

Podcast 89 – The Health of Australians

Learn English while learning about daily life in Australia, with Rob McCormack

Podcast Number 89 – The Health of Australians

<http://traffic.libsyn.com/slowenglish/podcast89.mp3>

Hi,

I have always considered myself lucky to be living in Australia. One of the reasons we can enjoy a great lifestyle is the great support services which Australians receive. In particular, we have a pretty good health system. I have talked about that in podcast number 13. On balance, I think Australians have every chance to be healthy and to stay healthy. In this podcast, I would like to talk a bit more about the health of the Australian population.



Image by qimono (Arek Socha • Stockholm/Sweden)

(<https://pixabay.com/en/users/qimono-1962238/>)

I guess one of the most important outcomes of being healthy is that you live a long life. This is measured by your life expectancy. In Australia, a boy born between 2010 and 2014 can expect to live 80.3 years. Likewise, a girl born between those years can expect to live 84.4 years. This compares very well with other countries in the world. In fact, there are only six other countries besides Australia where both men and women have a life expectancy of more than 80 years. These are Japan, Switzerland, Iceland, Italy, Sweden and Israel.

It's amazing how life expectancy has changed in Australia over the last 120 years. For example, in Australia in 1890, the average man lived around 47 years and the average woman 50.8 years. The difference between then and now is remarkable. There are many factors which have helped bring this about, the most important of which is the quality of our health care.

For example, there are many, many diseases which today can be prevented using vaccinations. In Australia, 93% of all children have received a full range of vaccinations by the time they are 4 years old. This includes vaccinations for chickenpox, diphtheria, haemophilus influenzae type b, hepatitis B, polio, measles, meningococcal C, mumps, pneumococcal, rotavirus, rubella, tetanus and whooping cough.

(see <https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/immunisation/immunisation-throughout-life/national-immunisation-program-schedule>)

All these diseases are obviously unpleasant and can also be very dangerous. The fact that 93% of children under age 5 are fully vaccinated means that these diseases are quite rare in Australia. Of course that means fewer children get sick and as a result our children are generally healthier and grow to be adults. There are also further vaccinations which children receive before they reach 15 years of age. Personally, I am a great believer in vaccinations. Our government is too.

There is even a government policy that, if children don't get their vaccinations at the right time, then parents are not able to receive certain child care benefits from the government. Furthermore, in my state of Victoria, children cannot attend day care, kindergarten or family day care centres unless they have had or are having their vaccinations. The policy is called 'No jab, no play'. For further information, you should go to <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/immunisation/no-jab-no-play>

But it's not just the impact of vaccinations. Once upon a time, many medical problems which are easily cured today, would have been fatal. For example, at the start of the 1900s in Australia, most Australians died from infections such as tuberculosis, diarrhoea and septicaemia (or poisoning of the blood). Today, antibiotics and other drugs can overcome these diseases. They are no longer the threat they used to be.

Now, in Australia, the biggest cause of death is coronary heart disease. This disease causes the arteries in the heart to become narrower. If they become blocked, this is the usual cause of a heart attack. In 2013, there were almost 19,000 deaths in Australia from coronary heart disease. The fact is, Australians often eat too much of the wrong foods and this contributes to coronary heart disease. For example, only 5% of Australians eat the recommended amount of fruit and vegetables. We have these foods readily available in Australia, and at cheap prices, so there really is no excuse. When I was a child, there used to be a saying – 'An apple a day keeps the doctor away'. I think that saying was made up by the apple growers, but nonetheless, it still makes sense. We should eat more fruit and vegetables.

Another contributor to coronary heart disease is lack of exercise. In Australia, around 55% of people aged 18 to 64 undertake some kind of regular exercise. That means around 45% of us are not active enough. Our climate suits an active outdoor lifestyle, so again there is no excuse. Related to

our lack of exercise is the fact that around 35% of Australians are overweight and a further 28% are obese. This problem is getting worse too. In 1995, there were 56% of Australians who were overweight or obese, which compares to the latest figure of 63%. Of most concern is the increasing number of children in this group. In 2015, around 1 in 4 children aged 5 to 17 were overweight or obese. That's terrible when you think about it.

But there are some good news stories. For example, only 13% of Australians are now regular smokers. That is way down from 23% in 1991 and is one of the great success stories for Australia's health system. Only 18% of Australians over-use alcohol (that is, more than 2 standard drinks per day). This figure is down 2% from 3 years earlier, so that is a good trend which I hope continues.

While these are good news stories, Australian's use of illicit drugs such as ecstasy, cannabis, cocaine and methamphetamine (also called 'ice') is a great worry. In 2013, around 12% of Australians over 14 years of age had used illicit drugs in the past 12 months. This compares to around 5% worldwide, so this is a worrying trend for Australians. This is a topic of great interest and concern in Australia and I hope that our government can put more programs in place to counter this in the future.

As I get older, I try to keep healthy by watching my weight, eating a healthy diet and getting regular exercise, which for me means taking an 8 kilometre walk several times a week. I am a non-smoker and only occasionally drink alcohol. I can't complain about my health, although I realise that as you get older, the body starts to wear out and you are more likely to get certain diseases. That is all the more reason to enjoy every day that you have, count your blessings and live life to the full.

If you have a question or a comment to make, please leave it in the comments box at the bottom of this page. Or, you can send me an email at rob@slowenglish.info. I would love to hear from you. Tell me where you live, a little bit about yourself and what you think of my Slow English podcast. I will write back to you, in English of course. If you would like to take a short quiz to see if you have understood this podcast, you will also find it on my website. Goodbye until next time.

Rob

Podcast 89 Quiz - Did you understand the podcast?

You may take the quiz as many times as you like.

Start quiz

Vocabulary

- Play active = when you do exercise
- Play amazing = something that is really, really good
- Play antibiotics = a special medicine which cures infection
- Play apple growers = people who grow apples
- Play arteries = the tubes that carry blood in your body
- Play attend = to go to
- Play average man = a typical man, one who is like many, many other men
- Play benefits = welfare payments from the government, to

help you live

- Play blocked = when something stops a liquid going through a pipe
- Play compares = when you decide if something is better or worse than something else
- Play concern = a worry
- Play considered = to have thought something
- Play contributes = one of the causes
- Play count your blessings = remember all the good things you have
- Play counter = against
- Play cured = when a sick person gets well again
- Play dangerous = when you can get hurt, sick or die
- Play day care = a place where children are looked after while their parents work
- Play diseases = sicknesses
- Play excuse = when you say why you can't do something
- Play exercise = when you make your body work. For example, running, walking, playing sport
- Play expect = when you think something will happen in the future
- Play expectancy = something that you think will happen in the future
- Play factors = things
- Play fatal = when someone dies

- Play figure = a number
- Play full range = all
- Play illicit drugs = drugs which are illegal, against the law
- Play impact = effect
- Play infections = a disease or sickness in the body
- Play jab = when you push something sharp at someone (like a needle, or a stick)
- Play lifestyle = the way you live your life
- Play medical problems = sickness, disease or injury
- Play narrower = thinner
- Play nonetheless = despite this, even though
- Play obese = when you are very fat
- Play obviously = when it can easily be seen or understood
- Play occasionally = sometimes
- Play outcomes = results
- Play overweight = when you are fat
- Play personally = for one person, for yourself
- Play policy = a way of doing something. Governments have policies
- Play population = the total number of people in a place or country
- Play prevented = stopped
- Play program = a group of activities

- Play quality = how good something is. For example, high quality is very good.
- Play rare = when something doesn't happen very often
- Play receive = to get
- Play recommended = when an expert tells you something, gives advice
- Play related to = when one thing is connected to something else
- Play remarkable = unusual
- Play sense = something that seems like a good idea, that seems right
- Play support services = the things that are done for you to make your life better
- Play threat = when something is dangerous
- Play trend = when a change keeps happening
- Play tuberculosis, diarrhoea = types of sicknesses
- Play unpleasant = not nice
- Play vaccinations = a special medicine which stops a person getting sick

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