

# HCF CONSUMER INSIGHTS SERIES

Post Pandemic Trends:  
2021 Summer Holiday Health Report



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All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 2579 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 29th October - 3rd November 2021. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all Australian adults (aged 18+).

## POST PANDEMIC TRENDS: 2021 SUMMER HOLIDAY HEALTH REPORT

Welcome to the first in a series of consumer insights reports that will start conversations about the healthcare issues and trends that matter most to Australians.

Now more than ever, at HCF we're committed to showing members a level of care that is uncommon. That's why we've surveyed Australians to find out more about key health trends, opinions and experiences. These insights will help us to guide members to the right care at the right time, so they're empowered to lead healthier lives.

After two years of living with significant disruptions to our lives at home, work, and at play, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the mental health of many Australians.

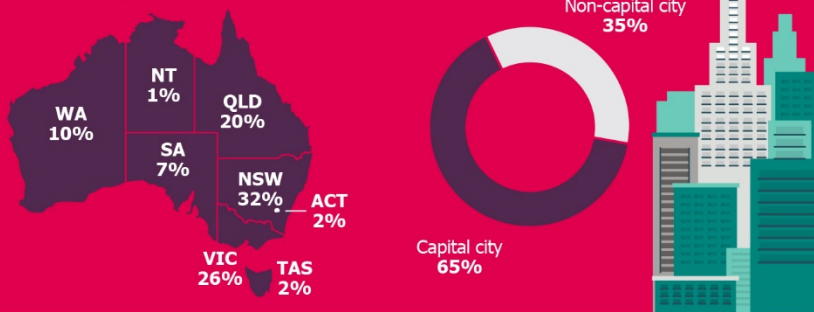
We wanted to know how this has shaped expectations heading into the Christmas Holiday period. While it's a joyful time of year, it may also be a stressful time for many, but will that be the same this year? And what help is at hand for when it all becomes a little overwhelming?

There is hope that 2022 will herald a new start in many ways, so we've also asked Australians what their health goal and resolutions might be, and found some helpful hints and tips from our program partners to stay on track no matter the goal.

### WHO DID WE TALK TO?

Their survey of 2,579 Australians was conducted on behalf of HCF Australia by YouGov.

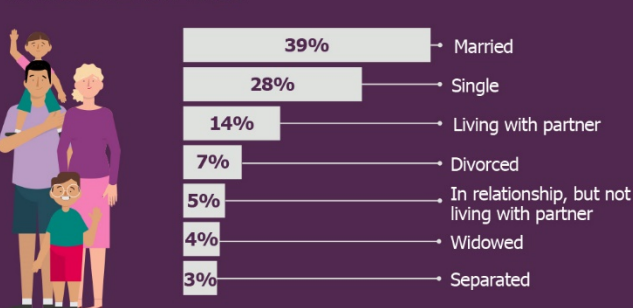
#### LOCATION



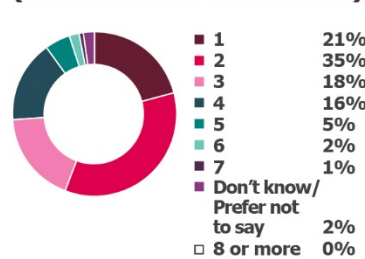
#### GENDER



#### MARITAL STATUS



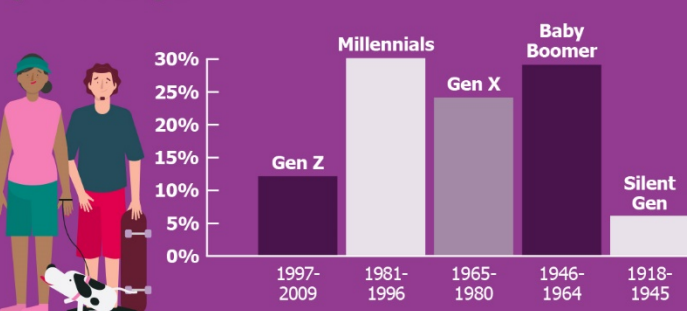
#### HOUSEHOLD SIZE (ADULTS AND CHILDREN)



#### CHILDREN UNDER 18 AT HOME



#### GENERATION



#### WORKING STATUS

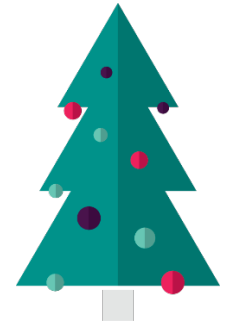




**KEY**  
**FINDINGS**



# 1. FESTIVE STRESS



## KEEPING THE PEACE DURING THE HOLIDAYS

**'Tis the season to be jolly, but will this summer be a time of joy for Australians or a time of increased post-pandemic stress? Our survey found this year will present some new worries for many Australians, but at HCF we're here to help guide you to the right tools to make sure this year's festive season truly is full of peace, love and joy for you and your family.**

## WHAT'S STRESSING US OUT

- The equivalent of more than 2.9 million Australians (1 in 6) say Christmas is the most stressful time of year; while 2.6 million feel this Christmas will be more stressful than previous years as there's pressure to make it perfect to compensate for a bad year.
- Seven in 10 (71%) Australians are expecting to experience stress, pressure, and/or loneliness this Christmas/holiday season.
- Most commonly, this includes concerns about overeating and lack of exercise leading to weight gain (23%); feeling pressure to be more social with family and friends than they want to be (22%) and feeling worried about travel restrictions and whether they will be able to have the Christmas they want (21%).
- Other Australians reported feeling pressure to spend a lot of money at Christmas on food and gifts that they really can't afford (19%); and that they feel lonelier and sadder at this time of year (19%).

## GENDER ROLES

- Women are twice as likely as men to say they take the lion's share in their household when it comes to planning gifts and meal preparation for Christmas or summer holiday gatherings (21% vs 10%) and to say Christmas is the most stressful time of year for them (16% v 13%).
- Men are more likely to say a major cause of Christmas stress is keeping the in-laws or family happy with gifts and food they'll like (12% vs 9%), and that their family always seem to have an argument of some sort on Christmas Day (10% vs 8%).

## AGE MATTERS

- The younger generations are more likely to expect to experience stress, pressure and/or loneliness this Christmas/holiday season (Gen Z 75%, Millennials 79%, and Gen X 72% compared to Baby Boomers 63% and Silent Generation 65%).
- In particular, Gen X (20%) are most likely to say Christmas is the most stressful time of year for them while Gen Z are most likely to say they feel pressure to be more social with family and friends this Christmas than they want to be (32%), they feel pressure to spend a lot of money at Christmas on food and gifts that they really can't afford (31%) and that their family always seems to have an argument of some sort on Christmas day (19%).

## FAMILY DYNAMICS

- Australians who are not married are twice as likely to say they feel more lonely and sad at Christmas (26% compared to 13%), while those who are married are more likely to say they are worried about overeating and lack of exercise leading to weight gain during Christmas/the holiday season (25% compared to 20%), that they are worried about travel restrictions and being able to have the Christmas they want (24% compared to 18%), that they take the lion's share in their household when it comes to planning gifts and meal preparation for Christmas/holiday gatherings (19% compared to 12%) and that a major cause of Christmas stress is keeping the in-laws/family happy with gifts and food they will like (13% compared to 8%).
- Parents with a child under 18 at home (80%) are also more likely to be expecting to experience stress, pressure and/or loneliness this Christmas/holiday season with worries about travel restrictions and not being able to have the Christmas they want to have (27%), pressure to spend a lot of money at Christmas on food and gifts that they really can't afford (26%) and feeling worried about overeating and lack of exercise leading to them putting on weight (26%), major contributors.



## WHAT DOES THIS TELL US?

### TAKE A BREATH, AND REMEMBER WHAT THE HOLIDAYS ARE ALL ABOUT

While many people are looking forward to summer holidays with loved ones, the research shows that people may have high emotional expectations for this year's festive season.

Psychotherapist Lissy Abrahams said there is typically a lot of emotional pressure around this time of year, but that may be more so this year.

"Given what we've already been through with the pandemic and for millions of us with lengthy lockdowns, we're going into Christmas with less resilience, more stress and also low social batteries," Ms Abrahams said.

"There are so many factors at play at this time of year than cause us to feel pressure on top of pressure. The structure and routine that we are used to completely disappears when we're all on school and work holidays, and regular support from friends can change if they're away as well. It's also not necessarily a fun time for those who miss out on the festivities if they're not Christian, or don't have any family in Australia."

With pressure placed on making everyone get along, the key is to understand your own triggers for conflict and defence mechanisms.

"There's an expectation to make Christmas a happy time, especially when the host works hard to create this, but family dynamics are not always enjoyable. No-one wins when we argue, upset people, or lose our temper. We all have to do our bit to create a nice occasion," Ms Abrahams said.

"Try to avoid controversial topics, the hot-heads or know-it-alls at your festive gatherings. At Christmas, it's often easier to get on if we keep conversations lighter and in a safe zone."

### SETTING EXPECTATIONS

The research reports that 19% of people feel pressure to spend a lot of money on food and gifts that they can't afford, which Ms Abrahams said can be a psychological game for many.

"Gifts are complicated – people feel they need to spend enough money that reflects the value of their relationship with someone. This causes so much pressure to find the right gift. The research that shows that there is an expectation that women will buy the gifts is also interesting.

It's important we start to shake up those stereotypes."

The research revealed Generation X was the most likely to say Christmas was the most stressful time of year, which Ms Abrahams said was because it's the "hosting generation" as their children are not yet at a stage in life to take it on or still live at home, and their own parents are elderly and have happily handed it over.

"Even though people might offer some help, it's a huge financial outlay, and co-ordinating it all creates burdensome expectations for Generation X hosts, who feel responsible for everyone having a good day. So it's not surprising this age group find this time of year to be stressful."

### MIND AND BODY

The research also revealed concerns about over-eating and lack of exercise leading to weight gain were at the top of the list of reasons why the 71% of Australians anticipate feeling stress, pressure or loneliness. Ms Abrahams said health goals are often derailed in many ways at this time of year.

"There's also a pressure to provide an abundance of food, just look at ads on TV. The food looks amazing but there's this overblown picture of what Christmas should look like, and it's often gluttonous with too much food and alcohol and not enough exercise. None of this helps our mood and how we relate in our relationships."



## KEEP FESTIVE STRESS IN CHECK

To keep stress at bay and mental health in check, Ms Abrahams recommends the following tips:

- If you're hosting a get-together, be really organised to reduce pressure on yourself by delegating tasks among guests and realise that you don't have to host alone – every pair of hands is a resource. Set expectations early and also shake up the stereotypes, this way women will be less likely to feel the burden of carrying most of the mental and physical load. Enlist others to bring plates, or ask some to come early to help set the table or move furniture.
- Use food delivery services to take the pressure off you. People don't care if you spend 20 hours in the kitchen or 2, they want the experience of connection with loved ones.
- Review your expectations of the day – ask yourself, what is the point of this occasion? Are we losing sight of what we want? Is it to show off your culinary skills, or connect with loved ones, or is this how my family always did it and I've never questioned why I am doing this way? Keeping your why in mind will help you keep perspective of what the occasion is all about.
- If you feel agitated on the day take time out, otherwise you're at risk of going into fight or flight mode. Then activate your vagus nerve to calm down, by breathing slowly for five seconds in, holding for five seconds, then slowly breathing out for five seconds. Repeat 5 times. It's a wonderful tool in our body, and signals our system to calm and destress.



## UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGES

At HCF we know how important it can be to get quick and early access to appropriate mental health support when and where you need it. Whether you're looking for support for yourself or your loved ones, our unique range of mental health and wellbeing programs and resources at HCF can help you understand and improve mental health challenges such as stress, anxiety and depression.

Eligible members have access to a range of exclusive service offers, including PSYCH2U telehealth services.

HCF partner PSYCH2U Psychologist Jeremy Cowden said the most common quote he has heard in the days after Christmas was, "I just thought for one day everyone would be nice to each other."

"Christmas is always a tough time for people and a lot of it is caused by a build-up of expectation, which this year will be greater because we've had a long time to think about it," Mr Cowden said.

"You get a whole bunch of relatives who don't talk to each other during the year for different reasons, then you put them together for one day. You need to manage expectations because it's likely there will be friction, just like there probably was last year."

## SEEKING SUPPORT

While we now know it's normal if we expect some level of friction between family members during the festive season, what can people do when the stress doesn't go away?

Mr Cowden said if your worries are interfering with everyday life, then it might be time to speak to a mental health professional.

"If you've had an awkward family dinner and you had a blow-up that you haven't been able to let go, maybe you keep re-running the script in your head, then talking to someone could really help," he said.

"Other people might be anticipating a stressful situation so much that they're finding it hard to get on with life. That means it's time to learn some strategies and techniques so you know what specifically you can do to manage the way you are feeling."

For more information about mental health support options for HCF members, visit:

[www.hcf.com.au/members/manage-your-health/mental-health-support](http://www.hcf.com.au/members/manage-your-health/mental-health-support)

## 2. THE MENTAL HEALTH TOLL OF THE PANDEMIC



### SYMPTOMATIC AWARENESS ON THE RISE

Throughout 2020 and in the early months of 2021, many researchers gathered evidence revealing heightened psychological distress during the pandemic.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, HCF claims data shows an 18.8 per cent increase in overnight admissions for hospital psychiatric services during the 2020 calendar year compared to CY19.

What has also been anecdotally noticed by mental healthcare providers are 'trends' in mental health conditions, such as ADHD and PTSD, that people are seeking diagnosis and treatment for.

Working from home and being socially restricted has intensified the symptoms of many of these conditions, and it's easy to understand why. In fact, it's been estimated that productivity costs resulting from reduced workforce participation, absences from work and reduced productivity while at work make up 81% of the total financial cost of ADHD in Australia, which is estimated to be \$12.8 billion.<sup>2</sup>

While it's now well known that the pandemic had a detrimental impact on our mental health, it also taught us to reflect on and understand our symptoms, and most importantly, reach out for help if we need it.

### THE MENTAL HEALTH SYMPTOMS WE EXPERIENCED IN LOCKDOWNS

- More than two thirds (68%) of Australians say they have been negatively impacted as a result of lifestyle changes due to COVID-19 lockdowns/restrictions.
- Most commonly these impacts include poor sleep quality (39%), feeling more irritable and restless (36%) and feeling like they need to be doing lots of things urgently, but not sure where to start (32%).
- Productivity has also suffered with almost 3 in 10 (28%) reporting inability to focus on tasks in the home, inability to focus on work tasks (21%) and finding it harder to meet deadlines (15%).
- Women are more likely to report poor quality sleep (41% compared to 37%), feeling more irritable and restless (38% compared to 34%), feeling like they need to be doing lots of things urgently, but not sure where to start (34% compared to 30%) and inability to focus on tasks in the home (32% compared to 25%).

- Gen Z (84%) and Millennials (78%) are more likely than Gen X (65%) and Baby Boomers (54%) to say they have been negatively impacted as a result of lifestyle changes due to COVID lockdowns/restrictions and in particular are more likely to say they have experienced feeling more irritable and restless (47% and 41% compared to 37% and 28%), poor sleep quality (46% and 42% compared to Gen X 38% and Baby Boomers 34%), feeling like they need to be doing lots of things urgently, but not sure where to start (46% and 41% compared to 28% and 22%), inability to focus on work tasks (36% and 28% compared to 23% and 8%) and finding it harder to meet deadlines (27% and 21% compared to 14% and 5%).
- People in NSW (72%) and Qld (76%) and parents with a child under 18 at home (78%) are more likely to say they have been negatively impacted as a result of lifestyle changes due to COVID-19 lockdowns/restrictions.

### WHO IS SEEKING HELP, AND WHAT ARE THE PERCEIVED BARRIERS?

- Amongst Australians who experienced mental health issues over the past 12 months, two thirds (67%) reached out for help. Most commonly this included seeking regular help from a medical or clinical professional (27%) or from family and friends (24%), while 12% sought just one-off help from a medical or clinical professional and 4% from a support line such as Lifeline or Beyond Blue.
- Women who experienced a mental health issue were more likely than men to reach out for help (70% compared to 63%) and more likely to seek help from family and friends (26% compared to 21%).
- Amongst those who did not reach out for assistance, not knowing where to go (10%), being fearful of the cost (7%) and being too embarrassed to tell a doctor (7%) or their loved ones (7%) were the main barriers.
- Millennials (70%) and Gen X (70%) who experienced a mental health issue are more likely than Baby Boomers (60%) to say they reached out for help.
- Overall, Gen X (34%) are more likely than Gen Z (20%) and Millennials (25%) to have sought regular help from a medical or clinical professional over the past 12 months while Millennials are more likely than Gen X and Baby Boomers to have sought help from family or friends (27% compared to 20% and 20%).
- The biggest barrier for Gen Z seeking help was not knowing where to go (16%) while for Baby Boomers it was feeling too embarrassed to tell their loved ones (12%) or a doctor (10%).

<sup>1</sup> [www.aihw.gov.au/reports/mental-health-services/mental-health-services-in-australia/report-contents/mental-health-impact-of-covid-19](http://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/mental-health-services/mental-health-services-in-australia/report-contents/mental-health-impact-of-covid-19)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www2.deloitte.com/au/en/pages/economics/articles/social-economic-costs-adhd-Australia.html>



## SEEKING THE RIGHT HELP

The symptoms identified in the survey can be linked to a range of mental health disorders, including anxiety, depression, ADHD and depression.

HCF partner PSYCH2U Psychologist Jeremy Cowden, said it was good that awareness was on the rise, but people needed to be careful when self-diagnosing without seeking professional help.

"We have certainly noticed an increase in the number of people telling us they believe they had disorders like ADHD or PTSD over the past year," Mr Cowden said.

"Usually if someone thinks there's something going on then it's worth investigating with a mental health professional who can work with you on shifting your thoughts from self-diagnosis to dealing with the symptoms.

"There are many, many conditions and situations that look like ADHD or PTSD, and when these conditions get a lot of publicity on social media, it's easy to start to worry more. When we've been in isolated situations there's an extra degree of difficulty because we've had so much time to think.

"Having a chat with the right person doesn't hurt, we're here to help."

## LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

The good news, according to Mr Cowden, is that many people will start to feel these symptoms ease coming out of lockdown, but he warns that people should embrace social freedoms with caution.

"Everything is going to be a little more intensive," he said.

"People are not used to having large numbers of people around them, and suddenly they're going to be in situations where your attention will get overwhelmed.

"It takes time to readapt. Our brains might take time getting used to the sensory process of having more people talking within your vicinity and filtering out background noise. From a biological perspective, that creates stress."

Mr Cowden recommends easing back into social situations, particularly for those who really felt the emotional impact of the past two years.

"It's like dipping your toe into a hot bath – at first it's going to be quite a shock. Limit or gradually reintroduce yourself to stimulating situations if you think you'll feel overwhelmed, like a small barbecue with a handful of friends instead of a party with 50 or 100 people. And if you're overwhelmed by the stress of reintroducing yourself to these situations, book in to speak to someone."



# 3. RELATIONSHIPS

## IN LOCKDOWN AND IN HEALTH

**For many Australians, the past two years have introduced pressures that have had significant impacts on couple relationships.**

**Our survey revealed that while many felt the pressure, some found an emotional growth.**

### CHANGING FEELINGS

- The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Australians' relationships is staggering with the equivalent of 980,000 Australians saying they are seriously considering or have already ended their relationship during lockdown.
- Overall, one in four (23%) Australians who were in a relationship during the COVID-19 pandemic say it was negatively impacted, with 16% saying they argued a lot more during lockdown and intimacy decreased.
- Of the remainder, half (53%) say there was no real change in their relationship, and on a positive note, one in four (24%) say the pandemic even brought them closer together emotionally and intimacy has increased.

### GENERATIONAL STRESS

- Gen Z (16%) are more likely than all other generations to say they are seriously considering or have already ended their relationship during lockdown while Millennials are more likely to say they argued a lot more during lockdown and intimacy decreased (24%).
- Interestingly, Gen Z (38%) and Millennials (33%) are also more likely to say the COVID-19 pandemic brought them closer together emotionally and intimacy increased.

## CHILDHOOD PRESSURES

- Similarly, parents with children under 18 years at home (28%) are more likely than those without children in the household (20%) to say they experienced a negative impact on their relationship due to COVID-19 and especially that there were more arguments (22%). However, they were also more likely to say that the pandemic brought them closer together (34%).
- Having younger children under five years (26%) and five to eight years (27%) is associated with a greater likelihood of arguments between parents while those with older children 13-17 years are more likely to report there was no change to their relationships (46%) due to the pandemic.
- Australians in relationships who experienced a mental health issue over the last 12 months (35%) are four times as likely as those who did not (9%) to report that they experienced a negative impact on their relationship due to the pandemic and more than three times as likely to say they are seriously considering or have already ended their relationship during lockdown (11% v 3%).



## UNSEEN VICTIMS OF THE PANDEMIC

Psychotherapist Lissy Abrahams said she's seen firsthand the distressing impact of lockdown on couple relationships.

"Many couples suffered behind closed doors and relationships were the often-unseen victims of the pandemic," Ms Abrahams said.

"The fallout from the pandemic for many couples is concerning, especially when there are children in the home."

## REIGNITE THE SPARK

To keep the health of relationships strong coming out of significant shifts brought about by the pandemic, Ms Abrahams suggests the following tips:

- Learning how to pick your battles. Be careful you're not criticising for the sake of it.
- Have new experiences together that neither of you have done before lockdown.
- Lower your expectations of each other's stereotypes of gender roles. Think about who your partner needs to be for themselves and their own fulfilment in life, not just for you.

- Set time away from each other. During lockdowns partners were couped up together. Allowing some breathing space will help you look forward to seeing each other and reconnect.
- Express gratitude for what your partner does for you.
- Laugh a lot and let them know you like them.

## ENLIST HELP

For a quarter of those surveyed for this report, the pandemic had a negative impact on their relationship.

When a relationship becomes overwhelmingly challenging, it can help to seek help from a trained mental health professional, which may be covered for eligible HCF members.

Ms Abrahams said couples might know it's time to enlist help when their mental health has declined; they are withdrawing or isolating from their partner; or they can't resolve frequent arguments.



# 4. HEALTHY NEW YEAR

## NEW YEAR'S GOALS

Setting health goals when the calendar ticks over from December to January has long been a way many Australians have strived to better themselves.

But our research shows that those goals don't often last long, which can all depend on our age, the goal, and the support we surround ourselves with.

## NEW YEAR, FRESH START

- Three quarters (76%) of Australians say they set New Year's Resolutions, while younger generations are much more likely to do so (Gen Z 88% and Millennials 85% compared to Gen X 77%, Baby Boomers 63% and Silent Gen 68%).
- Among Aussies who set New Year's Resolutions, the most popular resolutions for 2022 are to do more physical activity or exercise (54%), to eat more healthily/improve nutrition (47%) and to lose weight (43%).
- Other resolutions that are likely to be set for 2022 include to stress less (36%), to make more money/chase financial freedom (36%), to get more sleep (35%), to say 'yes' to new adventures and experiences (33%) and improve their connections with loved ones (27%).
- Women are more likely to say their New Year's Resolutions will include doing more physical exercise (57% compared to 52%), stress less (38% compared to 32%), saying 'yes' to new adventures and experiences (37% compared to 30%) and reducing their screen time (25% compared to 20%) while men are more likely to say they will include changing their relationship with alcohol (13% compared to 10%).
- Millennials (31%) are most likely to say their New Year's Resolutions for 2022 will include reducing their screen time while younger generations are more likely to say they will include making more money/chasing financial freedom (Gen Z 50%, Millennials 49% and Gen X 37% compared to Baby Boomers 16% and Silent Gen 5%) and stress less (Gen Z 36%, Millennials 39% and Gen X 40% compared to Baby Boomers 27% and Silent Gen 24%).

## HOW LONG AUSTRALIANS STICK WITH THEIR NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS

- The majority (78%) of Aussies who set New Year's Resolutions, say their resolutions do not make it to the end of the year with three in 10 (29%) admitting their resolutions never make past the end of January.
- Amongst the remainder, three in 10 (29%) say their resolutions last several months while one in five (20%) say they fizzle within six months.
- Just one in five (22%) say they typically stick to their resolutions for the whole year.
- Men (24%) are more likely than women (19%) to say they stick to their New Year's Resolutions for the whole year while women are more likely to say they never make it past the end of January (32% compared to 26%).
- Gen X (25%) and Baby Boomers (24%) are more likely than Gen Z (18%) and Millennials (19%) to say they usually stick to their New Year's Resolutions for the whole year while Gen Z (33%) and Millennials (34%) are more likely to say they tend to last for several months (compared to Gen X 27% and Baby Boomers 23%).



## NEW YEAR, NEW RESOLUTION

- Four in 10 (44%) Australians who set New Year's resolutions like to choose different resolutions each year while one in five (20%) disagree with this sentiment and one third (36%) neither agree nor disagree.
- Men are more likely than women to strongly agree that they like to choose different New Year's resolutions each year (15% compared to 10%).
- Younger generations (Gen Z 49%, Millennials 52% and Gen X 43%) are more likely than older generations (Baby Boomers and Silent Gen – both 33%) to agree that they like to choose different New Year's resolutions each year.

## GYM GOALS

- As many as one in four (23%) Aussies who set New Year's Resolutions, the equivalent of more than 3.4 million Australians, have taken out a gym membership/signed up to online classes as part of a resolution that was/were rarely used.
- Millennials (34%) are most likely to say this has happened to them and especially parents with a child under five years of age (43%).

## WEIGHT LOSS GOALS

- More than two thirds (68%) of Australians have set a weight loss goal in the past with the vast majority (85%) saying they have found it difficult to stick to the weight loss goal they set.
- The main difficulties these Aussies have faced sticking to a weight loss goal include that they found it hard not to eat more when they felt emotionally high or low (36%), that they can last all day on their diet and then cave in at night when cravings for snacks/unhealthy food kicks in (35%).
- Other difficulties they have experienced include that they get too busy to stick to all the meal planning and preparation (27%), they rewarded themselves after exercising by eating more food than usual (22%) and that the diets they chose were just too boring to stick to/did not have enough variety of food (21%).
- Women (39%) are more likely than men (33%) to say a difficulty they faced sticking to a weight loss goal was that they found it hard not to eat more when they felt emotionally high or low, while men are more likely to say the difficulties they faced were that they rewarded themselves after exercising by eating more food than usual (25% compared to 19%) and that the diets they chose were just too boring to stick to/did not have enough variety of food (23% compared to 19%).

- Gen Z and Millennials are more likely than Gen X and Baby Boomers to say the difficulties they faced sticking to a weight loss goal include that they got too busy to stick to all the meal planning and preparation (36% and 35% compared to 27% and 15%) and that they rewarded themselves after exercising by eating more food than usual (35% and 30% compared to 20% and 8%).

## WHY WE DON'T STICK TO OUR GOALS

- Almost four in ten (38%) Aussies who set New Year's Resolutions say they just get too busy to stick to them
- Gen Z (46%), Millennials (44%) and Gen X (37%) are more likely than Baby Boomers (28%) and Silent Gen (22%) to say they just get too busy to stick to their New Year's Resolutions.
- Parents with a child/ren under 18 years at home (50%) are also more likely to agree with this sentiment.

## A FLEXIBLE WAY OF LIVING

- Australians who are studying or working and can do so flexibly/remotely are looking to spend the time they save from less commuting in 2022 focusing on a hobby that makes them feel happy (43%), exercising outdoors (41%), spending the time with family and friends (40%) and simply sleeping more (40%).
- Others plan to make more home-cooked food (37%), exercise at a gym (21%), study (20%) and exercise with new equipment at home (17%) with the time they save from less commuting.
- Gen Z are most likely to say they will spend the saved time sleeping more (53%) and studying more (33%), while Millennials are more likely to exercise with new equipment at home (23%) and both Gen Z and Millennials will head to the gym more (28% and 27% respectively).



## REAL LIFE STORIES

### NICOLE

HCF Member Nicole Grant, 50, was no stranger to New Year's Resolutions and diets that had helped her lose weight, but never lasted.

With a history of health issues like arthritis that were complicated by injuries and weight gain, Nicole found herself having to take 21 months off work as a social support worker because she was in too much pain to be as physically active as her job demanded. Life in lockdown also didn't help, with the delivery of her post knee surgery rehab impacted.

After finding out about the Healthy Weight For Life program offered at no cost for eligible HCF members, Nicole said she thought she'd "give it a whirl".

"I approached this not as a diet but as a lifestyle change, and 27 kilograms later I've never felt better. I went from basically being housebound with a walking stick, to being able to walk for hours. I can live a much better quality of life now," Nicole said.

Reducing inflammatory foods immediately improved Nicole's arthritis symptoms, and a history of IBS was also alleviated.

"My gut has never felt better!" Nicole said.

Her advice is that people need to visualise how they need to change their lives.

"There is hope – when you're ready to make the change to go ahead and get support, that's key, you've got to be ready to make those changes. I needed to change my life, I wish I did it before I was housebound."

### LYNDA

HCF Member Lynda Paju, 59, admits she ate and drank too much during Sydney's lockdowns.

"I couldn't do the things I enjoyed – I'm a really outdoorsy person but because I was carrying so much extra weight the things I used to enjoy really hurt," Lynda said.

It wasn't until Lynda saw a photo of herself that she realised she "had to fix all of this."

She joined HCF's Healthy Weight for Life program, and after changing her approach to food and nutrition, resulting in a 17 kilogram loss, is now excited to spend a summer riding her bike, bushwalking and chasing her grandkids.

"I've got so much more energy now, it's immensely easier when you weigh 17 kilograms less to do indoor climbing and ride a bike."

### MEAGHAN

HCF Member Meaghan Nixon fits the profile of an incredibly healthy Australian. After competing for Australia in a Karate tournament in Montreal, a long day spent walking around New York City sparked a niggle in her ankle. An MRI revealed she had osteoarthritis, which she later discovered was also in her knee.

"You think it's an old people's thing," the 39-year-old said, who was 30 when she was diagnosed.

Although she was playing AFL and continuing with Karate training, unhealthy habits, like lattes and ramen after training sessions, started to add up and Meaghan found herself gaining unnecessary weight.

"I put on a little bit of weight, then Covid-19 hit and I couldn't go to training and I put some more on," she said.

The weight gain exacerbated her osteoarthritis symptoms, which led her to researching treatments.

"I listened to a podcast that said for every 1 kilo of extra weight you carry, it's 4 kilos of extra pressure on your knee."

After participating in the Healthy Weight For Life program specifically for people with osteoarthritis, Meaghan lost 17% of her body weight and is back in the dojo, pain free.

"I can fit back into my jeans from eight years ago. I've learned that there's no better for osteoarthritis for me than having a healthy lifestyle and eating well – if you lose 10% of your body weight, you lose 50% of your symptoms."

## SOLUTIONS

Dietician Trent Watson, who collaborates with the Healthy Weight for Life program offered to HCF members, said despite the survey finding many people fall off the wagon with their resolutions, it's often better to set a resolution than nothing at all.

"Closing off options can be empowering," Dr Watson said.

"For example, zero is a more enforceable limit than a flexible alternative, like setting a goal not to buy chocolate when you go to the shop."

In the lead-up to New Year's Eve 1995, psychologist John Norcross and a team from the University of Scranton in Pennsylvania phoned hundreds of Americans at random and asked whether they were planning to make specific measurable resolutions at midnight – or whether they weren't but still had measurable goals they would like to achieve.

Six months later, 46% per cent of those who had made resolutions claimed to be meeting their goals, compared to only 4% of those who had not.<sup>1</sup> The success rate of resolutions is approximately 10 times higher than the success rate of adults desiring to change their behaviour but not making a resolution.



### BE SMART ABOUT YOUR GOAL

Dr Watson said the best way to maximise your chances of achieving New Year's Resolutions is to set them properly in the first place using SMART goals:

#### **S - Specific:**

"Be specific when you state your goal. You have to know exactly what you want in order to set yourself up to have it," Dr Watson said.

"If your goal is vague, it's much harder to create a roadmap to achieving it, and it's also much harder to know when you hit it.

"Resolutions like 'getting fit' or 'losing weight' are difficult to quantify to say the least.

"An example of a specific goal would be, 'I want to do a 10km fun run by March.'"

#### **M - Measurable:**

"For best results, your goal needs to be measurable.

"This is the key piece that must be in place in order for you to know when you've definitely reached your goal.

"For example, a smart goal would be 'I want to save \$50 a month' as opposed to 'I want to save more money.'"

#### **A - Attainable:**

"Your goal needs to be something that is attainable... not a pie-in-the-sky dream.

"You want to set goals that are challenging yet attainable if you put in the hard yards. Dangle the carrot sufficiently in view by not making them easy either.

#### **R - Realistic:**

"Your goal needs to be realistic: within the availability of resources, knowledge and time.

#### **T - Timely:**

"Your goal should have a date attached to it so that you know how much time you have to hit it.

"It's important that you pick a date that gives you enough time to reach the goal, but not one that is so far out in the future that it reduces motivation in the present moment."

## NUTRITION - ON THE GO

Almost four in 10 (38%) Aussies who set New Year's Resolutions say they just get too busy to stick to them.

Dr Watson's solution to this 'excuse', is to be prepared.

"It is far more efficient to pack your lunch at home than it is to go to a café, wait in line, and wait for someone else to make your lunch," he said.

"Packing your lunch would take three to five minutes in the morning prior to going to work, and be far more nutritious."

<sup>1</sup> [pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/11920693/](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/11920693/)

## HOW CAN WE IDENTIFY AND CONTROL EMOTIONAL EATING?

The research found that more than a third of Australians found it hard not to eat more when they felt emotionally high or low.

Dr Watson said we have all experienced sadness, anger, loneliness, depression and boredom.

"Eating can be very comforting and may be used to self-medicate during these times instead of responding to whether or not we are really hungry," he said.

To help control your emotions taking over your eating behaviours, Dr Watson suggests:

- Take a minute to think about why you are wanting to eat.
- Find alternatives to eating when you are not hungry.
- If possible, always try and eat in the same place (e.g. family meals).
- Set the table before eating.
- Serve the food away from the table and have no distractions when eating.
- Use smaller plates and smaller portions and chew your food well.
- Pause to check whether or not you are full, and ENJOY!

"Don't expect to make all these changes at once," Dr Watson said.

"Try concentrating on one goal for a week, when this is achieved move onto the next goal. Remember, changes can take some time to become a routine."

## DO HEALTHY MEALS HAVE TO BE BORING?

Twenty-one per cent of Australians who found it hard to stick to a diet said the food was just too boring or didn't have enough variety.

Dr Watson said when 'boring' and 'healthy meals' were in a sentence together, people were often referring to the elimination of foods that are high in sugar, fat and salt (the "taste triangle").

"Thus, in this context the answer to this question would be 'yes', because healthy eating principles would recommend a diet low in sugar, fat and salt," Dr Watson said.

But it's not just the Taste Triangle that people should be focusing on.

"Other healthy eating principles include a diet high in fruit and vegetable, a variety of fibre from whole grain breads and cereals; and moderate amounts of dairy, lean meats or meat alternative.

"People may reference the word 'boring' due to the lack of variety, but there is an extraordinary range of foods that can be eaten within these general healthy eating guidelines. Therefore, people will only be limited by their imagination."

Dr Watson said the primary pleasure we should gain from food is to satisfy our physiological hunger and nourish our bodies to help us perform our daily tasks with energy and vitality.

"When we start eating in pursuit of pleasure or to overcome boredom this most often results in guilt and personal dissatisfaction. Nothing tastes as good as healthy feels!"

## SEEK SUPPORT

Finally, if you feel like carrying extra weight is taking a toll on your body – both physically and mentally, it might be time to explore that first step towards better overall health and wellbeing.

Help is on hand for eligible HCF members from our partner Prima Health Solutions with its evidence-based Healthy Weight for Life program.

By getting in touch with the Healthy Weight for Life team about improving your health, you can get back to doing more of the things you enjoy, just like Nicole, Lynda and Meaghan.

Find out more:

[www.hcf.com.au/members/manage-your-health/weight-management/healthy-weight-for-life](http://www.hcf.com.au/members/manage-your-health/weight-management/healthy-weight-for-life)





