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INTRODUCTION



How often have you been introduced to someone by your first name and occupation?

Or how often have you met someone for the first time and, without any thought or hesitation, found yourself asking, 'So... what do you do?'

We tend to put a lot of emphasis on the work that we do. And this especially seems to be the case for men – our occupation forms a significant component of our identity. But while this isn't necessarily unhealthy, it can naturally lead to a tendency to over-prioritise work duties to the detriment of the other important aspects of our lives.

We've all been there. If I put my own profession under the microscope for a moment, it's no secret that those in medicine have traditionally coped with long hours, heavy workloads, and stressful responsibilities.

I remember being invited to my son's primary school when he was in grade one to talk about my work. As I was talking to the kids, a young student at the back of the class put his hand up and asked, "How many hours a day do you work?"

"24!" came the instant response from my son – even before I had a chance to open my mouth!

I love the work that I do – just as I imagine a number of you do – but it's just too easy to get caught in the hustle and bustle of our daily working lives. And when we become engrossed in our work roles, other aspects of our lives may suffer. It may be as a father, a husband, or as a friend.

We may also neglect ourselves – being busy can lead us to make poor choices. These decisions may be related to our nutrition, physical health, or the way in which we choose to cope with problems.

Too often we try to cope with issues, rather than dealing with their root causes. We need to look for help and support.

Of course, the health issues that men face go far deeper than those solely related to work-life balance – and I think that is evident in the pages of this booklet. In what follows, Alfred staff take an introductory look at men's health through the lens of common male occupations – such as tradesmen, office workers, and shift-workers.

I am positive its contents will drive you to make a positive change.

If you find yourself dealing with any of the health issues covered in this publication, please understand that there is no shortage of support available for you. Your GP is your number one resource and best first port of call if you feel you might need to talk to someone.

I hope you enjoy the read.

Dr Marco Bonollo
General Medicine Specialist,
The Alfred

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A HEALTHY APPROACH TO WORK



Always put things in perspective; work is not completely symbolic of who you are. Your work shouldn't necessarily give your life complete meaning. It should give you an income, but it is never the primary thing that defines you as a person.

Three effective strategies to develop a healthier attitude towards your work include: pursuing a better work-life balance; adopting goal-setting; and undertaking self-reflection.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Recent research by a leading recruitment firm indicates that approximately 50 per cent of Australian workers have changed jobs in search of a better balance.

However, studies show that Australia has fallen behind the rest of the developed world in respect to cultivating a healthy work-life balance for its workers. In fact, many Australian workers continue to experience job insecurity and feel pressured into working longer hours.

'Workaholism' is frequently linked to a wide range of chronic health issues, including anxiety, insomnia, and heart disease.

Whether you are a shift-worker or someone who operates a business from home, there are several helpful strategies that you can employ to regain a healthy balance in your life.

Recognise what work means to you.

Sure, your occupation plays a major role in your life. It provides for you and your family, keeps your mortgage repayments ticking over, and funds the things you love to do. But everything should always be put in perspective. Has your focus on work gone too far? Is it time to start pursuing a more flexible approach?

Don't be afraid to switch off. Never feel guilty for setting time aside for yourself. It could be participating in your favourite hobby, spending time with loved ones, or simply switching off from the pressures of daily life and taking the time to recover and recharge.

Make time for your mates. How often do we find ourselves in a particularly busy period of work and, before we know it, we can't remember the last time we caught up with our mates? For many men, this happens far too often. Spending time with friends is such an important activity – it gives us the opportunity to unwind, be around like-minded individuals, and have fun.

Create a routine. We all have access to a diary. Use this to your advantage and employ it to include all non-work-specific activities. Whenever we record something in our diaries, we are more likely to do it.

Be strategic with your planning. Try and find activities or hobbies you enjoy. This way, you'll be more likely to prioritise them. Additionally, schedule time for physical activity and even put aside time for the weekly shop – a great way to ensure healthy options are on hand and you don't always need to hastily grab that 'easy' (and often unhealthy) snack.

GOAL-SETTING

Goal-setting has long been considered an effective strategy to increase motivation and promote beneficial change in your life. Even if you are not battling any form of ill-health or injury, the process of conceptualising your goals can be an effective way to improve your wellbeing, relationships and productivity, and help lend focus to the components of your life that you see as being significant.

Despite the benefits of goal-setting, there are several common mistakes that people make when defining their aspirations. These include:

- setting goals that are too high
- focusing on too many goals at once
- not making their goals specific enough.

Each of these mistakes can lead to individuals feeling disappointed, demoralised and even more stressed.

Goal-setting tips

- Be specific about your goals
- Keep your goals challenging, but achievable
- Articulate your ambitions; write them down
- Break down larger objectives into smaller steps
- Think about telling other people about your goals, and try and pursue feedback
- Develop goals across all aspects of your life, including work, exercise and your personal relationships

SELF-REFLECTION

Self-reflection is engaging in careful thought about your own behaviour and beliefs. It's like looking into a mirror and describing what you see.

Undertaking regular self-reflection can be an effective strategy to build a healthy approach to your profession.

An easy way to begin the self-reflection process is to think about what gives you meaning in life. You may want to reflect on your own core strengths and resources—the existing skills that you can employ during stressful times—as well as the values and goals that underpin your own life philosophy.

By clarifying these aspects of your life, you can embrace goals and values despite difficult situations. For instance, do you derive the most amount of happiness in your life from spending time with your family? Then give it priority in your life and structure your weekly plan to give it precedence. Do you feel most at peace when you engage in a certain pastime? Then, above all, make time for this activity.

Drawing on others

It is during times of self-reflection that the perspectives of others can become extremely important. Often loved ones will be the first ones to sense an unhealthy change in your behaviour or disposition.

An important ally in your fight against work-related stress and anxiety is your GP. They will be in a great position to assess negative change in your life and recommend a solution.

A HEALTHY APPROACH TO WORK

STRESS

No matter what our chosen profession, we all deal with stress. In fact, most individuals rely on stress to perform at their peak – we tend to get the best out of ourselves when we are under some degree of pressure.

But far too often this pressure can become excessive. Here are some quick tips to reduce work-related stress.

- **Don't shy away from the issue.** Seek out the correct information about stress and educate yourself.
- **Understand the warning signs.** Whether it's neck pain or feelings of nausea, understand how your body reacts to too much pressure.
- Be attune to what your body is telling you.
- **Reach out and involve friends and family.** So often a reassuring voice can put things in perspective; let someone know you are under stress.

- **Make sure you get enough sleep.** Turn the TV off earlier, dim the lights and give yourself time to relax before going to bed.

- **Pursue mental downtime.** Listen to music, read a book, don't be afraid to simply zone out.

- **Keep active.** Not only does routine exercise make you feel better, but it can help distract you from negative thoughts.

- **Eat healthy.** Recent research indicates that people who eat more processed foods are more likely to experience anxiety.

- **Be mindful.** Activities like meditation, yoga and tai chi can help prevent stress from developing into a larger issue.

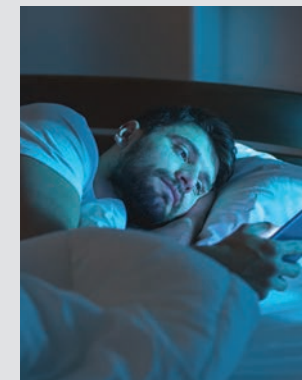


THE SIGNS OF STRESS

Mental health experts will tell you – as a general rule – that **if you think you are dealing with too much stress in your work life, you probably are.**

And while the symptoms of stress can greatly vary from person to person, some common indicators include:

- headache
- muscle tension/pain
- upset stomach
- changes to your appetite
- anxiety
- fatigue
- sadness/depression
- an inability to switch off from work pressures
- reduced libido
- sleep issues
- irritability
- social withdrawal
- drug and alcohol abuse
- spending longer hours at work (beyond the expected norm).



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OFFICE WORKERS

Whether it's the round-the-clock stress, long working hours, or the lure of unhealthy eating habits; your office job may be slowly chipping away at your health. But before things get out of hand, there are several ways you can adjust your approach to keep your mental and physical wellbeing in check.

BEWARE THE CHAIR

There is little doubt that the majority of office workers are sitting for unhealthily long periods of time – leading some health experts to declare that “sitting is the new smoking”.

Research continues to explore the extent of its associated risks, it has been reported that the normal office worker spends as much as 80 per cent of their day sitting. It's of little surprise that a similar percentage of office workers report lower back problems.

Be mindful of your sedentary lifestyle. Make sure you sit with correct posture, take regular breaks, and stretch throughout the day. For an easy target, try to stand for at least two hours a day.

If possible, see if there is any scope in your organisation to purchase sit-standing desks. You burn double the amount of calories standing than you do sitting.

TAKING YOUR WORK HOME WITH YOU

Courtesy of the influx of technology in our lives, it's becoming increasingly difficult to draw clear boundaries between “work” and “private time”. This dilemma is probably best highlighted by the number of people checking their work emails while away from the office.

This is even changing the way we approach our holidays – with recent research suggesting that as many as three in five Australians check and respond to work emails while on vacation.

Building boundaries between work and personal time is important. The simple act of checking work emails draws your focus away from your personal time and space. Immediately, you aren't “present” with your friends and family.

The first step to curb this bad habit is being conscious of how often you are doing it. Once you are clear on how much of a problem it is causing you, then you can make a positive change.

TAKE A BREAK, GO OUTSIDE

Blocking off time in your day to get away from your desk is undoubtedly the best way to feel refreshed and re-energised. So, when you can, go outside and get some healthy servings of fresh air and vitamin D.

***TIP:** If long workdays and lengthy commutes are playing havoc with your enthusiasm for exercise, you should make sure you split your workday in two with a long walk outside. Pedometers have been found to be great motivators in this sense – by simply keeping track of how many steps you complete in a day, your level of activity will inevitably increase.*



TIPS TO EAT HEALTHY IN AN OFFICE JOB

- 1 Cook a little bit more for dinner and take the left overs for lunch the next day. That way, you have control over the portion size, the ingredients, and you'll save money too.
- 2 Use snap-lock bags or small containers to portion-control snack foods like nuts or biscuits to prevent over eating and absentminded grazing. Most unwanted calories generally come from snacking.
- 3 Drink plenty of water. A 'foggy brain' and fatigue are both symptoms of dehydration, so drinking more water will help keep you focused throughout the day and can keep your appetite at bay.
- 4 Try to eat your lunch away from your desk. When you are distracted while eating you tend to eat more. Also, try to keep your immediate workstation free from open snacks.
- 5 Don't forget about lunch when you are busy at work – this can lead to binge on calorie dense snacks in the afternoon and large portion sizes at dinner.
- 6 If you do need an afternoon snack, grab a piece of fruit, a low fat yoghurt or a small handful of nuts.
- 7 Think about getting together with your colleagues and ordering a weekly fruit box to share with the office.
- 8 It is important to include fibre in your lunch. Fibre-rich foods like grains and vegetables give you sustained energy and ward off that afternoon slump.
- 9 Alfred dietitians agree that for a balanced diet and healthy weight-control, a portion-controlled plate should include:
 - 50% of your plate filled with non-starchy vegetables, including leafy greens and other coloured vegetables such as carrots and tomatoes
 - 25% of your plate comprised of protein like meats, eggs, poultry or beans
 - 25% of your plate made up of carbohydrates such as rice, pasta, couscous and starchy vegetables like potatoes and corn.

OFFICE WORKERS

IT'S NOT ONLY WHAT YOU EAT, IT'S WHEN YOU EAT

Despite its status as 'the most important meal of the day', some of us have been guilty of not treating breakfast with such regard.

Numerous Australian studies conducted over recent years have shown that Australian men and women exhibit an unhealthy tendency to skip breakfast.

Often food is the last thing on your mind when you are rushing to get to work on time. However, skipping breakfast may leave you deprived of energy and more likely to crave unhealthier food options later in the day.

For those struggling for time in the morning:

- set your alarm 10–15 minutes earlier and make the time to eat/prepare your brekkie

- do your best to organise as much of your breakfast the night before
- prepare your smoothie the night before by putting some low-fat milk, a piece of fruit and some oats in a container ready to be mixed in the morning
- don't rely on breakfast drinks as these tend to have hidden sugar. They are also higher in calories and are low in fibre
- if you do eat breakfast in the office each day, make sure you have healthy options on hand (for example, low-fat milk in the fridge and wholegrain cereals).



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TRAVELLING FOR WORK

Whether your work requires you to travel by plane, train or automobile, staying healthy on the road isn't easy. Challenges can include physical inactivity, the lure of unhealthy eating options, and feeling isolated from your personal networks.

REMAIN HYDRATED

When we travel, we often forget how important it is to maintain hydration. Instead, we can find ourselves reaching for reaching for caffeinated or sugary alternatives. While these options may seem like the best choice if we are tired, stressed or under pressure, they have the opposite effect and can eventually lead to a sugar crash and lethargy. So, if you want to remain focused throughout the day, carry a water bottle and keep well hydrated.

Remember – if you are travelling by plane, make sure you empty your water bottle before going through airport security and then refill from a tap or water fountain on the other side.

EAT RIGHT

Time-zone changes, hectic schedules and limited access to healthy options can derail even the most disciplined healthy eater when they travel.

Some quick nutrition tips for those on the road include:

- Pack sensible, healthy food that you can eat on the go (for example, fruit, nuts and homemade trail mix).
- Avoid the hotel mini-bar. Go to the local supermarket and buy healthier alternatives (like low-fat yoghurt, canned tuna, fruit and pre-chopped vegetables).

- Bring your own breakfast. Travelling with some healthy wholegrain cereal or a container of low-fat yoghurt can help ensure you start your day off on the right track.
- If your business trip sees you eat at restaurants each day, make sure you choose healthy menu options like salad over chips. Be aware of restaurant food portions (page 10) – think about choosing entrees, sharing plates with your dinner partners or taking a doggy-bag home with you for tomorrow's lunch.
- Beware the hotel buffet breakfast. Think about the portions you are consuming, and choose healthy options like you would at home.



KEEP ACTIVE

It can be a struggle to get in a workout when you are away from home, especially for those whose schedules have been thrown out of whack due to international travel. And since many hotels now offer gym facilities, the challenge is not so much where to train, but when.

The easiest way to keep active while you're on the road is to stick to your usual routine.

If you can't easily access a gym, why not train in your hotel room? There are a host of exercises and drills that you can easily do in a small space.

Resistance bands are a great ad-hoc workout option that you can easily pack into your bag or suitcase. While they may just look like large elastic bands, when used correctly with the right form, they can make it feel like you are moving some serious weight.

TIP: The web is a great resource for body-weight workouts, resistance band exercises, as well as unique routines. A quick search on YouTube is a great way to fill you with ideas and inspiration.

STAY CONNECTED

One only has to walk through an airport nowadays to see hordes of men in business suits sitting in airport lounges 'face-timing' their loved ones.

If you must be away from your loved ones for an extended period, use available technology and social media to keep your family at the forefront of your mind. Why not make a phone call home part of your evening ritual?

CREATE BOUNDARIES

Many men who are on business trips may be tempted to do work the entire time. Be aware of this trap, and, schedule in as much personal time as you can without it affecting your job. In most cases, you are there to do a 9–5 job, so keep that in perspective.



PACK YOUR CROSS-TRAINERS

If you are unable to get to a gym, a great alternative for the travelling businessman is going for a run or a long walk. Not only is it a wonderful way to see a new city, but it's an easy way to expel some energy and give your brain a break.

TRAVELLING FOR WORK

FLYING HIGH

Australia's unique shape, size and positioning in the world means that if your job requires you to travel from city to city or internationally, more likely than not you will be in transit for a long distance.

Lengthy flights can be extremely uncomfortable, and it's important to understand the risks associated with flying long distances.

The most dangerous risk is deep vein thrombosis (DVT) – a blood clot in the veins of the leg, which can potentially be fatal.

Lengthy flights can contribute to DVT, with many experts saying that any flight longer than four hours can pose a threat to your health. The longer the flight, the greater the risk.

You can reduce your risk of developing DVT by wearing loose clothing, avoiding cigarettes and alcohol, and consulting with your doctor before travelling.

It is also recommended that you complete a few sets of the following exercises for approximately five minutes every hour of your flight. Also, don't forget to get out of your seat and stretch your legs by moving around the cabin whenever possible.

Ankle rotations: Lift your feet off the floor and rotate your ankles by drawing a circle with your toes. Repeat in the other direction. Focus on getting a full range of motion through your ankle.

Foot raises: Alternate between: keeping your toes on the floor and your heels lifted; and keeping your heels on the floor and your toes lifted.

Knee to chest: Bend forward slightly and lift each knee to your chest, holding it with your hands to stretch out the muscles. Hold for 10–15 seconds.

Knee lifts. With your knee bent, lift your leg so that you are flexing your hip. Alternate between legs.

Forward reach. Place both of your feet on the ground and, while sucking your stomach in, bend forward and reach down towards your ankles. Hold the stretch for 10–15 seconds.

Shoulder rolls. Hunch your shoulders forward and roll them in a circular motion.



QUICK TIPS TO REDUCE JETLAG

- Get a good night's sleep the night before you fly.
- For short, one or two-day work trips, try to stay on home time.
- For longer trips, endeavour to change your clock and acclimatise to the new time zone as soon as possible. You may even want to do this in the lead-up to your trip, to help you prepare mentally.
- After you land, naps can make you feel more alert when you are attempting to readjust your body clock. However, be sure that you sleep no longer than 30 minutes at once and that you are awake for more than 4–5 hours before you go to sleep.
- Seek out the sun. Sunlight resets your body clock and will help you adjust faster.
- If you arrive in the daytime, don't go to bed until the evening.
- Beware of booze. Alcohol at altitude causes dehydration and can make you even more tired, which in turn can worsen jetlag. Additionally, moderate your alcohol intake when you land.
- In a similar vein, don't use alcohol as a sleeping aid. While you may think it will make you tired, alcohol actually fragments sleep.
- Avoid caffeine and other stimulants. Your body functions best when it is hydrated, so focus on drinking water to offset jetlag, rather than caffeine-based drinks.

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SHIFT WORKERS

When we reference 'shift workers', we usually refer to those individuals regularly working outside the traditional '9–5 work day'. For many men, this may mean starting late in the afternoon or soldiering through to the wee hours of the morning.

You might think that shift work may be quieter, more predictable, and less stressful on your mind and body than traditional work patterns. However, men who work such a schedule are often guilty of skipping meals, choosing unhealthy food options, and ignoring their physical health.

AN UNHEALTHY PROFESSION?

Shift-work is a tough gig. Research suggests that shift workers are more likely to be obese, more likely to smoke, and more likely to have existing health issues. On average, they tend to get two hours less sleep.

We know that there are various kinds of shift workers, but generally they fall into two categories. The first group consists of those on fixed rosters (for example, someone who only works nights). Following some adjustment to their lifestyles, these workers generally do quite well. They can preserve their wellbeing and stay clear of the significant health risks.

The second group relates to those shift workers who frequently change their shifts – with little to no regularity. It's these workers that tend to exhibit health issues, both short- and long-term.

If you find yourself falling in this second category, Alfred Health experts recommend trying to keep to a 40-hour week, scheduling at least a 12-hour break in between shifts, and, if possible, getting involved in your work scheduling system to develop some consistency in your timetable.

Regarding the latter, a rotating roster is ideal.

BEWARE THE WARNING SIGNS

Especially if you work nights, shift work can wreak havoc with your internal clock – leading your body to second guess when it needs sleep or food to replenish. You may also be finding it more difficult to engage in regular exercise away from work.

If you are experiencing any of the following problems, it might be time to consider change:

- trouble falling asleep or a disrupted night's sleep
- sudden weight loss or weight gain
- less attention to exercise and diet
- feelings of lethargy
- gastrointestinal issues like diarrhoea, constipation or gas
- a dramatic change in your appetite
- high blood pressure.

THE VALUE OF SLEEP

We are biologically designed to be active during the day and sleep at night. For those of us looking to buck this natural trend, our health will naturally be at risk unless we take the proper precautions.

Sleep has an important purpose. 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.

A lack of sleep can lead to reduced alertness, a lowering of your cognitive ability, forgetfulness, and poor judgement. On top of this, sleep deprivation can significantly affect your outlook and mental wellbeing – potentially leading to anger, stress, irritability, anxiety and depression.

SLEEP TIPS FOR SHIFT WORKERS

- Let people know that you are going to sleep. There's nothing worse than your phone going off or hearing a knock at the door when you are getting ready for bed.
- Don't drink alcohol before bed. It may make you tired, but it significantly affects sleep quality.
- If you are transitioning sleep patterns back to a conventional routine, use the sun to your advantage. Sunlight resets your natural sleep-wake rhythm and can put you back on course.
- If your schedule means that you need to sleep during the day, ensure that you eliminate all sunlight from entering your bedroom. Even the smallest sliver of light can throw you off.
- Try to eat and sleep at the same times on your days off as you would when working. This will reduce the strain on your body clock.

WINDING DOWN

We've all been there. Lying idly in bed, eyes wide open, unable to switch off our mind. For shift-workers, this annoying problem can become an unwelcome habit.

Your best weapon in this battle is a routine. Put aside the hour or two before you go to bed to mentally unwind. Everyone will have different habits, whether it's listening to your favourite podcast, reading a book, or meditation.

If you do find yourself unable to get to sleep within half an hour of going to bed, you should go to another dark room and sit quietly, until you feel tired enough to return. We need to teach our mind and body to link our bed with sleep.



SOCIAL ISOLATION

Many men who work shifts may find themselves out of sync with their social networks. While this is completely normal, it's imperative that you try to reconnect on a regular basis with your friends and family.

Spending time with mates is an important activity in our lives, not only because we enjoy doing it but because it is an effective coping mechanism for stress and helps us improve our mood.

If you are finding it difficult to connect with mates, be proactive – set priorities, use your diary, and organise something!

SHIFT WORKERS



HEALTHY EATING

A lack of sleep, time and routine will often steer shift workers towards poor dietary habits. Below are some easy tips to avoid unhealthy traps.

Be prepared and pack healthy snacks.

Pack sensible, healthy food that you can eat on the go (for example, fruit, nuts and trail mix) or healthy microwavable meals that you can put in the freezer.

Avoid sugary drinks, including energy drinks.

You may think your body needs a pick-me-up, but these drinks will only lead you to crash later – not to mention they are extremely high in sugar.

Don't overdo it with the coffee. Caffeine can stay in your system for up to six hours, consequently affecting your sleep.

Avoid fatty and fried foods. These 'heavier' foods can lead to slow digestion and heartburn, especially when coupled with an irregular sleeping pattern.

Stay hydrated. Keep up your intake of water throughout each shift to stay alert and full, and to avoid unhealthy snacking.

Consume alcohol with caution. If you are sleep-deprived, its effects will be magnified. Alcohol is also high in calories and contributes to weight gain.

TRICKS OF THE TRADE



Pete Finnegan has been working as an emergency registrar at The Alfred's Emergency and Trauma Centre for four years. Not only does this role see him regularly work nights, but he must do so with the knowledge that he is one of the senior doctors overseeing some of the ED's most sick and injured patients.

How are your shifts currently structured?

My roster sees me do seven night shifts in a row – which I do once a month. These shifts start at 10pm and finish the next morning at 8am.

The other three weeks are a mixture of morning and afternoon shifts.

How do you mentally prepare for work?

In medicine, you learn how to do nightshifts from your intern years; however, it's very different when you get to a more senior role. You have more responsibilities – you play a leading role in many of the life-saving decisions taking place in ED.

Initially when I started doing night shifts as a registrar, I would pre-prepare. I knew I'd be one of the seniors on for the night, so I would mentally rehearse the top 10 emergency events that wanted to be able to deal it. This allowed me to figure out what I would do in those situations.

How do you manage your sleep patterns?

As a shift worker, you really need to get your sleep hygiene right. I'm lucky in a sense that I'm able to fall asleep anytime, anywhere. However, I still ensure that when I am working nights, I follow the same wind-down routine each morning when I get home.

I have a meal, a quick shower, and watch a bit of TV to relax. Then the mobile goes on silent, the blinds come down, and I go to sleep.

How do you manage your night-shift work with your friends and family?

You need to be good at building a schedule. For example, when I am working nights I will often be asleep when my girlfriend is at work. But when she comes home, I'll make sure that we catch up for a couple of hours before I head off to work.

There is also a bit of a benefit from doing shift work. I will often find myself with a couple of free afternoons a week. So that gives me a great opportunity to catch up with family and friends.

What other tips do you have for someone working shifts?

It's so important to make time for regular exercise – even if you have a busy week of shifts. I must admit I used to find it a bit difficult to get motivated to do this, so I decided to get a personal trainer. And since then, I have really enjoyed it. It's good for the mind as much as it is the body.

At least twice a week I will get a really good workout in; I'm currently doing a lot of boxing.

TRADESMEN

Musculoskeletal injuries like back and neck problems remain among the top health issues facing tradies, and there are a host of other chronic health conditions and disabilities that pose significant risks.

ACHES AND PAINS

Niggling aches and pain often go hand in hand with manual work – regardless of the specific trade. So much so that Australia's trade industry continues to have the highest health and safety issues of any professional sector.

The negatives of getting injured at work go well beyond the initial trauma and pain. Time off due to poor health and injury can affect your livelihood, family, and business.

General tips for preventing injury include:

- regularly appraise and risk-assess all manual tasks
- ensure that all equipment used is safe, easily handled and fit for purpose
- during manual handling and lifting, make sure you use good posture and technique
- increase your core strength – this will not only make you stronger but less likely to get injured

- maintain flexibility by regularly stretching (this only needs to be for as long as 10–15 minutes each morning).

Over the course of a career full of hard physical work, it would be very easy to write off aches and pains as a natural component of your profession. However, it is important that you seek help.

When in doubt go to a GP; don't just dismiss your physical complaints.

WHEN HANDLING OBJECTS:

- Where possible, keep your chest up when lifting or handling.
- Keep loads close to the body.
- Avoid awkward and twisted postures.
- Make tasks safer if there are other alternatives.
- Ask for assistance when required.
- Stop a movement if you feel any pain or discomfort.



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look inside

TRADESMEN

FIT FOR THE JOB

While tradies may spend a lot of time on their feet, this doesn't always equate to an active lifestyle. In fact, if you lack adequate core strength or flexibility, you may be putting yourself in danger of injury.

Core exercises strengthen muscles in your abdominals, back and around your hips. Some great exercises to strengthen your core are abdominal crunches, planks and bridges. Jump online, or talk to your GP or personal trainer, for some ideas on the best exercises for you.

Some jobs involve a lot of manual labour, and many tradies will struggle to find the motivation to incorporate regular exercise in their weekly routine. One strategy to do this would be to develop fitness-based goals. Do you want to put some muscle on for summer? Do you want to cut 10 kilos before the New Year? By explicitly acknowledging these personal objectives, as well as celebrating milestones as you achieve them, you will increase your motivation and resilience.

Flexibility is also key in ensuring your body is well primed for the strain of manual labour. One of the primary ways to increase your flexibility is via stretching. You could choose to do the traditional method of stretching (that is, static stretching) or you could focus on dynamic stretching.



Static stretching sees the participant holding a joint in a stretched position for usually 20–30 seconds.

Dynamic stretching involves the participant preparing their body through a range of motion using bodyweight movements, like squats and lunges.



MENTAL HEALTH

Every two days in Australia a construction worker commits suicide. In fact, they are more than twice as likely to take their own lives as other Australians.

These sobering statistics are a microcosm for tradesmen's problematic relationship with mental health.

Some men struggle to acknowledge they are experiencing mental health issues, and 70 per cent of men to avoid seeking treatment altogether. More often than not, this behaviour is linked to the traditional male psyche and social norms of masculinity – both core tenants of the stereotypical "tradie" character.

There are many professional factors that can affect the mental health of tradesmen. This includes uncertain employment, work injuries and the potential repercussions, lengthy commutes, and long work days. Additionally, many of tradesmen operate their own businesses – which can lead to a whole host of extra financial and professional pressures.

Below are some tips that you can employ to diminish mental health stigma and improve your own approach to your wellbeing:

Education. Educate yourself about the most common forms of mental health conditions and their respective warning signs.

Support. Offer the same support to people with a mental illness that you would if they were physically injured or unwell. When engaging those facing mental health battles, demonstrate your willingness to listen and lend a helping hand.

Control. Take active control of your own mental health and pursue positive lifestyle changes and treatment solutions earlier rather than later.

Prepare. Develop health coping mechanisms to adopt when you are under emotional distress.

Speak. Don't be afraid to reach out to others for help and guidance. This can include family members, friends or medical professionals.

NUTRITION TIPS

For a number of reasons, tradies can fall into the trap of frequently visiting the corner store for meals, snacks and drinks. Unfortunately, these convenient foods tend to be both high in fat and rich in calories.

If you want to improve your eating habits and overall health, here are just some ways you can eat healthy while on the job:

- It's all about preparation. Be proactive and prepare healthier food options for the week. This could involve drawing up a list and making the time for the big, weekly shop or having a big cook up on Sunday night to create several lunch options for the week.
- Breakfast is important. If you do start early and find yourself struggling to get breakfast in before you leave for work, follow some of the tips on page 11.

- Buy yourself a cooler bag – an easy way to carry around healthy food choices
- If you do get hungry mid-morning and feel like something quick and easy, choose healthy snack options. Some good choices include low-fat yoghurt, unsalted nuts, wholegrain biscuits with tomato and ricotta, tinned tuna or salmon, or a boiled egg.
- If you are buying out, go for a sandwich, sushi roll or salad. Avoid soft drink and energy drinks.
- Always follow the healthy food portion sizes outlined on page 10.

STAY HYDRATED THROUGHOUT THE DAY

Hydration is particularly important for men working in physical jobs, such as labourers, who lose a lot of fluid through sweat. However, most men find it hard to reach their fluid requirements for each day.

The recommended daily fluid intake is based on body size.

An individual's estimated fluid requirements are 35–45 ml per kg. This means that a 75 kg man usually requires approximately 2.6–3.4 litres a day.

Alfred dietitians recommend having a water bottle nearby and aim to get through several during the day.

FARMERS

There is no shying away from the fact that the modern Australian farmer faces a host of life-threatening risks and emotional pressures. This makes it imperative that they be proactive about their health, and follow safe work practices.

FARMING CAN BE DANGEROUS

Farmers are more likely to experience a serious or fatal workplace injury than other Australian workers.

Some farmers can become acclimatised to risk-taking behaviour as part and parcel of everyday work. This increases complacency, diminishes alertness, and puts those working rurally in greater danger.

To avoid the issues inherent with isolated work, it is recommended that farmers always have an operational emergency phone on hand. They are also encouraged to inform friends, family or colleagues about their work plans for the day.

Many farming accidents could be prevented if proper safety procedures and safety equipment are used by all workers at all times. Organisations such as WorkCover and Farmsafe can offer valuable advice on improving health and safety at your farm.

DEPRESSION

Individuals who work in rural and remote areas regularly deal with long-term sources of stress. These include a reliance on the climate and weather, extreme natural events (like flood, bushfire, etc), financial worries and feelings of isolation.

This cocktail of pressures fuel psychological distress and poor mental wellbeing. Recent data indicates that farmers experience high rates of stress, anxiety and depression.

Similarly, male farmers die by suicide at significantly higher rates than the general population.

If you or someone you care about is experiencing mental ill-health, it is important that professional help is sought. For more information on tackling stress and other mental health issues, go to page 7.





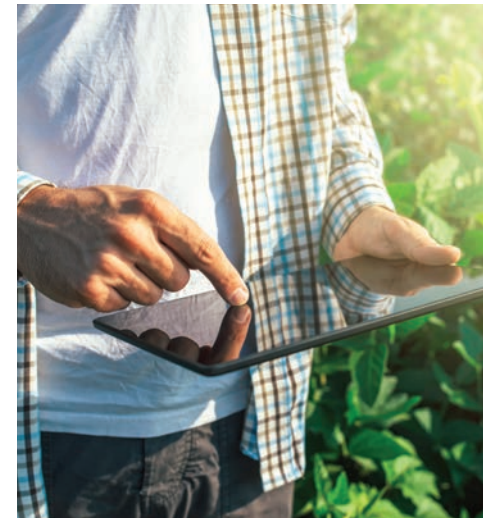
EXERCISE

While advances in agricultural machinery and technology have improved work efficiencies, they also have come at a cost – farmers aren't necessarily doing as much physical activity as they used to.

Not only can this lead to a host of health issues in the future, but it means their bodies aren't running anywhere near their full potential – so when the time does come for heavy lifting or good conditioning, they are putting themselves at risk of injury.

Here are just a few ways that you can seamlessly work more physical activity into your daily routine:

- Walk for short trips around your property – leave the quadbike in the shed.
- Take regular breaks and do some quick stretches to increase flexibility and decrease future injury risk (this is particularly important before you start working)
- Get active in the garden – why not take some time out to replenish the veggie patch?
- Buy a pedometer and get a sense of how many steps you do a day
- Go online – there are a host of specific strength and core exercises on the internet designed for those who work rurally
- Lifting and farm work go hand in hand, so always ensure you are lifting with proper technique. Again, if you are unsure about proper lifting techniques, check in with your GP or go online for more information



FARMERS



HEAT STROKE

Particularly during heat waves or periods of extreme heat, farmers are susceptible to heat stroke – a condition that can lead to death.

Hot weather puts an immense amount of strain on your body and this is of concern to those who may be working outside or in poorly-conditioned or cooled sheds or buildings.

Warning signs of heatstroke include:

- high temperature
- fatigue
- nausea or dizziness
- dry and swollen tongue
- red, hot skin (with no sweating)
- headache
- rapid pulse.

If you or your loved one is exhibiting signs of heat stroke, it is important that you seek emergency medical help as soon as possible.

Some ways in which you can avoid heat-stroke include:

- drink plenty of water (or other cool, non-alcoholic liquids) and keep hydrated throughout the day
- limit out-door activity during the warmest part of the day; seek shade when possible
- take regular breaks
- try to stay as cool as possible and, if you are inside, keep the air circulating around you
- wear light-coloured, loose-fitting clothing (try to wear clothes made from natural fibres like cotton or linen)
- practice sun safety techniques.

BE SUN SMART

Farmers naturally spend a considerable amount of time outside and, without proper protection, this can lead to skin cancer.

Be sure to check your skin regularly for moles that are raised or have changed in shape and/or colour. When in doubt, your first port of call should be your GP. Also consider getting a regular mole map completed to keep an eye on your skin changes over time.

Some ways you can prevent dangerous sun exposure are:

- work undercover or in the shade during the period of the day when the sun's UV rays are at their most dangerous (usually between 11am and 3pm)
- wear sunglasses
- wear a wide-brimmed hat
- wear long sleeves if possible
- use sunscreen.

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ROBERT'S STORY



Robert remembers everything happening in slow motion.

He watched as the 300kg bucket dislodged from the tractor and began to fall. He quickly turned to make sure nobody was standing next to him. Then he felt the extraordinary force hit him and push him downward. As he fell, he heard his ribs start to pop, one by one.

The next thing Robert recalls was lying dazed on the ground, the bucket leaning heavily on his shoulder and the rain falling around him.

His brother and neighbours lifted the bucket, giving Robert enough space to squeeze out and stagger to his feet. He found himself struggling to breath.

"The pain across my back was extraordinary," Robert recalls. "I actually couldn't feel my shoulder or ribs... other than knowing that they had moved."

His brother immediately called an ambulance and Robert began the agonising 50-metre walk back to his house. In a way, he was lucky. The incident occurred on a neighbour's property in an area of phone coverage. Ironically, if the group had been only a kilometre closer to home, and in the middle of the mobile blackspot, it would have taken them a lot longer to get help.

Robert was taken by ambulance to local hospital, where he spent three hours before being transported to The Alfred's Emergency and Trauma Centre. With Robert immobilised on a stretcher and with a fitted neck brace, the long trip gave him time to reflect on the incident that ultimately left with eight broken ribs, a scapula fracture, and two compound vertebrae fractures.

Robert and his brother had been helping their neighbours put up some fence posts for a chicken pen. Needing to set three long posts in the ground, the pair decided to use the tractor's front-end loader bucket to push the wood into place. However, the pin that locks the bucket into the tractor's loader frame had not properly fallen into place.

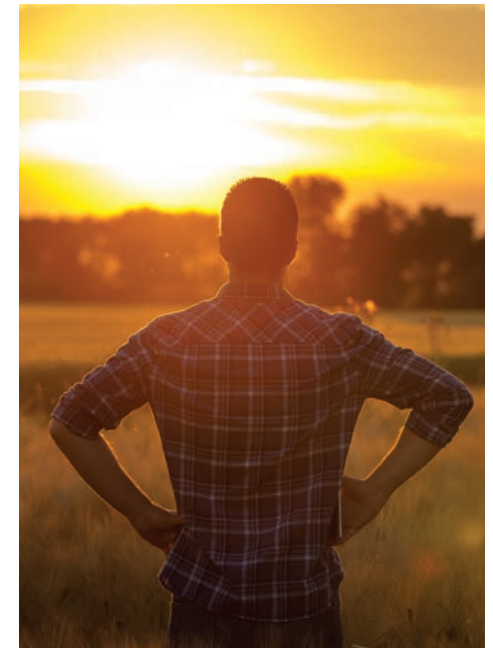
"I'd had the tractor for about three months and was still getting used to it," Roberts says. "On later inspection, we found out that the bucket had slightly twisted on its spot at the front of the tractor, so its locking pin could not engage properly."

It was this accident that led Robert to be admitted to The Alfred's trauma wards soon after his arrival – a stay that lasted only five days, a great result considering the extent of his injuries. During this time, Robert says he was completely blown away by the great work of Alfred staff.

"All the staff were caring and focused on getting me better. I saw so many of them... orderlies, nurses, occupational therapists, X-ray technicians, surgeons and doctors," he says. "I'm extremely grateful they were there for me."

Robert says he also feels indebted to his family and friends who helped out after his accident: "I cannot thank them enough".

After numerous scans and X-rays, Robert was fitted with a removable brace and given the all clear to return home. And since then, he has been improving every day.



"I'm feeling really good. After the brace was removed at Christmas, I immediately started doing some small jobs around the farm. Then I had physiotherapy for a while locally and that freed me up to do even more," he says.

"My previous employer even offered me a small temporary job for a while and I started that about a month ago. It's great for the grey matter and feelings of self-worth."

WORKING FROM HOME



Working from home may seem like an ideal scenario, but it can still lead to negative consequences if not approached appropriately.

It can be easy for your professional and personal lives to blur together when you ply your trade from home – leading to a work-life balance that is completely out of whack.

You may end up feeling stressed and anxious, unmotivated, unhappy with your occupation, and even more time-poor than you were to begin with. Definitely not what you had in mind when you first took on this flexible career option!

Below are some ways that you can make small changes to proactively improve your work-life balance while working from home. Remember, the easiest way to employ all the tips is to do it again and again, each day.

Create a designated work space. One strategy to create a more productive work setting is to separate the area where you work from the space/s where you spend most of your leisure time. Plainly put: treat your office like an office.

Build a professional routine. Determine a regular time to begin work, and work backwards from there. What time do you need to wake up? Have breakfast? Shower? Even go as far as getting dressed for work before you turn on your computer. Don't do work in your pjamas.

Now that you don't necessarily have structure enforced upon you – like in a conventional work environment – it is up to you to build that structure.

Take a break and get out of the house. People who work from home often complain about feeling “trapped” in their surroundings, especially if they are spending a great deal of time in their house. Try to take regular breaks away from home – whether this means running errands during the day or going for a long walk.

Set limits and make time to unwind. Don't be afraid to “turn off” your business when appropriate. If you work within a larger team, make it clear to your colleagues the hours of the day that you are available to be contacted – and make sure you stick to it!

Remember: if you are available all hours of the day, then it will quickly become an unhealthy expectation.



Maintain a healthy diet. Because you're spending your working hours around your home, it is so easy to fall victim to bad eating habits. Even though the kitchen is only a few steps away, try not to snack too much and, make sure you don't skip breakfast.

Seek out others. Feelings of isolation and social exclusion are common for individuals who work from home. Research indicates that we derive a lot of psychological strength and support from the regular contact we have with work colleagues. To counter this, seek out friends or loved ones on a regular basis, and try to catch up with someone every day – even if it's a work-related meeting.

Choose a good chair. When at home there is always the temptation to work in an ergonomically unhealthy position – such as your bed or kitchen table. Invest in a comfortable, ergonomically-healthy chair to keep you aligned throughout the day, and make sure you get up and stretch regularly. Use a timer or an email prompt to remind you every hour.

Keep active. Use the flexibility inherent with your professional lifestyle to your advantage and schedule in regular physical activity – even if it is just a long walk during the day to distract you from work and help you reset. Not only will routine exercise make you feel better physically, it will also improve your brain functioning, focus, cognition and sleep.



TRANSITIONING TO RETIREMENT

Retirement brings its own host of unique challenges.

It is common for men who are transitioning into retirement to lose a sense of self and purpose. After all, work makes us feel productive, valuable, and gives us an opportunity to interact with others in a social setting.

The best way to approach the challenges inherent with ageing and your transition into retirement is to maintain a positive attitude. It's about feeling good about yourself, remaining fit and healthy, and living life to the fullest.

LEARN A NEW SKILL

Why not challenge your brain by taking on a new skill? Whether it's trying your hand at painting or taking part in a local creative writing class, a new skill brings with it opportunities to meet others, push your boundaries, and, realise a sense of achievement.

STAY CONNECTED

It is very easy to lose contact with people when you retire. We know that the relationships that we forge have a unique impact on our overall mental wellbeing, so it's important that retirees remain connected with others. If you find yourself feeling lonely or isolated, make it part of your daily routine to catch-up with a friend or family member.

For those looking to develop new social connections, get involved in activities where an opportunity exists to meet and engage with other like-minded men. Many retirees find it particularly rewarding to get involved in volunteer work. Not only does this enable them to utilise their time and expertise to benefit others, but it allows them to interact with others on a semi-regular basis.

NUTRITION AS YOU AGE

Keeping a healthy diet is extremely important as you age – to improve your energy levels, maintain a healthy weight and prevent against chronic health conditions.

Men less than 70 years of age require 65 grams of protein per day, while those over 70 require up to 80 grams. High-protein foods include eggs, meat, poultry, dairy, nuts and legumes.

Fibre is important to combat gastrointestinal issues, such as bloating and constipation. Foods high in fibre include wholegrain breads, vegetables and fruits. It is also important you drink plenty of water to assist with digestion as well to maintain your fluid status – you tend to lose more fluid as you age due to your skin becoming thinner.

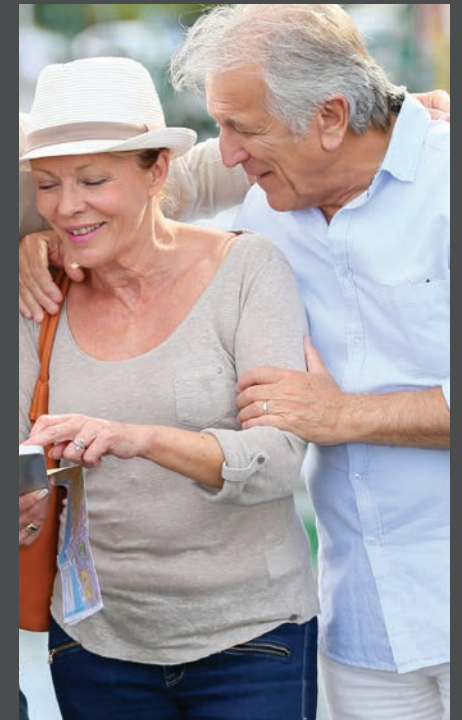
DON'T LET YOUR RETIREMENT SLOW YOU DOWN

It is crucial that you devote time and effort to your physical wellbeing. Just be mindful that your body may not be able to perform to the same level as it once did – so be sensible, practical and mindful of how you feel.

Always remember – if you are experiencing any unwelcome symptoms when building up your fitness base, see your doctor.

FOUR TIPS TO STAY ACTIVE AS YOU AGE

- 1 Find an activity that you enjoy. The best exercise you can do is the one that you will do again tomorrow.
- 2 If you haven't participated in regular physical activity for a while, take it slowly and gradually build up a routine. Start by going for a five or 10-minute walk a few times a week
- 3 Variety is key – begin with low-impact exercises such as walking, cycling, swimming and water aerobics. For something a little different, try tai chi and ballroom dancing (both have been shown to improve balance and reduce future falls risk).
- 4 Even if you have physical limitations, there are always ways to safely exercise. Hydrotherapy is great for people of all ages because it doesn't involve excessive weight-bearing movement.



DON'T BE AFRAID OF THE DOCTOR

Throughout your life, your general practitioner (GP) is your first port of call if you feel you might need to talk to someone about your health. And as you get older, regular check-ups with your GP become even more imperative.

Older men are at greater risk of being affected by chronic disease – such as arthritis, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease.

RISKY BUSINESS

When we consider the risky behaviours in which men participate in, it's easy to think about extremes.

One immediately thinks of the man driving home from the pub after too many drinks, or the tradesmen taking that dangerous shortcut on the worksite.

However, according to Dr Helen Stergiou, one of The Alfred's Emergency & Trauma physicians, the concept of risky behaviour is significantly more complex.

"You don't progress in life unless you push the boundaries and take on some level of risk," she says. "For example, as a health professional, I want you to go out on your bicycle because it's good for your cardiac health – but have you had the appropriate fitness check-up? How good is your bike? Is it safe where you are riding?"

"So, the issue becomes about understanding the risks and ensuring the correct safety measures are in place."

A classic example of a risky activity that men routinely participate in is climbing on ladders. Last year, an Alfred Health study found a sharp increase in the number of serious injuries caused by ladder falls – particularly among the 'baby-boomer' generation.

"As a trauma clinician, it's not easy to tell a 73-year-old man to stop climbing his ladder." Dr Stergiou says. "He may have been climbing his ladder to pick his lemons or clean his gutters for 50 years... so this is definitely not the right approach if we want to curb his risky behaviour."

"Instead we need to educate him in a way that makes him feel viable as a male. We need to think about the right conversation to have with him to make him aware of the dangers and the most ideal safety precautions."

Dr Stergiou says that, as a health educator, it is about making use of that "teachable moment" when a person is ready to reflect on the risks associated with an act, and recognise how their behaviour can be modified for the benefit of their own health.

"It's very much about telling a story about what may happen and explaining the fine line between success and failure," she says. "Sure, their behaviour may not change... but what are the safety measures that they can adopt?"

"No matter what you are doing, look at mitigating the risk. For example, who do you have around you that can help? Is there any equipment that you can use to make the job easier? It may mean an extra step in your approach to an activity, but it's worth it if it stops you presenting to our Emergency Department."

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