



6 March 2020

### Tap it Out

The other day I sat down for a breakfast meeting with Nathan Charles. We said our usual hellos and got straight down to business talking about Nathan's upcoming plans to support Cystic Fibrosis Australia (CFA) and raise cystic fibrosis (CF) awareness.

I noticed that we were getting more than the regular number of gawking looks that Nathan draws from crowds as a national athlete. It clicked right away that our 'usual hellos' were not the kind of display that most people are used to witnessing.

Instead of the common handshake, Nathan and I had greeted each other with the CF elbow tap. It is a familiar gesture in our circles, but several people around us were stirring their omelettes and their avocado smash trying to figure out what on Earth we were up to. It reminded me of something that I have been wanting to say to the CF community: Health knowledge and hygiene practices are not a CF quirk, they are useful, vital knowledge, and they can save lives, now more than ever.

When Nathan and I parted company we made a point to do the elbow tap, drawing more quizzical eyebrows. This did not bother me in the slightest. Air Pollution and Climate Change - not to mention recent global health scares – have made public hygiene a necessity and a badge of honour, not a quirk or a curiosity. It's about time the rest of the world learned about our CF secret handshake.

The world is holding its breath right now because of coronavirus. Caution at a time like this is certainly understandable. But the CF community is managing life threatening infection risks year in year out. That's our normal, that's first gear.

People with CF become homegrown experts on hygiene practices, risk areas, public health etiquette and of course the substitution of mainstream social gestures for infection-smart alternatives. If you are living with CF or have a person with CF in your family, then please take this time to appreciate that you are an asset to your community. You have experience and know-how in keeping people safe.

This year we can take pride in helping our fellow Australians up their game in public health. People with CF often avoid the risk of public hugs and handshakes with acquaintances. Instead we favour a classic infection-smart elbow tap.

It's a greeting and a signal and even a salute. It's a knowing wink at the CF life and the common bonds of that struggle. It is the first friendly word in a vocabulary of infection-smart lingo and behaviour that Australia desperately needs right now.

So, I encourage you to raise your CF chicken wing in public for a cleaner healthier tomorrow. While you are at it, take a photo of your elbow tapping and post it on our Facebook page. We are going to challenge our politicians, clinicians and researchers to do the same.

Kind regards

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