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MIND & BODY

What You Think About Your Emotions Matters

Our underlying beliefs about emotions—whether or not we’re aware of them—can affect our happiness in life **4**

The research on emotion beliefs gives us hope that we can impact people's lives using a fairly simple lesson that costs almost nothing to impart.

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WHAT YOU THINK ABOUT Your Emotions MATTERS

JILL SUTTIE

Emotions can be mystifying at times. After all, who hasn't been wailed by sudden anger that's out of proportion to whatever prompted it, or felt gloomy for seemingly no reason?

To add to the complexity, we also have beliefs about our emotions—whether we believe they're a positive, manageable force in our lives, or that they're unwanted interlopers that wreak havoc on our psyche. These beliefs may be unconscious, likely based on our own experiences or the implicit and explicit messages we receive from our parents and our culture.

Now, new research suggests that these beliefs about our feelings—whether they are “good” or “bad,” “controllable” or “uncontrollable”—affect us in important ways. Believing that emotions are generally helpful, and that they can be changed when problematic, may help us recover better from emotional upset and prevent us from falling into depression and anxiety.

“Learning why people have emotions, how they are adaptive, and how they can benefit you in some ways is crucial to understanding them and can benefit your well-being,” researcher Eric Smith of Stanford University says.

Can You Change Your Emotions?

Imagine that a close friend ignores you when you arrive at her holiday party. You'd be angry or upset, right? But if you tried thinking about the situation differently—maybe your friend didn't see you or was distracted with host duties—that would help calm you down and keep you from acting out.

The ability to manage difficult emotions—something scientists call “emotion regulation”—is tied to several positive outcomes, like better mental health, moral decision making, and memory, as well as general well-being. Using a particular emotion-management strategy called

“reappraisal,” which involves reinterpreting an emotionally upsetting event in a more positive light (as you might do at that holiday party), is often very effective. Yet some of us don't believe we have any control over our emotions. With that in mind, several new studies looked at how this belief may affect how we act and how we feel.

In one study, 355 Filipino college students reported on whether they thought emotions were controllable by agreeing or disagreeing with statements like, “If you want to, you can change the emotions you have” or “The truth is, you have very little control over your emotions.” They also reported how much they used reappraisal to handle their emotions, and to what extent they experienced positive feelings, life satisfaction, and depression or anxiety.

The findings showed that how people thought about their emotions was important. If they believed feelings were malleable, they used reappraisal more frequently, and in turn, they had greater emotional well-being and life satisfaction.

“How people think about the malleability of their emotions seems to be a crucial factor in emotional functioning,” the researchers conclude.

Though this study focused on a single point in time, a recent study by University of Toronto researcher Brett Ford and her colleagues found a similar pattern over time.

More than 200 youths between 10 and 18 years of age reported on whether they believed emotions could be changed or were unchangeable, and whether they used reappraisal or suppression (trying to tamp down feelings) to manage difficult emotions. Then, researchers measured their emotional well-being at the beginning of the study and 18 months later, using surveys and reports from parents.

Youths who believed emotions were controllable used reappraisal more and were less depressed 18 months later than those who didn't. In addition, they didn't

try to suppress their feelings nearly as often as other young people—a good sign, as suppression has been tied to poorer emotional health.

This suggests a potential pathway through which emotion beliefs impact well-being.

“Once you have emotion beliefs, the beliefs shape what you do when difficult emotions come up in daily life,” says Ford. “While it's also possible the reverse is true—that very intense depression could make you believe that emotions are uncontrollable—we didn't find much evidence for that.”

Many of us have heard of the benefits of a growth mindset: When people believe that learning and intelligence come from effort rather than natural talent, they are more motivated to persevere, leading them to perform better. Emotion researchers believe there may be something parallel going on with emotions: When you believe that feelings are something you can impact through effort, rather than being out of your control, you may be willing to try strategies to manage them better.

Are Emotions Good or Bad?

People often judge feelings as “good” or “bad” by whether or not they are pleasant or unpleasant: Happiness is good, while anger is bad. Yet many emotion researchers believe that feelings, whether pleasant or unpleasant, are adaptive and useful, providing important information about what's going on around us. In other words, even unpleasant emotions can be “good.”

Does believing that impact our well-being? Some studies suggest it does.

In a recent paper, Ford and her colleagues looked at how participants with different emotional beliefs reacted to stressors. In one experiment, researchers deliberately stressed-out participants by requiring them to give an impromptu talk; in another experiment, people kept daily diaries about how they handled stressors in their regular lives. Participants also reported whether they were more accepting or more judgmental of their emotions.

In both cases, participants who accepted their feelings experienced less negative emotion while stressed than people who judged their feelings, though they did not experience more positive emotion. In the latter experiment, emotion-accepting participants were also less depressed and anxious, and more satisfied with life, six months later.

“Acceptance could be a useful strategy to help people to feel better—not right

away, perhaps, but with a delay—and it might help them to engage with the world in effective ways,” says Ford.

Her study supports other research showing the benefits of believing that all emotions are useful and equally valuable. For example, one study found that participants who thought emotions were helpful also reported being happier and having more social supports than those who found emotions a hindrance. Additionally, the more participants viewed emotions as helpful in their lives, the better they performed on a timed reasoning task—which is somewhat surprising, given how often people pit reason against emotion.

Similarly, other research has found that believing that happiness is very valuable can lead people to be less happy, as they struggle to meet their own high expectations and experience disappointment. On the other hand, mindfulness meditation—which trains people to be nonjudgmental of their experiences, including emotions—can lead to better psychological health.

Overall, it seems that being accepting of whatever emotions arise, while having strategies to counter difficult emotions, might be valuable for our well-being.

Changing Your Emotion Beliefs

This all raises the question: Can our beliefs about emotions be changed?

Fortunately, a recent study by Smith and his colleagues suggests they can. In the study, middle school students from all over the United States were randomly assigned to one of two online courses: one about the importance of their feelings, their malleability, and how to handle difficult feelings using strategies like reappraisal; or a similarly engaging unit on how the brain works (the control group).

Before and four weeks after the course, students reported on their theories about emotions, their emotional well-being at school, their sense of belonging at school and satisfaction with school, and their general well-being in life.

After a month, those students who'd received the emotions lessons were more likely to believe their emotions could change and to have greater well-being and sense of belonging at school than those who had received the lessons on the brain. Interestingly, the differences between the groups were due to large declines in well-being in the control group over the four weeks, while those who learned about emotions had less steep declines. (This just goes to show how hard middle school can be.)

Smith and his colleagues also discovered that the students' general belief about whether emotions are malleable—that is, People can change their emotions—was not as central to their future well-being as believing they could change their emotions using certain strategies. In other words, general theories were less important than the student's sense of self-efficacy.

“People already have experiences of changing their emotions—they see people regulating their emotions all the time, like when they feel upset and try not to cry,” says Smith. “An effective part of our intervention appears to be that students not only believe they can change their emotions, but also that they can get better at it.”

Of course, there may be many good strategies for handling difficult emotions—such as mindfulness meditation training or expressive writing. More research is needed to tell us which ones (or which combinations of practices) are most effective. Smith also cautions about applying a course like his before it's been thoroughly tested on different groups.

And while emotions may be changed with effort, that doesn't mean they are completely controllable—nor should they be, says Smith. We shouldn't expect to completely avoid certain feelings, or be able to get rid of one on the spot whenever it arises. But we can learn to soothe them in hard times or when it's socially appropriate to do so.

“Understanding that emotions may be benefiting you in some ways is crucial to living an emotionally healthy life,” says Smith. “You don't want to just tamp down all negative emotional experiences, or increase positive ones, in all circumstances.”

Given how young people—particularly young teens—are developmentally primed to experience emotions more intensely, providing them with tools to manage those emotions better seems like a no-brainer. The research on emotion beliefs gives us hope that we can impact people's lives using a fairly simple lesson that costs almost nothing to impart. And we could probably all use this lesson if we want to enhance our well-being.

“Giving people the right strategies to deal with their difficult emotions is powerful,” says Smith.

Jill Suttie, Psy.D., is Greater Good's book review editor and a frequent contributor to the magazine. This article was originally published on the Greater Good online magazine.

Even unpleasant emotions can be 'good.'

Participants who accepted their feelings experienced less negative emotion while stressed than people who judged their feelings.

THINK WELL, WORK WELL

Rules to Improve Work Relationships

Getting along with co-workers can go a long way to making your job more enjoyable

JEFF GARTON

Few places have as much impact on your mental and physical health as your workplace. And few aspects of your workplace affect you as much as your work relationships.

When you are considering joining, you want to know if your future associates will accept you as a member of their team. Will they provide you a helping hand when you need one and appreciate you for your contributions and efforts? Will you get along with them, including the ones you may not like?

You know the ones I mean. You cringe at the sight of them. Just the thought of having to interact with them can make you feel uneasy. You would rather do anything else but you can't, because a part of your job is to try and get along with whomever you work with.

Difficult work relationships are the primary source of dissatisfaction and conflict in the workplace. Failed relations can be awkward, dysfunctional to the business, and harmful to your health. Some people can transform a good job into misery.

One of my old HR bosses once told me, “This HR work would be pretty good if it wasn't for the people. Anytime you put two folks together and pay them to get something done, there's conflict.” This is why it's important to be selective about

where you work, which raises another issue.

No matter how selective your job choices are, all work relationships are subject to change. You may not always have the opportunity to choose your boss or colleagues. It becomes necessary in any job to get along with all types of people. Here's one solution that has survived the test of time.

The late psychologist William Schutz gave us what he called his Theory of Interpersonal Relationships. It states that people need people. To get along without so much of the inevitable conflict, you set up ground rules for your interactions.

You need to figure out how others need to be treated by you. Ask them. Then you have to let them know how you need to be treated by them. Tell them. Your needs are interpersonal and span three dimensions that can affect your ability to be content in your relationships.

Inclusion

All people need to establish and maintain meaningful connections with others. We want and need to feel accepted, understood, and worthwhile. When our needs for inclusion aren't met, we feel lonely, left out and unwanted.

People with a low need for inclusion tend to be introverted or withdrawn. They may not appreciate your efforts to include them, if that's not how they prefer to be treated. People who have a high

Failed relations can be awkward, dysfunctional to the business, and harmful to your health.

need for inclusion tend to be outgoing and engaging. They may not appreciate when you leave them out or exclude them.

Control

All people need to make decisions and influence events and others around them. At other times, we need to submit and allow others to have this control over us. When our needs for control aren't met, we become anxious.

People with a low need to control are okay with someone else taking the lead. They may not appreciate your efforts to

make or encourage them to take the lead, if that's not how they prefer to be treated. People who have a high need to control prefer to take charge. They may not appreciate when you prefer to lead when they want to.

Affection

All people need opportunities to express and receive affection. We want and need to establish close ties and relationships. But at other times, we also need privacy. When our needs for affection aren't met, we feel unfulfilled and neglected or otherwise exposed and vulnerable.

Learning how to foster a better connection with co-workers can help you avoid difficult relationships and form stronger bonds.

ANTONIO GUILLEM/SHUTTERSTOCK



People with a low need for affection are okay with being a loner. They may not appreciate your efforts to give them affection, if that's not how they prefer to be treated. People who have a high need for affection need to establish good ties with those they associate with. They may not appreciate when you resist their efforts to share their affection.

This framework for understanding interpersonal needs can provide a way for colleagues to share with each other whether those needs are low or high.

Then each must be willing to flex and accommodate the other's needs. The idea is to keep working on improving your relationships until you get it right.

According to Schutz, the most successful relationships form between people who aren't extreme in any of their three interpersonal needs. Here were his suggested rules to avoid extreme behaviors.

Inclusion: It's better to be sociable, adaptable, and willing to include and be included.

Control: It's better to respond democratically in the midst of a struggle. Be flexible and willing to submit when it's advisable and worthwhile to do so.

Affection: Be personable and engaging, but also prepared to grant others the space and privacy they may need.

To discover if your interpersonal needs are low or high, the FIRO-B assessment is recommended. You can learn more and take the assessment by visiting DiscoverYourPersonality.com.

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.

NAVIGATING AGING

The Secret to Chronic Happiness as You Age

A mind inclined toward gratitude the best defense against age-related anxiety and depression

BRUCE HOROVITZ

By all rights, Fletcher Hall shouldn't be happy.

At 76, the retired trade association manager has endured three heart attacks and eight heart bypass operations. He's had four stents and a balloon inserted in his heart. He has diabetes, glaucoma, osteoarthritis in both knees, and diabetic neuropathy in both legs. He can't drive. He can't travel much. He can't see very well. And his heart condition severely limits his ability to exercise.

On a good day, he can walk about 10 yards before needing to rest.

Yet the Brooklandville, Maryland, resident insists he's a genuinely happy guy—in part because he appreciates what he can do. "There's no question that as age impinges on your life, you do have 'black dog' days," said Hall. "I fight aging every day. But I never, ever give up. You have to work at keeping happy."

Hall focuses on the things that bring him joy: writing and listening to music and audiobooks. By juggling those pastimes throughout the day—every day—he ultimately feels a sense of contentment. "Every one of those things requires that I use my mind—which is a good thing."

Geriatric experts agree that Hall has pretty much figured out the right formula. "You have to be willing to accept your new reality—and move forward," said Dr. Susan Lehmann, director of the geriatric psychiatry day program at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. "Aim to have the best life you can where you are right now."

Living with chronic disease often complicates life. The majority of adults 65 and over have multiple chronic conditions that contribute to frailty and disability, according to a 2013-14 report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The percentage of people 65 and over with various chronic conditions has increased over time, too. The percentage of people reporting hypertension, asthma, cancer, and diabetes was higher in 2013-14 than in 1997-98, the CDC reports.

Chronic conditions can have a devastating impact on both men and women, according to the CDC report. About 57 percent of women and 55 percent of men age 65 and up reported hypertension. Another 54 percent of women and 43 percent of men reported arthritis. And a full 35 percent of men and 25 percent of women reported dealing with heart disease. At the same time, older women were more likely to report clinically relevant depressive symptoms than were older men. In 2014, 15 percent of women 65 and older reported depressive symptoms, compared with 10 percent of men.



Living with chronic disease often complicates life.



You have to be willing to accept your new reality—and move forward.

Dr. Susan Lehmann, Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine



It's the small things in life that end up mattering most of all.

Dr. Susan Lehmann, Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine

Chronic pain, in fact, more frequently leads to depression than does anxiety, said Dr. Kathleen Franco, associate dean at the Cleveland Clinic Lerner College of Medicine. That depression then leads to additional pain and suffering, she said. "So you have an emotional and physical component."

That's why Hall clings dearly to his greatest passion: writing. When he retired at 65, his original plan was to travel with his wife, Tracey. His physical limitations curbed those goals, so he circled back to what has brought him the most happiness. He stays engaged in daily news by writing for two blogs—including one at-large column in which he espouses what he calls his "compassionate conservative" values.

Hall also adores reading, even though glaucoma has made it all but impossible. Not one to give up, he uses his Amazon Echo smart speaker to order audiobooks. He loves sitting on his balcony in the sunshine and listening to books such as *The Guns of August*. Similarly, he enjoys streaming both classical and country music, especially the Oak Ridge Boys and the country-rock group Alabama.

Hall also has learned to use Alexa, the Echo's built-in digital assistant, to help with seemingly simple tasks that are difficult with poor eyesight. To tell time, he simply asks Alexa.

Beyond that, he avoids getting trapped in any frustration loops, such as trying to troubleshoot computer issues. During a recent technological tussle, he simply shut down the machine and turned on PBS and Charlie Rose. "Watching that show keeps my mind active," he said. After taking time to de-stress, he was able to solve the tech issue.

Hall finds every day excuse to get out of his house every day. Sometimes, he runs an errand, or he'll meet a friend for lunch. As a bird lover, he might just sit in a park listening to birds singing. "If I can combine a pleasant venue with the sound of bird symphonies, I'm a happy camper," he said.

This is Hall's version of what some experts call "mindfulness." Mindfulness, which often involves deep, slow breathing that's aimed at lowering your heart rate and calming you down, can be highly effective on older, ailing people, said Franco. "It's simple. It doesn't cost anything. You can do it and no one even knows you're doing it."

One other thing often works like magic: helping others. "Once you start giving to others, you tend not to get stuck in your own aches and pains," said Franco.

Anne McKinley knows this firsthand. Even at 85, she still volunteers for an ag-

ing advocacy group and sits on its board of directors.

McKinley copes with the debilitating effects of lifelong scoliosis. She, too, battles glaucoma, and her difficulties with visual perception affect her balance. She's had both knees replaced and more recently needed emergency surgery for an infection she contracted in the hospital following parathyroid surgery, which also affected her vocal cords.

The Evergreen, Colorado, resident said that keeping a very positive attitude—and constantly reaching out to family and friends—keeps her content.

"Feeling like I have control of my life is very important," she said. "The key is not to feel rushed. I can accomplish one thing in a day and feel good about it."

It's been a tough road since her husband, Cameron, died four years ago after 59 years of marriage. But with her master's degree in social work and experience as a social worker, she knew how to utilize social services for older people in her community. That includes a service that performs house-keeping and other chores for a modest fee.

McKinley still visits family in Florida—though she must use a cane or walker to get around. Her grandchildren frequently come to visit, "and we feast whenever they do," she said, typically on the cookies and pies she loves to bake. Above all, she said, she's always getting out of the house. She gets her hair cut every week. "It's my best-remaining feature," she said.

Then, there's her Siamese cat, Frankie, who joins McKinley every evening at 6 p.m. to watch the evening news while McKinley makes herself a snack and a martini. "My favorite part is the olives," she said. She expresses how particularly grateful she is for what she has—including a home with a 20-foot-high ceiling on an 18-acre site, where she can look out any window and see the surrounding beauty.

The real key to happiness at every age and stage—particularly old age—is not material things, but gratitude for life's simple blessings, such as laughter among friends or watching a sunset with a loved one, said Lehmann, the Johns Hopkins doctor. "It's the small things in life that end up mattering most of all."

Bruce Horowitz is a freelance journalist and regularly writes for Kaiser Health News, which first published this article. KHN's coverage related to aging and improving the care of older adults is supported in part by The John A. Hartford Foundation.

The real key to happiness is gratitude for life's simple blessings.

Pineapple for digestive enzymes.



Coconut oil helps with the absorption of antioxidants.



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Sauerkraut for probiotics.

FOOD IS MEDICINE

How to Better Absorb Vitamins and Minerals

Simple tips to get more of the good stuff out of your food and into your body

DEBORAH MITCHELL

You are what you absorb. That includes the good (vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients) and the bad (environmental toxins, food additives, etc). Let's focus on the good; that is, effective ways to better absorb vitamins and minerals.

The amount of vitamins and minerals you absorb from the foods you eat can range from 10 percent to 90 percent. Why is the range so large? Several factors have an impact on the percentage of nutrients you actually get from your food, including (but not limited to): how the food is prepared, any drugs or supplements you may be taking, your age, health status, time of day, and other foods you are eating at the same time.

To make it even more confusing, the amount of vitamins and minerals in any given food can vary greatly, depending on the variety, weather and growing conditions, storage conditions, and natural variation.

For example, although the National Nutrient database reports that a medium banana contains 422 milligrams of potassium, that figure is just an average determined from 14 samples. The actual range of potassium found in those samples was 364 mg to 502 mg per banana, as noted in a recent *Scientific American* article.

Taking all of these factors into account, you might be thinking it's difficult to know if you are getting enough nutrients. Actually, the recommended intakes for vitamins and minerals and the dietary guidelines allow for the fact that we don't absorb everything from our food.

However, that doesn't mean you shouldn't do all you can to help ensure you do absorb the maximum amount of nutrition. One way, of course, is to choose fresh, unpro-

cessed, natural, organically grown foods whenever possible.

Here are five other ways to better absorb vitamins and minerals from your food:

Digestive Enzymes Digestive enzymes are active protein (amino acids) compounds that assist with digestion and metabolism. Common digestive enzymes, including

amylase, lactase, lipase, and protease, are produced in the gastrointestinal tract. Their task is to metabolize food into digestible nutrients for absorption and use by the body.

Although digestive enzymes are produced in the body, they are also found in unprocessed, raw foods such as bromelain (in pineapple) and papain (in papaya). Digestive enzymes sold as supplements, however, are subjected to your gastric enzymes and therefore are probably not going to help enhance vitamin and mineral absorption.

Probiotics

Probiotics (beneficial bacteria) produce many different enzymes, including types that can help with digestion and absorption. Beneficial bacteria are available in supplement form and in fermented foods, such as kefir, kimchee, sauerkraut, yogurt, and tempeh.

Friendly Nutrients

If you combine certain foods, you can boost your absorption of specific nutrients. For example, foods that are high in vitamin C can enhance your ability to absorb iron, especially from plant-based foods. One

example would be to drink orange juice with an iron-fortified breakfast cereal or a handful of raisins. B vitamins are better absorbed when they are consumed along with vitamin C and dietary fat.

Coconut oil, which has a large proportion of medium chain fatty acids (MCFAs), helps with the absorption of antioxidants and other nutrients from your food. MCFAs are smaller than

the fatty acids found in most other oils, which means they are better able to enter cell membranes.

The B vitamin folic acid, which is the form added to foods, is typically more bioavailable than the form of the vitamin found in food (folate). To boost absorption of this B vitamin, foods rich in folate (e.g., green leafy veggies) can be consumed along with foods that are fortified with folic acid.

Prebiotics

Prebiotics are essentially carbohydrates (soluble fiber) that your body cannot digest. However, they are super "food" or nutrients for the beneficial bacteria in your gut. Therefore, these prebiotics stimulate the growth and activity of probiotics and make it easier for you to absorb vitamins and minerals from your food.

Prebiotics have names that don't roll off the tongue too easily; namely, oligofructose, fructooligosaccharides (FOS), galactooligosaccharides (GOS), xylooligosaccharides, and inulin, among others. The good news is that you can probably get all the prebiotics you need by eating plenty of fresh veggies rich in soluble fiber, such as broccoli, cauliflower, kale, spinach, chard, and

other leafy greens, as well as garlic, onions, leeks, asparagus, and bananas. Beans are also an excellent source of soluble fiber, as are oats, barley, sweet potatoes, flax seeds, hemp seeds, and many fruits.

Aloe Vera

You may know aloe vera as a handy plant to have in your kitchen to handle minor burns and cuts. However, this succulent also can help with vitamin absorption. In a study from the UC Davis Medical Center, researchers evaluated the use of aloe vera inner leaf gel and whole leaf gel in healthy volunteers to see how they affected the bioavailability of vitamin C (500 mg) and vitamin B12 (1 mg). Water was used as a control. Both aloe vera gels significantly increased levels of both vitamins and enhanced their bioavailability and antioxidant potential.

In another study, use of a polysaccharide-enhanced aloe vera juice product showed that study participants experienced a 20-fold increase in their absorption of vitamin C supplements when they consumed 2 ounces of aloe vera juice. The research was conducted by Lily of the Desert (Naturally Savvy's sponsors).

You are what you absorb. If you begin with natural, fresh, organic foods, you are off to a running start. Then you can enhance the nutritional benefits by boosting the absorption of vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients from those foods.

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

Do You Really Need to Stretch?

Stretching has become somewhat controversial, but it shouldn't be

EMILY LUNARDO

You're often told that before and after exercise, you should stretch, but why?

Sometimes, you're on a time crunch and simply don't have time to stretch, so you get in the gym, go through your workout, and head out. Maybe you feel fine after and think you don't need to stretch. So, the question remains, do you really need to stretch?

It has long been believed that stretching prior to exercise helps prepare the muscles for activity. Stretching after a workout helps aid in recovery.

Jan Schroeder, chair and professor of fitness in the department of kinesiology at California State University, Long Beach, explained, "There's a lot of controversy surrounding stretching right now."

Schroeder said stretching recommendations from the American College of Sports Medicine have changed frequently because they



Stretching prior to exercise helps prepare the muscles for activity.

are still learning a lot about it.

Devon Blackburn, registered kinesiologist, said, "Stretching allows our bodies to achieve resilience and mobility. Health Canada tells us that we need to get cardiovascular exercise for heart health and that women need to work with

weights to prevent osteoporosis, but we don't hear about stretching. From my perspective, if we don't have the flexibility [afforded by stretching], we can't do the cardio or muscular strength training. It's foundational in terms of movement."

There are two main types of stretches: dynamic and static. Dynamic stretching is often completed prior to a workout and static stretching post-workout. Dynamic stretching helps stimulate the nervous system where static stretching promotes relaxation of the muscles.

Dynamic stretching can help reduce the risk of joint injuries. Dynamic stretching involves going through motions that the activity you're about to perform requires. For example, you will often see basketball players performing shots prior to a game. Dynamic stretching should adhere to whatever activity or exercise you're about to perform. For example, if you're about the play soccer, perform stretches that target the legs.

Static stretching allows for the release of muscle tension. Tense muscles take longer to recover, so you can feel sore for much longer. Furthermore, studies have shown stretching can improve muscle

growth as well.

Yoga has seen a great boost in popularity as many people are now beginning to recognize the benefits of stretching as it can improve range of motion, flexibility, blood flow, and reduce aches and pains. In fact, many bodybuilders have started doing yoga to enhance muscle growth, along with preventing injury.

All age groups can benefit from stretching. Whether you're an athlete or an occasional gym-goer, stretching does have importance in daily life and should be conducted for all the reasons listed above. So, although you may think it is a tedious task, you will feel much better overall if you incorporate stretching into your life.

Emily Lunardo studied medical sociology at York University with a strong focus on the social determinants of health and mental illness. This article was first published on Bel Marra Health.

ALL PHOTOS BY SHUTTERSTOCK



The indiscriminate killing of bacteria through the use of antibiotics may cause several health problems.

The relatively recent discovery of the microbiome makes the indiscriminate prescription of antibiotics a major public health concern.

Antibiotics Side Effects and Alternatives

The discovery of the microbiome should have had a profound impact on modern medicine—too bad it didn't

KELLY BROGAN

We use a lot of antibiotics—for coughs, cuts, urinary tract infections, and many times, “just in case.” You could be considered reckless or ignorant if you opted to not use them. “But you could die of a deadly infection that could kill you!” chants the choir of voices entrained by a system that sees dangerous enemies lurking everywhere.

But the real danger could lie in assaulting your body with an “anti-life” (the actual meaning of the word) chemical that brings a Russian Roulette of unintended harms. Some of these harms are so significant they could change the course of your life. Given that, I bet that there were effective, safe alternatives, you'd seriously consider them.

To make good decisions about health, you must inform yourself. Informed consent around medical interventions requires knowing the risks, benefits, and alternatives. In our reactivity, however, we are accustomed to focusing only on the promise—knock that infection out and feel better quick—without any enough meaningful information about risks and treatment options.

The Benefits

Antibiotics obviously work, right? Well, we are learning that our dogmatic assumptions about the sacred cows of conventional medicine may be leaning on a house of cards. Or a house of placebos to be more exact.

The reality is that infections have a natural course and our bodies have an inbuilt capacity for robust recovery. We may be giving undue credit to antibiotics, according to published research.

For instance, a study on rhinosinusitis concluded: “...the risks of potential side effects need to be weighed against the potential benefit that antibiotics give to the patient. This is especially pertinent as usage of the placebo has shown to be

almost as efficacious as using the antibiotic therapy, and also much safer.”

With rising rates of antibiotic-resistant infections (due to rampant antibiotic use), and fewer novel replacement medications in the pipeline, it seems we are coming to a point of reckoning around our belief that the rampant extinguishing of life is a health-promoting practice.

Microbiome-Dependent Risks

With the discovery of the microbiome, conventional medicine as we know it should have gone back to the drawing board. The “body as machine” model became obsolete when we discovered an inner ecosystem drives our epigenetic expression, ranging from nutrient production to metabolic health to hormonal balance to immunity and inflammatory response. We need to better understand what makes a microbiome healthy and what hurts it.

So far, we have been left with many questions and few answers. Researchers have looked at super healthy modern hunter-gatherers to try to quantify their gut health, the beneficial effects of probiotics, and have learned that chemicals like Monsanto's Roundup wreak havoc on our beneficial microbes.

We have learned that the transfer of bacteria occurs well before birth, and continues throughout breastfeeding, setting the stage for adult health by age 2. We also know the indiscriminate killing of bacteria through the use of antibiotics may cause several health problems.

We have ample evidence that antibiotics take out the “good” with the “bad” bacteria and cause imbalances that leave the patient more vulnerable.

A 2017 review from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention warned of increased risk of foodborne infection, including antibiotic-resistant strains, in those who took antibiotics during travel, with unpredictable recovery rates that seem to get dismally worse with repeated antibiotic exposure:

“Even short antibiotic exposures disrupt the gut microbiome up to a year or more, and repeated exposures appear to attenuate recovery from ever occurring.” If read,

Similarly, up to a one-third reduction in biome diversity can persist longer than six months, even after one short course of the popularly dispensed antibiotic Cipro. This decrease in diversity can, itself, be a precursor to new illness. For instance, inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) is one of several chronic illnesses associated with low levels of beneficial bacteria. Dysbiosis (imbalanced gut bacteria) is also a precursor to autoimmunity, obesity, and weight gain.

But what if we have to take an antibiotic? Then can't we just take a probiotic afterward?

There is, unfortunately, scant evidence to support this seemingly logical integrative medicine practice. While hamster studies suggest recovery of damage is possible, the broad spectrum of antibiotic effects and probiotic options makes personalization of this support method challenging. Most probiotics contain only a few bacterial species, and our gut contains thousands.

Microbiome-Independent Risks

As if that weren't enough to slow your rush to the pharmacy, there is a growing body of literature focused on the non-microbiome-based risks of antibiotics. From slowed fracture healing to acute liver injury, antibiotics have effects at the cellular level beyond simply inducing dysbiosis. These include changes in up to 87 percent of gut metabolites functional in the gut, injury and destruction of mitochondria (the energy centers of the cell), and damage to gut tissue.

Of significant interest to me are the known and well-documented psychiatric risks of antibiotics. I imagine there are few patients who are told and consent to the risk of acute onset psychosis or suicidality (which includes suicidal ideation, suicide plans, and suicide attempts) before being prescribed an antibiotic.

An excellent 2017 review by Zareifopoulos and Panayiotakopoulos suggests that patients should be told of these risks, including irritability, confusion, encephalopathy, suicidality, psychosis, and mania.

These researchers conclude: “The neuro-psychiatric effects of antimicrobial drugs are extensively documented in the litera-

ture. A number of antimicrobial drugs have the potential to exert CNS [central nervous system] effects and many are associated with stimulant, psychotomimetic and epileptogenic properties...”

In fact, the term “antibiomania” has been coined around the potential for antibiotics to induce manic symptoms. In a recent review, two-thirds of the mania-inductions were in male subjects. The resolution of acute-onset mania with charcoal suggests that these psychiatric risks may be both microbiome-dependent and independent. Relatedly, data suggests that there is a dose-dependent risk of new-onset depression; the higher the antibiotic exposure, the higher the risk of depression.

If you don't connect these dots, you could end up believing that your “mental illness” is a new diagnosis requiring lifelong treatment.

The Alternatives

Fortunately, many alternative strategies exist that resolve bacterial imbalances without the side effects of pharmaceutical antibiotics. Even better—many of the plant-derived therapies can be easily incorporated in your everyday meals as a tasty preventative approach to resiliency.

Colloidal Silver

Also called silver nanoparticles, colloidal silver has been used for over 2,000 years to resolve bacterial infections. Silver is commonly used today in intravenous catheters, dental fillings, wound dressings, and bone implants. Though the exact antimicrobial mechanisms are still debated, colloidal silver generally works by damaging the cell membranes of pathogenic bacteria. Depending on the surface charge of the silver nanoparticles and the type of bacteria, bacteria can be killed by the formation of free radicals, accumulation of nanoparticles in bacterial cell walls, or depletion of cell membrane components. Colloidal silver is effective both as a topical treatment for skin infections, like MRSA (methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*), as well as an oral antibiotic.

Botanical Herbs

For centuries, botanical herbs have been used as antibiotics. There are countless herbal remedies for various types of infec-

tions. Here are a few common herbs that have been validated by modern research.

Inula helenium, also called elecampane, was shown to be 100 percent effective against 200 isolates of *Staphylococcus aureus* (commonly known as “staph infection”) in a study done in Ireland. Similarly, a study that evaluated *Alpinia galanga*, a plant in the ginger family that has been traditionally used in Asian countries, found that this herb was effective against *Salmonella typhi* and *E. coli*, as well as against other drug-resistant bacterial strains.

Extract from *Nigella sativa*, a flowering plant native to South Asia, kills MRSA, while cinnamon and oregano are potent selective antibiotics against many drug-resistant species. Similarly, easy-to-find spices like cumin and rosemary are powerful antimicrobials, as are child-friendly options like elderberry. Many high-quality herbal products combine evidence-based herbs such as oregano, echinacea, and goldenseal into an effective immune support formula.

Probiotics

A great way to prevent imbalances from making you sick is by strengthening your beneficial bacteria, also called probiotics. Probiotics improve metabolic and immune function while crowd out pathogenic bacteria.

Probiotics can resolve bacterial infections ranging from oral gingivitis to *H. pylori*-mediated gastric infections to bacterial vaginosis. One of the earliest and richest sources of probiotics is breastmilk. Breastmilk probiotics have been shown superior to antibiotics to treat mastitis, a common infection during lactation (another reason to breastfeed). I recommend that people get probiotics through fermented foods like kimchi and sauerkraut, as these contain many more complimentary bacterial strains than supplements for daily prevention.

Garlic

“Let food be thy medicine,” decreed Hippocrates, the father of modern medicine—and he would have ranked garlic as one of



(Top) Garlic is an effective treatment for stomach infections caused by *H. pylori* and *C. difficile*, as well as for pneumonia and other lung infections.

(Middle) Many of the plant-derived therapies can be easily incorporated in your everyday meals as a tasty preventative approach to resiliency.

(Bottom) Raw Manuka honey is one of the tastiest ways to stay healthy.

the most medicinal foods.

Numerous studies have shown the antimicrobial effects of garlic, including a report in which researchers tested garlic-water against 133 multidrug-resistant species, showing remarkable antimicrobial properties. A randomized controlled clinical trial showed that garlic was more effective than a standard antibiotic, metronidazole, for bacterial vaginosis. Authors remarked that garlic provided both increased therapeutic efficacy as well as decreased side effects. Garlic is an effective treatment for stomach infections caused by *H. pylori* and *C. difficile*, as well as for pneumonia and other lung infections.

Besides protecting against bacterial infections, garlic also lowers blood pressure, stabilizes blood sugar, and decreases cancer risk.

Manuka Honey

Raw Manuka honey is one of the tastiest ways to stay healthy. This honey comes from bees in New Zealand who pollinate the Manuka bush. It has been used for thousands of years by various cultures to promote wellness. This high-antioxidant golden honey is a popular ingredient in high-end skin care products, as it is broadly anti-inflammatory and antimicrobial. Ingested manuka honey can cure antibiotic-resistant *C. difficile* infection, strep throat, urinary tract infections, and MRSA. A bonus of eating honey is that it can include propolis, a mixture of bee saliva and wax known as “bee glue,” which contains over 300 therapeutic compounds that fight cancer as well as harmful bacteria.

Make a Trade

It requires a mindset shift to stop fighting—stop fighting each other, stop fighting nature, and stop fighting our own bodies.

We need to break out of our patterned programs of control and domination and understand that this only strengthens our perceived enemies. We need to reconnect to the sacred complexity of pregnancy, birth, and breastfeeding as the origin of our health resiliency rather than throw risky pharmaceuticals into our bodies.

The microbiome has taught us—through the poetry of biology—that we are inextricably interconnected to the web of the natural world. It isn't possible to simply pull one thread of that web while leaving the rest of it intact—not in nature or in our bodies.

Visit the greenmedinfo.com research dashboard to do your own exploration of risks, benefits, and alternatives to conventional pharmaceuticals and review the research that went into this article.

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 Mind 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



How to Locate and Eliminate Hidden Sugars From Your Diet

DEVON ANDRE

Sugar has been public enemy No. 1 for a few years. Sugar intake—by way of sugars added to processed and refined foods—is a significant contributor to several contemporary health issues. Type 2 diabetes, obesity, heart disease risk, and more can all be influenced by sugar intake. High sugar intake may also influence pain and cause mobility issues by triggering inflammation.

The good news is that most people are getting the message. A survey by the International Food Information Council Foundation found that 70 percent of Americans have cut back on foods with added sugars. And while people may be eating fewer candies, chocolates, and cupcakes, added sugars are lurking in a lot of unexpected places.

For example, pre-sweetened



Granola bars are often sugary treats trying to pass themselves off as health food.

beverages such as soda, specialty coffees, tea, energy drinks, cocktails, fruit-flavored drinks, and flavored water represent about half of the added sugars people consume. Even 100 percent natural fruit juice has about as much

sugar as a cola or soft drink. Because the fiber is removed, a glass of orange or apple juice may have the same metabolic impact as a Coke. Key takeaway: Make sure there is fiber in your juice. Lots of foods you might not asso-

ciate with sweetness also feature sugar. Flavored yogurt, for example, contains more added sugar than you might think. Even when you subtract naturally occurring sugars in the dairy and fruit, there is still roughly two to four teaspoons in a single, six-ounce portion of flavored yogurt. Other common “health” foods that are heavy on sugar include:

- Protein bars
- Whole grain cereals
- Granola bars

Looking at ingredient lists is an excellent way to identify sugars—but you have to know what you're looking for. Sugar is not always so easy to spot, and there are roughly 61 different names that sugar goes by. One common ingredient is high-fructose corn syrup. In fact, any time you see an “ose”—dextrose, glucose, fruc-

tose—as a single ingredient, it is an added sugar.

Satisfying your sweet tooth doesn't mean you have to read the ingredients on everything you eat. You can do it by electing to eat fresh or frozen fruit like honeydew, watermelon, cantaloupe, berries, or apples. You can also try sugar substitutes in recipes or cut sugar content in recipes down by one-third. Further, doing your shopping around the perimeter of the grocery store is a great way to limit sugar intake. And when you're thirsty? Reach for water and flavor it with mint, cherries, lemon, or lime.

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

JONI RAVENNA SUSSMAN

Tibetan monks have a ritual. They spend hours, sometimes days, creating exquisite, intricate mandalas from colored sand. Once finished, the mandalas are destroyed. It's a way of accepting the transitory nature of life. Nothing is permanent. All we ever have is now.

The monks know that creating art, whether mandalas or drawings, is a direct portal to present-moment awareness or mindfulness. Creativity springs from the now, and being in the now fosters creativity, according to a new study in Psychological Science.

Musicians, stage actors, and comedians have perfect timing. They neither rush nor hesitate. Sculptors and painters become lost in the moment as they find their art. But what about the rest of us? Can we use art to find the moment? And what are the benefits if we do?

People who have tried meditating and can't still their minds may find that creating art offers another portal to mindfulness.

In 2018, researchers at Aalborg University in Denmark reviewed twenty studies drawn from a wider selection and concluded that "engagement in specially designed art activities or arts therapies can reduce physical symptoms and improve mental health issues."

"They recommended that art activities and clinical art interventions be "used as non-medical interventions to promote public health and wellbeing."

We Are Born Creative Geniuses

Those of you who can't carry a tune in a paper bag or who create "paintings" that look more like Rorschach tests may think this approach is not for you. In fact, it's all the better if you have fewer expectations because you are then less likely to attach yourself to the results. It doesn't matter whether we create a masterpiece; it's the process of artistic expression that—if done without judgment—is healing.

In fact, it is our judging mind that may actually undermine our creative potential.

When a test devised by Dr. George Land for NASA back in the '60s was administered to 1,600 5-year-olds, an astounding 98 percent scored at creative genius levels. Five years later, only 30 percent of those same subjects scored at genius levels. By the time they turned 15, it was down to 12 percent, suggesting that creativity is innate, then unlearned.

In the process of growing up, learning rules, memorizing facts, ascribing judgments, and regretting past choices while accruing hopes and aspirations for the future, we habitually let the thinking, judgmental mind take over. This mind can suffocate creativity.

For example, one common bit of advice for

Art as Medicine

Mindfulness increases health and happiness and getting creative can help us experience it



GOLUBOVY/SHUTTERSTOCK

writers is to break their creative process into two roles. The first role is that of the writer, who puts words on the page with abandon. The second role is that of the editor, who comes in afterward to evaluate the work and fix it or delete it. Then the writer comes back when it's time to add more words in again. Writers who can't keep their internal editor silent will often critique themselves into writer's block.

How Creativity Makes Mindfulness Easy

Art and mindfulness go hand-in-hand. Mindfulness occurs when our mind stops generating useless and distracting thoughts and comes to bear fully, and often silently, on whatever it is right before us. It is a calm, natural state that researchers now know has many associated health benefits, including improved immunity and self-esteem, lower chronic pain and anxiety, and reduced risk factors for cancer and heart disease. Mindfulness can also rein in reactivity, like binge-eating after hearing bad news, for example. According to research, it does this by shrinking the amygdala, our brain's fight or flight center.

We live in an age of unprecedented stress and distraction. A recent University of Southern California study found that Americans consume 13-plus hours of media a day on average, much of it filled with stimuli designed to trigger the amygdala. Many have forgotten what it means to have a calm, present-moment awareness.

Stephen Barker, dean of UCI's Claire Trevor School of the Arts, would suggest an art class to help people rediscover this awareness and the benefits that come with it.

"The arts are important in healing, and present-moment awareness," says Barker. "They quiet anxiety and promote inner well-being." The 72-year-old director, choreographer, dancer, actor, writer, painter, singer, and guitarist looks and sounds fifteen years younger than his age. He describes his artful life as feeling "like an endless improvisation." When asked about his health, he doesn't hesitate.

Continued on Page 12

PAJARUWAN/SHUTTERSTOCK

The monks know that creating art, whether mandalas or drawings, is a direct portal to present-moment awareness or mindfulness.



researchers concluded that the paleo diet could lead to weight gain and raise the risk of cardiovascular problems and diabetes.

FOOD IS MEDICINE

Paleo Diet Might Be Associated With Heart Disease Risk: Study

MAT LECOMPTE

Those who follow a paleo diet may want to re-think their food choices, as research shows a link between the popular way of eating and heart disease. This diet has been surrounded by controversy and many studies have fueled the debate over whether the paleo diet is as safe and healthy as proponents claim. The paleo diet claims to emulate what ancestors of modern humans used to eat. This type of diet pro-

motes a high intake of meats, vegetables, fruits, nuts, and seeds, but eliminates whole grains, legumes, and dairy.

As the paleo diet has grown in popularity in the past few years, so have the studies to determine how healthy it actually is. For example, one study from 2016 found that the paleo diet may be able to protect against heart attacks and cardiovascular disease by raising blood levels of a protective molecule.

However, another study conducted around the same time made an opposite discovery. These

researchers concluded that the paleo diet could lead to weight gain and raise the risk of cardiovascular problems and diabetes.

With a new study conducted this year and published in the European Journal of Nutrition, there seems to be a new reason to be skeptical of the popular diet. This research conducted by a team from Australia outlines how those who follow the paleo diet may be placing their heart health at risk.

The team, led by Angela Genoni, worked with 44 participants who followed paleo diets. They also

looked to 47 participants who ate typical diets that met national dietary recommendations.

Researchers followed both groups for one year, during which they collected biological samples from the participants and assessed their diets. They took the information collected and compared results between the paleo cohort and the control group.

To be more accurate in the findings, the researchers split the participants who followed a paleo diet into two groups. This included one group who were strict paleo dieters who ate less than one serving of grains and dairy a day. The other group was pseudo paleo who ate more than one serving of grains and dairy a day.

What they found was that across all paleo groups, participants presented heightened blood levels of a compound that specialists associate with a heart disease called trimethylamine N-oxide. The compound forms in the gut and is dependent on a person's diet and the gut bacteria that populate in the digestive tract, among other factors.

Genoni spoke about the study saying, "Many Paleo diet proponents claim the diet is beneficial to gut health, but this research suggests that, when it comes to the production of [trimethylamine N-oxide] in the gut, the Paleo diet could be having an adverse impact in terms of heart health."

"We also found that populations of beneficial bacterial species were lower in the Paleolithic groups, associated with the reduced car-

bohydrate intake, which may have consequences for other chronic diseases over the long term."

Lack of Whole Grains

The argument from this research is that individuals following paleo diets have such heightened levels of trimethylamine N-oxide because they don't consume whole grains. Previous studies have shown that whole grains are a great source of dietary fiber and can help reduce the risk of cardiovascular problems.

"We found the lack of whole grains [was] associated with [trimethylamine N-oxide] levels, which may provide a link [with] the reduced risks of cardiovascular disease we see in populations with high intakes of whole grains," said Genoni.

"The Paleo diet excludes all grains and we know that whole grains are a fantastic source of resistant starch and many other fermentable fibers that are vital to the health of your gut microbiome."

The study concluded that excluding whole grains from a diet can seriously impact gut health, with implications for heart health as well. The researchers for this study also state the need for further studies into the role of vegetables and saturated fats in regulating key biological mechanisms in the gut.

Mat Lecompte is a freelance health and wellness journalist. This article was first published on Bel Marra Health.



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A paleo diet of meat and vegetables is missing the health benefits that come from whole grains, and that could increase the risk of heart disease.

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Chinese medicine is a holistic practice that treats the entire system rather than a focus on alleviating the symptoms.

Chinese medicine is intricately tied to the Chinese people's cultural heritage and traditional way of life.

Traditional Chinese medicine emphasizes the idea of harmony between people and nature.

PRESERVE HEALTH

An Ancient Practice With New Found Relevance

Traditional Chinese medicine is based on generations of practice with insight that Western medicine is just gaining now

CHRISTINA XU

Trying to introduce people to traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) can be challenging given the depth and breadth of the knowledge and practice involved.

Traditional Chinese medicine is built on a foundation of more than 2,500 years of Chinese medical practice. It includes various forms of herbal medicine, acupuncture, massage (tui na), meditation/exercise (qi gong) and dietary therapy. It is a holistic

practice that treats the entire system rather than a focus on alleviating the symptoms.

Cultural Heritage

Being such a long-standing and well-developed practice, Chinese medicine is intricately tied to the Chinese people's cultural heritage and traditional way of life. This is why Chinese people see Chinese medicine as a natural extension of their life. However, I hope to educate and enrich the understanding of people less familiar with TCM.

TCM emphasizes the idea of harmony between people and nature. It recognizes that emotions and environmental factors can affect human health. Therefore, our life should adapt to the four seasons and conform to nature. It is a systematic and holistic approach that is focused on preserving health and preventing disease.

In the theory of TCM, there is a primary emphasis on "Qi" energy which is energy that needs to be in balance for good physical and mental health. Qi is considered to be life force or vital energy and includes both the physical body as well as our intrinsic spiritual nature such as our thoughts, feelings, and emotions. All work together to ensure a balanced and healthy mind and body. The system of energy distribution is known as the meridian channels which are located throughout the body where Qi or energy flows.

Chinese medicine is poorly understood by the mainstream medical system.

TCM is a reflection of Daoism, one of China's three religious traditions. Daoism is about seeking the truth about the world and the individual.

Chinese medicine is poorly understood by the mainstream medical system, which has historically taken

CANCER UP CLOSE

D-Day: When the Diagnosis Dropped

Hearing the word 'cancer' come from your doctor's mouth changes your world

MICHELE GONCALVES

Cancer is one of the most common diseases of our age, and yet those who face it rarely know what's about to happen to them beyond the broadest terms. "Cancer up Close" is an open recount of Michele Goncalves's cancer journey from pre-diagnosis to life after treatment.

My fear was steadily rising in the days leading up to my diagnosis, but when the word finally came, it landed like a punch in the stomach.

"You're going to need a colonoscopy." That's what the gastroenterologist told me on Nov. 11, 2017, after our short 10-minute consultation.

Despite our quick interaction, I can't say that I was surprised by his recommendation. All throughout our appointment, I had explained that I was not feeling well, with belly pains in my lower abdomen and severe constipation that I was "managing" by drinking a cap full of Miralax stool softener in a cup of water each night.

As I sat in my living room on Dec. 13, 2017, the eve of my first colonoscopy, a sick feeling started to come over me. Yes, it was partly due to the fact that I was drinking a pitcher of lemonade spiked with Miralax to cleanse my bowels for the procedure, but mostly

I arrived at the outpatient surgical center and waited in a crowded room for what felt like an eternity.



TYLER OLSON/SHUTTERSTOCK

I had never had surgery or anesthesia before, so I was very nervous and felt like I was having a bad dream.

it was because I knew that I'd probably be getting some information the next day that I didn't want to hear.

At 2:30 p.m. the next day, I arrived at the outpatient surgical center where my gastroenterologist was located and waited in a crowded room for what felt like an eternity. My father, mother, and brother all came with me.

Finally, my name was called, and it was my turn to go in. I was taken to a small room for pre-procedure evaluation, where they took my temperature and other vitals, plus a urine sample. Afterward, I changed into a hospital gown and was asked to take off my pants and underwear, but to keep on my sports bra and socks.

The nurse then walked me into a surgical suite where I saw my doctor, who was behind a surgical mask. It was all very surreal. I had never had surgery or anesthesia before, so I was very nervous and felt like I was having a bad dream.

I got up on the operating table and laid on my left side. The anesthesiologist introduced herself to me, inserted an IV into my arm,

and I drifted away into la-la land in less than a minute.

My next memory was slowly opening my eyes in a curtained-off post-procedure area, with a nurse checking in on me every few minutes. As I came back to reality, she let me rest a few minutes, then asked me to get dressed and meet her outside the curtain.

As I dressed, I started to hear other patients next to me get their results. "Hey, everything looks good," one person was told. "No problems, everything looks fine," someone else heard.

"Hey, wait a minute," I thought. What about me? Where is my good news, or words of encouragement? Nobody said a word to me.

That was the moment I realized I was facing a different outcome.

I came out and met the nurse. She sweetly took my arm and led me to a small, private room. "Have a seat. The doctor will be here in a minute," she said. "Would you like a warm blanket?"

I said, "Sure, why not?" She came back and carefully wrapped me up, then my doctor walked in.

"We found a mass, and we couldn't finish the procedure because the scope could not fit past it. We've taken a biopsy and tattooed it. Do you want to see the images from the procedure?" he asked.

"Sure, why not?" I said. He showed me the mass and it looked big and ugly, but the word "cancer" didn't come out of his mouth.

At this point, I was in a haze, a crazy fog, but appeared cool as a cucumber on the outside.

He then said that I needed to get another CT scan as soon as possible (this time with contrast), and he wanted me to see a surgeon right away. He had the name of someone he could refer me to and offered to call him right then and there if I wanted. I said, "Sure,

a reductionist approach to treatment. This means that the body and its systems are looked at in isolation and, until recently, modern medicine had little understanding of the complex interconnection between emotions, diet, and the interplay of the body's organs and processes. This has begun to change, but the common clinical practice is still far behind modern research.

For example, we now understand how the microbiome, a collection of bacteria, viruses, and protozoa that live in our gut, influence both our mind and body, but doctors are unable to factor this into clinical practice because they are not trained in nutrition or the microbiome.

Chinese medicine, however, has understood the connection between diet, and various organ systems and emotions for generations. Modern medicine once considered it superstitious to suggest mood disorders, the liver, and conditions like hypertension could be connected, which was something taught in TCM. Now we know that both hypertension and mood disorders have a dysfunction that involves the same neurotransmitter, serotonin, which is chiefly metabolized by the liver.

Fortunately, interest is growing in TCM and there is more scientific research being undertaken by western medicine to try to understand the systems and knowledge of TCM.

To date, very little of this research has focused on the whole system of TCM. This makes sense given it is beyond modern scientific practice to study complex systems. The best our current science can do is study isolated elements and formulate a hypothesis that explains the apparent interconnections between these elements.

As a result, research on TCM focuses on a single type of treatment, such as acupuncture or botanical/herbal medicine, and how these can be applied within conventional medicine.

However, this segregation of TCM fails to understand the holistic approach integral to TCM treatment. As alternative forms of medicine become better understood and more popular, there will inevitably be greater integration of different forms of medical practices, including TCM.

But just because modern medicine and science can't fully explain TCM at this time doesn't mean people can't enjoy the benefits of TCM.

My husband and I recently dined

with friends at our favorite Chinese restaurant. Our friends thanked us for taking them somewhere they could really enjoy delicious food, of which not a morsel was left.

In this case, eating delicious food was the last word. They didn't need to be experienced chefs or understand how it was cooked, or even know what all the ingredients were to appreciate it. The taste of the food was a good life experience all on its own. Chinese medicine is similar. You may not know how it works in the terminology of western medical science, but it has a well-established foundation with thousands of years of practiced knowledge. TCM has contributed to the health and well-being of Chinese people for centuries before the arrival of western medicine.

It is silly for western scientists to suggest that the observations that generations of Chinese medicine practitioners have made and passed down regarding the effects of their treatments do not constitute a legitimate scientific basis.

TCM is a different system from Western medicine, having a vastly different ideology and practice. And just like eating Chinese food does not prevent you from eating burgers, using Chinese medicine does not prevent you from using Western treatments, especially since Chinese medicine is non-invasive and its herbal remedies are gentle and work in synergy with the bodies natural systems.

With many years of study and refinement, TCM is an advanced medical/healing system that has a very close relationship with Daoism, including a strong focus on prevention and preservation. This is very different from western medicine, which is more focused on curing illness after it develops. Chinese medicine aims to maintain and optimize health and wellbeing and is a preventative form of medicine. It is a treasure trove that will contribute to a good life with a healthy body and mind.

I look forward to sharing my understanding of the benefits of TCM with you to help you achieve a more active and fulfilling lifestyle.

Christina Xu holds a bachelor's degree from Beijing University of Chinese Medicine. Living in Australia, she now dedicates her time to advocating for and promoting the benefits of traditional Chinese medicine to the mainstream western society. Learn more at PreserveHealth.com.au

VIENTOUATROESTUDIO/SHUTTERSTOCK



Art as Medicine

Continued from Page 8

"I'm in perfect health, and I'm getting younger every year," he quips, eyes twinkling. "I'm not kidding," he says, and we both laugh. Barker is also director of the UCI Institute and Museum for California Art, where he encourages people to consider how art makes them feel physically, in the moment, before they make intellectual judgments about the work.

This distinction between the intellect and the heart is essential. It is the difference, often, between experiencing the moment and analyzing the moment. The power of art comes in drawing us in and leaving us in a state of experiencing the work, rather than dissecting it. The same is true of creating art.

For example, with his acting students, Barker urges them to get out of their heads onstage and into their physical senses, into the subtle sights and sounds around them for a more instantaneous experience.

Any one of us can find a similar experience. We need simply grab a piece of wet clay and squeeze, pound, and caress it into some inspired shape. In the process, we'll discover that we're blissfully aware only of how the clay oozes beneath our fingers and a small remnant of preschool play period. Voilà! We are in the moment and reaping the benefits.

The Thing That Blocks Creativity and Mindfulness

Of course, just picking up a paintbrush isn't always enough to draw us out of

our thoughts and onto the canvas. Sometimes our mind just keeps on ticking. That can be especially true if we are a practiced artist prone to criticizing our work even as we create it. This is a side-effect of memory and holding onto events or ideas from previous experience.

We all carry around this baggage of memory—because it keeps us safe. "Memory helps us to know ourselves," Barker says. It helps us learn that fire burns—always. We make associations, then proceed through life, frequently engaging an autopilot constructed from memory that can help us navigate situations without relearning them every time.

But the very feature designed to keep us safe can also keep us stuck. Onstage, there's a microcosm of this paradox. The script must be learned, but watching an actor recite lines memorized weeks ago might be spot on one night, but fall flat the next as he tries to reproduce those exact inflections. Watching this is painful for both the actor and the audience.

The trick to staying in the present moment is to become a child again. Forget what you think you know, by concentrating on what is right there in front of you, trusting that the future will unfold as it's meant to. The past—however perfect—can never be recreated.

"The true artist buries any previous realizations or insights during the performance so that it can be uncovered at that mo-

ment," says Joshua Townsend-Zellner, an acting coach involved in the theater and film industry for more than 25 years.

Awareness and Creativity Many artists will tell you that being creative and being in the moment go hand in hand, each increasing the other. So how can we drop any baggage that may keep us from the infinitely alive and creative present?

"Most actors have tricks to keep them spontaneous," says Barker. These tricks allow them to create the illusion of performing the scene for the first time onstage. One way they do this is by focusing on their senses. The average person can use this same trick. You can focus on the sights, sounds, and smells of the present; the weight of your arms, and the rhythm of your breath, and other small moment-to-moment subtleties. By doing so, we are brought into the now.

In doing this, the amygdala becomes less active and the entire autonomic nervous system gets a break.

It's the same state achieved during meditation, conferring the same benefits. But for those who have tried meditating and just can't seem to still their minds, artistic expression offers another portal to the now. The creative process opens us up to seeing, hearing, feeling anew, to relaxing into the moment, without judgment. Perhaps that's why the typical yogi and the typical artist often seem younger than their age.

The Paradox of Letting Go Of course, coming into the present moment or creating art isn't neces-

sarily as simple as focusing on our breath and senses. Part of the challenge we face is getting into the right headspace, or rather, brain space.

Our brains have two modes of thought: exploitative and exploratory, according to esteemed neuroscientist Moshe Bar. We might think of the exploitative modes as habitual and the exploratory mode as creative. When we're doing something new, whether traveling to a new place or trying our hand at painting, we're in exploratory mode.

We're adventurous and willing to take risks. We are in the moment. This contrasts with the exploitative mode, which is the mode we need to be in when we have a set of specific tasks to get done in a certain sequence.

"Mental load, such as to-do lists, is a part of life, and we have to accept it," says Bar. "But when our mental capacity is loaded, we are more exploitative and less creative."

The actor with a mind full of memorized lines and well-practiced behaviors set to the mold of a character is at risk of becoming bogged down in the exploitative mode every bit as much as the mother with a laundry list the length of an escalator who carves out a moment for quietude only to become exasperated by her inability to fully relax.

Each experiences the critical, over-thinking, over-taxed mind removing them from the present moment. Rather than being creative, the artist becomes destructive (think Van Gogh, Hemingway) while the mother becomes frazzled, prone to screaming at the top of her lungs for her kids to "Stop screaming!"

The mental state needed for both creativity and blissful present-moment awareness is elusive when dissected, scrutinized, or sought after.

It then becomes bogged down with words, thoughts, and associations. Like the meditator who tries unsuccessfully to force present-moment blissfulness, the artist who tries too hard to find the moment onstage appears stiff or lost.

Whether it is an experienced artist or a layperson looking to become present through the arts, Townsend-Zellner recommends listening with the whole body. "You can read or write fast or slow, but with listening, you must be in sync with the other," he says. Listening is a gift that blesses both giver and receiver because by bestowing one's undivided attention, one becomes instantly present.

How Do You Know if You've Arrived?

Eckhart Tolle, the author of "The Power of Now," suggests we ask ourselves if there is joy, ease, and lightness in what we're doing. "If there isn't, then time is covering up the present moment and life is perceived as a burden or a struggle."

Creating art is fun. Improve, walk through a gallery, hum a tune, take an acting class. For a happier, longer life, rekindle the creative genius inside you. Along the way, you might just discover a present moment full of beauty and you that is more relaxed, attentive, and creative.

Joni Ravenna Sussman is a freelance writer specializing in health and wellness. Her articles have appeared in dozens of national and regional publications over the years. She is also a playwright and TV writer. Contact her at Joni.Ravenna@gmail.com

The creative process opens us up to seeing, hearing, feeling anew, to relaxing into the moment, without judgment.

“The arts are important in healing, and present-moment awareness, they quiet anxiety and promote inner well-being.”

Stephen Barker, dean of UCI's Claire Trevor School of the Arts

FOOD IS MEDICINE

Doctor With MS Finds Successful Self-Treatment Through Diet

Out of my wheelchair and back on my bike: Why I'm putting MS diet to the test

TERRY WAHLS

When I was first diagnosed with MS, or relapsing-remitting multiple sclerosis to be precise, I did what most doctors do when they are diagnosed with something serious—I began reading the latest research. I was distressed to discover that within ten years of diagnosis, half of those with MS are unable to work due to severe fatigue and a third have a gait disability.

Multiple sclerosis is a chronic inflammatory disease in which the immune cells attack and damage the brain and spinal cord. At first, the episodes are marked by periods of worsening, (relapses) and periods of improvement (remissions). Over time, the damage accumulates, and the brain and spinal cord slowly shrink, and the level of disability steadily increases. Each patient is uniquely affected due to the specific location of the accumulating damage.

My Story

Doctors prescribed me the newest drugs, but I continued to decline. A vegetarian for 20 years, I considered the paleo diet—which mimics the basic diet of our pre-agricultural hunter-gatherer forebears—which claims to have the potential to treat auto-immune conditions.

According to paleo diet advocate Loren Cordain, by not eating grains, legumes (pulses) and dairy—foods that were introduced into the human diet 10,000 years ago—patients will have fewer dietary lectins (proteins found in most plants). Cordain's theory is that dietary lectins increase inflammation in susceptible patients. He also theorized that some patients with rheumatoid arthritis would have fewer symptoms if they consumed less lectin-containing food.

I read Cordain's article in Mayo Clinic Proceedings, which examined the differences between paleo

and the modern Western diet and the theoretical benefits of using the paleolithic diet to reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease. I decided the risk of adopting his dietary suggestions in an attempt to slow my decline was low, so I went back to eating meat.

The next year my illness transitioned to secondary progressive multiple sclerosis. In this phase, no spontaneous remissions occur. Once lost, functions are gone forever. I got the recommended tilt-recline wheelchair. In an effort to slow my decline I underwent chemotherapy to deplete my immune cells and make it more difficult for them to continue their assault on my brain and spinal cord. But it didn't work.

I wanted to maximize my intake of the nutrients I'd been taking in supplement form, directly from the food I ate.

By 2007, seven years after my initial diagnosis, I was too weak to sit up in a regular chair. I was constantly exhausted and had increasingly severe bouts of trigeminal neuralgia—intense jolts of electrical face pain that were harder and harder to stop.

That summer I researched what I could do to protect my brain, focusing on vitamins and nutritional supplements to further support my mitochondria—the powerhouse for each cell. According to one theory, brain diseases may be more severe due to mitochondria that are not working well. I began taking more supplements to support my cell health, but still little changed.

So I decided to self-experiment, hoping, if I was lucky, to slow the progression of my MS. As a doctor, I certainly did not expect to walk around the hospital again making

my rounds. Or go hiking or biking again. Or lead an important clinical trial testing my theories on using diet to treat multiple sclerosis-related fatigue. But that's what happened.

My New Diet

By identifying the key nutrients important to brain health, I redesigned my paleo diet. I wanted to maximize my intake of the nutrients I'd been taking in supplement form—getting them instead directly from the food I ate.

The new diet I created dramatically increased my vegetable intake: each day I consumed three platefuls of green leafy vegetables, sulfur-rich and deeply pigmented vegetables, and ate meat in moderation while eliminating gluten-containing grains, eggs, dairy, and legumes. I also added fermented foods, full of good bacteria for digestive health, mineral-rich seaweed, and more nutrient-dense organ meats.

Three months after starting the diet, my fatigue was gone. The electrical face pains were gone too. I began doing my hospital rounds using a cane. After six months, I began walking without a cane. At nine months I got on my bike again for the first time in six years and biked around the block. After 12 months of this new way of feeding my cells, I biked 18 miles with my family. If I went off the diet, the electrical face pains came back within 24 hours.

Looking at the Science

Paul Rothman, Iowa University's then-chief of medicine, asked me to write a case report because recovery from progressive multiple sclerosis is rare. I worked with my treating medical team, who wrote up my case, which documented my dietary changes, supplements, neuromuscular electrical stimulation treatment, and intensive physical therapy.

EAT WELL

Veggie Nutrition: Eat The Skins, Stems, and Tops!

Most of us are wasting the most nutrient rich parts of plants because we don't know how to use them



ALEXANDER MILLS/UNSPLASH
The skin of most fruits and vegetables contain antioxidants, fiber, and other health-promoting properties.

LISA ROTH COLLINS

Stems, skins, and the tops of fruits and veggies carry even more nutrients than the fruit or vegetable itself. If you're already buying beautiful, fresh, and perhaps even local and organic produce, then why waste a quarter to a half of it? Unless you're composting, you're getting rid of essential veggie nutrition that could be beneficial to you.

Vegetable stems, including kale, collards, parsley, and Swiss chard, are loaded with vitamins, fiber, and nutrients because the stem is the component that is rooted in the soil. The skin of most fruits and vegetables such as apples, oranges, potatoes, squashes, and even kiwi contain antioxidants, fiber, and other health-promoting properties. Vegetable tops, including



Terry Wahls before and after she changed her diet.

Rothman also asked me to write up the protocol that I had used to conduct a safety and feasibility study. My protocol included diet, stress reduction, exercise and electrical stimulation of muscles. The pilot study suggested that the complex protocol "may reduce fatigue and improve quality of life of subjects with progressive MS."

Since then, we have conducted two more small pilot studies with favorable results showing that the

dietary intervention is safe and can be sustained by over half of the people who begin the protocol. The National Multiple Sclerosis Society is funding our clinical trial to test the effect of diet on fatigue. It will complete in 2020.

Now, the idea that diet has an impact on multiple sclerosis is being considered by MS researchers, and many neurologists and patients. However, neurologists at the US National Multiple Sclerosis Society, said: "While many different dietary strategies are being promoted for people with MS, currently there is insufficient evidence to recommend any of these strategies."

Until the results from my clinical trial are in, we won't be able to say how effective my dietary protocol is at reducing fatigue in people with multiple sclerosis. But from my own experience, what I eat does matter.

Terry Wahls is a clinical professor of internal medicine at the University of Iowa and the author of "The Wahls Protocol: How I Beat Progressive MS Using Paleo Principles and Functional Medicine" and a companion cookbook.



beets, carrots, or any other vegetable that sprouts a leaf or is green, contain added vibrancy and nutrients, so be sure to hold on to them. They are useful and can be a great contribution to your diet.

Here are some different ways you can make use of leafy greens and root veggie nutrition: 1. Stems make a great base to add to stir-fries. Add in broccoli and Swiss chard stems at the beginning along with your onions and celery. That way, they can soften and absorb the delicious flavor.

2. Collard, kale, or parsley stems are great for the base of soup stock. Let them infuse in your water for an hour or so and then remove them from the stock. They will infuse all of their nutrients into your soup stock. 3. The skins of citrus fruits contain bioflavonoids, which are amazing antioxidants. Sprinkle the zest of an orange into a cookie or muffin recipe.

4. Put the stems and skins of any fruit or vegetable through your juicer, including collard, kale, broccoli, chard, carrots, beets, and apples. 5. Bake your potatoes and squash with the skin on. Potato skin has potassium, iron, and vitamin C. 6. Use the tops of beets and stems of Swiss chard to make

a wonderful and colorful side dish. Beetroot tops are loaded with calcium, magnesium, and iron. See the recipe below for some inspiration!

Garlicky Green Stem Sauté

3 cloves of garlic
2 large bunches of whole beetroot tops and Swiss chard
1-2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil

Directions

7. Fold green leaves in half lengthwise and cut away the leaf from the inner ribs or stem. 8. Chop up the stems into small pieces and set aside. 9. Pile about 5-6 leaves on top of one another, and roll into a tight roll. 10. Starting at the top and cutting across the leaves, slice the leaves into needle-thin strips. 11. In a large skillet, heat the oil over medium heat. 12. Add the garlic and sauté for a few seconds. 13. Add the stems, season with salt and pepper, and sauté for 5 minutes or until soft. 14. Add in the green leaves and cook until they are bright green and are just short of their wilting point.

Lisa Roth Collins is a registered holistic nutritionist and the marketing manager at NaturallySavvy.com, which first published this article.

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF TERRY WAHLS



Chris Norton had to be airlifted to a hospital after breaking his neck in a football accident.



Chris and the love of his life, wife Emily Norton.

With enough effort, a transformation of our attitude has the power to completely reshape our reality.



Chris recounts the lessons he learned—including how powerful attitude can be—in his book, "The Seven Longest Yards."

ELEVATE AND INSPIRE

Reshape Your Reality: An Inspirational Story

After a football accident left one young man paralyzed, he found the power of positivity

CHRIS NORTON

"Get up, Norty. Come on, man. Let's go," my teammate Josh Patterson said as he stood over me.

The play was over, the pile had cleared, and the rest of the team was jogging toward our sideline. I told my arms to push off the ground, but nothing happened. Instead, I lay there facedown, motionless. Panic struck all at once as I realized I couldn't feel my arms or my legs. I couldn't feel the ground underneath my body. I couldn't feel anything below my neck.

As it turns out, I dove to make what would be my last football tackle. My head collided with the ball carrier's thigh, breaking my neck instantly and severely compressing my spinal cord. A helicopter was called immediately to fly me out. At that moment, my life changed forever.

I've learned a lot of lessons since that day, lessons I write about in my book, *The Seven Longest Yards*. The most important of these lessons to me—the one that truly saved me—was the realization of just how powerful our attitude can be. That with enough effort, a transformation of our attitude has the power to completely reshape our reality.

I always imagined my first helicopter ride would be a fun experience, but that couldn't have been further from the truth. It was just me and two EMTs in the back of a chopper taking off for the nearest trauma center.

I couldn't look around the cabin, much less out the window. Instead, I lay there, immobilized, staring straight up.

As we were taking off, the flood gates in my mind burst open and the thoughts came crashing into me. Will I ever play football again? Will I ever walk again? Will I ever move my hands again? What kind of woman would ever want to be with a guy who can't move? Will I be alone for the rest of my life? Will I ever be happy again?

It was too much. My heart was pounding, my mind racing. Suddenly, I couldn't get enough air. I tried to take a deep breath, but nothing happened. I began to panic. I tried again for a couple short, rapid breaths—still nothing. I was suffocating. For the first time in my life, I felt that I was going to die. "Help," I wheezed, but I couldn't tell if I had made any noise.

The roar of the chopper blades drowned out everything. If I couldn't hear myself, how could the EMTs hear me? "I can't breathe!" I said, but no one moved. "Help," I called again, but neither EMT turned towards me. My only hope was to make eye contact with one of them. But both were looking the other way.

Forgetting for a moment the predicament that had gotten me into this mess in the first place, I tried



Chris and Emily Norton and their five adopted daughters.



Chris Norton recounts his experience and insights to students.

When we only focus on what's wrong, we will never see what's right.

to wave my hands at them to get their attention—they sat like stones cemented to the gurney. Surely the heart monitor will alert them that I'm struggling, I hoped, but I didn't have much time.

An overwhelming sense of helplessness overcame me. I was on my own.

It was in that moment, the moment I hovered between life and death 10,000 feet above the border between Minnesota and Iowa, that I made a decision to take back control. I decided to change my attitude and stop viewing myself as the victim of my circumstances. I thought back to football and the tools I once used to play the game I loved.

Before every snap, I used to visualize where I would run, where I thought the ball might be, the positions on the field the other players would be in. In just a few seconds, I could take the complexity of a football play and break it down into small, manageable parts.

I forced from my mind all the other questions that had consumed me moments before. I closed my eyes and visualized my mouth opening, sucking in air, and my lungs filling with oxygen. I imagined my chest rise and fall as the breaths circulated through my body. Then, I counted. One breath. Two breaths. Three breaths. The breaths were small, but they were something.

I began to focus on the air I was able to breathe in, rather than all the air I couldn't get.

With every positive thought, each breath got a little easier. "I'm going to make it," I told myself. "I'm going to be fine."

From the moment my body hit the ground after the tackle I had focused completely on what I could not do. I couldn't move; I couldn't feel; I couldn't breathe. The obstacles kept getting bigger and bigger until they completely overwhelmed me.

However, my reality began to change when I switched my focus to what I could do. For the first time, I realized that my attitude had the power to transform the world around me. The lesson I learned that day in the helicopter proved invaluable. In the coming years, I would face more than my fair share of obstacles and challenges, no matter how complex or scary they were, I chose to tackle them with the exact same attitude.

Nine years later, I've found the answers to the questions that haunted my mind as the chopper was taking off. I've made huge strides in my path to mobility, I have a speaking career, I married the love of my life, and we have a beautiful family together. It is never easy, but it started by forcing myself to only focus on the things I could control at that moment.

It's easy to see me in my wheelchair and think that I should be miserable. However, that couldn't be further from the truth.

I owe my happiness to the fact that I'm consistently pointing out to myself the things I have instead

of the things I don't; the things I can do rather than the things I can't.

I have never allowed my physical paralysis to paralyze my mindset. In fact, some people call me crazy, but being in a wheelchair isn't so bad. You may not realize it, but there are some major perks.

Like no standing in line. Ever. While everybody's complaining about the wait or their feet hurting, I'm just chilling. I can also be at a campfire and have 30 mosquitoes on my legs and I don't feel a thing. And of course, you get the best parking. Everywhere I go I have reserved spots in the front row. Unfortunately, in Florida, it is really competitive.

It's natural to focus on what we can't do, the things we don't have, or what we've lost. However, when we only focus on what's wrong, we will never see what's right.

To change your reality, you must choose to transform your attitude—to focus on the positive things you have control over. For many, taking these steps may seem like a daunting task, but I'm here to tell you that oftentimes the first step isn't a step at all, sometimes it's as simple as slowing down and taking one deep breath at a time.

To learn more about Chris's journey and how life's lowest moments can be the source of our greatest gifts, check out his book "The Seven Longest Yards." It is available everywhere books are sold.

THINK WELL, WORK WELL

Job Stress Is Harmful Because You Make It That Way

We often think our job situation causes our stress, but it's usually our thoughts about our job situation that are to blame



ALL PHOTOS BY SHUTTERSTOCK

JEFF GARTON

A recent study by Korn Ferry found that job stress is on the rise. This is partly the result of people being misinformed about stress and its prevention.

Google the term "job stress" and you'll see that it's defined as an emotional reaction to the misery caused by your difficult circumstances. But don't be fooled by this misleading definition that is missing a crucial bit of reality.

Although it's true that job stress is an emotional reaction, it's not simply caused by your difficult circumstances. Those are more accurately described as the trigger. They trigger your thoughts that ultimately create your emotional reactions and the resulting stress.

Stress is a mental reaction. It begins with a thought that you generate to interpret your reality and the emotions follow immediately afterward. Stress is managed by controlling the thought that's triggered. Rather than allow a thought to cause emotional strain, you replace it with one that creates emotional ease.

Types of Stress, Symptoms, and Consequences

This deeper truth of stress is an essential bit of information given the costs and consequences of stress.

To be clear, we are not talking about good stress (eustress). This type of stress is associated with being energized by the challenge of learning new things and doing what you think is enjoyable.

That's in contrast to bad stress (distress). This kind of stress is associated with exposure to situations you think are not enjoyable. The latter can kill you, but not before wreaking havoc with your mental and emotional health.

But what if we can change one form of stress into the other? That would be a crucial ability given the costs of stress in our society.

Studies have found that medical costs are 50 percent higher for employees with high-stress levels, which can cause sleep disturbances, difficulties concentrating, stomach issues, temper tantrums, angry outbursts, apathy, headaches, muscle fatigue, eating disorders, anxiety, depression, chronic illness, and heart disease.

Research by Princeton University also found that during periods of prolonged stress, parts of your brain literally shrink and can weaken your ability to cope and think

During periods of prolonged stress, parts of your brain literally shrink and can weaken your ability to cope and think straight.

Assign the stressor a better meaning than you normally would.

straight. It's during stressful periods when you're more likely to have accidents, engage in substance abuse, isolate yourself from fellow workers, and you may even experience discord, broken relationships, and thoughts of suicide.

The American Institute of Stress reports that the top causes of job stress are workload (48 percent), people issues (28 percent), balancing work and personal life (20 percent), and job insecurity (6 percent).

Of course, as we already discussed, the stress isn't really caused by those things—it is caused by how people think about those things.

In all, there are two broad categories of stressors or triggers.

Physical Stressors: working alternating shifts, being immobile for long periods, lacking sufficient work breaks, highly repetitive tasks, work that is fast-paced, and even environmental issues like poor lighting, loud noise, and the temperature of your workspace.

Psychological Stressors: unresolved conflicts, false accusations, poor supervision, a lack of recognition, insufficient instruction and communication, unfriendly coworkers, office politics, bullying, harassment, discrimination, ridiculous work rules, demands, and deadlines, and many more.

Physical stressors can have psychological consequences, so we have to keep in mind that these involve both a physiological and

psychological impact.

Some suggestions for how to cope with stress focus on physical activity, like breathing deeply, taking a break, meditating, getting more sleep and exercise, changing your diet, and when all else fails, changing your job or getting professional help.

Other suggestions for coping with stress encourage you to shift your mindset. They suggest you focus on what you can control and let go of what you can't. Don't take things so seriously, look for what's going right, and acknowledge that things could be worse.

These suggestions move you towards controlling your thoughts, which is a prerequisite to self-regulating your emotions, a practice the esteemed psychologist Abraham Maslow referred to as self-transcendence.

You think intentionally to create helpful emotions and use these emotions to motivate yourself to rise above your stressors. More recently, psychologist Susan Farrow referred to this as "meaning-focused coping."

Farrow's solution is similar to Maslow's and is considered state-of-the-art in managing stress. When a stressor occurs, you don't allow it to trigger a habitual thought. Instead, you assign the stressor a better meaning than you normally would. Just as Maslow suggested, you think intentionally to create emotional ease rather than strain.

For example, if a co-worker asks you for urgent help, the habitual thought might be, "Why does he think he can ask me for help instead of doing it himself. I am already so busy." The new, better thought may be, "John finds this work so much more difficult than me, it's great that I have the skills to help my co-worker and still meet my own deadlines."

The most helpful emotions include love, joy, optimism, excitement, enthusiasm, gratitude, courage, confidence, and contentment. Each is an option you can create by thinking intentionally in any situation, no matter how difficult it may be.

Rather than living and working in response to your stressors, which gives them power over you, choose to live and work in response to what you think about your stressors, which gives you power over them. If you do, then you are alleviating your stress rather than causing it, and saving yourself from all kinds of potential health problems.

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.

BECOMING MINIMALIST

Minimalism at 70

Downsizing became a path to a new way of life we deeply enjoy

LINDA SAND

My husband and I followed the traditional path to the American Dream. As our income increased, so did the size of our home. At one point, three of us lived in a four-bedroom house with both living room and family room as well as an amusement room and three baths.

We started out as a young couple with cheap, mostly particle board furniture. But we added to it. Then we upgraded until we had a house full of mostly teak furniture of Scandinavian design, supplemented by oak furniture and barrister bookcases.

It was way more house than we need-

ed, even though it didn't seem too big at the time.

After our daughter left home, we moved into a few smaller houses and then we retired. At that point, we decided to move into a motorhome to facilitate roaming around this great country, seeing the sights and enjoying their historical significance.

We sold nearly everything we owned including our house and both cars. The little bit we kept fit into a small 5-by-5-foot storeroom.

And then we traveled the countryside. Gettysburg in July is hot—I felt sorry for the soldiers who fought there wearing wool uniforms. We watched people demonstrate things like bread baking by a fire, making

It's taken a lot of years and we've covered a lot of miles, but we've come to realize we don't need much.

ropes, or building wooden boats—all those things were a fun way to learn about our country's history.

We traveled through all of the 48 contiguous states, stopping at museums, national parks and monuments, living history sites, and places where we could enjoy nature.

We traveled for several years until we decided the community we left behind was more important to us than the sights we were seeing. Yes, experiences are a great way to learn and build memories, but relationships need maintenance to be healthy and we'd been neglecting our community for too long.

Continued on Page 16

BECOMING MINIMALIST

Minimalism at 70

Downsizing became a path to a new way of life we deeply enjoy

Continued from Page 15

We sold the motorhome and moved back home—into an apartment rather than a house. We felt free from the need to maintain a house and we'd become used to not having a lot of space.

Somewhere along the way, we'd become used to not having the "best" furniture. So, we thought intentionally about what we actually needed in our new apartment and ordered it from IKEA to be delivered. It was the easiest move we ever made!

A one-bedroom apartment is plenty of room for us and our new furniture is particle board once again. But that works for us. We could live differently, but there's nothing about our current living situation we want to change. This time, we chose it.

It's taken a lot of years and we've covered a lot of miles, but we've come to realize we don't need much and there are more important things in life than constantly needing to upgrade the size of our home or the quality of our furniture.

Minimalism is a lifestyle that is growing among all age groups—including mine.

I know nobody gets to go back and start life over again. But here are some of the most important lessons I have learned. Maybe someone younger can learn from us:

Housing: The first house we bought was small. Just barely big enough for three of us. Despite our eventual purchase of larger and larger houses, fancier furnishings, and more vehicles, we are happier now living in a small one-bedroom apartment with one small car. It brings us joy to just live with what we actually use.

Education: Neither my husband nor I went to college right out of high school. Eventually, we realized not having a degree was going to limit our career options, so my husband used his GI benefits to go to col-



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It brings us joy to just live with what we actually use.

lege. He worked full time and went to school part-time for eight years. We saw little of each other during those years, but they led him to a career change into a field where he actually enjoyed working and where he made good money. If he had tried college right after high school, he would not have discovered his career (it wasn't even a thing yet). Sometimes, postponing your education can be a good thing. There are plenty of nontraditional routes to a fulfilling life.

Finances: We have enough money to live well now, but that was not always the case. Discharged from the Army with a 3-month-old baby meant taking a pay cut of nearly fifty percent. We quickly learned we didn't need to buy clothes—except for the growing baby—but she didn't mind her clothes coming from a thrift shop. We learned how to eat well on cheap foods. We learned how to have fun with friends and family without a lot of expense. And, even though we can afford more now, we still have few clothes and prefer cheap entertainment. We do appreci-

Discovering the joy of living with less after a lifetime of getting more is a lesson worth passing on.

ate being able to support public television now after those early years of our daughter watching Sesame Street, Mr. Roger's Neighborhood, etc. Being able to give back now in gratitude for all those who gave when we couldn't is wonderful.

Travel: For many years, we were campers—vacationing in tents, trailers, motorhomes, and conversion vans. We even lived in a motorhome full time for three years as we explored this great country. We took ocean cruises. We traveled through Europe and England. Traveling broadens your perspective. For one thing, you realize there are many ways to live and all of them are right for someone. But, I must say, nothing beats coming back home to friends and family.

Parenting: We raised our daughter to think that different was good and that following the crowd was seldom rewarding. She resented us at times for not being as materialistic as her friends' families were. But learning to follow her own path led her to a job that is right for her. And now she is happy to have learned to be herself. I'm proud of the lessons she learned—even though they were difficult to teach at times.

So what about you? Who are you really and what would make you happy? Probably not materialism.

Minimalism may help you discover what's really important to you and how you'd prefer to live your life. And then, it will give you the time and money to do those things.

We've learned that to be true in our life—and it can be true in yours as well.

Linda Sand is a guest contributor to *BecomingMinimalist.com* where this article was originally published. Joshua Becker is an author, public speaker, and the founder and editor of *Becoming Minimalist* where he inspires others to live more by owning less.

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