

Health, wellness & chronic diseases



Everyone wants to be, and feel, well. 'Wellness' is more than just being free of disease – it also includes emotional, physical, mental, and social wellbeing. If we look after our physical health, we are better able to cope when faced with difficult situations that we cannot fully control. Looking after your health is an important part of keeping well.

Chronic Disease

Chronic diseases are long-term diseases. As we age, chronic diseases become more common. They affect our quality of life and general wellbeing. Some examples of common chronic diseases include diabetes, cardiovascular (heart) and respiratory (lung) diseases, joint diseases, and mental health diseases.

Family history can be a cause of some chronic diseases. However poor diet, low levels of physical activity, obesity, stress, poor sleep, smoking, and substance abuse (such as the use of illicit drugs and excessive alcohol), can also cause poor health and lead to chronic diseases. Making wise choices that lead to a healthy and fulfilling life can reduce or even prevent your risk of developing many chronic diseases.

Diabetes is a complex condition needing daily care and management because it affects the whole body. There are three main types of diabetes which are type 1, type 2 and gestational (pregnancy) diabetes. Approximately 1.7 million Australians have diabetes and the number is increasing. It is a serious condition that can cause blindness, kidney failure, increased risk of heart attack and stroke, limb amputations and poor mental health. Making healthy choices can delay and even prevent diabetes.

Cardiovascular disease includes diseases of blood vessels in the heart and the brain, and is the number one cause of deaths in the world. Heart attacks and strokes are more likely to happen to individuals who have a history of smoking, eating an unhealthy diet high in sugar and saturated fats, being overweight, not being sufficiently physically active, overuse of alcohol or have high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol levels or uncontrolled diabetes. Most cardiovascular disease is better managed by addressing these risk factors as early as possible.

Long-term pain can cause stress and worry, and mental health problems like anxiety and depression. Depression can also be caused by other factors.

Depression can lead to poor eating habits, lack of physical activity, substance abuse, weight gain and other diseases like cardiovascular disease. It can become a vicious cycle with mental health impacting physical health.

Being **overweight** can put pressure on the large joints such as the knee and hip joints. This can lead to long-term pain that occurs particularly when moving or after exercise.

Lifestyle options

- Be active on most, and preferably every, day of the week. Adults should aim for 2½ to 5 hours of moderate, or 1¼ to 2½ hours of vigorous intensity physical activity each week.
- Do exercises that strengthen your muscles on at least 2 days per week.
- Avoid being sedentary (seated) for long hours in a day, and limit the time spent on digital devices.
- Get enough sleep – aim for 8 hours per night for adults and longer for children and teenagers.
- Eat a healthy diet that is low in saturated fats and sugars (less than 10%). Increase the number and types of vegetables in your diet.
- Learn relaxing techniques such as controlled breathing and meditation exercises to help deal with stress and anxiety.
- Quit smoking.
- Drink alcohol moderately (no more than 2 standards glasses per day).

Pharmacy options

Always inform pharmacy staff if you are taking any medicines, or if you have any other health conditions, because some over-the-counter medicines or recommendations may not be suitable for you.

Apart from giving you advice about medicines, your pharmacist can also provide advice about improving your general health and wellbeing. Your pharmacist can talk with you about any specific risk factors that can affect your health. They can provide services such as:

- education about chronic diseases like heart disease, diabetes, asthma, mental health, musculoskeletal and sleeping problems
- health screening services
- chronic disease management programs – such as clinics for weight management and smoking cessation.

Your pharmacist can also:

- refer you to appropriate health professionals such as your doctor, a dietician, physiotherapist or exercise specialist when necessary
- provide blood pressure, blood glucose and blood cholesterol checks
- screen for sleep apnoea
- recommend appropriate products that that can assist with weight loss
- recommend quit smoking aids (see *Quit smoking* Health Information Brochure)
- demonstrate use of a blood pressure monitor or blood glucose meter that you can purchase and use at home
- recommend aids for arthritis and other musculoskeletal problems (see *Managing your pain* Health Information Brochure)
- demonstrate correct techniques of asthma devices and insulin injection
- suggest supplements (such as iron or calcium) if you have been diagnosed with specific vitamin or mineral deficiencies
- recommend evidence-based complementary medicines (e.g. for stress or sleep)
- give advice on good sleep habits (see *Sleeping difficulties* Health Information Brochure)
- offer vaccination services such as influenza (and others such as measles, mumps, rubella, diphtheria, tetanus and others depending on where you live in Australia).

More information

Health Direct: www.healthdirect.gov.au

Sleep Health Foundation:
www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au

Quitting Smoking: www.quitnow.gov.au

Mental Health services: Beyond Blue:
www.beyondblue.org.au

The Heart Foundation:
www.heartfoundation.org.au

Diabetes Australia:
www.diabetesaustralia.com.au

Australia's Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines and the Australian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines at: www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/health-publth-strateg-phys-act-guidelines#npa1864

Australian dietary guidelines:
www.eatforhealth.gov.au/guidelines

Alcohol and Drug Foundation: adf.org.au

Disclaimer: The information provided is a guide only, is current at time of publishing, and is not intended to replace the advice of your pharmacist or doctor.

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References: 1. NDSS test strip MAT April 2019. 2. Data warehouse, March 2019.
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