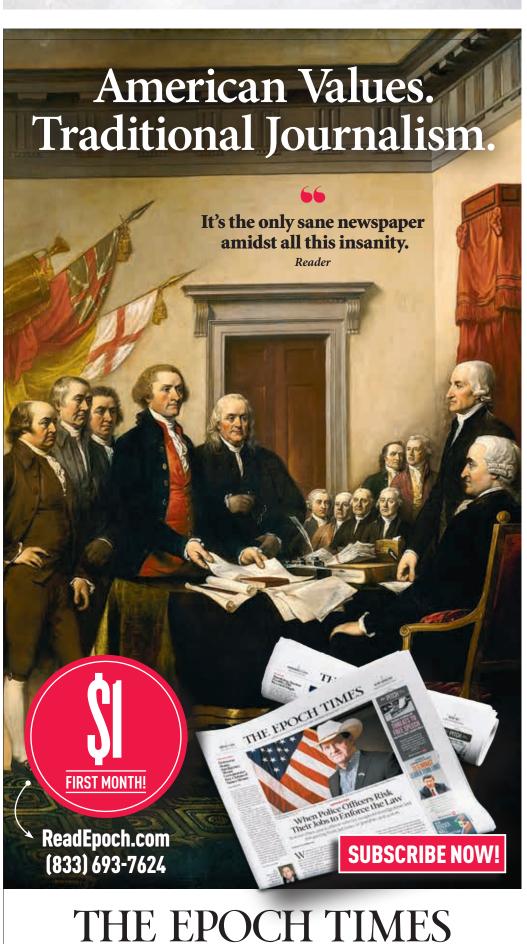


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A workplace program teaching exercise routines can help some people improve their physical activity, but more personalized programs are more effective, suggest researchers.

What Workplace Wellness Programs Can-and Can't-Do

One-size-fits-all programs can boost morale and have a minor impact, but workers want more

CHRISTOPHER CURLEY

orkplace wellness programs have been in vogue for a while now. However, a recent study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) suggests they might not be all they're cracked up to be, at least in the short term. In a randomized trial involving nearly 33,000 employees at 160 BJ's Wholesale Club stores and work sites, researchers found that workers engaged in wellness programs reported an 8 percent increase in regular physical exercise

The study also found a 13 percent higher rate of workers actively managing their weight after 18 months compared to a control group that wasn't offered these programs. Sounds pretty good, right?

But despite these improvements, the researchers didn't register any improvements in other outcomes, including clinical markers of health such as cholesterol levels, blood pressure, and body mass index. Job outcomes such as absenteeism, tenure, performance, and sleep quality also didn't show im-

The researchers also didn't note any overall savings in health spending during this time.

Not All Gloom and Doom

One of the strengths of the study was its size and design in that it was randomized and had a large But "wellness programs" can incorporate a wide

range of practices and aims. In this case, the programs constituted eight wellness modules on nutrition, physical activity, and

stress reduction-among other topics-administered by registered dietitians That's just one approach among many and not enough to write off wellness programs at large.

"I am not unduly surprised by the results in the study," Russell Thackeray, an organizational consultant with more than 20 years of experience working with workplace wellness programs, told Healthline. "There is no explicit aim that the programs were meant to achieve those outcomes [cholesterol levels, blood pressure, etc.] and, even if

that were the aim, there are a vast range of variables that can affect the results. Those include factors such

as the quality of the programs themselves, the motivation of participants, adjusting for non-workplace variables, how involved management is in supporting the programs, and the degree to which the learning in these programs is embedded in the workplace.

"The issue is that so many wellness programs have mixed objectives, outcomes, and motivations, and the net effect can be a short term 'bounce' in morale rather than any long-term change," he added. "Often, the effects of change are more observable in an employee's family circumstances when truly focused on their needs-the work outcomes simply become a 'knock-on' effect."

What We Can Learn

Ultimately, this study should not be looked at as prescribing a singular truth about workplace wellness but adding to our overall understanding of these programs "Well-done studies [like this one] give

us a very useful estimate about what happened under the conditions that they study and that data point is very valuable when it's put with collection of studies that have been done on the same topic. said Stewart I. Donaldson, a professor of psychology and community and global health at Claremont Graduate University and the executive director of the Claremont Evaluation Center in California.

Instead, workplaces seeking to implement programs should look at what does work. "The most effective ones are those on-site or near-site and that are multi-year efforts, simply because health change is a slow process impacted by motivation, time and life demands, and mediated by the work culture, leadership, and income and education levels," Priyanka Upadhyaya, a clinical health psychologist specializing in wellness interventions, told Healthline. "Health, happiness, and employment are inextricably tied as a healthy employee who doesn't need to take off, be away from work, or avoid tasks at work. A healthy and happy worker is motivated, energetic, and can go beyond to get the job done."

Making wellness programs more effective may require deeper integration into workplace culture.

Personalization May Be Key

Making wellness programs more effective may require deeper integration into workplace culture. That includes more personalization for workers.

For instance, a recent survey from consumer health software company Welltok found that 84 percent of employees said their workplace wellness programs were "one-size-fits-all programs" and that more than half–56 percent of employees–had received "irrelevant support."

Moreover, the same survey found that more than 8 in 10 workers said they would be more likely to participate in wellness programs if they were more

Structural Problems

Americans' healthcare habits and outcomes are complicated, not in the least because of the cost of healthcare.

That offers the potential of workplace programs to affect real change by offering free services and easier access to care-both preventive, proactive, and mental health-but they

education. "You can't just make a sweeping statement that healthcare costs can never be affected by health behavior and wellness," Donaldson said. "But in a setting like this study, this result doesn't surprise me. You wouldn't be able to find savings because I imagine the healthcare situation is driven

would have to go

deeper than mere

Christopher Curley is a freelance health, business, and finance writer. This article was first published on Healthline.com

by things much more powerful than short-

term exercise and diet."

Why **Skipping** Is Better Than Running

You may not have skipped in decades, but researches suggest maybe it's time to try

KIMBERLY HOLLAND

he last time you skipped anywhere, you may have been wearing pigtails or carrying a superhero lunch box.

Indeed, skipping is often thought of as a playground activity reserved for children who still frolic around swing sets and sandboxes. However skipping, like so many other forms of

play, is often left behind with age as young adults take on more serious forms of exercise such as running. But running may be doing a great deal of harm to the bones, joints, and bodies of people who prefer this form of exercise.

With that in mind, researchers from two universities in North Carolina suggest people who appreciate the cardio activity of running but want to avoid injuries may find skipping is a well-suited activity. Yes, the same skipping you once enjoyed as a child.

Better for Your Body

To study the different impacts of skipping and running on the body, researchers at East Carolina University and Appalachian State University worked with 30 healthy adults between the ages of 18 and 30, evenly divided between men and women.

Each study participant took part in a training program that taught them how to properly skip for longer distances (up to one mile) while on a labora-

Once the participants were able to do this, the researchers began taking measurements of gait, force, and energy expenditure (that is, how many calories they actually burned).

The study authors found that running produces nearly two times the peak force on the patella or kneecap compared to skipping

The average peak force on the tibiofemoral joint (the knee hinge where the femur, tibia, and patella meet) is 30 percent greater in people who run com pared to people who skip.

What's more, skipping allows for a greater calorie burn. Skippers burn 30 percent more calories than runners, the study found

"Certainly, running is an integral component of many athletic activities and we are not unaware of the aversion some people may have toward performing skipping as a standard component to their physical regime, but skipping has nonetheless emerged from this study as an alternative form of locomotion with untapped potential," said Jessica McDonnell, lead study author and a doctoral candidate at East Carolina University in Greenville, North Carolina.

Should You Switch to skipping?

The number of people facing injuries as a result of

running is on the rise.

As many as 79 percent of runners report some form of injury in any given year.

The most common running injuries are to knees and lower extremities. That's likely because of the force on joints and bones, as described in this study, which was published in Gait & Posture.

Runners have a cyclical gait where they are either landing with impact absorbed in one leg or launching by using the power of the other leg.

By contrast, skipping allows for a period of support in the natural gait-step and hop on one leg, step and hop on the opposite leg, and repeat. Even this small moment of support with one or both legs cuts down on the force applied when feet hit the ground.

"In people who have pre-existing knee issues, this can mean less knee pain with exercising with skipping rather than running," Dr. Derek Ochiai, sports medicine doctor and orthopedic surgeon at Nirschl Orthopaedic Center in Virginia, told Healthline. "However, with the shorter strides, you will not travel as far skipping. Skipping burns more calories, which makes it more efficient in terms of exercise. but less efficient as a means of travel.

Still, skipping has some potential drawbacks, says Thanu Jey, clinic director at Yorkville Sports Medicine Clinic in Toronto

"Skipping may put less impact through the knee ioints, but it does put more repetitive stress on your ankles and calves," Jey told Healthline

Running

produces nearly two times the peak force on the patella or kneecap compared to

skipping.

skipping in with other forms of movement.

"A combination of both [running and skipping] would be ideal for burning calories while giving your body a break," Jey said.

"Vary the forms of cardio on different days. Each activity-skipping and running-requires slightly different engagement from the muscles involved," Jey said. "Therefore alternating on days would be good especially if you feel sore after completion of either."

Where to Skip

Ochiai says you might be better suited to rekindle your passion for skipping somewhere outside, such as a track, running trail, or yard.

Unlike the participants in this study, skipping on a treadmill might prove problematic, if not harmful. "I would not recommend skipping on a treadmill, since the skipping gait is syncopated, and the treadmill is going at a constant rate, increasing the chance of injury," Ochiai says.

And don't worry if you think you'll get stares from fellow exercisers while you skip and hop your way through a cardio routine.

"Anything that makes exercise more enjoyable is beneficial in and of itself," Ochiai said. "If you find skipping fun and enjoyable, then there are some medical reasons that it is good for you. Skip away.

Kimberly Holland is a freelance journalist and editor. This article was originally published on Healthline



Persistence and Optimism Protect Mental Health

Holding onto goals can reduce anxiety, depression, and panic attacks: Study

A recent study published by the American Psychological Association has found that people who don't give up on their goals and have a positive outlook on life appear to suffer less with depression, anxiety, and panic attacks. The research looked at thousands of Americans over the course of 18 years. The study published in the Journal of Ab-

normal Psychology was unlike previous research as it did not find that self-mastery, or feeling in control of one's fate, had an effect on the mental health of participants across the 18-year period.

"Perseverance cultivates a sense of purposefulness that can create resilience against or decrease current levels of major depressive disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, and panic disorder," said Nur Hani Zainal from The Pennsylvania State University and lead author of the study. "Looking on the bright side of unfortunate events has the same effect because people feel that life is meaningful, understandable and manageable."

Often, people with these disorders are stuck in a cycle of negative thought patterns and behaviors that can make them feel worse.

Michelle G. Newman, co-author of study

Mental Illness Can Be Debilitating

Many people who suffer from mental illness and their family members know all too well that anxiety, depression, and panic attacks can be chronic and de bilitating and put a person's physical health at risk. Co-author of the study, Michelle G. Newman, also of The Pennsylvania State University explains, "Of-

The decision to stick with our goals may make life harder, but it also makes it more reward ing, even if our goals can't be accomplished. WARREN WONG/UNSPLASH

ten, people with these disorders are stuck in a cycle of negative thought patterns and behaviors that can make them feel worse," said Newman. "We wanted to understand what specific coping strategies would be helpful in reducing rates of depression, anxiety and panic attacks."

The research was done by using data from 3.294 adults who were studied over an 18-vear period. The average age of the participants was 45, nearly all were white and slightly less than half were college educated. There were three intervals throughout the study where data was collected

At each interval, participants were asked to record their goal persistence (e.g. When there is a problem, I don't give up until it has been solved), self-mastery (e.g. I know I can do anything I set my mind to), and positive reappraisal (e.g. I can look on the bright side of any situation). Diagnoses for major depressive, anxiety and panic disorders were also collected at each interval.

The study showed that participants who had more optimism and goal persistence during the first assessment had greater reductions in anxiety, depression, and panic attacks across the 18 years being recorded. Through the years, those who began the study with fewer mental health problems showed increased determination toward life goals and were better at focusing on the positive side of unfortunate events.

The findings of the study are beneficial for psychotherapists working with clients dealing with anxiety, depression, and panic disorders. Zainal said, "Clinicians can help their clients understand the vicious cycle caused by giving up on professional and personal aspirations. Giving up may offer temporary emotional relief but can increase the risk of setbacks as regret and disappointment set in," said Zainal. "Boosting a patient's optimism and resilience by committing to specific courses of actions to make dreams come to full fruition despite obstacles can generate more positive moods and a sense of purpose."

This article was first published on BelMarra-

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Further research has found that empathic doctors have patients with greater adherence to medications, improved trust, fewer malpractice suits, and even

Overcoming Barriers to Empathy in Health Care

How can we practice empathy when we feel stressed, over-worked, and burned out?

EVE EKMAN

The field of medicine is facing a dilemma when it comes to empathy. On one hand, research has found that receiving empathy from caregivers—feeling them, and self-care. understood and accepted—is critical for patient satisfaction, a key aspect of hospital reimbursement. tank." I think what contributes to burnout is when On the other hand, over 60 percent of health care providers are experiencing burnout across professions, making now a harder time than ever to prioritize additional training

Will our health care system be able to embrace empathy as a core value going forward?

I recently spent an evening in front of a live audience in conversation with author, doctor, and empathy researcher Helen Riess to discuss her new book, The Empathy Effect. Riess-who has been a assistant professor of medicine and the director of the Empathy and Relational Science Program at Harvard Medical School and founder and chief scientific officer at Empathetics, which offers empathy training across industries. Her research suggests that empathy is a skill that can be taught-not something we just have or we don't-and further research has found that empathic doctors have patients with greater adherence to medications, improved trust, fewer malpractice suits, and even reduced symptoms

How can health care providers learn skills to help others with an open heart when they already feel overworked, emotionally depleted, and cynical? In our conversation below, Riess and I address empathy, and explore how empathy can promote more meaningful work and greater compassion.

EVE EKMAN: I want to start with a simple question: Why did you write this book and why now?

HELEN RIESS: This topic has been very near and dear to me throughout my psychiatry training, and it has become more and more critical as I've worked in the health care world, where I have seen a dramatic drop in empathy. Through my own clinical practice, I have heard many patients complain bitterly about a lack of empathy. They describe how little contact they actually have with their caregivers and how they're treated like a number. Medical care has become so focused on getting people in and out of doctor's offices that they are missing out on the true healing in a relationship that is so vital.

I started this book for the medical profession, but in my empathy training work, I get calls from every industry-from the law, to parenting, to business, and leadership. I'm confident that if everybody was given a choice, they would prefer a more empathic interaction than a less empathic interaction, and yet it's still such an obstacle. We need training.

MS. EKMAN: I often hear people concerned that if they increase their empathy, they will be overwhelmed "The world is so painful and stressful; how am I going to manage all of that?" What are your thoughts on the relationship between burnout and empathy?

open their hearts to too many more people, they're just going to be flooded with everyone's burdens, and they're going to be crushed by the needs and the emo-

tional weight of connecting. Actually, I think that's absolutely a risk, but I also think that the secret is learning self-regulation skills, such as meditating, learning how to name and identify emotions, how to manage

the tank is empty and we don't take time to fill it with what truly nourishes and soothes us. We keep trying to be a certain way (like compassionate) when we haven't filled ourselves up adequately for the task. So I think empathy and self-care are really intricately interdependent

Empathy can make us burn out if we don't tend to ourselves, but empathy can also actually enliven and invigorate us. One author in the Journal of the American Medical Association, Michael Kearney, wrote mentor and friend to me over several years—is an about the concept of "exquisite empathy." He used that phrase to refer to that magical moment when a person feels thoroughly cared about; it enlivens and quickens the relationship not just for the patient but also for the caregiver.

MS. EKMAN: There is a provocative viral video making the rounds among health care professionals suggesting that burnout is the wrong term and we should call it moral injury-the result of being asked to work in an environment that is toxic and untenable. Beyond not filling our own tanks, are there more systemic causes of burnout, whether it's in a hospital or a company? **MS. RIESS:** Burnout is an interesting word, because I think it implies to the burned-out person that it's their fault-that they're not resilient, not tough, or that this difficult question, as well as other barriers to they're weak. Statistics in the past 10 years show that up to 60 percent of physicians are showing symptoms of burnout, with equal numbers of nurses. It can't be that all of a sudden 60 percent of the workforce is unable to cope. Something's happening within the whole system of health care. The disconnection in these systems is that the people making decisions about how medicine is practiced are not the ones in the frontlines.

Leaders who have never been doctors or nurses view health care as a business. In the last few decades, there's been this "lean six sigma" approach to health care that has nearly dropped the humanity out of it and brought in the spirit of a Toyota factory, where you try to make the parts as cheaply as possible and get the workers to work as quickly as possible. We have kind of lost the magic of what a health care profession can offer. It really is the system that's burning people out; it's not that people have become

I think it's a real challenge to figure out how health care workers can approach their leadership teams and help them to recognize that the organizations they lead are not going to get the outcomes that they want—which are happy, satisfied, and well-cared-for patients-if the providers working with them are emotionally and physically exhausted and deriving very little pleasure

MS. EKMAN: What other challenges do health care providers face when trying to be empathic?

MS. RIESS: I developed some training around how **MS. RIESS:** As you said, some people think that if they we maintain empathy even in the most challenging situations. It's very easy to have empathy if a patient is nice and grateful. However, one example of a challenge is if patients are not so happy with whatever

whereas empathy opens our hearts. As a society, we are living in a state of massive fear exaggeration right now, and it is really closing a lot of hearts and minds. We are all wired to recognize threats, and we recognize threats much more quickly than we recognize gratitude and opportunity. A large percentage of what we perceive as $threatening, we {\'re}\, actually \, projecting \, out \, onto \, others.$ So much of the tone that's been set in medicine has been about rushing into getting the most out of everybody and acting as if there is such a scarcity in everything, which is a kind of fear. I think one of the piggest myths is to have everyone feel as if there's just "not enough." If we just flipped that around and said, There's enough for everyone," I think we could ease up on everything. That abundance has to come from our leaders, but also from within.

I would love to see everyone in a leadership position learn about the value of valuing the people who work with you. To recognize that the more you invest in the people, the more you're going to get out of your bottom line-and the more you use people and treat them like objects and want them to be a cog in the wheel, the more impoverished your organization is going to be. This applies to health care leaders, business leaders, and deans and presidents of all kinds of institutions

MS. EKMAN: How do we train empathy in a way that leads to showing compassion and actually taking ac-

MS. RIESS: Opening our perceptions of what's going on in other people typically leads to empathic concern, but the concern doesn't always lead to action. That transition to compassion has to come from a more reflective life, where you don't just pass by a homeless person and think, "Oh, I should help," but never do. We can reflect on the abundance we live with, about humanity as a brotherhood, and the possibility of joining with other people in the journey to have a more compassionate society. The fact that things aren't this way can embolden us to do more.

MS. EKMAN: In your book, I was really struck by your sharing of your painful personal experiences and how that made you more open to empathy. If people got in touch with their own struggles, would this help them be more present, open, and caring to others?

you prescribe-maybe it's not working and they're still

having symptoms, and they're calling you frequently

because nothing is quite satisfying—that can become

challenging merely because it can make physicians

and caregivers feel helpless. And when they feel help-

less, they don't like that feeling. They may decide they

don't really like the patient that much and empathy

What we were trying to do is help health caregiv-

ers see the vulnerability that the patient is feeling,

MS. EKMAN: One of the emotions that gets in the way of

these beautiful reflections is a feeling of fear, like when

and not dismiss them because

they're having an emotion, but

actually figure out what's going

on so we help them with their

specific needs. These skills also

help with parenting and other

important relationships. I wish

I had known some of these em-

pathy skills when I was raising

my children. I've learned a lot

but actually want empathy to arise?

along the way.

MS. RIESS: We know that when people have struggled, they're much more able to relate to people who have similar struggles. Let's work toward the end of our conversation with a quote by Carl Jung, who said that "the sole purpose of life is to kindle the light in the

> darkness of mere being." And when you think about empathy, I think of it as a light that we're able to put forth into the world. That just puts a little light into someone's experience. It doesn't have to be a heavy lift; it could be a kind word or a knowing look or a nice smile at somebody. But if

we think that the sole purpose of life is to kindle the light in the darkness of mere being, there is a lot of darkness in life. We all can make the life of others lighter.

Eve Ekman, Ph.D., MSW, is the director of training at we want to give money or a meal to a person living on the street who's clearly in need, but feel fearful to the Greater Good Science Center. She is a UC Berkeley- and UCSF-trained contemplative social scientist engage because they appear mentally ill. How can we work with fear, when we feel threatened personally and teacher in the fields of emotional awareness and burnout prevention. This article originally appeared **MS. RIESS:** Empathy is the antidote to fear. When we on Greater Good, the online magazine of the Greater live in a state of fear, we close off our heart defensively, Good Science Center at UC Berkeley.

We have kind of lost the

magic of what a health care

profession can offer.

Helen Reiss



Why Should You Be Eating More TOMATOES

These nutrient-packed fruits are a flavor saver with endless possibilities

DEBORAH MITCHELL

f the scores of fruits and vegetables vailable to you, there are plenty of easons you should be eating more tomatoes. This fascinating fruit has an interesting story, noteworthy nutritional value, and health benefits galore.

Tomatoes are believed to have originated in countries along the western side of South America, including Peru, Chile, Ecuador, and Colombia. However, they were later cultivated in Mexico. The first tomatoes grown are believed to look like today's cherry tomato rather than the larger fruits we commonly see in the market.

Tomatoes are a member of the nightshade family, which is viewed as a potentially deadly group of foods. At one time, the Europeans did not trust the bright, shiny fruits and considered them to be poisonous. Although the leaves are toxic, the wide popularity of these fruits has shown the poisonous idea to be untrue.

Understanding Tomato Nutrition

This delicious fruit especially shines in the area of nutritional value. One interesting thing about tomatoes is that they have one specific nutrient-lycopene-which is enhanced when they are cooked and processed into foods such as ketchup, soup, sauce, juice, and paste

The redder the tomato, the higher the lycopene content. For most other nutrients, fresh tomatoes

For example, raw tomatoes are excellent sources of vitamin C, vitamin K, and biotin as well as the mineral molybdenum. They also provide very good levels of vitamins A, B3, B6, E, and folate, along with copper, manganese, phosphorus, and potassium. However, levels of vitamin C decline by up to 30 percent when tomatoes are cooked.

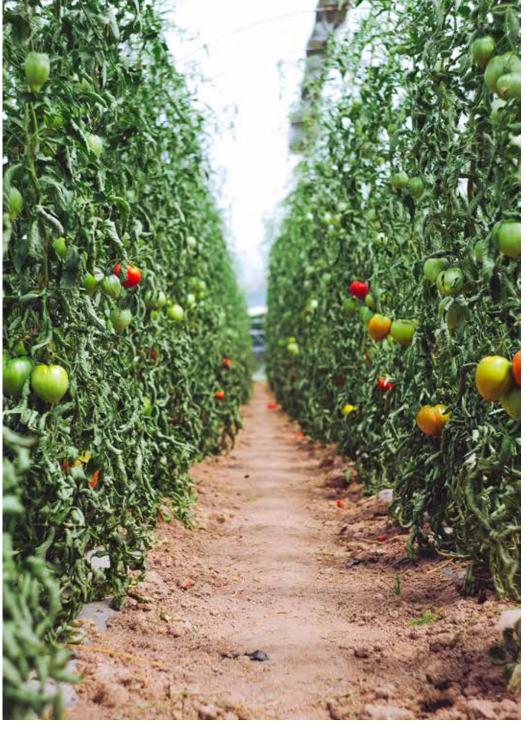
The amount of fiber in tomatoes is also worth noting. One cup of fresh tomato slices provides more than 2 grams of fiber, which is important for heart and colon health.

Health Benefits of Nutrient Tomatoes Tomatoes provide a wealth of health benefits. You will want to include more in your diet, fresh or minimally processed, so you can reap the advantages of biting into these luscious fruits.

Source of Potent Antioxidants

Tomatoes are a treasure chest of phytonutrients with free-radical fighting powers, including carotenoids, fatty acid derivatives, flavonoids, and saponins. In addition to these antioxidants, these fruits also have the traditional tomato vitamins with antioxidant powers-A, C, and E; and the anti-





Tomatoes have grown in size and reputation from their early years in South America.

oxidant minerals, chromium, manganese, and zinc. duced risk of prostate cancer. Another important

Anti-Inflammatory Abilities

The same phytonutrients that offer antioxidant powers also help fight inflammation. One of those phytonutrients is naringenin, a flavonoid found in tomato skin and known to reduce inflammation. Some of the conditions associated with inflammation include asthma, arthritis, inflammatory bowel disease, diabetes, and heart disease.

Cardiovascular Benefits

Tomatoes are helpful for the cardiovascular system in three main ways: their antioxidant powers, their ability to regulate fats in the bloodstream, and their impact on platelets. Lycopene is the star when it comes to benefits for the cardiovascular system because it works to reduce damage to cell membranes by fats in the blood. Research shows jazz up casseroles and stews. Whether you choose and triglycerides. Finally, too much clumping of be doing something good for your body—and your platelet cells can cause blood clots and resulting problems, such as heart attack and stroke. These fruits contain various phytonutrients that can help prevent excessive clumping.

Anti-Cancer Crusader

Men may be familiar with research indicating that the lycopene in tomatoes is associated with a re-

cer risk is alpha-tomatine, which has been shown to affect developing prostate cancer cells. Other cancers that may respond well to tomato consumption include non-small cell lung cancer, pancreatic cancer, and breast cancer, but more research needs

substance in tomatoes that helps lower prostate can-

If you are looking for protection against sunburn,

tomatoes may be one solution. Eating foods rich in lycopene may protect against sunburn.

Why Else Should You Eat Tomatoes?

Let's face it: tomatoes are just great tasting and fun to eat. They spark up a salad, enliven sandwiches. add zing to dips, add flavor to hot and cold soups, and that eating tomatoes has been proven to reduce heirlooms, cherry tomatoes, beefsteak varieties, levels of total cholesterol, bad cholesterol (LDL), Roma, or any of the other varieties available, you'll tastebuds-by adding tomatoes.

> Deborah Mitchell is a freelance health writer who is passionate about animals and the environment. She has authored, co-authored, and written more than 50 books and thousands of articles on a wide range of topics. This article was first published on NaturallySavvy.com

Gallbladders May Be Removed Too Often

New study suggests surgeons may be overly inclined to put some patients under the knife

any patients with gallstones and abdominal pain don't feel better after a procedure to remove their gallbladder, and a recent study suggests this surgery may not always be

mend that doctors perform a minimally invasive operation known as a laparoscopic cholecystectomy to remove the gallbladder when patients have abdominal pain associated with gallstones. But in nonemergency cases, there's no consensus on how doctors should choose which patients might be better off with nonsurgical treatments and lifestyle changes. For the current study, researchers tested whether Surgery to relieve abdominal pain by removing

Treatment guidelines in many countries recom-

patients with gallbladder conditions being treated at outpatient clinics might have better outcomes and less post-operative pain if surgeons adopted a strict set of criteria for operating instead of the "usual care" practice of operating at surgeons' discretion. Researchers randomly assigned 537 patients with

gallstones and abdominal pain to receive usual care, and 530 patients to get surgery only if they met five criteria: severe pain attacks; pain lasting at least 15 to 30 minutes; pain radiating to the back; pain in the upper abdomen or the right upper quadrant of the abdomen; and pain that responds to pain relief medication. Pain relief was no better or worse with the restric-

tive criteria than it was with usual care. With both approaches, at least 40 percent of patients still had abdominal pain 12 months later.

But fewer people had operations with the restrictive criteria: 68 percent compared with 75 percent inferiority" of restrictive surgical selection critein the usual care group. This suggests that surgeons ria as compared with leaving the choice up to the need to rethink whether gallstone surgery is neces- surgeon. To prove this, researchers estimated that sary in every case and reconsider their criteria for there would need to be at least 5 percentage points



the gall bladder is often unnecessary or of little value, a new study finds.

recommending operations, researchers write in The Lancet.

Patients should "be aware that there is a high chance that your gallbladder operation will not resolve all your abdominal pain," said study coauthor Dr. Philip de Reuver, a gastrointestinal surgeon at Radboud University Hospital Nijmegen in the Netherlands

"A good way to minimize unnecessary surgery is shared decision making," de Reuver said by email. "Patients should make a list of their symptoms and doctors need to tell which symptoms are most likely to be resolved after surgery and which are less likely or unlikely to be resolved.

The main goal of the study was to prove "non-

There is a high chance that your gallbladder operation will not resolve all your abdominal pain.

Dr. Philip de Reuver, study co-author and gastrointestinal surgeon

separating the proportion of patients who were pain-free one year after surgery. With restrictive criteria, 56 percent of patients

were pain-free after 12 months, as were 60 percent of patients with usual care. This difference was too small for the restrictive criteria to be considered "non-inferior" to usual care.

There was no meaningful difference in gallstone complications related to participating in the trial; 8 percent of patients in the usual care group and 7 percent in the restrictive criteria group experienced complications like acute gallbladder pain or pancreatitis. Surgical complication rates were also similar between the groups, affecting 21 percent of patients in

the usual care group and 22 percent in the restrictive criteria group. At the end of the day, the study suggests that more work is needed to determine the best criteria for selecting patients for surgery, said the co-author

of an accompanying editorial, Dr. Kjetil Soreide of the University of Bergen in Norway. "Jumping to a cholecystectomy may not always yield good outcomes, although many patients

do still benefit from having a cholecystectomy," Soreide said by email. "One needs to be aware that this is not necessarily a 'quick fix' to avoid disappointment after

surgery," Soreide added. "Hopefully further studies will give better insight to what might cause symptoms and when a gallbladder surgery is likely to relieve symptoms.'

By Lisa Rapaport

From Reuters

7 Ways to Feel More

in Control of Your Life

Developing greater agency can help you make important life decisions and feel less overwhelmed, stuck, the fear of or lost failure or

ANTHONY RAO & PAUL NAPPER

eslie and Josh came to therapy to talk about their son's problems in school. But it soon became apparent that they had a different problem altogether-one familiar to working parents.

As an experienced child and family psychologist (Anthony) and a management psychologist who works with business leaders (Paul), we were struck by how common these concerns are. We hear the same thing over and over from the people who come to see us: Their daily routine included a dizzying array of activities and responsibilities that kept them constantly

Getting their kids out the door for school was an ordeal, involving much haranguing and eating on the run. After working long hours, they arrived home to a laundry list of other duties. Constant interruptions from electronic devices made them feel on-call to their workplaces and disengaged from each other. Though unhappy, they didn't know what to do or how to make a change.

It's common for people to feel overwhelmed

Practicing a growth mindset ... can help combat

judgment.

ships, or in life in general. Here is what we recommend.

Control Stimuli

Agency begins with what you let into your mind-meaning what comes in from your environment. If you are lacking agency, it's likely your attention is being hijacked and you need to figure out how to restore it.

For example, research has shown that having a phone present while you work distracts you and interferes with your capacity to think. On the other hand, taking a walk (especially outdoors) is a good way to restore depleted attention in your brain so you can concentrate better later.

To help you increase your agency, practice going to quiet and screen-free spaces to escape overstimulation. That may mean spending time in nature, turning off your phone notifications while at work, or avoiding eating in loud cafeterias.

Associate Selectively

It's impossible not to be affected by those around us. It's easy to "catch" their emotions because our brains tend to sync up when we associate with other people. That means you should set boundaries with difficult people, disentangle yourself from negative online interactions, and be more conscious of how you might be vulnerable to "groupthink"pressures to behave or think in ways that are contrary to your values.

Instead, surround yourself with friends, family, and communities that encourage you to reach your full potential, nurture your talents, affirm your values, and support difficult decisions. Find those that give you a reality check when you've behaved badly or are stuck in negative thinking. You also can get involved with your community through volunteering or just chatting with local merchants or neighbors. These positive social interactions will improve your state of mind and physical health, two critical building blocks of agency.

your body and mind into balance, giving you greater motivation, strength, and stamina. Research has shown that sitting a lot is dangerous for your health and that even short breaks from concentrated periods of inactivity-like getting up to stretch or walking around the block-are good for you. Studies also suggest that exercise can lead to greater self-controlthe ability to defer gratification, which is key

If you're in deep at work, set a timer to go off every hour and remind yourself to take a moment to assess your mood. If you're feeling stuck or overwhelmed, get up and move. And, if you're having any issues at work, discussing them in a walking meeting (instead of a sitting meeting) may help mitigate conflicts.

Position Yourself as a Learner

People with high levels of agency are continually learning more and expanding their capacity to learn by adopting a more open, collaborative approach to everything in life. This requires nurturing your curiosity and allowing yourself to explore new ideas, skills, and people.

You can take an interesting class, explore your world kinetically (through your hands or body), or spend time playing or using your imagination. Or you can learn from other people by staying curious and asking them open-ended questions, listening to gain understanding, and avoiding any quick judgments.

This isn't always easy. Practicing a growth mindset-where you recognize that you are a work in progress, capable of learning and changing-can help combat the fear of failure or judgment that often come with learning new things. If you have trouble letting go of perfectionism, it might help to practice mindfulness meditation, which has been shown to reduce self-judgment, or use cognitive-behavioral therapy techniques that help put mistakes in

Manage Your Emotions and Beliefs

emotions like fear, sadness, or worry, it can Practice going lower our energy and make us feel doomed or to quiet and screen-free spaces to escape

things. When we are driven by unconscious

overwhelmed, which also hurts our agency.

Increasing your awareness of how your emo-

tions and beliefs drive your thinking, influence

your behavior, and affect your judgment will

help you navigate life with greater confidence.

While uncovering these inner thoughts and

emotions may take effort, being more self-

reflective helps you stay grounded by slowing

For example, try to catch yourself the next time you feel angry with yourself. Don't au-

tomatically accept the harmful emotion or,

worse, dwell on it. Instead, pause and question

it. Ask yourself, "Why am I feeling this way?

Am I pressuring myself too much? Maybe my

beliefs and expectations need some adjusting."

Start by slowing your thinking down. Take slow

deep breaths. Take yourself to a quiet place. Con-

sciously let go of the tension building up in your

muscles. These simple techniques will relax you

and keep you more self-aware. This enhances

your agency by putting you more in charge of

By learning how to recognize our inner emo-

tions and thoughts, name them, and let them

pass through us, we can practice more self-

control, which also helps build greater agency.

 $Think of intuition \, as \, deep \, inner \, knowledge \, that \,$

is comprised of millions of data points that our

brains have observed over the course of our lives.

When used wisely, it can be a tremendous boost

to our creativity and help us make important

decisions, thereby increasing our level of agency.

Many of us are familiar with visceral, gut

feelings about people or things-such as when

you meet a new boss and sense right away that

he's bad news. When you're in situations in-

volving unclear social demands with few clues

to navigate them, this type of intuition can be

useful to you. However, you must be careful

not to confuse intuition with bias and preju-

dice. In situations where emotions are running

high-during a job interview or while swiping

on Tinder, for example-it's best to slow down,

take a breath, check in with others, and get more information rather than relying exclusively on

Strategic intuition, a second type of intuition,

is more intentional. For example, you decide to

stop thinking about a particularly vexing prob-

lem at work and-while on a long run, in the

shower, or after meditating-a solution avails

Finally, "expert" intuition happens after long

periods, sometimes years, of practice at a par-

ticular skill. Here, less conscious parts of your

brain are able to take over, provided you stay calm. Think of a pilot handling an emergency

landing who allows their mind and body to perform as needed, without consciously thinking

You can get better at using intuition to inform your decision-making if you learn to quiet

your mind, develop a greater awareness of what you're thinking and feeling, and listen to your

People with low agency experience common

impediments when trying to make sound de-

cisions. They may procrastinate, obsess over

details, or worry excessively during the process;

they may lack confidence and be risk-averse,

or their thinking may be too fast and they act

When making an important decision, like

where to move or how to advance your career,

it's helpful to stop and deliberate first. Put your-

self in an environment conducive to reflection and exploration, and make sure you have time

and your emotions are calm. Then, focus on the issue at hand enough to clarify your primary

objective and what is at stake. Asking open-

ended questions and gathering pertinent facts

quick, automatic impressions.

through each and every step.

Deliberate. Then Act

on impulse.

down your thinking process.

what you feel and think

Check Your Intuition

overstimulation.

It's good to generate lots of options at first, making sure that any strong emotions or biases aren't driving your thoughts. Then, you can draft a plan for yourself based on those options, putting your thoughts and decisions into writing. The plan should simplify your options and incorporate the most important facts. At this point, let your mind rest and allow any intuition to rise to the surface. Set your plan aside and

changes as necessary. Remember, taking action doesn't require 100 percent certainty. Higher-agency people will start to act if they are 80 percent sure or more. So, don't over-deliberate before acting. You can always reassess later if needed.

come back a while later to reassess it, making

Having more agency means taking responsibility for your life. The next time you sense something happening around you-or within you-that doesn't feel quite right, don't ignore it or reflexively press on. Exercise the discipline to stop, pay attention, and work on finding a better path for yourself. By practicing more agency, you'll have more influence over your life and greater impact on the lives of others.

Anthony Rao is a nationally-known child psychologist. For more than 20 years, he was a psychologist at Boston's Children's Hospital and an instructor at Harvard Medical School. He is the co-author of "The Power of Agency: The 7 Principles to Conquer Obstacles." Paul Napper leads a management psychology and executive coaching consultancy in Boston, whose clients include Fortune 500 companies, universities, and start-ups. He is the co-author of "The Power of

Agency: The 7 Principles to Conquer Obstacles."

Health Benefits of **Intermittent Fasting**

ANDREA DONSKY

Anti-aging is one of the more popular health ben efits of intermittent fasting, but beyond these effects on aging and longevity, there are many other health benefits and they can be pretty impressive.

Promotes Weight Loss

Overall, intermittent fasting tends to make people eat fewer meals. Unless you compensate by eating more food during the allotted time frame, you likely will lose weight.

When you stop eating for a half day or longer, your body begins to undergo cell repair that removes waste material from cells. Fasting also can increase the body's secretion of growth hormones, which boost fat burning and muscle gain. Insulin levels also decline significantly, which enhances fat burning. Meanwhile, norepinephrine (noradrenaline) levels rise, which increases the metabolism of fat that can then be used as energy by the body. In fact, short-term fasting, also known as intermittent fasting, can accelerate your metabolism by 3.6 to 14 percent. A 2014 scientific review

reported that in a period of three to 24 weeks,

intermittent fasting can result in 3 to 8 percent

Eating well is a good idea, and so is not eating at all—

reduction in weight and a 4 to 7 percent reduction has been shown to significantly improve insulin in waist circumference.

Reduces Diabetes Risk

high levels of sugar in the bloodstream, as is the development of Type 2 diabetes. Intermittent fasting



resistance and as a result lower blood sugar levels.

In a study appearing in Translational Research,

form of intermittent fasting, resulted in a 20 to 31

percent reduction in fasting insulin levels and a 3

to 6 percent decline in fasting blood sugar levels.

It should be noted, however, that at least one study found that blood sugar control got worse among

women who followed a 22-day intermittent fast-

ing program. These preliminary results require

Insulin resistance is a dangerous consequence of

Improves Heart Health Some of the more significant risk factors for heart disease include high blood pressure, elevated total and low-density lipoprotein cholesterol, and high levels of triglycerides, blood sugar, and inflammatory markers. Intermittent fasting has been shown to help improve all of these risk factors in animal

studies, with a smaller number of human studies showing the same results.

Enhances Brain Function

further study.

Countless processes are involved in keeping the and Naturally Savvy Media. This article was first brain functioning, and intermittent fasting may

Intermittent fasting may boost the growth of neural cells.

help some of them. Animal studies indicate that intermittent fasting may boost the growth of neural cells, which can then go on to become neurons or the authors reported that alternate-day fasting, a non-neuronal glia cells. In addition, you may experience a rise in levels of the hormone known as brainderived neurotrophic factor (BDNF). Low levels of BDNF have been associated with depression.

May Help Prevent Cancer

Although the jury is still out on this benefit because human studies are needed, evidence from animal research indicates that intermittent fasting may enhance the effect of some chemotherapy drugs, as well as help slow or prevent certain types of cancer. Is intermittent fasting for you? If intermittent fasting sounds like something you want to incorporate into your life, be sure to consult with a knowledgeable health care provider before you embark on this journey, especially if you have a chronic health condition or are taking any medications.

Andrea Donsky is an author, registered holistic nutritionist, editor-in-chief of NaturallySavvy. com, and co-founder of The Healthy Shopper Inc. published on NaturallySavvy.com



Some doctors are sending their patients for a walk on the beach to treat what ails them

JAY MADDOCK

We've long known it's refreshing to spend time outside in natural environments. Being cooped up inside can feel unnatural and increase our desire to get out. Taking a walk on a wooded path, or spending an afternoon in a park can have a noticeable impact on our mood.

Renowned biologist E.O. Wilson, creator of the biophilia theory, hypothesizes that people have an innate need to seek relationships with nature and other forms of life.

On an intuitive level, this makes sense. Humans have nearly always lived in open, natural environments. Our migration into cities has been a very recent phenomenon. It makes sense that removing us from the natural environment could affect our health. Now scientists are beginning to affirm what many of us already know.

Nature and Healing

Research in this area started in the 1980s with Robert Ulrich, a professor at Texas A&M University. His work looked at surgery patients who had a view of trees out of their window compared to those who had the view of a wall. Those with the natural view reported less pain and spent less time in the hospital

Since then, several studies have shown a reduction in pain both through viewing natural scenes as well as looking at nature videos and pictures

Other studies have looked at the effect of exposure to daylight has on patients and found they experienced less pain, less stress, and used fewer pain medications than patients not exposed to natural light. There is also preliminary evidence that hospital gardens can alleviate stress in both patients and their families.

Such findings have implications in designing health care facilities. There appears to The 30 Days Wild program run by the Wildbe consistent evidence that exposures to natural environments have a positive effect on pain, stress, anxiety, blood pressure, and heart rate. In the Center for Health and Nature, a joint venture between my university Texas A&M, Houston Methodist Hospital, and nonprofit Texan by Nature, our new studies are assessing if these effects extend to the virtual world, including immersive virtual reality and virtual windows.

A Preventive Effect?

While nature appears to be helpful in restoring health after illness, can it actually help us stay healthy? Researchers across the world have been asking this question. From forest bathing ("shinrin-yoku") in Japan to the 30 Days Wild campaign in the United Kingdom, which encourages people to connect to wild places, people have been examining the healing powers of nature. While walking is well established as a

health-promoting behavior, studies now

are examining if walking in natural environments is more beneficial than indoors or in urban environments. Results have shown positive effects on mental and physical health, including improved attention, better mood, and healthier blood pressure and heart rate. Several programs across the country have been formed to expose military veterans to natural spaces to combat symptoms of PTSD. In children, playgrounds with green space increased vigorous physical activity, decreased sedentary time, and even led to fewer fights.

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While there is growing evidence that exposure to natural environments is beneficial to health, The need for there are still many questions to be answered. What is nature? exposure is While this may seem simple at first glance, there are many differences between a national park, an urban pocket park, and

> a picture of waves crashing on the beach. What is the dose of nature needed? For physical activity, there is a scientific consensus that people need 150 minutes a week for good health. How much and how often is exposure to nature needed for better health? How do longer doses versus shorter doses-such as a weekend camping trip in a forest versus a walk through a park-affect us? What sensory part of nature is affecting us? Is it sight, sound, smell, touch, or a combination of them?

A recent paper proposed enhanced immune function as the central pathway for the variety of positive health outcomes received from nature exposure. This still needs

Despite the need for more research, the need for more nature exposure is urgent. The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that U.S. citizens, on average, spend 90 percent of their time indoors. A study in the UK found that children spend only half the time outdoors that their parents used to.

But there are efforts to fix this problem. life Trusts in the UK encourages people to engage with nature every day for a month In its first year, more than 18,000 people signed up. It starts again on June 1.

Doctors in Scotland now are able to give nature prescriptions to their patients. The educational leaflet they provide describes numerous monthly activities including touching the ocean, taking a dog for a walk, and following a bumblebee. In the United States, the Park Rx America program has been working to connect publicly available outdoor space to physicians to have them prescribe nature.

As spring arrives, it is time to make a commitment to spend more time in nature. Better health could be as easy as a walk in the park.

Jay Maddock is a professor of public health at Texas A&M University. This article was first published



ELEVATE AND INSPIRE

Martial Artist Felled by Illness Finds Unexpected Cure

A lifelong dream was nearly taken from him until his wife told him about an ancient practice

NGUYEN QUYNH XUYEN

spirit collapsed when I found out I needed heart surgery and could be bedridden for the rest of my life. I was at a high point in my career when this devastating blow came. It was early summer of 2015. I was a lieutenant colonel and an honored martial arts teacher at the air force academy of my country, Vietnam

I had been teaching martial arts there since 1986, when I was 22 years old. Dozens of my students had won high awards in national tournaments. I was so confi dent and proud of my physical strength and athletic skill. Then my health and passion were threatened by disease.

A routine health exam before a national competition revealed that I had very high blood pressure. The organizers wouldn't allow me to compete

I was diagnosed with mitral incompetence (also called mitral valve regurgitation), a disorder where the mitral valve on the left side of the heart malfunctions and prevents efficient blood flow away from the heart

I took pride in having a strong and agile body and I never thought I would have to worry about my health. But there I was, at 51, with no confidence in my future.

Expert medical treatment didn't help. I was fatigued, short of breath, and had chest pain. There was no cure except expensive heart surgery to repair the valve. There was a risk that I would be

advice from my wife.

debilitated for the rest of my life and discharged from the academy. Three years later, I am in good health and I never had the surgery thanks to

There I was, at 51, with no confidence in my future.

I share my story so that others may benefit from my experience and understand what I mean when I say "a healthy body indeed comes from a sound mind and a compassionate heart."

In My Most Desperate Moment

I had a lifelong passion for martial arts. My dream came true when I was hired as a martial arts teacher at the Vietnam Air and Air Defence Forces Academy.

Then the disease came. I fell into a fog of despair as the world collapsed around me. Questions without answers churned in my mind.

Is my future gone? Are the glorious days of practicing martial arts and training students over? How did my condition develop after a healthy life? Why, after endless treatments, am I not cured?

But good fortune soon smiled upon me. My wife had suffered from many health issues including arthritis, stomach ailments, balance problems, and high blood pressure. As a teacher, she had to request leave every month to go to the hospital for treatment and then recover at home.

The same summer that I learned of my heart condition, my wife began to practice a traditional Chinese discipline for improving the mind and body called



The author reading Zhuan Falun, the main book of the Falun Dafa teachings.

Falun Dafa, or Falun Gong. Miraculously, her illnesses disappeared shortly after she started doing the Falun Dafa exercises and reading its main book of teachings, Zhuan Falun, which emphasizes elevating one's moral character based on the principles of truthfulness, compassion, and tolerance.

> At age 51, the author was diagnosed with high blood pressure and mitral incompetence, and the severity of his condition was such that he would need heart surgery.

The Falun Dafa exercises are different from the martial arts training routines I was used to. They consist of four standing exercises and sitting meditation. The movements are not vigorous but gentle, slow, and fluid

My wife encouraged me to read the book and do the exercises with her, but I never took her seriously. Then one day, seeing me in especially low spirits, she came to my side and tried again. "You don't have to be sad or worried. We can practice Falun Gong together. It has helped many people," she said.

I finally decided to give it a try, only because I had reached a dead end. If Falun Dafa could not help me at least I would learn something new for my work.

I finally decided to give it a try only because I had reached a dead end.

Miraculous Reversal

Surprisingly, after only a few days of doing the exercises, the pain in my chest eased up and I could breathe normally. It was as if my body was gradually being cleansed and restored.

This miracle compelled me to carefully study the book Zhuan Falun. Its spiritual truths made a deep impression on me; it was the first time I read a book focused on teaching people to better themselves on a path toward spiritual enlightenment by improving their moral character. Its principles of truthfulness, compassion, and tolerance resonated deeply with me.

I read the book and did the exercises every day, and I started to change fundamentally. Remarkably, my body underwent a complete transformation. I stopped dwelling on my illness and embraced an optimistic mindset and a

greater consideration of others. In the past, I regarded myself as a good person, particularly because I completed assigned tasks well at work. But after I started practicing Falun Dafa, many people noticed that my character changed along with my health.

For example, it is a custom at the academy for students to give their teachers "gifts" of money to show appreciation. As a practitioner of Falun Dafa, I understood I should not take this money, so I stopped accepting it.

When my colleagues heard this, they said it was moral and upright. They recommended me to the head of the academy for praise but I told them there was no need. I only did what was right. Then, three months after I started practicing Falun Dafa, a relative wanted to give me 15 million Vietnam dong (\$650)

to help him find a job. I told him: "I will

no need to give me money. I don't need

certainly help you, but please there is

anything in return." I then helped him find a good job

When my brother's family heard this, they didn't understand why I rejected the money. I told them stories about other Falun Dafa practitioners helping others without any thought of reward or recognition. I explained how Zhuan Falun teaches unconditional kindness to ward others, giving of oneself freely, and being motivated solely by compassion. My brother's whole family was touched and called Falun Dafa a great teaching. Later, they even began practicing Falun Dafa themselves

Misunderstandings Resolved

Practicing Falun Dafa, my mind became serene and I developed more clarity about what is right and wrong. I could remain humble even amid the fame and honors of martial arts competitions.

However, false and misleading information from the ruling Chinese regime's persecution of Falun Dafa caused many of my friends and colleagues to misunderstand the practice.

Falun Dafa is a practice from the Buddhist school with a long history. It used to be taught in private in China before it was made public by its teacher, Li Hongzhi, in 1992. Its benefits in improv ing people's health and moral character quickly spread by word of mouth all across China. Unfortunately, its popular ity led to it becoming a target for persecution in 1999.

While Falun Dafa adherents simply strive to be good people by following the principles of truthfulness, compassion, and forbearance, they were demonized in a nationwide propaganda campaign, and countless practitioners were taken into custody and tortured in attempts to force them to renounce their beliefs.

The persecution continues to this day, 19 years later, and there are investigative reports with alarming evidence that Falun Dafa prisoners of conscience are being subjected to forced organ harvesting to supply China's lucrative transplantation industry.

The Chinese regime's misinformation about Falun Dafa has spread so widely that it reached Vietnam and many people believed it, my colleagues among them. One day my office suddenly reported me to senior management for speaking about

I felt great pressure but remained calm. I knew I had done nothing wrong. I sincerely shared my understanding with my colleagues in hopes that they would understand the goodness of Falun Dafa and the deceit and brutality of the persecution.

The author stopped

accepting gifts of money from his students and returned all of the money they had given him in the past.

In the end, one of the colonels met with me and quietly listened to what I had to say. As a result, he came to understand that Falun Dafa is a good practice that benefits people.

I have since retired from the academy and now value the time that I have to let more people know about Falun Dafa, how it has benefited me and my family, and how it is being persecuted in China. I hope more people will come to understand the beauty of Falun Dafa and have a chance to experience its profound benefits, just as I and my family have seen the miracles it has brought into our lives.

Nguyen Quynh Xuyen lives in Vietnam.

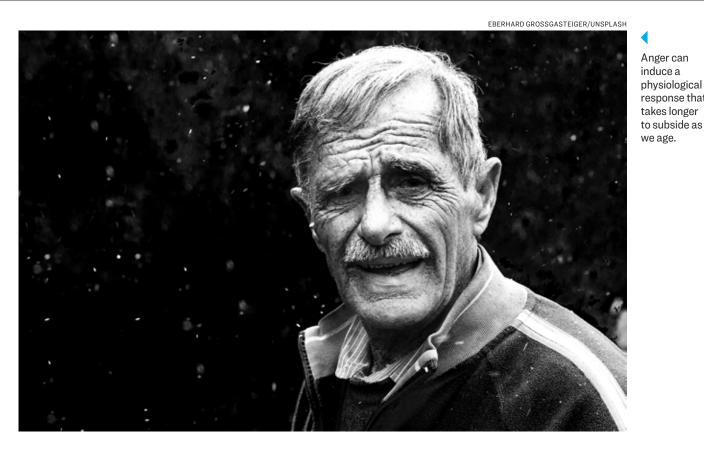


This miracle compelled

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MIND & BODY 9



Anger Linked to Illness in Old Age

Learning emotional regulation can help people avoid inflammation and ill health

LOUISE BROWN NICHOLLS

egative emotions aren't necessarily bad when they can direct our behavior in useful ways. If you're stuck in traffic and running late, anger with the situation might motivate you to find an alternative route, which will then relieve your stress (though you don't necessarily need to get angry to be motivated to find a quicker route).

But when anger simmers over in a situation that can't be changed, it's less than useful and can even

Emotions have physiological effects, such as raising the level of cortisol in your bloodstream, which can affect your health. A new study, published in Psychology and Aging, shows that high levels of anger are associated with poor health in older people. The Canadian study recruited 226 adults aged 59-93 years. They took blood samples to assess levincreasing age, comes strength and vulnerability. els of chronic low-grade inflammation and asked the participants to report any age-related chronic illnesses they might have, such as cardiovascular disease, arthritis, and diabetes. The participants also completed a short questionnaire about the level of anger or sadness they experienced in three typical days over a one-week period.

For the analysis, the researchers considered whether age could affect the results. They found that higher levels of anger were associated with inflammation and ill health in the oldest participants (aged 80 and above), but not the youngest participants (59-79 years). Sadness was not associated with inflammation or ill health in either age group.

The study is cross-sectional, meaning that it assessed a group of people at a single point in time. To get a fuller understanding of the relationship between negative emotions and health, we need studies that follow participants for a period of time-so-called

prospective observational studies. Future studies should also take into account other factors that might be involved, such as other emotions (both positive and negative), clinical depression, stress, and personality.

Although this new research shows a link between emotion and health in older age, we do not know whether anger causes inflammation and illness or whether health problems make people angrier.

Emotion and Health Across the Lifespan

Negative emotions sometimes can help people overcome life's challenges, but this latest research suggests that specific negative emotions work differently, particularly across different stages of life, and should be assessed separately.

Older age is a period associated with decline, loss, and reduced opportunities. If a challenge is difficult or impossible to overcome, anger may no longer be useful and may lead to health problems. In contrast, sadness may be psychologically adaptive in older age, helping people accept loss and adjust to it.

These findings can paint a negative picture of emotional experience and its effects in older age. Yet a long line of research has shown that older people are happier. When following people over a 10-year period, positive emotional experiences are shown to increase with age, peaking at 64 and never returning to the levels observed in the average young adult.

Perhaps central to these findings is the idea that, with increasing age, comes both strength and vulnerability. The finding that older people are happier can be explained by age-related strengths in emotional regulation. As we age, we are better at avoiding or reducing exposure to negative situations and stress. We can also better regulate our emotional reaction to external events. But not all negativity can be avoided. In the case of high levels of sustained negative emotion, older adults may be more vulnerable, taking longer to overcome the physiological response.

Letting Go of Negative Emotions and Stereotypes

Negative emotions and health in older age is a relatively new field of research, but substantial research has investigated the relationships between attitudes to aging and health outcomes. Holding negative agerelated stereotypes earlier in life can predict cardiovascular problems in later life and brain-aging processes associated with Alzheimer's disease.

For example, believing that decline is inevitable may reduce the chance of a person doing what's good for their health, such as exercising or taking their prescribed medication. So letting go of anger and other negative emotions and attitudes throughout life may be beneficial for health in later life.

It is important that older people have opportunities to be involved in mutually beneficial intergenerational communities. For example, a program in the United States brings older people into local schools to help young children learn to read. Intergenerational communities offer better social support and understanding of aging for everyone and opportunities for older people to keep active for as long as possible.

Louise Brown Nicholls is a senior lecturer in psychology at the University of Strathclyde in the UK. This article was first published on The Conversation.

Risk of Mental Disorders Higher for People Who Live Alone

GIGEN MAMMOSER

THE EPOCH TIMES Week 21, 2019



more than

twice as likely

... to have

a mental

disorder.

dults living alone are more likely to have com mon mental disorders, including anxiety and depression-and the reason is loneliness. That's the conclusion of new research published this week in the journal PLOS ONE, which used data from three separate surveys in the United Kingdom over the course of nearly two decades

"In our study, the prevalence of common mental disorders (CMDs) was higher in individuals living alone than in those not living alone in all survey years. Multivariable regression analyses corroborated these findings, as there was a positive and significant association between living alone and CMDs," Louis Jacob said, the first author of the study and member of the faculty of medicine at the University of Versailles Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines in France.

Researchers looked at survey data from the United Kingdom conducted in 1993, 2000, and 2007, which included more than 20,000 adults. Between 1993 and 2007, the incidence of adults

living alone steadily increased from 8.8 to 10.7 percent, correspondingly, so did the rate of common mental disorders from 14.1 to 16.4 percent.

Regardless of age or sex, CMDs were invariably more prevalent in individuals who lived alone. In some cases, those living alone were more than twice as likely as cohabiting individuals to have a mental disorder.

Expanding Evidence

Other studies have associated living alone with CMDs, but this research builds on that work in

Prior studies have primarily been interested in the effects of living alone on the elderly, but this research helps to expand findings on the relationship between living alone, loneliness, and mental disorders to the adult population in general. The authors also expanded their research to include other disorders like anxiety rather than depression alone.

The findings are consistent with other work on the subject. For example, a study of nearly 5,000 adults living in Finland found a twofold increase of anxiety and depression in people living alone compared with people who were married.

A 2011 study from Singapore of nearly 3,000 adults age 55 and older found that living alone was a contributor to poorer psychological wellbeing, with loneliness being the cause.

Loneliness is a complex issue, and its association with living alone and mental disorders has become a topic of increasing interest for public health officials and urban planners.

Some researchers have pointed at cities in general as drivers for loneliness and social isolation. While others have noted our increasingly digital world and the influence of social media on feelings of isolation, depression, and anxiety.

Many are also taking note of the effects of loneliness as a legitimate public health concern. Beyond mental health and well-being, the effects can also take a physical toll.

Physical Health Risks

A 2015 study in the British Medical Journal found that loneliness and isolation were risk factors for both coronary heart disease and stroke.

Jacob said he hopes giving loneliness and social isolation more visibility will ultimately help to bring relief.



Previous research studied the effects of living alone on the elderly. New research finds that the depression among lonely seniors was also seen among younger people living alone.

"This is important for the identification of vulnerable populations and the establishment of effective strategies to improve population mental health," Jacob said "Based on the findings of the present study,

health professionals should be aware that living alone is a risk factor for CMDs, and that this association is largely mediated by loneliness. We believe that reducing levels of loneliness in people living alone is important," he said. Indeed, the most important findings from the research may have more to do with how loneli-

ness can be treated on many different forms.

What You Can Do

According to Jessy Warner-Cohen, a health psychologist at Long Island Jewish Medical Center, "The most robust finding of this study is the effect of social support on those living alone."

"The takeaway message for me from this study is that those not in cohabiting relationships, whether living with a partner or marriage, need to more actively seeks means of developing social support," Warner-Cohen said, who wasn't affiliated with the research.

Social support can take on many different forms and affect people from all walks of life. It can mean joining clubs related to personal interests, like book clubs or athletic organiza-

Look for meet-up groups related to something you enjoy.

Jessy Warner-Cohen, health psychologist, Long Island Jewish Medical Center

Social support can take

hood, or cooking together. Involving friends and family more frequently is a great resource for social support. "Look for meet-up groups related to some-

tions, walking dogs with others in the neighbor-

thing you enjoy. This will help with meeting other people with similar interests and provide a natural means of developing social support. Fill your life with fun and exciting things," Warner-Cohen said.

Gigen Mammoser is a freelance journalist. This article was originally published



What Are Artificial Flavors?

Our processed food addiction is pushed along by these flavor enhancers

LISA TSAKOS

The tongue is covered in taste receptors that identify the five basic tastes: salty, sour, bitter, sweet, and umami. Taste and the other senses play an important role in our enjoyment and digestion of food. The smell, sight, and taste of foodespecially delicious food-stimulate the body to prepare to receive the food by producing digestive 'juices' such as saliva in the mouth and hydrochloric acid in the stomach.

When food is processed, it loses its natural flavor, and when it sits on a store shelf for weeks, natural chemicals in food begin to deteriorate, reducing their shelf life and affecting the way they taste. That's where the flavor industry comes in.

In the food industry, flavors can be categorized as artificial flavors, natural flavors, and spices. Flavors are regulated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and are either "generally recognized as safe" (GRAS) substances or food additives, which must be approved by the FDA.

You may already be aware of the health hazards and addictive qualities associated with certain flavor additives such as monosodium glutamate and various sources of sodium. You also may have noticed that many food labels list the terms "artificial flavors." "natural flavors," or "contains artificial and natural flavors"-without disclosing exactly what

those flavors are Artificial flavors are additives designed to mimic the taste of natural ingredients. They are a cheap way for manufacturers to make something taste like strawberry, for example, without actually using any real strawberries.

The FDA defines artificial flavoring thusly: "The term artificial flavor

or artificial flavoring means any substance, the function of which is to impart flavor, which is not derived from a spice, fruit or fruit juice, vegetable or vegetable juice, edible yeast, herb, bark, bud, root, leaf or similar plant material, meat, fish, poultry, eggs, dairy products, or fermentation products thereof."

In other words, ingredients that comprise artificial flavors are chemicals that were not originally sourced from

Artificial flavors are proprietary chemical formulas owned by the flavor companies that create them. The demand for top-secret recipes made by fla vor manufacturers (such as Givaudan) has produced a multi-billion industry. an industry shrouded in secrecy-and with good reason. Flavor companies employ a range of experts from chemists to chefs to 'cook up' novel flavors from an assortment of 1,300 FDA-approved

ingredients. They don't want to disclose their recipes, and consumers don't like knowing that the delicious chicken flavor in their Stouffer's dinner comes from a mix of chemicals

rather than the real thing. Unfortunately, the FDA does not require flavor companies to disclose ingredients as long as all the ingredients have been deemed GRAS. This protects the proprietary formulas but allows for many chemicals to be

hidden under the word 'flavor'

on the ingredients list. For consumers, this is unfortunate, since even food manufacturers are not aware of the specific ingredients that comprise the flavors used in their products.

Artificial flavors are known to cause many adverse reactions, including:

- Allergic reactions
- · Chest pain · DNA damage

Headaches

Even food

manufac-

turers are

not aware of

the specific

ingredients

that comprise

the flavors.

- Fatigue
- Depression of the nervous system Brain damage

Other symptoms include seizures, nausea, dizziness, and more. Without labeling the specific ingredients in artificial flavors, identifying the root cause of your symptom(s) is near impossible. According to the USDA National Or-

"Aliphatic acyclic and acyclic alcohols, aldehydes, ketones, carboxylic acids, and related esters, lactones, ketals, and acetals comprise more than 700 of the 1.323 chemically defined flavoring sub stances in the United States. Additional structural categories include aromatic, heteroaromatic, and heterocyclic substances with characteristic organoleptic

Many artificial flavors include ingredients that are also used to make artificial colors, which are made from highly processed crude oil. Hence, the numerous health effects associated with them are not surprising. What is astounding however, is that there is little document ed research and practically no studies published on the effects of artificial

The food industry has bombarded our taste buds with flavor. Those who regularly eat-or are addicted to-processed foods lose their taste for real food. We lay blame on sugar and fat for the worldwide obesity epidemic, but ultimately, isn't the flavor industry largely responsible for making processed food taste good?

Lisa Tsakos is a nutritionist and educator specializing in weight management. She has been featured on the Discovery Channel, numerous radio programs, and is a contributor to various publications. This article was first published on Naturally Savvy.

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CONNECT TO LEAD

Creating The 'Mission Decision Line'

At some point in a project, you need to commit, with no other option but success

SCOTT MANN

Back in 2005, in southern Afghanistan, I was a mission commander for a group of special operators and host nation soldiers who were going deep into the Uruzgan Province. The deeper we flew into Taliban sanctuary, the tighter the knot in my stomach grew as the pilots called off phase lines into my headset. That knot grew until they called off the mission decision line (MDL).

In special operations, the MDL is an easily recognizable line on the ground, and on your map, that tells everyone involved with the mission that once you've crossed it, there's no turning back. It's the point of no return. No matter what happens, you're going forward with the mission.

When we crossed that line, I felt a sense of relief. Doesn't that sound crazy. I sure thought so. So much so, that I looked around inside the chopper to see what my guys were feeling. You know what I saw? Teeth! Operators grinning from ear to ear.

They were starting to lean into the mission set. You could see the tension melting

I think it's because all other options were gone. We were singularly focused on the target at hand. Whatever waited for us up in those mountains, we were going forward to meet it together. We had trained for this, we had prepared for this, and there was a high level of energy around that.

I believe this applies to your life, here at home. Whether you are military or civilian, we have too many choices these days. We have inundated ourselves in this society with so many choices, so many safety nets, for our kids and for ourselves, that there is no struggle; there is no risk in pursuing the things that light our fire. As a result of that, we've become too pasty, staying right in the middle of the road, in the bleachers, outside the arena.

When we have too many choices in life; we don't commit to the things that are in front of us; we don't commit to the things that are on our



People respect those who establish a Mission Decision Line, cross it, and don't look back. these safetynet choices slowly erodes the confidence that our people have in us. When you think about your goals, don't look for plan B and plan C;

your goals, don't look for plan B and plan C; don't look for the safety net. Go for it. Focus on plan A. We've allowed contingency planning to supersede the primary planning, and as a result of that, we don't fully commit to things in mind, body, and spirit.

High performers don't start with the contingency plan in mind. You make a plan, and bring everybody into it, involve them it, establish the common direction and vision. Then you set your MDL, a line in time or space that says, "When we cross this, there's no turning back." And then

you execute it relentlessly and learn from your failures.

I think if more people used this approach, we would find that it creates more psychological safety for the people we lead, for the clients who buy from us, for the investors deciding whether or not they should take a chance

on us, the donors trying to decide on putting money toward your nonprofit, or for the people you serve with that nonprofit who have entrusted their needs to you.

All those elements require psychological safety. Your kids won't follow your guidance without it. If you're not singularly committed to the thing you're doing, then how will others find safety in what you're proposing? People respect those who establish an MDL, cross it, and don't look back.

That's who we follow; that's who's relatable; that's who's relevant; that's who owns the room

Gather your team. Take a look at your life and your business. Ask yourselves, "Is there something on our horizon that we want to pursue? Could we establish a mission decision line between where we are now and where we want to go?" Then, act! Agree with all your heart that when you cross it, there's no turning back. No plan B. It's all in.

When we have too many choices in life, we don't commit.

That's the power of the MDL. Put it to work in your life and you'll find that people follow you up the ladder, not because they have to but because they choose to.

Scott Mann is a former Green Beret who specialized in unconventional, high-impact missions and relationship building. He is the founder of Rooftop Leadership and appears frequently on TV and many syndicated radio programs. For more information, visit RooftopLeadership.com