

get
fit

eat
well

enjoy
life!

with uncle chris



THE MILK ALTERNATIVES

Hello folks

Now we all know the value of cows' milk – it's high in protein and calcium and essential vitamins. Besides I reckon it tastes good.

Suddenly there's a bottle of almond milk in our fridge. It's not for me – its 1litre of goodness is for she who must be obeyed, who has also discovered lactose-free milk products as well as cow-milk alternatives. The almond milk is produced in Australia, is unsweetened and carries a 4-star health rating (all good).

Number one ingredient is filtered water. The second main ingredient is "sun-kissed whole almonds squeezed into our Almond Milk Unsweetened". That sounds okay, but then the label says there's a minimum of 3.8% almonds."

According to the label, there's also calcium phosphate, sunflower lecithin, sea salt, natural flavour (I thought the almonds would provide that) and vegetable gum.

The label also states the product is "brimming with good stuff".

So, folks, by my schoolboy maths, if the almonds crushed, ground, squeezed or whatever account for less than 4% of the total volume, the product must be around 90% filtered water.

If you tried to digest almond milk with say 20% of crushed almonds it would probably clog up your system.

Okay so it costs around \$3 a litre, but nutritionists swear by it – and other cow-

milk alternatives too.

She who must be obeyed is travelling well on almond milk and I must confess, while a bit watery, it goes okay with muesli. One day I'll try it with coffee ... one day.

Soy milk is the original alternative to what comes from cows. There are regular or reduced-fat varieties. It's a good source of protein and usually it's fortified with calcium. Many studies have rated it the best alternative to the real thing.

It's creamier and probably better for my muesli than almond milk, but check the sugar content.

Other moo-cow alternatives include:

- **Rice milk**, made from milled rice and water, usually calcium fortified, but can be low in protein and high in natural sugars.
- **Coconut milk** can be high in saturated fat, but low in carbs.

Nutrition expert Dr Tim Crowe says cows' milk is a great source of nutrition "but if you don't like milk, or are intolerant, that's fine, have something else."

He says soy milk has more protein on average than other plant alternatives. It contains fibre and is a source of 'good' fats, but it should be unsweetened.

"Some soy milks have added sugar to try to mimic the natural sweetness of milk."

In our fridge, alongside the bottle of almond milk there's lactose-free milk – both for her exclusive use. Me? I'm drinking the normal stuff until the cows come home.

AVOCADO AND OTHER ALLERGIES

We've all heard that people can have nasty allergic reactions to shellfish, nuts and even eggs. But did you know that a few of us, just a few, are allergic to a variety of good things, from apple and avocado to watermelon. Even that foodie indispensable ... garlic!

We know that some people have an allergic reaction to bee stings. And then there are others who are allergic to that which bees produce – yes, folks, honey.

SBS recently found a NSW young woman – let's call her Jaclyn, in fact it happens to be her real name – who had to undergo skin-prick tests to find she has a honey allergy. The apparent culprit: berries that the bees were feeding from.

Australia has one of the highest food allergy prevalence rates, according to a detailed study by the broadcaster, and worldwide food allergies are on the rise.

In Australia one in 10 babies are affected, although most outgrow the allergy. Two in 100 adults have allergy issues.

COMFORT FOOD to warm you up

Okay folks, now that winter has set in, let's eat heartily. Here are some of my favourite soups, easy-to-make mains and a couple of warm desserts.

Cauliflower and bacon gratin

1 teaspoon olive oil
200g bacon, sliced
2 large onions, sliced
1-2 cloves garlic, crushed
1kilo cauliflower, cut into bite-size florets
100g mature cheddar, coarsely grated
250ml cream
salt and pepper

Heat oven to 200C. Heat the oil in a pan and fry the bacon for 5 minutes until just starting to crisp. Add the onion and cook for a further 12 minutes until soft and golden.

In a gratin dish, layer the cauliflower on the base of the dish, then top with the bacon and onion mixture.

Pour the cream over the top and season. Scatter with the grated cheese and bake for 45 minutes until bubbling and cauliflower is tender.

Cottage pie

3 tablespoons olive oil
1kilo beef mince
1 onion, finely chopped
2 carrots, chopped
2 celery sticks, chopped
2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
2 tablespoons plain flour
1 tablespoon tomato paste
125ml red wine (optional)
400g can crushed tomatoes
2 tablespoons worcestershire sauce
1 tablespoon thyme
2 bay leaves
salt and pepper

For the mash

1.5kilos potatoes, chopped
60ml milk
100g butter
200g strong cheddar, grated
½ teaspoon nutmeg

Heat 2 tablespoons oil over a medium heat in a large saucepan and cook onion until softened. Add garlic, carrot, celery, bay leaves and thyme then cook for 2-3 minutes. Transfer to bowl and remove bay leaves.

Add the remaining oil to the same pan, add the mince and cook over a high heat until browned. Add the flour and cook for a minute, then add the wine and cook for 2-3 minutes. Return vegetables to the pan with the tomato paste, worcestershire sauce and crushed tomatoes. Reduce heat, cover and simmer for 45 minutes, stirring occasionally. Season to taste then transfer to an ovenproof dish and let cool.

Preheat oven to 180C

Meanwhile, boil the potatoes in salted water until tender, drain, then mash with milk and butter until smooth and fluffy. Season with pepper and nutmeg, spoon over the meat and top with the grated cheddar. Bake for 30 minutes until golden and crusty

Chicken korma

2 tablespoons olive oil
1 large brown onion, diced
4 cloves
¼ teaspoon ground cardamom
4 skinless chicken breasts, diced
3 garlic cloves, crushed
4 cm fresh ginger, peeled and grated
1 teaspoon ground coriander
¼ teaspoon ground allspice
1½ teaspoons ground cumin
½ teaspoon ground turmeric
1 teaspoon mild chilli powder
2 teaspoons tomato purée
75g almond meal
250ml chicken stock
200ml cream
salt and freshly ground black pepper

Heat the oil in a large frying pan. Once

hot, fry the onion, cloves and cardamom for a few minutes until the onion begins to soften.

Add the chicken, garlic and ginger, frying for a few minutes. Add all the remaining spices, stirring constantly, continue to fry allowing the spices to become aromatic and infuse the chicken.

Add the tomato paste, almond meal, stock and cream and bring to a simmer. Cook for about 15 minutes until reduced to the consistency of thick cream. Taste and add seasoning if needed.

Chorizo and beans

2 tablespoons olive oil
1 onion, finely diced
2 sticks celery, finely diced
1 red capsicum, diced
400g chorizo sausages, sliced
3 garlic cloves, crushed
1½ teaspoons smoked paprika
½ teaspoon ground cumin
1 tablespoon dried thyme
125ml white wine
2 x 400g cans diced tomatoes
2 sprigs fresh thyme
1 chicken stock cube
salt and pepper

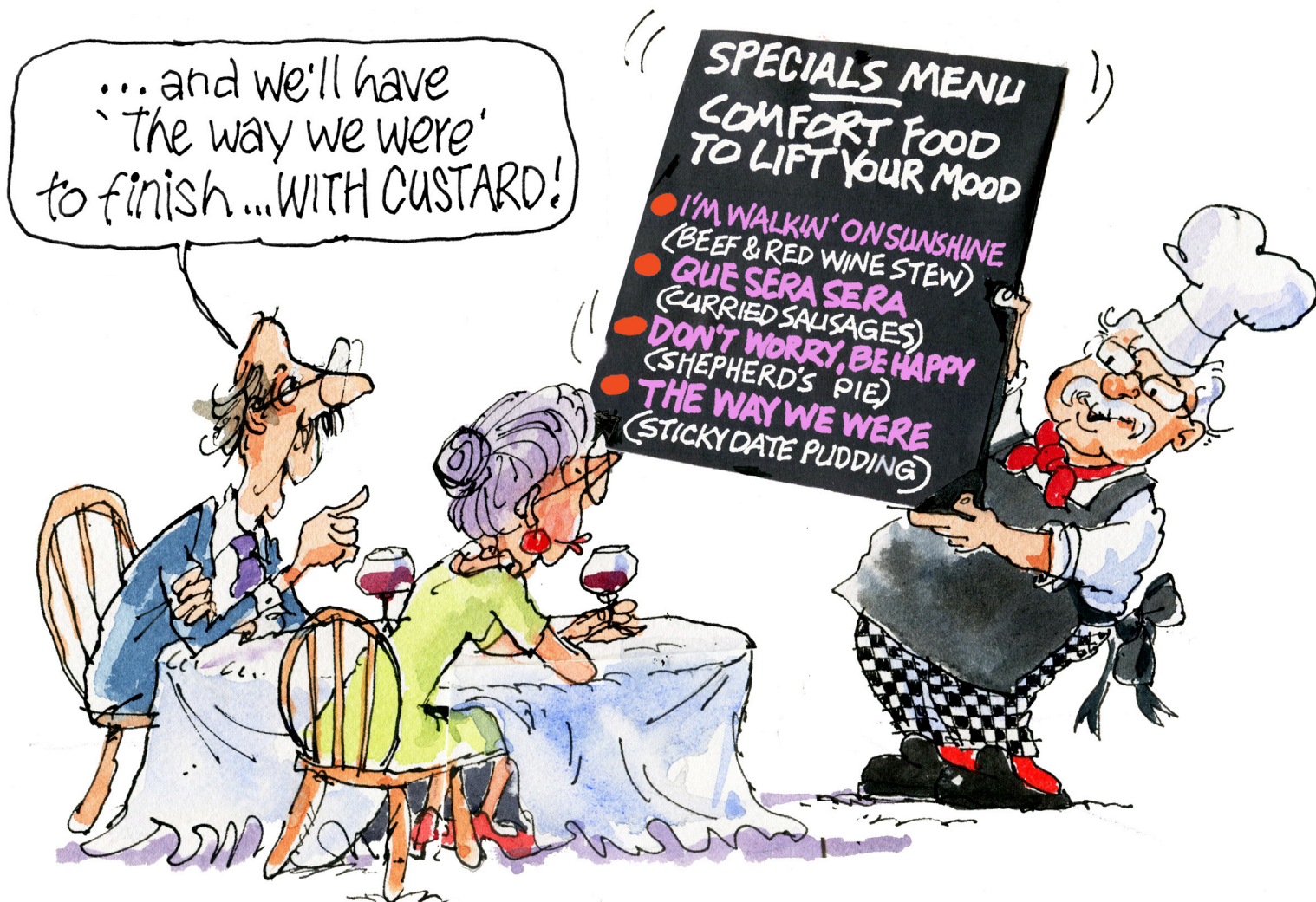
In a large heavy-based pan heat olive oil, add onion and cook gently for 5 minutes. Then add celery, capsicum and cook for a further 5 mins.

Add sliced chorizo sausage and fry for 5 minutes. Stir in garlic, paprika, cumin and thyme and continue cooking for 1-2 minutes or until the aromas are released.

Pour in 125ml white wine and use a wooden spoon deglaze the bottom of the pan. Add tomatoes, thyme and bring to a simmer. Crumble in the chicken stock cube and stir.

Cook for 40 minutes. Stir in beans and cook for a further five minutes.

Remove the thyme sprigs, season with salt and black pepper.



Beef and red wine stew

1kilo gravy beef, cut in chunks
30g plain flour, seasoned
2 tablespoons olive oil
2 cloves garlic, crushed
1 teaspoon rosemary
1 teaspoon thyme
150g streaky bacon, sliced
8 shallot bulbs, peeled, halved
200g button mushrooms, quartered
500ml red wine
2 tablespoons tomato paste
500ml beef stock
salt and pepper

Toss diced beef in seasoned flour until evenly coated. Heat oil in a large saucepan over high heat. Brown the beef in 3 batches until all coloured, add extra oil to the pan in-between batches if needed. Add the bacon to the pan and cook for 2 minutes, remove then add shallots, garlic, herbs and mushrooms

and cook for 5 minutes or until onions are browned.

Deglaze the pot with the red wine scraping up any sediment from the bottom. Stir in the tomato paste and stock. Add the beef and bacon back to the pot with any juices. Cook slowly until meat is tender and the sauce is glossy and thickened. Adjust seasoning at the end.

Braised lamb shanks

4 lamb shanks, frenched (bone trimmed of excess fat and gristle)
2 tablespoons olive oil
2 red onions, peeled and diced
2 cloves garlic, crushed
2 carrots, diced
2 celery stalks, diced
400g can diced tomatoes
125ml red wine
1 tablespoon rosemary, chopped

salt and pepper

Preheat oven to 160C

In a pan that can go into the oven heat oil over a medium heat and cook the onion until translucent, add the garlic and other vegetables cook for a further 2 minutes. Add the lamb shanks and brown, pour in red wine and diced tomatoes, then bring to boil. Stir in rosemary and seasoning.

Cover and transfer to the oven for 2 hours or until meat pulls away from the bone. You may need to adjust the liquid in the cooking time with water to make sure that the shanks don't dry out. Adjust seasoning at the end.

Curried sausages

9 thick sausages, pork or beef, your choice

1 tablespoon vegetable oil
20g butter

3 cloves garlic, crushed
2 large onions, sliced
3 teaspoons curry powder
1 teaspoon garam masala
2 teaspoons tomato paste
1 tablespoon plain flour
625ml chicken stock, hot
salt and pepper

To blanch the sausages, place them in a saucepan covered with cold water, bring to the boil and lower the heat to a simmer for 3 minutes. Remove from heat and allow to cool in the water, then drain and pat dry, cut in 2cm pieces.

Heat oil in a large frying pan and cook the sausages until golden, remove from pan then add the butter, garlic, onion and cook until golden. Add the curry powder and garam masala then cook for 1 minute until the spices become aromatic. Stir in the tomato paste then add the flour, stir to coat ingredients then pour in the hot stock, taking care no lumps form. Bring to a simmer and add the sausages and cook for 15 minutes or until thickened. Adjust seasoning.

Chicken and mushroom casserole

4 tablespoons olive oil
1 kilo skinless chicken thighs, quartered
1 onion, thinly sliced
1 leek, thinly sliced
2 garlic cloves, crushed
350g portabella mushrooms, sliced
½ teaspoon tarragon
375ml chicken stock
185ml cream
2 teaspoons lemon juice
2 teaspoons dijon mustard
salt and pepper

Pre heat oven to 180C. In a fry pan heat 1-2 tablespoons of oil and fry off the chicken in batches until golden, place to one side.

Add remaining oil to the pan and cook onion, leek and garlic until softened. Add mushrooms and cook until soft

and browned, add tarragon, mustard, lemon juice, stock and cream, bring to the boil and cook for 5 minutes. Return chicken and any juice back to the pan and season.

Place in a casserole dish and cook covered for 1 hour or until sauce has thickened and reduced.

Beef stroganoff

400g beef rump, cut in thin strips
2 tablespoons plain flour
50g butter
1 onion, thinly sliced
2 garlic cloves, crushed
250g portabella mushrooms, sliced
60ml brandy, optional
250ml beef stock
1½ tablespoons tomato paste
185ml sour cream
1 tablespoon parsley, chopped
salt and pepper

Dust beef in the flour and shake off any excess.

In a frypan melt half the butter and in batches cook the beef until seared all over. Remove from the pan and sit to one side.

Add remaining butter to the pan and cook onion and garlic over a medium heat until softened, add mushrooms and cook for 2-3 minutes. Pour in brandy if using and simmer until nearly all the liquid has evaporated, stir in the stock and tomato paste cook for 5 minutes to reduce the liquid and then add the beef back to the pan with any juices and stir in the sour cream. Cook until meat is tender and sauce thickened. Season to taste and stir through the parsley.

Lazy Sunday lamb shank soup

2 tablespoons olive oil
1.25kilo lamb shanks
2 large brown onions, diced
4 garlic cloves, crushed
250ml red wine
2 bay leaves
2 tablespoons rosemary
1 tablespoon thyme
1 large carrot, diced
1 large potato, diced

1 large swede, peeled and diced
1 large parsnip, peeled and diced
2.5litres beef stock
400g can crushed tomatoes
165g pearl barley
salt and pepper

In a large soup pot heat oil over a high heat and brown shanks until golden for 2-3 minutes. Remove.

Add onion and garlic to the pot and cook until softened then add the red wine and simmer for 5 minutes. Add the shanks, bay leaves, rosemary and thyme and 1.5 litres of the stock to the pot. Season and bring to the boil over a high heat. Reduce heat to a simmer, covered for 2 hours or until meat falls off the bone. Remove shanks and cool slightly.

Take meat off the bone and roughly chop. Put back into the broth with the remaining stock, tomato and barley and simmer for 30 minutes. Add the vegetables and cook for 1 hour or until barley and vegetables are tender. Remove bay leaves and adjust seasoning.

Roasted cauliflower and cumin soup

1 large cauliflower, cut into florets
3 tablespoon olive oil
2 onions, sliced
2 garlic cloves, crushed
1½ teaspoons cumin seeds
½ teaspoon red chilli flakes (optional)
600ml vegetable stock, hot
400g can coconut cream
salt and pepper

Preheat oven to 190C

In a bowl combine cauliflower, chilli flakes, garlic and cumin seeds, drizzle with 2 tablespoons of oil and place in a baking tray. Bake for 30-35 minutes.

In a pot add remaining oil and cook onion until it is softened. In a separate pot bring stock and coconut cream to the simmer. Once cauliflower is roasted add to the onion pot and add the hot liquid. Gently simmer for 10 minutes.

Remove soup from the heat and blitz with a stick blender until smooth and season to taste with salt and pepper.

Roasted parsnip and rosemary soup

600g parsnips, peeled and roughly chopped
4 tablespoons olive oil
50g butter
225g onions, thinly sliced
1 tablespoon rosemary
750ml chicken stock
750ml milk
salt and pepper

Preheat oven to 200C. Place parsnip on a tray with half the oil and toss to coat. Roast in oven till golden brown and tender. Set to one side.

Heat remaining oil and butter in a large saucepan. Add onion, garlic and rosemary and gently cook for 3-4 minutes until softened. Add parsnip and remaining ingredients and bring to the boil. Reduce to a simmer and cook about 20 minutes or until parsnip is very soft.

Remove soup from the heat and blitz with a stick blender until smooth and season to taste with salt and pepper

Shepherd's pie

4 tablespoons olive oil
1 large brown onion, diced
2 garlic cloves, crushed
2 celery stalks, diced
2 carrots, diced
1 tablespoon thyme
1kilo lamb mince
1½ tablespoons plain flour
125ml red wine
2 tablespoons tomato paste
400g can crushed tomato
salt and pepper
1.5kilo potatoes (dutch creams preferred), cut into even pieces
60ml milk
100g butter
salt
½ teaspoon nutmeg

Preheat oven to 180C.

Heat 2 tablespoons of oil over a medium heat in a large saucepan. Cook onion for 3-4 minutes until softened. Add garlic, vegetables and thyme and cook for 3-4 minutes then transfer to another container.

Add remaining oil to the pot, heat and add mince, cook on high until browned

all over. Mix in the flour and cook for a minute, add red wine and cook for 2-3 minutes. Return the vegetables back to the pot with paste and crushed tomato, reduce heat and simmer for 45 minutes, stirring occasionally. Season to taste, then transfer into to a shallow overproof dish and leave to cool. Meanwhile, boil the potatoes in salted water over a medium heat about 25 minutes or until tender. Drain then mash with milk and butter. Season with nutmeg and pepper. Spoon over the top of the mince. Bake for 30 minutes until golden and crunchy.

Chicken tagine

1kilo skinless chicken thighs, cut in quarters
3 garlic cloves, crushed
80ml olive oil
2 teaspoons ground cumin
1 teaspoon ground ginger
1 teaspoon ground turmeric
1 teaspoon paprika
½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
2 brown onions, diced
580ml chicken stock
½ lemon, zested
400g can chickpeas
½ teaspoon ground black pepper
1 teaspoon salt

In a bowl add 2 tablespoons of oil with garlic, spices and seasoning. Stir to combine then add chicken and coat with mix, cover and marinate for an hour in fridge.

Heat remaining oil in a large saucepan, add the chicken in batches and sear until golden. Remove from pan and add onion, cook for 2 minutes, return chicken back to the pan and add chicken stock. Reduce the heat and simmer for 1 hour, add the zest and chickpeas and cook uncovered for another 30 minutes or until chicken is tender and sauce is reduced and thickened.

Now for the desserts, comfort style

Sticky date pudding

170g dates, pitted
1 teaspoon bicarb soda
300ml boiling water
60g butter
170g caster sugar
2 eggs
170g self-raising flour, sifted
1 tablespoon vanilla essence

Sauce

400g brown sugar
1 cup thick cream
250g butter
vanilla essence

Preheat oven to 180C, butter or spray an 18cm cake tin.

Mix dates and bicarb soda, then pour the boiling water on top, leave to stand until softened.

Cream butter and sugar until light and fluffy, add eggs one at a time and beat well after each addition. Fold in sifted self-raising flour gently then stir in the date mixture and vanilla. Pour into prepared tin and bake in the centre of the oven for 30-40 minutes or until ready when you test with a skewer and it comes out clean.

To make sauce bring all ingredients to the boil in a saucepan over a medium heat and simmer for 5 minutes. Serve with slices of the pudding.

Old-fashioned baked custard

3 eggs
2 tablespoons caster sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla essence
2 cups milk
nutmeg

Preheat oven to 180C

Heat milk over a low heat until scalding point, beat eggs, sugar and vanilla together lightly. Add warmed milk gradually, whisking to combine. Pour into a shallow oven proof dish, sprinkle with nutmeg and stand baking dish in a baking tin, with enough cold water to come halfway up the sides of the dish.

Bake in the oven for 40 minutes or until set.

DON'T STRESS OUT

EXERCISE ... but don't overdo it

Hey Brighton

Today I want to continue with the series of articles exploring the links between exercise and how we live our lives. After discussing the wonders of sleep and rest previously, this time the focus will be on the other side, the impact and potential challenges of stress.

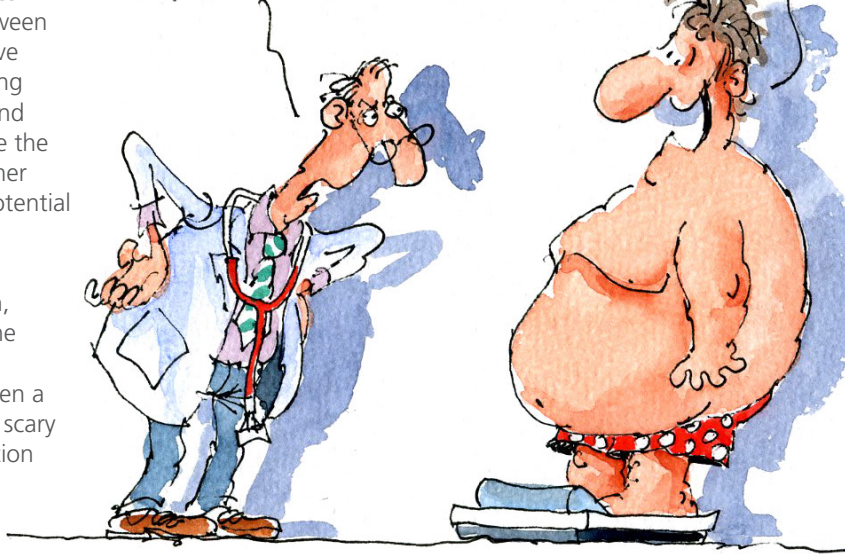
Before I discuss the effects of stress though, I'll briefly cover what the body does to deal with stressful situations. When a person sees something scary or thinks about a situation that makes them uncomfortable, the body reacts by pumping certain hormones that heighten our senses and make us more alert to protect us.

While people often think of being stressed as a mental situation, where we are pushed emotionally beyond 'our happy place', stress is actually defined as any internal or external stimulus that leads to a biological response.

When you think of it this way, does stress always have to be a bad thing? The simple answer is no. Take doing weights in the gym as an example. The process involves lifting heavy things in order to strain the muscles, which then makes them 'recover' bigger and better. This situation applies for the mind too, and studies have shown that a mild amount of stress, that falls below a person's threshold, actually improves mental functioning and memory. Some of the hormones that are released in stress situations can also improve coping strategies and limit anxiety.

It is all a matter of getting the balance correct and not overdoing it. If you are too stressed, too often and over a long

Are you getting any exercise?



'Exercise on days that your partner insists on watching the next series of Married at First Sight. Even better, walk around the house while the show is on'

period of time, your ability to remember things actually gets worse. This is due to a different hormone that we release when we are stressed. The part of the brain that converts short-term memories into memories that we will keep has been found to be receptive to this hormone, and the hormone makes that part of the brain deteriorate over time.

Too much stress over an extended period has also been found to

impact on our immune system and as a result can lead us to get sick more often. One reason for this is that the stress hormone is an anti-inflammatory and therefore, when it is there, it does the job the immune system should be doing, which makes the immune system lazier.

Also, growth hormone, which allows our bodies to recover, is limited when the stress hormone is present. This is why after a race, I was always told to relax before the next race

the next day. Similar negative links are seen in the cardiovascular system and the function of our gut. You get the point. Being too stressed for too long is not a good thing for the body or the mind. If you want to read up more on this, check out the article found at www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5579396/

The next question is how exercise impacts on stress. This works in much the same way as stress itself works on the body. In the right amounts stress caused by exercise is great. As has been discussed, the stress from getting moving will lead to lower blood pressure, lower heart rate and better lung capacity. It makes muscles stronger, makes us more flexible and less likely to have issues such as arthritis.

Of course the impacts of too much physical activity are real too and huge amounts of training stress can cause injury, excessive fatigue and, in extreme cases, disorders of the heart. The important thing to remember here though is that your physical capacity is

quite high, so you have to do a lot of work before you tip the scales into the danger zone. The bottom line is that stress from exercise is far more likely to help than it is to hinder you.

One last thing to discuss is how exercise allows us to better cope with all of life's stresses, both physical and mental. For starters, the release of the hormones, endorphins when we exercise, make us happy. They lower anxiety and commonly lead to a more positive outlook. Therefore, when we encounter overwhelmingly stressful situations, we are more easily able to shake off feelings of being unable to manage, and can better stop the slide into being depressed in the short term.

These exercise hormones impact positively on memory and mental processes so, as you can imagine, they can limit the negative memory effects caused by stress. On a physical level, the linked lower heart rate and blood pressure mean the rise caused by stress will not tip us into the uncomfortable range as often, and therefore we will become more resilient to things that normally make us flip out. Finally exercise helps us sleep, and this is the best way to limit the impact of stress on the body.

I don't want to sound like a broken record, but the more I read about these processes, the more I see that we have been given a great gift in our ability to deal with many of the problems we face. The key to a lot of this is staying active.

Just to remind you, they say around 150 minutes of exercise per week is all you need to make a difference. Doesn't matter what it is, just remember to keep doing exercise on days that your partner insists on watching the next series of *Married at First Sight*. Even better, as 150 minutes is around 20 minutes a day, walk around the house while the show is on.

Until next time.
Tristan

Reproduced from an earlier edition.

FOUR TIPS FOR FITNESS

EXERCISE

While I still believe setting yourself an ambitious goal (your marathon) is a good frame of mind to aim for, there is often more chance of success in working on small improvements over time. Thus today I'll stick to something we all do: walking. Many people have tried and then become bored with wearing a Fitbit, but it isn't the only way to track how much we walk in a day.

There are now many free mobile phone apps that can be used to automatically keep track of your steps. The Fitbit app is one and I use the basic Google Fit (on my Samsung), but there are lots of others that sound fun. Pacer for instance allows you to record and even compete with friends, or try Wokamon, which converts your steps into food.

Once you find one that you like, the first step (pardon the pun) is to assess how much walking you do at present. The average Australian walks around 7000 steps per day, so see how you compare. People often quote 10,000 as being the magic number, but build it slowly and don't limit yourself to that. This recommended figure doesn't actually take normal daily activity into account, so base your goals on your own history and no matter what your intentions, any more than usual is a positive. Who knows, you could even find it fun!

HYDRATION

Like the recommendations for steps, we often hear that we 'should' drink a particular volume of water each day. The international Journal of Sports Medicine, for instance, recommends a rough guide of 2.5L/day when not doing much or up to 6L/day when undergoing intense exercise when it is hot. Once again, however, everyone is different. People have varying weights and some sweat more than others. Everyone's body is unique. This website www.drinksoma.com/water-calculator is a handy tool to help you calculate how much water you should drink, but the best method is simply viewing your urine. The less yellow it is, the better (note: many multivitamins or tablets will affect this too), and you'll know that you are having too much water if you keep rushing to the toilet more than usual.

Thirst is a great safety measure to battle dehydration, but it is worth noting that when you feel thirsty your body is already

dehydrated. Hydration is essential for everything from normal body processes to brain function so get on top of this.

Get yourself a 1L drink bottle and carry it to work or whatever so you can accurately measure your daily intake. Don't drink within two hours of sleep if it wakes you up at night.

DIET

As we are hearing more and more, sugar is a major issue in modern day Western society. Food companies fighting for your dollars during your weekly shop are putting various forms of sugar into products. They know sugar will make their food tastier and hard to resist, but it is doing us damage. So think about trying to limit your sugar intake. Look at the ingredients of a product. If there is a form of sugar in the first five ingredients then perhaps try to find an alternative (the ingredients are listed in order of quantity).

Secondly, just as important as what you eat is when you eat. Think of food as fuel that, if not used as energy, will be stored in the body for future as fat. That chocolate bar was naughtier late at night as you watched Federer vs Nadal, when compared to early afternoon when there is more of a chance to burn off the sugar. A walk after dinner is a great idea to overcome this, or you could even adopt a more European approach with bigger lunches and smaller dinners.

SLEEP

Sleep is the body's best way of recovering. There is a reason people in countries such as Spain have a break in the middle of the day for a siesta (a nap). Sleep experts recommend a minimum of 8hr/24hr day, advise that hours before midnight are best and recommend that ideally you keep regular sleeping patterns to let your body maximise sleep benefits.

I recommend you charge your mobile in a room other than your bedroom. Looking at the phone (and the blue light from it in particular) late at night confuses your body as to the time of day, and sleep quality is significantly affected.

Similar reflections can be made about stress levels, mood and even social interactions, but it's better not to focus on too many elements at once. If something written here clicked then give it a go and see for yourself the difference it can make.



Whether it's a granny or a pink lady, AN APPLE A DAY keeps the doctor away

Apples have been a pivotal thing in my life.

My first involvement with them came at age two and a bit.

A late developer, I had not spoken a single word and my parents, fearful I was suffering some horrific condition, were seeking medical opinions.

I reckon my 'no speaks' were probably laziness, but in any case one warm afternoon I was sitting with my grandmother and other family on the veranda as she pondered how she would eat a gigantic big red apple in her hand.

She pondered and pondered as grandmas are prone to do until eventually I irritatingly looked at her and advised "cut it with a knife".

Instant jubilation. No "mum-mum" or "dad-dad" here, this super silent kid had spoken a whole phrase. He could talk after all. An apple had done the trick.

Then later, when about 11, apples were my downfall when I got whacked in the eye by one during a backyard apple fight with neighbourhood combatants.

Not only did I suffer a black eye but I bore my father's ire for weeks for raiding his treasured apple trees.

I didn't eat many apples after that. Somehow I lost the taste.

Decades later, after suffering a serious bowel condition requiring a six-hour operation, I asked my surgeon what I should eat.

"Anything you like," he told me, before sagely adding "you might eat some apples".

I have been eating them religiously ever since. Love them.

I guess what I'm saying is that apples have lots to offer.

I reckon anyone who doesn't grow a

tree or three, especially on the Apple Isle where crisp winters bring out their juicy best, is bonkers.

Not only are they packed with healthy nutrients and vital roughage, especially when eaten au naturel with their skins, newer, sweeter cultivars take them to a sublime taste level.

While many still favour the old Granny Smith, Jonathan and Golden Delicious, being a sweet tooth I'm seduced by Pink Lady and Gala.

When it comes to cooking apples, maybe in a yummy pie, I don't reckon you can beat an oldtimer called Bramley's Seedling.

Hailing from England in the 1800s, it's a stunner when baked in a crispy-pastry pie with a few cloves for bite and a tangy lemon icing on top.

Some people say apples trees are hard to grow and maintain.

Don't believe it.

Follow the rules and they're really quite easy – and now is a good time to plant.

Apples need at least 1000 hours of temperatures below 7°C a year and in Tassie that's a cinch.

Treat them to soil that drains well and protection from wind and heavy frosts and they'll do the rest beautifully.

Yes, but what about the pruning and the need to grow more than one tree for pollination, I hear the sceptics asking.

Yes, most apples do need another tree flowering nearby to aid pollination, but then why grow just one apple tree when you can have more?

In any case, your local nursery can advise the best cross-pollinating combinations.

Some also bring up the need for

pruning.

That's so. Most trees benefit from an occasional clip but it is no-where near as mysterious as some so-called experts make out.

The pruning aim is simply to encourage healthy growth in a maintainable fashion that produces the best fruit.

Prune to allow maximum sun to get to developing fruit. Cut off those vigorous rogue branches that soar up through the centre and keep the tree low enough so picking is easy.

A quick winter tidy can also help.

Keep in mind that apples fruit on wood two or more years old.

While you want to remove clutter and competing branches by cutting back to a leader, you need to leave those stubby fruiting spurs on laterals, or the side branches growing out at an angle of between 30 to 60 degrees.

On the other hand, newly-planted bare-root trees do benefit from a year or two of hard winter pruning to encourage vigorous new growth that will form their framework over coming seasons.

Even easier, you can grow some of the slimline varieties such as Ballerina that require minimal pruning.

They boast a narrow frame with the fruit growing on short spurs, making them ideal for corners or against fences.

You just need to cut back side branches in winter so two buds remain on each.

How easy!

If you're really into your apples, you can even plant a range of varieties so that at any time from December to late July you will be able to savour fruit.

These trees truly deserve to be the apple of everyone's eye.

