

THE EPOCH TIMES

MIND & BODY

Overcoming Barriers to Empathy in Health Care

How can we practice empathy when we feel stressed, over-worked, and burned out? **4**



7
Ways to Feel More in
Control of Your Life
PAGE 6

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, or lost

ANTHONY RAO & PAUL NAPPER

Leslie 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 stressed.

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 by life.

They struggle to make choices and decisions. They often feel stuck, adrift, or thwarted.

For many of us, the pace of life has accelerated to a level where we can't fully adapt. We exist in a buzz of worry that we're not doing what we're meant to do, and the anxiety we feel, in turn, makes it difficult to get things done, creating a spiral of inaction. What we need is more agency: the ability to cut through all of what pulls at us, find emotional and physical balance, think more clearly, and advocate for ourselves so we can take a course of action that makes sense.

With agency, we can feel more in command of our lives.

In our new book, *The Power of Agency*, we outline seven steps to create a more personal agency, so that you can put yourself on a more powerful path—whether at work, in your relation-

Practicing a growth mindset ... can help combat the fear of failure or 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.

Move

Physical movement, along with proper rest and nutrition, puts

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-control—the ability to defer gratification, which is key to agency.

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 perspective.

Manage Your Emotions and Beliefs

Too often, we operate from unconscious beliefs—"I'm too old to learn a new job skill," or "No one will ever want to be in a relationship with me"—without being aware of how they thwart us from even trying certain

Surround yourself with friends, family, and communities that encourage you to reach your full potential.

ANDREW HARRIS/UNSPASH

things. When we are driven by unconscious emotions like fear, sadness, or worry, it can lower our energy and make us feel doomed or overwhelmed, which also hurts our agency.

Increasing your awareness of how your emotions 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 down your thinking process.

For example, try to catch yourself the next time you feel angry with yourself. Don't automatically 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. Consciously 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 what you feel and think.

By learning how to recognize our inner emotions and thoughts, name them, and let them pass through us, we can practice more self-control, which also helps build greater agency.

Check Your Intuition

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 involving 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 prejudice. 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 quick, automatic impressions.

Strategic intuition, a second type of intuition, is more intentional. For example, you decide to stop thinking about a particularly vexing problem at work and—while on a long run, in the shower, or after meditating—a solution avails itself.

Finally, "expert" intuition happens after long periods, sometimes years, of practice at a particular 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 through each and every step.

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 body.

Deliberate, Then Act

People with low agency experience common impediments when trying to make sound decisions. 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 on impulse.

When making an important decision, like where to move or how to advance your career, it's helpful to stop and deliberate first. Put yourself 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

Practice going to quiet and screen-free spaces to escape overstimulation.

also helps.

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 come back a while later to reassess it, making 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.

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

Intermittent fasting may boost the growth of neural cells.

ANDREA DONSKY

Anti-aging is one of the more popular health benefits 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

reduction in weight and a 4 to 7 percent reduction in waist circumference.

Reduces Diabetes Risk

Insulin resistance is a dangerous consequence of high levels of sugar in the bloodstream, as is the development of Type 2 diabetes. Intermittent fasting



Eating well is a good idea, and so is not eating at all—for a while at least.

has been shown to significantly improve insulin resistance and as a result lower blood sugar levels.

In a study appearing in *Translational Research*, the authors reported that alternate-day fasting, a 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 fasting program. These preliminary results require further study.

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

Countless processes are involved in keeping the brain functioning, and intermittent fasting may

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 non-neuronal glia cells. In addition, you may experience a rise in levels of the hormone known as brain-derived 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 Naturally Savvy, and co-founder of The Healthy Shopper Inc. and Naturally Savvy Media. This article was first published on Naturally Savvy.com

Prescribing *a Day in the* PARK

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 be 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.

While there is growing evidence that exposure to natural environments is beneficial to health, there are still many questions to be answered. What is nature? 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 to be tested.

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. The 30 Days Wild program run by the Wildlife 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 on *The Conversation*.



AFRICA.STUDIO/SHUTTERSTOCK

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

My 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 confident 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 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 advice from my wife.

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.



This miracle compelled me to carefully study the book Zhuan Falun.

Quynh Xuyen in his uniform as a senior officer with the Vietnamese air force academy. He had taught martial arts at the academy for nearly 30 years when he discovered he needed heart surgery.

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.

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 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 advice from my wife.

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."

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 certainly help you, but please there is no need to give me money. I don't need

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 toward 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 improving people's health and moral character quickly spread by word of mouth all across China. Unfortunately, its popularity 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 transplant 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 Falun Dafa.

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.

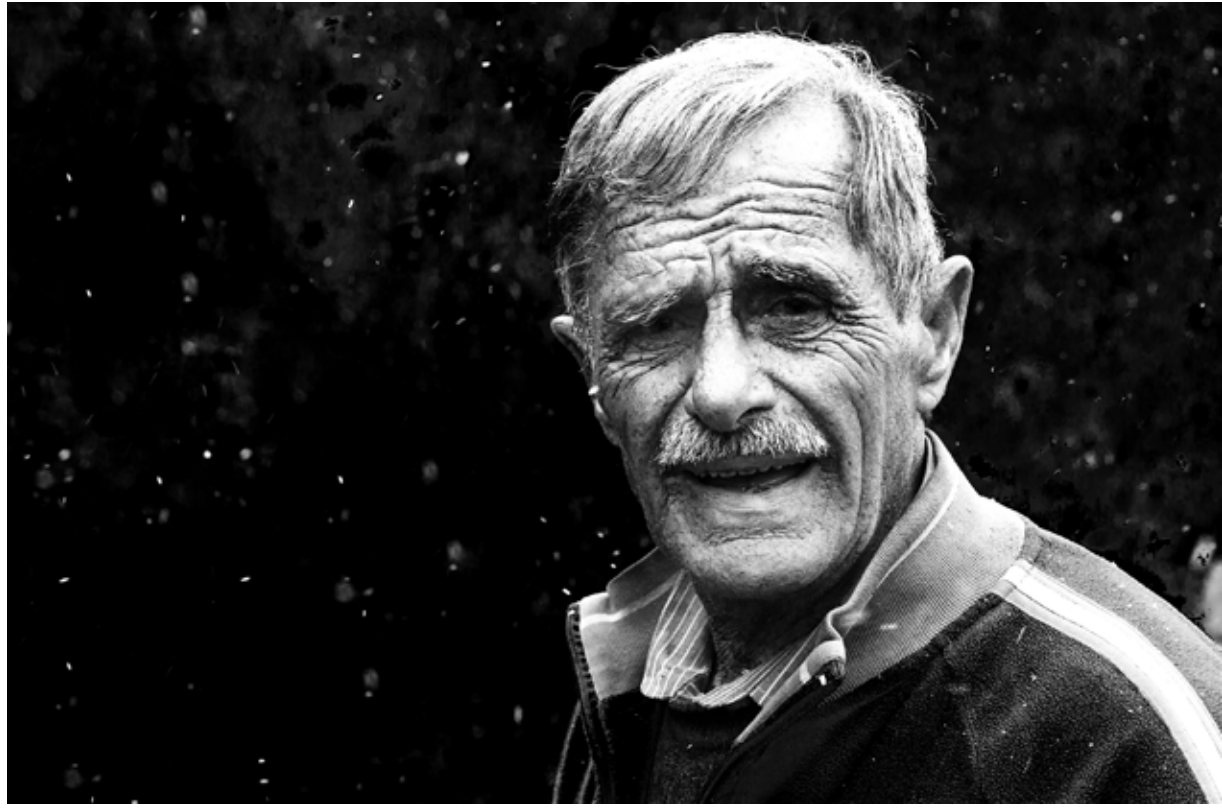
The author stopped accepting gifts of money from his students and returned all of the money they had given him in the past.

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.



EBERHARD GROSSGASTEIGER/UNPLASH

Anger can induce a physiological response that takes longer to subside as we age.

Anger Linked to Illness in Old Age

Learning emotional regulation can help people avoid inflammation and ill health

LOUISE BROWN NICHOLLS

Negative 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 be harmful.

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 lev-

With increasing age, comes both 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 age-related 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

Adults living alone are more likely to have common 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 several ways.

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 well-being, 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.



Those living alone were more than twice as likely ... to have a mental disorder.



RAWPIXEL/PIXABAY

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 loneliness can be treated.

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 seek 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 on many different forms.



TYLER OLSON/SHUTTERSTOCK

tions, walking dogs with others in the neighborhood, or cooking together. Involving friends and family more frequently is a great resource for social support.

"Look for meet-up groups related to something 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 on Healthline.com

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 food—especially 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 nature.

Artificial flavors are proprietary chemical formulas owned by the flavor companies that create them. The demand for top-secret recipes made by flavor 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



Even food manufacturers are not aware of the specific ingredients that comprise the flavors.

ingredients. They don't want to disclose their recipes, and consumers don't like knowing that the delicious chicken flavor in their Souffler'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
- Fatigue
- Headaches
- 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-

ganic Program:

"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 substances in the United States. Additional structural categories include aromatic, heteroaromatic, and heterocyclic substances with characteristic organoleptic properties."

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 documented research and practically no studies published on the effects of artificial flavors.

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.

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 away. Why?

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



There comes a time when opting out isn’t an option. And for many teams, that’s a great thing.

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

People respect those who establish a Mission Decision Line, cross it, and don’t look back.

heart. Creating all of these safety-net 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; 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 in 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