

Why being too healthy is a bad thing



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As long as it's healthy, then "the more, the merrier" right? Wrong. Too much of most things - as harmless as they appear to be - could eventually hurt you. Here are five such habits to moderate.

'BAD' HEALTHY HABIT #1: HAND WASHING

Why too much is bad: Lathering up more than five times a day can trigger and worsen skin problems if you are prone to them.

Regular soap tends to strip skin of natural oils that are essential in retaining moisture and keeping bacteria out. When that happens, skin may become red, sore and inflamed. These are

signs of irritant contact dermatitis and hand eczema, says Dr Harneet Ranu Eriksson, consultant and specialist in dermatology at Raffles Aesthetics Centre.

The proper technique of hand washing: Do it three to five times a day and skip anti-bacterial cleanser, especially if you have eczema as it contains chemicals that deplete the skin's oils more than regular soap, says Dr Eriksson.

Her advice: Besides applying hydrating lotions immediately after washing to lock moisture in, opt for soap-free cleansers. They are gentle, free of unnecessary chemicals, and may be used often without compromising skin's natural protective barrier or causing sensitivity.

'BAD' HEALTHY HABIT #2: TEETH BRUSHING

Why too much is bad: Obsessing over the cleanliness of your teeth could be the reason you have dentine hypersensitivity, says Professor Patrick Tseng, chief dental officer at the Ministry of Health. This condition affects nearly one in two Singaporeans, according to a 2010 Sensodyne study.

Over-brushing can erode the tooth's outermost layer or enamel, exposing the dentine (the middle layer) and the nerves it protects. That's when you start to experience short, sharp pains in the teeth especially after consuming hot or cold food and drinks, says Professor Tseng.

The proper technique of teeth brushing: To maintain good oral health, brush twice or thrice a day for about three minutes each time. And do it gently with a "soft" toothbrush. "Some

people think that the more force they exert, the cleaner their teeth will be, but it's not true," adds Prof Tseng.

Those with sensitive teeth should also try to avoid whitening toothpastes as they're too abrasive on the enamel, he adds.

Instead of brushing right after a meal, wait at least 30 minutes before doing so to give the enamel that's temporarily weakened by food acids some time to regain its hardness.

'BAD' HEALTHY HABIT #3: LONG-DISTANCE RUNNING

Why too much is bad: While an active lifestyle can reduce the risk of heart disease and high blood pressure, you could - literally - run into trouble by overdoing it.

A local study showed that those who run more than 10km per week are twice as likely to suffer lower limb injuries as those who clock less mileage.

In fact, between 15 and 20 per cent of women who play sports at least once a week have some form of knee ailment, says Dr Lee, lead author of the study and medical director of the Centre for Joint & Cartilage Surgery. This includes ligaments and muscles around the bones becoming weaker and stiffer, and knee osteoarthritis (a degenerative disease of the knee joint).

According to a knee pain survey by pharmaceutical company Sanofi, 73 per cent of Singaporeans are at risk of having knee osteoarthritis. The leading risk factor is high-impact sports, including running.

The proper technique of long-distance running: Follow a well-designed training schedule that includes a 10 per cent build-up of distance per week and plenty of rest. This will allow your body and lower limbs to grow accustomed to the increased mileage and intensity, he explains.

And forget the adage: "No pain, no gain". "Pain is your body's way of telling you to stop before you suffer further damage so seek a specialist's advice if the discomfort lasts more than a week even after you've reduced the intensity of training," says Dr Lee. In some cases, a keyhole surgery and other forms of invasive treatment may be needed.

'BAD' HEALTHY HABIT #4: DRINKING WATER

Why too much is bad: When you drink too much water within a short span of time (more than one litre of fluid in an hour), the sodium content in the body starts to dilute and this causes cells - including the brain's - to swell.

This could bring on symptoms like confusion and nausea, and lead to seizures, coma and even death, according to the US National Institute of Health.

People are generally more aware of dehydration than they are of hyponatraemia or water intoxication.

The latter is more common among endurance runners or those who exercise for more than four hours at a go, as they tend to over-compensate the fluid loss by drinking too much in too short a time, says Dr Stanley Liew, consultant and endocrinology specialist at Raffles Internal Medicine Centre.

The number of cases may also spike, given the growing interest in endurance races among Singaporeans, he adds.

The right practice of drinking water: When exercising, pay attention to your pre- and post-training weight - you should be drinking just enough to ensure you're not losing more than two per cent of your pre-exercise weight.

Since hyponatraemia is caused by an imbalance of water and sodium content in the body, it's ideal to drink no more than 250ml of electrolyte-balancing isotonic sports drinks every 15 to 30 minutes during a long run (more than four hours), advises Dr Liew.

For shorter sessions, during which fluid loss is small (less than one litre), drinking plain water suffices.

Watch out for symptoms like headache, confusion, nausea, and drowsiness even after you've stopped working out as they can start immediately or even a few hours later.

'BAD' HEALTHY HABIT #5: LOADING UP ON VEGGIES

Why too much is bad: Fibre promotes smooth bowel movement but when taken in excess (more than 50g per day), it could worsen constipation, irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) and bloating.

"Stems and leaves of vegetables and piths from fruits like oranges are like hair.

If you are already constipated, it means that there is a big bulk of solid stool clogging up your colon. So forcing insoluble fibre from plant foods is like pushing more hair into an already clogged drain," explains Dr Gwee Kok Ann, consultant gastroenterologist at Stomach Liver and Bowel Clinic.

Undigested vegetable matter is also the leading cause of intestinal obstruction, a serious condition where intestinal contents are unable to pass through because of a partially or completely blocked bowel, says Dr Gwee. Those who swallow food without chewing or are unable to chew properly are at higher risk.

The right practice of eating vegetables: One simple way to ease mild constipation without running into further problems is to balance your water and fibre intake.

The upper limits of your daily water and dietary fibre intake are two litres and 20 to 30g respectively.

"The more fibre you eat, the more water you need to drink. It's because the former binds to the latter in order to form bulky soft stools that are easy to pass out of the body. Without sufficient water, the stools remain hard and the body is unable to pass them out easily," explains Jaclyn Reutens, clinical dietitian at Aptima Nutrition and Sports Consultants.

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