



14:40 PM *Rashell Habib* THERE is no denying Australia's love of cakes has gone beyond the \$6 mud cake from Woolies -still a strong contender- but here are four of the best.

'I wonder ... is my vagina normal?'



14:24 PM *Kristie Mercer* KRISTIE Mercer has always been "completely and utterly terrified" that her lady bits "don't stack up". She's not alone either.

## Latest In lifestyle

# FOBO: The modern epidemic infecting all of us

July 26, 2015 9:12am



Put that thing down ... right after reading this story.

ANGELA MOLLARD News Corp Australia

**ONE of the best cafes in my neighbourhood is called Hemingways.**

A huge bookshelf filled with old hardcover volumes fills one wall, there's red stools to perch on and the menu — chargrilled corn, prawns, awesome chips — is designed for sharing and conversation.

'Indeed, if Ernest Hemingway strolled in he'd have no trouble finding something to drink, someone to banter with and an interesting woman to take home.

Well, I say that. In truth, the passionate author and conversationalist would be horrified. For the cafe culture that inspired he and mate Pablo Picasso has virtually disappeared, to be replaced by people communing with their digital devices.

Naturally the management is miffed. When you've curated a library of Dr Seuss, Encyclopaedia Britannica and a 1971 version of Who's Who, sourced some great craft beers and turned out a bloody good cup of coffee, it's not a lot to ask for a bit of society from your patrons. And so manager Theo Gibson has done just that, limiting the free Wi-Fi to just 30 minutes.

He says he wants to foster an atmosphere of conversation. "We didn't want to be a soulless Wi-Fi hub," he says. "We want to generate some social interaction."

Good on him. We all know our phones are turning us into prats. Mine makes me neurotic, self-obsessed, unsociable and a bad mother. And that's when it's switched off. I tell myself — and the kids — I'm checking it for work purposes but in truth I'm using it to fill a hole I can't quite define. A hole that's getting deeper and more agitating. A hole that draws me inward; kills rather than feeds my curiosity; tarnishes my shine.

Thanks to Google I've self-diagnosed my condition: it's called FOBO — Fear of Being Offline — and the only treatment, it seems, is to take a long hard look at myself. And not with the front-facing camera on my phone.

Seven years ago I remember showing my mum my first iPhone. "It's genius," I told her. "I can do my job anywhere." She nodded sagely. For she had seen me pull it out as I pushed my youngest on the swing; had observed as I made everyone wait in the driveway as I checked goodness knows what.

Years later much has changed. Teenagers, particularly, don't carry their phones in bags but in their hands. A study of 450 students in the US shows students check their phones about eight times an hour while many of us can't make it through a 90-minute movie without checking our devices.

As for parents, I suspect we're not ready to confront the damage we're doing. Every time we say "hold on" or "just a minute" we're effectively telling our kids they matter less. Giving your attention to someone is an act of love; when you withhold attention you withhold love. You also miss details, stories, the chance to appreciate what fabulous little people they are becoming.

According to Larry Rosen, a leading authority on our relationship with technology, many of us have obsessive compulsive disorder when it comes to our phones. We constantly check in to reassure ourselves, he says. "What we're seeing is that the device is forcing us to make decisions, which means it's controlling us."

With a recent survey showing 81 per cent of us keep our phones nearby almost all the time during waking hours and another showing 75 per cent of email users log on before they do anything else in the morning, FOBO is rapidly becoming a 21st century epidemic.

And what happens when the phone that is now available as a watch goes one step further and is embedded in our skin? Who controls who then?

Of all the things I worry about as a mother, it's this. And so I'm embarking on a change. I'm not planning a digital detox — anything I give up for any time simply makes me hungrier for it once the ban is over. And I'm not joining the Amish because the clothes are terrible.

Rather, I'm banning devices from my bedroom — hello ugly clock radio — and putting them in a cupboard when my kids are around. I'll allow myself a few minutes to check emails every two hours. When I go out for a run I'll leave my phone at home because there's less chance I'll have a heart attack and have to call an ambulance than there is of being mown down by a bus while I'm on the damn thing. I won't put my phone on the table when I'm in a restaurant and I'll refrain from checking it in the car, having done so five minutes earlier inside.

Finally, I will take Mr Hemingway's advice and when people talk I will "listen completely". And if they're boring? Then I will follow his other advice and drink to make them more interesting.

