

# What do we do when we are sick?

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The GSK Health Index is a web-based survey that is independently carried out by Pure Profile Research on behalf of GlaxoSmithKline Australia.

The quarterly survey uses a sample of 1000 adult Australians and is weighted to be representative of the general Australian population.



# Welcome to the first GSK Health Index report.

THE health of the Australian population is continually improving and Australians are more aware of their health and wellbeing than ever before. Compared to previous generations we now live longer and are starting to see change at a community level that is being driven by government and more importantly, by the consumer.

The GSK Health Index is a quarterly survey aimed at providing a snapshot of Australians' understanding of, and behaviour toward, health and health-related issues. Using a 'baseline' series of questions, the survey provides an

ongoing comparison of health behaviour amongst Australians with a view to identifying trends. The survey also has a number of changing questions that focus on a specific, topical health issue.

This quarter's report explores what people do when they are unwell and how far they will go before doing something about it, providing some interesting insights into Australians' health seeking behaviour.

The GSK Health Index report is free and the results of the survey are provided to the media. To obtain a copy of the report visit [www.gsk.com.au](http://www.gsk.com.au)

# For better or for worse – in sickness and in health



AUSTRALIANS are well known for their “she’ll be right” attitude, which has won us the reputation of being a laid back and easy going nation. The results of this quarter’s GSK Health Index show that this attitude seems to be reflected in our attitude towards health and wellbeing, which is a concern for longer term health outcomes.

According to the survey, while most people had been sick in the preceding three months, they only visited their doctor once they “gave themselves a couple of days to get better.” Some of the things they tried to speed up the healing process included getting more rest, trying over the counter treatments,

changing their diets and trying complementary therapies.

Dr Eugene Goh of GlaxoSmithKline believes that while the decision about the right time to see a doctor may not always be easy or obvious, it is always better to play it safe and talk to a doctor sooner rather than later. “This is particularly important with symptoms such as chest pain, any new or noticeable lumps, abnormal bleeding or unintended loss of weight” Dr Goh said. “It is also important to get into the habit of getting an annual health check, so that your doctor has a benchmark of what is “normal” for you and can catch issues early.”

Only 14 per cent of Australians visit their doctor for regular health checks. The majority of us only visit the doctor if we are unwell, with some of us putting it off until we can barely get out of bed.

# Now's as good a time as any

NEARLY 50 per cent of people surveyed in the GSK Health Index feel healthy and actively take steps to look after themselves. This is not surprising as many people begin their new year determined to turn over a new leaf, as they welcome in the summer months.

According to the survey, 75 per cent of us have sought out health information in the past three months and made at least one lifestyle change to improve our health. However 60 per cent of us grapple with a lack of willpower which stops us from making these changes in the long term.

Dr Selwyn Fung from GlaxoSmith-Kline says "one of the best ways to introduce exercise into your life is to tie it in to day to day activities. Try and get into the habit of walking to the shops instead of driving, take the stairs instead of the lift, and replace those 3pm cravings with healthy alternatives such as fresh fruit or a handful of nuts".

**"Sometimes it's not enough to be excited about making a change. You need to do your homework and get some guidance from someone who knows the area. The advice you get from a nutritionist, exercise physiologist or personal trainer could be all you need to make sure you see results sooner and feel better about the change you've made."**

— DR SELWYN FUNG



## There are several ways to increase your chances of success when making lifestyle changes.

### PLAN YOUR CHANGE

Find out more about the sport, activity or diet you have chosen and recognise where you are most likely to face challenges eg. If quitting smoking, plan ahead how best to manage situations where you will be tempted to light up.

### SET GOALS

Be realistic about what can be achieved and allow time to see the change. e.g. Start jogging a short distance and slowly build this up as your fitness level increases.

### INVOLVE A FRIEND

Any change is easier when made with support, so get a buddy involved so you can motivate each other and share the highs and lows.

### REWARD YOURSELF

When you reach a goal, make sure you recognise it in a way that encourages you to go further.

# What's in a health check?

THERE is a common misconception that regular health checks are something associated with ageing, and are only required as our health begins to deteriorate. The reality is that we age from the day we are born, and as such it is important to look after our health and prevent the onset of disease and illness throughout our lives.

The GSK Health Index revealed that most of us look after our diet and lifestyle because we are concerned about our weight (65 per cent) and want to live longer and be our best (54 per cent). Regular health checks are an important part of this equation as they give us a snap shot of our health and provide useful information about specific areas we need to focus on.

“Regular visits to a GP are one of the best ways to catch health issues early. If you are over 40 an annual check-up is essential, so set a memorable date such as a week after your birthday and save yourself having to play down your health concerns. If you are under 40 a check-up every two years is appropriate so think about booking one on every birthday that falls on an even number,” says Dr Selwyn Fung.

## A regular health check involves some or all of the following:

- An assessment of your family history for health issues that may affect you
- An assessment of your diet and lifestyle including your level of physical activity, alcohol consumption and smoking
- A height and weight ratio measurement to assess your body mass index (BMI)
- A baseline measurement of your blood pressure
- A blood test to check your cholesterol and iron levels
- A urine test to assess your bladder and kidney health and diabetes risk
- A pap smear/breast check for women and a prostate check for men
- A skin examination to assess any abnormal moles

## Quirky facts:

- Many people look after their health so that they have more time to spend with their loved ones.
- A number of people cited their concern for their health was driven by their upcoming wedding.
- Some of the interesting barriers that prevent people from exercising include addiction to smoking, lack of access to safe parks, laziness and distance to the local gym.

Thinking about making changes to your diet and lifestyle but not sure where to start? The following websites may be a good starting point.

### Working together for a Healthy Active Australia

[www.healthyactive.gov.au](http://www.healthyactive.gov.au)

### Go for 2&5

[www.gofor2and5.com.au](http://www.gofor2and5.com.au)

### Nutrition Australia

[www.nutritionaustralia.org](http://www.nutritionaustralia.org)

### Quit

[www.quit.org.au](http://www.quit.org.au)

### Heart Foundation

[www.heartfoundation.org.au](http://www.heartfoundation.org.au)

## REFERENCES

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