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# MIND & BODY

## 25 Habits to Add to Your Routine

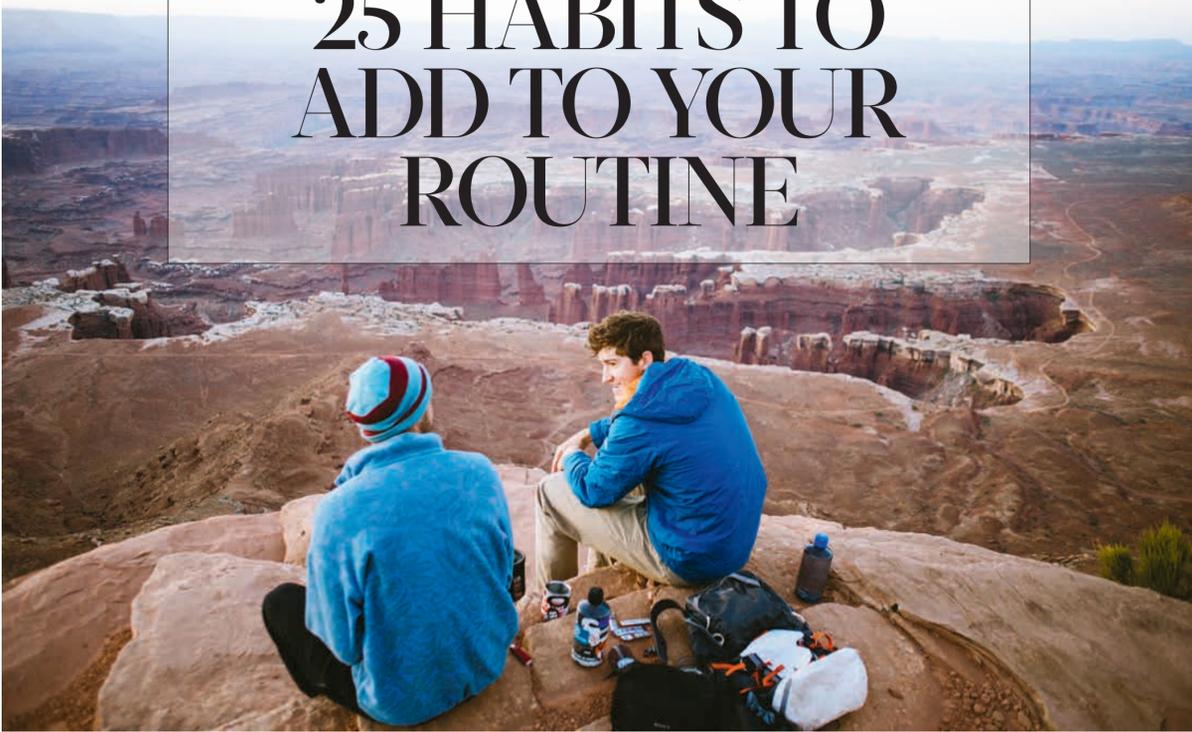
Habits can be hard to form, but they have the power to shape your life—and how you feel about it **2**

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## HOW TO BE HAPPY

## 25 HABITS TO ADD TO YOUR ROUTINE



Many habits will make you happier, including getting out into nature, spending time with friends, and exercising.

Habits can be hard to form, but they have the power to shape your life—and how you feel about it

## ANN PIETRANGELO

Happiness looks different for everyone. For you, maybe it's being at peace with who you are. Or having a secure network of friends who accept you unconditionally. Or the freedom to pursue your deepest dreams. Regardless of your version of true happiness, living a happier, more satisfying life is within reach. A few tweaks to your regular habits can help you get there.

Habits matter. If you've ever tried breaking a bad habit, you know all too well how ingrained they are. Well, good habits are deeply ingrained, too. Why not work on making positive habits part of your routine?

Here's a look at some daily, monthly, and yearly habits to help kickstart your quest. Just remember that everyone's version of happiness is a little different, and so is their path to achieving it. If some of these habits create added stress or just don't fit your lifestyle, ditch them. With a little time and practice, you'll figure out what does and doesn't work for you.

## Daily Habits

## 1. Smile

You tend to smile when you're happy. But it's actually a two-way street.

We smile because we're happy, and smiling causes the brain to release dopamine, which makes us happier.

That doesn't mean you have to go around with a fake smile plastered on your face all the time. But the next time you find yourself feeling low, crack a smile and see what happens. Or try starting each morning by smiling at yourself in the mirror.

## 2. Exercise

Exercise isn't just for your body. Regular exercise can help to reduce stress, feelings of anxiety, and symptoms of depression while boosting self-esteem and happiness.

Even a small amount of physical activity can make a difference. You don't have to train for a triathlon or scale a cliff—unless that's what makes you happy, of course.

The trick is not to overexert. If you suddenly throw yourself into a strenuous routine, you'll probably just end up frustrated (and sore). Consider these exercise starters:

- Take a walk around the block every night after dinner.
- Sign up for a beginner's class in yoga or tai chi.
- Start your day with 5 minutes of stretching. Here's a set of stretches to get you started.
- Remind yourself of any fun activities you once enjoyed, but that have fallen by the wayside. Or activities you always wanted to try, such as golf, bowling, or dancing.

## 3. Get Plenty of Sleep

No matter how much modern society steers us toward less sleep, we know that adequate sleep is vital to good health, brain function, and emo-

tional well-being.

Most adults need about 7 or 8 hours of sleep every night. If you find yourself fighting the urge to nap during the day or just generally feel like you're in a fog, your body may be telling you it needs more rest.

Here are a few tips to help you build a better sleep routine:

- Write down how many hours of sleep you get each night and how rested you feel. After a week, you should have a better idea how you're doing.
- Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day, including weekends.
- Reserve the hour before bed as quiet time. Take a bath, read, or do something relaxing. Avoid heavy eating and drinking.
- Keep your bedroom dark, cool, and quiet.
- Invest in some good bedding.
- If you have to take a nap, try to limit it to 20 minutes.

If you consistently have problems sleeping, talk to your doctor. You may have a sleep disorder requiring treatment.

## 4. Eat With Mood in Mind

You already know that food choice has an impact on your overall physical health. But some foods can also affect your state of mind.

For example:

- Carbohydrates release serotonin, a "feel good" hormone. Just keep simple carbs—foods high in sugar and starch—to a minimum, because that energy surge is short and you'll crash. Complex carbs, such as vegetables, beans, and whole grains, are better.
- Lean meat, poultry, legumes, and dairy are high in protein. These foods release dopamine and norepinephrine, which boost energy and concentration.
- Highly processed or deep-fried foods tend to leave you feeling down. So will skipping meals.

Start by making one better food choice each day.

For example, swap a big, sweet breakfast pastry for some Greek yogurt with fruit. You'll still satisfy your sweet tooth, and the protein will help you avoid a mid-morning energy crash. Try adding in a new food swap each week.

## 5. Be Grateful

Simply being grateful can give your mood a big boost, among other benefits. For example, a recent two-part study found that practicing gratitude can have a significant impact on feelings of hope and happiness.

Start each day by acknowledging one thing you're grateful for. You can do this while you're brushing your teeth or just waiting for that snoozed alarm to go off.

As you go about your day, try to keep an eye out for pleasant things in your life. They can be big things, such as knowing that someone loves you or getting a well-deserved promotion.

But they can also be little things, such as a co-worker who offered you a cup of coffee or the neighbor who waved to you. Maybe even just the warmth of the sun on your skin.

With a little practice, you may even become more aware of all the positive things around you.

## 6. Give a Compliment

Research shows that performing acts of kindness can help you feel more satisfied.

Giving a sincere compliment is a quick, easy way to brighten someone's day while giving your own

happiness a boost.

Catch the person's eye and say it with a smile so they know you mean it. You might be surprised by how good it makes you feel.

If you want to offer someone a compliment on their physical appearance, make sure to do it in a respectful way. Here are some tips to get you started.

## 7. Breathe Deeply

You're tense, your shoulders are tight, and you feel as though you just might "lose it." We all know that feeling.

Instinct may tell you to take a long, deep breath to calm yourself down.

Turns out, that instinct is a good one. According to Harvard Health, deep breathing exercises can help reduce stress.

The next time you feel stressed or at your wit's end, work through these steps:

- Close your eyes. Try to envision a happy memory or a beautiful place.
- Take a slow, deep breath in through your nose.
- Slowly breathe out through your mouth or nose.
- Repeat this process several times, until you start to feel yourself calm down.

If you're having a hard time taking slow, deliberate breaths, try counting to 5 in your head with each inhalation and exhalation.

## 8. Acknowledge the Unhappy Moments

A positive attitude is generally a good thing, but bad things happen to everyone. It's just part of life.

If you get some bad news, make a mistake, or just feel like you're in a funk, don't try to pretend you're happy.

Acknowledge the feeling of unhappiness, letting yourself experience it for a moment. Then, shift your focus toward what made you feel this way and what it might take to recover.

Would a deep breathing exercise help? A long walk outside? Talking it over with someone?

Let the moment pass and take care of yourself. Remember, no one's happy all the time.

## 9. Keep a Journal

A journal is a good way to organize your thoughts, analyze your feelings, and make plans. And you don't have to be a literary genius or write volumes to benefit.

It can be as simple as jotting down a few thoughts before you go to bed. If putting certain things in writing makes you nervous, you can always shred it when you've finished. It's the process that counts.

Not sure what to do with all the feelings that end up on the page? Our guide to organizing your feelings can help.

## 10. Face Stress Head-On

Life is full of stressors, and it's impossible to avoid all of them.

There's no need to. Stanford psychologist Kelly McGonigal says that stress isn't always harmful, and we can even change our attitudes about stress.

For those stressors you can't avoid, remind yourself that everyone has stress—there's no reason to think it's all on you. And chances are, you're stronger than you think you are.

Instead of letting yourself get overwhelmed, try to tackle the stressor head-on. This might mean initiating an uncomfortable conversation or putting in some extra work, but the sooner you tackle it, the sooner the pit in your stomach will start to shrink.

## Weekly Habits

## 11. Declutter

Decluttering sounds like a big project, but setting aside just 20 minutes a week can have a big impact.

What can you do in 20 minutes? Lots.

Set a timer on your phone and take 15 minutes to tidy up a specific area of one room—say, your closet or that out-of-control junk drawer. Put everything in its place and toss or give away any extra clutter that's not serving you anymore.

Keep a designated box for giveaways to make things a little easier (and avoid creating more clutter).

Use the remaining 5 minutes to do a quick walk through your living space, putting away whatever stray items end up in your path.

You can do this trick once a week, once a day, or anytime you feel like your space is getting out of control.

## 12. See Friends

Humans are social beings, and having close friends can make us happier.

Who do you miss? Reach out to them. Make a date to get together or simply have a long phone chat.

In adulthood, it can feel next to impossible to make new friends. But it's not about how many friends you have. It's about having meaningful relationships—even if it's just with one or two people.

Try getting involved in a local volunteer group or taking a class. Both can help to connect you with like-minded people in your area. And chances are, they're looking for friends, too.

Companionship doesn't have to be limited to other humans. Pets can offer similar benefits, according to multiple studies.

Love animals but can't have a pet? Consider volunteering at a local animal shelter to make some new friends—both human and animal.

## 13. Plan Your Week

Feel like you're flailing about? Try sitting down at the end of every week and making a basic list for the following week.

Even if you don't stick to the plan, blocking out time where you can do laundry, go grocery shopping, or tackle projects at work can help to quiet your mind.

You can get a fancy planner, but even a sticky note on your computer or piece of scrap paper in your pocket can do the job.

## 14. Ditch Your Phone

Unplug. Really.

Turn off all the electronics and put those earbuds away for at least one hour once a week. They'll still be there for you later. If you still want them, that is.

If you haven't unplugged in a while, you might be surprised at the difference it makes. Let your mind wander free for a change. Read. Meditate. Take a walk and pay attention to your surroundings. Be sociable. Or be alone. Just be.

Sound too daunting? Try doing a shorter amount of time several times a week.

## 15. Get Into Nature

Spending 30 minutes or more a week in green spaces can help lower blood pressure and depression, according to a 2016 study.

Your green space could be anything from your neighborhood park, your own backyard, or a rooftop garden—anywhere you can appreciate some nature and fresh air.

Better yet, add some outdoor exercise into the mix for extra benefit.

## 16. Explore Meditation

There are many methods of meditation to explore. They can involve movement, focus, spirituality, or a combination of all three.

Meditation doesn't have to be complicated. It can be as simple as sitting quietly with your own thoughts for 5 minutes. Even the deep breathing exercises mentioned earlier can serve as a form of meditation.

## 17. Consider Therapy

We're certainly happier when we learn how to cope with obstacles. When you're faced with a problem, think about what got you through something similar in the past. Would it work here? What else can you try?

If you feel like you're hitting a brick wall, consider speaking with a therapist on a weekly basis. You don't need to have a diagnosed mental health condition or an overwhelming crisis to seek therapy.

Therapists are trained to help people improve coping skills. Plus, there's no obligation to continue once you start.

Even just a few sessions can help you add some new goodies to your emotional toolbox.

Worried about the cost? Check out how to afford therapy on any budget.

## 18. Find a Self-Care Ritual

It's easy to neglect self-care in a fast-paced world. But your body carries your thoughts, passions, and spirit through this world, doesn't it deserve a little TLC?

Maybe it's unwinding your workweek with a long, hot bath. Or adopting a skin care routine that makes you feel indulgent. Or simply setting aside a night to put on your softest jammies and watch a movie from start to finish.

Whatever it is, make time for it. Put it in your planner if you must, but do it.

## Monthly Habits

## 19. Give Back

If you find that giving daily compliments provides a needed boost to your mood, considering making a monthly routine of giving back on a larger scale.

Maybe that's helping out at a food bank on the third weekend of every month, or offering to watch your friend's kids one night per month.

## 20. Take Yourself Out

No one to go out with? Well, what rule says you can't go out alone?

Start each day by acknowledging one thing you're grateful for.

Keeping a journal can help ensure you take the time for self reflection and that you contemplate the things in life you have to be grateful for.

If you've ever tried breaking a bad habit, you know all too well how ingrained they are.

Go to your favorite restaurant, take in a movie, or go on that trip you've always dreamed of.

Even if you're a social butterfly, spending some deliberate time alone can help you reconnect with the activities that truly make you happy.

## 21. Create a Thought List

You arrive for an appointment with 10 minutes to spare. What do you do with that time? Pick up your cell phone to scroll through social media? Worry about the busy week you have ahead of you?

Take control of your thoughts during these brief windows of time.

At the start of each month, make a short list of happy memories or things you're looking forward to on a small piece of paper or on your phone.

When you find yourself waiting for a ride, standing in line at the grocery store, or just with a few minutes to kill, break out the list. You can even use it when you're just generally feeling down and need to change up your thoughts.

## Yearly Habits

## 22. Take Time to Reflect

The start of a new year is a good time to stop and take inventory of your life. Set aside some time to catch up with yourself the way you would with an old friend:

- How are you doing?
- What have you been up to?
- Are you happier than you were a year ago?

But try to avoid the pitfall of judging yourself too harshly for your answers. You've made it to another year, and that's plenty.

If you find that your mood hasn't improved much over the last year, consider making an appointment with your doctor or talking to a therapist. You might be dealing with depression or even an underlying physical condition that's impacting your mood.

## 23. Reevaluate Your Goals

People change, so think about where you're heading and consider if that's still where you want to go. There's no shame in changing your game.

Let go of any goals that no longer serve you, even if they sound nice on paper.

## 24. Take Care of Your Body

You hear it all the time, including several times in this article, but your physical and mental health are closely intertwined.

As you build habits to improve your happiness, make sure to follow up with routine appointments to take care of your body:

- see your primary care physician for an annual physical
- take care of any chronic health conditions and see specialists as recommended
- see your dentist for an oral exam and follow up as recommended
- get your vision checked

## 25. Let Go of Grudges

This is often easier said than done. But you don't have to do it for the other person.

Sometimes, offering forgiveness or dropping a grudge is more about self-care than compassion for others.

Take stock of your relationships with others. Are you harboring any resentment or ill will toward someone? If so, consider reaching out to them in an effort to bury the hatchet.

This doesn't have to be a reconciliation. You may just need to end the relationship and move on.

If reaching out isn't an option, try getting your feelings out in a letter. You don't even have to send it to them. Just getting your feelings out of your mind and into the world can be freeing.

Ann Pietrangelo is an author, writer, and health care blogger. This article was first published on Healthline.

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## WISE HABITS

# The Universal Narrative When You Feel Unworthy



We can easily stitch together our shortcomings and mistakes into a story about our unworthiness, but we don't have to.

That story about how you're not good enough isn't worthy of your constant repetition

LEO BABAUTA

A little boy was taught he wasn't good enough by his father who criticized him, yelled at him, hit him, and left him.

The boy grew up into a man, knowing that he was unworthy of praise, of success, of love.

The boy, as an adult, got a job but didn't really think he was good enough to do the job well. He faked it, deathly afraid every single day that he would be found out, mocked, and fired. He tried not to put himself in the spotlight so no one would see his unworthiness.

But he was deathly afraid of people seeing him fail. So he held himself back, careful not to do anything where he might fail. He put off taking on tough tasks and formed a long habit of procrastination. This came to rule his life, affecting his health habits, financial habits, and relationships.

The boy, now that he was an adult, got into a couple of long-term relationships, hoping to find someone to make him happy. He didn't believe he could make them happy or get them to love the true him, because he already knew he was unworthy of love. But maybe if he was really nice to them, and only showed them the good parts of himself, they'd think he was lovable. So he never tried to be truly honest and never found true intimacy. He could only show his partner certain parts that might win him love.

And he was always ready for them to find out how bad he was and to leave him. In fact, he often left them before that could happen. If he didn't leave them, he kept himself only half in the relationship, with one foot out the door. As a result, his romantic partners never felt his full commitment, yet always wanted it.

This was true of every friendship and

professional relationship. He was never fully committed or fully honest and never showed his true self.

This is the story of Unworthiness. And it is more common than you might expect.

### My Inner Narrative of Unworthiness

One of my longest-running inner narratives is that I'm not good enough—that I'm somehow unworthy to teach, to write books, or to train people in uncertainty.

As I've worked with thousands of people in changing their lives, I've found this is one of the most common inner narratives there is.

We're unworthy. Unworthy of praise, of putting our work out there in the world, of leading a team or community, of creating something meaningful in the world. We're unworthy of success. Of happiness. Of peace. Of financial comfort. Of loving relationships. We're unworthy of love.

We're not good enough: not to tackle our toughest struggles, change our addictions, change our diet, or to start exercising.

We're not good enough to put our writing or art out in public, start a podcast, or launch our business. We're not good enough for others to recognize our accomplishments.

We're not good enough, and we're unworthy.

### The Great Secret

Here's the thing: it's all just a story, isn't it? It's a narrative in our heads that we replay, over and over, until it beats us down into submission.

We made up this story, and we pick out evidence to match the narrative. When someone says something remotely critical, we take it to heart and offer it up as

yet more proof that we're not good enough. (Of course, some people apply this selection bias in the opposite direction, making themselves always perfect and correct.)

The narrative isn't true. And worse, it hurts us in every part of our lives. It means we're never truly honest, never fully committed. It makes us anxious and afraid of failure. If we do put ourselves in public, it's a performance to prove our worthiness.

This is the universal narrative of unworthiness and it hurts us deeply.

### Unlearning the Story

So how do we stop believing this story that goes so deep we usually don't even realize it's there?

I'll share two practices that have helped me start to unravel the story, even if it still persists when I'm not being vigilant.

### The first practice: write out a mantra and repeat it.

This is something I use when my unworthiness narrative comes up around writing a book or public speaking.

When I'm writing a book, the narrative inevitably asserts itself as something like, "No one is going to find this book valuable, this is going to be terrible." It makes it much harder to write the book and I get very good at cleaning my kitchen instead of writing.

When I am supposed to give a talk, it seems fine when it's months away and I agree to it. Then I get deathly afraid as the day gets nearer. Then the flow sweats start. I start questioning my sanity: "Why did I ever say yes to this? No one is going to want to hear what you have to say."

So last year I came up with a mantra to start to see the world in a new way: "The world craves you and your gift."

I repeated this whenever I noticed my heart fluttering because of having to give a

talk, conduct a workshop or webinar, lead a course or program, or write a book or blog post. I repeated it many times: "The world craves you and your gift."

I repeat it until I start to believe it. Yes, it sounds incredibly corny. And yet, it works. I start to look for evidence of it being true. I can't hear the other story so much if this one is being told.

### The second practice: let the story dissolve.

I do this all the time, and it's absolute magic.

Here's how it works. I notice the narrative. I notice how it's making me feel—I feel crappy, I'm fearful, I'm procrastinating, I'm hiding. And then I ask myself, "What would I be like if I didn't have this story?"

This is a magical question for me. I imagine what it would be like, in this particular moment, if I didn't have this narrative. All of a sudden, I'm completely present in the moment—I notice how my body feels, I notice my surroundings, I notice the sensation of the air on my skin, the light in the room, and the sounds all around me.

All of a sudden, I'm immersed in this moment and free of the story. I'm at peace. I can open my heart. What an incredible gift it is to just drop the story and be completely present and in love with how things are, in love with myself and other people around me.

Practicing a new mantra and the magical question, the boy is gorgeously free of his old narrative and can run wildly through the jungle, joyfully alive.

Leo Babauta is the author of *six books*, the writer of "Zen Habits," a blog with over 2 million subscribers, and the creator of several online programs to help you master your habits. Visit [ZenHabits.net](http://ZenHabits.net)

## Seniors Who Feel Their Life Has Purpose May Live Longer

NATHAN ANDERSON/UNSPLASH



Researchers found that seniors with higher purpose in lives were far less likely to die before the end of the ten-year study.

of U.S. adults older than 50. The earliest participants were enrolled in the study in 1992 and were born between 1931 and 1941.

For the new study, the researchers analyzed data from 6,985 individuals who

filled out a seven-item survey in 2006. Participants were told to rate each item on the survey on a scale of one to six.

Among the seven items were: "I enjoy making plans for the future and working to make them a reality"; "My daily

activities often seem trivial to me"; "I don't have a good sense of what I'm trying to accomplish in life"; and "I live life one day at a time and don't really think about the future."

Higher scores on the survey indicated a greater purpose in life. When comparing individuals who scored lowest on the survey to those who scored highest, the researchers found that the low scorers were 2.43 times more likely to have died by the end of the study. Those with the lowest life purpose scores were 2.66 times more likely to die from heart, circulatory, and blood conditions, compared to participants with the highest scores. Those with the lowest life purpose scores were also twice as likely to die from digestive tract conditions, compared to participants with the highest scores.

Other studies have found that low life purpose scores are associated with higher levels of inflammatory markers and stress hormones, Pearce said. "And there is one study that shows that life purpose is associated with telomere length," she added.

Those life purpose scores can be changed, Pearce said. "The literature

shows that meditation or yoga can be used to help build life purpose," she explained. "And there are studies showing that volunteering can have a positive effect on well-being. So I think taking steps that affect and improve life purpose could be beneficial."

As the study suggests, volunteering can be a good strategy for those searching for life purpose, said Rick Morycz, an associate professor of psychiatry and social work at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center and a member of the board of directors at UPMC's Aging Institute.

The key, Morycz said, "may be to be more altruistic and to engage in compassionate behavior. One thing I have tried in my own clinical work helping people who are struggling is to look at ways to find their own goals and meaning in life. Part of that is suggesting that people try to help others. It doesn't have to be structured. But it has to be regular, like perhaps every Wednesday volunteering for Meals on Wheels."

By Linda Carroll

From Reuters

ORLOVA MARIA/UNSPLASH



MINIMALISM

## The Case Against Extravagant Weddings

Spending more on that special day can subtract from the life together that comes afterward

JOSHUA BECKER

According to a recent study, the average wedding cost in the U.S. is \$33,391—and that's not even including the amount spent on an engagement ring.

As you might imagine, the figures vary widely from state-to-state. Couples in New York City spend the most at \$76,944, while couples in New Mexico spend the least at \$17,584.

If that sounds like a lot of money, it is. To put that into historical perspective, wedding spending has increased 3000 percent since the 1950s. Extravagant, expensive weddings are becoming the norm.

A wedding is an important day and a significant moment in time. It signifies the day we commit the rest of our lives to another human being—to love, cherish, and honor until death do us part. It is a commitment we make in front of friends and family and often represents the joining of two families into one.

This article is, by no means, meant to downplay the importance of that special day. But we should consider if this trend to spend more and more money on weddings is a wise choice.

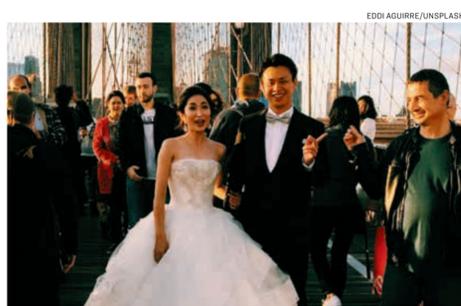
It is helpful, I think, to consider some of the negative ramifications of an expensive and extravagant wedding. Ever-increasing wedding costs are not necessary and may actually do more harm than good.

Consider the reasons:

**1. Extravagant weddings result in increased stress and distraction.** Wedding days are stressful enough—adding dozens of unnecessary frills and expenses makes them even more so.

On the other hand, a simple wedding helps keep the focus on the bride and groom rather than decorations, accommodations, and food.

**2. Expensive weddings bring financial consequences felt for years.** If you are going into debt to pay for your wedding, please don't. Financial pressures consistently rank as one of the top reasons for divorce.



EODIAGUIRRE/UNSPLASH

▲ A magical wedding dress might look great for the hour you wear it, but it doesn't feel as great as the memories of an incredible honeymoon.



The average wedding cost in the U.S. is

**\$33,391.**

**6. Extravagant weddings tend to promote (or result from) competition.** Thinking your wedding day must measure up to a purely subjective standard set by a friend or family member is a foolish way to spend your day. "Comparison is the thief of joy," Theodore Roosevelt once famously said. Allowing it to creep into your wedding day, in any fashion, is a poor choice.

Your wedding day is about you and your future spouse. Nobody else.

**7. Expensive weddings often result in shorter marriages.** Believe it or not, there is evidence that marriage duration is inversely associated with spending on the engagement ring and wedding ceremony. Couples who spend less on their ceremony are more likely to remain together longer.

In the same study, there was also connection made between the honeymoon and the marriage: Going on a honeymoon is "significantly associated with a lower hazard of divorce." Based on these stats, spending money on your honeymoon is a wiser investment than money on the ceremony.

My wedding occurred before my introduction to minimalism. And yet, it was not an extravagant one. It was big, but not expensive.

Kim and I got married at our home church in Omaha, NE, with 400-500 people in attendance. Our ceremony was not flashy but included many beautiful elements you would assume to be present at a traditional church wedding service. For our reception, we served sandwiches, cake, and punch. If I could do it over, there's not a single thing I would change.

Not a single day of our lives have we looked back and regretted not spending more on our wedding. But I know many couples who look back and regret the amount of money they wasted on their ceremony.

If you'd like a simple wedding, here are some helpful ideas to get you started:

- Set a budget (and stick to it).
- Choose elements that are important to you, but limit the number. Try fewer flowers, simpler decorations, or less food choices. You can keep many of the traditional elements (if that is your style) without needing to go over the top with any of them.
- Don't shell out big money for expensive accommodations. A simple church building can be just as beautiful as an expensive wedding chapel. And if the time of year permits, a backyard can easily host an intimate, informal, unforgettable reception with little expense.
- Look for personal touches. A wedding ceremony that communicates your unique personalities and/or time together will always be considered more thoughtful by your guests than expensive add-ons bought at the bridal store.
- Realize the wedding industry is built entirely on convincing you that you need "x." There are entire stores, catalogs, and websites in business today working tirelessly to convince you that you need x or y in order for your wedding to be perfect. They are wrong. You don't need anything—except for maybe official paperwork from your state and a few witnesses to sign the document.
- Enjoy your simple, precious day focused on the things that matter most.

Marital happiness has nothing to do with your wedding ceremony. It has everything to do with the weeks and years of your life together afterward.

That's why the simplest weddings are often the happiest.

Joshua Becker is an author, public speaker and the founder and editor of *Becoming Minimalist* where he inspires others to live more by owning less. Visit [BecomingMinimalist.com](http://BecomingMinimalist.com)

## Easy, Natural Allergy Relief

Help your body keep allergies at bay with natural remedies

MELISSA CARR

If allergy season has you sneezing, sniffing, or rubbing your eyes, here are some simple things that can help ease your symptoms.

**1. Reduce Exposure to Allergens in the Home** I hate cleaning, but dusting and vacuuming your home regularly can help to get rid of allergens like pet hair, dust, pollen, and pollutants. Vinegar can help to prevent mold from building on surfaces that get wet and humid, such as windowsills.

### 2. Rinse Your Nasal Passages

Allergen irritants can be rinsed out of your nasal passages using a simple warm saline solution. There are many tools you can choose from to do so, including traditional neti pots, small sprouted squeeze bottles, and specially made devices like the Nasaline syringe.

### 3. Drink Tea

Histamines are released during an allergic reaction. Green tea and chamomile tea both contain natural antihistamines that can help the immune system. But avoid chamomile if you have ragweed allergies.

### 4. Avoid Foods That Irritate the Immune System

According to Traditional Chinese Medicine, foods that produce mucus and dampness can exacerbate allergies. Those foods include dairy, too many cold and raw foods, and too many simple sugars. With this in mind, you can see that ice cream is the ultimate evil. Other potential immune system irritants are common food allergens like corn, citrus, peanuts, soy, shellfish, wheat, and nightshade vegetables, such as tomatoes, peppers, and eggplants. This doesn't mean that all these foods are bad for you, but they are ones to keep an eye on and limit or avoid when your allergies flare.

### 5. Eat Foods That Help Boost the Immune System

Leafy green veggies are your friends. Berries and cherries help balance the body's immune and inflammatory response. Remember to wash your foods well to remove chemical and pesticide residues. Eat more foods rich in omega-3 essential fatty acids, including flaxseed, wild salmon, and fish oil supplements. Choose whole grains instead of processed grains, such as brown rice rather than white rice. Choose sprouted grain bread instead of flour-based bread for easier digestion. Choose ancient grains like quinoa, amaranth, millet, and spelt instead of only wheat. Use spices like turmeric, garlic, oregano, basil, horseradish, and white pepper, organic whenever possible.

### 6. Stay Hydrated

Water is important to keep the sinuses hydrated and essential for proper lymphatic drainage. Drink fluids at room temperature or warmer (try squirting some lemon juice into warm water for a hydration boost).

### 7. Try Self-Acupressure Massage

Make sure you wash your hands first so as not to add more allergens from your hands to your nose. The acupressure point "Welcome Fragrance" is positioned on either side of the nostrils, where the nose and cheek meet. Use your index fingers to press those points for two to three minutes while taking slow, deep breaths.

### 8. Consider Traditional Chinese Medicine

Acupuncture and Chinese herbs can help treat allergies. In a study published in the journal *Allergy* in 2004, patients suffering from allergic rhinitis were treated with acupuncture and herbs, and those with hay fever symptoms showed "significant after-treatment improvement."

Melissa Carr is a registered doctor of traditional Chinese medicine and began her career in health with a bachelor's degree in human kinetics. This article was first published on [NaturallySavvy.com](http://NaturallySavvy.com)



NISHIHAMA/SHUTTERSTOCK

Green tea and chamomile tea both contain natural antihistamines.

# Adverse Effects of ANTIPSYCHOTIC DRUGS in Children

Rising rates of drugs are being prescribed to children for diseases they weren't designed to treat



Only 2.8 percent of children prescribed antipsychotic drugs were being treated for psychosis. The other 97.2 percent had behavioral symptoms deemed unacceptable by the school, family, or both.

KELLY BROGAN

We've all wished for it at one time or another. It may have been with your son who can't sit still in school, your niece who was throwing a temper tantrum, or a child who wouldn't stop crying on that redeye flight. Wouldn't it be nice to pull out a tranquilizer dart and "poof" turn that little Tasmanian devil into a calm, quiet, sleeping beauty?

That idea is not far from reality. Tranquilizer darts often contain antipsychotic drugs, which are increasingly prescribed to our children. From 1993 to 2002, the number of office-based visits that included an antipsychotic drug increased more than 500 percent.

As a parent desperate for answers, reaching for a quick fix pill can be tempting. But what is the cost?

## Adult Side Effects of Antipsychotic Drugs

Our collective focus on the quick fix makes it easy to ignore the long-term impact of a drug-based intervention. We have data showing that antipsychotic drugs cause high blood sugar, excess fat accumulation around the waist, low levels of good cholesterol (HDL), high levels of triglycerides, and increased blood pressure in adults.

Having three out of these five risk factors means that you have something called the metabolic syndrome. Basically, this is a fancy term that means you are at an increased risk of developing diabetes, heart disease and stroke.

## The field of psychiatry is experiencing an institutionalized form of cognitive dissonance.

Longitudinal studies have shown that up to 52.4 percent of schizophrenic patients who start an antipsychotic drug will develop metabolic syndrome within the first three months of treatment.

However, the vast majority of this data comes from studies done on adults. What about children? Surprisingly, even though these drugs are being prescribed to young people, we don't have much data on the long-term consequences.

## Recent Study Sheds Light

A recent study suggests children face the same risks as adults from these drugs. Children between the ages of six and eighteen were randomized into three groups. Each group was given one of the following 'second-generation' antipsychotic drugs: olanzapine, risperidone, or aripiprazole. All subjects had behavior problems and at least one psychiatric di-

## Research that shows psychiatric drugs in a negative light often gets swept under the rug.

The volume of antipsychotic drugs being prescribed to children has skyrocketed.

agnosis, such as ADHD. None had ever taken antipsychotic drugs before.

At the conclusion of the twelve-week study, all three groups showed behavioral change. However, all three groups also showed significant negative side effects. Subjects showed increased resistance to insulin, putting them at higher risk for early onset diabetes. They also showed an increase in body fat with specific increases deep within the abdomen around the organs. It may seem trivial to include this specific bit of information.

## Fat Is Fat ... Right?

One of the fascinating developments in our understanding of chronic disease is that the anatomical distribution of fat matters. To sum up a still-developing story, fat distributed in the abdomen around the organs (visceral fat) is much more dangerous than fat just below the skin (subcutaneous fat). Thus, two people with the same amount of body fat may have very different health risks based on where their fat is stored. In short, excess body fat is a risk factor for disease, but if that fat is distributed in the visceral region, it confers an additional independent risk for cardiovascular disease, diabetes, certain cancers, high blood pressure, and abnormal cholesterol.

More disturbingly, researchers hypothesized that their study "likely underestimates longer-term treatment effects" because these negative changes are often progressive over the first year of treatment. For those of you who don't like math, what they're saying is that they only looked at the score in the first quarter, not at the end of the game. The real long-term risks of obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, are probably much greater than those detailed in this short three-month study. Further, children are "physically and emotionally more vulnerable to the adverse effects (of antipsychotic drugs) because of their smaller size, developing physiology, and negative impact on peer perceptions." To answer our previous question, children are not more resilient to the adverse effects of antipsychotic drugs, they are more susceptible.

These results are not particularly shocking. They confirm that what is bad for adults is also bad for children—actually worse.

## Why Are These Drugs Given to Children in the First Place?

In the pediatric population, the majority of antipsychotic drugs are actually not given to treat psychosis, as the name implies. Surprisingly, they are generally prescribed to treat behavioral disorders. For example, only 2.8 percent of the subjects in this study actually had symptoms consistent with psychosis (some further percentage of whom were likely already treated with a stimulant known to induce psychosis). The remaining 97.2 percent had behavioral symptoms deemed unacceptable by the school, family, or both.

Use of antipsychotic drugs in this manner is largely not approved by the FDA due to "insufficient evidence of safety and efficacy." So why is there a growing trend to prescribe them when they are

not approved by the FDA and studies are mounting showing severe negative side effects?

## Do We Really Practice Evidence-Based Medicine?

Robert Whitaker, a medical journalist, and author writes that the field of psychiatry is experiencing an institutionalized form of cognitive dissonance—a conflicted psychological state that occurs when new information challenges deeply held beliefs. In the context of this article, long-held beliefs about the safety and efficacy of antipsychotic drugs are being challenged by new data showing their dangerous side effects and overall ineffectiveness. In general, people resolve this conflicted state "by sifting through information in ways that protect their self-esteem and their financial interests."

Psychiatry, as an institution, is doing just that. Sifting through data to suit their needs. Research that shows psychiatric drugs in a negative light often gets swept under the rug as being biased, of poor quality, or otherwise uninformed. There is little acceptance for anything that goes against that status quo. The goal is no longer to seek better treatment protocols but to protect the power, prestige, and financial interests of the psychiatric institution. Unfortunately, in this state, evidence-based medicine cannot be practiced.

As Upton Sinclair famously stated, "It is difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends on his not understanding it."

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INTEGRATIVE HEALTH CARE SOLUTIONS

# A Missing Focus on Prevention Makes US Health Care Unsustainable

Who pays for health care is secondary to having care that actually preserves health, avoids unnecessary disease

JINGDUAN YANG

Fifty years ago, President Richard Nixon declared that the U.S. health care system faced a massive crisis, warning that without prompt administrative and legislative action, the system would break down.

Since then, almost every administration has repeated a similar statement, using such terms as "unsustainable" and promising revolutionary changes.

## A Nonexistent Health Care System

Perhaps the reason that we have been muddling along for decades with an unsustainable health

care system, perpetually in crisis, is that we have misnamed the entity we are talking about. The United States really has no "health care system." What we do have, rather, is an illness and injury care system. One typically sees a doctor only when one is sick—sick enough for doctors to prescribe medication, further lab tests, or investigative procedures.

By the same token, Americans don't have health care insurance, but rather sickness care insurance. That term better describes our situation, in which you pay insurance premiums for benefits that manifest only when you have lost your health by becoming sick or injured.

The American health care system is stuck in crisis response mode, costing billions to treat diseases that could have been prevented and billions more taking care of its own mistakes.

The way out of our seemingly interminable crisis in health care is to actually focus on health care. We need to establish public health policies that help people avoid disease and promote health as an upstream initiative. At the same time, we should encourage healthy lifestyles and natural medicines that prevent disease and foster health as a midstream effort, while preserving the best aspects of our current pharmaceutical-and-surgery-based crisis intervention and disease care system as downstream medicine.

## Downstream Medicine Is Costly

Our current system emphasizes downstream medicine, practi-

cally to the exclusion of personal health maintenance and disease prevention. It focuses on treating the results of health problems and deals with symptom control and lifesaving most of the time. It's, therefore, very costly. How costly? According to Peterson-Kaiser Health System Tracker, Americans pay more, way more, than residents of any other country on earth. In 2017, per capita, health consumption expenditures in the United States were more than \$10,224. By comparison, the average expenditures for other wealthy countries were about half that, or \$5,280.

Continued on Page 8

## East Acupuncture

### Dr. Ping H Liou

Chinese Medicine Acupuncturist, Pharmacist



Born in a family of traditional Chinese medicine, Liou studied at Chengdu University of Traditional Chinese Medicine under famous doctors Benshu Diao and Yuqin Lai, has been practicing Chinese medicine for 13 years. Liou is expert in comprehensive treatment combining acupuncture and medicine.

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INTEGRATIVE HEALTH CARE SOLUTIONS

# A Missing Focus on Prevention Makes US Health Care Unsustainable



Continued from Page 7

In terms of our national economy, national health expenditures have grown to 17.9 percent of GDP in 2016 from 6.9 percent in 1970, according to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. It is estimated that by 2026, health care spending will reach 19.7 percent of GDP, or \$5.7 trillion. Since 1970, U.S. health care costs have risen an average of 17.5 percent every year. What would we have done if energy costs had risen as much over the same period?

What makes it a sad situation is that 30 to 34 percent of health care costs are due to unneeded and wasteful spending in administration and operations, as well as clinical services.

**Downstream Medicine Worse Than Costly**  
You may imagine that such costs are worthwhile, that they reflect better health for the typical American than that of the typical foreigner. But you would be wrong, dead wrong. The U.S. mortality rate is the highest of all comparable countries, as is our disease burden and rates of medical, medication, and lab errors (which are addressed below). Hospital admissions for preventable diseases such as congestive heart failure, asthma, and diabetes are also more frequent in the United States than in comparable countries. This underscores the lack of attention we pay to prevent disease and maintain health—a misplaced focus that results in higher costs and worse overall health.

**Adverse Drug Reactions**  
What lays behind the high cost and poor performance of American medicine? The prominence played by drugs and surgery in our sickness system accounts for much of the misery.

While prescribed medications have helped many patients relieve their pain and disabilities, the cost borne by these patients is enormous. And it's not just money; many patients pay with their lives.

**The United States really has no 'health care system.' What we do have, rather, is an illness and injury care system.**

Studies of hospitalized patients have estimated that as many as 106,000 U.S. residents die annually because of adverse drug reactions (ADRs), which occur when patients have unpredictable reactions to correctly prescribed medications. By comparison, about 6,000 Americans die each year because of workplace accidents. If those estimates are accurate, then ADRs represent the country's fourth-leading cause of death—ahead of pulmonary disease, diabetes, AIDS, pneumonia, accidents, and automobile deaths. In economic terms, one study estimated the annual cost of drug-related morbidity and mortality at \$136 billion, which is more than the total annual cost of cardiovascular or diabetic care.

The American crisis of ADRs has many causes, but the vast availability of drugs and the propensity of medical personnel to prescribe them are fundamental. In 2000, U.S. medical personnel wrote more than 2.8 billion prescriptions, or approximately 10 per person. Two-thirds of patient visits result in a prescription, and ADRs increase exponentially when a patient is taking four or more medications.

**Medical Practice Errors**  
Physicians are humans, and humans make

mistakes. But in the context of downstream medicine, the consequences of mistakes are far more dire than they would be if our focus was on preventing disease and maintaining health. For example, reports show that U.S. surgeons operate on the wrong part of the body 40 times per week. According to a recent study by the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, more than 250,000 people in the United States die every year because of medical mistakes, a figure that represents about 10 percent of all U.S. deaths and is the third-leading cause of death, after heart disease and cancer.

**Physicians who depend solely on prescribing medications to help their patients must reevaluate the role they play in their patients' health care.**

According to a study reported in the "Journal of Patient Safety," however, the number of deaths from medical errors may be as high as 440,000. The reason for the 76 percent difference is that physicians, funeral directors, coroners, and medical examiners rarely note medical errors or system failures as causes of death. In addition, diagnostic errors affect at least 12 million patients a year, with 4 million suffering serious harm. For example, hospital-acquired infections cause about 80,000 deaths per year in the United States.

In economic terms, medical errors cost Americans up to \$29 billion per year, with outpatient medication errors costing Americans \$4.2 billion annually. In outpatient settings, medical errors resulted in an additional 1.4 million office visits. Meanwhile, in the operating room, more than 4,000 preventable surgical errors occur annually, resulting in \$1.3 billion just for malpractice payouts.

**What to Do?**  
Without addressing the root causes of illness and providing advice on lifestyle modifications, our focus on medication and surgery alone can only mask symptoms and remove diseased body parts, even when it works. Physicians who depend solely on prescribing medications to help their patients must re-evaluate the role they play in their patients' health care. We have every reason to believe that Americans should have better health care outcomes than residents of other countries who pay far less and get much more.

How do we fix the U.S. health care system problem? The first step will require us to refocus the national debate. The issue of who pays for health care is secondary to fixing the structure of our system. Our primary attention needs to be on how to elevate the priority of more effectively delivering preventative care. By keeping more people healthy, and catching any issues in their early stages, we can shift the size of the burden that we currently place on emergency care. We can also avoid totally preventable diseases and debilitating conditions. Through these changes, we'll reduce our reliance on very expensive hospital and emergency room care, as well as drastically improve the quality of life for all.

*Dr. Jingdun Yang is a neurologist, psychiatrist, and an expert in acupuncture, Chinese medicine, and integrative medicine. He founded Yang Institute of Integrative Medicine, Tao Clinic of Acupuncture, and American Institute for Clinical Acupuncture. Dr. Yang co-authored two books: "Facing East: Ancient Health and Beauty Secrets for the Modern Age" and "Clinical Acupuncture and Ancient Chinese Medicine."*

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Medicine that truly aims to care for health is cheaper, safer to administer, and can help patients avoid painful diseases and treatments.

ELEVATE AND INSPIRE

# Battling Depression by Running Through It

Woman who slipped into deep depression after several friends, family died ran her way to a better state

ANDREW THOMAS

**C**linical depression, also known as major depressive disorder, can make even the most routine aspects of daily life unbearably difficult. A chemical imbalance in the brain and environmental factors, such as the loss of a loved one, can either cause or exacerbate the condition.

One woman who contended with both found the best way to deal with her depression was to run away from it.

Nita Sweeney suffered not one, but multiple tragic losses within the span of a single year. She had already been struggling with depression since 1994, but 2007 was hellacious.

First, her niece who had been ill with osteosarcoma, a bone cancer, passed away in February 2007.

"It really threw me for a loop, just because it felt so wrong," Sweeney told The Epoch Times.

**A Tragic Series of Events**

The second blow came when Sweeney's husband's friend passed away from pancreatic cancer in May 2007. In August, the third wave came when Sweeney's father-in-law passed away. Then, in September, her niece's father passed away. To make matters worse, her niece's cat Theo also died.

October was a rough month as well, after her mother's ex-boyfriend passed away from lung cancer. Then, her mother's best friend died in November after sustaining a head injury. To end the year, Sweeney's mother died from surgical complications on Dec. 30, 2007.

Sweeney's depression quickly spiraled downward during and after 2007. She found herself having difficulty getting out of bed in the morning and showering. She also found herself overeating, irritable, and struggling to focus. Everyday tasks became unbearable.

For instance, Sweeney had been attending graduate school to get her master's degree in creative writing and she noticed that the depression was affecting her work. She was trying to bind her thesis together, and became overwhelmed trying to put the pages in the binder.

"I just remember that moment of feeling everything is so hard. I just don't know if I can do this anymore," Sweeney recalled.

**Running Therapy**

In late 2009, Sweeney saw a friend's social media post about a program called "Couch to 5K" and how running had become fun for her. She saw the post, and realized that she was the same age as her friend and about the same size.

"It planted a seed in the back of my mind," Sweeney explained.

Once spring arrived and the days became warmer, Sweeney committed herself to start running. She put on old hiking shoes, sweatpants, and a sweatshirt. She thought that she couldn't do it by herself, so she decided to take her Labrador with her.

Sweeney walked out her front door, and realized she didn't want anyone to see her. She went down into a ravine, and ran 60-second sets with five-minute intervals. She ran three times a week, and increased the intensity of her workout over time.

Within a few weeks, she was running faster and faster. After about six months, she was running 5K races.

"I could sort of see my progress, and that, for me, helped. That was a little bit of a sense of achievement," Sweeney explained.

**Runner's High**

Now when Sweeney is running, she feels like she's flying. The first mile is always the hardest, but after that, the running takes over.

Running gives Sweeney a sense of accomplishment and self-worth. Physically, she experiences what is called a "runner's high," where everything feels a bit lighter for her.

By Oct. 12, 2012, Sweeney was running her first marathon in Columbus, Ohio. At first, she was fearful that she wouldn't finish. But when she turned the last corner and saw the finish line, she took off.

"We turned that corner and it was just like somebody shot me full of adrenaline, and I started sprinting," Sweeney remembered.

In fact, she crossed the finish line and completely passed by her friends who were holding a "Go Nita" sign.



Nita Sweeney (L) after the 2012 Columbus Marathon. COURTESY OF SUE NIVAM

To date, Sweeney has run three full marathons, 26 half-marathons, and 60 shorter races. While Sweeney continues to battle depression, running has immensely helped her contend with it.

Her book, entitled "Depression Hates a Moving Target: How Running with My Dog Brought Me Back from the Brink," recounts her experience battling depression, and how running has become an effective tool to contend with the condition.

Sweeney says isn't stopping anytime soon, and was to run another half-marathon in Cleveland, on May 19.

"I always like to be training for a race. I like to have that thing in the future to work for."



Nita Sweeney (L) running with her friend Julie DeBord during the 2012 Columbus Marathon. COURTESY OF MARATHONFOTO

# Treating Dementia With Creative Expression

Creative art therapies can help people with dementia socialize and express their grief

JOANNA JAANISTE

**P**eople with dementia can flourish and show creativity in ways they, their caregivers, and loved ones never thought possible. Under the guidance of a trained therapist, creative arts therapies use painting, drama, dance, and music to help improve quality of life for people with dementia.

Around 50 million people worldwide have dementia and it's on the rise. The condition affects the brain and can result in memory loss and inability to carry out everyday activities, recognize faces, or remember words.

Every person with dementia has a different experience of the disease and their own life stories. This is where creative arts therapies come in.

**What Are Creative Arts Therapies?**  
Each art therapy has its own way of engaging the imagination.

- Art therapy brings imagery and self-awareness to people, some of whom don't think they can make art. Participants work with paints and clay and have the opportunity to extend their world with color.
- Drama therapy uses performance, role play, and improvisation to recreate memories, encourage problem-solving, and re-awaken social skills.
- Dance-movement therapy engages rhythm and body gesture, helping integrate the mind and spirit, and enabling nonverbal communication.
- Music therapy can help ground anxious participants, allow tolerance for tension, and ease the expression of joy and sadness.

**What Can These Therapies Do?**

Coming together to play music or sing increases social interaction and communication. It also reduces the risk of social withdrawal, and can also help reduce depression.

Drama therapy can improve quality of life for people with dementia by awakening memories and

**Creative arts therapies can play an important role in reducing the overuse of drug interventions.**

Creating art, working on crafts, singing, playing music, and other creative outlets provide a drug-free way to reduce depression among seniors suffering dementia.



LAUPO SMOKOVSKI/SHUTTERSTOCK

helping patients "work through" troubling issues from their past. It helped one study participant, for example, let go of an obsessive memory of being emotionally abused by a teacher at the age of 9, even a year after the drama therapy ended.

Drama therapy can also help people with dementia to cope with grief, loss, and cognitive and physical decline.

In terms of visual arts, research shows participation in art therapy results in significant improvements in mood and cognition, which last long after the sessions have finished.

One such program in Western Australia encourages indigenous Noongar elders to make dolls, sharing birthing stories from a time when birthing happened on reserves, in missions, or under the stars because mothers weren't allowed to give birth in a hospital in their part of the country.

Finally, dance-movement therapy stimulates many of the senses and exercises both the body and mind. An important role of these therapies is to help older people reflect on the final stages of life and express their grief about losing friends and loved ones.

**Alternative to Medical Intervention**

Hearings of the aged care Royal commission have begun to focus on how to improve the quality of life for older people with dementia and reducing the overuse of drug interventions. This is possible—and creative arts therapies can play an important role.

We still need further research with greater numbers of participants to continue to rigorously evaluate creative arts therapies. But so far, we know these therapies are a safe and holistic way to deliver a level of creativity and calm to people with dementia in aged care.

Joanna Jaaniste is a career development fellow at Western Sydney University in Australia. This article was first published on The Conversation.

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# People Eat More on Diets High in Ultra-Processed Foods

Researchers suggest that processed foods lead to weight gain because they are less satiating and calorie dense

ELIZABETH PRATT

If you eat a diet high in ultra-processed foods, odds are you're eating more than you would with an unprocessed diet.

Researchers have long suspected a link between ultra-processed foods and the obesity epidemic.

Now, in a report published in the journal "Cell Metabolism," experts have undertaken the first randomized controlled trial comparing differences in calorie consumption between unprocessed and ultra-processed diets.

Even when the two diets in the trial were matched for things such as fat content, participants on the ultra-processed diet still ate more food and gained more weight.

"Because the meals were designed to be matched for carbohydrates, fat, sugar, salt, and calories, I suspected we would find little difference between them in terms of overall calorie intake or weight change," Kevin Hall, lead author of the study and a section chief in the Laboratory of Biological Modeling at the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases within the National Institutes of Health (NIH), told Healthline.

However, Hall said researchers observed that the ultra-processed diet increased calorie intake by about 500 calories per day.

"This was a surprise," Hall said. He said the consumption of ultra-processed foods has been associated with obesity and poor health in observational studies, but there's never been a randomized controlled trial testing whether processed foods actually cause overeating or weight gain.

"Most nutrition studies focus on the nutrient content of foods, so I was skeptical about whether the processing of foods has any importance apart from their nutrient content," Hall said. "We thought it was important to conduct the first [randomized controlled trial] where subjects were exposed to ultra-processed diets versus unprocessed diets, matched for a variety of nutrients to see if ultra-processed foods caused overeating and weight gain."

**Eating More Ultra-Processed Food**  
In undertaking the research, Hall and his team enlisted 20 healthy volunteers, who were admitted to the NIH's Metabolic Clinical Research Unit for one month.

The participants were allocated either an ultra-processed diet or unprocessed diet for two weeks, then switched.

They ate three meals a day and were given bottled water and snacks that were either ultra-processed or unprocessed. Participants could eat as much as they wanted and the quantities of all that they ate were measured.

The NOVA food classification system, which categorizes foods based on how much they've been processed, was used by the researchers to choose foods for the participants.

On the ultra-processed diet, participants were given Honey Nut Cheerios, whole milk with added fiber, and a blueberry muffin with margarine for breakfast.

The participants who ate an unprocessed diet



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“In these busy times, people often go for fast and easy.”

Lauri Wright, assistant professor, University of South Florida

were given a parfait with strawberries, banana, walnuts, salt, olive oil, Greek yogurt, and apple slices with a squeeze of lemon.

After two weeks of eating an ultra-processed diet, participants gained an average of two pounds. Those on the unprocessed diet had an average weight loss of two pounds.

**Researchers observed that the ultra-processed diet increased calorie intake by about 500 calories per day.**

Dana Hunnes, a senior dietitian at the University of California Los Angeles Medical Center, said the research results aren't surprising. "Ultra-processed diets tend to have foods in them that are more calorically dense and with less water content, making each individual food less satiating and satisfying," she told Healthline. "To achieve the same satiation in the stomach—or sense of fullness—which may have more to do with volume than calorie intake, it would make sense that more of the calorically dense foods would be eaten (and therefore more calories) than when eating an unprocessed diet."

**Why You Eat More**

The researchers hypothesized a few reasons why the participants on an ultra-processed diet ate more food.

One reason is the speed they ate at. "People ate the ultra-processed food faster, and this may have contributed to overeating," Hall said.

Kristin Kirkpatrick, a licensed, registered dietitian and manager of wellness nutrition services at the Cleveland Clinic Wellness Institute in Ohio, says people need to be mindful of how quickly they eat.

"Many studies cite chewing longer and mindfulness as effective tactics for weight loss," she told Healthline. "Eating fast obviously means eating more—more food, more calories, and too much fuel at the end of the day that can't be burned off, which results in abundant energy still there before you go to bed."

Researchers acknowledge that a notable limitation to the study was that all food given to participants was prepared by someone else. This doesn't consider convenience or cost of foods eaten, which are common reasons a person may choose something ultra-processed.

"Processed food is quick, and, in these busy times, people often go for fast and easy," Lauri Wright, an assistant professor in public health at the University of South Florida, told Healthline.

"Ultra-processed foods often have high amounts of sugar, sodium, and fat. Examples of these foods to avoid include chips, hot dogs, instant soups, soft drinks, and packaged baked goods," she said.

**What You Can Do**

Not all processed foods are bad. Wright says some minimally processed foods can be helpful for busy people.

"Any time we cook, bake, or prepare food, we're processing food," she said. "Minimally processed food can actually help you eat more nutrient-dense foods. Milk and juices are sometimes fortified with calcium and vitamin D, and breakfast cereals may have added fiber. Canned fruit is a good option when fresh fruit isn't available. Some minimally processed food such as pre-cut vegetables and pre-washed spinach are quality convenience foods for busy people."

If you want to minimize your intake of processed food, aim to do more food prep and cooking at home.

"Base your meals on whole foods, including vegetables, beans, and whole grains," Wright said. "Eating processed food in moderation is fine, but avoid those with a lot of added sugar, fat, and sodium."

Elizabeth Pratt is a freelance journalist. This article was first published on Healthline.com



# Brain Training May Help You Form Stronger Memories

Researchers look at how we can put the 'feel-good hormone' to use in raising memory retention

SHAWN RADCLIFFE

Dopamine is often known as the "feel-good hormone," but it's much more than that.

This neurotransmitter earned its nickname because when we anticipate a reward—like winning a game or falling in love—dopamine levels increase, giving us a feeling of euphoria and bliss.

But research has also found that dopamine is essential for the formation of episodic memories, such as what you had for dinner last night or where you parked your car at the mall. This provides insights into potential new treatments for memory disorders.

One treatment option would be to use medications that increase dopamine in the brain, either directly or indirectly. Another is deep brain stimulation of the neurons that produce dopamine.

But those looking for a less invasive version may have another option: brain training.

Researchers are now investigating the effect that brain training games have on dopamine, learning, and memory.

**Unexpected Rewards Boost Memory**  
In a recent study, a team led by researchers from Brown University found that in certain situations, unexpected rewards boost the formation of episodic memories.

The study was published earlier this month in Nature Human Behavior.

In psychological research, this kind of better-than-expected outcome is known as a reward-prediction error. These involve the release of dopamine in certain parts of the brain.

In the study, researchers tested the link between reward-prediction errors, learning, and memory by asking people to play an online game.

During the first—or learning—phase of the game, people bet on whether they would win the reward shown at the start of the round. The chance of winning was tied to an image that appeared after the potential reward.

People's guesses were based on feedback from previous rounds. The likelihood of an image category being associated with a win remained the same for many rounds but changed at certain points in the game.

During the memory phase of the game, people were asked to identify images they had seen during the learning phase. These were mixed in with new, but similar, images.

Researchers found that people were better at

remembering images from rounds in which they accepted a risky gamble.

Memories were also stronger when the images caused a stronger reward-prediction error—when there was a larger difference between the expected reward before and after the image was seen.

Memory benefits showed up within five minutes after the learning task. Similar research done in mice found that it took 24 hours for memories to form.

The findings occurred within the context of a computer game. But these kinds of unexpected rewards also occur in real life—such as stumbling upon a new favorite coffee shop or finding a great deal on a new car.

**Dopamine Makes Moments More Vivid**

Ken Berridge, a professor of psychology and neuroscience at the University of Michigan, said the results support the authors' view that activating dopamine neurons 'stamps in' learning at that moment.

"It's a kind of learning or teaching signal that creates a memory," said Berridge.

He pointed to earlier research that focused on norepinephrine, a neurotransmitter that's active in the amygdala, a part of the brain involved in processing memories.

"That research showed that you could enhance the memory of a moment, primarily by activating norepinephrine to the amygdala," said Berridge, "like creating a flashbulb memory where the world is brighter, where you remember that moment very vividly."

He said that although dopamine and norepinephrine are involved in different pathways in the brain, their effect is similar—by making a moment more exciting or more vivid enhances memory formation.

Dr. Alison Adcock, an associate professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Duke University, said dopamine acts like a gateway between experience and memory.

Memory isn't just a "tape recorder of the things that happen to you," she said. "It's really about making memories of things that are most important and have relevance to future behavior."

She said this happens both through attention and through basic memory mechanisms, including dopamine's actions in the brain.

The authors of the new study plan on repeating the experiment with people with depression. People with this illness often have imbalances of dopamine and other neurotransmitters.

Study author Matt Nassar, an assistant profes-



New experiences stimulate the neurotransmitters that help us form memories.

**Lower levels of dopamine in the brain are associated with symptoms of ADHD.**



**Making a moment more exciting or more vivid enhances memory formation.**

sor of neuroscience at Brown University, said in a statement that this can affect how well people with depression form new memories—they may remember negative events better than positive ones.

**Memory Problems Associated With Illnesses**

Parkinson's disease is another illness caused by a shortage of dopamine in the brain. This leads to body tremors and movement problems. But it can also affect a person's memory.

"People with Parkinson's disease have memory problems because they don't have enough dopamine to help them lay down new memories," said Dr. Cheryl Kennedy, a professor of psychiatry at Rutgers New Jersey Medical School in Newark.

People will usually be able to recall old memories, but they may not remember what they ate for breakfast.

Kennedy said this is because "the retrieval of old memories is different from laying down new memories."

The goal of the new study wasn't to test a brain training game that could be used in the clinic. It was to understand how unexpected rewards affect memory.

Adcock's lab, though, is testing a brain training game designed for people with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Some studies have found that lower levels of dopamine in the brain are associated with symptoms of ADHD. Medications used for ADHD may work by stimulating the production of dopamine.

Adcock's work is focused on using brain training to activate dopamine neurons on the midbrain—and seeing if this can prime learning.

But results from this study won't be available for another couple of years.

The effects of dopamine on memory are not just about turning experiences into "flashbulb" moments.

Dopamine also encourages people to seek out new experiences that could become memories—a function that's impaired in both depression and ADHD.

"Dopamine is critically important to that kind of exploratory behavior, or flexibly adapting to what's happening in the environment," said Adcock. "If you sit in one place, you're not going to make memories because nothing's happening."

Shawn Radcliffe is a freelance health and science writer. This article was first published on Healthline.

# Feeling Old? How Vitamin B12 Might Help

DEVON ANDRE

Sometimes you can feel "old" and have no idea why. It could be a little extra fatigue, some confusion, or a difficult lack of strength that you chalk up to age.

These things can creep up slowly, after all, making them difficult to notice. But what if it's not just normal aging? Sometimes, there is an underlying reason you're feeling this way.

It's estimated that 20 percent of people over 60 have low levels of vitamin B12. Many likely have no idea. It's not the first thing that may come to your doctor's mind when you report symptoms such as fatigue, weakness, or disorientation.

Vitamin B12 plays an important role in several essential bodily processes, including red blood cell production, nerve function, and making DNA. Because of its reach and versatility, deficiency can show up in several seemingly unrelated ways. Some signs you could be low include:

- Fatigue
- Weakness



HALFPOINT/SHUTTERSTOCK

Age is an important number, but sometimes the more important number is the amount of B12 a person absorbs.

- Shortness of breath
- Constipation
- Tingling in numbness in the hands or feet
- Memory loss
- Disorientation
- Paranoia
- Irritability

To hit vitamin B12 targets, people need to absorb 2.4 micrograms per day. This, for most people, is relatively easy to meet, the exceptions being vegans, vegetarians, and people who limit animal product intake. The primary sources of B12 are dairy, meat, fish, and eggs. But people over 60 are at risk because they don't always adequately absorb vitamin B12 even if they're consuming enough of it.

According to the Institute of Medicine, 10 to 30 percent of people over 60 have a hard time absorbing all the B12 from their food. The reason is that stomach acid production declines with age,

and the enzymes responsible for B12 may end up lacking. Further, people 60 and over are more likely to be on medications that can impact absorption. Metformin, the diabetes drug, and heartburn medications such as Zantac and Prilosec can also inhibit vitamin B12 uptake.

If you're feeling "old," trying to boost vitamin B12 intake might help. Including more meat, poultry, fish, dairy, and eggs might help you get there. Swapping some eggs or Greek yogurt for a carb-heavy breakfast might also work, as can adding some fish or meat to lunch salads. If you are concerned about B12 levels, talk to your doctor about supplementation, as well.

Devon Andre holds a bachelor's of forensic science from the University of Windsor in Canada and a Juris Doctor from the University of Pittsburgh. This article was first published on Bel Marra Health.

# Study: Seniors' Physical and Mental Health Linked to Optimism

MOHAN GARIKIPARITHI

With the entire Baby Boomer generation set to be at least 65 in the next decade, there will be growing health challenges. One of the main ones is understanding how various factors contribute to overall health.

Often, people look to treat specific ailments instead of examining the whole. If you have high blood pressure, for example, diet and exercise are prescribed. Memory fading? Oh, it's just age. But the reality is that age is just a number, and health treatments don't always reflect the cause. It is, after all, entirely possible for an 85-year old to be functioning better than someone who's 65.

A recent study conducted by researchers from the University of California, San Diego School of Medicine looked at how several distinctive factors influenced physical and mental health in people 65 and older. The goal was to identify how things such as wisdom, outlook, loneliness, income, and sleep played a role in the overall health and functioning of older people.

The four main observations made, which were published in the American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry, were:

- Physical health correlated with both cognitive function and

- mental health;
- Cognitive function was significantly associated with physical mobility, wisdom, and life satisfaction;
- Physical health was associated with mental well-being, resilience, and younger age; and
- Mental health was linked to optimism, self-compassion, income, and lower levels of loneliness and sleep disturbances

"Traits like optimism, resilience, wisdom, and self-compassion were found to be protective, while loneliness seemed to be a risk factor," said Dilip Jeste, head of the research team.

So what does all this mean for you? It seems the results suggest that staying active and positive can help promote healthy aging. Maintaining friendships and building new relationships also appear to boost health in older folks, so making human connections is key. It's likely that sleep is influenced by overall outlook, so it's possible that if your mind is at peace, sleep disturbances can be kept to a minimum.

Mohan Garikiparithi holds a degree in medicine from Osmania University (University of Health Sciences). This article was originally published on Bel Marra Health.



WIKIMEDIA/ALBERTA/SHUTTERSTOCK

# Rise in Suicide Rates in US Youth, Especially Girls

Suicide rates among U.S. youth have been on the rise for nearly a decade, with the sharpest increase in young girls, a new study shows.

After examining records from more than 85,000 youth aged 10 to 19 who took their own lives, researchers found that between 2007 and 2016, suicides among children aged 10 to 14 climbed by nearly 13 percent annually among girls, and by a little over 7 percent among boys, according to the report in JAMA Network Open.

"What we saw was a significant disproportionate increase in younger female rates," said the study's lead author, Donna Ruch, a researcher at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio. "There's been a gender paradox where we always see rates of death higher in males than in females, but there is a higher rate of attempts and suicidal ideation in females."

Ruch suspects that the bigger increase in deaths among

girls is related to changes in the methods girls choose to try to kill themselves.

"Now they are using more lethal means," Ruch said. "And that really concerns us."

Suicide is the second leading cause of death among youth aged 10 to 19 years in the United States, Ruch and her coauthors note.

To take a closer look at suicide trends among the young, Ruch and her colleagues analyzed nationwide data on suicides among kids aged 10 to 19 from 1975 to 2016.

The researchers identified 85,051 deaths among U.S. youth between 1975 and 2016, about 80 percent of which were in boys.

Rates of suicide in kids aged 10 to 14 had trended downward between 1993 and 2007, with yearly decreases of around 2 percent to 3 percent, the researchers found. After that they began to rise again, by 12.7 percent per year among girls aged 10 to 14 years and by 7.1 percent among boys in the same age range. Similar



LOILAMTAN/PIXABAY

Between 2007 and 2016, suicides among children aged 10 to 14 climbed by nearly 13 percent annually among girls.

trends were seen among kids aged 15 to 19, with a decline until 2007, then annual increases of 7.9 percent among girls and 3.5 percent among boys.

Ruch and her colleagues can't explain the increases. Finding a reason is "an important next step," she said.

In the meantime, she advises parents to be alert for warning signs that a child might be in danger: "Is the child making suicidal statements? Are they unhappy for longer periods of time? Are they withdrawing from friends and school activities? Are they increasingly irri-

table or aggressive?"

If they are, Ruch said, "that's when you should start to consider taking your child to a mental health professional."

Suicide expert Ian Rockett suspects that the numbers in the study are an underestimate of the number of girls who kill themselves. "We know that females are more inclined to use drug intoxication as a method," said Rockett, a professor emeritus in the epidemiology department at West Virginia University in Morgantown, and an adjunct professor of psychiatry at the University of Rochester Medical Center in New York. "That's less likely to be picked up as a suicide. And the narrowing (of the difference in suicide rates between boys and girls) reported in this study would be greater, I suspect, if they had truly accurate data."

By Linda Carroll

From Reuters

JAKOB OWENS/UNSPLASH

ANTON REPPONEN/UNSPLASH



## WISE HABITS

# Riding Life's Crashing Waves

Sometimes life can overwhelm you; that's when you rise to the occasion

## LEO BABAUTA

We're in the middle of a big move back to California from Guam, and things are in great flux: saying goodbye to everyone, packing, and shipping stuff, not having a home yet, traveling with kids on a couple of long flights, moving our old stuff from storage in a U-Haul, finding our way in a new city.

Life is turbulent right now—though if we think about it, it almost always is.

I'm not a surfer, but I imagine that I can let myself be overwhelmed and crushed by the turbulence or I can ride it like a surfer might ride a wave. You don't control the wave or know how it will turn out; you just have to navigate it moment to moment.

If we can learn to ride the rolling uncertainty of our lives, staying open each moment to what unfolds, we can live without as much stress and anxiety, and be present to what is happening. Maybe we can even enjoy ourselves in the middle of it.

So what would that be like?

For me, it seems to be staying present with the feelings of uncertainty that come up for me, instead of trying to ignore them or get away from them. That means allowing myself to feel the turbulence, not constantly staying distracted.

It seems to be trying to be curious about what is unfolding, about what this particular moment is like, without needing to know what comes next exactly. Without needing it to be any certain way. And if I do expect it to be a certain way, being present with my feelings of frustration or stress when it doesn't turn out to be that way.

It seems to be about surrendering, a bit, as I relax my constant need for

control. I don't have all the information I need to perfectly plan out my life—there's so much uncertainty about everything, that I can't possibly know how things should go, what I should do exactly, what will come next. So should I try to plan for every possible outcome, be incredibly prepared for any possible scenario, when I can't know what might happen? Or can I relax and surrender, trusting that I can deal with whatever does come up. So far, that's always been true.

It seems to be about dealing with what's right in front of me, in the moment. I can't deal with every possible scenario that might come in the future, but I can be fully open to what's happening right now. I can be as present as I can with this situation, and figure out what needs to be done right now.

It also seems to be about learning to love this moment, as it unfolds, as it is. I don't know what will come next, but what's happening now is completely new, a beautiful surprise. Instead of worrying so much about what is still to come, I can open my eyes to what's right here.

And then fall in love with it.

Walking into the unknown can be scary but it can also be a time of discovery and love for a fresh experience. It can be a time of walking into pure joy at the miracle of life that's just emerging in this moment.

It is breathtaking and lovely.

*Leo Babauta is the author of six books, the writer of "Zen Habits," a blog with over 2 million subscribers, and the creator of several online programs to help you master your habits. Visit ZenHabits.net*

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