

MIND & BODY



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Joan Lunden former host of Good Morning America and senior living advocate.

Baby's Immune System

This essential defense grows over time, but gets a jumpstart from mom.



Babies come into this world vulnerable to countless pathogens but quickly develop an immune system that can protect them—after a little help from mom.

LILIAN PRESTI

As with all other organs and systems in their bodies, newborns' immune systems are not fully developed at birth. Rather, their immunity—a protective function consisting of cells, proteins, and organs—grows and strengthens with time. With each new day, this immune system strives to keep them safe from the countless pathogens in their environment.

At birth, a baby's immune system is still quite weak and sensitive. Given its fragility, nature has compensated for this by endowing mothers with the ability to transfer immunity to their baby (called passive immunity) by way of antibodies through breast milk. A mother's breast milk is filled with protective immunoglobulins that work to fight off bacteria and viruses that could be harmful to the baby. This is why breastfed babies get sick much less often than formula-fed babies.

Immunoglobulins survive the digestive tract because they are packaged within a protective substance that allows them to survive the stomach environment and get to the intestinal tract, at which point they adhere to the lining or are absorbed. By remaining in the digestive tract, immunoglobulins help prevent the growth of bacteria that can

be dangerous to a baby's health.

Interestingly, during pregnancy, a mother also passes on helpful antibodies, particularly IgG, through the placenta, which remain with the baby for the first few months of life. From colostrum—mother's first milk—onward, breast milk is filled with highly beneficial antibodies that a mother's own body has developed in response to her region's specific pathogens.

A child's immune system will start to develop on its own at about 2 to 3 months of age. At this point, the antibodies that the mother has conferred start to decline. A baby's immune system begins to grow and develop when it comes into contact with bacteria, viruses, and fungi. The immune system can now wage a counterattack against the invaders. By 1 year of age, a baby will have developed its immune system significantly, although not entirely. Some experts suggest that an immune system is not fully developed until a child is approximately 12 to 14 years old. At this time, the child has reached adult levels of antibody formation.

Strategies to Boost Baby's Immunity

- Breastfeed for as long as possible
- Keep baby away from sick individuals
- Ensure clean hands when dealing



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- with newborns
- Use baby probiotics to ensure a healthy intestinal tract
- Ensure the breastfeeding mom is eating a healthy diet
- Ensure adequate exposure to sunlight or vitamin D

A baby's immune system should be supported throughout the first phase of its life so that it can be encouraged to strengthen quickly. A healthy immune

system is the foundation of a healthy childhood and later adulthood.

Lilian Presti is a registered holistic nutritionist who has worked in the nutrition and corporate wellness fields for more than a decade. She teaches pediatric nutrition and has been featured in Elle Magazine, Flare, Today's Bride, The Weekly Scoop, City TV, and more. This article was originally published on NaturallySavvy.com

FOOD IS MEDICINE

Why Walnut Resembles

Remarkable similarities between plants

SAYER JI

Nothing could be more beautiful or poetic than when a healing food actually looks like the organ system it nourishes and heals in the body.

While commonly viewed as mere coincidence or an act of extraordinary randomness, it is difficult for me to acknowledge the exquisite design of the walnut, whose eerily skull-like shell encompasses the fatty-acid rich, bihemispheric "brain" of the nut, without opening myself to the possibility that Mother Nature wove metaphor and meaning into the natural order of things.

Walnuts are well known to have a disproportionately high amount of the very fatty acids, specifically the EPA/DHA omega-3 fatty acid substrate alpha-linolenic acid that the brain requires for optimal health. Moreover, walnuts contain well-known neuroprotective compounds such as gallic acid, vitamin E isomers, melatonin, folate, and polyphenols. Coincidence? Or is Mother Nature providing a clue so obvious we would have to be nuts (or nut deficient) in order to overlook it?

Or, consider the remarkable pomegranate fruit, prized the world over as a regenerative, fertility- and prosperity-enhancing food of deep cultural and mythological significance.

Amazingly, pomegranate not only looks like the mammalian ovary but is literally the fruiting ovary of the pomegranate plant, and which produces some of the very same hormones (e.g. estrone and testosterone) that normally only animals produce, and which can even replace their function in the ovariectomy-induced experimental model of menopause.

In these examples, we see reflected a phenomenon once described as part of the "doctrine of signatures," a concept that goes back at least 500 years around the time of Paracelsus (1491-1541), who stated: "Nature marks each growth ... according to its curative benefit."

While this concept was sometimes taken too literally in the ancient world, with superficial resemblances between plants

and human organs often being mistaken as having significant medical value, indubitably, there is still deep wisdom embedded in ancient medical texts, concepts, and practices.

GreenMedInfo.com focuses on supporting intuitive faculties and direct experiences (the so-called "N of 1," which is the phenomenological ground of all truth) in the realm of natural medicine with peer-reviewed scientific research. This includes validating some of the more "poetical" concepts, such as the "doctrine of signatures" that the majority of modern medical professionals have left behind as "magical thinking," or were never exposed to in their training.

I believe we are nearing a golden age of mutual validation, where the ancient and new worlds meet to confirm one another, ultimately amplifying the awareness that natural healing and self-healing is the only sane path when it comes to, at least, nonemergency health care.

Pomegranate: The Ovary, Heart, and Blood Healing Food
Pomegranate is an exceptional example of a food that participates in the ex-

the Brain It Nourishes

and their healing effects are more than coincidence

traordinary doctrine of signatures, because it both resembles and heals multiple organ systems. Not only is it a plant ovary that supports, nourishes, and heals the ovaries of animals, but it looks like a heart and "bleeds" an amazing, astringent juice that anyone who has tasted it knows leaves the mouth feeling exceptionally clean.

The oral cavity happens to be lined with the very same epithelial tissue that lines the inside of the blood vessels (endothelium). The same cleansing effect that you taste and feel in your mouth also occurs in your arteries, which is why pomegranate has been clinically proven to reverse arterial plaque buildup within just months of consumption. Can you imagine what would happen if the millions of people on statin drugs—who are obtaining no cardiovascular benefits—consumed pomegranate instead? If food were used as medicine, we might actually accomplish a deceleration, and perhaps even regression, of the ever-expanding global heart-disease epidemic.

Pomegranate's blood-like juice has been clinically shown to increase the health and vitality of our

blood. A 2014 study published in the Journal of Applied Physiology, Nutrition, and Metabolism, titled "Effects of pomegranate extract on blood flow and running time to exhaustion," found that acute ingestion of pomegranate extract 30 minutes before exercise enhanced vessel diameter and blood flow and delayed fatigue during exercise. The pomegranate group noted a significant increase in post-exertion vitality as well.

If food were used as medicine, we might actually accomplish a deceleration, and perhaps even regression, of the ever-expanding global heart disease epidemic.

I found this study particularly interesting because I have noticed after consuming pomegranate juice the same sensation of increased blood flow. I was not certain, until reading this study, if this was something I was imagining, or if it was possible that within one dose of pomegranate, one could experience significant differences in blood flow.

Remarkably, another "blood-like" liquid, beet juice, has also been found to have significant blood-supportive properties. In one recent study, a single dose of beet juice resulted in improved cognition within 90 minutes, and which researchers attributed to its ability to positively modulate the blood flow dynamics (hemodynamic response) in the frontal cortex. One of the mechanisms identified was the nitrates in beet juice, which produce a blood-vessel-dilating effect.

For those looking for more information on the doctrine of signatures, the herbalist Matthew Wood provides salient insight in an article on the topic under the subheading "The Forces of Nature and the Creation of 'Signatures':" "Every plant represents a finely honed response to environmental stress—the exact same stress that human beings must contend with in order to stay healthy. The wide array of chemical compounds in the plant, as well as its shape, color, and environmental

niche all represent adaptations to stress. The plant has been molded in response to stress. There is no room for extra chemicals or colors or extravagant shapes. It is a survivor and what it can do for itself it can convey to us as a medicine. The philosopher Rudolf Steiner pointed out that the same forces which cause disease in the human frame cause the contortion of the plant. Thus, the 'contortions' or shapes and colors, not to mention the environmental niche in which the plant lives, are 'signatures' picturing the stresses and diseases to which plant is remedial.

"There is also a deeper lesson. The doctrine of signatures teaches us to view disease and remedy in a 'characterological' sense, or as specific patterns or identity patterns formed in response to stress. Each possesses an inherent logic and intelligence all their own. These responses produce patterns or 'signatures' which we must learn to read in plant and person alike."

For an even deeper scientific explanation of how plants and animals coevolved, learning how to survive and thrive together by developing certain phytochemical codependencies, read the remarkable article on the topic titled "Xenohormesis: health benefits from an eon of plant stress response evolution."

For more information on food-organ resemblance, read GreenMedInfo's article: 3 Foods That Look Like the Organ They Heal, as well as the deeper food-philosophy of Sayer Ji: Leonardo da Vinci & The New Biology.

Sayer Ji is the founder of GreenMedInfo.com, a reviewer at the International Journal of Human Nutrition and Functional Medicine, co-founder and CEO of Systeome Biomed, vice chairman of the board of the National Health Federation, and steering committee member of the Global Non-GMO Foundation. This article was first published on GreenMedInfo.com

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Women are especially susceptible to an underperforming thyroid, which can lead to them being treated for depression that can result from the condition.



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Milder Form of Hypothyroidism Often Misdiagnosed as Depression

Frequent misdiagnosis results in ineffective treatments due to difficult-to-spot and complex condition

KELLY BROGAN

If you walk into a doctor's office and tell a conventional doctor that you're depressed, gaining weight, fatigued, having trouble concentrating, cold, and constipated, chances are that the doctor would tell you that it's depression, aging, or just stress, and that's why you're feeling the way you do.

They might prescribe you some medication and off you go.

But one thing that the doctor might fail to realize is that those very symptoms of depression also double as symptoms of a commonly underdiagnosed condition: hypothyroidism.

An underperforming thyroid (hypothyroidism) is one of the most underdiagnosed conditions in America, yet it's incredibly common—especially in women. Over 20 percent of all women have a “lazy” thyroid, but only half of those women are diagnosed.

Science has known about the relationship between a dysfunctional thyroid and symptoms of depression for a long time. Depression often occurs concurrently with changes in the hypothalamic-pituitary-thyroid axis, which is a hormonal feedback control loop that regulates metabolism.

So exactly how many patients are told they have depression when it's really a thyroid problem? A new study published in the peer-reviewed journal BMC Psychiatry is shedding a bit of light onto that question.

New Insight Into Subclinical Hypothyroidism

In a 2019 study, researchers from several Malaysian universities used a meta-analysis technique to evaluate the association between subclinical hypothyroidism—meaning hypothyroidism that is not severe enough to present definite observable symptoms—and depression amongst 12,315 individuals. The researchers were hoping to further clarify the prevalence of depression among people with subclinical hypothyroidism (SCH) and the effect of levothyroxine therapy, the most common synthetic thyroid hormone drug that is sold under the brand names of Synthroid, Tirosint, Levoxyl, Unithroid, and Levo-T.

Though the relationship between depression and hypothyroidism has been evident to scientific research for around 200 years, the association between depression and hypothyroidism's sneakier and more subtle cousin, subclinical hypothyroidism (SCH) has historically been more controversial. Subclinical hypothyroidism is an early, mild form of hypothyroidism where peripheral thyroid hormone levels are within normal range but serum thyroid-stimulating hormone (TSH) levels are mildly elevated. It's estimated that a whole 3-8 percent of the general population (usually more women than men) is affected by SCH.

Over 20 percent of all women have a “lazy” thyroid but only half of those women are diagnosed.

The thyroid sits in the middle of a complex and dynamic web of hormones and chemicals that controls metabolism.



Keeping a thyroid healthy is an exercise in holistic medicine that requires you to pay attention to all aspects of your lifestyle.



In the study results, which the researchers found by compiling the data of many other studies, researchers found that:

1. Patients with SCH had a higher risk of depression than patients with normal thyroid function controls, which means that patients with SCH were more likely to have depressive symptoms.
2. In individuals with SCH and depression, levothyroxine therapy didn't help improve their depression or symptoms.

What does that mean? The researchers found that thyroid imbalance seems to be a driver of depression—and that trying to replace those missing hormones with the most commonly prescribed synthetic T4 hormone, levothyroxine, doesn't actually help alleviate depressive symptoms.

This is an interesting finding because about 20 million Americans, mostly women, have some type of thyroid problem and are prescribed synthetic thyroid hormones such as Synthroid, a brand of the levothyroxine. Instead of using synthetic chemicals to “fix” our bodies, which apparently isn't really working, we should be finding the root cause of the thyroid dysfunction and take a more holistic approach in healing our bodies.

The Thyroid

To better understand why this study was interesting, we first need to understand more about the thyroid in general. The thyroid is a butterfly-shaped gland that sits at your throat just a little under the Adam's apple. The gland produces a range of hormones, but its two most active substances are T3, the active form of thyroid hormone, and T4, the storage form of thyroid hormone.

A healthy thyroid regularly secretes T3 and T4 into the bloodstream so that most of the T4 can be converted into its active form, T3, around the body, including the brain. To do that, the process depends on a wide variety of factors: the amount of available specialized enzymes, optimal cortisol (your stress hormone) levels, and certain nutrients such as iron, iodine, zinc, magnesium, selenium, B vitamins, vitamin C, and vitamin D.

But thyroids do much more than pump out hormones; they also take information in from the body to adjust its own pace. The thyroid sits in the middle of a complex and dynamic web of hormones and chemicals that controls metabolism, which is how fast and efficiently cells can convert nutrients into energy. In conversation with the brain, adrenal glands, and more, the thyroid indirectly affects every cell, tissue, and organ in the body—from muscles, bones, and skin to the digestive tract, heart, and brain.

One major way that thyroids affect us is through our mitochondria, the organelles in most cells that are widely considered to be the powerhouses of the cell. Mitochondria not only help generate energy for our body to do things, but they also determine the time of cell death and more.

Our mitochondria are maintained by our thyroid hormone—which is why patients whose thyroids are underperforming experience an array of symptoms, including fatigue, constipation, hair loss, depres-

sion, foggy thinking, cold body temperature, low metabolism, and muscle aches. That's partially why thyroid problems have such resounding and far-reaching effects on the body. When your mitochondria aren't being properly cared for by your thyroid hormone, everything in your body has less energy to do the work it needs to do, and everything slows down.

What Makes the Thyroid Misbehave?

It's no surprise that so many factors go into keeping the thyroid happy. The thyroid can be thrown off balance by all sorts of reasons: chemicals and food additives, like emulsifiers (found in commercial soda), synthetic plastic chemicals, fluoride (found in much of our tap water), and mercury (from large fish), or immune responses. Importantly, this circuitry is also influenced by another hormone, cortisol, which is produced by your adrenal glands at the command of your brain.

When we look at adrenal function, we have to take our analyses one step farther and understand what is causing adrenals to be stressed out. From there, we know that the adrenal glands are affected by the gut, diet, and environmental immune provocation and that many lifestyle and environmental factors can influence this relationship, which in turn, can disturb the thyroid.

Thyroid Disease Is a Psychiatric Pretender

The point of all of this is to say that because of how interconnected the relationship between the thyroid and other parts of the body are, thyroid imbalance often leads to the symptoms of depression, when the culprit is an unhappy thyroid. The study that we talked about earlier is helping us better understand just how prevalent mistaking thyroid imbalance, particularly subclinical hypothyroidism, for depression is.

Of course, it doesn't help that symptoms listed above are a vague bunch and could have many causes, so conventional doctors frequently write them off as a symptom of aging, depression, or stress in the few minutes they usually spend talking with patients. The way that lab tests for hypothyroidism (both subclinical and hypothyroidism) are run and the way reference ranges are established aren't very accurate.

Keeping a thyroid healthy is an exercise in holistic medicine that requires you to pay attention to all aspects of your lifestyle. Check out our free symptom checker at KellyBroganMD.com to see if your thyroid might be affected, or if you have any of the other Top 5 “Psychiatric Pretenders” common physical imbalances that show up as mental or emotional symptoms.

Kelly Brogan, MD, is a holistic women's health psychiatrist and author of *The New York Times* bestselling book “A Mind of Your Own,” the children's book “A Time for Rain,” and co-editor of the landmark textbook “Integrative Therapies for Depression.” This work is reproduced and distributed with the permission of Kelly Brogan, MD. For more articles, sign up for the newsletter at KellyBroganMD.com

Long Commutes by Car Hard on Our Health

Walking and cycling to work makes commuters happier and more productive, find researchers

LIANG MA & RUNING YE

In Australia, more than 9 million people commute to work every weekday. The distance they travel and how they get there—car, public transport, cycling, or walking—can influence their well-being and performance at work.

Our study, involving 1,121 full-time workers who commute daily to work, made several important findings:

- Those who commute longer distances tend to have more days off work.
- Among middle-aged workers, those who walk or cycle performed better in the workplace.
- Those who commute short distances, walk, or cycle to work are more likely to be happy commuters, which makes them more productive.

In Australia, full-time workers spend 5.75 hours a week on average traveling to and from work. Among them, nearly a quarter of commutes can be classed as lengthy (travel for 45 minutes or more one way).

Long commutes cause physical and mental strains on workers and may also affect their work participation, engagement, and productivity.

Australia's pervasive urban sprawl means most workers commute by car. It's a problem reflected in other major urban centers such as Los Angeles or Toronto, where public transit is unable to adequately cover commuters. Unfortunately, driving has been found to be the most stressful way to commute.

Driving to work is associated with a series of health problems and lower social capital (smaller social networks with less social participation), which all affect work performance and productivity.

What Did the Study Look At?

Our research investigated how and to what extent our daily commuting can influence workplace productivity. We surveyed 1,121 employees from Sydney, Melbourne, and



GOLDYB/Shutterstock

Driving has been found to be the most stressful way to commute, with longer commutes associated with higher stress and more absent days.

Brisbane. These employees are all employed full-time, have a fixed place of employment, make regular commuting trips, and work in different industries and occupations.

We found that workers with a long-distance commute have more absent days.

Two reasons can explain this result. First, workers with long commutes are more likely to become ill and be absent. Second, workers with long commutes receive less net income (after deducting travel costs) and less leisure time. Therefore, they are more likely to be absent to avoid commuting cost and time.

The average commuting distance for Australian capital cities is about 15 kilometers (9 miles). Workers with a commuting distance of 1 kilometer have 36 percent fewer absent days than those commuting 15. Workers who commute 50 kilometers have 22 percent more absent days.

This study also finds that middle-aged (35 to 54) commuters who walk or cycle—known as active travel—have better self-

reported work performance than public transport and car commuters. This result may reflect the health and cognitive benefits of active travel modes.

Finally, this study finds the short-distance and active travel commuters reported they were relaxed, calm, enthusiastic, and satisfied with their commuting trips, and were more productive.

How Does Commuting Affect Productivity?

Urban economic theory provides one explanation of the link between commuting and productivity. It argues that workers make trade-offs between leisure time at home and effort in work. Therefore, workers with long commutes put in less effort or shirk work as their leisure time is reduced.

Commuting can also affect work productivity through poorer physical and mental health. Low physical activity can lead to obesity as well as related chronic diseases, significantly reducing workforce participa-

tion and increasing absenteeism. The mental stress associated with commuting can further affect work performance.

A growing number of studies have found active commuting by walking and cycling is perceived to be more “relaxing and exciting.” By contrast, commuting by car and public transport is more “stressful and boring.” These positive or negative emotions during the commute influence moods and emotions during the workday, affecting work performance.

Finally, the commuting choice could influence work productivity through cognitive ability. Physical activity improves brain function and cognition, which are closely related to performance. So it's possible that active travel commuters might have better cognitive ability at work, at least in the several hours after the intense physical activity of cycling or walking to work.

What Are the Policy Implications?

Employers should consider types of commuting as part of their overall strategies for improving job performance. They should aim to promote active commuting and, if possible, to shorten the commuting time. For example, providing safe bike parking and showers at work could significantly increase cycling to work.

As for governments, in most states of Australia, only a tiny portion (less than 2 percent) of transport funding is devoted to bicycling infrastructure.

By contrast, in the Netherlands, most municipalities have specific budget allocations to implement cycling policies. Australia should allocate more transport infrastructure funding to active travel, given the economic benefits of walking and cycling to work.

Liang Ma is a vice chancellor's postdoctoral research fellow at RMIT University in Australia. Runing Ye is a research fellow at Melbourne School of Design at the University of Melbourne in Australia. This article was first published on *The Conversation*.

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MICHAELJUNG/SHUTTERSTOCK

Seniors tend to underestimate their chance of falling.

NAVIGATING AGING

More Seniors Are DYING IN FALLS

Rates of fatal falls have doubled since 2000 and doctors can do more to stop that

JUDITH GRAHAM

Older adults worried about falling typically receive general advice: Take an exercise class. Get your vision checked. Stop taking medications for sleep. Install grab bars in the bathroom. A new study suggests that sort of advice hasn't proved to be very effective: Nearly three times more adults age 75 and older died from falls in 2016 than in 2000, according to a recent report in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. In 2016, 25,189 people in this age group died from falls, compared with 8,613 in 2000. The rate of fatal falls for adults 75 and older more than doubled during this period, to 122.2 per 100,000 people in 2016 from 51.6 per 100,000 people in 2000, the report found.

What's needed to check this alarming trend, experts suggest, is a more personalized approach to preventing falls, more involvement

by medical practitioners, and better ways to motivate older adults to take action. Elizabeth Burns, a co-author of the report and health scientist at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), said it's not yet clear why fatal falls are increasing. Older adults are probably more vulnerable because they're living longer with conditions such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease and taking more brain-altering medications such as opioids, she noted.

By 2030, the CDC projects that 49 million older adults will fall each year, resulting in 12 million injuries and more than \$100 billion in health-related spending.

The steep increase in fatal falls is "definitely upsetting," especially given national, state, and local efforts to prevent these accidents, said Kathleen Cameron, senior director of the Center for Healthy Aging at the National Council on Aging. Since 2012, the CDC has tried to

turn the situation around by encouraging physicians to adopt evidence-based fall prevention practices. But doctors still aren't doing enough to help older patients, Burns said. She cites evidence from two studies. In one, published in 2016, researchers found that fewer than half of seniors who were considered high risk—people who'd fallen repeatedly or sought medical attention for falls—received a comprehensive fall risk assessment, as recommended by the CDC and the American Geriatrics Society.

These assessments evaluate a person's gait, lower-body muscle strength, balance, medication use, problems with their feet, blood pressure when rising from a sitting position, vision, vitamin D levels, and home environment.

In another study, published last year, Burns found that physicians and nurse practitioners routinely failed to review older adults' medications (about 40 percent didn't do

so), recommend exercise (48 percent didn't), or refer people to a vision specialist (about 62 percent didn't) when advising older patients about falls.

Physicians' involvement is important because older adults tend to take their doctors' advice seriously, said Emily Nabors, program manager of the Fall Prevention Center of Excellence at the University of Southern California.

Also, seniors tend to underestimate their chance of falling.

"It's very easy for people to look at a list of things that they should be concerned about and think, 'That doesn't apply to me. I walk just fine. I don't have trouble with my balance,'" said Dorothy Baker, a research scientist at Yale School of Medicine and executive director of the Connecticut Collaboration for Fall Prevention.

What's the alternative to giving seniors a laundry list of things to do and hope they pay attention? We asked experts around the country for suggestions:

Get a fall risk assessment. Doctors should ask older adults three questions about falls: Have you fallen in the past year? Do you feel unsteady when walking or standing? And are you afraid of falling? If the answer is yes to any of these questions, you're probably a good candidate for a comprehensive fall risk evaluation.

Continued on Page 12



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How a Faith in Feelings Enslaves Your Mind

Haven't we all blamed our circumstances or other people for our feelings?

BARRY BROWNSTEIN

We have been taught to trust our feelings. Being authentic, we are told, is the key to success. On college campuses, feelings have been elevated to the sacred.

Gillian McCann, a professor of religion at Canada's Nipissing University, relates the story of her graduate school supervisor advising her "to do whatever [she] felt." A friend listening to her story quipped, "That kind of advice has ruined a generation."

Writing with co-author Gitte Bechgaard, McCann observes that problems with emotional self-regulation and addiction are rapidly growing. They add that "we are living in a culture with an expectation to be authentic and expressive in all life situations—quite independent of context or consequences."

McCann and Bechgaard pointedly write, "A mind that is left undeveloped (or not attended to) is ... potentially our worst enemy."

Wet Streets Don't Cause Rain

One morning, after setting up my breakfast in my Instant Pot, I sat down and prepared for my workday by watching my thoughts arise. I was attending to my mind, especially noticing grievances and mild annoyances that could undermine my purpose for the day. As I sunk into my meditation, I heard the steam hissing furiously from my Instant Pot. The pot had not sealed.

Mindless, I found myself back in the kitchen screaming in frustration.

In seconds, I was shocked by the intense emotions seething beneath my placid surface. The hissing steam exposed what was lurking in my mind.

If I was ready to learn, the hissing steam was about to teach me a lesson. I could blame the Instant Pot for my rage, or I could acknowledge my thoughts of frustration, irritation, and blame ready to erupt.

Feelings Don't Cause Thoughts

Haven't we all blamed our circumstances or other people for our feelings? Feeling resentment, we blame our partner for not offering enough support. Feeling anxiety and stress, we blame a traffic delay. Feeling depressed, we are sure it is coming from the state of the world. We have reversed cause and effect. As

You can't have a feeling without having a thought first.

Our life is what our thoughts make it.

Marcus Aurelius, "Meditations"

We can interpret our feelings as signals, giving reliable feedback on the quality of our thinking.

the late author Michael Crichton observed, "Wet sidewalks don't cause rain." Likewise, feelings don't cause thoughts.

You can't have a feeling without having a thought first. Take a moment now; try to feel anger. Can you feel anger without first conjuring up angry thoughts?

Splitting your thoughts from your feelings and pretending something outside yourself is causing them is the beginning of psychological enslavement. The Instant Pot didn't cause my frustration; its hissing steam revealed my frustration. Traffic doesn't cause anger; it reveals our anger. Relationships don't cause resentment; they reveal resentment we are carrying within ourselves. Yet, we stubbornly insist that our wet sidewalks cause our rain. The more intense our feelings, the more certain we are that other people and circumstances are to blame for the feelings we experience.

As our feelings become more intense, so do the associated sensations. Our heart rates may rapidly rise. Our muscles may constrict. Our thinking swirls with rapid-fire thoughts; an external situation has hijacked our attention. We seek relief from our swirling thoughts. For many of us, reaching for our smartphone is an escape from the swirl. Addictions form to escape that swirl.

The World Is Experienced Inside-Out

This past week, you may have experienced anxiety, fear, depression, worry, resentment, frustration, or some other intense feeling. I have never met a person who claims to be immune to negative feelings. What is crucial is how we choose to process our feelings: outside-in or inside-out.

Typically, we process feelings in an outside-in manner. We believe our feelings are giving us feedback about other people, our circumstances, past events, or future possibilities.

Most of us pay special attention to some negative feelings while easily overlooking others. Judging by the growing number of prescriptions written for anxiety, many pay special attention to anxious thoughts. For some, when anxiety arises, their thinking speeds up. They are gripped by thoughts of, "Why am I feeling this way? How can I get rid of this feeling?" The more their head is filled with thinking, the less present they are to the moment. Taking a prescription drug may seem like the only way to calm the mind.

Looking at feelings through an outside-in mindset, it seems we have a lot of external circumstances to process and manage. After all, if an endless supply of other people and circumstances are causing our feelings, it is natural to have a lot on our minds. However, we misunderstand how the mind operates when we attempt to get to the bottom of our feelings from an outside-in mindset.

There are no feelings that can ever exist separate from our thoughts. We are always experiencing our thinking and our feelings from the inside-out.

In "Meditations," Marcus Aurelius wrote, "Our life is what our thoughts make it." From an inside-out mindset, our feelings are a barometer, giving us feedback on the quality of our thinking at the moment.

Taking More Responsibility

Understanding that we can only expe-

rience life inside-out, not outside-in, is the beginning of taking responsibility and experiencing psychological freedom.

In 1895, the first silent movie was shown in Paris. The less-than-a-minute movie simply showed a train arriving in a station. There are apocryphal accounts of audience members rushing out of the theater in fear. The audience experienced the train bearing down on them; the experience of projection was new.

The story, even if untrue, provides a good metaphor. Gripped by an outside-in mindset, we try to flee our mind's theater by resisting the thoughts and feelings we have created. The feelings we are having in any given moment are arising from our thoughts, not from our external circumstances.

We project our thinking onto the world. In "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People," Stephen Covey wrote, "We see the world, not as it is, but as we are."

Each moment, we choose whether to take responsibility for our experience of life. When we look at our experience through the lens of an outside-in mindset, we believe our feelings are giving us honest feedback about our circumstances and other people. This outside-in mindset leads to blame.

The alternative is to experience life through an inside-out mindset. Moment by moment, we can interpret our feelings as signals, giving reliable feedback on the quality of our thinking.

Life requires action. When action is needed, an inside-out mindset allows us to act from our highest purpose and values. In contrast, using an outside-in mindset, we approach a problem with a built-in lack of clarity. This lack of clarity undermines our problem-solving ability. Indeed, the harder the problem, the more the lack of clarity in the outside-in mindset works against us. As the popular saying goes, "We cannot solve our problems with the same level of thinking that created them."

Learning From Life

We can go through life kicking and screaming, or we can be a happy learner. To stubbornly maintain that life is being lived outside-in is to be devoted to misery.

To be a happy learner, remember that your interpretation of an "external" situation is a big clue to your state of mind.

Observe when intense feelings arise. Observe any thoughts blaming other people or circumstances for your feelings.

For example, do bad drivers anger you? If so, observe the accusations you are making. Perhaps you are a good driver, but inconsiderate in other situations. If you are willing to learn, life gives you insight into the contents of your thinking.

Understanding that life is lived inside-out, practice the subtraction solution: have a little willingness to say, "I must be mistaken because I'm blaming."

The Stoic philosopher Epictetus began his life as a slave. He overcame physical bondage and then attended to his mind to free himself of his own inner chains. In the collection of his writing "The Enchiridion," he shared his timeless discovery: "People are not disturbed by things, but by the views they take of them." Epictetus continued, "When therefore we are hindered, or disturbed, or grieved, let us never attribute it to others, but to ourselves; that is, to our own principles. An uninstructed person will lay the fault of his own bad condition upon others."

The good news is life's situations—even hissing steam—will instruct us if we are willing to learn to attend to our mind from an inside-out mindset. Barry Brownstein is professor emeritus of economics and leadership at the University of Baltimore. He is the author of *The Inner-Work of Leadership*. To receive Barry's essays, subscribe to *Mindset Shifts* at BarryBrownstein.com. This article was originally published on the *Foundation for Economic Education*.



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What It's Like to Be Truly Committed to Something

If you're not keeping your commitments, it may be time to do a gut check and be honest with yourself

LEO BABAUTA

All my life, I've struggled with being half-committed.

Not always, but more than I'd usually like to admit. I say I'm going to stick to something, and I actually believe it. Then, a week later (sometimes sooner, sometimes longer), I falter. I justify it. I feel guilty. I try not to think about it. I resolve to do better. Repeat, for life.

Recently, I read a post by a coach and teacher I respect, Kendra Cunov, on Getting Clear on Commitment. It was thought-provoking, as always, and made me re-examine what I'm truly committed to. Not "I'm committed, but ..." What I'm truly committed to.

I've done this before, notably last December, when I was doing an annual re-examination of my life and commitments. It's always useful to re-examine what you're committed to, and to re-commit. But as the year has progressed, it's become clear that I'm only truly committed to some of the things on my list.

So I've been spending some time looking at what makes me truly committed in one area (my family, for example), and not so committed in another (reading books).

What I've found is that when I'm truly committed, there is a deep feeling in my gut that there's no way I'm going to fail at the commitment.

It's not, "I really want to fulfill this commitment." Instead, it's, "There is no question in my mind I'm going to fulfill it."

When I feel discomfort and have an urge to put off the commitment, if I'm not really committed, I'll justify putting it off. If I'm truly committed, there's no doubt in my mind that I'll make it happen.

To paraphrase a teacher of mine, if I'm committed, I become a man who would walk through walls to make it happen. What are you truly committed to? Are you willing to walk through walls for it? Is there no question in your mind that you'll do it?

If you're not fully committed, you have three choices:

1. **Keep being half-committed.** This is what most of us do. I don't re-

About to take on a new hobby? Best to do a gut check and make sure you're really committed before turning your garage into a pottery studio.



half-committed, and either let go of a half-commitment (best option, usually), or deepen to true commitment.

How to Deepen

For me, the process of deepening commitments this year has looked something like this:

- Commit to it, including committing to other people that I'll do it.
- Create a structure to hold me in that commitment even when things get tough. (This includes a "Sacred Council," who I email every week.)
- Things go well, I'm on track, I feel great. I report weekly to my Sacred Council, things are awesome.
- Then I get busy and some of the commitments fall off or are put temporarily on hold. I justify it to myself.
- I re-examine my commitment—from how things have gone, it becomes apparent that I'm not as committed as I thought. I get clear on how I'm showing up and where I need to deepen my commitment.
- Then I spend some time reflecting on this commitment. I deepen it inside of my heart.

At this point, I spend some time deliberating and meditating. My deepening session goes a bit like this:

1. **Go for a walk in nature.** I've found that solitude in nature, especially while moving, is ideal. I also will find a rock or log to sit on and find stillness. But first, I like to walk, to get the blood circulating. The solitude creates space to more deeply deliberate. No phone.
2. **Ask myself, "Am I truly committed to this?"** Would I do just about anything possible to make this happen? This is a gut check. Feeling deep inside myself to understand how much I care about this.
3. **Ask myself, "Why do I care deeply about this?"** Is it because of my love for my family? Love for the people I serve? Compassion for others' pain? If it's a self-centered reason, I'm less likely to walk through walls to stroke my ego. If it's to serve the world or people I love, I'm much more likely to walk through walls. I'd do anything for my kids. And my

It's always useful to re-examine what you're committed to, and to re-commit.

commend this at all. It saps you of energy. It makes you feel like committing to something isn't really important. It makes others trust you less. It makes you trust yourself less. Instead, do one of the two next options.

2. **Let go of the commitment.** This is the best option in many cases. Let go without judgment. It's OK to not be committed to everything—in fact, it's impossible to be committed to every single thing you want to do. It's better to be committed to fewer things, but more deeply. So examine a half-commitment, and ask whether you want to make this one of your few commitments, or whether it's worth letting go. If you don't feel you'd walk through walls for this, let it go without guilt. Like you're letting go of a caged bird.

3. **Deepen your commitment.** For only a small number of things (maybe four to six), you want to be truly committed. There is no question in your mind that these things will happen. If you are only partly there, don't fret. You can deepen. We'll look at that in the next section. So let go of the habit of being



How to Think Yourself Into a Fit Person

If you want to exercise more, start viewing yourself as an exerciser

SHAELYN STRACHAN

Many of us, aware of the benefits of exercise, try to stick to a routine, only to find our sneakers at the back of the closet when the weather doesn't co-operate, our routine is disrupted, or we are short of time.

One way to turn an exercise fling into a long-term commitment is to develop an exercise identity. An exercise identity is what we imagine when we think of an "exerciser." For most, this is someone who goes to the gym regularly or prioritizes their walk, despite a busy schedule.

When we adopt an exercise identity, physical activity becomes a part of who we are and a powerful standard that can drive behavior.

The research I conducted at the University of Manitoba and the University of Ottawa shows that the more adults identify with exercise or physical activity, the more they do it.

Other researchers agree with the power of exercise identity and have described it as one of the largest psychological correlates of exercise.

Walk the Walk
So how does an exercise identity help people develop an exercise habit? Exercisers feel uncomfortable

Working out in a group has also been shown to build identity and promote behavior.



when they don't play the part and this discomfort can be motivating. Our research showed that people with a strong exercise identity who imagined not exercising for three weeks felt worse (more guilty), intended to get their exercise back on track, and had more plans about how they would do this than people with a weaker exercise identity.

Identifying with exercise gives people an advantage.

Identifying with exercise gives people an advantage. People with strong exercise identity have plentiful and strong exercise plans and intentions. Their motivation to exercise also comes from quality sources—such as enjoyment or their values, rather than from guilt or pressure from others.

Exercise confidence is also strong among people with a solid exercise identity and all these things help people get moving.

Imagine Yourself as Fit
If you want to exercise more, start

viewing yourself as an exerciser. But if your routine sees you more inclined toward a Netflix marathon than true participation, you may be skeptical about how you are going to convince yourself that you are an exerciser.

Imagining yourself as one may help. Retirees who saw themselves in the future as a physically active person reported a stronger physical activity identity one month later.

Fake It Until You Make It

Even if you have a vivid imagination, you may need some behavioral proof that you are an exerciser. Fake it until you make it—simply start working out.

Inactive women increased their exercise identity after participating in 16 weeks of exercise. The identity increases occurred independently of how intensely or long the women exercised.

This means that you don't have to run 30 miles a week or break into a sweat to wear your exerciser badge. Some report that walking the dog or simply working physical activity into their daily lives (for example, getting off the bus a few stops early) allows them to view themselves as an exerciser.

Regardless of the exact exercise rou-

tine that allows you to call yourself an exerciser, consistency is key. The take-home: find a fitness routine that fits your life and stick to it.

Exercise in a Group

Though walking the walk is a way to convince yourself that you are an exerciser, becoming one is actually about more than just exercise.

In my research, people started seeing themselves as exercisers when physical activity crept into other aspects of their lives. So shamelessly wear the gear, even when you aren't exercising. And don't be shy to work exercise into your conversations.

Working out in a group has also been shown to build identity and promote behavior so add other exercisers within your social circle. These efforts may feel contrived but they often happen naturally when you put yourself out there in exercise contexts.

Shakespeare told us ages ago, in Hamlet that "thinking makes it so." So play the part of the exerciser and start thinking about the exerciser that you can be and are becoming.

Shaelyn Strachan is an associate professor at the University of Manitoba in Canada. This article was first published on The Conversation.

It's better to be committed to fewer things, but more deeply.

discomfort is so much less important than the people I care about.

4. **Firm my resolve.** If I'm truly committed, I need to feel it in my gut. Even more, I need to feel it in my heart. This is a matter of feeling into my heart for the love that I feel deeply. And how much more important this is than my self-concern.

5. **Ask what I need to do to make this happen.** Now that I'm resolved, I ask what steps need to happen to make this a reality. If I'm committed to impeccable structure for my family's finances, what actions need to happen?

Deepen your commitments for the sake of the people you love most.

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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Creating Our Reality—Heaven or Hell

How minding our thoughts is a prerequisite to controlling our emotions and our experience of life



JEFF GARTON

Scientists continue to find ways that our thoughts help create the world around us. That makes learning to supervise how you think critically important to having the best life humanly possible.

Tom Campbell, the former NASA scientist and author of *My Big T.O.E. (Theory of Everything)*, says physicists have become the mystics of our time. If you listen to what they are saying today, you'll hear something quite amazing.

Your body and the world around you is a virtual reality that was manifested by your thoughts. Your virtual future is being created right now as we all think. We are co-creators of our good and bad reality, virtual heaven, or hell on earth.

As far-fetched as this may seem,

this idea is gaining momentum within the scientific community. For example, research over the past 35 years by the Global Consciousness Project suggests that when human consciousness becomes coherent and synchronized, it can change things in the external environment.

Researchers in transcendental meditation found that when thousands of meditating people (synchronized) meet in one location and focus their thoughts (coherent) on peace and love, violence in that location drops.

Researchers came to this conclusion by observing fewer reported incidences of crime, suicides, and ambulance trips after the group meditation. While some scientists challenge the findings, the effect is interesting enough to spur deeper investigation.

On the other side, a 2012 study by

psychologist Dan Gilbert found the average person spends nearly half of each day on autopilot. You're mentally checked out nearly 46.9 percent of the time. It's like driving through an intersection and not remembering if the light was red or green.

When on autopilot, your mind wanders almost of its own volition. You analyze, second guess, ruminate about past regrets, and worry about the unknown future. This unsupervised thinking creates emotions that make you miserable, anxious, and depressed.

Psychologist Ellen Langer found that unsupervised thinking is visible to others and repelling. You appear aloof, disengaged, and apathetic, which makes you unlikeable.

Bruce Lipton is a former researcher at Stanford University's School of Medicine, developmen-

tal biologist, and early advocate of the potential role epigenetics can play on gene expression. He made the controversial assertion that thoughts can alter gene expression.

Lipton claims up to 95 percent of your time is spent living in response to the conditioning you received while growing up. You go on autopilot and rely on habitual brain thinking (mindless thinking) and remain confined within the self-limiting boundaries of your comfort zones.

While lounging in those comfort zones, you allow life's golden opportunities to pass by. When you later reengage with the world, you beat yourself up by thinking you could have done this or should have done that, things you may have done without the fear influenced by the conditioning of your unsupervised thinking.

However, if you can control your thoughts, you really do have the ability to create a better reality. You also have the ability to elevate your potential to function in that reality.

When you use this ability to supervise the tendency of your brain to think habitually, you switch off the autopilot and keep your mind engaged. Then you have the power to self-regulate how to think, feel, and act.

And now you're thinking, Come on, all I have to do to create a kind of heaven on earth is supervise my thinking?

According to the mystics of our time and past sages, from the Stoics to the Buddha, this is the only way any of us can create a better reality. Philosophers and spiritual leaders have been trying to tell us this for over two thousand years. Scientists are finally catching up to them.

The field of integrative medicine incorporates mind and spirit to help heal the brain and body. Meditative practices, clinical hypnotherapy, and the mindfulness revolution all rely on supervised thoughts to ease stress and facilitate healing.

At some point in our not too distant future, we'll no longer be able to get away with blaming other people or our circumstances for the pain and suffering we sometimes experience. If you do, someone might interrupt you and say, "Hey, you created that experience. If you weren't so lazy, you could've just as easily created a better experience. Stop whining and start supervising your thoughts like the rest of us. Our collective consciousness is depending on you."

Jeff Garton is a Milwaukee-based author, certified career coach, and former HR executive and training provider. He holds a master's degree in organizational communication and public personnel administration. He is an originator of the concept and instruction of career contentment.



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