

MIND & BODY

Pursuing a Richer, Fuller Level of Happiness

Life isn't always a good
time, but that can be
what makes it great **6**

Our deepest
happiness in
life stems from
fulfilling purpose.



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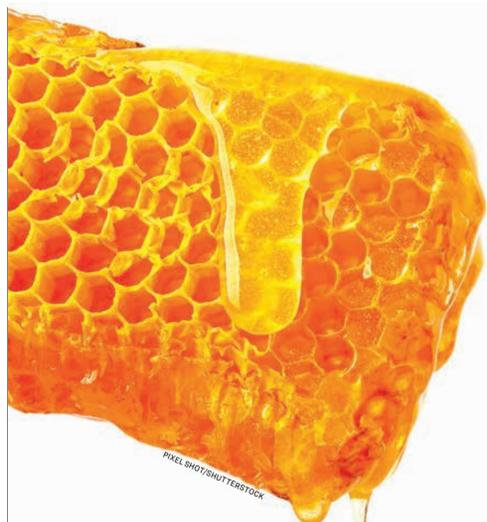
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FOOD IS MEDICINE

Amazing Facts About Honey's Healing Power

Research has revealed that this unique food does far more than sweeten

SAYER JI

Honey, unlike almost everything else we consume in our diet, was intended solely to be a form of nourishment—albeit, for the bees. Only milk, to my knowledge, shares this singular biological imperative.

But honey is far more than a source of sweetness and quick energy within the human diet.

Honey has profound medicinal applications, some of which are as follows.

Feeds Good Bacteria

It is a little-known fact that bees have a diverse population of beneficial lactic acid bacteria (LAB) in their honey crop, which is the bulge between the esophagus and the gizzard of the bee.

In fact, according to newly published research in PLOS, “studies of LAB in all extant honeybee species plus related apid bees reveal one of the largest collections of novel species from the genera *Lactobacillus* and *Bifidobacterium* ever discovered within a single insect and suggest a long (>80 mya) history of association.”

Indeed, raw honey feeds good bacteria. It's been experimentally demonstrated in *in vitro* (petri dish) conditions to increase the number of *Lactobacillus acidophilus* and *Lactobacillus plantarum* counts 10- to 100-fold compared with sucrose.

Fights 'Bad' Bacteria

Reports of honey eradicating MRSA infection have been reported in the medical literature for well over a decade.

MRSA, an acronym for methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*, produces a biofilm which makes it especially resistant to conventional antimicrobial agents.

Honey has been shown to be effective at killing biofilm-associated MRSA isolates from patients suffering from chronic rhinosinusitis. This has also been demonstrated in human research, with a 70 percent effective rate in destroying MRSA in chronic venous ulcers. Moreover, manuka also synergizes with conventional antibiotics, making MRSA bacterial isolates more susceptible to their antibacterial action.

Kills Dental Plaque-Causing Bacteria
Manuka honey, a special honey produced by the flowers of the manuka plant that grows in New Zealand and Australia, was shown at least as effective as the chemical chlorhexidine gluconate, often used in mouthwash, in reducing plaque

formation as a mouthwash.

Superior to Pharmaceutical at Killing Herpes

A 2004 study published in the Medical Science Monitor, showed that topical honey was far superior to the drug acyclovir (trade name Zovirax) in treating both labial (lip) and genital herpes lesion.

According to the amazing study, “For labial herpes, the mean duration of attacks and pain, occurrence of crusting, and mean healing time with honey treatment were 35 percent, 39 percent, 28 percent, and 43 percent better, respectively, than with acyclovir treatment. For genital herpes, the mean duration of attacks and pain, occurrence of crusting, and mean healing time with honey treatment were 53 percent, 50 percent, 49 percent, and 59 percent better, respectively, than with acyclovir. Two cases of labial herpes and one case of genital herpes remitted completely with the use of honey. The lesions crusted in three patients with labial herpes and in four patients with genital herpes. With acyclovir treatment, none of the attacks remitted, and all the lesions, labial and genital, developed a crust.

Noside effects were observed with repeated applications of honey, whereas 3 patients developed local itching with acyclovir.”

Protective Against Gastric Damage

Honey has been shown to prevent alcohol-, indomethacin- (an NSAID pain-killer) and aspirin-induced lesions.

This is just a sampling of the research indicating the profound medicinal value of honey. If you would like to view the full range of demonstrable health benefits

of honey, take a look at GreenMedInfo's page dedicated to the topic which now includes research 120-plus ailments and symptoms that may benefit from its use.

This article is pretty sweet, but our database on honey is even sweeter. Learn more today!

[Editors note: Please view online version for links to studies mentioned throughout the article.]

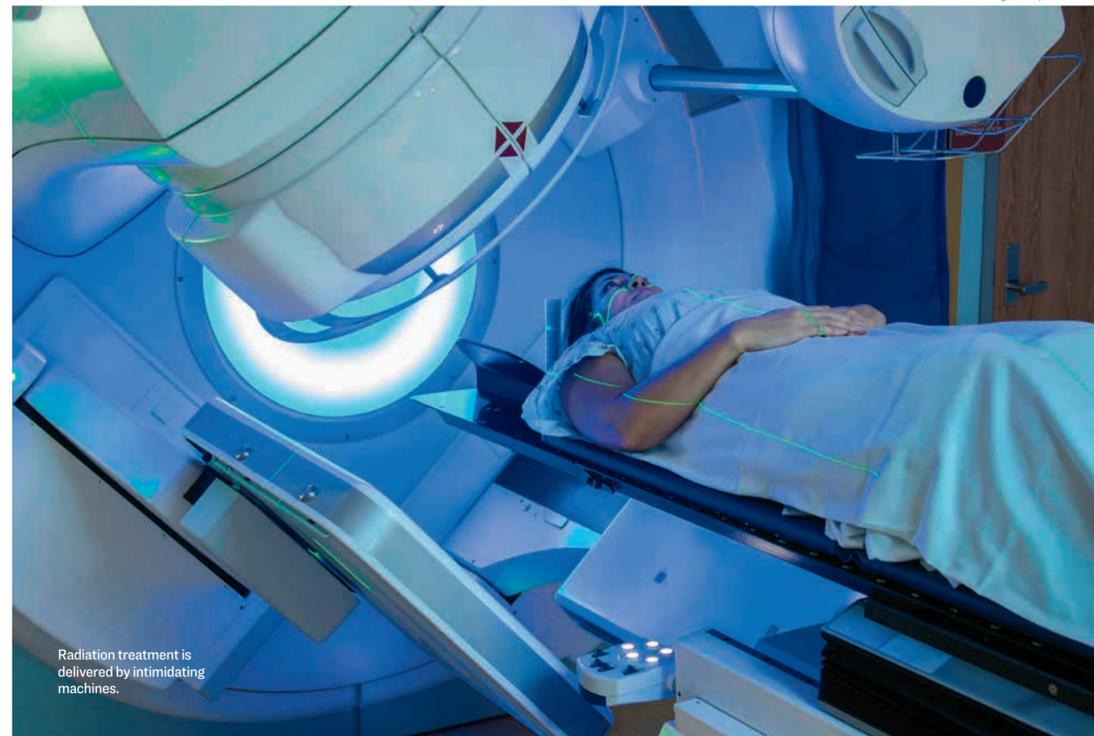
Sayer Ji is the founder of GreenMedInfo.com, a reviewer at the International Journal of Human Nutrition and Functional Medicine, co-founder and CEO of Systome Biomed, vice chairman of the board of the National Health Federation, and steering committee member of the Global GMO Free Coalition. This article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



Need a new mouthwash?

Studies have shown manuka honey, produced by the flowers of the manuka plant that grows in New Zealand and Australia, is as effective as a common germicidal mouthwash.

REUTERS/THOMAS PETER/FILE PHOTO



Radiation treatment is delivered by intimidating machines.

CANCER UP CLOSE

What It's Like Getting 5 1/2 Weeks of Radiation Treatment

Cancer is a painful journey that many people face without every knowing what to expect

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.

To say that I was dreading getting radiation to treat my cancer is a severe understatement. I had no idea what to expect. My radiation oncologist told me that I'd need 5 1/2 weeks of radiation and chemo pills every weekday. This regimen would attempt to kill and/or shrink my stage 3 rectal tumor, and eradicate any cancer in the surrounding rectal lymph nodes. Was it going to hurt? How sick was I going to get from it? I didn't know, but it all sounded awful.

The first step was a 30-minute radiation simulation appointment on Jan. 18, 2018. This visit included getting my photo taken (to link my face with my medical records to ensure I was the correct patient), sitting on a blue plastic tarp on a table that turned into a hard mold of my body from the waist down (to keep me in the same position each treatment), and getting three tiny, black, pin-sized tattoos on my hips and private area. These were then covered in clear stickers to help the technicians align me properly for each treatment.

As I was getting ready to leave, the two technicians told me that if I wore sweatpants with no metal on them, or elastic waist leggings each treatment, I could simply pull down my pants while on the table and not have to change into a hospital gown every time. Point taken. I went out and got a few pairs of leggings for the weeks ahead (as if I needed an excuse to go shopping).

Before my first radiation treatment, I had to solve the logistics of these Monday-through-Friday appointments. Since I lived in New Jersey, about an hour and 20 minutes away from the Cancer Treatment Centers of America (CTCA) in Philadelphia, it made sense to be closer to the facility. My brother graciously volunteered to be my caregiver and go with me to my treatments, so we rented places through Airbnb from Sunday through Thursday. This was cheaper than staying at a hotel.

Thankfully, since I had already been approved for short-term disability, and my brother worked from home, this arrangement worked.

My radiation treatments began Jan. 24, 2018. That morning I accidentally took my first chemo pills 30 minutes after eating breakfast but should have waited to take

To say that I was dreading getting radiation to treat my cancer is a severe understatement.

I asked for spa music, to keep me calm, the first three weeks, and then Motown for motivation for the final weeks.

Finally, feeling as if I had climbed Mt. Everest, my last day of radiation arrived on March 2, 2018.

them on the second day, as I later learned from my oncology nurse. They wanted to run blood tests first before I started them.

As I walked into the radiation waiting room that first day, I was nervous and unsure of what was going to happen. After sitting for 10 minutes, my name was called and a radiation technician brought me to the treatment room.

I verified my picture on their computer screen and I initialed a logbook that kept track of my treatments. I sighed at the 28 appointments listed there and scribbled my initials. Two technicians walked me through a two-foot-thick door into the actual treatment room where the machine was. It looked like we were going into a safe at Fort Knox. I'm guessing it was to contain the radiation. I stepped up and fit myself into the blue-tarp-mold table that was under the machine and laid down. They covered me with a warm sheet and I pulled my leggings down to my knees.

A technician pulled my underwear a bit lower so they could see the stickers that had been put on me. I wasn't prepared for that, but it was OK and I was still covered for the most part. Then they began to adjust me so that I was perfectly aligned, and covered me back up with the blanket when they finished. They played my choice of music for the 10-minute treatment. I asked for spa music, to keep me calm, the first three weeks, and then Motown for motivation for the final weeks.

The technicians then left the room and the machine began to swirl around me loudly. About halfway through, I felt my table move and tilt a bit. They were adjusting the angles from their control room. Then the machine swirled around me again.

I always kept my eyes closed during the treatment and tried to recite positive sayings and talk to the radiation machine. I nicknamed it Rodney. I would tell it things such as, “Kill the tumor but don't do any other harm to me.” Before I would know it, the treatment would be over and a technician would come to help me out of the cast. “OK, not so bad,” I thought to myself.

While painless, the machine was intimidating. One nice touch that helped was that CTCA made the radiation room as serene as possible by having two huge illuminated picture murals of the New Jersey shore on two walls and an illuminated picture of clouds above the machine. If you opened your eyes, you would be staring at a sunny day with pretty puffy clouds. It helped.

So that was pretty much it. That was my routine for the entire 5 1/2 weeks. The only thing that changed is that they did a “boost-

er” on my last three days of treatment. This meant they pointed the radiation beam only at the tumor. During the five weeks prior, they had also aimed it at the surrounding lymph nodes and other target areas in the zone where recurrence could happen.

Throughout these weeks of treatment, every Tuesday I had a standing appointment with my radiation oncologist and his patient assistant to see how I was doing and help with any side effects. This was very helpful, because I soon started to have issues like severe burning and pain while urinating, and diarrhea. Radiation side effects accumulate, so the longer you have the treatments, the worse they get. However, 75 percent of my problems in this phase were related to the chemo pill Xeloda I was taking. It caused big blisters and tenderness on my feet that made it hard to walk. This got so bad that I stopped the chemo pills my entire final week of radiation.

Finally, feeling as if I had climbed Mt. Everest, my last day of radiation arrived on March 2, 2018. I felt pretty awful by then and vomited for the first time that morning. My bum and private area were sore, burned, and a strange purple color from the radiation.

I went through my normal routine one last time, then met with one of the nurses who was going to officially “close out my file.” She gave me post-treatment pointers such as using a SITZ bath to soothe my burned bottom (a plastic basin you put on top of your toilet like a potty trainer that lets you sit in a pool of water), and advised eating plenty of protein to help my body heal quicker. I needed six weeks of rest to let my body recover and for the inflammation to go down before any follow-up exam could be done on me.

As I walked out of the treatment room that last time, I got to ring a bell at the nurse's station to signal that I finished my treatments. Everyone cheered and clapped. It was very emotional. I sobbed at passing this milestone, and yet also beamed (no pun intended) with pride. I thought to myself, I did it. I survived phase one. Yay, me.

Join me next time when I will talk about two radiation side effects that I didn't feel prepared for: being put into early menopause, and coping with the little-discussed topic of vaginal stenosis.

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*.

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The core treatment strategies of the program are based on diet, lifestyle, supplements, herbs, and medications—usually in that order.

THE ROOT CAUSE

Can Dementia Be Reversed?

A new treatment paradigm for Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia

ARMEN NIKOGOSIAN

For decades, conventional medicine has offered little regarding the treatment of patients suffering from dementia or cognitive decline. Alzheimer's disease is now the third-leading cause of death in North America, after heart disease and cancer. But treatment is possible.

It is estimated that dementia will afflict approximately 50 percent of the next generation of senior citizens (that would be every other person between the ages of 40 and 60 reading this article right now). Most seniors today feel utterly helpless as they witness the deterioration of their cognitive abilities. Some even accept this as a normal part of aging. But dementia is not a normal part of aging and should not be accepted as such.

And while we've all met cancer survivors, no one has ever met an Alzheimer's survivor—until now.

The ReCODE program (or Reversal of Cognitive Decline) was developed over the past decade by Dr. Dale Bredesen, the director of research for neurodegenerative disease at UCLA and the author of "The End of Alzheimer's: The First Program to Prevent and Reverse Cognitive Decline."

This treatment program is based on addressing the several dozen mechanisms responsible for the expression of Alzheimer's disease and is completely in alignment with the principles of integrative and functional medicine.

So what exactly is the ReCODE program? To quote Bredesen: "Imagine you have 36 holes in your roof—because we initially identified 36 different mechanisms involved—if you patch one hole, that's not going to help you much. You want to patch all the holes. Now, a drug typically patches one hole... [but you need to] patch the other 35 as well."

The ReCODE program is a full-spectrum, functional medicine approach for addressing all the physiological dysfunctions and imbalances that ultimately present as Alzheimer's in the patient.

Your brain's ability to perform its various

Most seniors today feel utterly helpless as they witness the deterioration of their cognitive abilities.

Your brain's ability to perform its various activities requires connections between brain cells (also known as neurons).

activities requires connections between brain cells (also known as neurons). You have approximately 100 billion neurons in your brain, and each neuron has approximately 10,000 connections, called synapses. That's more than 100 quadrillion synapses per brain.

When your brain is in a state of good health, this massive number of connections maintains a balance between cultivating new connections and pruning old connections that are no longer needed. Looking at this problem from a root-cause perspective, Alzheimer's begins with an imbalance between synaptoblastic activity (building or cultivating synaptic connections between neurons) and synaptoclastic activity (destroying or pruning synaptic connections between neurons). It's all about restoring balance to the brain.

Alzheimer's patients are on the wrong side of this balance. Their synaptic building activity (synaptoblastic) is too low and their synaptic pruning activity (synaptoclastic) is too high. Bringing this synaptic dynamic back into balance is the final goal of the ReCODE approach.

Many patients ask what the differences are between Alzheimer's disease, dementia, and cognitive decline. Cognitive decline is a general term denoting any loss of cognitive function of which dementia is a part.

Dementia is a syndrome used to describe symptoms that impact memory, communication, and performance of daily activities of which Alzheimer's disease is a part. Alzheimer's disease is the most common type of dementia, associated with beta-amyloid plaque deposits in the brain and characterized by progressive worsening of memory, language, and thought. Since the term Alzheimer's is used by the general public to denote any form of dementia, that's the term I use.

One of the first steps of the ReCODE program in restoring this balance is determining what subtype of Alzheimer's the patient has:

Type 1: Inflammatory or 'Hot'

These are patients with mainly inflammatory symptoms. They have a brain that is figuratively "on fire" and balance cannot be restored until the inflammation has been brought under control. There have been many similarities observed between adults with this type of Alzheimer's and children on the autism spectrum—with some overlap of successful treatment modalities for both.

Type 1.5: Glycotoxic or 'Sweet'

This is a mixed subtype in between inflammatory and atrophic. This is typically associated with diabetes and insulin resistance and is the most common form of Alzheimer's that we see and treat.

Type 2: Atrophic or 'Cold'

These are patients in which disease is driven by a lack of essential nutrients, hormones, or other growth factors. Withdrawal of any of these factors (such as testosterone, estrogen, vitamin D, or essential fatty acids to name a few) will unfavorably alter the synaptic balance.

Type 3: Toxic or 'Vile'

These are patients with toxic exposures ranging from heavy metals to persistent organic pollutants to biotoxin illnesses such as mold toxicity or Chronic Inflammatory Response Syndrome. Treatment success for these patients is paramount in identifying and removing the toxic exposure.

Type 4: Vascular or 'Pale'

These are patients in whom their Alzheimer's is driven by poor circulation of the brain. These patients will frequently have other vascular issues as well, such as coronary artery disease or peripheral vascular disease.

Type 5: Traumatic or 'Dazed'

These are patients in which disease is driven by traumatic injury to the brain. It can be one large traumatic injury, but more commonly is a result of multiple, recurrent, minor head traumas, such as those seen in professional football players.

These subtypes are not mutually exclusive of one another, and having one subtype doesn't exclude a person from having another subtype. Most patients will have one predominant subtype driving their disease and then have varying degrees of the other subtypes as contributing factors to their dementia. A successful ReCODE program will address all the patient's problems in due course.

A frequently asked question is, "What will I be given or what will I need to do for the ReCODE program to work for me?"

The answer to that question is different for every individual. For one patient, the foundational treatment piece may be following a low-glycemic diet far beyond the expectations of the patient's primary care physician or endocrinologist. For another, it may be correcting their nocturnal oxygenation as a result of their untreated sleep apnea for the past decade. For another, it could be detoxifying them of the lead they had accumulated from a youth spent breathing in leaded gas fumes. Another may require balancing their hormones, and another, controlling their inflammation from their autoimmune disease, and so on and so on. That question cannot be answered until the individual patient has had a complete functional medicine evaluation.

The core treatment strategies of the program are based on diet, lifestyle, supplements, herbs, and medications—usually in that order. This program has no magic bullets, and if that is what you are looking for, then you should look elsewhere. This is a full-spectrum, multi-faceted approach to your neurological health in specific and your overall health in general.

Armen Nikogosian, MD, practices functional and integrative medicine at Southwest Functional Medicine in Henderson, Nev. He is board-certified in internal medicine and a member of the Institute for Functional Medicine and the Medical Academy of Pediatric Special Needs. His practice focuses on the treatment of complex medical conditions with a special emphasis on autism spectrum disorder in children as well as chronic gut issues and autoimmune conditions in adults.

Viruses Aren't All Nasty—Some Protect Our Health

Our evolving understanding of viruses could change how we treat some diseases

CYNTHIA MATHEW

Viruses are mostly known for their aggressive and infectious nature. It's true, most viruses have a pathogenic relationship with their hosts—meaning they cause diseases ranging from a mild cold to serious conditions such as severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS). They work by invading the host cell, taking over its cellular machinery and releasing new viral particles that go on to infect more cells and cause illness.

But they're not all bad. Some viruses can actually kill bacteria, while others can fight against more dangerous viruses. So like protective bacteria (probiotics), we have several protective viruses in our body.

Protective 'Phages'

Bacteriophages (or "phages") are viruses that infect and destroy specific bacteria. They're found in the mucous membrane lining in the digestive, respiratory, and reproductive tracts.

Mucus is a thick, jelly-like material that provides a physical barrier against invading bacteria and protects the underlying cells from being infected. Recent research suggests the phages present in the mucus are part of our natural immune system, protecting the human body from invading bacteria.

Phages have actually been used to treat dysentery, sepsis caused by *Staphylococcus aureus*, salmonella infections, and skin infections for nearly a century. Early sources of phages for therapy included local water bodies, dirt, air, sewage, and even body fluids from infected patients. The viruses were isolated from these sources, purified, and then used for treatment.

Phages have attracted renewed interest as we continue to see the rise of drug-resistant infections. Recently, a teenager in the United Kingdom was reportedly close to death when phages were successfully used to treat a serious infection that had been resistant to antibiotics.

Nowadays, phages are genetically engineered. Individual strains of phages are tested against target bacteria, and the most effective strains are purified into a potent concentration. These are stored as either bacteriophage stocks (cocktails), which contain one or more strains of phages and can target a broad range of bacteria, or as adapted bacteriophages, which target specific bacteria.

Before treatment, a swab is collected from the infected area of the patient, cultured in the lab to identify the bacterial strain, and tested against the therapeutic phage stocks. Treatment can be safely administered orally, applied directly onto wounds or bacterial lesions, or even spread onto infected sur-



Like protective bacteria (probiotics), we have several protective viruses in our body.

Viral infections at a young age are important to ensure the proper development of our immune systems.

The immune system is continuously stimulated by systemic viruses at low levels sufficient to develop resistance to other infections.

faces. Clinical trials for the intravenous administration of phages are ongoing.

Beneficial Viral Infections

Viral infections at a young age are important to ensure the proper development of our immune systems. In addition, the immune system is continuously stimulated by systemic viruses at low levels sufficient to develop resistance to other infections.

Some viruses we come across protect humans against infection by other pathogenic viruses.

For example, latent (nonsymptomatic) herpes viruses can help human natural killer cells (a specific type of white blood cell) identify cancer cells and cells infected by other pathogenic viruses. They arm the natural killer cells with antigens (a foreign substance that can cause an immune response in the body) that will enable them to identify tumor cells.

This is both a survival tactic by the viruses to last longer within their host and to get rid of competitive viruses to prevent them from damaging the host. In the future, modified versions of viruses like these could potentially be used to target cancer cells.

Pegivirus C or GBV-C is a virus that doesn't cause clinical symptoms. Multiple studies have shown HIV patients infected with GBV-C live longer in comparison to patients without it. The virus slows disease progression by blocking the

host receptors required for viral entry into the cell and promotes the release of virus-detecting interferons and cytokines (proteins produced by white blood cells that activate inflammation and removal of infected cells or pathogens).

In another example, noroviruses were shown to protect the gut of mice when they were given antibiotics. The protective gut bacteria that were killed by the antibiotics made the mice susceptible to gut infections. But in the absence of good bacteria, these noroviruses were able to protect their hosts.



Viruses are supposed to be the boogymen of the microscopic world, but some of them seem to have gotten a bad rap.

The Future of Therapeutic Viruses

Modern technology has enabled us to understand more about the complexities of the microbial communities that are part of the human body. In addition to good bacteria, we now know there are beneficial viruses present in the gut, skin, and even blood.

Our understanding of this viral component is largely in its infancy. But it has huge potential in helping us understand viral infections, and importantly, how to fight the bad ones. It could also shed light on the evolution of the human genome, genetic diseases, and the development of gene therapies.

Cynthia Mathew is a research assistant at the University of Canberra in Australia. This article was first published on *The Conversation*.

Eat Less for Your Chance at Aging Better, Living Longer

MOHAN GARIKIPARITHI

If you want to live a little longer and age a little slower, it might make sense to start eating a little less.

Numerous studies—both on animals and humans—have indicated that only a slight cut in daily calories can lead to a massive boost in the chances of healthful aging and lifespan.

Research has provided various recommendations on calorie limits, but benefits are noticed when total intake is lowered by as little as 10 percent per day. Some work has shown 300 calories per day works, which is roughly identical considering the average American takes in about 3,000.

Dropping calories—or adopting a "calorie-restricted" diet, as it's known—may improve healthy ag-

ing and longevity by allowing your metabolism to take a rest. When you eat a lot of food, your body is using up a lot of energy and producing a lot of byproducts from the expenditure. These byproducts are known as free radicals, which are known to damage healthy cells.

The more you eat, the more free radicals you produce. One study showed that by cutting calories by 15 percent over two years, participants were able to slow the aging process and protect themselves from several diseases. The effects are believed to be a result of less free radical damage.

Another obvious benefit of eating fewer calories means weight loss—or at least weight management.

But it's not all about how much you eat; what you eat plays a big role, too. The easiest way to make the modest 15 percent cut to calo-



Overeating leaves your body in a constant state of digestion, without much needed downtime.

ries is to replace high-calorie, low nutrient foods with nutrient-dense items. This means getting rid of processed and refined foods and replacing them with nutrient-dense items like whole grains,

fruit, vegetables, lean proteins, nuts, legumes, and healthy fats. These changes make cutting calories quite easy because they are a lot more filling than calorically dense food.

If you want to experience the anti-aging benefits of a reduced-calorie diet, take it slow. Start by knocking off 300 calories and no more. If you try to cut 500, for example, it will be very difficult and likely unsustainable. Cutting 300 could be easy as holding the sugar in your morning coffee and switching to skim milk from cream.

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*.

BECOMING MINIMALIST

Pursuing a Richer, Fuller Level of Happiness

Life isn't always a good time, but that can be what makes it great

JOSHUA BECKER

My friend Jason and his wife are in their early 40s. Four years ago, they had three school-aged children when they adopted a 12-year-old from the New Jersey foster care system. Understanding that their lives would be forever changed by the decision, they moved forward because they knew it was the right thing to do—they had an opportunity to change someone's life and they couldn't pass it up.

Today, life looks a lot different for them than it once did. The challenges of parenting a child who has experienced more than children should have to endure have stretched each person in the family in ways they never imagined.

As Jason and I shared a cup of coffee last week, I was curious how he'd narrate his family's journey.

"Joshua, I've got to be honest—it's hard," he said during a moment of openness and vulnerability. "Some days at home are better than others, but there continue to be a lot of really rough moments."

I listened and nodded while knowing deep in my heart I had no idea the depths of emotional and physical struggle their family has faced in recent years.

"You know what's weird?" Jason said. "Maybe the hardest part is everything I have been forced to confront about myself through all this: struggles I thought I had overcome in my life and lessons that I didn't think I had left to learn. All my assumptions about what the perfect American life is supposed to look like have been challenged."

A follow-up question came to mind—one that I struggled to ask because I didn't want it to be misinterpreted by

him in any way. I proceeded slowly, almost apologetically, to ask, "Jason, would you say that you are happier now?"

He set down his cup and looked off into the distance as if to clear his mind to ensure the words came out right. After a long, contemplative breath, he replied. "I am happier. But it's hard to describe. I would say that I now have a deeper, richer view of happiness than I had before."

Jason had discovered, the hard way, that a life that's deeply satisfying can look very different than the one he'd once expected.

"It's kinda like I look back on my life before, how I measured happiness, and see that there's this deeper level of joy in my life now," he said.

"Yeah, it would be great to have the newer car, or the house renovation, or the white picket fence and the picture-perfect family, but I think that kind of happiness is short-lived. Or at least happiness can look very different than that. I'm experiencing a deep satisfaction and happiness because we know that this is what we were meant to do." Boom.

Jason named something I have been trying to find the words to communicate for a long time: Our deepest happiness in life stems from fulfilling purpose. Doing the best we can, where we are, with what we've been given is the best way to live a life of meaning and significance.

It's how to be happy.

The Lie We've Been Fed

Jason's experience of happiness flies in the face of what most people in Western society have been conditioned to believe about where happiness can be found. Retailers, advertisers, and marketers of every stripe have led us to believe that we'll be happy with the

Doing the best we can, where we are, with what we've been given is the best way to live a life of meaning and significance.

next thing we attain. This is the underlying message of every advertising campaign—that we aren't as happy or fulfilled as we would be with their product in our life. So we spend our time, energy, and resources on that which, in the long run, fails to satisfy.

An article in USA Today put a price tag on the American dream so many of us have been taught is our birthright. According to their calculations—counting the house, car, necessities, simple luxuries, even savings and retirement—it costs \$103,357 per year to live the American dream.

I find this incredibly foolish. I've spent 90 percent of my life making less than half that dollar figure and have never felt deprived in any way. But even more telling and unfortunate to me is how the article's writers defined the American dream. To them, it requires a \$275,000 house, a 4WD SUV, restaurants, entertainment, vacations, even a maxed-out 401k plan. This is how they define happiness—in material terms, and material terms only.

This is the message we are constantly fed.

As a result, we continually seek happiness in the next purchase—clothing, phones, tech gadgets, cars, houses.

We continually seek happiness in the next job or a bigger paycheck—more prestige, more power, more satisfaction, more dollars.

We continually seek happiness in the next physical enhancement—tauter skin, slimmer figure, larger muscles.

We continually seek happiness in the next escape—clubs, television, vacations, addictions.

We continually seek happiness in the next relationship—the next woman or man who will meet our needs.

And while these pursuits may pay off for a moment of pleasure, they consistently fail to deliver lasting happiness.



This—living a life not for ourselves but for others—is at the root of that deeper happiness we were each made for.

That's why we constantly pursue more and more of them—but are never fully satisfied. You can never accumulate enough of that which will never make you happy.

Many of us are so busy chasing the next thing that we never pause to ask if what we're after will truly satisfy. So we feel a pang of envy scrolling through our sister-in-law's St. Thomas vacation photos. We may long for the leisure enjoyed by our neighbor, who retired at 55 and now plays golf every day. We might even quietly believe that the parents of our child's friends are happier because of what they wear, where they live, and what they drive.

But when we pause from our scramble long enough to reflect, we notice that the folks who are "living the dream" aren't as happy as we expected they might be. They are off chasing the next attainment just as feverishly as we are.

When we're in our right minds, we recognize that lasting happiness must be found somewhere other than the pursuit of more perks and pleasures. My friend Sandra is someone who has

been able to pause and name what makes her deeply satisfied.

Living to the Fullest

Sandra owns a popular local restaurant and employs teens to bus tables there. Sandra shared with me that a 17-year-old girl started working at the restaurant on Mother's Day, which was wildly busy. As the young employee was punching her time card at the end of the day, Sandra asked her how she felt about her first day.

With an exhausted look on her face, the girl remarked, "I am so tired." Sandra, who'd also hustled throughout the day, added, "I know! Doesn't it feel great?"

The young girl, clearly surprised by her boss's comment, mustered, "Uh ... I don't know if that's what I was going to say ..."

Sandra laughed as she recounted the story to me. "There's just this wonderful feeling to know that you've put your whole heart into something and lived your day to the fullest. That you didn't waste it. You made the most of it!"

What Sandra was describing about work is also true in life. We experience meaning and satisfaction when we get to the end of the day, end of the year, end of the season, and know that we put everything we had into what we were doing. That we gave our all to something bigger than us.

That kind of meaning and purpose simply can't be found among life's more fleeting pleasures. Those things may add short moments of happiness and pleasure, but we experience the most authentic, longest-lasting happiness when we fulfill the role we've been called to live. We taste it, not as we strive to please ourselves, but as we offer the benefit we're designed to provide in the world.

If you know what your purpose is, that's great. If you don't, let me suggest one simple step you can take today. Who is one person in your life who needs what you can offer? A child, a co-worker, a friend, or maybe a customer at your business? What benefit can you bring into that person's world today?

the shadow of the leaves and the album that played while I marked a cut. At no point did I have grand sweeping realizations; my mind was ever so slightly engaged and so could only muster flippant thoughts or passing impressions. It wasn't relaxing, and it didn't make me any money. It was a project I completed simply to make a bookcase.

A Hobbyist Resurgence

I reflect on dinner conversations with friends. Between passing dishes and after preliminary catch-ups are over, someone inadvertently asks the group if they have been watching some show. A few murmur yes and others no. Wanting to share in the experience but

unwilling to spoil anything, those in the loop croon a few syllables over the quality of it, and the conversation dies back down. Then someone asks about some other series, and the process repeats. Where Netflix and Facebook provide superficial content and leave our lives devoid of interesting stories, knitting fostered a conversation to last the entirety of the resident reception. Perhaps that was a manifestation of a deeper meaning that both of those women had in their lives.

Commentators and authors have spilled much ink discussing the death of community, family, and religion in America. The arguments run that without necessarily divi-

ty, people either turn to politics for their meaning or lose any center to their lives.

This has been blamed for anger, political vitriol, populism, extremism, despair, declining birth rates, and the aforementioned rise in depression, anxiety, and suicidality.

The response to this situation, though, is not clear. If I ask a colleague to go to church with me or give them a Bible, I risk ruining a relationship. It's unlikely that a host of Americans will miraculously return to church, since religious belief is an emotionally fraught, deeply personal, and almost necessarily divi-

sive issue. Returning to church, the daily choice to place primacy on family, sweeping policy reforms, and personal investment in failing communities are difficult decisions to make, but picking up a hand saw or knitting needles is easy.

A hobby is really just a stand-in word for a third mode of being between work and relaxation. Building a bookshelf accom-

plished little definitive good for me, but while I was working on it, I had something with which to define myself that was less stressful than work and more substantive than video games. While it won't fix the mental health crisis or the state of political discourse, perhaps it's time for us all to take the cliché advice and go find a hobby.

I don't believe finding deep happiness is ever a walk in the park. It doesn't always look like the images we see in ads or even a stress-free life. Not every day is cheerful bliss. Sometimes happiness is hard and messy. Sometimes it feels like aching legs or sheer exhaustion.

Sometimes a life that is deeply satisfying looks very different than the one we thought we were promised.

Income can't determine our happiness. Life's unavoidable losses can't determine our happiness.

Illness can't determine our happiness. Unexpected challenges, ones that we never imagined when we were dreaming the dreams for our lives, can't determine our happiness.

Even relationships, ultimately, cannot determine our happiness.

Lasting satisfaction can be ours only when we invest our life into those things that are worthy of the one life we've been given.

Choosing Happiness

If you're weary of chasing after pleasures that fail to satisfy, and itching to experience a deeper satisfaction in life, let these three thoughts be your guide.

First, dig in right where you are. Care for the people in your kitchen. Your swing set. Your carpool. Your neighborhood. Your soccer field.

Second, use what you have. Do you enjoy cooking? Do you interact with people in your day job? Can you do simple home repairs? Use the opportunities and gifts you've already been given.

Third, benefit others. Though our natural instinct is to please ourselves, open your eyes to those around you who might be in need. How can you do good for the people in your orbit—neighbors, strangers, people who speak a language other than English, children without parents, folks who look different than you?

Tackle what's in front of you with confidence as you purposefully benefit others where you are, with what you've been given. You'll find joy and lasting meaning in it.

You'll discover happiness.

Joshua Becker is an author, public speaker, and the founder and editor of Becoming Minimalist, where he inspires others to live more by owning less. Visit BecomingMinimalist.com

Americans Need a Hobby

Our lives are richer with something to captivate us between work and relaxation

DANIEL BUCK

There are a few untold benefits of being a doctor's spouse: free food, fine cocktails, and small talk with disparate characters. At one event, a reception for new psychiatric residents, I sat with two other doctors' spouses discussing house projects and summer vacations. When I left to get seconds, I returned to a conversation about knitting.

To me, the potential tedium of knitting induces anxiety, but to them, it was exhilarating. It was an activity that required a single mind such that they could not talk while focused on their needles. They had a hobby.

Our Current State

Unfortunately, hobbyism is in decline; more than half of American leisure time is spent watching TV. Standing as an example, my class (I'm a school teacher) had just finished a discussion, and with the material covered and not enough time to start anything new, I gave the students a moment of free time. About six or seven of them stood up, plopped down on bean bags, and spent the next few minutes showing their screens to

each other.

An English classroom is an apt metaphor for contemporary life. A proper classroom has countless elements fostering peak productivity. When class finishes, all structure subsides and a dull repose takes its place. It is like a microcosm of our work-rest culture.

Every second of the workday is geared toward productivity, bound up tight until it's all released in pure catharsis—the internet, video games, or the entire "Game of Thrones" series.

Despite stereotypes about entitlement and apathy, millennials fit this mold as workaholics. They take less time off than older generations and are more likely to work on vacations. On the other end of the spectrum, they spend more than four hours a day watching TV and 11 hours engaging with media. The dichotomy of work and lethargy reigns.

This lifestyle of workism paired with media catharsis has left millennials and Gen-Zers caught in an upward trend of depression, anxiety, and suicidality. Gone are T.S. Eliot's ghosts in his "Wasteland" ambling across London Bridge, discussing the bodies of World War II buried in the garden; now,

This lifestyle of workism paired with media catharsis has left millennials and Gen Zers caught in an upward trend of depression, anxiety, and suicidality.

blue-lit apparitions amble down the hallways between moments of engagement and activity in the workplace, car, and classroom. As we consume more and more content, our lives become ever more devoid of it.

Look to E.B. White

I compare this contemporary dichotomy to a lifestyle hiding contentedly in E.B. White's essays. Between his moments of mindless observations and literary pursuits, he maintained a small farm that required herding his flocks, collecting eggs, planting, watering, and fertilizing. Did any of it help his writing? Perhaps, but only in so far as it gave him subject matter to write about. Was it mindlessly cathartic like binge-watching television? I doubt it. And yet there is a fullness of life and even peace in his essays that our 20-minute episodes cannot create.

Between his state of work and relaxation, both of which he did much, there was a third mode of being.

It wasn't productive enough to be considered work; it wasn't relaxing enough to be leisure. It was a full life of hobbies.

I reflected on what I considered

my hobbies. Some might call exercising a hobby, but my breathless search of personal records makes it seem too productive for such a designation. Perhaps reading is a hobby, but when my choices fell into either philosophy or fantasy, my reading bordered on productivity or catharsis. I didn't have a hobby.

Hobbies fall between the productivity-catharsis divide. Woodworking, embroidery, collecting, crafting, fishing, or any other is not productive like work is. Work is done for what it accomplishes. Leisure activities bring relaxation. Both have an alternative goal. A hobby is done for itself.

A Personal Experiment

I decided to build a bookcase. I hadn't worked with power tools since an elective period in middle school. Building a piece of furniture was tedious work. The project called for countless measurements, repeated cuts, sanding, screwing, gluing, more sanding, finishing, and one last round of sanding.

Very little thought happened in my rudimentary shop of sandpaper and hand saws, but I remember seeing a solar eclipse in



Hobbyism is in decline; more than half of American leisure time is spent watching TV.

THINK WELL, WORK WELL

Coping Strategies for When Bad Things Happen

Challenges can lead us toward meaningful thought and action if we know how to cope

JEFF GARTON

If you can't control a difficult situation, how do you cope with it? Coping involves applying your mental and emotional energy to manage the strain associated with challenges.

Psychologists have identified three coping strategies people commonly rely on. But before we get to those, consider the order in which humans normally make things happen.

1. We self-motivate through thinking in an attempt to achieve our best performance.
2. This thought creates the emotional energy we need to move ahead and stay the course.
3. We take action in response to how we made ourselves feel and repeat steps 1 and 2 as necessary.

Problems arise when you get out of order; when you act without thinking first or allow the wrong emotions to get in your way. In either case, you'll later regret not thinking first to create the most appropriate emotion to help you.

And that emotion needn't be a potent passion. A calm and clear heart can be the most powerful

starting point for any meaningful action.

So, now to the three ways of coping

Meaning-Focused Coping

This is the most reliable strategy. It's based on the premise that thoughts, not circumstances, create emotions. Whatever happens to you is meaningless until you assign it meaning and react. Scientists (and ancient sages) believe you may never need the second or third strategies if you make the best use of your thoughts.

You cope by thinking first to assign better meanings to your circumstances. The purpose of this is to intentionally create emotional ease or a self-empowering emotion to help you cope well. In many cultures, this means broadening your mind to consider the wider implications of an event, or to align your thoughts about it with deeper values, like kindness and faith. Psychologist Abraham Maslow referred to this as meta-motivating to self-transcend your circumstances. You rise above your circumstances.

- Recognize what's most important and then assign a better



A calm and clear heart can be the most powerful starting point for any meaningful action.

meaning to the situation.

- Avoid being judgmental.
- Think in a non-negative manner (realistic + optimistic).
- Look for the agreeable middle ground between what is and what's ideal.

People who use this strategy might appear from the outside as if they're aloof or unaffected by challenges. But on the inside, they're caring for themselves by relying on the emotions of joy, optimism, enthusiasm, gratitude, confidence, and contentment. We admire these people for their calm resilience.

Emotion-Focused Coping

People who rely on this strategy first typically have no knowledge of meaning-focused coping. It involves changing or ignoring how you feel when a difficult situation occurs. It's like numbing yourself to the evolving world around you.

When this strategy was popular, people wrongly assumed their unwanted emotions were caused by their circumstances.

This led to largely ineffective approaches, like denial (ignoring the situation or avoiding reality), procrastinating, distraction (TV, drugs, etc), and wishful thinking.

After coping in this manner, some slowly find the will to accept their situation and start dealing with it. But by the time this happens, the problem may have worsened. This is not the ideal way of coping, but it works temporarily when nothing else might.

People who cope in this manner are comfortable with ignoring or minimizing the seriousness of their problems. They may appear beat or hopeless and don't realize their actions are being unintentionally motivated by fear, worry, envy, doubt, and anger. We sometimes feel sorry for these people.

Problem-Focused Coping

Similar to the previous strategy, this one is based on the false idea that your circumstances cause emotions. Coping involves taking action first to resolve the problem before an unwanted emotion occurs.

This strategy can potentially work. But if you can't resolve the problem, you become discouraged and give up too soon. You lack the motivation to persevere because you didn't first thing in order to create the most appropriate emotion to help you. This approach is all about actions and usually involves some

seemingly rational steps.

- Plan how you will address the situation.
- Problem-solve to identify the best approach.
- Seek help from others who have experience in dealing with your situation.
- Assert your opinions about what you would rather see in this situation.
- Establish boundaries so the same situation does not occur again.

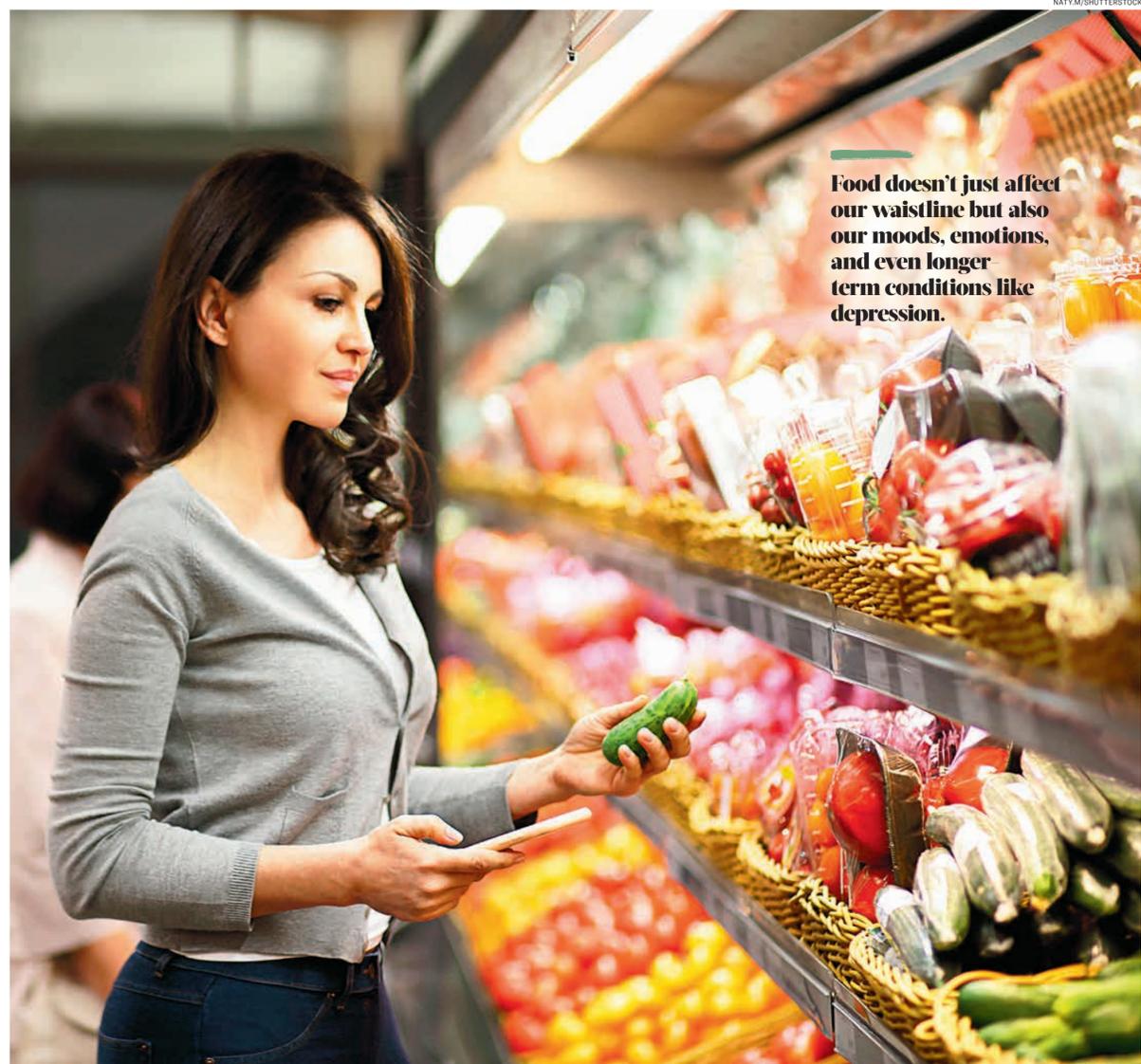
When you take action first, you may end up with the wrong solution, solving the wrong problem, or wasting your emotional energy on what you might later realize was not a serious issue.

People who cope in this manner have good intentions and are more optimistic in their problem-solving abilities than they should be. So when things don't go their way they become impatient and frustrated. We might cheer these people on for their enthusiasm in the face of adversities.

Hands down, the most efficient coping strategy is meaning-focused. Think first to energize your motivation to cope using the most helpful emotions. Not only does this improve how well you feel, but it also enhances your problem-solving abilities.

It's like this Keanu Reeves quote. "You don't struggle with depression you struggle with the reality we live in." The meanings we assign create what we think is real and that's how we can avoid depression. By first changing how we think.

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



Food doesn't just affect our waistline, but also our moods, emotions, and even longer term conditions like depression.

What Is the Best Diet for Mental Health?

New research explores links between food and our feelings of depression, anxiety, and happiness

KIRA M. NEWMAN

It turns out that comfort food might be anything but comfortable if you suffer from common mental health issues.

A growing body of research is discovering that food doesn't just affect our waistline but also our moods, emotions, and even longer-term conditions like depression. Which makes sense, after all. Our brains are physical entities, running on the energy that we put into our bodies, affected by shifts in our hormones, blood sugar levels, and many other biological processes.

Although there are many unanswered questions, the research to date can give us some guidance when we're hunting for an afternoon snack. What we know so far can be summed up, more or less, as this: Whole-food diets heavy on fruit, vegetables, and unprocessed protein can lift our moods and protect us from depression, while too

much junk food and sugar may put our mental health at risk.

One-third of adults in the United States eat fast food on a given day. Many of us see french fries and chocolate cake as treats to cheer us up when we're feeling down. But perhaps our perspective on food needs an update. With a few simple dietary changes, you might be able to improve both your mind and your mood.

Can Your Diet Protect You From Depression?

A paper published this year in Psychosomatic Medicine offers one of the most up-to-date snapshots of diet and mental health—specifically, how diet might play a role in depression.

The research team scoured academic journals for experiments

Too much junk food and sugar may put our mental health at risk.

that had asked people to change their diets and had measured the effects. In all, they found 16 studies with nearly 46,000 participants from the United States, Australia, and Europe, ranging from ages 21 to 85.

The experiments were quite diverse, prescribing a variety of diets to boost nutrient intake, reduce fat intake, or encourage weight loss. One group went on a vegan diet, while others restricted calories; many people loaded up on fruits and vegetables while avoiding meat and processed foods. Some people attended nutrition classes together, while others got personalized counseling or simply took home a set of guidelines. They followed the diet for anywhere from a couple of weeks to a few years.

The results? Overall, adopting a healthier diet did lead to reduced symptoms of depression—less hopelessness, trouble sleeping, and disconnection from others—compared to engaging in other self-improvement activities or going about life as usual.

"Including more non-processed foods, more whole foods—fruits, vegetables—is very beneficial in terms of your psychological well-being, particularly mood," said Joseph Firth, the lead author of the paper and a research fellow at Western Sydney University.

Continued on Page 11



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What Does Your Face Say About Your Health?

If something unusual is happening inside your body, it may show up on your face

DEBORAH MITCHELL

When you meet and greet other people, the first thing they see is your face. Depending on how you feel and the circumstances of the meeting, you may be smiling, laughing, frowning, or portraying some other facial expression. Without using words, you are letting people know how you feel at that moment.

But what does your face say about your health?

Your Face and Your Health

Your face can reveal a lot about what's going on inside your body. According to the ancient art of face reading (Mien Shi-ang), it's possible to know what's going on inside the body by studying the face, if you know what to look for.

Here are 13 messages your face could be sending you about your health.

Brown patches: These patches may be triggered by birth control pills, hormone therapy, or pregnancy. In some cases, they may be associated with thyroid problems or stress.

Check breakouts: If you experience discoloration or patchiness on your cheeks, you may be experiencing a problem with poor metabolism or poor absorption of folic acid or iron. Another possibility is poor lung function and shortness of breath, so pay attention to your breathing.

Chin and jawline breakouts: Skin issues in these areas could be a sign of a hormone imbalance. Sometimes women who didn't have acne as a teenager develop this problem as an adult. It tends to be worse during menstruation, stress, and menopause.

Cracked lips: Both hot and cold weather can cause cracked, dry lips, and they can be treated with lip balms. However, cracked lips also can be a sign of dehydration or a reaction to a medication, such as steroids.

Fine white hairs: This condition has a name—hypertrichosis lanuginosa—and is characterized by excessive fine white hairs that typically develop on the face. These hairs are sometimes called a “malignant down” and are a sign of internal malignancy, especially colon and lung cancers.

Hair loss: If you are losing your eyelashes or eyebrows, as well as patches of hair on your head, it may be a sign of alopecia areata. This is an autoimmune condition in which the immune system attacks the hair follicles.

Moles: These bumps or spots on the skin are typically dark brown to black and harmless. However, if they portray certain characteristics, you should have them checked. Are they asymmetrical, jagged around the border, uneven in color, larger than a pea, or change in appearance? Time to check in with your doctor.

Puffy eyes: Most of us think of puffy eyes as being a sign of not getting enough sleep, and that's one cause. But puffy eyes also can be an indication of eating too much salt or undergoing hormone changes. Simply getting older is also a cause because the muscles that support the eyelids grow weaker. Puffy lower eyelids may indicate impaired kidney function.

Sores: Outbreaks of one or more sores around the lips and mouth are usually cold sores, which are associated with type 1 herpes virus. Although they can be unsightly, they usually go away on their own and aren't serious. Cold sores typically appear when we are stressed, sick, or fatigued.

Unexplained darkening or tanning of the skin: If you haven't been exposed to the sunlight yet have a tan or darkening skin, it could be a sign of Addison's disease. This condition is characterized by underactive adrenal glands that can't make enough of the hormone cortisol. Therefore, the brain steps in and makes too much of a hormone called ACTH, which increases pigmentation of the skin.

Unwanted hair: Chin hair is for men, but women can get it, too. In younger women, it may be a sign of polycystic ovary syndrome and should be evaluated by a physician.

Yellowish eyes and skin: This is a sign of jaundice when there is an accumulation of bilirubin in the body. This orange-yellow pigment can mean a viral infection (e.g., hepatitis, mononucleosis), problems with your gallbladder, liver, or pancreas, or alcohol abuse.

Yellow spots on eyelids: There's a fancy name for these yellow bumps on the upper and lower eyelids, xanthelasmata. They are composed of cholesterol and are harmless themselves, but they also can signal your risk for heart disease.

Puffy lower eyelids may indicate impaired kidney function.

Bottom line

Changes to your facial skin can signal a wide variety of health issues you may not even know are occurring. If any of these changes are happening to you, it may be time to contact your physician to determine if you have any underlying health concerns that can be resolved.

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



Your face can reveal a lot about what's going on inside your body.



Focus on cultivating healthy but sustainable eating habits.

What Is the Best Diet for Mental Health?

Continued from Page 9

But the results got more interesting when the researchers started to dig into the details, to see for whom and under what conditions our diet might keep the bad feelings at bay.

Who Benefits Most From a Healthy Diet?

First off, diet programs tended to work better for women. Why? Besides differences in hormones and metabolism, Firth conjectured, women seem to be in a better position to benefit. They're more likely to be depressed, and they might have more discipline at following diets than men, he said.

Also, diet programs worked better if a dietary professional administered them, probably because the recommendations were sounder and the participants—believing in the dietitian's authority—were more apt to follow them, Firth said. An earlier review of diet studies came to a similar conclusion.

One of the strongest studies in the collection suggested that diet could help people who were right in the midst of a major depressive episode. Researchers recruited 67 depressed people with poor diets, half of whom were instructed to follow a healthy, Mediterranean-style diet favoring whole grains, fruits, vegetables, legumes, low-fat dairy, nuts, fish, lean red meat, chicken, eggs, and olive oil while reducing sweets, refined grains, fried and fast food, processed meats, and sugary drinks. Across 12 weeks, they attended seven sessions with a dietitian who helped them set diet goals and stay motivated; they also received recipes, meal plans, and a hamper of food.

The other half attended sessions on a similar schedule. But rather than getting diet advice, they simply spent time with a research assistant who was trained to be supportive of them—talking about topics they were interested in, like sports and hobbies, or playing games with them for an hour.

Despite how beneficial social interaction is, the diet group fared better

than the social support group. After 12 weeks, they had reduced their depression and anxiety more—and they were about four times more likely to experience a remission from their depression. The more they improved their diet, the more their depression lifted.

What about anxiety? In that particular study, anxiety did go down—but on average, across all 16 studies, healthier diets didn't seem to make people less anxious. That actually strengthens the case that diet can directly affect depression, said Firth. If the results were simply due to people feeling proud and accomplished with their new healthy habits, you would expect them to feel better all around, including less anxious. The fact that only their symptoms of depression shifted means that something deeper may be going on.

What could that be? We don't know for sure yet, but there are a variety of biological processes that seem to be both influenced by diet and involved in mental health. It's possible that certain diets may increase inflammation and oxidative stress, and disrupt our mitochondrial function and neuron production in ways that could put us at risk for psychological problems. Our gut microbiome—the colony of microorganisms in our intestines that is increasingly being studied as a contributor to mental health—may interact with many of these processes. Also, said Firth, following a diet can bring us a sense of self-esteem and self-efficacy, as well as potential weight loss—which can influence our minds, too.

But there are still many unknowns. As professor Almudena Sanchez-Villegas of the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria pointed out, the findings from diet experiments aren't consistent. Many of the diet programs in Firth's review didn't help alleviate depression, nor did a newer one that also included multivitamins. Researchers have much more to explore.

Can Your Diet Make You Happy?

It's one thing to say that our diet might protect us from depression and other

mental health issues. But could the foods we eat actually move the needle toward more positive emotions and happiness?

In a 2017 experiment published in *PLoS ONE*, researchers recruited 171 young adults with a diet low in fruits and vegetables, which meant three or fewer servings per day. These 18 to 25 year olds were split into groups: One got a basket of carrots, apples, and kiwi or oranges and was told to eat an extra serving of fruit and an extra serving of vegetables per day; another didn't change what they ate.

Every day for two weeks, they answered questions about their feelings, mood, and happiness. At the beginning and the end of the experiment, they also filled out surveys about their anxiety and depression.

The diet group only managed to add one extra serving of fruit and vegetables to their daily diet. But that made a difference: Compared to everyone else, they had more energy, curiosity, creativity, and motivation; and they felt more engaged and purposeful in their lives overall—a greater sense of flourishing.

Surprisingly, though, the diet didn't seem to change their mood or their feelings of depression and anxiety. That might be because the experiment was so short, the authors believe; while diet can give us a positive boost pretty quickly, it's possible that mental health problems take longer to show up.

Certain diets may increase inflammation and oxidative stress, and disrupt our mitochondrial function and neuron production in ways that could put us at risk for psychological problems.

“The accumulation of factors such as low vitality, reduced motivation, and poorer socio-emotional flourishing may precipitate the development of psychological ill-being over time,” wrote researcher Tamlin S. Conner and her colleagues.

Similarly, in a short pilot study from 2011, a Mediterranean diet seemed to boost people's feelings of contentment—but didn't improve their depression or anxiety.

Twenty-five women were surveyed on their feelings of depression, anxiety, anger, calm, and contentment. Some continued eating as usual for 10 days, while the rest adopted a Mediterranean diet (this time with no red meat). After another round of surveys, the research-

ers found that the women on the Mediterranean diet felt more content.

“The nutrients consumed in everyday diets are important for individuals' mood,” wrote Laura McMillan and her colleagues.

Of course, this was a very small study—and the women may have simply felt satisfied about doing something good for their health. Indeed, in a few other studies, a healthy diet didn't make people happier. For example, following a Mediterranean diet for 12 weeks didn't seem to boost people's mood, well-being, nor sense of self-efficacy compared to receiving social support.

Despite how catchy it sounds, it might be too early to say that any particular diet is going to bring us happiness.

Eating for Well-Being

So, how should all this research inform our grocery list?

Most researchers are only willing to say that diet does seem to influence our mental health in some way, although they're not sure exactly how. “There's no real evidence to suggest that one diet works better than another,” said Firth.

However, the big picture is reasonably clear: Try to get enough fruits and vegetables—and avoid junk food.

Supporting that perspective, one paper reviewed the results of another 16 studies and found no differences between two relatively healthy diets. People who were eating a typical Western diet of fast food, salty snacks, desserts, and soft drinks became more depressed over time. But eating a classic healthy diet high in fruit and vegetables, seafood, and whole grains or a more Mediterranean diet—which includes lots of olive oil and more legumes, meat, dairy, and alcohol—both seemed to protect against depression.

Since many of the research findings are stronger for women, Firth does have one further tip.

“If you're female, then you will benefit from adopting a healthier diet in general and you don't need to worry about what type of specific diet you're adopting,” he said. “If you're a man and you're not overweight, probably don't bother.”

In other words, at least as far as our mental health goes, we can stop obsessing about having a perfectly consistent diet—or whether we should go paleo or keto—and instead focus on cultivating healthy but sustainable eating habits. That's the area where Firth wants to see more research, too, to figure out how to help people make lifestyle changes that last.

“It's more important to actually stick to any healthy diet than it is to try and go for some aspirational perfect one that's ultimately unfeasible or disgusting for you to stick to,” he said.

Kira M. Newman is the managing editor of *Greater Good*. This article was originally published in the *Greater Good Magazine* online.

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FOOD IS MEDICINE

How Lion's Mane Mushroom Benefits Your Brain

The rare, edible lion's mane mushroom, aka *hericium erinaceus*, has an unmistakable appearance.

Two potent nerve growth factors makes strange-looking mushroom a cognitive bodyguard

VALERIE BURKE

Lion's mane is one of nature's gifts to your nervous system. It's the only mushroom possessing not one but two potent nerve growth factors, showing potential benefits for Parkinson's and Alzheimer's disease, mild cognitive impairment, multiple sclerosis, leg cramps, anxiety, and more.

Lion's mane mushroom has been used medicinally in Asia for centuries, but for some reason it's all but unknown in the West.

Besides being called "lion's mane," *Herichium erinaceus* is known by other names including bearded tooth mushroom, bearded hedgehog, and bearded tooth fungus. In Japan, it's known as yamabushitake, which means "mountain priest mushroom." It has a variety of other names, depending on the country.

In Asia, it is said that lion's mane gives you "nerves of steel and the memory of a lion," and from what science is revealing, that's apt prose. Thus far, evidence exists that lion's mane mushroom confers the following health benefits: improved cognitive function; nerve regeneration, remyelination, and increased nerve growth factor; improved digestive function and relief from gastritis; and immunosupportive, anti-inflammatory, and antioxidant properties. It also acts as an anticoagulant, mild

ACE inhibitor, and grants improved lipid profile.

The science about lion's mane in its infancy, but evidence already points to significant therapeutic benefits for numerous diseases of the central and peripheral nervous system.

Conditions that may benefit from lion's mane mushroom include:

- Dementia and mild cognitive impairment (MCI)
- Parkinson's disease
- Peripheral neuropathy
- Muscle cramps and spasms
- Multiple sclerosis (MS)
- Stroke recovery
- Seizures and seizure-like post-stroke episodes
- Anxiety and depression

Mother Nature's First "Smart Mushroom"

According to world-renown fungi expert Paul Stamets, lion's mane may be the first "smart mushroom," providing support specifically for cognitive function, including memory, attention, and creativity. It is reported that Buddhist monks have consumed lion's mane tea for centuries before meditation in order to enhance their powers of concentration.

This unique fungus contains a group of compounds that regenerate myelin along the axons, which opens the door to a world of neuroprotective benefits.

In one of the few human studies to date, older adults with mild cognitive impairment were given 250 milligrams of powdered lion's mane three times a day for 16 weeks and compared to another group receiving a placebo. The lion's mane group scored significantly higher on the cognitive function scale compared with placebo, with no adverse effects. This study should prompt scientists to investigate the therapeutic efficacy of these fungi for dementia patients.

Lion's Mane Regenerates Nerves and Stimulates NGF

One of the reasons for this mushroom's exceptional neuroprotective powers is its ability to stimulate synthesis of nerve growth factor (NGF). NGF is a protein that plays a major role in the maintenance, survival, and regeneration of neurons in both the central and peripheral nervous systems. Lion's mane contains two unique types of compounds: hericenones and erinacines. The erinacines found in *Herichium erinaceus* mycelium are among the most powerful NGF inducers in the natural world, able to cross your blood-brain barrier and stimulate the production of new neurons within the brain itself.

With many neurological disorders, the brain is unable to manufacture NGF—in fact, this is thought to be one of the primary mechanisms underlying Alzheimer's disease. Making matters worse, myelin sheaths and the blood-brain barrier prevent your body from accessing external sources of NGF, and this contributes to the progressive deterioration of brain neurons over time.

Lion's mane is the only mushroom to demonstrate significant potential for nerve regeneration. In a groundbreaking 2014 study, an oral extract proved effective in promoting peripheral nerve regeneration after surgically-induced crush-injuries in rats.

NGF also plays important roles in myelination, including protecting oligodendrocytes (myelin-producing cells) and the production of BDNF (brain-derived neurotrophic factor). In 2003, lion's mane extract was found to stimulate nerve myelination, which was confirmed by a later study in 2013. This finding has huge implications for helping individuals with multiple sclerosis, a disease characterized by progressive demyelination.

As an aside, there is actually another mushroom that may prove helpful with demyelination—*Phellinus igniarius*, otherwise known as willow bracket. One study found its extract suppressed demyelination as well as suppressing many of the immune cells active (or overactive) in multiple sclerosis.

Amyloid Plaques, Anxiety, and Depression

Lion's mane has also been shown to reduce beta-amyloid plaques. Beta-amyloid plaques are proteins that form in the fatty membranes that surround nerve cells, interfering with neurotransmission. These plaques are thought to play a role in neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's.

In a compelling animal study, mice were injected with neurotoxic peptides (to induce plaque formation), in order to assess the effects of lion's mane on the type of amyloid plaque seen in Alzheimer's sufferers. As the plaque developed, the mice lost their ability to memorize a test maze, but when they were fed a diet containing lion's mane mushroom, their performance in the maze significantly improved. In addition to regaining their former cognitive skills, they gained new cognitive skills—something akin to curiosity, as measured by greater time spent

exploring novel objects compared to familiar ones. The reduction of beta-amyloid plaques in the mushroom-fed mice was remarkable.

Lion's mane also shows potential in the treatment of anxiety and depression. In a study involving menopausal women, the mushroom reduced depression and anxiety by some mechanism other than its NGF-enhancing properties. The effects were particularly strong in lowering anxiety, reducing feelings of irritation, and enhancing concentration. So it looks like the Buddhist monks were right.

Benefits Beyond the Nervous System

As with many mushrooms, lion's mane has a number of other therapeutic actions resulting from its anti-inflammatory and immune-supportive properties, including the following:

- Cancer: One animal study found an extract of lion's mane inhibited the spread of colon cancer cells to the lung by 66 to 69 percent; the mushroom has also been shown to induce apoptosis in leukemia cells and inhibits angiogenesis.
- Thrombosis: Hericenone B appears to "potently and specifically inhibit collagen-induced platelet aggregation."
- Mild ACE Inhibitor: The exact molecule underlying this effect is not currently known, but it is thought to be a bioactive peptide.
- Lipids: Lion's mane mycelium is reported to reduce triglycerides and improve LDL and HDL levels.
- Fat Metabolism: It increases the expression of several genes involved in fat metabolism.
- Wound Healing: Topical application of the extract was found to accelerate wound healing.

Lion's mane mushroom has earned its right to be in your kitchen pantry and medicine cabinet. I'm sure we'll be seeing many more studies illuminating its therapeutic potential in the near future.

Although the mushroom's availability is limited to hardwood forests and a few gourmet food shops, kits are available that allow you to grow your own lion's mane at home. Lion's mane mushrooms are 20 percent protein and can be prepared using standard culinary techniques, just like any other edible mushroom. Mushroom Forager describes this oddball's appearance as sort of like a "faceless hedgehog," or a truffle tree out of "The Lorax." In other words, they're easy to spot. Does it taste like chicken? No, in this case lobster ... or so they say, as I've not partaken myself.

According to Mushroom Forager: "Lion's mane has no look-alikes, edible or poisonous, and all forms are edible and delicious in the kitchen."

You can find lion's mane in the forests of North America, Europe, and Asia during the summer and fall, typically attached to dead or dying hardwood trees and logs, including maple, beech, oak, birch, walnut, and sycamore. Lion's mane is also widely available as a supplement and comes in powders and liquid extracts. Some serious allergic reactions have been reported, so please take ample precautions.

Valerie Burke is a freelance health writer in Olympia, Wash., with backgrounds in both allopathic and integrative medicine and a master's degree in nursing science. Her areas of interest include nutrition, energy psychology, EMF protection, and integrating principles of holistic health to create balance in mind, body, and spirit. You can learn more about her at shungite-queen.com. This article was first published on GreenMedInfo.com



Skin-Lightening Cream Leaves Woman Semi-Comatose

Tainted beauty products more prevalent in some communities and in imported shipments

ANNA ALMENDRALA

She had been buying face cream through a friend of a friend for 12 years. This time, it was Pond's "Rejuveness," a version of the company's anti-wrinkle cream that is made and sold in Mexico.

But someone in the Mexican state of Jalisco had laced the cream with a toxic skin-lightening compound, and it had a devastating effect on the 47-year-old Sacramento resident.

She showed up at the emergency room this summer slurring her speech, unable to walk or feel her hands and face, public health officials said. She now lies semi-comatose in a hospital.

Authorities aren't releasing her name, but they say she is the first known victim of methylmercury poisoning from a cosmetic in the United States.

Methylmercury is a heavy metal used in things like thermometers, batteries, and mirrors, and long-term exposure can cause kidney damage, loss of peripheral vision, and lack of coordination.

The chemical—along with a less potent, but still toxic, form of mercury known as calomel—is also a key ingredient in skin-lightening products. A bustling market for these products is driven by immigrants who buy them from their home countries.

The face cream that sickened the Sacramento woman was tampered with after manufacture, but some other skin-lightening products made overseas intentionally contain mercury as an active ingredient, said Bhavna Shamasunder, an associate professor at Occidental College in Los Angeles who studies skin-lightening cosmetics. While mercury removes skin pigmentation, Shamasunder said, the side effects are toxic.

Pond's, owned by the international consumer products giant Unilever, said it doesn't use mercury in its products. It encourages consumers to buy their products only from authorized retailers to avoid tampering. The company said it is working with authorities to investigate the Sacramento woman's case.

In the past nine years, there have been more than 60 poisonings in California linked to "foreign brand, unlabeled, and/or homemade skin creams" that contained calomel, Sacramento County officials said.

While it is illegal to sell cosmetics in the United States with more than 1 part per million (ppm) of mercury—except eye products, which can have up to 65—the Food and Drug

Administration can't keep up with the imports, whether they're shipped, tucked into suitcases, or purchased online.

Nor does it have the regulatory power to enforce recalls or require preapproval of cosmetic products and ingredients before they're sold, Shamasunder said.

Methylmercury is a heavy metal used in things like thermometers, batteries, and mirrors, and long-term exposure can cause kidney damage, loss of peripheral vision, and lack of coordination.

"The FDA has extremely poor oversight over our beauty products," she said. "The burden of proof is on the consumer to get sick first."

The FDA declined to comment on the record for this story.

Skin-lightening products are popular throughout the world, and the market is projected to grow to \$31.2 billion by 2024, according to Global Industry Analysts, a publisher of market research.

Products made outside the United States aren't subject to the same standards as U.S.-made ones and may contain poisonous chemicals, like mercury, or have higher proportions of potentially dangerous ingredients, such as steroids.

Skin-lightening products are advertised for their ability to even out blemishes and skin tone, but some consumers feel pressure to use them on their whole face or body in cultures that tend to confer more money and social status on people with lighter skin.

Nearly 40 percent of women surveyed in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Korea said they used skin lighteners, while 77 percent of women in Nigeria and 25 percent in Mali said they did so, according to the World Health Organization.

In the United States, potentially hazardous skin-lightening products can be purchased in some ethnic beauty stores, in ethnic supermarkets, and at swap meets. They can even be found online at sites like Amazon and eBay.

It's difficult to estimate how many people

have been affected by mercury poisoning from cosmetics because screening for the heavy metal isn't routine, said Tracey Woodruff, a professor of reproductive sciences at the University of California—San Francisco.

But the problem appears to be concentrated among certain ethnic groups. A recent Minnesota study measuring mercury in the urine of 396 pregnant women from 2015 to 2017 revealed that nine had elevated levels, mostly linked to skin-lightening product use among Hmong and Latina women. Ongoing testing is revealing even more cases, said Jessica Nelson, program director for the state's biomonitoring project.

Often, victims of poisoning get their spiked products from people they trust, Woodruff said.

Woodruff co-authored a report about a pregnant woman in San Francisco who had unusually high levels of mercury in her blood. The source was a jar of Pond's face cream that had been adulterated in the Mexican state of Michoacán.

"A family member gave it to her, so it was a trusted source of information," Woodruff said.

A 2013 study that sampled 367 skin-lightening products purchased in Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, and Phoenix turned up at least a dozen products with exceptionally high levels of mercury, ranging from 1,729 ppm to 38,535 ppm.

In the Sacramento woman's case, the contaminated face cream contained a methylmercury concentration of more than 12,000 ppm. The level of methylmercury in her blood was 2,630 micrograms per liter, according to Sacramento County Public Health. Normal values are less than 5.

While mercury removes skin pigmentation, the side effects are toxic.

It's unclear whether the FDA could have done anything to prevent her poisoning, said Melanie Benesh, legislative attorney for the Environmental Working Group, a nonprofit advocacy organization.

While the FDA has been able to intercept some high-mercury imports and turn them away, the agency lacks the authority to require companies to register their products and ingredients with the agency. That

ALL PHOTOS BY SHUTTERSTOCK

would make it easier to screen shipments that have a higher risk of being poisonous, Benesh said.

In a 2017 letter to Congress, the agency said it had six full-time inspectors to monitor 3 million cosmetics shipments annually.

"Right now, the FDA is really flying blind," she said.

So it's up to public health officials to catch poisoning cases as they happen and then trace their way back to the source.

In California, state public health officials are developing a campaign to educate shopkeepers and consumers. They also train volunteer community health workers like Sandra Garcia to meet with families to discuss the symptoms of mercury poisoning.

Garcia, who lives in Tulare County and picks and packs grapes for a living, estimates that she has purchased creams from 40 stores to send to public health officials for testing since March. And she has visited 60 homes to hand out brochures and help residents identify poisonous products.

"There are people that get angry and say that the cream is good and that nothing bad has happened to them," she said. "But the majority of people are frightened and give me their creams."

Leads on retailers that sell mercury-laced products may be handed over to law enforcement for potential follow-up, said California Department of Health spokesman Corey Egel.

Public health officials recommend consumers avoid buying cosmetics at swap meets and flea markets, and check that products are properly sealed and labeled. At a discount store near MacArthur Park in Los Angeles, shop worker Lili Garcia dismissed the notion that consumers should avoid skin creams manufactured abroad.

She sells unopened jars of Pond's Rejuveness cream from Mexico for \$5 and \$10, depending on the size, while Target lists U.S. versions for \$8 and \$15, respectively.

Garcia, who uses the same cream herself, said she had heard about the Sacramento woman on the news and felt sorry for her. But she said it's up to consumers to check that products are sealed; beyond that, there isn't much else they can do.

"Well, the buyer buys the product, and they don't know what's inside," she said.

Anna Almendrala is a correspondent who covers the business of health care and health care policy. This article was originally published on Kaiser Health News.



Lion's mane may be the first 'smart mushroom,' providing support specifically for cognitive function, including memory, attention, and creativity.



If You're Sweating the Small Stuff, You're Not Alone

Our mind gets caught up in trivial things, but understanding how this happens can free us



Take a moment to look at your thoughts and ask yourself if you aren't making a big deal out of something small.

BARRY BROWNSTEIN

Bailey Jean Matheson recently died of cancer at age 35, touching people all over the world by writing her own obituary. Matheson expressed gratitude for her loving family and friends and for her beautiful, but short, life.

She closed her obituary with this advice: "Don't take the small stuff so seriously and live a little."

Some will be transformed by her story. But what about the rest of us? Our resolve to approach the world with a lighter touch may carry us for a few days. Then the gravity of old entrenched mindsets takes hold, and we go right back to sweating the small stuff. Inspiration seems to have a short half-life.

Fortunately, there is a better way. Greater awareness of our mindset allows us to make permanent changes. The work of Nobel laureate in economics, Daniel Kahneman, along with others helps us see how sweating the small stuff leads us to make poor decisions that undermine our well-being.

Don't Sweat the Small Stuff

Like Matheson, psychologist Dr. Richard Carlson died young. Carlson's 10th book, the pop psychology mega best-seller, "Don't Sweat the Small Stuff ... and It's All Small Stuff," has perennial appeal.

Carlson's breezy style belies the sound principles behind his guidance. In his book, "You Can Feel Good Again," Carlson succinctly summarized one of the principles: Your thoughts always create your emotions.

In "Don't Sweat the Small Stuff With Your Family," Carlson elaborated. For a moment, remember the last time you felt dismayed at a mess in your home. Did you blame your partner or your children? Carlson writes:

"If we're having angry thoughts, we feel angry. If we're having resentful thoughts, we feel resentful ... Don't believe me? Just try to get angry right now without thinking about something that makes you angry! You can't do it. In fact, your feelings follow your thoughts just as surely as a lamb follows its mother."

In other words, you are 100 percent responsible for your emotions. No matter how messy your partner is, you couldn't feel angry without first indulging in angry thoughts about the mess.

One day, you are irritated by the small stuff—perhaps the dishwasher wasn't loaded correctly.

The next day, you adore your partner and feel like the luckiest person in the world. You might be convinced you are reacting to changes in your partner. What if you are really responding to changes in your thinking?

How We Supercharge the Small Stuff

Kahneman, in his book "Thinking, Fast and Slow," explains the mindset that causes us

No matter how messy your partner is, you couldn't feel angry without first indulging in angry thoughts about the mess.

Just because thoughts come to mind doesn't mean they are worthy of your attention.

to give our dysfunctional thinking such relevance. Kahneman points us to the focusing illusion: "Nothing in life is as important as you think it is while you are thinking about it."

How is your life going? "Any aspect of life to which attention is directed will loom large in a global evaluation," writes Kahneman.

In our search for happiness, we often focus on the small stuff because we think we need more of this and less of that. The research is clear: hedonic changes—a new car, a new house, etc.—in our life do little to increase happiness. Kahneman observes, "even permanent life circumstances have little effect on well-being."

Kahneman's work points us in a helpful direction. The more we are aware of what we choose to focus our thinking on, the more attention we can place on what we choose to experience. Instead of being trapped in thoughts about the small stuff, we have more capacity to experience life.

With awareness, we watch our thoughts drift to the past and the future. We notice how often we insist on carrying around grievances. Thoughts of an argument that happened last week are merely a memory we recreate via our thinking this moment. When our thinking is drifting to the past or future, simply noticing the drift can bring us back to the present. Being present, in a state of flow, vanquishes the small stuff.

Kahneman observes, "We all care intensely for the narrative of our own life and very much want it to be a good story, with a decent hero."

The "decent hero" doesn't emerge by allowing mental illusions to squander time.

When you catch yourself making a big deal over the small stuff, imagine a part of you is sitting in the audience, watching yourself act out on the stage. Hear yourself utter your tired grievances. Consider the trouble your grievances create for others. Then, smile and say, "Here I go again."

Ask, who is witnessing your antics? By asking that question, you have restored the power of choice to your mind. Your latest thought, as my UK friends might say, is probably rubbish and can safely be ignored. You are not that discordant, brash, incessant voice in your head demanding you pay attention to the small stuff.

When we sweat the small stuff, we are actively choosing against the best version of ourselves. We might find ourselves blaming society for the miserable choices we have made. When we free up our mental bandwidth, we might be surprised by what is possible. What we focus our thinking on determines our experience of life.

Barry Brownstein is professor emeritus of economics and leadership at the University of Baltimore. He is the author of "The Inner-Work of Leadership." To receive Barry's essays, subscribe at MindsetShifts.com. This article was originally published on FEE.org

When we don't understand how our thinking can work against us, miserable days stack up.

We can't change a mindset we're not aware of. As you become more aware, you may be surprised by the number of thought

storms you experience in a day. Since these storms are coming from you and not from the world, the only change possible is your willingness to restrain your grievances and thoughts of misery. Just because thoughts come to mind doesn't mean they are worthy of your attention.

Overcoming the Focusing Illusion

If you forget that you are wearing dark sunglasses at 6 p.m. on a summer day, you might believe the time is closer to 9 p.m. You can remove your sunglasses, or at least remind yourself that the glasses are giving you false information. Awareness is a powerful cure.

If we want to increase our well-being, Kahneman's work points us in a helpful direction. The more we are aware of what we choose to focus our thinking on, the more attention we can place on what we choose to experience. Instead of being trapped in thoughts about the small stuff, we have more capacity to experience life.

With awareness, we watch our thoughts drift to the past and the future. We notice how often we insist on carrying around grievances. Thoughts of an argument that happened last week are merely a memory we recreate via our thinking this moment. When our thinking is drifting to the past or future, simply noticing the drift can bring us back to the present. Being present, in a state of flow, vanquishes the small stuff.

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We can't change a mindset we're not aware of. As you become more aware, you may be surprised by the number of thought

JESS CHUA

I moved into a new home earlier this year. The water and electric utilities had been set up. The internet, however, was scheduled to be connected the following day.

For disclosure purposes, I don't own a smartphone. Living without a smartphone isn't as big of a deal to me as going without a Wi-Fi connection.

As a work-from-home writer, I've always considered high-speed internet to be a vital necessity. It keeps me connected to what's going on in the world and in my network. Above all, it allows me to have a location-independent career.

Since I knew I wasn't going to have internet access for a couple of days, a unique situation for me, I took steps to prepare my "offline" workload for those days.

I expected to feel antsy and out of sorts. In reality, I was pleasantly surprised to undergo a thoroughly different experience. Instead of feeling lost, I managed to get a lot done and felt a deep sense of calm and satisfaction at the end of the workday.

Here are some things I learned from having temporarily limited internet access:

1. Planning Doesn't Need to Be Complicated

My preparation for working offline included downloading the documents I needed onto a thumb drive. I packed my work laptop and charger the night before so I wouldn't need to rush or look for items in the morning. This helped me to start the day off on a refreshing and positive note.

2. Eliminating Distractions Is the Key to Sharpening Focus

I initially envisioned being irritated due to the lack of internet access, because my mind wouldn't be able to focus on anything else (which sounds like a classic case of withdrawal symptoms). However, I found my ability to focus was greatly enhanced in the absence of endless information.

Instead of obsessively researching and sifting through a plethora of data, I focused on each task at hand with undivided attention.

3. Technology Shouldn't Replace Nature

I sometimes listen to instrumental music while writing or blogging. The music depends on my mood. On this day without internet, I did my work to more natural sounds like birds chirping in the morning and leaves rustling in the afternoon breeze. During my lunch break, I watched some beautiful red cardinals and blue jays from my kitchen window.

Instead of getting caught up in digital news feeds and sensational headlines, I felt calmer observing and feeling connected to the natural world. We might tell ourselves that what's on a virtual screen "isn't real," but its effects on us certainly are real.

4. You Can Be Calm and Productive at the Same Time

I managed to check off the items on my to-do list with less mental stress than usual. Instead of trying to do too much while multitasking, I got what needed to

Instead of feeling lost, I managed to get a lot done and felt a deep sense of calm and satisfaction at the end of the workday.

I found my ability to focus was greatly enhanced in the absence of endless information.

be done by simplifying the day's routine and streamlining my efforts under technologically-limited circumstances.

If unplugging from the internet or other forms of technology is something you've never done before, the change from your daily routine can be scary to consider, but the rewards outweigh the risks. I'm almost ashamed to admit it took a delayed installer to open my eyes to it.

Thinking about dipping your toes into digital minimalism?

Try some of these tips to experience the benefits while limiting your reliance on technology.

Get organized. Set aside a bit of time in the morning for organizing your thoughts and goals. If you check your phone or somehow connect to technology within the first five minutes of waking up—stop. How you spend the first few minutes upon waking up has a big impact on the rest of your day.

Reduce distractions. Before the era of smartphones and social media, surfing the internet was mostly limited to using a desktop computer. Research has shown that smartphones may actually be rewiring our brains. Social media

alone could be costing some of us almost 50 hours per month.

Whether you choose to unfollow, mute, or resort to more drastic measures, like entering a phone rehab program, be mindful which of your digital notifications are more distraction than anything resembling helpful.

Appreciate nature every day. What are some of the things you like about nature? Maybe it's the sunrise, the seasons, or rainy weather that you've always felt drawn to. Simply observing nature often has a calming or humbling effect as it reminds us of the rhythm and continuity of life. Admiring the power and beauty of nature will make you feel more aware and connected to life away from a digital screen.

Prioritize rest. Trying to do too much at once often leaves us frazzled. Prioritize rest so you're able to improve your productivity levels. This means winding down at least thirty to sixty minutes before you head off to sleep. Not using your phone or computer during this time helps you optimize your sleep environment—and your health.

Ask yourself what you can do without. Going on a technology detox will help you think about what else you can give up. Apply this to different areas in your life. For example, things you could do without may include fear of missing out (FOMO), frivolous spending habits, a negative mindset, toxic colleagues, or a cluttered workstation. Think about how "less is more" in these areas, and take small steps toward making your desired life a reality.

Remember that there are many important reasons to unplug.

The last thing you want to do with your phone or digital devices is wonder how much of your life you've frittered away on mindless scrolling.

Be conscious of how you use technology and you'll find your quality of life improve in fascinating ways.

Jess Chua is passionate about *mindful living*. She writes and edits content for the *Optimal Living Daily Podcast*. This article was originally published on BecomingMinimalist.com



The Courage of Consistency

Only the really brave see the benefit of a routine or consistent practice

JAMES WALPOLE

The older I get, the more I realize how brave it is to show up and do the same thing week after week.

When I was younger, I had the impression that it was the pursuers of novelty and the unknown who were brave, and the "slaves of routine" were the ones who gave in to fear. Of course, this is often true.

But if a routine is challenging and important and worthwhile enough, things get flipped. It doesn't require all that much courage to flit to something new.

It does require courage to stay the course—particularly if you won't see the results for weeks, or months, or years.

When we commit to routines and then abandon them, I think it's not because we're inherently "undisciplined," but because we're afraid. We're afraid that all of our work will come to nothing—an already acute fear that becomes stronger when you talk about investments of weeks or months or years of work. We don't necessarily acknowledge this fear, so it can rise up to sabotage us in different ways—like our "lazy" habits.

Only the really brave see the culmination

of a routine or consistent practice, like those friends of mine who have written daily for hundreds of days, or those wise people who have saved and invested for years, or the men and women who have spent years pursuing sports or martial arts.

James Walpole is a writer, startup marketer, intellectual explorer, and perpetual apprentice. He is an alumnus of Praxis and a FEE Eugene S. Thorpe Fellow. He writes regularly at jameswalpole.com. This article was republished from FEE.org



Doing the same thing day after day takes the courage to invest without the encouragement of immediate results.

'Why Me?' Is the Wrong Question to Ask

Tragedy befalls us all, so get beyond your self-centered perspective and seek the bigger picture

TYLER BRANDT

Many times in life, I have asked myself, "Why me?" When experiencing tragedy and hardship in a world where it seems like you suffer more than others, this is an easy question to ask. It comes to the mind just as easy as basic arithmetic. However, after trying hard to understand, and not letting my ego get in the way of the truth, I realized the framing of this question inaccurate and pointless. Here's why:

Suffering is universal.

We all suffer in life. It's a brutal truism. Suffering at a young age, it can seem as if you are the only one who has experienced tragedy or misfortune. However, you have not lived long enough to fully understand the reality of the world.

Instead of asking a 12-year-old if he has suffered in life, try asking a 70-year-old, and the elder will certainly be of a different opinion. It seems unfair that people suffer at younger ages. Many people issue empathetic remarks such as, "He's too young to have experienced that." The sad truth is, this is just wishful thinking and not necessarily accordant with the laws of nature. Tragedy befalls us all at some point in life, so asking "Why me?" is a self-centered perspective that ignores the bigger picture.

A Change in Perspective

Understanding that suffering is universal, and not specific to yourself, you might approach the individual problem of suffering with a different question. Instead of asking "Why me?" a better question might be "Why not me yet?"

When we attune ourselves to the outer

world and realize the great feats of suffering others are put through, we develop empathy. Asking yourself this question will put you in a place of appreciation instead of harboring resentment toward the world.

There might come a day where you will be worse off, so you must appreciate what you have right now and not let it slip through your grasp.

You will see how many people are worse off than you. You will develop gratitude for the things you have rather than the things you lack. You might notice you have your health, a roof over your head, people who care about you, a stable support system, and access to quality food, among a litany of other blessings. After realizing this, you might be able to grasp the great concept of your suffering. You might say, "Yeah, life is tough, and what I'm going through sure isn't easy. But there are many other things I am grateful for in this world, and compared to other people, maybe I'm not as worse off as I once thought."

Suffering Is Relative

This is to not say your suffering is insignificant. As the Jewish psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl once said:

To draw an analogy: a man's suffering is similar to the behavior of a gas. If a certain quantity of gas is pumped

into an empty chamber, it will fill the chamber completely and evenly, no matter how big the chamber. Thus suffering completely fills the human soul and conscious mind, no matter whether the suffering is great or little. Therefore the "size" of human suffering is absolutely relative.

The thought experiment is intended to orient you more toward the outer world and gratitude rather than your inner laments. It reminds you that terrible things can happen to you, but as for right now, you have a lot to be thankful for. There might come a day where you will be worse off, so you must appreciate what you have right now and not let it slip through your grasp. Cherish each moment with people you care about. Enjoy the experiences life offers you, because there will be a time that each and every one of us experiences the full weight of the world.

So ask yourself, "Why not me yet?"

Tyler Brandt is an associate editor at FEE. He is a graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Madison with a bachelor's in political science. In college, Tyler was a FEE campus ambassador, president of his campus YAL chapter, and research intern at the Maclver Institute. This article was originally published on FEE.org



It's easy to get caught up in our own stories of woe, but take a moment and consider the lives of others in situations that are truly woeful.

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