

HEALTH MATTERS
SEAN PARNELLMind how you go,
and the rest follows

Your brain is a long way from your fingers and even farther away from your feet (unless you've rolled yourself into a ball, in which case you won't be reading this anyway). Thankfully, the marvel that is the central nervous system covers the distance from head to toe in rapid time, allowing us to function, survive and thrive. As 2018-era humans, we tend to associate what we're doing with how we feel at that moment, expecting a similarly instantaneous response — a rush of chemicals to tell us whether something is good or bad, a sensation to guide the way. Yet, sometimes, the link between lifestyle and our physical and mental health takes a bit longer to reveal itself, and by then it may be harder to pull back on what we are doing. Like, say, something as simple as typing comments into an online forum — an action can have a reaction, it's just that sometimes you don't know how much of a reaction or when it will come, and what impact it will have on you. It's not just that the things you say and do today can play on your mind, it's that they ultimately can do you or others harm. Our thoughts and our actions are connected to our health and wellbeing in many ways, some fast-acting, some more of a slow burn. Self-awareness and mindfulness is as important as watching what you eat and making sure you get enough exercise and sleep.

Teenagers who put down their smartphones an hour before bed gain an extra 21 minutes of sleep a night and an hour and 45 minutes across the school week, according to a new report.

VicHealth and the Sleep Health Foundation found the average teen gets only 6% to 7% hours of sleep a night, instead of the recommended eight to 10. This threatens their mental wellbeing, with higher rates of depression, anxiety and low self-esteem among sleep-deprived teens, sometimes lasting a lifetime.

"The stereotype of a lazy teenager who sleeps all day is actually an anomaly; teens need more sleep than older people, yet we know most of them aren't getting enough," the Sleep Health Foundation's Dorothy Bruck says.

"There are things teens and their parents can do to get more sleep. During the day, try to be physically active and socialise with friends and family. At night, set a regular bedtime and read a book or magazine instead of scrolling through social media right before bed."

Deakin University researchers have discovered smartphone addiction is not all due to apps such as Facebook and Instagram.

"Our study showed that habitual use — that is, mindless checking out of habit rather than need — and entertainment use, for example watching videos or browsing the web, was more highly correlated with problematic use than using social media via the phone," researcher Sharon Horwood says.

"That's not to say social media is blameless, it still correlates with problematic use, it's just not the whole story."

Separately, University of Queensland researchers examined the effects of taking a break from Facebook and found it could reduce levels of the stress hormone cortisol but also could reduce feelings of wellbeing.

"People said they felt more unsatisfied with their life and were looking forward to resuming their Facebook activity," researcher Eric Vanman says.

A recent British-Australian study found an association between stronger grip strength and better brain function.

While the tabloid headlines talked of people with a firm handshake being smarter, the researchers who published their findings in the *Schizophrenia Bulletin* acknowledged more work was needed to understand the causal relationships. They also pondered whether muscle strength could be used for diagnosis, or indeed whether hand-strengthening exercises might help prevent mental illness.

Exercise is already known to be good for your overall health and wellbeing. Last year, researchers from Western Sydney University and the University of Manchester also reported that exercise was shown to increase significantly the left region of the hippocampus in the brain.

"Rather than actually increasing the size of the hippocampus per se, the main 'brain benefits' are due to aerobic exercise slowing down the deterioration in brain size," says researcher Joe Firth, who also was involved in the grip strength study. "In other words, exercise can be seen as a maintenance program for the brain."

WHAT LIES
BENEATHWELL
BEING

We can't halt ageing but there are ways to lessen its effects on our skin

SUVI MAHONEN

I'm a bad daughter. It's something I've always suspected. Especially when I was younger and my mother used to tell me so. But I received self-confirmation earlier this year when I went to visit her in hospital.

To be fair, it was nothing life-threatening, not that a leaking eyeball as a complication of glaucoma surgery is anyone's idea of fun. But it meant my mother required specialised treatment that wasn't available to her in central Queensland, necessitating her being flown to the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital ophthalmology unit.

When she was admitted we drove up from the Gold Coast to visit her. A nurse came in while we were there. She bathed my mother's eye. She put drops into it. With visiting hours nearly over, we stood up to leave.

"I hope the surgery helps your eye," I told her.

I hugged my mother and stepped back, and immediately felt ashamed of myself for realising that, instead of her eye patch, I was looking at all her wrinkles.

Maybe it was the fact she was in pain. Or maybe it was the fact the tyranny of distance meant that I hadn't seen her for nearly six months. Or maybe, most likely, it was simply because she hadn't put on any foundation or blush.

Either way, I couldn't help but notice the deep spiderweb of lines spreading from the corner of her eye patch, or the furrows of flesh crossing her brows, or the creases on her cheeks, or the sagging skin beneath her jawline.

I told you I am a bad daughter. As we drove home that night I was silent, worrying about my mother's upcoming surgery, and feeling ashamed that I was also worrying that I had looked into a mirror at my own face in 27 years.

Skin, which is composed of the epidermis, dermis and hypodermis layers, is the largest organ of the human body. It is also an organ where women are at a distinct dis-

advantage compared with men when it comes to ageing.

At all ages, male skin is thicker than female skin. It has increased amounts of collagen fibres in the dermal layer because of the stimulatory effect of testosterone. This thicker dermal layer may offer better protection against ultraviolet radiation, irritants and allergens.

Women have more subcutaneous fat and undergo more pronounced muscle atrophy as they age. These physiological differences are known to predispose to periorbital wrinkles and a sagging chin. Given that these physical attributes are a prime feature used by others in estimating a woman's age, and given that collagen loss begins in our 20s, it is perhaps not surprising that the worldwide skincare market was estimated to be worth about \$175 billion in 2016.

At menopause, a further rapid deterioration in the health of a woman's skin occurs as lower oestrogen levels leave skin drier, thinner and more prone to sagging.

There are several factors that contribute to skin ageing, including smoking, diets high in refined carbohydrates and low in fresh fruit and vegetables, excessive alcohol consumption, sedentary lifestyle, stress, and exposure to pollutants and harsh chemicals.

By far the biggest culprit of all, however, is sun damage.

"A certain amount of sunlight is required," Melbourne dermatologist Adam Sheridan says.

"But if you think about it, the sun is many billions of nuclear bombs going off per second, so it is nuclear radiation hitting your skin. At the very least you want 50-plus sunscreen on your face and on the backs of your hands every day, even when it's cloudy."

TIPS TO KEEP YOUR
SKIN HEALTHY

SUN PROTECTION
Sunlight is the single most potent, modifiable ageing for our skin. Clothing is the best natural sunscreen possible but it's also important to remember that a limited amount of sunlight between 10am and 2pm is needed to allow your skin to make vitamin D

EAT WELL
Strive to eat a balanced diet, including colourful vegetables and healthy fats such as avocados, nuts and seeds to keep your skin looking supple

MINIMISE STRESS
Stress increases androgens, which makes acne worse. Rosacea also is aggravated by stress

DIY FACE MASK
Try this at home to hydrate your skin and remove unwanted dead skin cells. Whisk up an entire egg white, add a tablespoon of mashed green papaw, then spread over the face. Rinse off after 20 minutes and follow up with your normal skincare routine
By dermatologist Michael Freeman

Fair skin is prone to developing wrinkles, rough spots, skin discolorations and precancerous lesions, all of which can be reduced by good skincare regimens.

"The net effect is to make the skin healthier, more evenly coloured and looking smoother and younger," says Terrence Scamp, a Gold Coast plastic surgeon with more than 25 years' experience.

"Skincare needs to start early. It's estimated that half the lifetime UV exposure occurs by age 15. Parents who protect their children's skin when young give them a huge head start in preventing skin cancer."

Caring for your skin should always be an integral part of caring for your whole body, says Scamp. "Not smoking, maintaining a healthy body weight and exercising are all activities designed to maintain good health," he says.

To the millions of women out there who, like me, look at their credit card balance and then into the mirror and wonder if all that money spent on skincare might as well have been flushed down the toilet, there is some consolation: numerous trials show at least mild and temporary improvements in skin appearance after application of topical creams and ointments containing retinols, polypeptides, growth factors and antioxidants.

But there are limits to what a healthy lifestyle, preventive measures and expensive cosmetic treatments can achieve, which is why many Australian women are turning to cosmetic surgery as well.

The Australasian College of Cosmetic Surgery says more than \$1bn is spent each year in Australia on invasive skin procedures such as anti-wrinkle injections, fillers and laser therapy.

Perth cosmetic physician Ehsan Jadoon was inspired to pursue cosmetic medicine after working in Alice Springs and seeing first-hand the effects sun damage could have on a woman's confidence and self-esteem.

"More people are separating in their 40s and 50s and are finding themselves on the dating scene," he says. "They want to have the self-confidence to meet someone. Likewise, more people are choosing to stay in the workforce for longer and they want to look their best. People who grew up without the awareness of sun damage are now seeing premature ageing."

"From the inside, they don't feel old but on the outside, people are treating them as older people." Michael Freeman, associate professor of dermatology at the Bond University's faculty of health sciences, uses laser therapy for the treatment of wrinkles and skin sagging.

"Every time we heal a wound we grow new elastin and collagen," Freeman says. "The signal for the skin to regenerate depends on the energy delivered by the lasers. Greater energy gives greater results. There is obviously a limit to how much you can safely push the skin and this is why it is best to have an experienced operator."

Freeman says there is some truth to the criticism that the aesthetics industry is fuelling society's obsession with youth and looks.

"Sadly, some are not just satisfied with maintaining their youth — they want features they have not been gifted by nature," he says.

"This can lead to significant distortions of facial features. It is fuelled by social media identities who push the limits."

Perhaps if we lived in a utopian

world, our appearance shouldn't matter.

For most of us, however, the way we present ourselves to others is important.

Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists president Kym Jenkins says: "There are many factors that contribute to our sense of self, and appearance is just one of them."

She says there is nothing wrong with wanting to present as well as possible as long as we keep things in perspective.

She says it's important to have age-appropriate standards.

"We don't have enough realistic role models of women as they age. A 60-year-old woman can look 60, and still be beautiful," Jenkins says. "If, however, at the age of 50 you won't feel alive or integrated as a person unless your skin looks like that of a 25-year-old, then you've probably got some problems."

Wrinkles can often force us to face uncomfortable truths, such as ageing and mortality.

"It's like when you look in the mirror and you realise that you look like your mother; it can be a shock," Jenkins says.

"But underneath that is the fear of, 'I'm getting older, my life is passing me by.'"

Recently, my mother, whose eye had healed, came to visit and we took my four-year-old daughter to a park. The river flowed beneath us as we walked across the Chevron Island bridge.

My daughter ran over to use the slide and my mother went and joined her. With her bright face and striped navy T-shirt, she appeared happy and lively. And I realised that the reason my mother had looked so different in the hospital was not because of her wrinkles but because she was unwell.

The vibrancy and animation in her features that had been lacking on that day were back. And when I looked at her in this light, I saw that my mother was beautiful.

'Neat, round and simple' does the job

Primordia Mushrooms omelet from Simon Burr of Olfactory Inn, Strathalbyn, South Australia

JOHN LETHEAN

FLAVOUR
OF THE
MONTH

In the charming little Fleurieu Peninsula village of Strathalbyn, chef Simon Burr has carved out his own little slice of sanity. The Olfactory Inn occupies a small, charismatic, veranda-ed stone cottage on a street with a ridiculous wealth of heritage architecture.

He works sane hours, with the woman he loves, and cooks delicious regional food that makes sense. He seems to like his customers, too, and vice versa. This is the kind of operation that could lead an otherwise sane person to say: "Gee, I'd love to run a lovely little country restaurant." We'd advise a Bex and a lie down until that particular thought bubble fades.

"I am certainly not known for my foams, paints, dots and smears," says the chef-restaurateur. "Rather a contemporary rustic food style perhaps best described as 'bonne femme'. I am classically trained but do favour Mediterranean style and flavour." As well as working in a Adelaide

during the late 1980s and 90s at restaurants such as the Red Ochre Grill, Botanic Gardens Restaurant and the Edinburgh Hotel, Burr used to be a cheesemaker, one of the two founders of the noted Woodside Cheese Wrights brand.

"I also have a pedigree as long as your arm in big unusual outback and location catering," he says, and still does the trackside marquee for the Birdsville Race Club.

"My partner at the Olfactory Inn, Lauren Alexander, brings a professional and contemporary service approach to the front of house that I think lets me get away with, possibly even shows off, my seasonal/regional 'old school' food."

Yes, maturity is evident in the chef's work. A good thing.

THE BACKSTORY

"I grew up in Adelaide around Norwood/St Peters," says Burr, "spending most of my holidays either on our family farm in the

mid-north or other family members' farms on the Yorke Peninsula and in the southeast.

"It entrenched in me a solid understanding of when and where food comes from, which translates today as regional and seasonal — not just lip service, as is often the case. During my overseas sabbatical in the mid-90s, it was the production of food and farming that grabbed my attention as a stagiaire in South Africa, France and the UK as a student wine-maker and cheesemaker rather than the cooking of food and its service, per se."

THE PRODUCE
Burr says this mushroom dish was born on his mind since the early 90s when he had Neil Perry's crab omelet at the original Rockpool in Sydney's The Rocks.

"I remember being so impressed with how neat, round, simple and delicious it was," he says. More inspiration came from

Michael Taylor of Primordia Mushrooms — a guest speaker at an Olfactory "Fleurieu chefs table" dinner — who grows all types of fungus in a converted garage. When he's not doing that, he's a professor of microbiology at Flinders University.

"We also get lots of pine mushrooms and porcini from nearby forests that I love to cook and eat. The final piece came when Luke and Kat Falkai joined my chicken-farming mate, Tom Bradman, in a joint initiative to farm hen eggs that I wanted to use in a hero role," Burr says.

THE METHOD
Burr makes a ragout of the mushrooms with plenty of herbs and alliums, and a bechamel with a bit of cheese, white wine and truffle oil to add another element and "glue it together a bit". He spreads hot bechamel over the omelet



straight from the pan, fills it with the ragout, rolls it up and trims the edges.

"Perfect: neat, round and simple," he says.

THE TWIST

A unique garnish gives Burr's omelet a very local touch.

"Olaf Hansen from Cafe Bombora at Goolwa brought me some sapphire he had pickled, as well as some fresh stuff. My apprentice Belinda decided to tear some of Primordia's beautiful pink and blue oyster mushrooms into strips and fry them; I tossed in a couple of strands of the fresh sapphire."

"We put some of the pickled sapphire on as a bit of a foil to the richness, season the fried mushroom and sapphire with pink Murray River salt flakes, then sprinkle over to garnish. Done."

THE PRICE
Entree, \$18.