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MIND & BODY

ALEX AVALOS/UNSPLASH

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Walking barefoot lets you reconnect—literally—with the earth. Researchers have confirmed that this age-old practice has measurable benefits.

Can Walking Barefoot Really Improve Your Health?

Scientists believe our connection with the ground can have an impact on how we feel

ROBERT JAY WATSON

The fact that something as simple and relatively small as our feet can support the entire weight of an adult body is pretty incredible when you think about it. Given how much we depend on them, it's a good idea to think about how you treat your feet.

But knowing what's best isn't always straightforward. Some people recommend "minimalist shoes" like those sold by New Balance, which have low heels and thin, flexible soles. Many people even maintain that going barefoot is the best way to keep your feet and body as healthy as possible.

Today, we'll look at the options you have and see what the scientists have to say about it.

Starting with your kids, what's the best way to go? While parents know that their kids would probably never wear a shoe their entire life if they could get away with it, going barefoot has tremendously important developmental benefits. Kids learn about the world through touch, and feet are no exception.

When kids walk and run (and fall) around the house and in the yard, they develop critical muscles in their legs that help them stay stable and balanced. Without this experience, they will never get the chance to truly "walk on their own two feet," as the saying goes.

As podiatrist Dr. Ali Khosroabadi said on The Doctors, "walking barefoot a few hours is really beneficial for our feet, especially for children." For him, letting his kids run around inside the house was really important, as it "helps them build these muscles."

So while it's definitely a good idea to let your kids do their thing barefoot inside the house, when it comes to walking outdoors, there's still a lot of debate going on. For millennia, humans have been running barefoot, and recently, there has been a resurgence of interest in "natural running."

Advocates argue that the greatest marathon runners of all times from the Greeks who invented the Olympic Games to 20th-century champions from Ethiopia, Kenya, India, and South Africa, all ran without shoes (though sometimes with tape covering parts of the feet).

Many barefoot runners claim that common runners' injuries are due to the way that shoes distort our natural stride. But what about all the stuff on the ground that can puncture or even contaminate your feet?

That's where "minimalist shoes" come in, allowing for a very thin layer of padding to keep your feet from getting gross viruses such as planters' warts or athlete's foot, not to mention helping avoid sharp gravel or rusted metal, which could give you tetanus!

Earthing can offer benefits from better sleep to reduced pain.

Most recently, many people have begun to advocate going barefoot not just for athletic training but for overall well-being, including mental health. How could going without shoes have such wide-reaching effects? The phenomenon is called "earthing."

According to a study in the Journal of Environmental and Public Health, "earthing (or grounding) refers to the discovery of benefits—including better sleep and reduced pain—from walking barefoot outside." Other definitions of earthing simply describe it as physically reconnecting with the earth through walking barefoot.

The scientists who have tested earthing believe that these positive effects come from absorbing the natural electrons from the ground.

Whereas most people living in big cities are increasingly cut off from contact with nature, taking your shoes off allows your body to literally "reconnect" with the earth. So the answer is probably to wear the most natural shoes possible when you have to, those that mirror the architecture of your feet as closely as possible, and take them off whenever you know and trust the surface that you're on.

Going barefoot all the time might not be practical, but doing this even a little bit can go a long way!

Spending Minimum 2 Hours Weekly in Nature Tied to Good Health

Researchers find that regular experiences of nature can improve our overall sense of well-being

People who experience nature for at least 120 minutes per week are more likely to report good health and psychological well-being, a large UK study suggests.

Researchers found that it didn't matter how participants achieved their total time outdoors, whether in one long stretch or several short visits, but the greater the weekly "dose" of nature exposure up to about 300 minutes, the bigger the benefit.

"Doctors (and patients) are often quite aware that spending time in natural environments might be good for people's health, but the question that keeps coming up is, 'How much is enough?'" said lead study author Mathew White of the European Centre for Environment and Human Health at the University of Exeter Medical School in the UK.

The greater the weekly 'dose' of nature exposure, the bigger the benefit.

"Our aim was to take a step in answering this simple, sensible question," he told Reuters Health by email. "Common sense, really."

White and colleagues analyzed 19,800 responses in 2014–2016 to a UK government survey assessing "engagement with the natural environment" in a nationally-representative sample of residents of England. Participants were asked about their contact with nature during the previous week, including parks, nature areas, beaches, farmland, hills, and rivers, but not including routine shopping trips or time spent in their own garden. They were also asked about their health and well-being with the questions, "How is your health in general?" and "Overall, how satisfied are you with life nowadays?"

White's team found that people who spent two hours in nature during the last week had 23 percent higher odds of reporting high well-being and 59 percent higher odds of reporting good health compared to those with no nature contact. The positive effect increased with additional time outdoors, peaking at about three hours per week for health and five hours per week for well-being.

The researchers adjusted for gender, age, health problems or disability, as well as socioeconomic factors and local air pollution levels, but the effect held for all kinds of people.

"The most surprising thing for us was just how consistent the pattern was across lots of different groups in society, including old and young, male and female, rich and poor," White said. "For us, the most important was also the same pattern for people with long-term illness or disability. It benefits everyone."

The survey participants who reported better health and well-being and who spent two to three hours in nature per week were more likely to live near neighborhood greenspace, to meet recommended physical activity guidelines, and to have an occupation with a higher socioeconomic status, the researchers note in the journal Scientific Reports.

"This has implications for our greenspace and how we design towns and cities, as well as street trees and backyards," said Richard Fuller of the Centre for Biodiversity and Conservation Science at the University of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia, who wasn't involved in the study.

"The difficulty in studying this area, however, is that it's tough to experiment other than on a small scale," he told Reuters Health in a phone interview. "It's harder to study cause-and-effect with nature on the street, in a park or during our lived experience."

Future studies should include a long-term look at how changes in weekly nature exposure affect health and well-being, White said. Since these studies can often be difficult to measure and are expensive, it may be a few years before researchers can offer scientific guidelines, he added.

Researchers also want to know in what ways nature affects health and if different people respond in different ways to different types of nature, Fuller said. A football field is considered green space, for instance, but it may not offer the same nature-related benefits as a park or forest. At the same time, it's simply important for people to go outside, he added.

FREE AROUND/SHUTTERSTOCK

Spending time in nature makes us happier and healthier the more we do it without any negative side effects.

"Nature is good for us. Let's get outside, especially with the growing concern around spending time looking at computers all day," he said. "It's fun and easy and makes us feel good."

By Carolyn Crist
From Reuters

Long Hours at the Office Could Be Killing You

A shorter work week can improve health, happiness, motivation and life satisfaction

SHAINAZ FIRFIRAY

MARVENT/SHUTTERSTOCK

Evidence also suggests that long working hours are associated with hypertension, heart disease, and the risk of injuries and accidents.

United Kingdom employees have the longest working week compared to other workers in the European Union. But, despite the long hours, recent studies have shown this does not make the UK a more productive nation.

An analysis by the Trade Union Congress on working hours and productivity found that, while UK full-time staff worked almost two hours more than the EU average, they were not as productive as staff in Denmark who worked fewer hours in the average week.

Such findings have triggered an interest in the relationship between the number of hours worked and productivity–and the results of several studies have suggested the concept of "optimal working time." This refers to an optimal number of hours spent at work after which productivity begins to decline and acute or chronic health problems begin to arise. Some experts suggest it should be no more than 35 hours a week.

So, while the prevalence of flexible working and the use of technologies to facilitate it has brought many benefits to organizations, such changes have also helped to create a 24/7 work culture–and with it that feeling of "always being on" and available to take work calls or emails. And, as research shows, employees working in such environments may actually show lower levels of engagement–which over time could reduce their productivity.

Impact on Health and Well-Being

Several studies have shown that some aspects of work are important predictors of health, happiness, motivation and life satisfaction. For a start, the number of hours people work has a major impact on their physical and psychological health. Evidence also suggests that long working hours are associated with hypertension, heart disease, and the risk of injuries and accidents.

Other studies have shown associations between hours of work and stress, anxiety and depression. The propensity to work long hours also has an adverse effect on family and social relationships and can increase family conflict.

But research studying the impact of working hours on health has also recognized how people's perceptions regarding long working hours and time demands can affect this negative association. This can help explain why some people who work extended hours may display poorer physical and psychological well-being compared to others.

Motives for Working Long Hours

There are predominantly two motivations for working long hours–both of which have distinctive influences on the relationship with work outcomes and well-being. cc These people genuinely enjoy their job and derive a sense of satisfaction from excelling at it.

Excessive involvement with work, even if it is enjoyable for the employee, can lead to neglect in other areas of life.

This is different from working long hours to avoid the threat of job insecurity or negative feedback from supervisors. In the first instance, while there might be pressure to put in long hours, it is ultimately the employee's choice. Hence, these workers are unlikely to experience the adverse effects of work pressure and stress as much as those who feel forced to put in longer hours.

Nonetheless, there is a lot of cynicism about the benefits of working extended hours. Excessive involvement with work, even if it is enjoyable for the employee, can lead to neglect in other areas of life which can take a toll on health, well-being, and interpersonal relationships.

Risks of Workaholism

In many cultures, long working hours and workaholism have positive connotations–such as dedication, commitment, and perseverance. But when the need for work turns so excessive that it begins to interfere with health, personal happiness, and social functioning, it can turn into a potentially fatal disorder.

Employers and co-workers can help colleagues who are prone to overworking by looking out for any warning signs of workaholism. Specific times to take breaks and finish work are vital. And everyone should be taking their holiday allowance so that they have enough time for rest and recovery.

Of course, this all sounds well and good—but job insecurity, work pressures and an overly competitive work atmosphere can compel employees to work extended hours–even when they know it's damaging their health.

Ultimately, most workers today desire a life beyond work–and research shows people can be more productive if they are able to balance their work and personal lives in more satisfying ways. Companies, for example, that have trialed the four-day work week have found that working fewer hours results in productivity increases due to reduced employee stress and improved focus on work tasks.

Also as working fewer days means employees will spend less time commuting, there are obvious payoffs for the economy (think, more time to recuperate and engage with leisure activities) and the environment. Just two more incentives for doing away with an overworked culture.

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RIDO/SHUTTERSTOCK

Discredited practices are hard to track, leaving patients at risk of being prescribed invalidated treatments.

Report: Nearly 400 Medical Procedures, Devices, or Practices are Ineffective

MOHAN GARIKIPARITHI

Have you ever been convinced that a treatment protocol prescribed by your doctor just didn't work? A new study suggests you could have been on to something.

In an attempt to create a comprehensive list of ineffective or outdated medical procedures, devices, and practices, a research team looked at over 3,000 articles from three well-known medical journals spanning 15 years. They found there were 396 reversals indicating the initial published results were not accurate, repeatable, or effective.

But that doesn't stop doctors from believing in them and potentially using them to treat a variety of illness. After all, everybody's got an opinion.

The research team found that the most highly represented category in the reversed studies focused on treatments for cardiovascular disease (20 percent). Preventative medicine and critical care represented the second and third largest contingents.

They identified developments known as "medical reversals." This is a term used to describe treatments, procedures, or devices that are no more effective than what previously exists. Discredited practices are rarely identified and surprisingly difficult to track, which served as part of the motivation for the study.

Other motivations are that ineffective practices put patients at risk and can be extremely expensive. Money is often allocated for testing or creating products that have proven ineffective, boosting healthcare costs not just for patients but for governments and private organizations, as well as other institutions.

Another problem is that it can be challenging to convince a doctor that has faith in a particular practice that it is ineffective. For example, one of the study's authors notes a trial in the 1980s designed to look at treatments for heart arrhythmia. The Cardiac Antiarrhythmic Suppression Trial (CAST) looked at the current medicines of the day versus placebos. Many doctors refused to place their patients on a placebo, even though the trial eventually found the medication was far more deadly.

You trust that your doctor is up to date with the most effective treatments, but the reality is that they might not be. It can be difficult to keep track of all the developments, and let's face it: some people can be stuck in their ways. If you don't think your treatment is working, or even just for peace of mind, it might be worthwhile seeking a second and third opinion when it comes to healthcare.

Mohan Garikiparithi received his degree in medicine from Osmania University (University of Health Sciences). This article was first published on Bel Marra Health.

THE 'SECRET' HEALING PROPERTIES OF BAMBOO

Bamboo: If it isn't in your cup, it should be

KATHERINE CARROLL

Considered an invasive species by some, bamboo is a panda's favorite treat. It is the king of grasses and offers significant, multi-faceted health benefits and endless practical uses. Bamboo serves us on so many levels, from supporting hair and nails, and building collagen, to rejuvenating skin and joints, to framing houses, creating furniture, and far more. Bamboo has proven itself as a resource for sustainable products and as a supreme provider.

GreenMedInfo.com cites 42 diseases and 29 pharmacological actions where bamboo exerts its powerful influence, from cardiovascular to neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's disease, cognitive decline or dysfunction, dementia, brain damage, and ischemia. It can also help with inflammation, a major contributor to countless diseases. It also helps with various types of cancers and chemotherapy-induced toxicity, as well as diabetes and its complications. It has beneficial impacts on blood sugar, immune system regulation, HIV, and Cytomegalovirus infections.

When you consider the more basic effects bamboo has on asthma, atopic dermatitis, anxiety, and depression, it makes me wonder why this isn't in everyone's cup. Toss it in along with whatever else you're steeping for some real health insurance.

Bamboo's Background

Recorded as being consumed by the Chinese during the Ming Dynasty (A.D. 1368–1644) and found mentioned in a note from the Tang Dynasty (A.D. 618–907), bamboo is one of the most useful plants on the planet. The tallest member of the grass family, bamboo is from the Bambusoideae subfamily. Taxonomically, there are 1,641 bamboo species, 120 genera, and three tribes from this subfamily.

Bamboo is characterized by its strong but flexible upright growth. It can reach astounding heights for a plant considered grass and can grow several feet per day. Over a longer stretch, that growth may vary, but a single cane can grow to 25 feet in 25 days.

Bamboo spreads vigorously, taking territory vertically as well as horizontally. The weight of heavy, wet snow merely displays its incredible flexibility as it bends nearly flat only to spring up tall again once the snow melts.

While many people will be unaware of bamboo's nutraceutical value, they will likely know that it can be used to make natural and sustainable flooring, plywood, any number of "wood" products and even fabrics that can be used for clothing, bedding, and more. More uses are being found for this green gift all the time. My Philippine friend tells me the soil around the bamboo is the best for potting soil.

Eating and Drinking Bamboo

Why drink plain water when you can turn it into a herbal pharmacy in a cup? Bamboo leaves make an herbal decoction that tastes great–like an earthy green tea–and can easily become your daily health-habit ritual either taken alone or mixed with other herbal teas such as jasmine and mint in creative, exotic blends.

Use the usual ratio of one teaspoon of dried leaves to a cup of pure water, steeping it for 5 to 10 minutes. If you have a structured water filter, it will pull the nutrition out without you even having to heat the water. The addition of monk fruit, stevia, raw honey, or lemon enhances the flavor of this delicate tea.

However, some bamboo has been found to be adulterated with plants of the carnation family often used in Chinese medicine, which are potentially dangerous to pregnant women. Pregnant mothers are advised to avoid it as consumption could induce abortion. Fertile and pregnant women should, therefore, consult a health care provider prior to including bamboo in their diet.

A single cane can grow to 25 feet in 25 days.

Young bamboo shoots, harvested within two weeks after emerging and under a foot tall, are a staple in Asian countries such as the Philippines, India, Nepal, Japan, Indonesia, Thailand, Korea, and of course, China. Boiled to just crisp-tender, these highly versatile shoots take on other flavors. They are available at Asian markets canned or fresh.

Bamboo shoots are a healthy addition to any meal, flavored with seasoning, butter, or ghee, or used in a stir fry with proteins, vegetables, and sauce, or added to soups and salads. In Indonesia and the Philippines, bamboo shoots are made into a type of spring roll called Lumpia. Bamboo-shoot recipes abound on internet sites for both vegan and meat-based versions.

Growing Bamboo

On my own land, a few gallon pots of bamboo planted several years ago have now morphed into a veritable forest both in height and in terrain covered. For this reason, many gardeners contain bamboo plants in a concrete trench or other boundaries.

Because of its high glass-like silica content, cutting bamboo cane isn't easy but anyone can easily harvest its leaves. My fresh, organic leaves harvested this morning are dehydrating to use in tea, tea that costs approximately $6.55 per ounce in stores.

Last year, I was excited about horsetail, which we can wildcraft here, wanting the strong fingernails and beautiful hair that natural silicon imparts. But when I found out that bamboo leaf tea has ten times the silica that horsetail extract has, deciding to jumpstart the process was logical. Horsetail averages 5 to 8 percent organic silica. Bamboo leaf contains an amazing 70 percent organic silica.

Bamboo's Benefits

Amazingly, this innocuous, ancient plant is a powerhouse of amino acids, fatty acids, vitamins, minerals, chlorophyll, soluble fiber, and carbohydrates. Medicinally, bamboo is cooling and calming. In addition to the uses listed above is it also good for digestion, obesity, lung, chest, stomach, heart, and urinary dysfunction.

It is also detoxifying and can quell inflammation. Bamboo leaves and shoots are important for male fertility, influencing thyroid hormones, balancing blood sugar levels, and they are a powerful antioxidant that can reduce cellular damage. Bamboo is good for bone and dental health and promotes general overall wellness. It is antibacterial and helps in asthma cases, too.

Lignins are a complex organic polymer deposited in the cell walls of many plants, including bamboo, making them rigid and woody. Lig-8, a lignophenol derivative from bamboo lignin, is a highly potent neuroprotectant protecting against apoptosis, a form of self-induced cell death.

Bamboo lignins can protect retinal ganglion cells. These cells die when a person develops glaucoma, leading to a loss of eyesight. The authors of a 2007 study that found "apoptotic cell death is associated with neurodegenerative disorders such as Alzheimer, Parkinson, or Huntington disease as well as glaucoma" and pointed to the potential benefits of lig-8, saying the substance could offer new approaches to treating neurodegenerative disorders.

With bamboo's many benefits, you may want to find ways to include bamboo leaves and shoots in your diet. As with any natural substance, add the factor of time, typically a few months, in order to register benefits.

But beneath the surface, and likely beneath your notice, the king of grasses could restore your health on the cellular level–and with a great deal of pleasure in the process. Processing the bamboo leaf by dehydration doesn't take long at all, which means you could go from harvest to cup quicker than you might think.

Here's to inexpensive, sustainable health in a cup!

Bamboo has proven itself as a resource for sustainable products and as a supreme provider.

Kat Carroll is a nutritional therapy practitioner, executive director of the National Health Federation, and managing editor of the National Health Federation's magazine, Health Freedom News, and is on the Board of Directors of the National Health Federation Canada and the Advisory Board for GreenMedInfo. This article was first published on the National Health Federation website, www.theNHF.com

FOTOHUNTER/SHUTTERSTOCK

Bamboo leaves make an herbal decoction that tastes great—like an earthy green tea.

How Nature Can Make You

Kinder, Happier, and More Creative

We spend more time indoors and online, but recent studies suggest nature can help keep our brains and bodies healthy

JILL SUTTIE

I've been an avid hiker my whole life. From the time I first strapped on a backpack and headed into the Sierra Nevada Mountains, I was hooked on the experience. I loved the way being in nature cleared my mind and helped me to feel more grounded and peaceful.

Like others before me, I've always believed that hiking in nature had psychological benefits. Now research backs that up. Scientists are beginning to find evidence that being in nature has a profound impact on our brains and our behavior, helping us to reduce anxiety, brooding, and stress, while increasing our attention capacity, creativity, and our ability to connect with other people.

"People have been discussing their profound experiences in nature for the last several 100 years–from Thoreau to John Muir to many other writers," says researcher David Strayer, of the University of Utah. "Now we are seeing changes in the brain and changes in the body that suggest we are physically and mentally more healthy when we are interacting with nature."

While he and other scientists may believe nature benefits our well-being, we live in a society where people spend more and more time indoors and online–especially children. Findings on how nature improves our brains brings added urgency to the call for preserving natural spaces–both urban and wild–and for spending more time in nature. Doing so can lead to healthier, happier, and more creative lives.

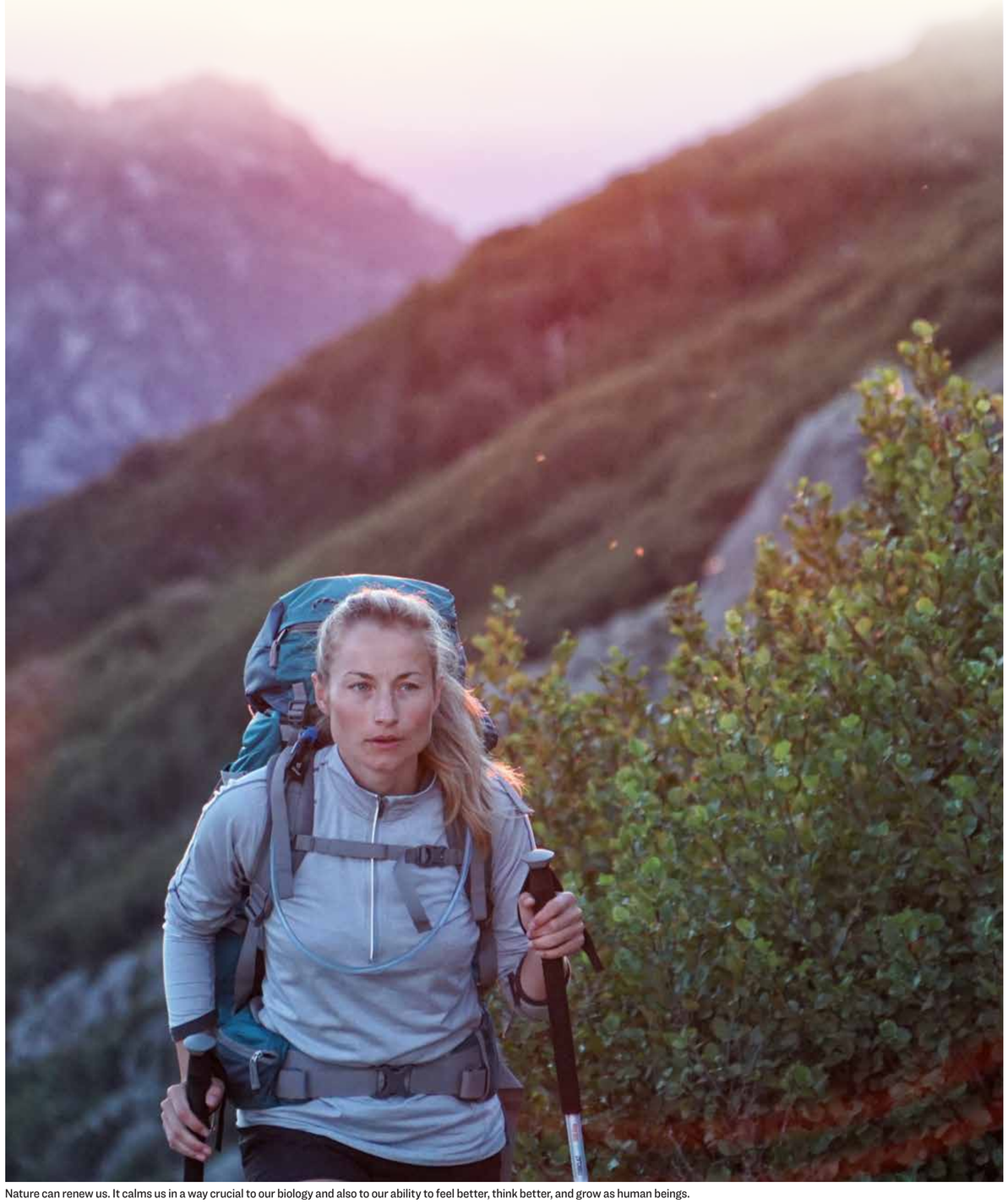
Findings on how nature improves our brains brings added urgency to the call for preserving natural spaces–both urban and wild.

Here are some of the ways that nature affects our brains and bodies.

1. Being in Nature Decreases Stress

It's clear that hiking–and any physical activity–can reduce stress and anxiety. But, there's something about being in nature that seems to augment those impacts.

Continued on ***Page 8***



LUCAS FAVRE/UNSPLASH

Nature can renew us. It calms us in a way crucial to our biology and also to our ability to feel better, think better, and grow as human beings.

With Kids, LOVE Is in the Little Things

Researcher Barbara Fredrickson explains how a parent's love helps kids thrive

MARYAM ABDULLAH

The loving relationship between a parent and child is crucial to that child learning trust and growing into a compassionate adult.

According to emotion scientist Barbara Fredrickson, there are small moments when love happens between parents and their children.

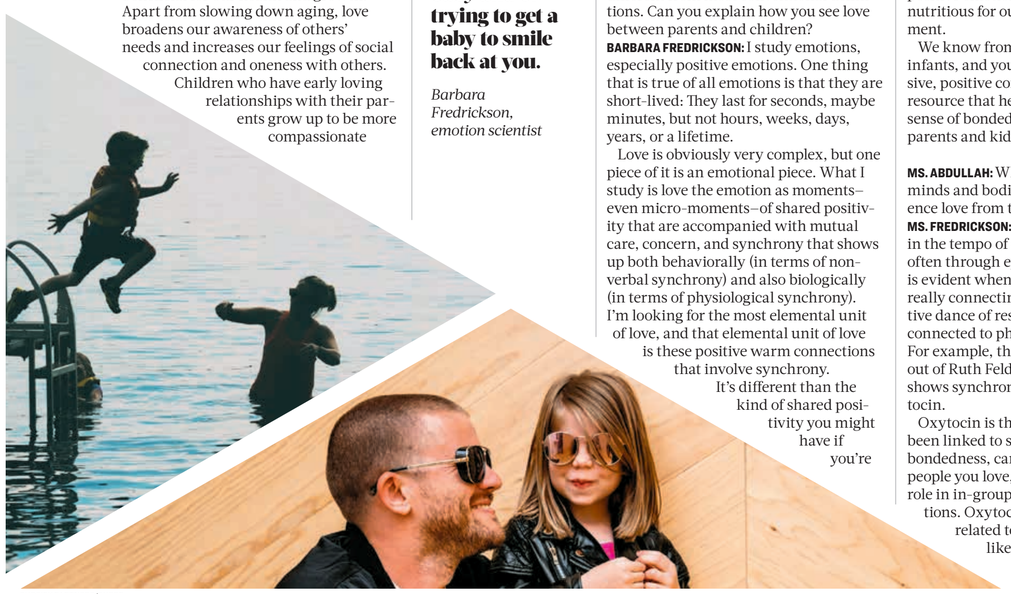
That moment when your baby meets your reach to pick her up and molds to your body as you hold her. When your preschooler calls out to you, emphatically pointing at the crescent moon he discovered, and you join him in looking up at the night sky. Or when your fifth grader catches your proud gaze in the audience of other parents during her elementary school graduation ceremony.

Fredrickson's research highlights that positive emotions like love, joy, and gratitude help us grow and become better versions of ourselves. While she used to think that all positive emotions were equally helpful, she has come to realize that love might be unique.

She now calls out love as especially beneficial for our health and growth. Apart from slowing down aging, love broadens our awareness of others' needs and increases our feelings of social connection and oneness with others.

Children who have early loving relationships with their parents grow up to be more compassionate adults.

> **The best examples of positivity resonance are those moments of smiling at a baby and of trying to get a baby to smile back at you.**
>
> *Barbara Fredrickson, emotion scientist*



SHOPIFY PARTNERS/BURST

We interviewed Fredrickson about how love grows between parents and their children and why it is important for children's development.

MARYAM ABDULLAH: Your definition of love is different from most conventional definitions. Can you explain how you see love between parents and children?

BARBARA FREDRICKSON: I study emotions, especially positive emotions. One thing that is true of all emotions is that they are short-lived: They last for seconds, maybe minutes, but not hours, weeks, days, years, or a lifetime.

Love is obviously very complex, but one piece of it is an emotional piece. What I study is love the emotion as moments—even micro-moments—of shared positivity that are accompanied with mutual care, concern, and synchrony that shows up both behaviorally (in terms of nonverbal synchrony) and also biologically (in terms of physiological synchrony). I'm looking for the most elemental unit of love, and that elemental unit of love is these positive warm connections that involve synchrony.

It's different than the kind of shared positivity you might have if you're both watching a funny movie. This is more about shared positivity in connection, and when that occurs in a caring way with synchrony, those moments of positive emotions seem to be especially nutritious for our growth and development.

We know from research on parents, infants, and young children that responsive, positive connection is an important resource that helps develop a greater sense of bondedness and trust between parents and kids.

MS. ABDULLAH: What happens in their minds and bodies when children experience love from their parents?

MS. FREDRICKSON: There is this synchrony in the tempo of action and connection, often through eye contact and touch, that is evident when we see a parent and child really connecting or showing this positive dance of responsiveness that is also connected to physiological synchrony. For example, there's some work coming out of Ruth Feldman's research lab that shows synchrony in subtle shifts in oxytocin.

Oxytocin is the neuropeptide that has been linked to social connectedness, bondedness, caring, and protecting people you love, and also plays a complex role in in-group versus out-group relations. Oxytocin, which has often been related to big bonding moments like sexual activity, childbirth, and lactation, also shows subtle shifts that are associated with these warm moments of connection. These ways in which people, including parents and their kids, co-experience positive emotions have clear biological signatures.

There is some evidence to suggest that there's important neural synchrony, as well. The more two individuals are sharing the same moment, ideas, or focus, their neural activity ends up being very similar. We've done some work to show that there's synchrony in other biological signals like heart rate and respiration.

MS. ABDULLAH: Attunement seems to be an important prerequisite for us to experience love, but this can be hard for parents when they are trying to juggle work and family demands. What are some ways parents can tune into their children more so that love can flourish?

MS. FREDRICKSON: I think having an appreciation for those moments that are the most elemental unit of love and how those are what help people and children feel loved and feel that they can trust and be open. What I like about this theory, which is what I call positivity resonance theory, is that it helps to point out how you would create this mysterious thing that we call "love," and these other mysterious things called "trust and commitment," because we know we can't just talk ourselves into loving and trusting.

One of the things we know about positivity resonance is that there are a few preconditions for such moments to emerge. One of them is a sense of safety in this current circumstance that allows you to be more open and other-focused. Sometimes people think of safety as a monolithic thing—that you're either in a safe home or neighborhood or not. But there are momentary shifts in perceived safety—when you feel safe in this moment and context.

The other precondition for positivity resonance to emerge is real-time sensory connection, best exemplified by being face to face. It's also possible to achieve somewhat through shared voice only, but eye contact seems to be central to this. If we take this notion seriously of real-time sensory connection as being a necessary platform for positivity resonance or momentary love to emerge, then a parent can support that by putting away all other distractions. The day-to-day experiences of love can't be supported when our attention is drawn to so many different things. So prioritize those activities and moments in your day when you can jointly experience something fun, silly, and comforting together, and recognize that touch, eye contact, and tracking one another's emotions is your key to that.

One of the best examples of positivity resonance are those moments of smiling at a baby and of trying to get a baby to smile back at you—that is a delicate dance. You need to bring your full attention to it, but also be really attuned to what level of [intensity] is appropriate for that baby because if you come on too strong, you can make the baby cry instead of laugh even if your intention is to make it fun.

We just need to be able to find the spirit of that moment that works with older children, because now it's a little more through conversation, maybe a little less emphasis just on nonverbal expression, but the nonverbal expression is still really key. It's not like our need for that warmth and that dance of responsiveness goes away, but it just gets accompanied by words. If we think about how we connect with preverbal infants, we can try to bring some of that same connection once we have more verbal connections with our kids.

We know that positivity resonance withers when people try to connect over technology instead of face to face. So even having the distraction of the possibility that your parent can be pulled away by looking at their phone can be a hindrance.

MS. ABDULLAH: Are there any other ways that parents may miss out on opportunities to show love?

MS. FREDRICKSON: I think that having an openness to the things that interest your kid and just going in that direction [is important]. For me, as a small example, I've never in my life really been much of a sports fan until I had two boys—and then it was the thing that we could do together and that I came to enjoy because I enjoy their enjoyment. Now, the best is actually going to see sporting events so we can high-five at a good play and just enjoy being spectators together in person. Or if we're not able to be together because now I have a son in college, finding ways to ask them, "Did you see that game?" Without trying, I became a sports fan so that I could stay with the interests of my kids.

MS. ABDULLAH: Your view of love is expansive and without borders. How can parents help their children broaden their experience of love beyond their family and close friends?

MS. FREDRICKSON: Kids learn a lot through modeling, so parents can be [models of] having warm positive connections with people they encounter in their community—even if it's a one-time encounter with the person making their coffee or another parent at the school. The more that we adults have moments of positivity resonance with strangers and acquaintances in our community in the presence of our kids, the more our kids learn how important it is to connect and be attuned to everybody in the right moment in a context that feels safe and involves face-to-face connection. The more we disregard everybody except those in our family, the more our kids will learn to disregard everybody else except those in the family.

One of the things I argue about positivity resonance is that it is not exclusive. Sharing positive emotions is something we can do with any other human and our mammal pets probably, as well. It is a kind, caring way to connect with people. The more we connect more broadly with members of our community and in open, respectful ways, the more our kids learn that, too.

ALL PHOTOS BY UNSPLASH UNLESS NOTED OTHERWISE

> **One of the most important things we can give to our kids is that caring attuned attention.**

When two people share an experience, like a father and son walking in the woods, they also experience similar neural activity, a biological connection that may be linked to the experience of love.

MS. ABDULLAH: You've argued that love is supremely consequential for human development. Why?

MS. FREDRICKSON: A lot of that comes from developmental science on how important responsive, caring, attuned parenting is because, poignantly, a subset of parents and caregivers who are unable to offer that kind of caring attunement are depressed caregivers. We know that depressed caregivers have much less behavioral synchrony with their kids. One feature of depression is "psychomotor retardation"—it's like you're wearing that lead apron from the dentist's office, making people move differently and without that behavioral synchrony and shared smiles. A lot of depression (not all of it) is also associated with "anhedonia" or the inability to feel positive emotions. The consequences for children of having a depressed caregiver last for decades. It affects social development and cognitive development into adolescence if you had a depressed caregiver in infancy.

These moments of positive connection that parents can develop with their kids are, as an effective neuroscientist described, like fertilizer for the brain. They support brain development and social skill development. One of the most important things we can give to our kids is that caring attuned attention. Finding ways to prioritize that within each day as a parent is tough. We're all juggling a million things, but we don't want to juggle out our kids and our ability to connect in those ways.

Maryam Abdullah, Ph.D., is the parenting program director of the Greater Good Science Center. She is a developmental psychologist with expertise in parent-child relationships and children's development of prosocial behaviors. This article was originally published on The Greater Good Magazine online.

CONNECT TO LEAD

The Opposite of Fear

Courage is essential for battle but love is often the feeling that compels it

SCOTT MANN

One of the most amazing men that I knew in the Army was a guy named Staff Sgt. Allen Johnson, who was posthumously promoted to Sgt. First Class after he was killed in action April 26, 2005. It was my battalion's first deployment to Afghanistan, and we were conducting a mission called Operation Nam Dong. This was the first time that the Afghan National Army (ANA) had been put into maneuver warfare and in true open battle against the Taliban. They were being employed down in Southern Afghanistan in a province known as Uruzgan Province and we were projecting out of Firebase Cobra, pushing even further into Uruzgan, and there were multiple teams involved. There were hundreds of ANA, most of them not battle-tested as a formation.

> **By focusing on the love and respect of your teammates, you'll likely find all the leadership and courage you need for even the most extreme moments.**

Allen and his teammates were on a Quick Reaction Force that was part of the task force I was leading on the ground. This Quick Reaction Force would flex in and flex out firefights whenever these Afghan soldiers and their Special Forces advisors needed to tip the scales one way or the other against the enemy. They would come in and they would add an element of surprise, superior firepower, and lethal targeting. These guys were good. On one particular day, April 26, we helo-lifted them into an area where we had been targeting some serious Taliban leaders in the area that had really been a problem for Uruzgan. Allen's team gave chase, pursued them deep into the mountains and were ambushed, and, as a result, pinned down. Allen's actions under fire, allowed the team to break free, but in the process of doing that, he was killed.

His team extracted his body and moved with Allen under fire through terrible terrain to get him to an evacuation site, and once Allen was medically evacuated, the team went back again and again to that area and continued to fight throughout the operation. In spite of the loss of their brother, I was struck by the courage that permeated that entire team and that entire mission. What I came to realize was that it really was more than courage. It was something much, much, deeper, and it wasn't until years later when I was reading Steven Pressfield's "The Warrior Ethos" that I figured out exactly what it was that I saw on that mission and continued to see time and time again with these amazing teams and brotherhoods that fought all over Afghanistan.

"The opposite of fear is love." Here is how Pressfield describe it in his book Warrior Ethos:

MARKUS RAUCHENBERGER/U.S. ARMY

In times of dire threat, sometimes the only thing that can keep a soldier going is the heartfelt need to keep his fellow soldiers alive.

"The greatest counterpoint to fear, the ancients believed, is love ... the love of the individual warrior for his brothers in arms. At Thermopylae, on the final morning when the last surviving Spartans knew they were all going to die, they turned to one of their leaders, the warrior Dienekes, and asked him what thoughts they should hold in their minds in this final hour to keep their courage strong. Dienekes instructed his comrades to fight not in the name of such lofty concepts as patriotism, honor, duty, or glory. "Don't even fight," he said, "to protect family or your home. Fight for this alone, the man who stands at your shoulder. He is everything, and everything is contained within him."

I was so gifted to see this on display time and time again with the amazing men and women that I served with, that love of their teammate, love of their brother, love of their sister, that they would show up for each other the way that they did, and I just wonder what it would look like if we did even a fraction of that here at home?

What if we showed up for our teammates at work, our family members, our friends, our community that way, where everything we needed was contained in them, and we just stood shoulder to shoulder with them and made sure they were okay? Seems like that would be a pretty nice place to be. If our warriors whom we send out to fight can find a way to do that in the worst of times and the darkest of places, maybe we could do that a little bit more here at home.

Now perhaps you're thinking: "This is a great mindset if you are a Spartan or a Green Beret, but what do courage and love have to do with me at work?" Well, the next time that you find yourself in a high-stakes, no fail situation, rather than look for ways to lead through it on your own or worry about how this situation will affect your career, take a moment to look at the women and men on your left and right. Check in with your teammates. How are they doing? What do they need from you? How can you better play your position for them?

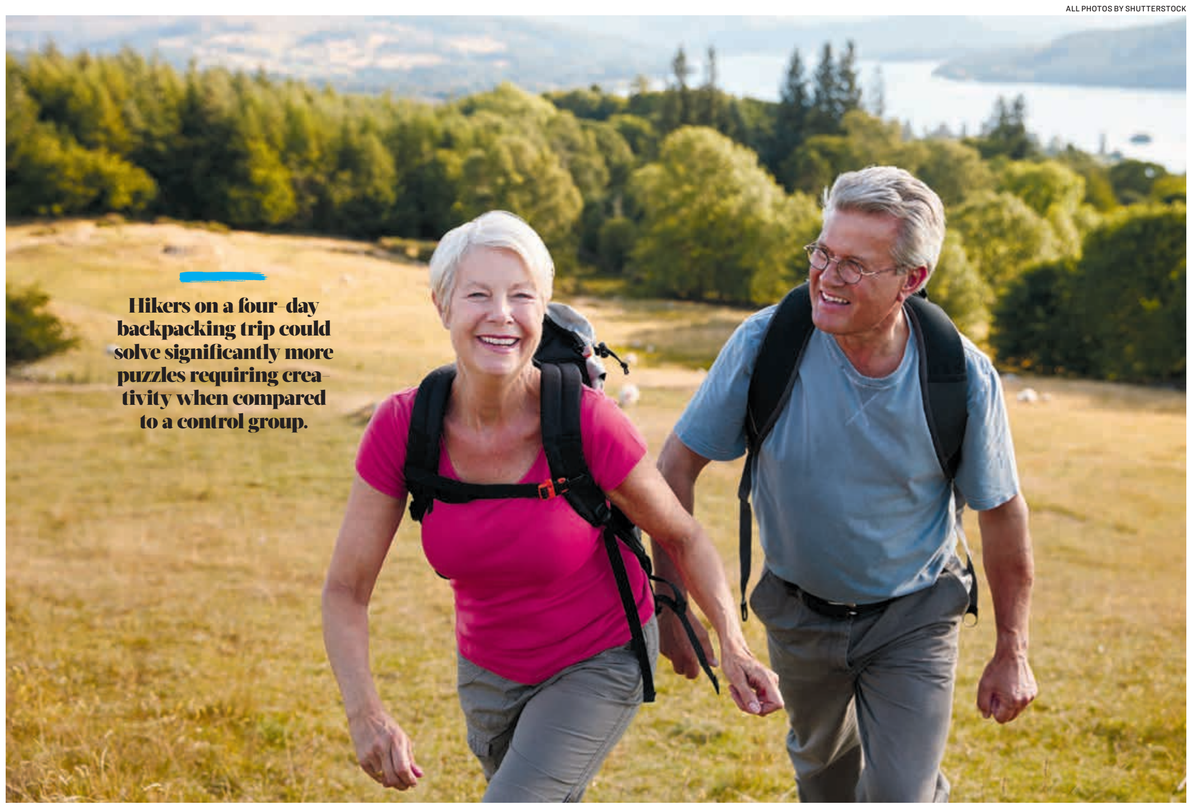
By focusing on the love and respect of your teammates, you'll likely find all the leadership and courage you need for even the most extreme moments.

That's something I learned in combat, and I hope you'll put it to use in your life.

I'll see you on the Rooftop.

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

ALL PHOTOS BY SHUTTERSTOCK



Hikers on a four-day backpacking trip could solve significantly more puzzles requiring creativity when compared to a control group.

How Nature Can Make You

Kinder, Happier, and More Creative

We spend more time indoors and online, but recent studies suggest nature can help keep our brains and bodies healthy

Continued from ***Page 5***

In one recent experiment conducted in Japan, participants were assigned to walk either in a forest or in an urban center (taking walks of equal length and difficulty) while having their heart rate variability, heart rate, and blood pressure measured. The participants also filled out questionnaires about their moods, stress levels, and other psychological measures.

Results showed that those who walked in forests had significantly lower heart rates and higher heart rate variability (indicating more relaxation and less stress), and reported better moods and less anxiety, than those who walked in urban settings. The researchers concluded that there's something about being in nature that reduced stress beyond what exercise alone might have done.

Experiencing the beauty of nature increases positive emotion.

In another study, researchers in Finland found that urban dwellers who strolled for as little as 20 minutes through an urban park or woodland reported significantly more stress relief than those who strolled in a city center.

In a now-classic laboratory experiment by Roger Ulrich of Texas A&M University and colleagues, participants who first viewed a stress-inducing movie, and were then exposed to color/sound videotapes depicting natural scenes, showed much quicker, more complete recovery from stress than those who'd been exposed to videos of urban settings.

In a now-classic laboratory experiment, Roger Ulrich of Texas A&M University and his colleagues asked participants to watch a stress-inducing movie. Then some viewers were exposed to videotapes depicting natural scenes and others were exposed to videos of urban settings. Those that viewed the nature scenes recovered much quicker and more completely from the stress.

These studies and others provide evidence that being in natural spaces–or even just looking out of a window onto a natural scene–somehow soothes us and relieves stress.

2. Nature Makes You Happier and Less Brooding

I've always found that hiking in nature makes me feel happier. Decreased stress may be a big part of the reason why. But Gregory Bratman, of Stanford University, has found evidence that nature may do more than calm us.

In one 2015 study, he and his colleagues randomly assigned 60 participants to a 50-minute walk in either a natural setting (oak woodlands) or an urban setting (along a four-lane road). Before and after the walk, the participants were assessed on their emotional state and on cognitive measures, such as how well they could perform tasks requiring short-term memory. Results showed that those who walked in nature experienced less anxiety, rumination (focused attention on negative aspects of oneself), and negative affect, as well as more positive emotions, in comparison to the urban walkers. They also improved their performance on memory tasks.

In another study, he and his colleagues extended these findings by zeroing in on how walking in nature affects rumination–which has been associated with the onset of depression and anxiety–while also using fMRI technology to look at brain activity. Participants who took a 90-minute walk in either a natural setting or an urban setting had their brains scanned before and after their walks and were surveyed on self-reported rumination levels (as well as other psychological markers). The researchers controlled for many potential factors that might influence rumination or brain activity–for example, physical exertion levels as measured by heart rates and pulmonary functions.

Even so, participants who walked in a natural setting versus an urban setting reported decreased rumination after the walk, and they showed increased activity in the subgenual prefrontal cortex, an area of the brain whose deactivation is affiliated with depression and anxiety–a finding that suggests nature may have important impacts on mood.

Bratman believes results like these need to reach city planners and others whose policies impact our natural spaces. "Ecosystem services are being incorporated into decision making at all levels of public policy, land use planning, and urban design, and it's very important to be sure to incorporate empirical findings from psychology into these decisions," he said.

3. Nature Relieves Attention Fatigue and Increases Creativity

Today, we live with ubiquitous technology designed to constantly pull for our attention. Many scientists believe our brains were not made for this kind of information bombardment and that it can lead to mental fatigue, overwhelm, and burnout that requires "attention restoration" to get back to a normal, healthy state.

Strayer is one of those researchers. He believes that being in nature restores depleted attention circuits, which can then help us be more open to creativity and problem-solving.

"When you use your cell phone to talk, text, shoot photos, or whatever else you can do with your cell phone, you're tapping the prefrontal cortex and causing reductions in cognitive resources," he says.

In a 2012 study, he and his colleagues showed that hikers on a four-day backpacking trip could solve significantly more puzzles requiring creativity when compared to a control group of people waiting to take the same hike–in fact, 47 percent more. Although other factors may account for his results–for example, the exercise or the camaraderie of being out together–prior studies have suggested that nature itself may play an important role. One study published in Psychological Science found that the improved scores on cognitive tests for the study participants resulted from nature's ability to restore attention.

This phenomenon may be due to differences in brain activation when viewing natural scenes versus more built-up scenes–even for those who normally live in an urban environment. In a recent study conducted by Peter Aspinall at Heriot-Watt University–Edinburgh, and colleagues, participants who had their brains monitored continuously using mobile electroencephalogram (EEG) while they walked through an urban green space had brain EEG readings indicating lower frustration, engagement, and arousal, and higher meditation levels while in the green area, and higher engagement levels when moving out of the green area. This lower engagement and arousal may be what allows for attention restoration, encouraging a more open, meditative mindset.

It's this kind of brain activity–sometimes referred to as "the brain default network"–that is tied to creative thinking, said Strayer. He is currently repeating his earlier 2012 study with a new group of hikers and recording their EEG activity and salivary cortisol levels before, during, and after a three-day hike. Early analyses of EEG readings support the theory that hiking in nature seems to rest people's attention networks and to engage their default networks.

Strayer and colleagues are also specifically looking at the effects of technology by monitoring people's EEG readings while they walk in an arboretum, either while talking on their cell phone or not. So far, they've found that participants with cell phones appear to have EEG readings consistent with attention overload.

Though Strayer's findings are preliminary, they are consistent with other people's findings on the importance of nature to attention restoration and creativity.

"If you've been using your brain to multitask–as most of us do most of the day–and then you set that aside and go on a walk, without all of the gadgets, you've let the prefrontal cortex recover," says Strayer. "And that's when we see these bursts in creativity, problem-solving, and feelings of well-being."

4. Nature May Help You to be Kind and Generous

Whenever I go to places like Yosemite or the Big Sur Coast of California, I seem to return to my home life ready to be more kind and generous to those around me–just ask my husband and kids. Some recent studies may shed light on why that is.

In a series of experiments published in 2014, Juyoung Lee, Greater Good Science Center director Dacher Keltner, and other researchers at the University of California–Berkeley, studied the potential impact of nature on the willingness to be generous, trusting, and helpful toward others, while considering what factors might influence that relationship.

As part of their study, the researchers exposed participants to nature scenes of various beauty (whose beauty levels were rated independently) and then observed how participants behaved playing two economics games–the Dictator Game and the Trust Game. The games measure generosity and trust, respectively. After being exposed to the more beautiful nature scenes, participants acted more generously and more trusting in the games than those who saw less beautiful scenes. The effects appeared to be due to corresponding increases in positive emotion.

In another part of the study, the researchers asked people to fill out a survey about their emotions while sitting at a table where more or less beautiful plants were placed. Afterward, the participants were told that the experiment was over and they could leave, but that if they wanted to they could volunteer to make paper cranes for a relief effort program in Japan. The number of cranes they made (or didn't make) was used as a measure of their "prosociality" or willingness to help.

Results showed that the presence of more beautiful plants significantly increased the number of cranes made by participants and that this increase was, again, mediated by positive emotion elicited by natural beauty. The researchers concluded that experiencing the beauty of nature increases positive emotion–perhaps by inspiring awe, a feeling akin to wonder, with the sense of being part of something bigger than oneself. This feeling, they believe, then leads to prosocial behaviors.

Support for this theory comes from an experiment conducted by Paul Piff of the University of California–Irvine, and colleagues, in which participants staring up a grove of very tall trees for as little as one minute experienced measurable increases in awe and demonstrated more helpful behavior. They also approached moral dilemmas more ethically than participants who spent the same amount of time looking up at a high building.

5. Nature Makes You 'Feel More Alive'

With all of these benefits to being out in nature, it's probably no surprise that something about nature makes us feel more alive and vital. Being outdoors gives us energy, makes us happier, helps us to relieve the everyday stresses of our overscheduled lives, opens the door to creativity, and helps us to be kind to others.

No one knows if there is an ideal amount of nature exposure, though Strayer says that longtime backpackers suggest a minimum of three days to really unplug from our everyday lives. Nor can anyone say for sure how nature compares to other forms of stress relief or attention restoration, such as sleep or meditation. Both Strayer and Bratman say we need a lot more careful research to tease out these effects before we come to any definitive conclusions.

Still, the research does suggest there's something about nature that keeps us psychologically healthy, and that's good to know–especially since nature is free and many of us can access it just by walking outside our door. Results like these should encourage us as a society to consider more carefully how we preserve our wilderness spaces and our urban parks.

And while the research may not be conclusive, Strayer is optimistic that science will eventually catch up to what many people have intuited for generations–that there's something about nature that renews us, allowing us to feel better, think better, and deepen our understanding of ourselves and others.

"You can't have centuries of people writing about this and not have something going on," says Strayer. "If you are constantly on a device or in front of a screen, you're missing out on something that's pretty spectacular: the real world."

Jill Suttie, who holds a doctorate in psychology, is a Greater Good's book review editor and a frequent contributor to the magazine. This article was first published on Greater Good, the online magazine of the Greater Good Science Center at the University of California–Berkeley.

MICHAEL HANSON FOR KAISER HEALTH NEWS

Dr. Ron Naito, an internist in Portland, Ore., was diagnosed with stage 4 pancreatic cancer in August 2018. His doctor wouldn't confirm the terminal diagnosis, even though Naito read the test results and understood what they meant.

Never Say 'Die'

Why So Many Doctors Won't Break Bad News

Doctors who avoid giving patients a fatal diagnosis clearly deny those patients the time to prepare for their death

JONEL ALECCIA

After nearly 40 years as an internist, Dr. Ron Naito knew what the sky-high results of his blood test meant. And it wasn't good.

But when he turned to his doctors last summer to confirm the dire diagnosis–stage 4 pancreatic cancer–he learned the news in a way no patient should.

The first physician, a specialist Naito had known for 10 years, refused to acknowledge the results of the "off-the-scale" blood test that showed unmistakable signs of advanced cancer. "He simply didn't want to tell me," Naito said.

A second specialist performed a tumor biopsy, and then discussed the results with a medical student outside the open door of the exam room where Naito waited.

"They walk by one time and I can hear [the doctor] say '5 centimeters,'" said Naito. "Then they walk the other way and I can hear him say, 'Very bad.'"

Months later, the shock remained fresh.

"I knew what it was," Naito said last month, his voice thick with emotion. "Once [tumors grow] beyond 3 centimeters, they're big. It's a negative sign."

The botched delivery of his grim diagnosis left Naito determined to share one final lesson with future physicians: Be careful how you tell patients they're dying.

Since August, when he calculated he had six months to live, Naito has mentored medical students at Oregon Health & Science University and spoken publicly about the need for doctors to improve the way they break the bad news.

"Historically, it's something we've never been taught," said Naito, thin and bald from the effects of repeated rounds of chemotherapy. "Everyone feels uncomfortable doing it. It's a very difficult thing."

Robust research shows that doctors are notoriously bad at delivering life-altering news, said Dr. Anthony Back, an oncologist and palliative care expert at the University of Washington in Seattle, who wasn't surprised that Naito's diagnosis was poorly handled.

"Dr. Naito was given the news in the way that many people receive it," said Back, who is a co-founder of VitalTalk, one of several organizations that teach doctors to improve their communication skills. "If the system doesn't work for him, who's it going to work for?"

Up to three-quarters of all patients with serious illness receive news in what researchers call a "suboptimal way," Back estimated.

"'Suboptimal' is the term that is least offensive to practicing doctors," he added.

The result is that dying patients are often ill-informed.

The poor delivery of Naito's diagnosis reflects common practice in a country where Back estimates that more than 200,000 doctors and other providers could benefit from communication training.

Too often, doctors avoid such conversations entirely, or they speak to patients using medical jargon. They frequently fail to notice that patients aren't following the conversation or that they're too overwhelmed with emotion to absorb the information, Back noted in a recent article.

"[Doctors] come in and say, 'It's cancer,' they don't sit down, they tell you from the doorway, and then they turn around and leave," he said.

That's because for many doctors, especially those who treat cancer and other challenging diseases, "death is viewed as a failure," said Dr. Brad Stuart, a palliative care expert and chief medical officer for the Coalition to Transform Advanced Care or C-TAC. They'll often continue to prescribe treatment, even if it's futile, Stuart said. It's the difference between curing disease and healing a person physically, emotionally and spiritually, he added.

"Curing is what it's all about and healing has been forgotten," Stuart said.

The result is that dying patients are often ill-informed. A 2016 study found that just 5 percent of cancer patients accurately understood their prognoses well enough to make informed decisions about their care. Another study found that 80 percent of patients with metastatic colon cancer thought they could be cured. In reality, chemotherapy can prolong life by weeks or months, and help ease symptoms, but it will not stop the disease.

Without a clear understanding of the disease, a person can't plan for death, Naito said.

"You can't go through your spiritual life, you can't prepare to die," Naito said. "Sure, you have your [legal] will, but there's much more to it than that."

The doctors who treated him had the best intentions, said Naito, who declined to publicly identify them or the clinic where they worked. Reached for verification, clinic officials refused to comment, citing privacy rules.

Without a clear understanding of the disease, a person can't plan for death.

Indeed, most doctors consider open communication about death vital, research shows. A 2018 telephone survey of physicians found that nearly all thought end-of-life discussions were important–but fewer than a third said they had been trained to have them.

Back, who has been urging better medical communication for two decades, said there's evidence that skills can be taught–and that doctors can improve. Many doctors bridle at any criticism of their bedside manner, viewing it as something akin to "character assassination," Back said.

"But these are skills, doctors can acquire them, you can measure what they acquire," he said.

It's a little like learning to play basketball, he added. You do layups, you go to practice, you play in games and get feedback–and you get better.

For instance, doctors can learn–and practice–a simple communication model dubbed "Ask-Tell-Ask." They ask the patient about their understanding of their disease or condition; tell him or her in straightforward, simple language about the bad news or treatment options; then ask if the patient understood what was just said.

Naito shared his experience with medical students in an OHSU course called "Living With Life-Threatening Illness," which pairs students with ill and dying patients.

"He was able to talk very openly and quite calmly about his own experience," said Amanda Ashley, associate director of OHSU's Center for Ethics in Health Care. "He was able to do a lot of teaching about how it might have been different."

Alyssa Hjelvik, 28, a first-year medical student, wound up spending hours more than required with Naito, learning about what it means to be a doctor–and what it means to die. The experience, she said, was "quite profound."

"He impressed upon me that it's so critical to be fully present and genuine," said Hjelvik, who is considering a career as a cancer specialist. "It's something he cultivated over several years in practice."

Naito, who has endured 10 rounds of chemotherapy, recently granted the center $1 million from the foundation formed in his name. He said he hopes that future doctors like Hjelvik–and current colleagues–will use his experience to shape the way they deliver bad news.

"It doesn't have to be something you dread," he said. "I think we should remove that from medicine. It can be a really heartfelt, deep experience to tell someone this, to tell another human being."

JoNel Aleccia is a senior correspondent focused on aging and end-of-life issues for Kaiser Health News, which first published this article. KHN's coverage related to aging and improving care of older adults is supported in part by The John A. Hartford Foundation.

VALERY SIDELNYKOV/SHUTTERSTOCK

Is the TV in Your Room a Major Health Risk?

DEVON ANDRE

If you're falling asleep to the nightly news or the latest episode of Chicago, it could be wreaking havoc on your health. A new analysis is showing a host of dangers associated with nighttime television watching from the comfort of your bed.

It's not the programming or the set itself that causes any harm. The trouble comes from nighttime light exposure that can throw your circadian rhythm out of whack. You could be at risk for the same problems if you don't have a TV in your room but use a tablet, computer, or smartphone before bed, or sleep in a place that allows a lot of bright lights to shine in once the sun has set.

A new study, published in JAMA Internal Medicine, found that women who slept in a room with a television or light on were more likely to gain at least 11 pounds over five years compared to those that slept in darkness. They were also 30-percent more likely to become obese.

The trouble comes from nighttime light exposure that can throw your circadian rhythm out of whack.

The body's circadian rhythm—its sleep-wake cycle—is determined by natural light and dark cycles. When you're not sleeping in a dark space and instead exposing yourself to certain kinds of light too late in the evening, it messes with your body clock. Your natural body clock controls hormones—like melatonin and cortisol—metabolism, blood pressure, and more. A healthy circadian rhythm is important to overall health and is a pillar of a healthy lifestyle (along with diet and exercise).

When the sleep-wake cycle is disrupted, it can lead to weight gain, high blood pressure, obesity, diabetes, anxiety, mental fogginess, and depression.

Taking sleep seriously can have a significant impact on your overall health. Thankfully, getting the screens out of your bedroom (or shutting them off earlier if you live in a studio apartment) and purchasing black-out blinds can be effective in providing the blackout conditions your body prefers. Sleep quality is essential to well-being, so taking these simple steps to improve sleep can go a long way towards a healthy life.

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.

Trouble Tracking Finances May Be an Early Warning Sign of Dementia

MOHAN GARIKIPARITHI

If you've been having a hard time tracking your finances and remembering to pay bills, it could be an early sign of a bigger problem.

Sure, everyone forgets the occasional expense they racked up. But if you're struggling with tasks like calculating your account balance, it could be the sign of early memory loss associated with dementia.

Researchers from Duke University tested 243 adults, between the ages of 55 and 90, on their financial skills. They also took brain scans to look at levels of beta-amyloid plaque, which can affect memory. The build-up of this plaque is closely associated with Alzheimer's. Participants in the study displayed a range of brain health, with some showing no signs of mental decline, others had mild memory trouble, while some had Alzheimer's.

The result was that certain financial skills declined with age and were present at early stages of memory impairment. As beta-amyloid plaque concentrations increased, people became worse at understanding relatively basic financial concepts and tasks like calculating an account balance.

These results not only serve as a warning sign for people but may help to explain why older adults are often victimized by financial scammers. Thankfully, with warning comes the opportunity for prevention.

Beta-amyloid plaque prevention is possible through certain lifestyle measures. Research has shown that regular physical activity and an anti-inflammatory diet can help. Some foods that have been noted to play a role in improving memory or preventing beta-amyloid include:

- Nuts like walnuts, almonds, pecans, and hazelnuts
- Salmon, mackerel, sardines, and other omega-3 rich fatty fish
- Berries (strawberries, blueberries, blackberries, raspberries)
- Spinach, kale, collards and other leafy greens
- Turmeric
- Coffee
- Chocolate

FIZKES/SHUTTERSTOCK

Try and stop further degradation by adopting a healthier diet and lifestyle.

A study found that as beta-amyloid plaque—which is closely associated with Alzheimer's—built up, people became worse with basic financial tasks like calculating an account balance.

A Mediterranean-style diet is a good model to follow and can be adopted at any age. Exercise, too, is something you can start regardless of how old you are. If you have existing health conditions, like heart problems, talk to your doctor before starting an exercise routine.

If you're struggling to balance your bankbooks, it could be a sign that memory is starting to fade. Try and stop further degradation by adopting a healthier diet and lifestyle.

Mohan Garikiparithi received his degree in medicine from Osmania University (University of Health Sciences). This article was first published on Bel Marra Health.

Obesity-Related Pain Contributes to Opioid Use

Long-term use of prescription opioids for chronic pain is more common among people who are overweight or obese, a new study finds.

As a group, these individuals are more likely to use prescription opioids for pain in the back, joints, muscles, and nerves, researchers write in the journal Pain.

Andrew Stokes of the Boston University School of Public Health and colleagues analyzed data for more than 25,000 participants in the National Health and Nutrition Examination Surveys, ages 35 to 79, to understand the relationship between obesity and prescription opioid use.

Obesity is one of the five major contributors to chronic pain.

Overall, in survey results from 2013–2014 and 2015–2016, seven percent of participants reported prescription opioid use. Compared to people with a body mass index (BMI) in the normal range, people with BMI in the overweight range had 11 percent higher odds of chronic prescription opioid use. Among people with BMI in the overweight range, the odds of regular use of opioids for pain rose from being 26 percent higher to being 233 percent higher, with increasing severity of obesity.

People in higher BMI categories were also more likely to use stronger opioids that were similar to morphine.

Obesity is one of the five major contributors to chronic pain, according to the Institute of Medicine. It raises risks for arthritis, back pain, diabetes-associated nerve pain, fibromyalgia, and migraine, for example, though factors such as biomechanical strain on joints and chronic inflammation in the body.

In the current study, back pain was the most common reason reported for prescription opioid use in higher BMI categories, followed by joint pain and muscle/nerve pain.

The researchers calculate that 14 percent of prescription opioid use is attributable to obesity. They estimate that each year in the United States, 1.5 million fewer people would be chronic opioid users if obese individuals were non-obese.

At the same time, the study authors acknowledge the difficulty of addressing this problem.

"The roots of the opioid crisis are complex and cannot to be reduced to any single factor," Stokes said. "Obesity has likely interacted with other factors, such as drug oversupply and social and economic despair, to fuel high rates of opioid prescribing in the U.S."

A limitation of this study, he added, is that the survey included self-reported data, and it didn't include a question about prescription opioid dosages.

"Overweight and obesity have a strong association with seeking care for low back pain and chronic low back pain," said Dr. Rahman Shiri of the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health in Helsinki, Finland. Shiri, who wasn't involved with this study, has researched the association between obesity and low back pain.

At the same time, Shiri told Reuters Health, "there is little information on the prevention of low back pain with weight reduction via lifestyle modification."

By Carolyn Crist
From Reuters

The Trebek Effect: The Benefits of Well Wishes

Social connection is plummeting even though it is essential to our well being, and the health of our communities

RICHARD GUNDERMAN

Long-time "Jeopardy!" host Alex Trebek announced in March that he had been diagnosed with stage 4 pancreatic cancer. Within days, he offered thanks to "the hundreds of thousands of people who have sent emails, texts, tweets, and cards wishing me well regarded my health." Then last month, Trebek reported that his cancer was in "near remission," saying that his doctors "hadn't seen this kind of positive results in their memory."

Although the odds remain stacked against Trebek (advanced pancreatic cancer has a 3 percent 5-year survival rate), his experience raises an intriguing question: What are the benefits of such well wishes?

Greeting card industry statistics amply demonstrate the relevance of the question to most Americans: We buy about 6.5 billion greeting cards a year, and while birthdays constitute the number one occasion, "Get Well" cards figure heavily in the mix.

Benefits for Recipients

The most immediately apparent benefits of well wishes accrue to recipients. When we are injured, sick or suffering, knowing that someone else is thinking about us can be a source of comfort. It counteracts one of the worst aspects of suffering—isolation. During periods of recuperation, we often miss school or work, which leaves us feeling alone. Knowing that we are in someone else's thoughts helps to counteract this.

When such well wishes are accompanied by offers of assistance, they can help to solve everyday challenges. Co-workers might offer to assume work responsibilities so that a colleague can take the time to get better or neighbors might offer to feed to deliver groceries. Relatives might stay with loved ones or bring them into their own homes to provide care.

As a practicing physician who teaches large numbers of medical students and residents, I believe that sharing well wishes benefits us in all sorts of ways that are not reflected in medical outcomes. For example, reaching out to others can reduce anxiety and fear, and connections formed during difficult times may persist for many years, even a lifetime.

Benefits for Well Wishers

Wishing others well is also good for the person doing the well-wishing. For one thing, we cannot genuinely do so without shifting our attention away from ourselves. Much unhappiness can be traced to an excessive preoccupation with self. Thinking of others counteracts this. There is neurological evidence that acts of generosity make us feel less anxious and happier.

Research has found people who feel disconnected from others suffer health consequences worse than obesity, smoking, and high blood pressure. By contrast, wishing others well helps us to recognize our interdependence, thereby fostering a greater sense of connectedness. We tend to invest more of our own time and energy in others when we stop and contemplate how much our well-being—economic, social, psychological and spiritual—hinges on theirs.

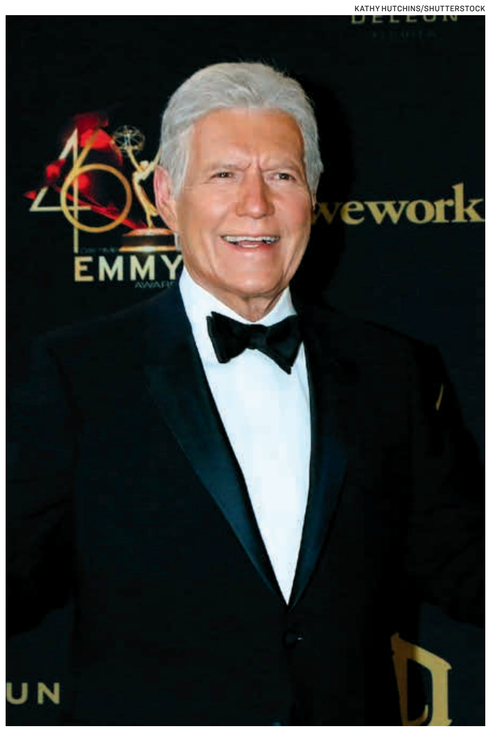
Of course, there is a trap here that needs to be recognized and avoided. We cannot genuinely wish others well if we are doing it for our own sake. Merely to appear to others to have their best interests at heart while really pursuing our own is but a form of deception, only compounding the adverse effects of self-centeredness and isolation. To realize real benefits from caring for others, we must genuinely care for them.

Benefits for All

It is so important to care for others that we should do it, at least in some cases, even when it hurts. For example, marriage, parenting, and friendship involve sacrifices. Sometimes we set aside our own good entirely to tend to the needs of another. While we may not benefit directly from such sacrifices, we do help to build larger wholes—relationships and communities—of which we are all a part. We make the world a better place.

The need to foster mutual care has perhaps never been greater. When Americans were asked in 1985 to say how many confidants they had, the typical response was three. By 2004, this number had dropped to zero.

KATHY HUTCHINS/SHUTTERSTOCK



Alex Trebek's remarkable near remission of stage 4 pancreatic cancer raises questions about the impact of well wishes.

Knowing that someone else is thinking about us can be a source of comfort.

I knew a physician who once met a patient with end-stage skin cancer in the emergency department. When it became clear that the patient had no place to go and no one to care for her, the physician, who had once been a nun, brought the patient into her own home, where she, her husband and their two sons cared for the woman around the clock during the last few weeks of her life. When such stories are shared, they can inspire our own resolve to do more to care more for those in need.

The recent outpouring of well wishes for a television game show host—a stranger to most who reached out to him—offers an important insight into what makes families, friendships and communities thrive. Connectedness and its benefits are not something we should take for granted. Whether in the form of a simple text message or greeting card—or better yet, a phone call or a visit—letting someone who is hurting know that we care can make a big difference for all.

Richard Gunderman is a chancellor's professor of medicine, liberal arts, and philanthropy at Indiana University. This article was first published on The Conversation.

Chronic Depression May Increase Death Risk in Heart Attack Patients: Study

MAT LECOMPTE

A recently published study suggests that heart attack survivors with chronic mood disorders such as depression may have more of a risk of premature death.

Patients who have experienced a heart attack and show signs of mood disorders have been linked to more extended hospital stays and a worse prognosis compared to those who do not suffer from mood disorders.

Earlier studies have connected chronic mood disorders to a higher risk of death after a heart attack, but there has been no apparent link to whether patients with specific types of emotional distress might have a higher risk for serious complications or premature death. Published in the European Journal of Preventive, the study assessed almost 58,000 patients for emotional distress two months after a heart attack, and again at 12 months after the attack. Twenty-one percent of all patients reported persistent psychological problems in both assessments.

Researchers ended up following a majority of the patients for at least four years. The results showed that compared to those who didn't suffer from any emotional distress, patients who felt depressed or anxious at both assessments were 46 percent more likely to die of cardiovascular causes during the follow-up period. It was also shown that 54 percent were more likely to die from other causes.

Senior study author Erik Olsson of Uppsala University in Sweden said, "Temporary mood swings, if they are not too frequent or dramatic, are a normal part of life."

"Feeling a little depressed after a heart attack might even be a good thing if it makes you withdraw a bit and get some rest," Olsson added. "Emotional states help us regulate our behaviors."

About 15 percent of patients in the study who experienced some symptoms of emotional distress two months after the attack said they no longer had symptoms after one year. These patients showed the same odds of premature death as those who didn't have any anxiety or depression at either assessment.

"It's possible that people who reported depression and anxiety at both assessments had a harder time following doctors' orders for an ideal recovery," said Olsson.

"Chronic emotional distress makes it harder to adopt the lifestyle changes that improve prognosis after a heart attack. These include quitting smoking, being physically active, eating healthily, reducing stress and taking prescribed medications."

Emotional Distress

Olsson noted that emotional distress might not have been directly related to the heart attack in some patients.

"Instead, they might have experienced depression or anxiety due to other risk factors for mood disorders like poverty, limited education or lack of a spouse or job."

Dr. Robert Carney of Washington University School of Medicine and Barnes-Jewish Hospital in St. Louis, Missouri, who wrote an accompanying editorial, said, "It is also unclear whether treating depression or anxiety could impact outcomes."

"We do not know for certain whether treating depression or anxiety improves survival, but there is some evidence that it probably does," Carney said. "At the very least, being free of depression and anxiety improves quality of life."

Mat Lecompte is a freelance health and wellness journalist. This article was first published on BelMarraHealth.com

Patients who felt depressed or anxious were 46 percent more likely to die of cardiovascular causes during the follow-up period.

SAM WORDLEY SHUTTERSTOCK

Want to Be Healthy and Happy? Choose a Conscientious Partner

LYNN WILLIAMS

Your partner's personality can influence your life in countless ways and studies have shown that a conscientious partner is good for your health. Our latest study shows that they are also good for your quality of life.

Personality reflects a person's characteristic way of thinking, feeling, and behaving. Psychologists tend to examine personality across five key traits: extroversion, openness to experiences, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and agreeableness. Typically, these traits are measured using questionnaires that help psychologists build up a profile of a person's personality.

Personality characteristics can have a strong impact on health, even influencing how long you live. Research shows that the more conscientious a person is, the longer they live. Conscientiousness is defined by high levels of self-discipline. Because conscientious people are more organized and careful, they are more likely to lead healthier lives than their less conscientious peers. For instance, they may be more likely to follow their doctor's advice, eat more healthily, and do more exercise.

It's not just your own personality that can strongly influence your health, though—your partner's can too. A U.S. study examined the relationship between partner conscientiousness and health ratings in 2,203 older couples. They found that husbands' conscientiousness influenced wives' health, and wives' conscientiousness influenced husbands' health. The same findings were also replicated in a more recent study.

These results showed something particularly interesting: conscientiousness had a compensatory effect, meaning that having a more conscientious spouse predicted better health, even after taking into account a participant's own conscientiousness. A finding that the researchers described as "compensatory conscientiousness."

Better Quality of Life

We recently carried out a study to see if we could find similar effects in younger adults. We also wanted to see if a person's conscientiousness influenced their partner's quality of life. The term "quality of life" reflects a person's satisfaction with their life, including physical health, psychological state, and social relationships.

We talked to 182 romantically involved couples, asking each person to complete a questionnaire. The participants were aged from 18 to 78, with an average age of 36. To qualify to take part, couples had to have been in a relationship for at least six months. Just under half the sample was married and most couples lived together. On average, the couples had been together for just over ten years.

Each person completed the questionnaire separately from their partner so that they could not discuss their answers. The survey questions let us measure their personality, using the ten-item personality inventory and ask them questions about their quality of life using questions developed by the World Health Organisation.

Our analysis showed that an individual's own level of conscientiousness was related to their quality of life, with participants who had higher levels of conscientiousness reporting a better quality of life. We also found that people who had partners with higher levels of conscientiousness also reported having a better quality of life. This finding was true for both men and women.

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Both men and women who had partners with higher levels of conscientiousness reported having a better quality of life.

Conscientious partners are also dependable and so are likely to be good providers of social support for their partner.

Our findings raise the question of how a person's conscientiousness influences their partner's health. It is likely that partners high in conscientiousness help to create an environment that leads to greater health. For instance, a conscientious partner likes to plan and be organized and so they may provide their partners with useful health reminders, such as to take medication or attend a doctor's appointment. Conscientious partners are also dependable and so are likely to be good providers of social support for their partner.

These findings show that our partner's personality is important for our health, so choose your life partner carefully.

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