

# Warren Brown

Mark Knight  
is on leave



## Staying afloat is enough

Rebecca Whitfield-Baker



How'd you go with setting your New Year's resolutions? More to the point, how are you going at sticking to them? If they've already fallen by the wayside, don't feel too bad, as we are just days away from what's become known as "Quitters' Day" which in 2026 falls on January 9.

Apparently, by the second Friday of the new year, most of us – that is, more than 80 per cent – have lost our resolve to stick to our resolutions to become fitter, healthier, lighter and wealthier.

It kind of makes me feel better that I gave up setting New Year's resolutions five or six years ago, coincidentally around the time the concept of Quitters' Day was coined. Tragic as it may seem to all the high-achievers out there, apart from a bit of "natural ageing", not much has changed since 2019.

Sure, the kids have both finished school and started uni – and I am quietly chuffed with the awesome young individuals they've become – but the reality is, I continue to muddle through most days; I've not upgraded the house, put in a pool or purchased a luxury car.

It's likely the reason I secretly like the whole idea of Quitters' Day – also referred to in gentler terms as "the Wobble". To me it seems so wonderfully inappropriate in 2026, to proclaim a day for quitters given we've now got to be so careful what we say; when there are so many perfectly-good, well-intended and non-toxic words we need to avoid. We've entered an era when our mostly characterless politicians fall over themselves not to offend anyone – only to inadvertently insult the mild-mannered, silent majority.

And while sidestepping words has become the norm, we've also become fixated on portraying ourselves and our lives as picture perfect, when we feel entitled to have it all. Kudos to those who can manage to do both but, really, sometimes we have to prioritise what it is we value most.

Life's not always perfect and nor do we need it – or our kids – to be. It's true I'll try to drink less wine – and more water – and will aim to get a few more steps into each day, but mostly I just want to focus on the little things that matter most to me, and to worry less about the things that don't; to celebrate life's beautiful souls and ignore its dickheads.

I'll not beat myself up if I experience a life wobble here or there, but keep in front of mind the words of Dolly Parton: "Find out who you are and do it on purpose". That's good enough for me in 2026.

Rebecca Whitfield-Baker is a Sunday Herald Sun columnist

# Virtual reality can help us confront concussion

Melbourne health advocate Candice Smith does not care too much for convention. She is someone on a mission and in a hurry.

After all, as Candice is quick to point out with a wistful smile, the longer we wait, the more difficult it will be for Australia to best confront an underlying problem but one growing by the day in terms of cases and cost ... concussion.

In March 2019, Greg Hunt, the nation's 43rd federal health minister, announced \$50m for nationally co-ordinated medical research to improve the recovery of patients with traumatic brain injuries.

At the time, it was estimated the lifetime cost of each TBI in Australia was \$2.5m for moderate and \$4.8m for severe injuries.

While concussions, classified as mild TBIs, typically have lower costs, their far greater frequency makes them a significant economic and health burden.

Candice has a vision to reduce the impact of the nation's head-knock trauma, leveraging state-of-the-art technology to make concussion screening more accessible – in your local pharmacy.

It is a bold yet feasible concept and with the necessary support – from government and the bodies running the major sporting codes – concussion could well be tackled ... head-on, if you'll pardon the expression.

The timing is imperative, because Australia invariably follows the US in terms of trends ... and litigation.

In 2015, America's gridiron competition, the NFL, had a

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significant increase in reported concussions, with a 32 per cent jump compared with the previous year, totalling 271 concussions in all games and practice hit-outs.

This increase was attributed to heightened player and team awareness as a result of stricter concussion protocols, with 183 regular-season games and 37 practice concussions reported. The year coincidentally also saw the release of the film *Concussion*, raising public awareness about the dangers of head trauma in the sport. The movie is based on the GQ magazine exposé *Game Brain* by Jeanne Marie Laskas.

Will Smith earned a Golden Globe nomination for his role as Bennet Omalu, a forensic pathologist who fights against the NFL trying to suppress his research on chronic traumatic encephalopathy brain degeneration suffered by players.

Sadly, closer to home, a number of AFL players have made brave admissions about their ongoing struggles with head injuries.

Former St Kilda star Justin Koschitzke last year stunned the football world with his frankness about his head injuries during and after his playing days.

Koschitzke retired from the AFL at the end of 2013 after 200 games, but now admits there were times he did not want to run out to play due to

dizziness and other symptoms of concussion.

And, of course, there was the tragic loss in 2019 of one of the modern game's superstars and genuine good guys, Danny Frawley, whose death in a single-vehicle crash rocked the football world.

An examination of his brain nearly a year later found Frawley had stage two CTE, a neurodegenerative disease caused by repeated head injuries. His devastated wife Anita said she had "strongly suspected there was more going on with Danny than straightforward depression".

On November 2, Melbourne Storm's hard-running Tongan second-rower Eli Katoa made headlines after sustaining horrific facial injuries in a Pacific Championships international rugby league match against New Zealand.

Katoa was taken from the field during the warm-up after receiving a massive hit but was permitted to play and then bumped hard twice more during the action. He was assisted off and required oxygen after a seizure on the sidelines, followed by emergency brain surgery.

He was told by Melbourne specialists not to play in 2026.

As Candice Smith, of Sciana Health, observes, "This is not an easy subject to discuss. But we must do everything we can ... and more. And we need to do it now. So many beautiful lives have been lost, so many sporting heroes as well as ordinary, everyday people have been affected."

"Eighty per cent of concussion hospitalisations are unrelated to sport. We cannot prevent every

concussion, that would be impossible. But what we can and are doing, using the Pharmacy Guild of Australia, is to offer people the opportunity to have a baseline assessment done. Then, after a fall or an on-field hit, the person can, with a quick, simple test using technology similar to a gaming headset, be properly triaged by comparing the results to their individual baseline data, determining the extent of the knock suffered.

"This approach provides not only an opportunity to educate parents, carers and patients about concussion, but ensures timely referral to qualified health professionals for appropriate management."

The technology uses virtual reality to test eye movement reflexes and cognitive, vestibular reaction times, replacing a sideline doctor's series of question-and-answers as to a player's fitness. This removes the ambiguity around decision-making on whether a player is fit to return to the contest, or needs treatment for concussion.

Sport contributes such a small percentage of concussion injuries, when you consider the number of children tumbling from play equipment, the elderly falling over, and road trauma.

But sport is highly visible and dominates the media cycle, so if government can provide support and codes can adopt the best available testing technology as a pilot program, what a boon that would be in making positive steps to reduce the effect of concussion on people's health, livelihoods, the hospital system and the economy.

Michael McCormack is the member for Riverina and a former deputy PM