

# MIND & BODY

Your hormones can help, if you give your body what it needs so it can deploy them properly.



## Eating Your Way to Hormonal Balance

What we eat can spur hormones that either help us eat better, or drive us to eat badly **4**

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



Scientists have found that spending two hours a week in nature is linked to better health and well-being.

### NATURE HEALS

# Doctors Prescribing Gardening Rather Than Drugs

Growing research findings reveal an innovative way to treat anxiety and depression

#### YVONNE BLACK

Spending time outdoors, taking time out to surround yourself with greenery and living things, can be one of life's great joys—and recent research suggests it's also good for your brain and body.

Scientists have found that spending two hours a week in nature is linked to better health and well-being. It's maybe not entirely surprising then that some patients are increasingly being prescribed time in nature and community gardening projects as part of "green prescriptions" by the United Kingdom's National Health Service (NHS). In Shetland, for example, islanders with depression and anxiety may be given "nature prescriptions," with doctors there recommending walks and activities that allow people to connect with the outdoors.

Social prescriptions—non-medical treatments which have health benefits—are already used across the NHS to tackle anxiety, loneliness, and depression. They often involve the referral of patients to a community or voluntary organization, where they can carry out activities which help to meet their social and emotional needs, and doctors are increasingly opting for community gardening—as this also has the added benefit of involving time spent in nature—even in highly built-up areas.

And the evidence base for such treatments is growing, with research indicating that social prescribing can help to improve patient's anxiety levels and general health. Findings also seem to suggest that social prescribing

schemes can lead to a reduction in the use of NHS services.

**The Benefits of Gardening**  
 Research shows that gardening can directly improve people's well-being. And that taking part in community gardening can also encourage people to adopt healthier behaviors. It may be, for example, that neighborhood projects can be reached on foot or by bicycle—prompting people to take up more active transport options in their daily lives. Eating the produce from a community garden may also help people to form the habit of eating fresh, locally grown food.

Growing food is often the driving force behind community gardening projects, whether purely for the consumption of the gardeners or for local distribution or sale. Unlike growing on individual allotments or private gardens, community gardening requires an element of cooperation and collective planning. Working together toward shared goals can create a real sense of community. And in a garden, a feeling of connection may develop, not just with other people, but with the living world as a whole.

Gardens also play a significant role in conserving biodiversity, by developing wildlife pockets and corridors across towns and cities—an idea encouraged by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds's Giving Nature a Home program. The inclusion of even a small pond in a garden can provide a home for important species such as amphibians. Their vegetation captures carbon and can improve air quality. Tree and shrub roots in the soil absorb water, reducing flood risk.

So because people's relationships with the living world affect their behaviors toward it, taking part in community gardening could also make people old and young more environmentally conscious and responsible. By connecting people to nature, it may be that community

gardens can also help to transform society—allowing towns and cities to move toward more sustainable futures.

#### Community Connections

This process of using plants and gardens to improve health is known as social and therapeutic horticulture. On top of promoting physical and mental health benefits, social and therapeutic horticulture has also been shown to help improve people's communication and thinking skills.

At Hull University's Centre for Systems Studies we want to understand more about the ways community gardening can boost well-being for people, societies, and the living world. So we are working with the Rainbow Community Garden in Hull, which also has links with local schools, social services, mental health teams, and veteran's association, to observe activities and interactions over the course of a year. We are also interviewing staff and volunteers about their experiences, looking at how people's well-being changes as they participate in the project.

Although no one intervention is right for everyone, community gardens do have wide appeal and potential. But such projects tend to be run by charitable organizations—often relying on grant funding to employ staff and provide equipment. And at a time when funding gaps mean that local councils are struggling to preserve public parks and gardens, it seems that despite all the positives that can be gained by such spaces, the future of many community gardening groups could be uncertain.

This would clearly be a significant loss, as individual well-being, societal well-being, and the living world are all inextricably linked. John Donne was correct when he said that "no man is an island." Community gardens can bring together diverse groups of people and it's possible to make these spaces widely inclusive and accessible. Raised beds and paved pathways, for example, can improve access for wheelchair users, while a complex sensory experience can be created using scents and sounds as well as visual stimuli. We hope that our research will help to highlight the importance of these places and the many benefits they can bring for people, society and the living world.

Yvonne Black holds a master's in conservation medicine and is a doctoral student in systems science at the University of Hull in the UK. This article was first published on The Conversation.

### CANCER UP CLOSE

# How Seeing a Therapist Prepared Me for a Conversation With My Tumor

#### 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.

Before I was diagnosed with cancer, I had already been working with a therapist for more than a year.

I have been through more than one traumatic event in my life, and I recognized they were affecting me. I wanted to do something about it.

For example, I lived through an unforgettable 8.0 earthquake in Mexico back in the 1990s when the ground shook so violently it knocked me over and the earth literally roared so loudly it sounded like a freight train. In Paris during a study-abroad semester my junior year in college, I woke up and there was someone inside my hotel room stealing from my friend's purse.

These experiences and others left me with an underlying fear of being unsafe, wondering when the next life-threatening event would happen. This fear followed me throughout the years.

Through working with my therapist, I was able to "reprocess" these two events about in my brain over several eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) therapy sessions and I feel like I have made progress in feeling less stressed about them.

Seeing this therapist has helped me become more aware of how the thoughts and stresses in my mind are connected to physical responses in my body. It has also helped me to realize that our bodies are alive and can communicate with us if we are "awake" enough to ask them questions.

You see, during a therapy session, I may mention something that is troubling or upsetting me, and my therapist will then proceed to ask me, "What do you notice in your body?" After I finish sharing the situation, I may notice that my lower belly is hurting, or my jaw is clenched, or my chest feels like it is being squeezed.

Actually, any part of the body may manifest a response. She then guides me to question that physical response, to ask it something like, "What do you want me to know?" I often get quite a remarkable amount of information that helps me understand what is going on deep inside myself, and I'm able to tell these subconscious physical responses that come forward how I (my main conscious self) am going to address the issue, which can help settle them down and inform the part that is anxious or scared.

I know what some of you may be thinking. This is getting too woo woo, new age, and "out there." I can understand why you would think that. But before you stop reading, consider the following idea.

There is a hypothesis in science called "body memory"

that states that the body itself is capable of storing memories, as opposed to only the brain. It might sound odd, but given that some of our bodies' most important neurotransmitters are produced in the stomach, it's not out of the question. I am not a scientist but I do truly believe the body remembers.

When we go through traumatic events, our conscious mind, our organs, and even our cells experience it. How could they not? The human body is completely connected, so how could something scary affect your brain in isolation? During the hotel room burglary in Paris, it wasn't just my eyes that saw something terrifying, my mind that knew I was in danger, my entire being went through the experience together. I was in bed and felt extremely vulnerable.

My entire body shook for several days afterward, and I remember feeling waves of panic wash over me (adrenaline perhaps) when I would re-live the experience in my mind. Couldn't this have been my organs and cells communicating with me? Maybe they were screaming for help and crying out that they were terrified over what had just happened, but at that time I didn't realize I could tune into what they were communicating and talk to them.

Since I had already had many conversations with different parts of my body in previous therapy sessions, when I became aware that I had a huge malignant tumor growing inside of me, almost fully blocking my colon, I decided to have a short conversation with it a few days after my diagnosis. It went something like this:

Me: "Are you going to kill me?"  
 Tumor: "No."  
 Me: "So why are you growing inside of my body?"  
 Tumor: "I am here to make you fearless."

I was floored with the response that I got. Fear is one of the biggest obstacles holding me back in life. I was too busy protecting myself from harm to live life to the fullest. It is the main reason I decided to go to therapy. So, I was really amazed that the tumor said it was there to help me release some of that

fear and not there to kill me. I thanked it for sharing this information with me, and I kept this understanding in my back pocket throughout my treatment. That conversation didn't convince me I was not going to die, but it did give me some relief at the time.

As I look back on this now, I believe it was God, or the Creator, or the Universe giving me encouragement. I had to go through this experience to grow and see that I have enough strength inside to face anything, even potentially life-threatening illness.

Has this cancer experience made me a fearless person? No. But I absolutely do feel more confident that I have the courage and ability to get through scary experiences.

So, the next time you have a headache, or your hip starts hurting, I invite you to find a quiet spot to sit and ask that part, "What do you want me to know?" You may be surprised at what you find out.

There is a hypothesis in science called "body memory" that states that the body itself is capable of storing memories, as opposed to only the brain.

Join me next week when I begin my mind, body, and spirit trilogy. This mini-series will explore how getting a cancer diagnosis is just as much a psychological and spiritual battle, as it is a physical one, and how I tried to keep all three in check. Until then, breathe deep, be kind, and take it one day at a time.

Michele Goncalves is a financial compliance and fraud auditor for a Fortune 500 company by day and a passionate pursuer of holistic and functional medicine knowledge by night. She is also the author of the column The Consummate Traveler.

PHOTOGRAPH BY SHUTTERSTOCK



Seeing this therapist has helped me become more aware of how the thoughts and stresses in my mind are connected to physical responses in my body.

## EATING YOUR WAY TO

# Hormonal Balance

What we eat can spur hormones that either help us eat better, or drive us to eat badly

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CONAN MILNER

A lot of little considerations go into what we eat: taste, convenience, and cost, just to name a few. But did you know that you can also choose foods based on how they affect your hormones?

Hormones are the body's chemical messaging system. They guide our growth and development, sexual function, sleep, mood, and more.

We usually only consider our hormones if we're going through a transition (like puberty or menopause), or if we've been diagnosed with some hormone-related disease. But hormones actually impact our lives constantly, and what we eat plays a huge role in making sure this system works like it should.

For certified clinical nutritionist Autumn Bates, hormonal balance is at the heart of her dietary advice. With her clients and on her YouTube channel, Bates shares a variety of simple ways to prevent cravings, lose weight, satisfy hunger, improve sleep, and more.

"I view what I do not so much as controlling hormones but as a marker in order to determine where you need to focus on strategies in your life," Bates said.

She began looking at the relationship between hormones and diet through her own struggle with anxiety. Beyond the typical recommendations for meditation and pharmaceuticals, Bates found another factor to help reduce her anxiety that she could use at every meal.

"I learned how to bring the body back into a state of rest and repair through simple nutritional strategies to balance hormones like cortisol, which is the body's fight-or-flight hormone," Bates said.

## Problems With Sugar

The most significant edible offender in throwing off our hormones is also one of the most commonly consumed foods: sugar.

Sugar has always played a role in the human diet, but today we eat far more sugar than we ever have. On average, we each consume about 152 pounds a year, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

There are several reasons we reach for sugar. It's quick energy. It's widely available. It's cheap. And it tastes good.

However, a sugar-rich diet sets you up to fail.

"Let's say you have a high sugar meal that some people might think is healthy—like an acai bowl that has a lot of hidden sugars in it," Bates said.

While eating whole fruit results in a relatively slow sugar transfer into the body, once it is blended, like in an acai bowl, not only do you eat more fruit, but your body absorbs the sugar much quicker.

"If you have something like that, especially first thing in the morning, that's going to cause a pretty big spike in your blood-glucose level. Your body doesn't want that big spike in blood glucose because it leads to oxidation, and oxidation leads to aging."

When your meals and snacks are high in sugar, your body gets subjected to a blood glucose roller coaster. Your body must produce a lot of the hormone insulin to clear all that sugar from your blood. However, too much insulin can cause you to suffer from hypoglycemia or low blood sugar. So the body releases another hormone, cortisol (sometimes known as the "stress hormone") to bump the blood sugar back up.

"When you have this low blood sugar and a release of cortisol, that's where a lot of people also experience shaky feelings of anxiety and stress," Bates said. "This is how anxiety can be tied to blood sugar swings throughout the day, because it's not stable." This instability perpetuates a vicious cycle. When your blood sugar is low, you reach for more sugar because your body becomes desperate for a quick source of energy to balance itself.

"When we're in this state, we're likely to choose the worst options, which will then continue the cycle," Bates said.

Every time we eat, we trigger a cascade of hormones. In addition to insulin, we also have another hormone secreted by our fat cells called leptin. It signals when we're full. A few hours later, ghrelin, another hormone,

delivers the message that it's time to eat again.

At least that is what's supposed to happen. However, sugar can upset these hormonal signals in very unhealthy ways.

One of sugar's more outspoken critics is Dr. Robert Lustig, a pediatric endocrinologist at the University of California—San Francisco who specializes in the treatment of childhood obesity. In his lectures, Lustig describes sugar as an addictive poison, but he's particularly wary of fructose. This type of sugar is found in things like fruit juice and high fructose corn syrup.

At the heart of our problem with fructose is what it does to our hormones. Lustig explains that when we eat fructose, the normal sequence of digestive hormonal reactions never occur. For example, fructose ingestion doesn't stimulate insulin. Unlike glucose, there's no receptor for fructose, so the liver just stores it as fat. Since insulin doesn't go up, leptin doesn't go up, so your brain doesn't register that you ate something. That's why you can consume hundreds of calories of fructose yet still remain hungry. As a result, you eat more and have more trouble burning fat.

Unfortunately, once it gets going, this cycle is incredibly difficult to stop, and it creates other problems in its wake. In a short video on sugar addiction, Lustig says that when something starts messing with our hormones to this degree, we have little power to fight the tide.

"Sleeping behavior, eating behavior, sexual behavior, drinking behavior are all hormonally driven," Lustig says. Our hormones affect our brain with signals that create a biochemical drive. Lustig thinks this is an impossible force to resist.

"No one can exert willpower over a biochemical drive that goes on every minute of every day of every year," he says. "It's just not possible."

To avoid the pitfalls associated with the sugar roller coaster, Bates recommends foods that have the least impact on our blood glucose: protein, fat, and fiber.

"They make it so you don't have those spikes and falls, and it's going to keep you satiated," Bates said. "You'll be satisfied, so you won't crave something within an hour or two with a crash in blood glucose. You'll actually be able to go 3 to 4 hours without having to snack."

Bates advocates for a vegetable-rich diet, including using a vegetable rather than a fruit base for smoothies to avoid the sugar rush that can come with blended fruit. Fiber is best obtained through fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, foods that don't send a surge of sugar into your bloodstream.

## Hormones and Eating Times

Evidence also suggests that restricting our feeding time to specific hours of the day, instead of eating whenever we want, can have a positive effect on our hormonal balance. One benefit is improved insulin sensitivity, which means our cells are better able to take in food energy. Restricting our eating times

can also result in higher levels of other helpful hormones.

"When you eat anything, it shuts off various hormones," Bates said. "Testosterone is one. This is not just for men, but also for women. There are a lot of women I work with that suffer from low testosterone, and that can result in an inability to lose weight."

Bates has several videos to help people implement a safe and effective intermittent fasting routine. The technique may not be for everyone, but it can be a much more sustainable slimming solution than the typical technique for weight loss, cutting calories. Although extreme calorie restriction can allow us to lose weight, the strategy can eventually hit a dead end.

"I just had a client today who illustrates this perfectly," Bates said. "She has not been able to lose any weight, even though she's had a 1000 calorie deficit for weeks. She's at a complete plateau."

Although your goal in calorie restriction may be weight loss, your body has another agenda: survival. This means that no matter how much you cut your calories, your body may become even more determined to hold on to fat.

"I equate it to the power-saving mode on your phone," said Bates. "If you're at five percent battery, your phone is going to shut off some applications that are available when you have a full battery. That's why people see a plateau in the calorie-deficit type of diet."

## All About Balance

To clinically assess your actual hormonal levels, diagnostic blood testing is required. For people who suffer from hormonal diseases, regular testing may be required. However, Bates says that most people can learn to tune into imbalances without a blood test. For example, problems with sleep may signify issues with melatonin. Anxiety may point to a cortisol imbalance.

And it's not just food. Lots of lifestyle choices affect hormones. How much stress we endure, how much sleep we get, and our activity level all play a significant role in health and hormonal harmony.

But if hormone balance is the goal, why bother with food and lifestyle? Why not just take hormones? Bates says that unless you have a disease that requires hormonal supplementation, this strategy can invite even bigger problems.

"We love fast solutions, but our bodies have this mechanism within us called a negative feedback loop," she said. "So if you take testosterone, for example, your body will stop producing it. It takes energy to produce this hormone, and your body is always trying to preserve energy. So you can actually get into a situation where you have to take more and more hormone replacements in order to achieve the same result."

Sometimes it's tempting to blame your body for working against your wishes. You put all this effort into weight loss, yet your body seems to stubbornly hold onto excess pounds.

However, if you take the time to tune into

your body's needs, you may find a mutually beneficial solution.

## Stress and Hormones

For example, if you're trying to lose weight and your diet is in order, the next thing to consider is stress. Stress triggers cortisol and cortisol is often tied to belly fat. It's a frustrating feature, but it exists for a reason.

The main job of cortisol is to provide you with an instant source of blood glucose for your body to tap into when you're in danger. When you're under constant stress, your body adapts by creating a storehouse of fat in your gut.

"It wants to provide you energy to get out of a bad situation," Bates said. "It's not that your body is faulty. It's just responding to the environment that it's in."

Of course, some of the stress of life is unavoidable. However, there are techniques that we can employ to reduce much of it. Practicing meditation and mindfulness can help ease emotional stress, but physical stress can be even easier to control.

This is why regular, moderate exercise is so important. Everyone knows that too little movement can result in weight gain and increased inflammation. However, people who become overzealous about exercise in an attempt to lose weight may also be inadvertently holding themselves back.

"If you're exercising too much, too often, and not following proper guidelines from a trainer or a program, this can result in increased cortisol levels that persist after your workout," Bates said.

For people putting everything they've got into losing excess weight, Bates recommends trading some of their strenuous workouts for a more laid-back routine.

"If you are a runner, you might actually want to swap in some walking days instead, in order to balance your cortisol levels. You could also walk in the middle of the day during your lunch break. Or you can walk outside, which has been shown to decrease serum cortisol levels as well."

Another way to cut out a big chunk of unnecessary stress is to ease off on your cell phone use. There is clear evidence that the microwave radiation our wireless devices emit causes cell damage, and oxidative stress. But the notifications also contribute to our stress level. When we're constantly monitoring the alerts and texts our phones receive, these little stresses add up.

"Every time that notification pops up on your phone and you see it, it results in a slight spike in your cortisol level," Bates said. At the very least, Bates advises that people lay off the devices an hour before bed, and leave them plugged in outside the bedroom. These small changes can improve the quality of our sleep, which can help resolve a variety of hormone-related health problems.

Of course, changing your diet and lifestyle can't make you slim and carefree overnight. Finding balance takes time, practice, and patience. It's a process of learning which lifestyle factors you can implement to create the life you want. Your hormones can help, if you give your body what it needs so it can deploy them properly.

"This is something you continue to incorporate, so you can allow your body to balance. You can reap the benefits of this balance with increased energy, weight loss, and mental clarity—all the things your body wants you to have," Bates said. "It's not a diet pill, and it's not going to give you immediate solutions."

That said, the solutions you do get will be lasting—and without side effects.

## EVERYDAY CHEMICALS

# New Study Suggests Fluoride Lowers Children's IQ

Fears of fluoride in drinking water can no longer be dismissed as a crank conspiracy theory

JEFFEREY JAXEN

The research continues to accumulate: Fluoride exposure harms the brain and reduces IQ.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention considers community water fluoridation one of the ten greatest public health achievements of the 20th century. The view of U.S. regulatory agencies has also been the dominant view of the medical community. Have these long-held beliefs stood the test of scientific rigor?

It has already been established that fluoride crosses the placenta, and laboratory studies show that it accumulates in brain regions involved in learning and memory and alters proteins and neurotransmitters in the central nervous system.

Now, a recent study is the first to estimate fluoride exposure in a large birth cohort receiving optimally fluoridated water. Published in the journal JAMA Pediatrics, the study has forced many to re-examine the practice of water fluoridation. Funded by the Canadian government and the U.S. National Institute of Environmental Health Science, the new study, titled "Association Between Maternal Fluoride Exposure During Pregnancy and IQ Scores in Offspring in Canada," examined the association between fluoride exposure during pregnancy and the IQ scores of the children at ages 3 and 4 years old.

The scientists assessed fluoride exposure in two separate ways. They measured fluoride

“**Maternal exposure to higher levels of fluoride during pregnancy was associated with lower IQ scores in children aged 3 to 4 years.**

study authors

in women's urine samples during pregnancy while also calculating fluoride consumption based on how much is in a city's water supply and how much women recalled drinking.

The study found that of the 512 mother-child pairs, a 1-mg/L increase in maternal urinary fluoride was associated with a 4.49-point lower IQ score in boys.

The study's authors concluded: "Maternal exposure to higher levels of fluoride during pregnancy was associated with lower IQ scores in children aged 3 to 4 years. These findings indicate the possible need to reduce fluoride intake during pregnancy."

Perhaps sensing the potential blowback from publishing the recent Canadian study in JAMA Pediatrics, the journal's Editor-in-Chief Dimitri Christakis provides an editor's note to accompany the study: "This decision to publish this article was not easy. Given the nature of the findings and their potential implications, we subjected it to additional scrutiny for its methods and the presentation of its findings."

Christakis said during a recent JAMA Pediatrics Editors Summary podcast, "For me before there were 'anti-vaxers' there were sort of 'anti-fluoridators.'" He shared that while he was going through residency, the traditional teaching he received was that "fluoride is completely safe. All these people that are trying to take it out of the water are nuts."

He commented about the recent study's findings, saying they were "sizable" and "on par" with the IQ drops seen in children ex-

A recent study is the first to estimate fluoride exposure in a large birth cohort receiving optimally fluoridated water.



PISAAI/SHUTTERSTOCK

## FOOD IS MEDICINE

# Is *Black Rice* the Superfood You Need to Try?

A grain once reserved for the elite is now known to have an exceptional nutrient profile

DEVON ANDRE

Blueberries don't have a thing on black rice. Did I say black rice? You bet I did.

Rice isn't just red, white, or brown. Black rice exists, too. Long called the "forbidden rice" or "emperor's rice," it's an uncommon variety of rice that's growing in popularity. Its nicknames come from a long history—word has it that it was initially only served to dignitaries and leaders in the Far East to encourage health and longevity.

**Black rice has more anthocyanins than blueberries, which are widely regarded as one of the healthiest foods you can eat.**

These days, however, black rice is available to all. You can find it in many grocery stores and restaurant dishes across the country. It costs a little more than other va-

rieties, but that's because it's a bit harder to produce; black rice crops only yield about 10 percent of what some white rice varieties can produce.

Research from Japan suggests that black rice originated, along with other colors of cultivated rice, about 10,000 years ago. Black rice began showing up occasionally as a muta-

tion, where a specific gene causes the plant to produce large amounts of anthocyanin, and farmers began to specifically cultivate it. Its nutrient makeup, like its color, makes black rice very unique.

Anthocyanins are the nutrient that gives black rice its power. Anthocyanins are the same antioxidants that give blueberries, black-

berries, acai berries, and eggplant their deep dark hues. Black rice has more anthocyanins than blueberries, which are widely regarded as one of the healthiest foods you can eat. Compared to whole-grain brown rice, black rice is also high in vitamin E and an excellent source of fiber to promote digestion and heart health.

But the anthocyanins are what make this grain truly unique. Anthocyanins have the potential to promote heart and brain health by limiting inflammation, lowering cholesterol, and reducing the risk of heart disease and dementia. And, generally speaking, they don't typically show up in grains!

Next time you head to the grocery store, treat yourself like an emperor and pick up some black rice. It's a versatile grain, popular in many East-Asian dishes, and it can add some new flavors to your routine.

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



THANTHIMALIM/SHUTTERSTOCK



Eating more vegetables and healthy fats, and fewer refined sugars, is a great way to keep your blood sugar stable and avoid a hormone-driven roller coaster.

YUGANOV KONSTANTIN/SHUTTERSTOCK



Norman Lear and Fern Field Brooks holding a photo shot after Norman and Carl Reiner played tennis with a tennis wheelchair champion.



Thomas Kellogg with the Department of Education MAPP team.

"We forget that people can often know exactly how we feel about them simply by the way we say their name," she said.

As digital platforms and social media come to mediate human relationships through the workings of algorithms and artificial intelligence, learning to use one's voice properly may be more important than ever. The healing and intimacy we experience during human voice-to-voice exchanges can never be duplicated by machinery, nor matched in anyway by emojis and text messages.

But whether she's demonstrating vocal techniques to command classroom attention, or working one-on-one with battered women, Valenza-Stern says her most important message is to be aware of how we speak to ourselves.

"It's very difficult for most people to say aloud to themselves 'I love myself,' but it's so healing. It's important to say it aloud," she said.

"One thought cancels out another, but our psyches really register affirmations spoken aloud."

#### Playwriting to Improve Self-Esteem

Thomas Kellogg is a successful actor, director, and playwright who has worked with some of the biggest names in the business. He's spent the last decade giving back by helping young people on Native American reservations to hear the power of their voices as playwrights.

"Most of them are teenage, though I've worked with kids as young as 9 or 10. But 12 or 13 is a great age for them to start expressing themselves because that's when they start checking out, getting lost," he said from the Coeur d'Alene Reservation in Idaho where he conducts a week-long program each summer teaching young tribe members to write full-length plays with two characters.

"They learn the components of dramatic storytelling and create several characters which are profiled using their own greatest desires," he said.

"Then they decide which two characters they want to work with."

Kellogg's program, called MAPP (Mentor Artists Playwrights Project) culminates with professional actors performing the plays before the community.

Kellogg also works within refugee communities, with children in foster care, and with other marginalized groups that experience higher rates of alcohol and drug abuse and suicide.

"We are honoring their voices," he said. "And improving their self-esteem."

#### The Benefits to the Artists

For Thomas Kellogg, Tasia Valenza-Stern, and Fern Field Brooks, the personal rewards of using the arts to empower these communities go well beyond winning awards or accolades. But as fate would have it, Valenza-Stern just won her very first Emmy in connection with voice-over work she donated to Wild Animal Sanctuary, a philanthropic cause she believes in.

*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](mailto:Joni.Ravenna@gmail.com)*

# Healing Hearts Through the Arts

How three entertainment industry artists create healing in the real world

#### JONI RAVENNA SUSSMAN

Whether via film, TV, or stage, the performing arts have always had the power to transport us to another world, often acting as a salve for what ails us.

The ancient Greek tragedies entertained early audiences and provided new insights into the human condition and catharsis. Later, Charlie Chaplain's "Little Tramp" warmed the hearts and tickled the funny bones of silent-film fans who were awed by the new motion-picture technology.

Today's megabudget blockbusters and captivating TV series instantly whisk us away from our worries into magnificent interstellar adventures, fantastic earthbound wonderlands, or intricate character-driven mysteries.

More recently, several artists have used their talents to go beyond providing a mere diversion. They're hoping to create lasting change in the world by doing things like help us recognize that disability is limited concept, strengthening the voice of battered women, or helping disadvantaged youth write their way to better self-esteem.

#### Changing the Way We See the Disabled

Fern Field Brooks is a multi-hyphenate artist. The Emmy and Peabody award-winning director, writer, and producer directed the Academy Award-nominated film "A Different Approach" starring Michael Keaton. It was the first short film to actively encourage the employment of workers with disabilities and it was so effective that it garnered her the distinguished service award from the president of the United States.



Thomas Kellogg helping kids on the reservation in Idaho to use the creative process to heal by writing plays.

"I started in the business working for Norman Lear on the series, "Maude," she says.

"There was a ground-breaking episode involving a class reunion where Maude avoids a best friend who has had a stroke and is now in a wheelchair with half her face paralyzed. Finally the woman confronts Maude, saying, 'You hate me because I scare the hell out of you.' It made me realize that the disabled just want to be treated like the rest of us."

Field Brooks then went on to hire the first regularly featured actress with a disability in a TV series (Geri Jewell who has cerebral palsy in "The Facts of Life"). She also created The Media Access Awards with late husband, Norman Brooks, after a disabled man challenged her to do more than just feature disabled actors in her projects.

He wanted her to change how the disabled are represented across the board in the entertainment industry. In the years since, the Media Access Awards have helped obliterate stereotypes by rewarding holis-

tic, well-rounded representations of people with disabilities in the media.

Most recently, Field Brooks co-executive-produced the Emmy and Golden Globe award-winning ABC series "Monk," starring Tony Shalhoub, who played a lovable widower suffering from Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder.

"I believe most important are the changes it made in the lives—and feelings—of the nondisabled people who worked on those shows," said Field Brooks. It changed us irrevocably."

#### Empowering the Voices of Battered Women

Tasia Valenza-Stern began acting professionally in 1984 at age 15 opposite iconic actor Sean Penn in the film "Crackers" directed by the esteemed Louis Malle. But the beautiful Brunette is more often recognized for her long-running, Emmy-nominated role of Dottie on "All My Children." She played the role for years before becoming one of the top three female voice-over artists in the country. For the past several years, Valenza-Stern has been using her voice to help others find theirs.

"I recently taught a 15-year-old girl how to stand up to bullies by helping her to respect herself and then demand respect from others by coming from a place of power, conviction, and courage," said Valenza-Stern. "All my life, my voice has been a powerful thing for me; but I realized it isn't that way for everyone."

Valenza-Stern teaches the art and technique of confidence and verbal communication. She teaches people how important their voice is.

## Study: Positive Outlook Adds Years to a

Focusing on what you love about life can add decades to how long you get to live it.



#### MOHAN GARIKIPARITHI

New research suggests that a positive outlook—or virtually any dose of positivity—can extend life.

That means if you battle depression and negative emotions, you can still benefit if you remain hopeful in some areas from time to time. And for the eternal optimists out there, it could make a big difference in your quality and length of life.

What was truly interesting is that an optimistic outlook was associated with longer life in people who drank, smoked, didn't exercise, had a poor diet, had undergone significant medical care, or suffered from chronic illness. The more positive a person was, the longer they were likely to live.

Other studies have linked optimism to lower risk for chronic illness and premature death. The new study, looking at 70,000 women and 1,400 men, builds on

#### THINK WELL, WORK WELL

# Controlling Your Thoughts Is Not Impossible

Better to control the thoughts we're aware of than to suffer their consequences

#### JEFF GARTON

This column discusses the mental and emotional rewards of attempting to control your thoughts when faced with life's challenges. Yet when this opportunity arrives, people sometimes say controlling their thoughts is too difficult. They may even develop a mindset that says, "I give up."

Often when this happens, they're referring to how some of their challenges are too upsetting and that trying to control what they think won't solve their problems. So they see no point in trying. They say that some thoughts are impossible to control. They just pop into their head, or they can't avoid thinking in a judgmental manner about issues that are highly important to them.

Barry Gordon, a professor of neurology at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, once suggested that it's not only difficult to control your thoughts, it's likely that you're unaware of the majority of the thoughts you experience. But he says you can still exert control over the thoughts you're aware of by directing your attention toward them—like shining a spotlight on them.

Bill Petit, a former psychiatrist for West Virginia University, offered a similar suggestion. Try viewing the constant flow of your thoughts as a smorgasbord of food. You have the option to pick a thought that will nurture you. Otherwise, if you're unconcerned or inattentive about this, you could end up allowing a thought that's harmful to you.

Some people might suggest you have a responsibility to choose your thoughts. Reputable psychologists like Martin Seligman and Chris Peterson are among those who support the finding that thoughts create emotions and that thoughts are foundational to our motivation and performance. In fact, the relatively new fields of positive psychology, mindfulness, and emotion regulation are all based in part on understanding the power and importance of supervising our thoughts and creating positive emotions.

It's true that controlling how you think won't pay the bills when you're jobless. Nor will it end a home foreclosure, or bring a loved one back to life. But controlling your conscious thoughts, says psychologist Susan Folkman, will grant you increased resilience and the ability to better cope with and resolve hardships and difficulties.

According to psychologist Jeffrey Nevid, it's not widely understood that "behind every disturbing emotional state lurks a triggering negative thought." He said that people are more often aware of their feelings than the thoughts that created them. They don't make the connection between their thoughts and resulting emotions, which brings us to another reason why controlling your thoughts can be difficult.

Our society places a priority on teaching people how to think so they can develop hard skills for their occupation; to think like a physician, engineer, chef, school teacher, etc. But it hasn't been a priority to teach people how to think to develop their soft skills, or how to think so they can maintain their emotional stability.

Only within the last 20 years have educators acknowledged that soft skills might be the hardest and most important skills to develop. We're finally starting to treat thinking as a fundamental skill that can be developed through



ALL PHOTOS BY SHUTTERSTOCK

You may think your circumstances are what make you miserable, but it's actually how you think about your situation that leads to your feelings.

Controlling your conscious thoughts will grant you increased resilience and the ability to better cope with and resolve hardships and difficulties.



#### mindfulness training.

Ancient sages and philosophers have guided people in how to better control their minds. One modern curriculum for this training was developed based on decades of medical research by physician John Kabat-Zinn, the creator of the Stress Reduction Clinic and the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society at the University of Massachusetts Medical School.

Mindfulness training is designed to help you manage stress and avoid the unintended creation of unwanted emotions. You learn to pay attention to your conscious thoughts, remain nonjudgmental in your thinking, and accept life's challenges. Mastering these skills requires daily practice with simple but effective exercises.

But regardless of the attention the "mindfulness revolution" has received in recent years, not everyone cares about this topic. Even those who do enroll in a mindfulness class often become bored and many never complete the entire eight-week practice regimen.

People assume that because they can think, there's no point in spending time or money perfecting how to think. As their life evolves, these untrained people may even insist it's too difficult to control their thoughts. They develop the habit of blaming their circumstances or other people for how they feel, never realizing it is their unsupervised thoughts that are responsible.

In my work educating discouraged job seekers and dissatisfied employees, I've tried to help people want to develop better thinking habits. I don't allow them to dwell on how difficult their thinking can be, particularly when they have enough problems on their minds already. The goal is to give them hope by strengthening their resolve and self-sufficiency to control the thoughts they can.

To illustrate, consider these two quotes from inventors who helped make our lives more comfortable by controlling their thoughts. The first is from Henry Ford who said, "If you think you can do a thing or think you can't do a thing, you're right."

Ford apparently understood something about motivation be-

fore scientists were able to confirm it. As noted earlier, your thoughts not only reflect your intentions, they create the emotions that motivate you to fulfill them. So if you think it's too difficult to control your thoughts, you won't try because you'll lack the motivation. But if you think you can control your thoughts, you're more likely to be motivated to do so.

Hence, both thoughts are correct and the choice is yours. For the benefit of your mental health and self-motivation, stop thinking about the "can't do" difficulties in controlling your thoughts and focus on the "can do" possibilities like the man who invented powered flight did.

In regards to the skepticism and challenges associated with powered flight, Orville Wright said, "If we worked on the assumption that what is accepted as true really is true, then there would be little hope for advance."

Don't accept as true the outmoded idea that your challenges cause your emotions or that your thoughts are too difficult to control. With a bit of study and practice, you can control some of your conscious thoughts to help you regulate the emotions they create. At the very least, you can correct for an unwanted emotion by thinking intentionally to replace it. This innate ability is truly a gift and should be used.

These two pioneering inventors succeeded because they didn't allow their challenges to dictate their thoughts or weaken their resolve. Instead, they conquered their challenges by controlling their conscious thoughts, and they didn't focus on the difficulties of doing this.

Since you have the ability to control what you say to others, so as not to offend them, you can also control your conscious thoughts when speaking with yourself. And while this can be difficult at times, at least you know it's possible and beneficial. Doing so is more than an opportunity. Health psychologists are suggesting it's your responsibility.

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

## Meaningful Life

Stressful situations are looked at more as opportunities to overcome, rather than negatives that drag them down.

those studies. Part of the reason optimism might aid health and longevity is that positive people tend to have less stress in their lives. Or perhaps not less stress—they are just affected by it differently. Stressful situations are looked at more as opportunities to overcome, rather than negatives that drag them down.

Stress is known to take a sizable physical toll, which tells us why positive people were more likely to reach age 85 or higher—

termed "exceptional longevity." It's possible their reaction to stressful situations, and how they dealt with them, have made optimists 50 to 70 percent more likely to reach 85 than their least optimistic counterparts.

Reducing stress and increasing optimism isn't easy, but it is behavior that can be learned, to a degree. There are things you can do to help cope with stress in the short term, like mindfulness, meditation, exercise, tai-chi, or yoga.

For a more long-term approach, it will take some work. Talking to a professional may help ease your stress by identifying its causes and helping you devise a plan to manage. It takes time, but over the long-term, it is possible to acquire a more positive outlook.

With better stress management techniques and a better outlook, you may be able to increase the length and quality of your life.

*Mohan Garikiparithi holds a degree in medicine from Osmania University (University of Health Sciences). He practiced clinical medicine for over a decade. During a three-year communications program in Germany, he developed an interest in German medicine (homeopathy) and other alternative systems of medicine. This article was originally published on Bel Marra Health.*



Sharing stories around a fire has a potent power to bond people in a shared experience.

Take your team somewhere where you can let your toes uncurl. It can be a day trip into a neighboring park, or a week in the mountains, but get your people away from those office distractions. That's No. 1.

No. 2, stack those phones out of reach from participants. People constantly checking their phones takes away from the group dynamic and keeps them disconnected from the shared experience.

No. 3, get yourself a fire pit. If you want to foster the most impactful, powerful group dynamics, get a fire pit, put your people around that fire pit, and when the sun goes down, do some story work around that fire pit. We've been doing it for thousands of years and its magic has built countless clans, tribes, and teams.

Ask this one key question, one by one, when you're around the fire pit, "What was the best team you were ever on and why?" Then sit back and watch what happens.

Everyone will get a true sense of what their teammates think makes a great team. This is gold when you are trying to figure out how you show up for each other and build a culture.

I saw this recently when I was coaching a corporate leadership team that was having trouble connecting. Around a crackling fire, they shared disparate stories about past teammates who had helped each other climb. A senior vice president shared a story of neighbors who had come to her aid after a hurricane demolished her house, for example.

By the time the stories were done, everybody had a better sense of each other, of themselves, and of what they valued. They also had a shared sense of what a great team looked like. The collective mindset of the team had fundamentally shifted.

It's not hard to do, just get out there and do it. Creating this culture can create a healthy work environment where people get the job done.

Remember, shared experiences make great teams.

*Scott Mann is a former Green Beret who specialized in unconventional, high-impact missions and relationship building. He is the founder of Rooftop Leadership and appears frequently on TV and many syndicated radio programs. For more information, visit RooftopLeadership.com*

CONNECT TO LEAD

## Shared Experiences Make Great Teams

Co-workers who support each other create healthier, stronger workspaces

SCOTT MANN

Many of the business and nonprofit leaders I work with today are always asking how they can build a team like the ones we see in the military.

I am often amazed at how the men and women I served with overseas are still as close today as we were back in the shared struggle of Ranger School.

A huge challenge for a lot of business leaders is building a cohesive culture of people that show up for each other, fight for each other, and stands shoulder to shoulder with each other. These leaders want the kind of team that swaggers into a conference together, an A team that is all-in, all the time.

I believe this is essential in this day and age. If we're going to, as organizations, be relevant and stand the tests of stress, fiscal responsibilities, change, distraction, and low trust, our teams have to be so resilient. They have to do the right thing when we're not looking. They have to tell our organizational story better than their leaders do. They have to show up and fight for each other. And that is no easy task these days because there's so much individualism out there, and it's hard to even find the inspiration. I get it, I do, but I believe that you can build these kinds of teams, and it's easier than you think.

One of the first things you want to do to build a great team is to adopt the mindset of the "shared experience." The reason

my special forces buddies have all stayed connected is because we endured an enormous struggle—together. When you share a struggle, an inexplicable bond is formed. To re-create that bond and build stronger teams where a true shared struggle isn't possible, we can create the collective mindset of a shared experience.

Remember, humans are social beings, always keeping tabs at a semiconscious level on who we can group with, who we can work with, and who we can stand shoulder-to-shoulder with. The people we have shared experiences with are the ones we'll form deeper bonds with.

How you build your team around these shared experiences matters. Get off-grid.

# Emilia Romagna

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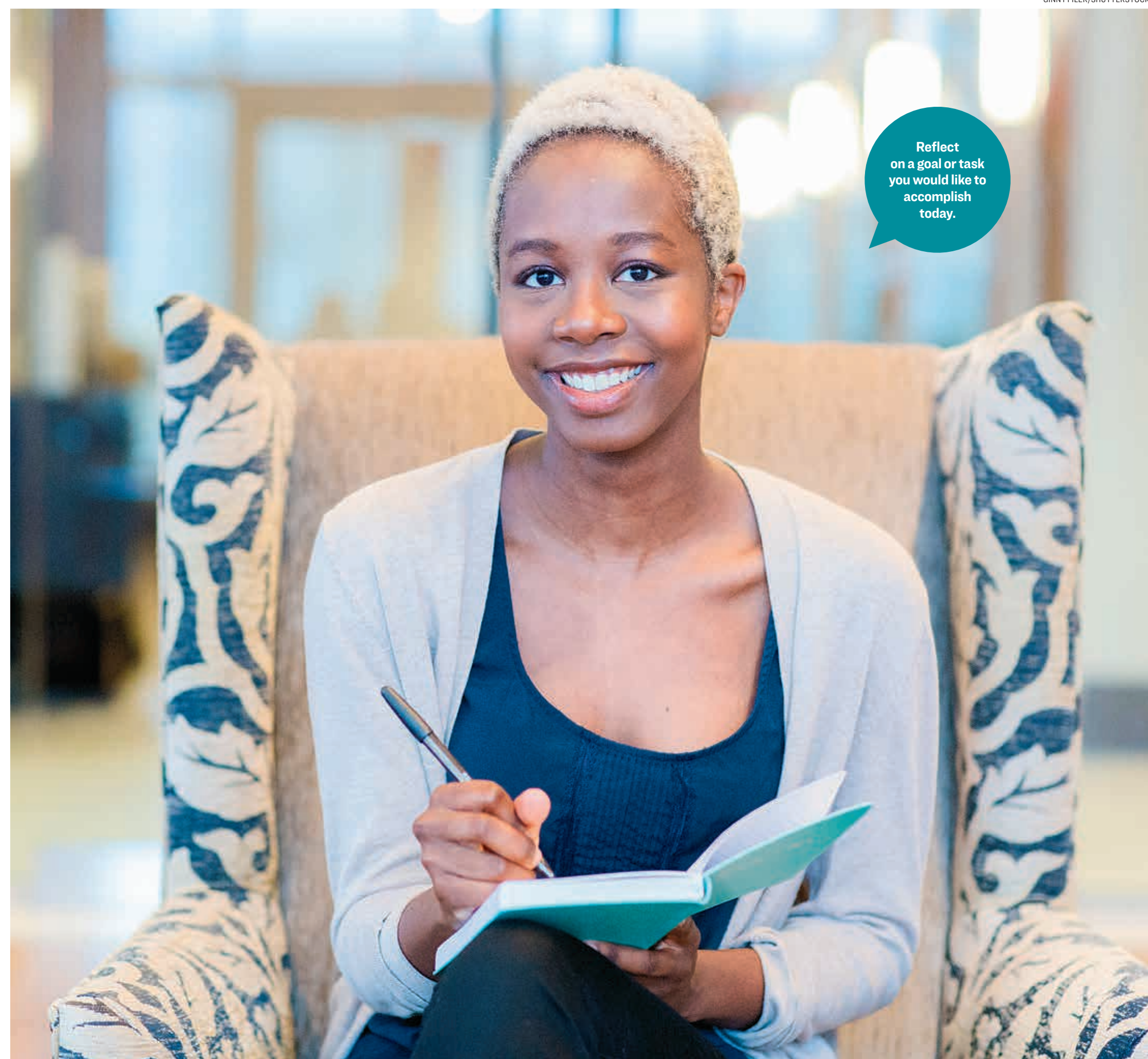
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Reflect on a goal or task you would like to accomplish today.

## Do This in the Morning for a Better Workday

According to a new study, mentally preparing for your workday is key

JESSICA LINDSEY

Work-life and home life have become blurred. Even after the workday ends, many of us feel a compulsion to continue checking emails and ruminating about work-related problems, worrying about how we will get everything done.

In response, we're advised to detach from work—to turn off our work brain at 5 o'clock, and take time to be present with our friends and family or engage in hobbies. But as beneficial as

this can be, completely detaching can make it more challenging to motivate ourselves and focus when we return to work. After a relaxing evening or jam-packed, adventurous weekend, how do we get back into work mode the next morning?

A new study suggests that people who have mentally prepared for and thought about the upcoming workday—or "re-attached" to work—have better work experience because they start the day off more in touch with their work goals.

Researchers recruited 151 people from a diverse range of careers and emailed surveys to them each morning for one

**Reattaching to work led to a cascade of positive experiences during the day.**

workweek. People were considered to be more reattached to work when they agreed with statements like, "This morning, I gave some thought to the upcoming workday," or "This morning, I thought about what I wanted to achieve at work today." People also indicated how much energy they felt to pursue work goals, how excited or inspired they felt, and how much they anticipated being able to focus at work.

In the afternoon, researchers sent out a second wave of surveys to capture how much support participants felt they received from their colleagues, how self-determined they felt around making decisions that workday, and how engaged they felt at work.

Analyses of these surveys found that reattaching to work led to a cascade of positive experiences during the day. The process may play out like this: Taking time to reattach to work helps our work goals to become more salient, which energizes us to focus. When we consider how to achieve our goals, we become more aware of our autonomy to accomplish them, as well as the resources and people we have supporting us. All of these factors contribute to feeling more inspired and engaged at work—which, other research suggests, is important for productivity.

While many factors outside of our control—like our work environment—play a role in how engaged we feel at work, reattaching to work is something that we can practice any given morning to make our workday better.



Continued on Page 10

## ECONOMIC WARFARE CORPORATE CYBER ATTACKS INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY THEFT

“

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## Do This in the Morning for a *Better Workday*

According to a new study, mentally preparing for your workday is key



Reattaching to work can mean briefly reflecting just after leaving the house, while we're on our commute, or when we sit at our desk before we begin working.

Continued from Page 9

### How to Reattach to Work

Reattaching to work can mean briefly reflecting just after leaving the house, while we're on our commute, or when we sit at our desk before we begin working. What does it entail? This study doesn't answer that question definitively, although the researchers suggest that it could include planning your activities and envisioning the flow of your tasks for the workday.

**Taking some time before work to sit and reflect on your goals, plan your activities, and envision the flow of your day's tasks can help you reattach to work and keep you engaged for the rest of the day.**

Based on the way reattachment worked in the study, though, we can imagine a few questions that might be helpful. Consider reflecting on or writing down answers to these questions when you are ready to reattach to work.

**1. Why does the work I do matter to me? How does my work impact the lives of others?** Reflecting on your answers to these questions allows you to become more in touch with your work goals and the motivating sense of purpose that you derive from work. For some people, the answers may come naturally, while others may be left blank. It's okay if you don't have an answer right off the bat. Even when we don't think our work is inherently meaningful, research suggests we can give it meaning by finding an answer to these questions. For example, a bus driver might find purpose in providing mobility to people in their community.

**2. Who are the people both at work and in my personal life who support me and my professional success?** At times, many of us feel isolated and even overwhelmed by our work tasks and responsibilities. In those moments especially, bringing to mind the people who support us can help relieve stress and make us feel more capable and confident about what we are trying to accomplish. Consider a friendly colleague who is always willing to help or eager to bounce ideas around. Alternatively, think about someone outside of work, like a close friend who is there when things are stressful and happy for you when things are going well.

**3. What would I like to focus on today?** Reflect on a goal or task you would like to accomplish today. For example, a teacher may have a certain number of papers they are aiming to grade, or a software engineer may intend on fixing a bug in their code. When you first think of this task, you may feel stress or apathy. Reattaching to work involves acknowledging and even embracing these feelings—and then trying to visualize yourself doing this task in a calm, focused, and productive way. Anticipating being focused and engaged in your work can help you to realize that vision.

Taking time to reflect on what we do, why we do it, and how we might approach our work today can help bring our full focus to our aspirations at work, as opposed to leaving our thoughts on the weekend or just going through the motions. Whatever you do for work, consider answering these questions—or simply taking a moment of reflection and intention—at the start of your workday. Hopefully, you'll find that doing so helps to ease the transition back into your workflow, and contributes to what you accomplish at work.

**Taking time to reattach to work helps our work goals to become more salient, which energizes us to focus.**

Jessica Lindsey is a fourth-year undergraduate student at the University of California-Berkeley studying cognitive science with a concentration in psychology. She is a researcher and course assistant for the three-course professional certificate series *The Science of Happiness at Work*. This article was first published on Greater Good Magazine.



At times, many of us feel isolated and even overwhelmed by our work tasks and responsibilities.

JAY HARRINGTON

**W**hat do you want to achieve in life? How do you spend your finite time? What is an hour of your time worth? Are your days spent focused on your priorities or someone else's?

These are some of the most important questions to consider if you want to lead a purposeful, rewarding life, but few of us take the time to give them critical thought. Many of us find there's simply not enough time in the day to reach towards our goals. If you believe you're too busy each day to accomplish something big—be it starting a business, writing a book, or learning a new skill—then you're correct. There's not enough time in one day to accomplish something big. Big goals take more time.

The problem is that too often people get overwhelmed by the enormity of a task and never begin. They overestimate the importance of one defining moment and underestimate the impact of making small improvements on a daily basis. Big success doesn't require a massive effort within a short period of time. It requires a clear objective and daily, incremental action.

**There's not enough time in one day to accomplish something big.**

**Important but Not Necessarily Urgent**

There is always something urgent to distract from things that are important but not necessarily urgent. This is especially true when it comes to the modern pace of life. Meetings. Phone calls. Meal prep. Family activities. Work obligations. Working out. The list goes on. An unceasing flood of demands keeps everyone hopping.

The rational thing to do is put a long-term plan in place that moves you slowly and steadily toward a goal, like finishing a first draft of a book. But of course, no one is purely rational—certainly not me. We're all affected by cognitive biases that lead to suboptimal decision-making.

While we all prefer big rewards over smaller ones, most of us have an even stronger preference for present rewards over future ones—even when the future ones are much bigger.

This concept, or cognitive bias, is called “hyperbolic discounting.” In short, the further away a reward is in the future, the smaller the immediate motivation to achieve it.

For example, instead of leveraging the immense power of compound interest, many people prioritize short-term spending over long-term investing. Across all aspects of life and work, it's difficult to make the time to invest in the important but not urgent work that's necessary to realize long-term rewards.

To escape the status quo, and move forward on your priorities, it's necessary to set a clear goal and reduce the goal to everyday action.

**Goals and Everyday Actions**

Goal-setting is a critical first step to achievement, but it's not enough. A goal without action is merely a dream. Goals determine your direction, but action determines your progress.

To make goal-setting more effective, here are some principles to keep in mind:

Make it specific. To be useful, a goal must be specific. “I want to write a book” is too loose. “I will write 500 words per day until my first draft is done” is better.

Don't have too many. If you have one clear goal, your direction is clear. Your actions can all be directed toward achieving a single outcome.

# Got a Big Goal?

## Sell Yourself an Hour Every Day

To accomplish something big, break it down and schedule an appointment with yourself daily

**There is always something urgent to distract from things that are important but not necessarily urgent.**

Have too many goals and you may find yourself going in circles (or never get started in the first place).

Understand its component parts. A big goal in the future is really a series of smaller, interim goals.

**Deconstructive Goal-Setting**

By keeping these principles in mind, you will achieve far more, over the long-term, than you thought possible through a process called deconstructive goal-setting.

Deconstructive goal-setting, like all goal-setting exercises, involves envisioning a big, ambitious objective. But it doesn't stop there. It forces you to work backward from your goal to determine and define all the steps necessary to get there.

**Most of us have an even stronger preference for present rewards over future ones—even when the future ones are much bigger.**

Let's say you're 40 years old and by the time you're 45 you want to have a thriving online business in the health and wellness space. You have five years to achieve your goal.

Through a process of deconstructive goal-setting, you'd first take the time to understand what it takes to start and operate a business. That includes things like 1) determining a target market, 2) building a network within that market, 3) establishing yourself as an expert and thought leader within that space, and 4) consistently getting yourself and your ideas in front of influencers and potential customers.

With that understanding in mind, it's all about deconstructing these objectives into specific action steps within the constraints of the allotted time.

You have five years to work with. To be on track for your five-year goal, you need to make a certain amount of progress this year.

This means you need to be taking action this month, this week and, yes, this very day.

**Put the Work in Now**

See how this works? You're capable of achieving big results way out in the future. But actually doing so is contingent on taking action every day. Don't merely plan and hold loosely formed beliefs about what the future holds in your head. Put the work in now to make it happen. Here's how:

**Define your goal.** Think clearly about what you want. Write it down. This will allow you to understand what it takes. Don't fixate on the result (e.g., running a profitable business or writing a best-selling book). Focus on the underlying skills, qualities, and attributes that will allow you to achieve the result. There are lots of sacrifices and trade-offs you'll have to make to achieve what you want, so it's important to understand them from the start.

**Deconstruct your goal into everyday action.**

Work backward to understand the component parts of your big goal and set a series of smaller goals that will keep you working on a linear path within the time you have available. You should deconstruct your big goal to the point where you have a clear understanding of the appropriate action you should be taking today to be on the right path.

**Block time.** You're going to have all kinds of externalities, from urgent work demands to personal issues, attempting to derail you from making progress on your goals. Your calendar, which is likely filled with other people's priorities, will be one of your biggest impediments. But it can be your best friend.

If you have the courage and discipline to schedule an appointment with yourself every day, you'll create the space and time to stay on track.

**Invest in Yourself or No One Else Will**

Charlie Munger is a self-made billionaire and Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway business partner. He's also a lawyer. Early in his legal career, as he was busy doing client work and billing hours, he came to the important realization that he was his own most important client. For Munger, this meant he needed to recalibrate

his thinking and start finding time to focus on himself and not just his paying clients.

Munger concluded that to get ahead and stay ahead, he needed to “sell” himself one hour of his time each day.

In her 2008 biography of Buffett, “The Snowball: Warren Buffett and the Business of Life,” Alice Schroeder recounts Buffett's early impressions of Munger.

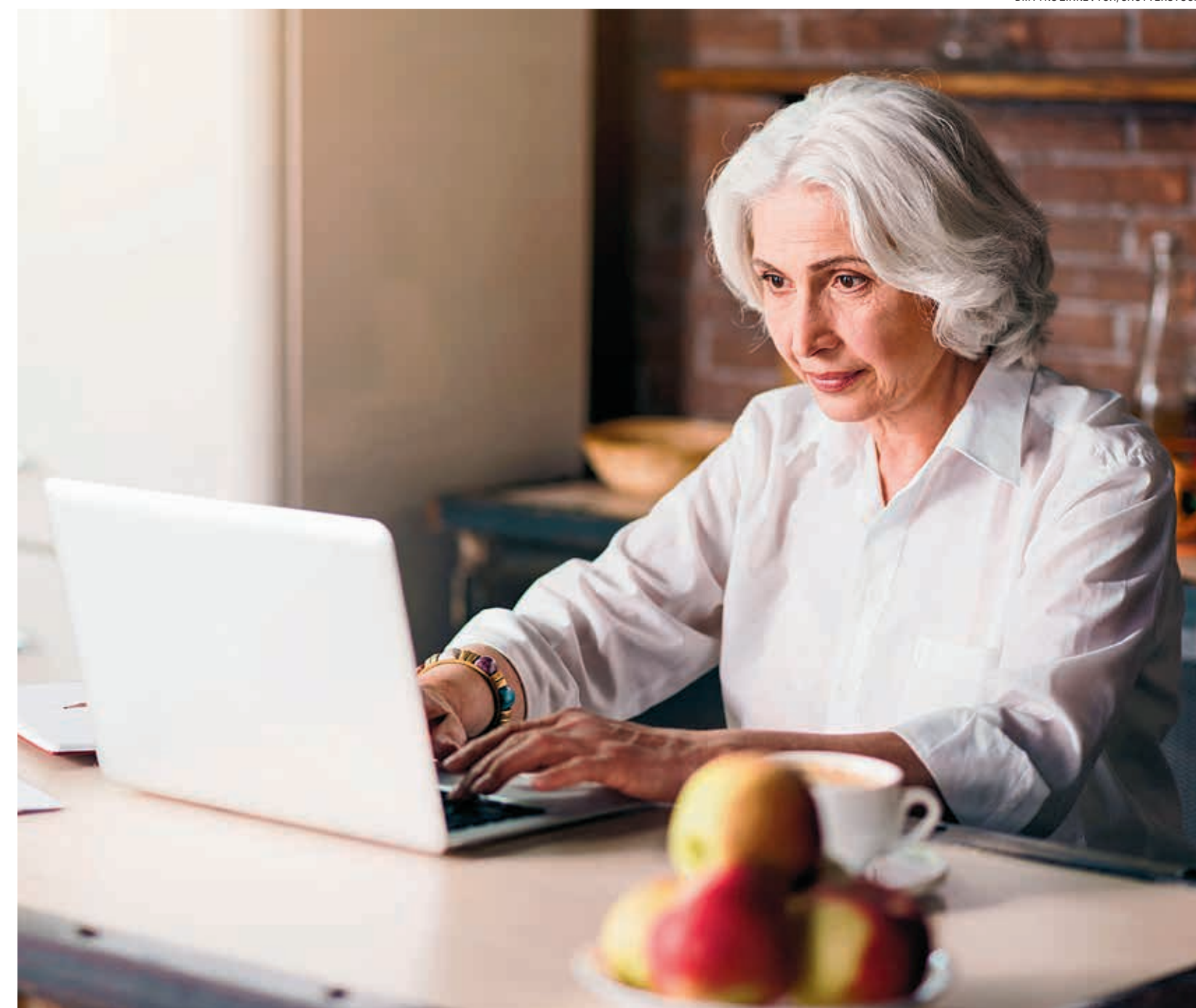
Charlie, as a very young lawyer, was probably getting \$20 an hour. He thought to himself, “Who's my most valuable client?” And he decided it was himself. So he decided to sell himself an hour each day. He did it early in the morning, working on these construction projects and real estate deals. Everybody should do this, be the client, and then work for other people, too, and sell yourself an hour a day.

**The rational thing to do is put a long term plan in place that moves you slowly and steadily toward a goal.**

Selflessness—to a point—is a worthy quality. But if you're not careful, devotion to helping other people achieve their dreams will prevent you from realizing your own. Again, what is your time worth? What do you want out of life? Progress doesn't happen by accident. It only results from prioritization and carving out time to take positive forward action toward clearly defined objectives.

Set a big ambitious goal, then “sell” yourself an hour each day to work toward achieving it. You'll find that you're capable of more than you ever thought possible.

Jay Harrington is an author, lawyer-turned-entrepreneur, and runs a northern Michigan-inspired lifestyle brand called *Life and Whim*. He lives with his wife and three young girls in a small town and writes about living a purposeful, outdoor-oriented life.



# How to Help Keep Children With Autism Safe

Behavioral skills training can give caregivers a format to teach children critical skills

KENDRA THOMSON

Preventable injuries are the leading cause of death for Americans and Canadians under the age of 45. Unfortunately, individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are two to three times more likely to experience a preventable injury than those without.

Children with ASD are particularly prone to poisoning, suffocation and wandering that can lead to death by drowning or vehicular accident.

They often need systematic training to learn safety skills. And they need explicit instruction to increase the likelihood of using these skills effectively in different settings and with different people.

Teaching safety skills to children with ASD at a young age is of utmost importance. However, preliminary research suggests that caregivers of children with ASD may not be comfortable teaching these safety skills themselves due to a lack of knowledge or experience.

As an associate professor at Brock University and Board Certified Behaviour Analyst-Doctoral (BCBA-D), I have been working with a community clinician and graduate students to prepare caregivers to teach safety skills to their children.

## A Model for Teaching Children With Autism

Behavioral skills training (BST) is a strategy commonly used to teach a variety of skills to people with disabilities. This can include safety skills such as learning how to solicit help, what to do upon finding a firearm, or reducing the risks of abduction.

Research suggests that the BST model ensures that the person being trained not only understands the new skill but is able to perform it accurately.

The model involves (1) instructions, (2) modeling, (3) rehearsal and (4) feedback. First, the trainer provides verbal and/or written instruction on how to complete the

Teaching safety skills to children with ASD at a young age is of utmost importance.

It is important that instructions are clear and concise.



skill, and a brief rationale. Next, the trainer models the skill by provides an accurate demonstration.

The trainer then provides the learner with the opportunity to practice the skill and offers feedback in the form of descriptive praise if the learner completes the skill accurately. If the learner does not complete the skill accurately, the trainer offers corrective feedback.

These rehearsal and feedback steps are repeated until the learner is able to accurately execute the skill.

## Instructions Must Be Clear and Concise

The first step to teaching safety skills is to select the behavior you would like to teach (for example, what to do when lost). The next step involves outlining the instructions to use when implementing BST.

It is important that instructions are clear and concise. We recommend breaking the skill down into three or fewer steps. For example, when we teach children what to do if they become lost or separated from their caregiver, we teach them to: (1) call out for caregiver, (2) find a worker, (3) tell the worker they are lost.

Once you have determined the instructions, ensure that you have all of the materials required, like props for example. Also, ensure the environment adequately facilitates learning for your child by eliminating any distractions.

## Follow These 5 Steps

The following training steps can be applied to teaching a variety of safety skills.

1. Provide instructions relevant to the skill to your child. For example: "Sometimes when we are at the grocery store, we can get separated, which can be scary. If this happens, I want you to do three things. First, call out for me in a loud voice. Next, if I do not respond, find a worker. Then, tell the worker, 'I'm lost.'"
2. Model the skill for your child by first getting their attention and then demonstrating all three steps in a mock scenario: "Let's pretend we are in the store and I get separated from you."
3. Ask your child to practice the three steps.
4. Provide feedback based on their performance. For example, if your child calls out for you but in a quiet voice, you can say: "I like how you called out for me, but remember to use a loud voice."
5. Continue rehearsal and feedback until you are confident that your child can perform the skill.

## Practice in a Natural Environment

It is also important to eventually practice the skill in the environment where the skill will be needed, such as a public setting.

For example, can the child perform the skill if separated in a grocery store? As a safety precaution, have someone go "undercover" to watch the child and to see if they engage in the appropriate steps.

If the child does not engage in the appropriate steps, provide feedback and repeat until everyone is confident.

If caregivers practice teaching basic safety skills using the steps of BST at home with their child, it may help to keep them safe if dangerous situations arise.

*Kendra Thomson is an associate professor in the department of applied disability studies at Brock University in Canada. This article was first published on The Conversation.*

autism and the gut microbiome in autistic children is different. I wanted to know what the underlying cause was," Naser told Science Daily

PPA exists naturally in our gut. But the study shows that eating foods containing the preservative can increase PPA in pregnant woman's gut, which can then cross into the fetus.

Laboratory tests show that exposing neural stem cells to excessive PPA damages brain cells. The acid reduces the number of neurons and increases the

number of glial cells. Excess glial cells disturb connectivity between neurons and cause inflammation.

Excessive amounts of PPA also damage neural pathways that communicate with the body. Reduced neurons and damaged pathways disrupt the brain's ability to communicate. This can cause repetitive behavior and difficulty socializing.

*Michael Edwards is the editor-in-chief of Organic Lifestyle Magazine, where this article was first published.*

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## OVERTREATMENT

# North Americans Far More Likely Than Swedes to Fill Prescriptions for Opioids After Surgery

JULIE APPLEBY

Americans and Canadians are seven times more likely to fill a prescription for opioid pain pills in the week after surgery than Swedes, says a study published Wednesday, one of the first to quantify international differences.

More than 75 percent of patients in the U.S. and Canada filled a prescription for opioids following four common surgeries, compared with 11 percent of Swedes, researchers report in JAMA Network Open. Americans also received the highest doses of opioids.

So, are Americans and Canadians wimpier than Swedes when it comes to pain, or is something else going on?

"There are a lot of tough people in lots of places," demurred Mark Neuman, an associate professor of anesthesiology at the University of Pennsylvania Perelman School of Medicine and a co-author of the study.

He pointed to a host of other potential factors, from cultural differences to variations in marketing, regulation and long-standing, ingrained prescribing habits.

"It's possible that in the U.S., people think about opioids as pain relief in a drastically different way than in other places," he said. Researchers examined four types of surgeries—minimally invasive types of appendectomy and gallbladder removal, as well as arthroscopic surgery to repair a torn meniscus in the knee and breast tumor removal. All the surgeries occurred from 2013 to March 2016, a time of growing concern about opioid dependence in the United States but before more recent guidelines suggesting that fewer pills are needed following many common surgeries.

Even so, "for the same exact surgery, the same exact tissue trauma, we have seven times more people in the U.S. getting opioids," said Neuman. On average, patients in the U.S. filled prescriptions for about 33 pills, each equivalent to 5 milligrams of oxycodone, he said, although the type of drug varied. Swedes who filled prescriptions had an average of 26 pills, while Canadians had 22.

Canadians and Swedes were also far more likely to get codeine or tramadol—painkillers that rely on a different mechanism in the body and are considered weaker types of opioids. Americans were far more likely to get hydrocodone or oxycodone, some of which were heavily marketed to physicians by drugmakers. States and cities are currently suing manufacturers, alleging they misrepresented the drugs' risks and didn't properly monitor suspiciously large sales, contributing to the opioid crisis.

The study does not comment on the marketing aspect but did note two factors that might account for some of the difference in the types of drugs prescribed. One is

that, during the research period, low-dose codeine was available over the counter in Canada. Tramadol is still not classified as a controlled substance there, although it has been a controlled substance in Sweden since 2007 and in the U.S. since 2014.

"While prescribers may view these so-called weak opioids as safer alternatives, data suggests that both codeine and tramadol have the potential for misuse and life-threatening adverse effects," the study says.

The U.S. and Canada were chosen because they have the highest per capita consumption rate of opioids in the world. Sweden was picked as a European counterpart because researchers could obtain detailed prescription information from databases there.

While the study was large—following about 129,000 patients in the U.S. with job-based insurance, 84,600 in Canada's Ontario province and 9,800 in Sweden—it did have limitations. For one, researchers could not track how many pills patients actually took of those prescribed, or the number of patients who didn't fill prescriptions they were given. Secondly, they don't have data on how well patients felt their pain was controlled following surgery.

"It's possible that in Sweden everyone's pain treatment is less than in the U.S., although I think that is unlikely," said Neuman, noting that other studies have shown that patients in the U.S. often do not take all the pills they've been prescribed following surgeries.

In addition, for certain types of surgeries, patients do not report greater dissatisfaction when prescribed fewer pills after surgery. Researchers in Michigan, for example, recently reported on what happened after dozens of hospitals recommended new prescribing guidelines—drawn up after studying how many pills patients actually took—following certain surgeries. While recommendations were often for far fewer than 30 tablets, researchers found no increase in reported pain.

Like the group in Michigan, some academic medical centers and other experts have recently issued guidelines calling for fewer pills following many procedures. Those grew out of concern that patients with what is called acute pain—the kind following surgical procedures, for example—were given far too many pills.

An analysis of Medicare data by Kaiser Health News with researchers at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, for example, found prescribing from 2011 to 2016 exceeded levels now recommended by organizations like Johns Hopkins. For example, Medicare patients took home 48 pills in the week following coronary artery bypass, 31 following laparoscopic gallbladder removal, 28 after a lumpectomy and 34 after minimally invasive hysterectomies.

According to postsurgical guide-



More than 75 percent of patients in the U.S. and Canada filled a prescription for opioids following four common surgeries, compared with 11 percent of Swedes.

lines spearheaded by Johns Hopkins last year, those surgeries should require at most 30 pills for a bypass, and 10 pills for minimally invasive gallbladder removal, lumpectomy, and minimally invasive hysterectomy. Postsurgical opioid use can lead to long-term dependency in a small but significant percentage of patients, studies have shown, but unused pills can also be a danger. Those tablets can make their way to the street or fall into the hands of other family members.

Researcher Dr. Chad Brummett, who worked on the guidelines in Michigan, said he thinks prescribing amounts in the U.S. and Canada have likely dipped in recent years, given the increased attention.

Still, he cautioned that the amounts likely remain too high in both countries and that the new study illustrates the wide disparity between North America and at least one European country.

"We know that marketing in the U.S. has affected prescribing in all domains, including surgery," said Brummett. "This study and others show that [surgeons] in the U.S. and Canada can drastically reduce prescribing standards without adversely affecting patient care."

*Julie Appleby is a senior correspondent and reports on the health law's implementation, health care treatments and costs, trends in health insurance, and policy affecting hospitals and other medical providers. This article was originally published on Kaiser Health News.*

Americans were far more likely to get hydrocodone or oxycodone, some of which were heavily marketed to physicians by drugmakers.

## EVERYDAY CHEMICALS

# EPA Blocks Glyphosate Warning on Labels

Regulator sides with Monsanto despite judgments against company over glyphosate cancer risk

MICHAEL EDWARDS

Products containing glyphosate, like Monsanto's RoundUp, were supposed to have warning labels on the packaging that stated potential cancer risks.

Glyphosate was added to California's Proposition 65 list of carcinogens in July 2017.

The glyphosate cancer warnings were scheduled to be on the packaging of glyphosate products in summer of 2018 but in 2018 Monsanto challenged the law and a federal judge temporarily banned California's plans to add cancer warning labels on glyphosate-based products.

Now the EPA has stated they will "no longer approve product labels claiming

"The State of California's much criticized Proposition 65 has led to misleading labeling requirements for products, like glyphosate, because it misinforms the public about the risks they are facing," reads an EPA statement.

glyphosate is known to cause cancer." The EPA will not allow labels that indicate a link between glyphosate and cancer. Registrants selling products that contain glyphosate have 90 days from August 7th to show compliance removing the warning.

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Meanwhile Costco, known for its responsible business practices, has banned glyphosate and Bayer, which purchased Monsanto in 2018, is facing around 10,000 lawsuits and losing millions of dollars in those lawsuits. In a judgment handed down in May, a jury in Alameda County, California, awarded a couple a combined \$2.055 billion in damages against Monsanto.

The company says it will appeal the decision.

*Michael Edwards is the editor-in-chief of Organic Lifestyle Magazine, where this article was first published.*



# Autism Linked to Preservative in Processed Foods: Study

MICHAEL EDWARDS

Researchers from the University of Central Florida have discovered cellular changes to neuronal stem cells exposed to propionic acid (PPA), a naturally occurring carboxylic acid that is also used as a preservative used to extend shelf life and reduce mold in processed foods, bread, and cheeses.

The study shows how preservatives in food can reduce the development of neurons in fetal brains. Highlighting the importance of diet for pregnant women.

Dr. Saleh A. Naser is Associate Director of the Biomedical Sciences department in College of Medicine's Burnett School. He specializes in gastroenterology research. Dr. Naser saw reports that autistic children suffer from irritable bowel syndrome and other gastric issues. Curious about the gut-brain axis and how it may affect children with autism, Dr. Naser examined the gut bacteria of those diagnosed with autism.

"Studies have shown a higher level of PPA in stool samples from children with

autism and the gut microbiome in autistic children is different. I wanted to know what the underlying cause was," Naser told Science Daily

PPA exists naturally in our gut. But the study shows that eating foods containing the preservative can increase PPA in pregnant woman's gut, which can then cross into the fetus.

Laboratory tests show that exposing neural stem cells to excessive PPA damages brain cells. The acid reduces the number of neurons and increases the

number of glial cells. Excess glial cells disturb connectivity between neurons and cause inflammation.

Excessive amounts of PPA also damage neural pathways that communicate with the body. Reduced neurons and damaged pathways disrupt the brain's ability to communicate. This can cause repetitive behavior and difficulty socializing.

*Michael Edwards is the editor-in-chief of Organic Lifestyle Magazine, where this article was first published.*

## DIETARY ESSENTIALS

## Are You Getting Enough of 5 Essential Trace Minerals?

LISA RICHARDS

Most of the discussion about minerals these days tend to revolve around magnesium. But while magnesium is indeed a very necessary part of your dietary intake, there are trace minerals that you also should be getting every day.

You've probably heard of the macro minerals: sodium, potassium, phosphorus, magnesium, sulfur, and calcium. But trace minerals are also vital. Even though you need far less of them each day, it's important that you eat a wholesome diet and obtain enough of them.

Trace minerals are essential for helping your body carry out its daily functions in the most efficient way possible. Minerals are considered trace minerals if deficiency can lead to disorders or even prove fatal. Such minerals are required for healthy blood pressure regulation, weight management, mood regulation, digestion, and more.

Six of the most important trace minerals that you should be including in your diet every day are iron, chromium, molybdenum, manganese, zinc, and iodine.

### Iron

Although it's one of the most important trace elements, iron is often lacking in the Western diet. Iron is vital for the healthy formation of red blood cells and lean muscle.

Iron is a major component of hemoglobin, the substance in red blood cells that carries oxygen through your body. In fact, hemoglobin represents about two-thirds of the body's iron.

If you're low in iron, your body can't make enough of these oxygen-carrying red blood cells. This can lead to a condition called iron-deficiency anemia, in which your body quickly becomes fatigued.

This fatigue can affect everything from brain function to your immune system.

Pregnant women with low iron levels may be at a higher risk of having a premature baby or a baby of low weight. Iron deficiencies are most common in children, women of childbearing age, and pregnant women. However, low iron levels can also occur in people with medical conditions such as gastroenteritis and dysbiosis, or those who don't eat animal products.

Good sources of iron include red meat, poultry, seafood, and dark leafy vegetables. In some cases, however, supplementation may be necessary.

### Chromium

Chromium is needed for both glucose metabolism and the proper function of insulin in the body. Low levels of chromium can lead to symptoms that are similar to diabetes, such as low blood sugar or impaired glucose tolerance.

Chromium is essential for the healthy metabolism of fats and carbohydrates. It also supports brain function and other body processes by stimulating fatty acid and cholesterol synthesis.

Supplementing with chromium picolinate

may be helpful in treating chromium deficiency or controlling blood sugar. Some studies suggest that additional chromium can improve depression in people with polycystic ovary syndrome and may even lower cholesterol, or assist with weight loss. There are some reports that chromium picolinate may treat acne by helping to regulate blood sugar levels.

Fortunately, it's fairly easy to maintain good levels of chromium by eating a healthy diet with plenty of fruit, vegetables, meat, fish, and grains.

### Molybdenum

Although your body doesn't absorb molybdenum well from certain foods, we only need a small amount—and there are plenty of foods that contain it.

Molybdenum acts as a cofactor for four important enzymes required by the body. These enzymes (sulfite oxidase, aldehyde oxidase, xanthine oxidase, and mitochondrial amidoxime reducing component) are involved in processing sulfites and breaking down other toxins in the body.

Low levels of molybdenum can mean that oxidase is less able to convert sulfite to sulfate, resulting in a build-up of sulfite. This, in turn, can lead to sulfite sensitivity.

Molybdenum has been shown to prevent liver damage from acetaminophen and helps the liver to break down toxic aldehydes like acetaldehyde. Studies have also shown that it reduces heart damage from an antibiotic named doxorubicin.

Molybdenum plays an important role in supporting circulation. It helps to maintain normal nitric oxide levels. It's also a vital component of nitrate reductase, the enzyme required for breaking down nitrate. This is crucial for healthy nitric oxide production in the body. When broken down, nitrate creates nitrogen dioxide, a direct precursor to nitric oxide.

Zinc is one of the most necessary minerals for healthy growth and development, proper functioning of the immune system, reproduction and a number of neurological functions. It also plays a role in protein synthesis, DNA synthesis, cell division, and healthy wound healing.

Your immune system is particularly dependent on zinc. Zinc helps your body to develop and activate T-lymphocytes,

some of your most important immune cells. Those with low zinc levels are often found to have poor immune responses to pathogens, which can mean they are more prone to infections.

Zinc is also required for maintaining the health of skin and mucosal membranes and can help to prevent the development of leg ulcers.

Deficiency in zinc can lead to impaired development, anemia, skin rashes, neurologic abnormalities, and poor immune function. Zinc deficiency can occur in the case of digestive disorders such as ulcerative colitis or Crohn's disease which result in reduced zinc absorption.

Foods rich in zinc include oysters, beef, crab meat, poultry (such as dark-meat chicken turkey), pork, yogurt, milk, and cheese. It is also found in smaller amounts in nuts such as cashews, chickpeas, almonds, peanuts.

### Iodine

Iodine is best known for its role in supporting the thyroid hormone. Low levels of iodine have been linked to a sluggish metabolism, weight gain, abnormal lipid profile, and poor cognitive function. This is because these hormones control your body's metabolism, as well as many other important functions.

Those who regularly miss out on their iodine requirements are often unable to make enough thyroid hormone. This can lead to numerous health problems. Infants whose mothers have severe iodine deficiency are at risk of stunted growth, mental retardation, and delayed sexual development.

Long term iodine deficiency can have detrimental effects on the developing brain, leading to impaired mental development. Iodine is also essential for healthy bone development during pregnancy and infancy.

Although iodine is found naturally in many foods, most people get it from iodized salt. Foods containing iodine include seafood such as fish (especially cod and tuna), kelp, and shrimp. Dairy products such as milk, yogurt, and cheese, as well as grain-based foods, such as bread and cereals, are also good sources.

*Lisa Richards is a nutritionist and the creator of the Candida Diet. She has been featured on Today, Women's Health magazine, Reader's Digest, and Shape, among others. Through her website, theCandidaDiet.com, she explains the benefits of a low-sugar, anti-inflammatory diet.*

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Good sources of iron include red meat, poultry, seafood, and dark leafy vegetables.



It's fairly easy to maintain good levels of chromium by eating a healthy diet with plenty of fruit, vegetables, meat, fish, and grains.

**Trace minerals are essential for helping your body carry out its daily functions in the most efficient way possible.**

## You May Need a Vacation a Little Bit More Than You Think

DEVON ANDRE

You might need that vacation a little more than you think you do. Sure, you may have heard that it's worthwhile to step away from the job and clear your head. But new research suggests it can do your body a lot of good too.

About 74 percent of U.S. workers get paid vacation time, yet they only use about half of it. Some think they can't get away from work, or they wouldn't know what to do with their time, or that it's too expensive. But the reality is that in most cases your employer will do just fine without you and you don't have to spend any money to step away for a few days.

The benefits can go well beyond stress-relief. A new study published in Psychology & Health suggests that vacationing can reduce the risk of metabolic syndrome and associated health complications.

Researchers believe that vacation could be a risk-reducing lifestyle change, like diet or exercise, that can battle metabolic syndrome. Metabolic syndrome is often a precursor to type-2 diabetes and heart disease. The syndrome is marked by high blood pressure, large waist circumference, elevated triglycerides and LDL (bad) cholesterol, and high blood sugar.

Researchers found that over a year:

- Each vacation a person took was associ-

ated with a 24 percent reduced risk of metabolic syndrome.

- The probability of meeting criteria for metabolic syndrome was 47 percent for people who took no vacations, 16 percent for those who took an average of five, and one for those who took a maximum of 15 vacations.
- Each additional vacation was associated with an 8 percent decrease in the number of metabolic symptoms.
- The number of vacations taken, not days, was associated with reduced symptoms.
- Taking more "staycations" (vacations at home) also translated to reduced risk for metabolic syndrome symptoms.

The study does not prove vacationing can reduce the risk for metabolic syndrome, since correlation does not equal causation, but it does provide something to think about. Stress can play a significant role in many of the contributing factors to metabolic syndrome, and taking some time for yourself now may pay dividends later. If you've been on the fence about stepping away from the workplace for some R&R, here's a good reason to go ahead with it.

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



Digestion is a complex process that fuels the body and depends on several organs working in harmony. Traditional Chinese medicine places special importance on how these organs function.

## TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE

## Digestion According to Traditional Chinese Medicine

The relationship between food and well being according to the world's oldest form of medicine

DR. MELISSA CARR

What foods should I eat? For my patients, both with and without digestive health issues, this is a common question. My answer is not that simple. Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) principles have me change my recommendations from person to person, as well as from season to season. There is no perfect diet for everyone because we are not all the same and our different external environments also affect our bodies.

### If you have too much digestive fire, you may suffer from heartburn, an insatiable appetite, or constipation.

TCM is the second largest, and the oldest, continuously practiced professional medicine in the world, used by one-third of the global population. Before we can discuss TCM treatments for digestive health, we need to understand the basics of digestion from a TCM perspective.

#### Tongue/Mouth

Digestion starts in the mouth. When you go for a TCM consultation, don't be surprised when you are asked to stick out your tongue. The tongue is the only internal organ that we, as TCM doctors, can ask to see. Unfortunately, we can't ask you to pull out your liver or stomach.

Observation of tongue color (should be pink), the coating on the tongue (should be thin and white), and the shape and size of the tongue reveal clues as to what is occurring in the body. If, for example, you have a swollen tongue with a thick coating on it, then perhaps some of the symptoms you suffer from include bloating and borborygmus (a fancy name for rumbling tummy caused by intestinal gas). A TCM doctor would have you limit or avoid phlegm-producing foods like dairy, wheat, and bananas. If your tongue is red, dry, and thin, your symptoms may include heartburn, constipation, or hemorrhoids, and a TCM doctor would advise you to avoid spicy foods.

#### Stomach

Let's follow food digestion down from the mouth to the stomach. TCM envisions the stomach as a cooking pot. When food reaches the pot, it is partly broken down by the cooking process. This continues the digestive process that began in the mouth. Since a pot requires fire or heat to cook food, TCM recommends the avoidance of excess cold and raw foods such as rice, ice cream, and ice water. Instead, the emphasis is on easier digestion with foods like

lightly steamed vegetables, and during colder seasons, more soups and stews.

If you do not have enough digestive fire, your metabolism may be too slow. Symptoms may include bloating, undigested food in the stools, and pain that is reduced by warmth.

If you have too much digestive fire, you may suffer from heartburn, an insatiable appetite, or constipation.

Because foods can have an innate warmth or coolness, you may want to eat foods appropriate to your constitution, as well as to the weather. For example, spicy foods are heating, but too much or too hot may cause digestive irritation. More suitable warming foods include ginger, cinnamon, fennel, winter squash, sweet potato, kale, oats, spelt, and quinoa.

If you have a tendency toward heat signs and symptoms (not necessarily just feeling hot), you could consider cooling foods like peppermint, dandelion greens, cilantro, apples, watermelons, citrus fruits, tofu, millet, barley, amaranth, lettuce, cucumber, and yogurt.

#### Spleen/Pancreas

The next organ involved in TCM digestion is the spleen. The spleen and pancreas together are termed the spleen system. If you suffer from bloating, soft stool/diarrhea, undigested food in your stools, fatigue, and/or poor appetite, your TCM practitioner will likely say you have a spleen energy deficiency.

One of the spleen's jobs is to transform food and fluid into useful nutrients and to transport those nutrients to where they are needed in the body. Treatments include foods like squash, carrots, yams, well-cooked rice, ginger, and small amounts of honey or molasses in your diet, while limiting or excluding dairy, citrus, fried or heavy foods, and too much sugar.

#### Liver

The liver helps cleanse the blood and detoxify the body. It also secretes bile which is stored in the gallbladder. Bile is required for the proper digestion of fats.



The tongue is the only internal organ that we, as TCM doctors, can ask to see.

In TCM, poor quality fat, intoxicants, chemicals, and denatured foods are known to cause problems with the liver. In addition, the TCM liver soothes and smoothes the functions of the whole body, including the emotions.

A person whose liver system is not functioning properly will likely have emotional struggles such as irritability, frustration, aggression, impatience, stubbornness, and anger. Dandelion root or greens, milk thistle, artichoke, and chlorophyll-rich foods such as spirulina, wheatgrass, and chlorella may be helpful. Because stress can particularly aggravate problems with this system, it is also important to find ways to relax and manage stress.

#### Intestines

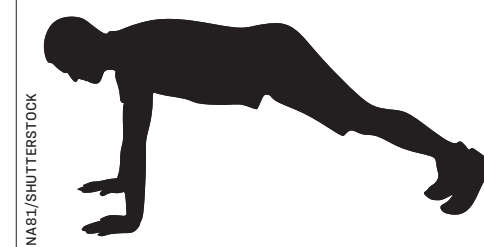
The small and large intestines absorb nutrients and eliminate digestive waste. In order for this to happen properly, the intestines must have healthy cells lining the walls, and the muscles must be able to contract rhythmically (peristalsis) to move matter along. Sufficient fiber and water are also needed to ensure proper elimination, but I'm sure you already know that.

### A person whose liver system is not functioning properly will likely have emotional struggles such as irritability, frustration, aggression, impatience, stubbornness, and anger.

If you do suffer from constipation, then avoid alcohol, yeasted bread, foods with baking powder or baking soda, and refined "white" foods such as white bread, white pasta, white sugar, and white rice. General foods to take for chronic diarrhea are rice or barley broth, leek, eggplant, sunflower seeds, yam, and adzuki beans.

While many of TCM's wordings for how the digestive system works are different from conventional allopathic medicine, the basic principles are similar. Eat healthy, whole foods, limit junk foods, chew your food well, eat regular meals, and enjoy!

*Dr. Melissa Carr is a registered doctor of TCM and began her career in health with a bachelor's degree in human kinetics. After spending two years in Japan, one of which was spent doing research at Ehime University School of Medicine, she completed a 4-year training for doctor of traditional Chinese medicine at the International College of Traditional Chinese Medicine in Vancouver. This article was originally published on NaturallySavvy.com*



## How Many Push-Ups Can You Do?

This simple exercise has enough variety to activate several different muscle groups

MOHAN GARIKIPARITHI

If you're interested in stronger muscles, better cardiovascular health, and improved body composition, you may not have to look much further than the floor.

How many push-ups you could do used to be more about bragging rights than health benefits, but push-ups have a lot to say a lot about your health. Including them into your daily routine, or at least performing them multiple times per week, may lead to worthwhile health improvements and a better quality of life.

Push-ups can be great for upper body strength. They do a terrific job activating chest, shoulder, and arm muscles while providing decent engagement through the core and legs. Research has shown doing regular push-ups can improve muscle mass and strength, as well as potentially reduce the risk for a cardiovascular-related event. Push-ups also help protect joints by strengthening the tissue surrounding the shoulder and elbow joints to minimize the potential of pain and increase capability and mobility.

There are a few different variations of push-ups to perform, and each has been studied and proven to offer unique benefits. They are:

- Standard Pushup (SP): Hands are shoulder-width apart and directly in line with shoulders. Upper body lines up with legs, the body remains rigid throughout the movement.
- Wide Pushup (WP): Distance between hands moves wider than shoulder-width (totaling about twice the total distance).
- Narrow Pushup (NP): Place hands below the center of the breastbone (sternum) with the thumb and forefinger touching, making a triangle. This variety provides the greatest activation of the triceps and chest muscles.
- Forward Pushup (FP): The hands are shoulder-width apart, but roughly 20 centimeters in front of the shoulders. These, along with BP (below), provide proper activation of the back and core.
- Backward Pushup (BP): Hands are shoulder-width apart, but roughly 20 centimeters behind shoulders. This type of push-up activates the most muscle groups of all forms.

To take advantage of the benefits of pushups, start incorporating them into your day. Progress gradually to avoid injury, and avoid doing too many, too soon. Move in a slow controlled fashion from start to finish. As you get stronger, you'll be able to do more. Once you can do 40, you may notice the cardiovascular benefits.

*Mohan Garikiparithi holds a degree in medicine from Osmania University (University of Health Sciences). He practiced clinical medicine for over a decade. During a three-year communications program in Germany, he developed an interest in German medicine (homeopathy) and other alternative systems of medicine. This article was originally published on Bel Marra Health.*

MOHANE/SHTUTERSTOCK



FOOD IS MEDICINE

# Proven Health Benefits of Pumpkin Seeds

Pumpkin seeds an often overlooked nutritional powerhouse

SAYER JI

Pumpkin seeds, like all edible seeds, pack an immense nutritional and medicinal punch. After all, they contain future worlds within their compact structure. As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “the creation of a thousand forests is within one acorn.”

In order to prepare their “babies” for survival outside the pumpkin, Nature equips these seeds with an extremely dense source of organically-bound nutrients, including exceptionally high levels of key, health-promoting minerals.

For example, a one-cup serving (64 grams) of pumpkin seeds has 44 percent daily value (DV) of zinc, 22 percent of copper, 42 percent magnesium, 16 percent manganese, 17 percent potassium, and enough iron (17 percent DV) to improve iron-deficiency associated anemia. And remember, food-derived minerals are far more bioavailable and biocompatible than inorganic forms.

But beyond the obvious nutritional virtues of the seed, recent scientific investigations have revealed that pumpkin seed meal, as well as its pressed oil, may have great therapeutic value in alleviating the following conditions:

**Prostate Growth:** pumpkin seed has been studied for its ability to inhibit testosterone-induced prostate growth, a common causative factor in benign prostatic hyperplasia. It was also proven safe and effective in a 2014 clinical trial comparing it to the drug Prozasin, which is often used to treat high blood pressure, posttraumatic stress disorder, and the symptoms of an enlarged prostate.

**Postmenopausal Symptoms:** Women supplemented with 2,000 mg of pumpkin seed oil over the course of 12 weeks were found to have reduced blood pressure, increased HDL cholesterol (aka the “good cholesterol”), as well as a reduction in the severity of symptoms associated with hormone insufficiency, e.g. hot flash, headaches, and joint pain. Additional experimental research indicates that adverse cardiovascular changes associated with estrogen deficiency, such as blood pressure and lipid abnormalities, can be mitigated with pumpkin seed oil.

**Calcium-Oxalate Kidney Stones:** According to a study performed in 1987 and published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, children with calcium-oxalate crystals (the

most common cause of kidney stones) in their urine responded favorably to the supplementation of their diet with pumpkin seeds.

**Cardiovascular and Liver Disease:** A mixture of flaxseed and pumpkin seed was found to have heart-protective and liver-protective properties in an animal study from 2008 published in the Journal of Food Chemistry & Toxicology.

**Drug and Chemical Toxicity:** The protein isolate of pumpkin seed has been shown to alleviate acetaminophen (Tylenol) toxicity on the liver, and protect against methotrexate-induced small intestine damage in an animal model. It has also been studied to protect against carbon tetrachloride-induced liver injury.

**Arthritis:** Pumpkin seed oil was found to compare favorably with the NSAID drug indomethacin in an experimental model of arthritis, but without causing liver damage, in a study published in 1995 in the Journal of Pharmacological Research.

**Hypertension:** Animals fed pumpkin seed oil were found to respond more favorably to conventional drug-treatment with ACE-inhibitors and Calcium Channel Blockers (with are both used to treat high blood pressure), likely because of its beneficial antioxidant properties.

**Parasites:** A preclinical canine study has shown that pumpkin seeds have significant activity against canine intestinal parasites.

**Insomnia/Anxiety:** Pumpkin seeds contain a high level of tryptophan (22mg/gram of pumpkin seed protein), the amino acid precursor to serotonin—which is itself converted to melatonin, the “sleep hormone,” in the evening. Research published in 2007 in the Canadian Journal of Physiology and Pharmacology found that when de-oiled pumpkin seed

**Food-derived minerals are far more bioavailable and biocompatible than inorganic forms.**



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was taken in combination with glucose, a clinical effect similar to that of pharmaceutical-grade tryptophan was achieved. A 2005 study published in the journal Nutritional Neuroscience found that pumpkin seed sourced tryptophan in combination with carbohydrate was as effective as pharmaceutical tryptophan in reducing awake time during the night.

**Androgenic Alopecia (i.e. male pattern baldness):** A 2014 randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled trial published in Evid Based Complement Alternat Med found that men receiving pumpkin seed oil saw 30-40 percent increased hair counts while the placebo group showed only 5-10 percent more hair count on average. GreenMedinfo covered this in more detail in an article called “Pumpkin Seed Oil Found to Help Reverse Balding.”

**Overactive Bladder/Urinary Disorders:** A 2014 clinical trial found that pumpkin seed oil, at 10 grams a day for 12 weeks, was safe and effective in reducing Overactive Bladder Symptom Score (OABSS) in patients with Overactive Bladder.

These, of course, are only some of the experimentally confirmed beneficial properties of pumpkin seed. Like all foods, there are likely countless properties that fulfill Hippocrates’ age-old and timelessly true proclamation that food can be our medicine. Stay abreast of new research on pumpkin seed oil and other pumpkin components on our database dedicated to the topic: Pumpkin Research.

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



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