

the perils of multi-tasking

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Multi-tasking can also lead to a tightening waistband. "Because the brain can only focus on one thing at a time, multi-tasking while you eat distracts your mind from monitoring what's going on within you," says Helena Popovic, a medical doctor and author of the book *NeuroSlimming: Let your brain change your body*.

This makes it harder to tune into feelings of fullness that signal to stop eating.

"You will overeat by at least 20 per cent," she says, "so don't sit at the desk, drive, watch TV, send an SMS or talk on the phone while you eat your meal."

The opposite of distracted eating, is to eat mindfully, which means concentrating solely on the food on your plate and enjoying the flavours, rather than hovering it down.

We know that as women, we're skilled at multi-tasking, but new research suggests that all that juggling might be less efficient than we think it is! Here's how to reclaim your focus...

BY KARISSA WOOLFE

Women are the ultimate multi-taskers (and there's science to prove it!), but just because you can, does that mean you should? If we're talking cleaning your teeth while in the shower, or doing a load of laundry when dinner's in the oven, then okay. But rapid switching between tasks at work or texting while you drive, not so much.

MENTAL JUGGLING

Is your brain as good at switching between tasks as you think? Surprisingly, no. A landmark study by researchers at the University of Michigan recently found it reduces your productivity by up to 40 per cent.

In fact, the more complex the tasks you switch between, the more mental juggling your brain has to do, and the longer it took study participants to complete tasks.

"The brain has two hemispheres, but it's only designed to focus on one thing at a time," says Perth medical practitioner Dr Jenny Brockis, a leading healthy brain advocate.

When you divide your focus and attempt to do two things at once it causes the brain to alternate rapidly between both sides.

"Because it's so fast, it creates the illusion that we're able to do two things at once effectively," explains Brockis.

"But the science shows it causes us to make far more mistakes, and take much longer to complete tasks than if we did one at a time."

You may also be shocked to learn that after a three second disruption it can take you up to 24 minutes to find your spot again, according to research led by University of California professor, Gloria Mark, a leading expert in information technology and stress.

"We're living in a time of incredible distraction," says Brockis. And technology certainly plays a role; we're glued to our smartphones with 24-hour access to email, constant Facebook status updates and news feeds. It's no wonder 1 in 10 Aussies say keeping up is a trigger for stress, according to a 2015 survey by the Australian Psychological Society.

RECLAIM YOUR FOCUS

"The best way to apply your attention is to block your day into chunks of focused time for different tasks," says Brockis. "Itemise each task, and then choose to do one at a time, so you can apply good, conscious focus for a specified amount of time. We're all different – some of us can work well for 45 minutes, some an hour, but it shouldn't be any longer than 90 minutes."

To refresh your brain so you can think well, advises Brockis, it's also important to give yourself a regular 'brain break' between tasks.

"A 'brain break' is anything that doesn't require focused work and technology." And yes, that means refraining from checking your phone. Examples: chill out with another human; grab a coffee or glass of water; head outdoors for a short walk. **P**

FOCUS
and refresh

Organise your day into chunks of time when you focus on one activity. Don't forget to have a 'brain break' to refresh and get ready for the next activity. That includes not looking at your phone!