

How this CEO beats the 3pm crash (and you can, too)

Natasha Boddy and Sally Patten

When Medibank chief executive David Koczkar is working from home and feels his energy levels dipping, he reaches for his cello bow.

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“One way that I like to decompress is through music,” he tells *The Australian Financial Review*.



Medibank chief executive David Koczkar plays the cello to decompress. Eamon Gallagher

“Often it’s taking a short break to spend five minutes listening to a favourite tune, but when I need a real break it’s picking up my cello. When you’re playing, you’ve really got to focus on the music, the technical and the emotional parts, so your mind can’t wander back to work.”

Music is the perfect antidote to 3.30itis for [Mr Koczkar](#), who is about to celebrate one year in the top job at Medibank. The former Aussie Rules amateur football player and rower is a strong believer that “if you feel good, you are more likely to work better”.

“Health and wellbeing is an intrinsic part of being able to work well,” he said.

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Despite the afternoon lull being a known phenomenon, many workers were woefully under-prepared for it, said productivity specialist Donna McGeorge.

There is a perfectly scientific explanation for it, too.

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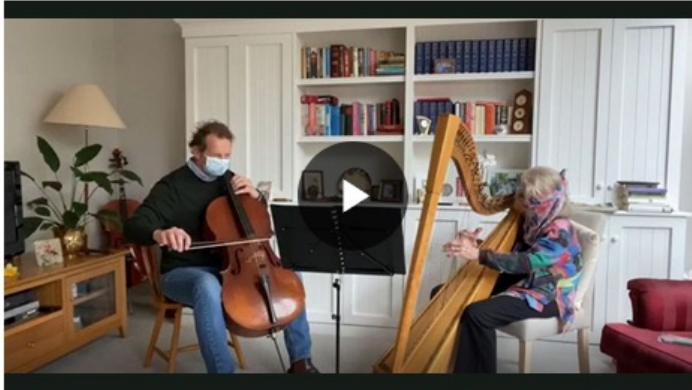
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...ect of our circadian rhythm or body clock," Australian Music Dynamix, a spokeswoman for the Dietitians Association of Australia, said.

"Our internal clock responds by dropping our body temperature, triggering the release of our sleep hormone, melatonin, and our stress hormone cortisol also dips at this time."

The result is often increased feelings of fatigue, tiredness or loss of focus.



Medibank CEO David Koczkar plays the cello with his mum on the harp.

And stress, bad eating habits, a poor night's sleep and even dehydration can make the problem even worse.

Most workers find themselves reaching for a coffee or a sugar hit. But experts agree there are better ways to beat the dreaded 3pm slump.

Here are their top tips.

1. Look at your lunch



BHP executive Jade Little credits intermittent fasting with getting her through the day. [Paul Harris](#)

For BHP executive Jade Little, intermittent fasting was her remedy for the afternoon lull. Caffeine is certainly not part of the program.

Since 2016, Ms Little, who works in operation services in BHP's Brisbane office and is a former [BOSS Young Executive](#), has restricted her eating to between 10.30am and 6.30pm, fasting for the remaining 16 hours.

"[I] love it," Ms Little said. "The clarity in my mind has increased tenfold, and now it's just such a habit. You don't even think about it. I'm not hungry, and I feel great.

"You know how people get afternoon lulls. I'll just power straight through. For me, it's been excellent."

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Carbohydrate-heavy lunches can be one of the biggest culprits of the 3pm slump. Opt for high-protein lunches and snacks such as greek yoghurt, nuts, chicken, or tuna and hummus with vegetable sticks instead.

“Protein has much less impact on blood sugar levels than carbohydrates with the bonus effect of keeping you alert and feeling satisfied,” Ms Dynan said.

Staying hydrated is also important and eating a piece of fruit can also help.

“Ultimately what you want is regulated blood glucose throughout the day so having approximately two to three hours between a meal and a snack is ideal for that consistent energy,” said clinical nutritionist Cailie Ford.

2. Take a break

Exercise, fresh air and natural light are other ways to rejuvenate when the afternoon lull hits.

Ms McGeorge said: “If you have to keep working, and you can’t just have a nap or stop, absolutely try and do something physical, get up and move around.”



Productivity specialist Donna McGeorge says most people are unprepared for the 3pm slump.

Movement has been found to have a greater impact on energy levels than caffeine when a person is sleep-deprived, Ms Dynan said.

Clinical nutritionist Cailie Ford agrees, saying walking meetings were a fabulous strategy to beat the afternoon lull.

3. Forget the flat white, try a nap-uccino



Powernaps can help boost productivity. iStock

Ever felt unable to function at work after a bad night's sleep?

It is far more common than many bosses would like. One in five Australians admit they have called in sick to catch up on sleep, a survey of 2000 people by sleep supplement company Floridis Redormin found.

Research has long shown the benefits of a power nap in [improving cognitive performance and alertness](#). One recent study from NASA found a 26-minute nap boosted productivity by 34 per cent.

Ms Dynan said: “The key thing to remember is to set your alarm to limit your nap to 10 to 20 minutes to avoid interfering with your evening slumber or



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NOT all workers will be able to sneak a siesta into their workday, so a healthy bedtime routine can help in the long run. Sleep coach Olivia Arezzolo recommends a minimum of one hour of screen-free time and avoiding blue light before bed as well as having a shower and reading a book.



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4. Plan ahead

Finally, avoid scheduling mentally taxing tasks in the second half of the workday, when fatigue might set in.

Ms McGeorge said: “Save things that are routine and don’t require much brain power and can almost be done on autopilot for the afternoon.

“The problem with the afternoon and the slump is that you’re at real risk of decision fatigue. The way our circadian rhythms work is that we’re more mentally alert in the morning and have more physical dexterity in the afternoon.”

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