



February 2026

### Fun Fact

**Did you know that our bodies' need for Vitamin C led to the formation of the mafia?**



Vitamin C is essential for many aspects of our bodies' functioning, including immunity and the synthesis of collagen to maintain healthy skin, blood vessels, bones and teeth. Our ancestors foraged for fruits and berries and therefore had an ample supply of Vitamin C, so early humans lost the ability to make it. When sailors went on long sea voyages of discovery from the late 15th century, scurvy – the illness caused by the lack of Vitamin C – caused immense suffering and death.

When the British finally worked out the cause in the 18th century, Admiral Nelson ordered that every naval ship carry supplies of lemon juice for the crew, which led to a huge demand for



lemons. These were most conveniently grown in the sunny climate of Sicily (which was already a bit lawless), where the need to protect these now very profitable trees led to the formation of protection gangs, and ultimately the modern mafia.

Just like our ancestors, your body needs a variety of fruit and vegetables. The modern version of foraging is to start your supermarket shop in the produce section, and ensure you cover the

bottom of your trolley with a variety of fruit and vegies – preferably a different selection very week.



### Healthy Fact

About 1 in 9 Australians suffers from asthma, a condition where the small airways in the lungs become reversibly narrowed through spasm, swelling and mucous plugging, leading to coughing, wheezing or shortness of breath. 'Attacks' of asthma can be brought on by viral infections, allergy (like with 'thunderstorm asthma') or exercise.



Even people with mild asthma can have serious 'attacks', so should have a written asthma management plan. Everyone is familiar with the 'puffers' that are used to treat symptoms of asthma, but if you are using your puffers regularly (more than twice per week) to relieve symptoms, or your symptoms are waking you at night, then your asthma may not be well controlled. If this is the case for you or your child, talk to your doctor for guidance about preventative medications that settle spasm and inflammation. The treatment of asthma has

come a long way in the last few years, and there are powerful new medications called 'biologics' that can have a huge impact on asthma for some.

### Did you know?

Young children can't tell us what's wrong with them and can get sicker quickly, and so parents worry – understandably – when their child is sick. If you're worried about your sick preschool child, then so are we. We'll do our very best at Merri-bek Family Doctors to fit your child in so that they can be assessed by a doctor promptly. Ring our lovely receptionists and explain that you're worried about your sick child, and we'll find a time for them with one of our doctors.

### Heart Food

Enjoy with us this beautiful poem by 20th century Greek poet C.P. Cavafy.

#### *Ithaka*

As you set out for Ithaka  
hope your road is a long one,  
full of adventure, full of discovery.  
Laistrygonians, Cyclops,  
angry Poseidon—don't be afraid of them:  
you'll never find things like that on your way  
as long as you keep your thoughts raised high,  
as long as a rare excitement

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# Merri-bek Family Doctors

## Newsletter

stirs your spirit and your body.  
Laistrygonians, Cyclops,  
wild Poseidon—you won't encounter them  
unless you bring them along inside your soul,  
unless your soul sets them up in front of you.



Hope your road is a long one.  
May there be many summer mornings when,  
with what pleasure, what joy,  
you enter harbors you're seeing for the first time;  
may you stop at Phoenician trading stations  
to buy fine things,  
mother of pearl and coral, amber and ebony,  
sensual perfume of every kind—  
as many sensual perfumes as you can;  
and may you visit many Egyptian cities  
to learn and go on learning from their scholars.

Keep Ithaka always in your mind.  
Arriving there is what you're destined for.  
But don't hurry the journey at all.  
Better if it lasts for years,  
so you're old by the time you reach the island,  
wealthy with all you've gained on the way,  
not expecting Ithaka to make you rich.

Ithaka gave you the marvelous journey.  
Without her you wouldn't have set out.  
She has nothing left to give you now.

And if you find her poor, Ithaka won't have fooled you.  
Wise as you will have become, so full of experience,  
you'll have understood by then what these Ithakas mean.

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