

# 5 Habits You Never Knew Were Destroying Your Health

by Zoe Meunier



While there are certain bad habits we know without doubt are doing us harm – smoking, drinking to excess, or being a couch potato, for example – there are other habits we engage in that may seem harmless, but are nonetheless having an adverse impact on our health. Here’s why... and what you can do about it.

## 1. Procrastination

While we’ve all been guilty of occasionally putting things off or doing everything but the thing we’re supposed to be doing, habitual or chronic procrastination (known as ‘trait procrastination’) can lead to a host of physical, mental, and psycho-physiological problems. For starters, putting off something until the last minute increases our stress levels, which can affect our immune system and lead to colds and flu, as well as causing headaches and digestive issues.

More concerning is a recent study which found “a significant connection between procrastination and hypertension and cardiovascular disease”.

The study of nearly 800 people by Bishop’s University found that people with hypertension or cardiovascular disease (HT/CVD) had much higher procrastination scores than healthy people, while they also had stronger links between

procrastination and harmful coping styles such as behavioural disengagement and self-blame.

If procrastination is an issue with you, follow these tips to keep it at a more manageable level.

- Start with tasks you dislike the most to get them over with more quickly.
- Ask for help if you need support or clarification on an issue.
- Prioritise tasks according to importance and when they are due. Break down bigger projects into smaller parts and set achievable deadlines.
- Limit distractions to make your work environment more productive, such as keeping your phone out of sight.

## **2. Poor posture**

While it's a no-brainer to see an obvious link between poor posture and muscular or joint pain, the ramifications of sitting or standing incorrectly can be much more far-reaching. In his book *The Power Of Posture*, Naudi Aguilar explains that poor posture can affect everything from our ability to breathe effectively, to our stress levels, our weight, our digestion, circulation, energy levels, and libido.

Movement specialist Trent Langlands from Lifecycle Fitness explains that good posture is something that needs to be taught.

"You need to be sure you're drawing your hips back, drawing in your belly button, pulling your shoulders back but not elevating through your traps, opening up through your rib cage and chest."

Trent adds that for those of us who have bad postural habits, readjusting our stance can take some time.

"It's like being taught to run properly," he says. "You've really got to understand how to be aligned, where your shoulders need to be, how to get your spine nice and straight, it's not a quick fix. It can take six months to a year of daily exercises, release work, a good 20 mins in the morning and 20 at night. You've got to work on all those tight points in the body, and do a lot of myofascial release, stretching, yoga and pilates."

## **3. Eating too fast**

You may have heard that eating too quickly can lead to overeating due to your stomach not registering that you're full until it's too late. But that's not the only issue that can arise from bolting down your food.

"When you're eating too quickly, firstly you're swallowing food in much larger chunks," explains gut health expert and naturopath Helena Davis. "You've got teeth for a reason! You're meant to chew your food, up to 35 times depending on

what it is, to break it down to microbes. You've also got the enzymes that go through to your stomach when you swallow the food to assist with digestion. If you're not doing that, you're increasing the amount the stomach needs to work to break that bit of food down."

Along with chewing your food carefully, Helena emphasises the importance of sitting down to eat.

"If you're eating on the run and are stressed out while you're running around, you're not going to be in digestion mode," she explains. "You can't be in that fight or flight mode and digesting food at the same time, you're sending your body mixed messages if you're doing that."

With symptoms of a poorly functioning digestive system including constipation, diarrhoea, gas, bloating, acne, headaches, irritability and low energy, to name a few, it makes sense to remedy what can be an easily-fixed habit change.

#### **4. Intense daily workouts**

No-one underestimates the importance of exercise for good health and vitality, but if you're putting yourself through the same rigorous workout every day, you could be at risk of injury or illness. "We always talk about how hard elite athletes train, so if somebody wants to get a result, they think they have to work super hard," says John Quinn, elite sports coach and exercise physiologist at Sydney East Sports Medicine and Orthopaedics. "To a point there's truth in that, but your body also needs time to recover. If people aren't recovered and they're pushing themselves day in, day out, the body's going to say, enough's enough, I demand a recovery. It might be as simple as a head cold, because you become run down and your immune system's suppressed, or it could be a soft tissue injury that comes about from that constant use and lack of recovery."

For those of us who love the exhilaration of a daily workout, John says variety is key. "If you're going out on a long run every day, over time you're going to pay a price for that in terms of the wear and tear on the body and lack of recovery," he says. "If on the other hand, one day you're running, the next you're on the bike, another you're in the gym, that then changes that stimulus and gives the body variety."

John also cautions about the training principle of overload.

"If you keep doing the same thing and increasing the load, the body can break down if it gets too much," he says, explaining that he builds recovery time into his training of elite athletes such as Olympians and professional footballers. "Generally

in training, we go three weeks building up and one lighter week, which allows them to recover and if they do go too hard one week, the body can adjust

## **5. Sleeping on your stomach**

Everyone has a preferred sleeping position and for many of us, tummy sleeping provides the greatest comfort. But what brings comfort now may well be a pain in the neck down the line... literally. Sleeping on our stomachs, while helpful in decreasing snoring and sleep apnoea, is considered the worst position for our health, mainly for the havoc it wreaks on our backs and necks.

Kate Wood, chiropractor at Health Space Clinics explains, "The main issue with sleeping on your stomach is that the natural curved position of the spine is disrupted, causing too much extension in the lower back facet joints and too much rotation in the upper spine and neck. You might not feel it in the short term but the average person spends about eight hours or a third of their day sleeping, so the chance of damaging your spine long term when you are in a misaligned position for a third of your life is high."

Nicole adds that turning of our necks to the side places a huge strain on the muscles of the neck. "Lying face down also increases pressure on the jaw and the shoulder joints (especially if you sleep with your arms over your head), both of which can make neck problems feel worse and also trigger things like dizziness and headaches," says Nicole, adding that in her practice she has found many stomach sleepers experience some type of pain, particularly lower back, ribs, neck, shoulder and/or jaw pain.

She also says that it's harder to get better if a person with neck or back pain continues to sleep on their stomach.

So how can you change the habit of a lifetime and shift to side or back sleeping? Nicole recommends investing in a body pillow.

"Place it along your chest and between your legs from your knees to your ankles (bending your knees slightly) and rest your top arm on top of it. Not only does this put your spine into a neutral position but it prevents you from being able to roll over onto your stomach. Many people like lying on their stomach because it feels safe and reminds them subconsciously of being in the womb, so the pressure on the front of your body from the pillow will help mimic this safe feeling and help you to adapt much more quickly to your new position."

Alternatively, she suggests putting socks in your front pockets so that you'll feel uncomfortable when you automatically move to your front in your sleep and train your sub-conscious to remain on your side.

Like breaking any bad habit, it takes about three weeks of conscious effort and even up to six months to cement the change," says Nicole, who also advocates a good quality contour pillow to support your neck and a mattress specific to your spine.

"You should also practice good sleep hygiene such as avoiding sugar before bedtime, avoiding electronics for at least an hour before bedtime, winding down before you go to bed, etc. in order to enhance your chance of getting a good night sleep while you are making the transition from tummy to side/back sleeping," she adds.

Source: <http://www.juicedaily.com.au/wellness/5-habits-you-never-knew-were-destroying-your-health/>