health and shortened lifespans due to long periods of sitting.

Recent studies have shown a link between prolonged periods of sitting and premature death. Importantly, research has shown that going to the gym at the end of the day does not undo all the damage done through sitting all day long.

Australian research calculated that people who sit watching six hours of television a day can expect to die, on average, about five years younger than those who don't watch any, even if they exercised for up to 60 minutes a day.

Remember, our bodies are designed to be active!

What can I do?

- Keep exercising – there are major health benefits to exercise
- High-impact exercise is not necessary during the day – all you need to do is get up and move around

- Even office workers can undertake small bouts of activity, which can also help clear the mind
- Get up and move around for five minutes every hour during the day – you'll be just as productive
- Ask your employer about standing desks or work stations that get you on your feet while at your computer. Standing has been shown to be beneficial, not just for general health, but also for posture
- When watching television, get up during the ad breaks or at least every 20 minutes.

EXERCISE AND HEART

Maintaining a healthy weight is important for heart health.

For men, a waist measurement of 94cm or greater is an indicator of internal fat deposits that will put you at an increased risk of chronic disease, such as type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

Exercise for the obese

Being obese means you may have high blood pressure, high cholesterol and insulin resistance. If you are overweight, your doctor should monitor you when you first start an exercise regime.



EXERCISE

What can I do?

- Start with small movements – do small movements every chance you get.
- Start weight training – this will build muscle to help burn calories, and can be done sitting down and at home – you can lift soup cans to work biceps, lift objects over your head or attach ankle weights and move your feet back and forth
- Join a support group – connecting with others will help support and motivate you.

EXERCISE AND SLEEP

Fight insomnia: move your body

While many seek medication to battle insomnia, it seems that regular aerobic exercise has the added bonus of helping you sleep.

It is thought that the heating up of the body through exercise in late afternoon and the resulting drop in temperature following exercise may facilitate sleep.

Even if you feel tired, you should get some exercise – being physically active will energise you.

Note: don't exercise too close to bedtime or you may be too aroused to sleep.

EXERCISE AND MENTAL HEALTH

The science

Exercise not only helps prevent mental health problems, it can be used to treat problems such as mild depression.

There is evidence that regular exercise and changes in physical fitness alter serotonin levels in the brain, release endorphins (the body's natural painkillers) and lead to improved mood.

Tackling common conditions

One in eight men will experience depression during their lifetime and one in five men will suffer from anxiety.

Exercise is an effective way to relieve or lessen feelings of mild anxiety, stress and depression. Exercising outdoors in direct sunlight is particularly helpful for boosting mood.

Regular activity is also useful for distracting you from negative thoughts, which feed depression and anxiety, as well as help you gain self-confidence.

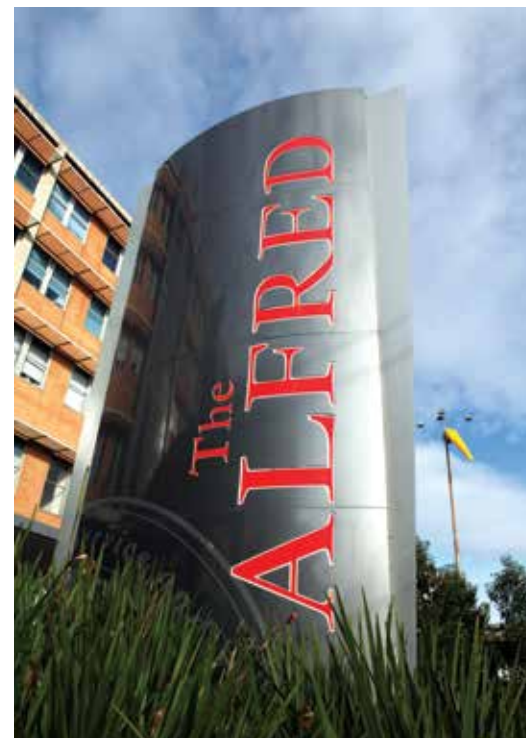
What can I do?

- Keep exercise simple and easy to access – walking, cycling and swimming are all good. Physical activity like gardening or washing the car will also help your mood
- Commit to 30 minutes of moderate exercise on most days. Any activity could help improve the symptoms of depression and anxiety
- Join a team sport or join a friend for activity, which doubles as a social occasion, and can also boost mood
- Activities like yoga and meditation can improve mental wellbeing
- See your doctor if anxiety or depression is interfering with your daily life. While exercise can ease symptoms, it is not a substitute for clinical care, should it be required.

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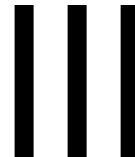


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