

THE EPOCH TIMES

MIND & BODY

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Why We Need Purpose and How to Find It

A meaningful life is one of the best ways to ensure your health and prosperity **6**

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THE ROOT CAUSE

Natural Strategies for Insomnia

Lifestyle tips and herbal helpers to get you a good night’s rest

ARMEN NIKOGOSIAN

Insomnia and disrupted sleep are some of the most common complaints Americans present to their doctors. A recent study from the University of Pennsylvania determined that 25 percent of Americans will experience an acute episode of insomnia within the course of a year. A further 25 percent of that group will then proceed to develop chronic insomnia which may last for years and negatively affect health in many ways.

The importance of sleep is obvious to anyone who has ever missed a single night of slumber. While many aspects of our sleep architecture and phases are poorly understood, we have clearly established the role of sleep on the daily metabolic maintenance and detoxification our bodies require. These fundamental functions of the human body are needed to achieve optimal health and pull us away from the depths of disease.

Sleep aid medications have been available for decades but can come with undesirable side effects, most notably the cycle of dependence and withdrawal. Finding new and natural methods to recalibrate this important system and achieve sound sleep should be a top priority for all health-care practitioners.

Your Natural Rhythm

Circadian rhythm is arguably the most important bio-rhythm we possess. It is responsible for keeping us alert and awake during the day as well as relaxed and asleep during the night. This rhythm is controlled by the secretion of and interaction between melatonin and cortisol hormones. Melatonin dominates the relaxed/asleep/night hours and cortisol dominates the alert/awake/day hours.

Lifestyle Adjustments

Lifestyle habits can interfere with sleep. It is possible to improve sleep quality with some specific adjustments to the sleep environment also known as good sleep hygiene.

- **Meal timing.** Do not eat a full meal within 2-3 hours of going to bed. A gut full of food will force your body to redistribute resources to digestion when those resources are most needed for daily maintenance and detoxification.
- **Electromagnetic fields (EMF).** EMFs radiate from Wi-Fi routers, smartphones, cordless phone bases, outdoor cellular antennas and a disturbingly growing array of household appliances. Some easy interventions would be to place your phone in airplane mode at night

While there are many contributing factors for insomnia, disruption in the circadian rhythm is a leading cause. Due to their swift effect, prescription pharmaceuticals can be a tempting way to get a good night’s sleep. Many of these drugs, such as benzodiazepines like Valium and Xanax or hypnotics like Ambien, are sedatives that rapidly impact the brain’s GABA receptors to induce sleep. GABA is the primary calming neurotransmitter in the human brain and has a balancing effect on the activating neurotransmitter glutamate. A healthy circadian rhythm will support increased GABA production prior to going to sleep. Unfortunately, increased GABA production can be a strong force to some individuals and hence lead to tolerance, dependence and even addiction. In addition, the sleep produced from these agents does not replicate the natural sleep phases and architecture that is so important for restorative sleep. In the long term, this is not a solution for chronic insomnia.

Herbs and supplements

Combating insomnia and toning the circadian rhythm using herbs and supplements can be just as effective as pharmaceutical interventions but without some of the risks mentioned above. On the contrary, the use of many of these sleep aids will also provide side-benefits rather than side effects.

- Melatonin is a hormone that is effective in assisting the circadian rhythm balance by promoting relaxation to allow sleep to commence. Melatonin can be particularly effective for promoting sleep induction as well as treating jet lag.
- Valerian, or valerian root, is derived from the root of a flowering plant native to Eurasia. It acts as a sedative on the brain and can treat sleep disorders and anxiety. It functions by enhancing GABA and inhibiting glutamate sensitivity.
- Lemon balm, or Melissa officinalis, is an herb in the mint family that has calming effects through alterations in GABA levels. It is also known to have



(or better yet just turn it off and rest) as well as turning off your Wi-Fi router when going to sleep.

• **Light.** We evolved to wake up to a blue-white sky and fall asleep in the dark with an amber-red fire. Keep your bedroom dark. If outdoor streetlights are intrusive, try blackout curtains. The white-violet-blue end of the light spectrum suppresses melatonin production, allowing cortisol to remain high when it should be dropping. One of our largest exposures to white-blue light in the evening hours is a result of increased screen time. This includes both televisions and phones as well as other electronic screens. Screen time should be limited or filtered within three hours of bedtime. This melatonin suppression is not seen in the amber-red end of the light spectrum so if a night-light is preferred, find one which replicates the color of fire.

Your body has a natural cycle of sleep and wakefulness. When this gets interrupted, or regularly seems off, you may need to take measures to correct it.

ALEXANDRA GORN/UNSPLASH

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CANCER UP CLOSE

Waiting in Agony for My Tumor to Shrink

Doctors do their best to predict what will happen but they can’t help but be wrong sometimes

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 Gonçalves’s cancer journey from pre-diagnosis to life after treatment.

My first encounter in January 2018 with the radiation oncologist and colorectal surgeon who treated my stage 3 rectal cancer was overly optimistic to say the least.

Both doctors were almost guaranteeing I would see shrinking in the size of my large rectal tumor quite quickly. This was very important to me because the mass was almost blocking my entire colon and I could not go to the bathroom without using stool softener every day. I was in tremendous discomfort (always feeling an urge to go to the bathroom every 20 minutes or so) and I wanted to at least get some relief from that as soon as possible.

“It should start to shrink in a few days after you start radiation and chemo, and you will feel so much better once that happens” proclaimed the colorectal surgeon. “Are you serious?” I thought to myself. This sounded way too good to be true, since nothing of significance in the world of treating cancer happens in just a few days. But hey, what did I know? He was the medical professional after all. So, not taking him too seriously, I decided to tuck his statement in the back of my mind and see what the other doctor had to say.

“The typical response is to see a reduction in the tumor by week three during the five and a half weeks of radiation treatment” declared my radiation oncologist. Okay, this sounded much more realistic to me. Three weeks was still very quick, but it was much more believable than a few days.

Honestly, I didn’t know what to expect and what my ultra-sensitive body would do during the harsh exposure to radiation and chemo. So, I just followed the crazy yellow brick road that is cancer treatment, and held my breath hoping for a quick response.

Well, it turns out I didn’t get a quick response at all.

I can remember having my weekly



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Cancer comes with untold emotional burdens but talking can help alleviate some of that discomfort.

meeting every Tuesday with my radiation oncologist, and at week three telling him that I still didn’t feel any different. Even though I no longer saw blood in my stool (which was a good sign), I still had to drink a big glass of stool softener every night before bed in order to have at least one bowel movement a day.

He reassured me not to panic, and that every person responded differently, but I should feel relief from some shrinking soon. Well, unfortunately, we had the same conversation at week four and five, all the way up to my last dose of radiation.

I was completely freaking out at this point.

Did all of the pain and suffering I endured with chemo and radiation not work? Couldn’t they just go in and cut the darn tumor out? My head was swirling with all kinds of thoughts and I was getting very scared and upset.

Then on my very last day of radiation treatment, I went to see my oncologist’s patient assistant for the last time. She

had been monitoring my side effects to the chemo during the 28 courses of radiation.

I had a complete emotional breakdown in her office and explained (in between my sobbing of course) that my tumor hadn’t shrunk at all and I don’t think the radiation did anything for me. In her calm and soothing motherly voice, she told me something that gave me a little hope to cling on to.

She explained that my body was extremely inflamed from the radiation and chemo at this point. I needed to wait the mandatory 8-12 weeks to let all the swelling go down before they could even think of looking at my body again via CT scan or rectal exam to see what was going on with the tumor. She said that probably it has shrunk at least a tiny bit, but that the inflammation was not letting me see or feel these results.

I remember calming down and taking some deep breaths after this discussion. It made so much sense. After all, the last three radiation treatments I had were called “boosters,” which meant they were only pointing the beam directly onto the tumor, and not the surrounding lymph nodes, as they had done in all the other sessions. This must-have caused tremendous inflammation in there.

So, with a little more optimism, I went home and started my two-and-a-half month recovery period. At about three weeks in, I finally had a sign that the tumor had shrunk a little bit. One afternoon, out of nowhere, I noticed that I could pass a stool with no pushing or struggle.

Yippie! You have no idea how happy I felt at that moment. Finally, evidence the tumor growing in my rectum was dying off.

In fact, when I went back for my follow-

antiviral, antidepressant, antibacterial, anti-inflammatory, and antioxidants effects as well.

- L-theanine is an amino acid derived from tea leaves or mushrooms. It promotes relaxation via a complex interplay between GABA, serotonin, and dopamine.
- GABA is a non-essential amino acid found in the brain. Supplementing GABA levels helps induce sleep, relaxation and relieve anxiety.
- Ashwagandha is a prominent remedy used in Ayurvedic medicine. It helps alleviate insomnia by balancing cortisol levels.
- 5-HTP is an amino acid used to enhance serotonin levels in the body. Serotonin is a key neurotransmitter involved in REM sleep or dreaming.
- Chamomile tea is one of the most ancient medicinal herbs known to man. Although well known for its relaxation effects, it has also been shown to be beneficial for a variety of disorders ranging from the common cold to cancer.

A major but often overlooked cause of non-restorative sleep is obstructive sleep apnea. Once an underlying medical condition, like sleep apnea, has been ruled out, the best approach to treating insomnia would be to start with good sleep hygiene. If necessary, it could be followed by supplementation with natural agents. Medication can be considered in resistant cases of insomnia only after lifestyle modifications and natural agents have failed as well as a complete functional and conventional medicine evaluation has been completed.

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.



ALL IMAGES BY SHUTTERSTOCK

One of the best ways to heal your body is through a nutritious diet.

Antioxidant-rich foods like blueberries, citrus fruits, and nuts all support the liver in multiple ways.

Top Foods to Improve Your Liver Health

Support your liver so it can help fuel and detoxify your body

LISA RICHARDS

Though people rarely consider it, food is medicine. So one of the best ways to heal your body is through a nutritious diet. And because your liver is a critical organ for processing what you eat, it makes perfect sense to eat foods that support its health.

Caring for your liver is especially important when your gut is imbalanced. Your liver has to filter, process, and break down harmful compounds in the foods you eat, as well as toxins that are created in your gut by yeast or bacterial overgrowth. Alcohol, drugs, and environmental pollutants can take their toll on your liver too, causing it to become inefficient and sluggish.

Fortunately, there are plenty of foods that can protect your liver and help it function at its best by stimulating the production of glucose and bile. Antioxidant-rich foods also shield your liver from free radical harm, while other plant-based foods can help cleanse the liver by increasing its ability to flush toxins from the body.

Foods That May Harm Your Liver

First, a quick note about the foods to avoid if you're concerned about your liver health.

The obvious candidates are excessive alcohol and foods that are high in sugar. These have been repeatedly shown to cause long-term liver damage.

Your favorite bread might be a

bad choice too! Many breads and pastas are full of refined carbs that can contribute to fatty liver disease. Best to stick with whole grains.

Foods That Can Improve Your Liver Health

In the long-term, a healthy diet can help to maintain and improve your liver health. Let's take a look at the top nine liver-friendly foods.

Garlic

Garlic is a powerful medicine and almost a pharmacy in itself for treating a poorly-functioning liver. Garlic causes your liver to activate specific enzymes that stimulate detoxification, helping clear harmful toxins from the body.

Garlic also contains selenium, an important mineral and antioxidant. Selenium plays a role in activating the liver enzymes that keep your liver functioning optimally.

Garlic may even help to speed recovery from non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD). This chronic liver disease has become more common in recent decades. Studies have shown that garlic can reduce body weight and body fat mass, which significantly reduces the burden on the liver.

Citrus Fruits

Grapefruit, lemons, and limes are great for boosting the liver's cleansing powers. And a little goes a long way! Citrus has been found to help in the production of important detoxification enzymes, particularly ALT and AST.

A study on mice found that lemon juice was helpful to those with liver impairment. The mice were first given ethanol then treated with lemon juice, which was shown to raise their liver enzymes back to normal. This significantly improved the histopathological changes in their liver. It was also found that other harmful effects of the ethanol were reversed by the lemon juice, such as increased lipid

peroxidation and increased liver triglyceride levels.

It appears that other citrus fruits (grapefruit, oranges, lemons, and limes) are all excellent at improving liver function. This may be due to the variety of compounds including vitamin C, essential oils, pectin, and flavonoids. As an antioxidant, Vitamin C helps to prevent oxidative damage and lipid peroxidation, while pectin benefits the integrity of the gut lining.

Alcohol, drugs, and environmental pollutants can take their toll on your liver too, causing it to become inefficient and sluggish.

Cruciferous Vegetables and Leafy Greens

Eating vegetables was never so important. Cruciferous veggies such as broccoli and cauliflower are rich in glucosinolate, a compound that helps the liver to produce detoxifying enzymes. At the same time, the sulfur in these plants is great for supporting liver health.

Leafy greens such as spinach and kale are packed with chlorophyll, a powerful antioxidant. Chlorophyll helps to protect liver cells and other body tissues by increasing phase II biotransformation enzymes. These are the specific enzymes that work to optimize liver functioning and support your body's natural elimination of harmful toxins. Try to include salads in your diet wherever possible—they don't need to be boring or expensive.

A number of animal studies have found that chlorophyllin may even

reduce the risk for both liver cancer and aflatoxin-induced liver damage, thanks to its ability to increase these phase II enzymes. It's also believed that they play a part in neutralizing heavy metals that have entered the body.

Turmeric

One of the most important herbs of all, turmeric's liver-loving properties means that it is often included in liver tonics. As a potent antioxidant, turmeric helps to prevent oxidative damage to the liver and ward off free radicals.

Numerous studies have shown that the active ingredient in turmeric, curcumin, can help to eliminate lipid radicals in the cell membrane of the liver, making it a lipid-soluble antioxidant.

In addition, curcumin has anti-inflammatory and antifibrotic properties that protect the liver against damage. It can help to treat and prevent fatty liver, hepatic inflammation, alcoholic hepatitis (necrosis) and progressive alcoholic cirrhosis (fibrosis).

Blueberries

Of all the fruits, blueberries are perhaps the most beneficial for liver health.

Blueberries are packed with powerful plant compounds called phytonutrients which can help prevent urinary tract infections. They're also known for their anti-inflammatory properties and high vitamin C content, which helps to keep the capillaries and blood vessels of the liver healthy. Their fiber and potassium content also support normal liver function.

But most importantly, blueberries are an excellent source of anthocyanins, the particular type of antioxidants that make them blue.

Nuts

A fantastic source of the amino acid arginine, nuts are a perfect addition to almost any diet. They help the liver in clearing out toxins like ammonia, as well as boosting levels of glutathione and omega-3 fatty acids, which all support natural liver cleansing.

Nuts contain a blend of fatty acids, bioactive compounds, and essential nutrients. Although they have a high-fat content, most of this is from beneficial monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats.

Nuts are also rich in vitamin E, a valuable antioxidant. The phytochemicals and polyphenols in nuts are helpful in reducing low-density lipoprotein (bad cholesterol) concentrations and free radicals.

Beets

Bright red beets are rich in betaine, a compound that encourages liver health and can help to reverse fatty liver disease.

Betaine helps to defend the body's bile ducts which are vital for assisting in healthy digestion. Bile breaks down food in the stomach and keeps the liver functioning properly. By allowing bile to flow more freely, betaine supports the movement of food through the intestines and assists indigestion.

Beets also increase oxygen efficiency in the blood, which in turn helps the liver cleanse the blood of harmful toxins.

As a good source of vitamin C and fiber, beets can promote the natural cleansing of the digestive system and lighten the burden on the liver.

Green Tea

Green tea leaves are rich in catechins, a specific type of antioxidant known to boost liver function.

Green tea's particular catechins work to protect your body from harmful free radicals that are known to cause cellular damage and inflammation. They are especially beneficial for assisting liver function and have been found to

protect your liver from the damaging effects of toxic substances such as food chemicals and alcohol.

It's also been found that concentrated green tea extract can help to block the amount of fat stored in the liver. Studies on obese mice showed that daily ingestion of green tea prevented them from developing severe fatty liver disease. It also improved their liver function and reversed any decline in their antioxidant levels.

Although green tea contains a small amount of caffeine, it's possible to take caffeine-free green tea supplements to benefit your liver.

Garlic is powerful medicine and almost a pharmacy in itself for treating a poorly-functioning liver.

Anthocyanins are incredible antioxidants that have been shown to inhibit the growth of cancer cells in the liver. Cranberries are also a good source of anthocyanins.

Oily Fish

Fish such as salmon, sardines, and mackerel are some of your best sources of omega-3 fatty acids. These are the healthy fats that work to reduce inflammation and keep cholesterol levels in balance.

In this way, omega-3 has been found to help prevent "bad" fats from accumulating in the liver.

These bad fats are a major cause of fatty liver disease, which can be fatal.

Omega-3 fatty acids help normalize liver enzymes, reduce inflammation, and improve insulin resistance. Eating plenty of omega-3-rich foods is important for keeping omega-6 in balance. Many of us exceed our recommended intake of omega-6 fats, which are present in plant oils and tend to promote disease-causing inflammation. Too much omega-6 in the diet is a serious risk factor for the development of liver disease, so it just makes sense to eat as much oily fish as possible!

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

When Companies Fund Research, the Truth Often Comes Last

Researchers are being forced into a job market where their findings get buried if they expose dangers or problems

LISA BERO

This article is part of a series on academic freedom where leading academics from around the world write on the state of free speech and inquiry in their region.

Over the last two decades, industry funding for medical research has increased globally, while government and non-profit funding has decreased. By 2011, industry funding, compared to public sources, accounted for two-thirds of the medical research worldwide.

Research funding from other industries is increasing too, including food and beverage, chemical, mining, computer, and automobile companies. And as a result, academic freedom suffers.

Industry Sponsors Suppress Publication

An early career academic recently sought my advice about her industry-funded research. Under the funding contract—that was signed by her supervisor—she wouldn't be able to publish the results of her clinical trial.

Another researcher, a doctoral student, asked for help with her dissertation. Her work falls under the scope of her Ph.D. supervisor's research funding agreement with a company. This agreement prevented the publication of any work deemed commercial-in-confidence by the industry funder. So, she will not be allowed to submit the papers to fulfill her dissertation requirements.

I come across such stories often and they all have one thing in common. The blocked publications present the sponsoring companies' products in an unfavorable way. While the right to publish is a mainstay of academic freedom, research contracts often include clauses that give the funder the final say on whether the research can be published.

Early career researchers are particularly vulnerable to publication restrictions when companies fund their research. Scientific publication is vital to their career advancement, but their supervisors may control the research group's relationship with the industry.

Senior researchers can also be vulnerable to industry suppressing their research. In the 1980s, a pharmaceutical company

funded a researcher to compare their brand's thyroid drug to its generic counterparts. The researcher found the generics were as good as the branded products.

The funder then went to great lengths to suppress the publication of her findings, including taking legal action against her and her university.

And there is little institutional oversight. A 2018 study found that, among 127 academic institutions in the United States, only one-third required their faculty to submit research consulting agreements for review by the institution.

And 35 percent of academic institutions did not think it was necessary for the institution to review such agreements. When consulting agreements were reviewed, only 23 percent of academic institutions looked at publication rights. And only 19 percent looked for inappropriate confidentiality provisions, such as prohibiting communication about any aspect of the funded work.

Industry Sponsors Manipulate Evidence

The definition of academic freedom boils down to freedom of inquiry, investigation, research, expression, and publication (or dissemination).

Internal industry documents obtained through litigation have revealed many examples of industry sponsors influencing the design and conduct of research, as well as the partial publication of research where only findings favorable to the funder were published.

For instance, in 1981 an influential Japanese study showed an association between passive smoking and lung cancer. It concluded wives of heavy smokers had up to twice the risk of developing lung cancer as wives of non-smokers and that the risk was dose-related.

Tobacco companies then funded academic researchers to create a study that would refute these findings. The tobacco companies were involved in every step of the funded work but kept the extent of their involvement hidden for decades. They framed the research questions, designed the study, collected and provided data, and wrote the final publication.

This publication was used as "evidence" that tobacco smoke is not harmful. It concluded there



MOTORTION FILMS/SHUTTERSTOCK

Early career researchers are particularly vulnerable to publication restrictions when companies fund their research.

was no direct evidence passive smoke exposure increased the risk of lung cancer. The tobacco industry cited the study in government and regulatory documents to refute the independent data on the harms of passive smoking.

By 2011, industry funding, compared to public sources, accounted for two-thirds of medical research worldwide.

Industry Sponsors Influence Research Agendas

The biggest threat to academic freedom may be the influence industry funders have on the very first stage in the research process: establishing research agendas. This means industry sponsors get unprecedented control over the research questions that get studied.

We recently reviewed research studies that looked at corporate influence on the research agenda. We found industry funding drives researchers to study questions that aim to maximize benefits and minimize harms of their products, distract from independent research that is unfavorable, decrease regulation of their products, and support their legal and policy positions.

In another tobacco-related example, three tobacco companies created and funded the Center for Indoor Air Research that would conduct research to distract from evidence for the harms of second-hand smoke. Throughout the 1990s, this center funded dozens of research projects that suggested components of indoor air, such as carpet off-gases or dirty air filters, were more harmful than tobacco.

The sugar industry also attempted to shift the focus away from evidence showing an association between sugar and heart disease. It was only recently revealed that, in the 1960s, the sugar industry paid scientists at Harvard University to minimize the link between sugar and heart disease, and to shift the blame from sugar to fat as being responsible for the heart disease epidemic.

The paper's authors suggested many of today's dietary recommendations may have been largely shaped by the sugar industry. And some experts have since questioned whether such misinformation can have led to today's obesity crisis.

Coca-Cola and Mars have also funded university research on physical activity to divert attention away from the association of their products with obesity.

How Do We Protect Academic Freedom?

In a climate where relations between academia and industry are encouraged and industry funding for research continues

to grow, academics must guard against threats to academic freedom posed by industry support.

Academic freedom means industry funding must come with no strings attached. Researchers must ask themselves if accepting industry funding contributes to the mission of discovering new knowledge or to an industry research agenda aimed at increasing profits.

Governments or independent consortia of multiple funders, including government and industry, must ensure support for research that meets the needs of the public.

When research is supported by industry, funders should not dictate the design, conduct or publication of the research. Many universities have and enforce policies that prevent such restrictions, but this is not universal. Open science, including publication of protocols and data, can expose industry interference in research.

Scientists should never sign, or let their institution sign, an agreement that gives a funder power to prevent dissemination of their research findings. Universities and scientific journals must protect emerging researchers and support all academics in fending off industry influence and preserving academic freedom.

Lisa Bero is a chair professor at the University of Sydney in Australia. This article was originally published on The Conversation.

Is Honesty Playing a Role in That Nagging Cold?

MOHAN GARIKIPARITHI

Let's be honest here—we all lie a little bit. Just a little. For example, are you that tall, or are those heels? Do you really not have time to see your friend, or do you just not prioritize it? Did you really walk uphill both ways to school?

Research published in the Journal of Basic and Applied Psychology in 2012 indicates that when Americans are talking to each other, 60 percent tell at least one lie in a 10-minute conversation. It may not seem like a big deal. Extra detail here for effect, a simple excuse that doesn't harm anybody, or a way to avoid hurting somebody's feelings are all ways people lie to each other—often thinking it's for the greater good.

But those lies could lead to physical symptoms.

A study from researchers at Notre Dame University found that when participants were instructed to be completely honest—not even tell

“We found that the participants could purposefully and dramatically reduce their everyday lies, and that in turn was associated with significantly improved health.”

Anita Kelly, lead author



YURIISHEVTSOV/SHUTTERSTOCK

little white lies—they showed improvements in physical health.

Lead author Anita Kelly explained, "Recent evidence indicates Americans tell about 11 lies per week." She continued, "we found that the participants could purposefully and dramatically reduce their everyday lies, and that in turn was associated with significantly improved health."

The no-lie group took about five weeks to completely adjust, after which point their honesty led them to experience fewer symptoms like headaches, sore throat, dizziness, and nausea compared to control groups.

Keeping things bottled up can also add to stress, which can have more severe health effects

like increased inflammation and a higher risk for heart disease. Depending on the size of the lie, it could be very detrimental to mental and physical health.

So, if you've got some symptoms you can't kick, take a look at how many little lies you might be telling. Coming clean and saying what you really think might make you feel better, while potentially improving relationships too. It could take a little effort, but after a while, telling the truth could have some big-time health benefits.

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

Can We Make Curiosity Safe Again?

Online attacks can do much to stifle the simple quest for honest information

ANN TOMOKO ROSEN

“The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing.”
— Albert Einstein

Remember when there were no stupid questions? I miss those days.

Once upon a time, questions were welcomed, even if answers weren’t readily available. It was fun to venture a guess, pose a theory, challenge it and maybe learn a new thing or two. Curiosity ruled the day. Learning was fun, and being wrong was no big deal because it was how you might find the next good question. But things have changed.

Trying to understand complicated issues can be difficult work that requires patience, introspection, and sometimes humility.

These days curiosity is met with exasperation, ridicule, and even hostility. Fact-checking has replaced critical thinking, character assault and name-calling have replaced thoughtful discussion, and questioning conventional beliefs is considered offensive, unpatriotic, and potentially “dangerous.” We are told to leave the questions to the experts who are qualified to answer them. The science is settled. It’s a difficult world for those



of us with questions. I have so many of them. And the more someone tries to make a blanket assertion, the deeper I want to dig. Now more than ever, I empathize with the two- and three-year-olds forever asking “why?” And maybe I’m a little jealous—they seem to be the only ones who can get away with curiosity. We seem to have developed a rather strong cultural intolerance for uncertainty. The internet has spoiled us all with instant gratification in every flavor. “Answers” are readily available, and explanations are abundant. No need to think things through—all the reasoning is

Children gain much from their curiosity, but as adults, it can quickly lead us to public ridicule.

provided. Sure, there are studies and laws and amendments, but they are long and cumbersome, full of confusing language and tiresome statistics—better to let the media reduce them to entertaining sound bytes, memes, and bumper-sticker slogans. The big, important issues of the world are preprocessed into news “digests” that allow us to understand everything from medical science to global politics over our morning coffee. All we need to do is choose a “trusted source,” sponsored by our friendly, neighborhood multinational corporation, and we can wake up to our daily dose of “knowing.” It’s all very convenient and reassuring.

So it is very interesting then, to see how much energy goes into influencing our choices. Reputation and expertise have become cultural currency as we rely more and more heavily on others to curate our worldview. “Trusted sources” help us decide who to vote for and what legislation is necessary to keep us safe and healthy. And now, our legislators have teamed up with social media moguls to make sure we only get access to the “right” information by censoring “fake news” and “conspiracy theories” that might challenge our collective belief system. Our social media use is monitored to prevent us from sharing the

wrong ideas lest we inadvertently promote “self-harm.” Propaganda has even been legalized in the United States in case we need some additional prodding in the right direction. I’m trying to figure out how we got here.

I suppose I have to start by acknowledging my own quests for certainty. Trying to understand complicated issues can be difficult work that requires patience, introspection, and sometimes humility. I crave the satisfaction of reaching a conclusion (science tells us that we enjoy an endorphin rush once we do, whether that conclusion is “right” or “wrong”).

But I’ve also noticed another pattern: I never get to hold onto my certainty for very long. Not about most things anyway. Inevitably, I will find myself in a conversation with someone I respect and discover that they have some very different ideas than the ones I’ve determined to be “true.” It’s often an uncomfortable moment, and something always goes tight in the pit of my stomach.

It can be tempting to cling to what I know, ignoring new information or assigning narratives to make sense of differing perspectives. Writing off new ideas as absurd or naïve might allow me to remain secure in my knowledge, but I have been making a concerted effort to revisit my own beliefs and explore them further. And it’s been an education, the kind I suspect very few people are getting nowadays. Many conclusions don’t hold up well to rigorous questioning—and the more strongly held the belief, the more difficult it is to reconsider—but doing so is a critical part of the learning process. Without it, our thinking becomes stagnant. Once we settle on what we “know,” we stop thinking. And that doesn’t seem like an intelligent choice for anyone.

As satisfying as it can be to come to a thoughtful conclusion or have our personal beliefs validated, it is curiosity that drives our creativity and promotes the mental flexibility that is essential for problem-solving and, well, growing as human beings. So why would we outsource it or eliminate it? Are we that afraid of uncertainty? Are we that attached to being right? And is that even possible all the time? I don’t believe it is. British-American anthropologist Ashley Montagu coined the term “psychosclerosis,” which he described as the “hardening of the attitude which causes a person to cease dreaming, seeing, thinking and leading.” In his book, *Growing Young*, he warned against the ossification of our thinking in adulthood, which impairs the ability to wonder, explore, and learn new things. Many of us readily acknowledge that calcification and rigidity in our bodies are associated with aging and deterioration, but we have failed to make the connection when it comes to our thinking. And intellectualism hasn’t done us any favors to that end. Even the definition of science has been adjusted to abandon the merits of inquisitiveness: The primary definition in Merriam-webster.com now reads “the state of knowing; knowledge as distinguished from ignorance or misunderstanding.” On an institutional level, we’re being asked to settle on science. Flexibility is important. So it is troubling that scientific research confirms that the rigidity in our brains isn’t merely figurative. Primary familial brain calcifications, calcosinosis, and Fahr’s syndrome are conditions marked by abnormal accumulation of calcium in the brain tissue and are associated with numerous neurodegenerative conditions and a decline in cognitive function. And many of us, thanks in part to fluoride, will experience calcification of the pineal gland, which we rely on as an important link between our endocrine and neurological

Let’s find out what we have in common and begin to wonder again about what is possible.



systems. While the most recognized symptoms of pineal gland calcification are associated with sleep problems, mood disorders, and anxiety, the pineal gland is associated with what many think of as the “third eye” and hardening points to a shutting down of creativity, intuition, and access to higher states of consciousness. Not surprisingly, the risks of calcifications in the brain increase with age and inflammatory processes, and while symptoms vary depending on the size and location of the calcifications, the impact on brain function is decidedly negative. So how do we preserve brain function and promote neuroplasticity? With exercise, of course! As with every other organ, it is important that we promote circulation and keep our brains active. Healthy lifestyles and nutrition obviously play a role, but thinking and engaging our minds is important. Websites like BrainHQ and www.everydayhealth.com encourage the incorporation of brain exercises to keep our minds sharp. But what about curiosity? Somehow curiosity has been left behind, and I suspect it is at least partly because one sing-song childhood mantra has proven to be untrue. “Sticks and stones can break my bones, but names can never hurt me” couldn’t be more wrong in today’s social climate. Names, it turns out, can hurt us. Labeling has been effectively weaponized to dismiss, discredit, or even villainize those who challenge consensus or shine light where it isn’t appreciated. Some of these names can impact reputations and even careers. Ask the wrong question or float an idea that is outside of the mainstream narrative and you risk being called a “conspiracy theorist” or a “Russian spy.” Or maybe you question the necessity of mandated medicine and you’re an “anti-vaxxer.” Challenging mainstream assertions can make you anything from a misogynist to an anti-Semite or a homophobe, and the rush to judgment is often almost gleeful because it is a very effective way of shutting down a conversation. Shame is a powerful silencer. So is ridicule.

I can’t help noticing that it’s not so much anger, but rather the laughing emoji that regularly shows up when someone asks an inconvenient question on Facebook. How better to drive the point home that there are stupid questions after all and discourage people from asking them?

Unfortunately, silencing opposition fuels mistrust, misunderstanding, and division. So here we are. Divided we fall.

So perhaps it’s time to welcome curiosity back into our conversations. If we make it safe for people around us to express themselves, we’re all likely to reach a deeper understanding of why our world is the way it is right now. Maybe we’ll find agreement and maybe we won’t, but at least we can practice disagreeing in a more respectful way.

We can start by simply turning rhetorical questions into genuine ones. There are probably some great answers to questions like “How can a person believe that?” and “Who does she think she is?” if we ask them in earnest and are willing to listen.

Let’s find out what we have in common and begin to wonder again about what is possible. Let’s ask the questions so we can access some new solutions. We’re likely to discover that we’ve been mistaken about some things, but then we can learn.

We can survive being wrong, and we can forgive each other, too. Let’s dwell in the discomfort of uncertainty and build up a tolerance for it... because it’s not going anywhere any time soon. Let’s explore respect from other angles, because if we all do it, we’re likely to experience more of it for ourselves.

We can do this. We can have more difficult conversations and break down the calcifications in our hearts and minds. And it’s likely to benefit all of us. Come on, aren’t you curious?

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Why We Need Purpose and How to Find It

A meaningful life is one of the best ways to ensure your health and prosperity

CONAN MILNER

We all need to eat and sleep. We all want shelter and companionship. But once our basic survival needs are met, we also yearn to feel useful too. A sense of purpose may not seem essential to survival, but our physical health and mental well-being depend on it. In his bestselling book, “The End of Procrastination,” Petr Ludwig reports that our sense of purpose has a strong influence on both the quality and quantity of our lives. He points to several studies which show that the more purpose we have at work, and in life in general, the lower our risk of stroke and cardiovascular disease, and the better our relationships. “Our sense of purpose significantly influences our longevity,” Ludwig said. “There is research that shows that societies that don’t retire live much longer.” Consider, for example, the Japanese island of Okinawa. On average, Okinawans live about ten

Chasing selfish pursuits leaves us unfulfilled, like a drug addict chasing their next hit that will never satisfy their needs.

Andrew Selepak, a media professor at the University of Florida

Our sense of purpose significantly influences our longevity.



years longer than Americans. Researchers believe one reason behind this longevity is that when Okinawans grow old they’re more likely to be contributing members of society. “They have their ‘ikigai,’ the Japanese word for life-long purpose, and use their personal strengths to serve others,” Ludwig said. “Even as we age, we should continue to try to change the world.” Purpose influences our health because it is intimately tied to our happiness. It’s not the fleeting thrill that comes from ice cream or a new car, but genuine, my-life-feels-like-it’s-in-a-good-place kind of happiness that sustains our soul, and gives meaning to our lives. However, when this driving force starts to fade, our performance begins to falter. Without the motivation of purpose pushing us along, procrastination develops. Despair and depression soon follow.

Loss of Identity

When we lose our sense of purpose, our lives can fall apart. Kevin Bishop sees examples of it every day. His mission is to provide people who’ve lost their purpose with a path back to it. His method is music. Bishop directs a Connecticut street choir called Music Moves Hartford. All the singers are

people who face homelessness. The project was modeled off of similar groups in Dallas and Atlanta. Bishop’s group meets twice a week—once in a Hartford homeless shelter, and again in a room off a local soup kitchen. “It is very evident that a major reason for homelessness is the loss of purpose,” Bishop said. “Purpose creates motivation. In a world where it is easy to think everything is going wrong, purpose gives you a reason to get up and keep on living and working.” Singing in a choir may seem insignificant, but Bishop says the experience of having this one small purpose can help people without direction achieve something greater. He mentions one man who came to the soup kitchen rehearsal soon after his release from prison. He was quiet and distant at first, but his spirit began to shine over the course of a year in the choir. He eventually left the shelter and found a job. Today, he lives in his own apartment in a neighboring town, but he still stops by the rehearsal room when he gets a chance. “He doesn’t have the need to come to the soup kitchen anymore, but he still feels a part of the community,” Bishop said. A big reason why purpose is so important to our well-being is because it is essential to our identity. In normal social circles, people ask what you do and you have an answer: student, parent, a career, or something else you’re engaged in. But Bishop says the homeless don’t have that answer. He says that’s why fights often break out in this community over petty stuff. People are scared, angry,

and depressed because they don’t know who they are or what they’re good for. “In the choir they keep it in check, but outside of that you see where people feel like everyone is out to get them, or take something from them,” Bishop said. “A lot of these people are veterans. They are very quiet and then all of a sudden they will be lashing out in anger. You can tell they’re not in a good place.” Choir members, on the other hand, develop an identity they can be proud of. For the first time in a long time, they begin to feel like they’re somebody.

When you feel that you are owed, you don’t feel a purpose other than to collect.

John Graden, motivational speaker, self-empowerment author, and self-defense teacher

“It’s one thing they can point to and say, ‘I’m a singer. I’m a member of this group. I’m doing something and succeeding at something useful and fruitful,’” Bishop said. Obstacles to Purpose Most of the people Bishop works with once led normal, productive lives. So how did they lose their way? He sees three common themes: mental illness, addiction, and violence. “Something catastrophic happens and it causes the slow degradation. Then the depression sets in,” Bishop said. “These people have a purpose, but it’s temporarily hidden. They’ve lost the motivation, usually due to

more than one of those categories.” Even if we never face homelessness, we all face moments in our lives where we feel lost or without direction. Often, it’s because our roles end. We graduate or retire; our children grow up and move out. The purpose we once had either runs its course, or becomes obsolete. In these situations, where we’ve been stripped of a familiar identity, it’s hard to move on because it’s no longer clear who we are. Our ability to navigate most aspects of life typically improves with experience. But according to psychologist and author Dr. Noelle Nelson, when it comes to purpose, age can be a major obstacle. “When we were younger, finding a purpose was easier. We had kids to raise, and a career path to follow,” Nelson said. “But what happens when you retire from the work world, your family ends up on the other side of the country, or you didn’t have grandchildren despite your fondest hopes?” Nelson says that when you find yourself in this position, you have a choice: search for something that gives your life meaning, or resign yourself to boredom and stagnation. “Once you start deliberately exploring your options you will find something—or many things—that pique your interest,” Nelson said. “Then, get up, get out, and do it. View finding a new purpose as an adventure. That sense of adventure alone will draw you towards finding new meaning and a happy life.” Purpose is a personal thing, but we often look to others for guidance. A group or an individual who exhibits a strong sense of purpose can serve as inspiration. Ludwig believes successfully promoting purpose in the workplace often depends on the quality of leadership. “When managers are disconnected, how can they inspire their employees?” Ludwig said. “Many companies have their mission

statements or values written on their office walls, but the reality is that those are empty phrases that no one believes in. Finding a purpose starts with authentic personal values that are lived every day.” As a leader, Bishop says a major goal for him is to instill confidence. If his choir members can find their confidence, realizing their purpose isn’t far behind.

Petr Ludwig, author

Finding a purpose starts with authentic personal values that are lived every day.

“Music is something they can be successful at. They can get accolades for it. People applaud, and it helps build their confidence again,” Bishop said. But even with good role models and a space to build confidence, people still need to forge their own way. And those who hold a strong sense of entitlement never find the motivation to do so. Motivational speaker, self-empowerment author, and self-defense teacher John Graden says that people who feel like the world owes them something lack the ability to make something of their lives. “When you feel that you are owed, you don’t feel a purpose other than to collect,” Graden said. A sense of purpose is an innate calling that naturally dwells within each of us—we just have to listen for it. A sense of entitlement, on the other hand, is the result of mental programming. Both can color our outlook. We decide which one to cultivate. “That programming will stick until the person makes the conscious decision to reprogram their patterns of thought and behavior into a more purposeful life,” Graden said.

Living for Others

Having a purpose is crucial to our own well-being, but we realize it through serving others. According to Andrew Selepak, a media professor at the University of Florida, what we give beyond our selfish pursuits is what really makes our lives significant. “Humans are by nature communal, and communities only work when we do for others,” Selepak said. “When we lose this, we begin to not only lose our purpose but our reason for living.” Some dream of a perfect life as a permanent vacation, with no responsibilities to get in the way of our fun and leisure. But a life geared exclusively toward personal pleasure may not be as satisfying as it sounds. “Everyone likes a vacation now and then, or to just binge their favorite show. But we can’t spend all of our lives playing video games and watching TV,” Selepak said. “Chasing selfish pursuits leaves us unfulfilled, like a drug addict chasing their next hit that will never satisfy their needs.” For Bishop’s choir, it’s the public performances that give the project meaning, and give the singers a reason to do what they do. They perform primarily in Hartford—from neighborhood festivals to downtown events—but they recently booked several gigs outside the city. They’re preparing for a tour around the state where they will share the stage with a well-known singer-songwriter and a string quartet. “This is the first time we’re putting them on a bus, taking them out of Hartford, and taking them on a little tour,” Bishop said. “When we first started this program we were honestly concerned that people would have serious behavior problems, but we’ve never had an issue. People are very supportive and kind to each other. They really leave life at the door and just have fun.”



Greeting strangers as friends and sharing a generous disposition with them can change the world around you.

CONNECT TO LEAD

The Hospitality Mindset

A warm heart and open home can be a powerful way to get things done

SCOTT MANN

Recently, I was involved with a theatre production in New York. When the cast got off the plane, I was astounded at the amount of work that had gone into the readiness and the reception, for not only the cast, but the entire team. The volunteers had food set up and had transportation available on demand. In the entertainment world, divas and high performers expect that level of service, but that was not what this was; these were all volunteers. This was true hospitality. This was community influencers and leaders who understood the power of having a hospitality mindset in a high-stakes environment. They knew that if they showed the cast hospitality and really received them well, that they would perform better. It would elicit a sense of reciprocity and the cast, in turn, would want to do as much as they could for them. It's a very natural way of leadership, and it's essential to the "Lawrencian" (as in Lawrence of Arabia) skills that we talk about. Lawrence mobilized the entire Badu tribe to confederate and overthrow the city of Aqaba, the crown jewel of the Ottoman Turks, and this really turned the table in World War I; using, among other strategies, a hospitality mindset.

Understanding the power of hospitality has tremendous business impacts for those in the modern era, especially when you think about how distracted, disengaged, and depleted of trust our world is. While still in the military, I would go to places in Afghanistan that were completely trust depleted and violent, yet an elder would bring us into his home, give us his last quarter of meat, share his fire with us, tell us stories, and make us feel welcome. As a result of that, trust was accelerated and it demonstrated the elder's status and ability to take care of business. It's a powerful leadership tool that is rarely used today.

We are social creatures at our core but today some people seldom answer the door when someone knocks. We once routinely welcomed people in. Even unannounced visitors would expect a warm greeting. When we demonstrate hospitality in our life and business, it still elicits the same primal response that it did with our ancestors. The same hospitality that I experienced in Afghanistan is just as effective as the hospitality I witnessed with the theatre production in New York. It's just as effective in your office. It's just as effective when you use hospitality to land a second meeting. Hospitality elicits connection and reciprocity. Recently, my wife and I went to a wedding. The hospitality that they showed us, the way they made us feel, and the perceived sense of safety and trust is something I have never seen before at a wedding. I hate weddings, but the hospitality was so genuine that I felt a primal connection to the whole experience. So where in your life have you seen it? Has it been at a restaurant? Has it been at someone else's office? Where have you seen hospitality and what made it so possible? What did it make you feel? Evaluate hospitality in your life. Look at your business, nonprofit, and office. Are you showing hospitality to your clients? Are you showing hospitality on your sales call or are you just being transactional? Are you showing hospitality when your people come in to talk to you at the office? If you're running events or workshops, how are you treating the participants? If you're selling online products, what's their experience like? Is there someone working hospitality? In your own home, how do your kids' friends feel when they come in? Do you stand up and shake their hand? Do you welcome them into your home or do you just kind of nod at them while you keep working on your laptop? How we treat people in our life and business determines how they will treat us, how they will think about us, and how they will perform when we're not looking.

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



Students have changed dramatically since these medical students toiled in the library of St Thomas's Hospital in 1886.

Better Than Self-Esteem Is Reality-Esteem

Hayek offers a correction to the failed self-esteem paradigm and the damage it has caused

BARRY BROWNSTEIN

The idea that raising self-esteem and confidence will raise performance... is something that people want to believe.

Many people want to build their self-esteem and confidence. A Google search reveals more than 500 million entries on confidence-building, while self-help books and scholarly articles abound. An influential bestseller by Harvard professor Amy Cuddy, "Presence: Bringing Your Boldest Self to Your Biggest Challenges," was on lists of best business books in 2015 and 2016. If you believe Cuddy's research, standing in a "power pose" leads to confidence and improved performance. However, her research failed to replicate, and one of her co-authors admits the study data was manipulated.

Still, Cuddy's book sells well. The idea that raising self-esteem and confidence will raise performance and help an individual attain his or her professional and personal goals is something that people want to believe. Since 1966, the American Freshman Survey has tracked the attitudes of first-year college students. Over time, there has been a dramatic increase in the percentage of freshmen seeing themselves as above average or even gifted, even as measured abilities have gone down. Students' self-reported "drive to succeed" has gone up, as the time students spend studying has gone down. Among students, narcissism has increased while performance has declined. Researchers, led by famed psy-

chologist Roy Baumeister, conducted an extensive review of scholarly literature to examine links between self-esteem and academic and job performance. Little evidence was found to support the idea that increasing self-esteem is the pathway to success. Are interpersonal relationships strengthened by higher levels of self-esteem? Again researchers say no. "People with high self-esteem claim to be more popular and socially skilled than others, but objective measures generally fail to confirm this and in some cases point in the opposite direction ... People who have elevated or inflated views of themselves tend to alienate others," they write.

Continued on Page 10

THE EPOCH TIMES

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Aidan Gabriel is currently a psychology student at the University of California-Los Angeles and an intern for the Greater Good Science Center. This article was originally published in the Greater Good online magazine.

BECOMING MINIMALIST

Too Busy Not to Minimize

Possessions require cleaning, repair, storage and time you could be using elsewhere

JOSHUA BECKER

Excess possessions rob us of time, money, energy, and focus. As the old proverb goes, “Those who buy what they do not need steal from themselves.” Additionally, excess possessions add stress, worry, and burden. As Randy Alcorn writes, “Every increased possession adds increased anxiety onto our lives.” Our lives have become busy, hurried, rushed, and stressed partly because we own too much stuff. Consider this: Never in human history have individuals owned as much stuff as they do today. There is freedom in owning less—if only we could catch our breath long enough to take hold of it. Some of us have become so busy

pursuing, accumulating, and caring for our things, we can’t even find the time to remove those that are no longer needed. How long has your basement been filled with boxes? How long have the shelves in your garage needed sorting? Or the clothes in your closet needed to be gone through? On one hand, I can see it. Minimizing possessions takes work (especially if you have a lot to begin with). It takes effort and energy and an investment of time. And if both parents are working jobs to make ends meet, finding extra time to own less can be tough. It can be hard enough to minimize just one room of a house—much less an entire home. On the other hand, it is essential we find the time to reclaim our lives. Consider these three truths:

1. Any time invested in minimizing your possessions is never wasted Not only is it not wasted time, it is time multiplied back to you. There’s an old quote from Abraham Lincoln that goes like this, “Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening the ax.” When we invest minutes removing unnecessary possessions from our homes, we receive an hour on the backend of less cleaning and tidying and organizing and maintaining. And the sooner we get started, the better. The sooner we free up our lives to live the one we want, the longer we get to live it!
2. Don’t waste the rest of your life decluttering Sure, you can commit 5 or 10 minutes a day to your minimalism journey. But as Zoë Kim says, “Do you re-

Our lives have become busy, hurried, rushed, and stressed partly because we own too much stuff.

ally want to spend the rest of your life decluttering?” The better investment is to set aside intentional time, as soon as possible, to remove as many possessions as you can, as early as you can, so you can begin enjoying the benefits of owning less as quickly as possible.

3. Your life is too valuable to waste caring for things you don’t need Joy, happiness, and fulfillment are found in the invisible things of life: love, hope, peace, and relationships. They are not on sale at your local department store. Stop looking for them there. People who live their lives in pursuit of possessions are never content. Our lives are too important. Don’t sacrifice your important role in this world by settling for possessions that can be purchased with a credit card. If you’re feeling rushed and stressed and overly-busy, creating the time to minimize your possessions is your first step in the right direction.

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](#).



MARINA OSHTUTTERSTOCK

Green in Cities Gives Mental Health a Boost

New approach can factor the benefits of nature more fully into city planning

MICHELLE MA

A new framework for how city planners can measure the mental health benefits of nature could help incorporate those benefits into plans and policies for cities and their residents. Almost 1 in 5 adults in the United States lives with a mental illness. That statistic is similar worldwide, with an estimated 450 million people currently dealing with a mental or neurological disorder. Of those, only about a third seek treatment. Experts are starting to recognize interacting with nature as one way to improve mental health. A number of scientific studies have shown that nature experiences may benefit people’s psychological well-being and cognitive function. But it has been difficult to find ways to quantify these benefits in a useful manner for cities or organizations that want to integrate nature to improve mental health.



JACOB LUND/SHUTTERSTOCK

But these actions don’t usually directly factor in the mental health benefits that trees or a restored park might provide. “We have entered the urban century, with two-thirds of humanity projected to be living in cities by 2050. At the same time, there is an awakening underway today, to the many values of nature and the risks and costs of its loss,” Daily says. “This new work can help inform investments in livability and sustainability of the world’s cities.” The researchers built a conceptual model that can help make meaningful, informed decisions about environmental projects and how they may impact mental health. It includes four steps for planners to consider:

1. Elements of nature included in a project, say at a school or across the whole city
2. The amount of contact people will have with nature
3. How people interact with nature
4. How people may benefit from those interactions, based on the latest scientific evidence

4 Steps for City Planners

The study outlines how city planners, landscape architects, developers, and others could eventually anticipate the mental health impacts of decisions related to the environment.

For millennia, many different cultures, traditions, and religious and spiritual practices have spoken directly to our deep relationship with nature.

Greg Bratman, an assistant professor at the University of Washington School of Environmental and Forest Sciences and lead author of the paper in *Science Advances*.

Many governments already consider this with regard to other aspects of human health. For example, trees planted in cities improve air quality or reduce urban heat island effects, and parks built in specific neighborhoods encourage physical activity.

We have entered the urban century, with two-thirds of humanity projected to be living in cities by 2050.

Gretchen Daily, faculty director at the Stanford University Natural Capital Project

“Thinking about the direct mental health benefits that nature contact provides is important to take into account when planning how to conserve nature and integrate it into our cities,” says Greg Bratman, an assistant professor at the University of Washington School of Environmental and Forest Sciences and lead author of the paper in *Science Advances*. “The purpose of this paper is to provide a conceptual model of one way we can start to think about doing this.”

Greater Happiness, Less Distress The researchers first step was to establish a baseline, a collective agreement regarding the understanding of the impacts of nature experience on aspects of cognitive functioning, emotional well-being, and other

dimensions of mental health. “In hundreds of studies, nature experience is associated with increased happiness, social engagement, and manageability of life tasks, and decreased mental distress,” says senior author Gretchen Daily, faculty director at the Stanford University Natural Capital Project. “In addition, nature experience is linked to improved cognitive functioning, memory and attention, imagination and creativity, and children’s school performance. These links span many dimensions of human experience, and include a greater sense of meaning and purpose in life.” While this line of study is still emerging, experts agree that nature can reduce risk factors for some types of mental illnesses and improve psychological well-being. They also agree that opportunities for nature experiences are dwindling for many people around the world because of urban growth. “For millennia, many different cultures, traditions, and religious and spiritual practices have spoken directly to our deep relationship with nature. And more recently, using other sets of tools from psychology, public health, landscape architecture, and medicine, evidence has been steadily gathering in this emerging, interdisciplinary field,” Bratman says.

Why Prescribing Xanax May Make Your Doctor Uncomfortable

Benzodiazepines are to anxiety what opioids are to pain—and that’s a prescription for addiction

ARASH JAVANBAKHT

As an academic psychiatrist who treats people with anxiety and trauma, I often hear questions about benzodiazepines and receive referrals for patients who are on these medications and reluctant to discontinue them. There has been rising attention toward the long-term risks of benzodiazepines, including the potential for addiction, overdose, and cognitive impairment. The overdose death rate among patients receiving both benzodiazepines and opioids is 10 times higher than those only receiving opioids, and benzo misuse is a serious concern.

What Are Benzodiazepines? Benzodiazepines are a class of anti-anxiety medications, or anxiolytics, that increases the activity of the gamma-aminobutyric acid receptors in the brain. GABA is a neurotransmitter, a molecule that helps brain cells, or neurons, communicate with each other. GABA receptors are widely available across the brain, and benzodiazepines work to reduce anxiety by enhancing GABA inhibitory function. The benzo family includes diazepam or Valium; clonazepam, or Klonopin; lorazepam, or Ativan; chlordiazepoxide, or Librium; and the one most commonly known to the pop culture, alprazolam, or Xanax, among others. Different benzos have similar effects, but they differ in strength, how long it takes for them to work, and half-life, a measure of how long the drug stays in your system. For example, while diazepam has a half-life of up to 48 hours, the half-life of alprazolam can be as short as six hours. This is important, as a shorter half-life is linked with higher potential for addiction and dependence. That is one reason physicians typically aren’t excited about prescribing Xanax for long periods of time.

When Are They Used? Benzos were introduced to the market in the 1950s and were considered a safer alternative to the barbiturates then used to treat anxiety. By the 1970s, ben-



MONKEY BUSINESS IMAGES/SHUTTERSTOCK

Benzos are mainly used to treat anxiety disorders, such as phobias, panic disorder, and generalized anxiety disorder.

zos were among the most highly prescribed medications. Benzos are mainly used to treat anxiety disorders, such as phobias, panic disorder, and generalized anxiety disorder. They are mostly used for a short period at the beginning of the treatment. That is because it may take a few weeks for the main pharmacological treatment for anxiety—antidepressants—to kick in. During that time, if anxiety is severe and debilitating, benzodiazepines may be prescribed for temporary use. Benzos are also prescribed for occasional situations of high anxiety, such as that caused by phobias. The main treatment of phobias, such as excessive fear of animals, places, and social interactions, is psychotherapy. Sometimes, however, phobias can interfere with one’s functioning just sporadically, and the person may not be interested in investing in therapy. For example, a person with a fear of flying who may fly on a plane once or twice a year may choose to take a benzo before flying. However, for a businessman or woman who flies several times a month, psychotherapy is recommended. Benzos may also be used for situations of short-term stress, such as a stressful job interview. Benzos are also used for other medical conditions, such as treatment of seizures or alcohol withdrawal in the hospital.

There is no good evidence for the use of benzos for post-traumatic stress disorder. **So Why the Worry?** Doctors have a Hippocratic oath to “first do no harm.” A major risk of long-term use of benzos is addiction. That means you may become dependent on these meds and must keep increasing the dose to get the same effect. Actually benzos, especially Xanax, have street value because of the pleasant feeling they induce. In 2017, there were more than 11,000 deaths involving benzos alone or with other drugs, and in 2015, a fifth of those who died of opioid overdose also had benzos in their blood. Benzos are to anxiety what opioids are to pain. They both are mostly for short-term use, have a potential for addiction, and aren’t a cure. Benzo overdose, especially when mixed with alcohol or opioids, may lead to slowed breathing and potentially death. Benzo misuse can also lead to a lack of restraint of aggressive or impulsive behavior. As benzos are sedating medications, they also increase the risk of accidents and falls, especially in the elderly. This is worse when they are mixed with other central nervous system suppressants like alcohol or opioids. Recently, we have been learn-

ing more about the potential cognitive, memory, and psychomotor impairment in the long-term use of benzodiazepines, especially in older adults. Cognitive functions impacted may include processing speed and learning among others. Such effects may persist even after ending long-term use of the benzos. Stopping benzos abruptly, especially a high dosage, can cause withdrawal symptoms, such as restlessness, irritability, insomnia, muscle tension, blurred vision, and a racing heart. Withdrawal from high doses of benzos, especially those that are shorter-acting, may be dangerous and can lead to seizure. Getting off of these medications should be done under the supervision of a physician.

Safer Options Abound There are safer effective treatments for anxiety, but they require patience to work. The first-line treatment for anxiety disorders is psychotherapy, mainly cognitive behavioral therapy. During therapy, the person learns more adaptive coping skills and corrects cognitive distortions to reduce stress. Exposure therapy is an effective treatment for phobias, social phobia, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder. During exposure therapy, the person is gradually exposed to the feared situation under the guidance of the therapist, until the situation doesn’t create anxiety anymore. Importantly, the skills learned during therapy can always be used, allowing a better long-term outcome compared to medications. Medications are also used for the treatment of anxiety disorders. The main group of such medications is selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors, commonly known as antidepressants. Examples of such medications are fluoxetine, sertraline, and citalopram. Especially when combined with psychotherapy, these medications are effective and are safer options than benzos, and without risk of addiction.

Arash Javanbakht is an assistant professor of psychiatry at Wayne State University. This article was originally published on *The Conversation*.

Low on Energy? Habits to Help You Wake Up Energized

MAT LECOMPTTE

We all have those days when it seems like getting up-and-at-it is an insurmountable challenge. But if it’s a routine feeling, then something’s got to change. Sluggishness in the morning can translate to less energy throughout the day and an inability to ever really get going and feel your best. In order to boost morning energy levels, start looking at time on a weekly basis instead of a daily one. Days fluctuate, and you’re not going to feel the same each time a new one rolls around. Looking at the bigger picture allows you to incorporate sustainable habits and routines that feed into each other to help reduce fatigue and offer more useful hours throughout each day. Exercising daily is one thing you can do to wake up energized. This doesn’t mean you have to exercise in the morning or even go to the gym—although there is research to suggest a morning walk works better than a cup of coffee. Exercising at any point during the day—and exercise can be walking, gardening, doing chores—leads to better sleep and an overall reduction in fatigue. Eating a light dinner is another way to maximize morning energy. There’s research

suggesting that eating a large breakfast, moderate lunch, and light dinner might encourage a host of benefits. Big dinners can be hard to digest and keep you up later, while light dinners featuring easily digestible foods such as vegetables and fruits help you prepare for sleep. A morning routine is another way to encourage energized mornings. Having something to look forward to, or add structure, to the early part of your day can really help things get moving. Whether it’s taking time to read or knit, or taking a shower and a shave, having things on the docket in the early hours can help you wake up with some pep in your step. Lastly, listen to your body. Sure, you may look at the clock every night and see 10:30 and think, “It’s time for bed.” But it doesn’t always mean it’s time for sleep. Yes, it’s a good habit to go bed at the same time each night, but if you’re not tired, don’t try to force yourself to sleep. Read, knit, meditate, or do something until you’re tired enough to close your eyes and escape to dreamland.

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

In order to boost morning energy levels, start looking at time on a weekly basis instead of a daily one.



BROUWERTSTOCK



Snacking: A Modern Habit Rife With Problems

Snacking could be pushing your waistline out and putting your health at risk

RUTH WHITESIDE

Cakes, biscuits, and energy bars are, for many people, just staples of everyday life—the snacks that keep them going through the day. But most people don't realize just how easy it is to over-consume calories while snacking. Women are advised to consume 2,000 calories a day and men 2,500. And the United Kingdom's National Health Service suggests aiming to have a balance of 400 calories for breakfast, 600 calories for lunch and 600 calories for the evening meal—leaving the remainder for drinks and healthy snacks. But research from the UK's Behavior Insight Team, also known unofficially as the “Nudge Unit,” found that adults may be consuming an average of 3,000 calories a day without realizing it, partly due to snacking. This is particularly significant given the rise in obesity in children and the fact that 64 percent of young people snack outside of mealtimes—with the majority of these snacks being high in fat, sugar, and salt.

Snack Attack
According to a recent paper, there are many reasons why people snack. It could be down to hunger and the need to eat, or more “distracted eating”—eating too much food while playing a game or watching TV. Many people also eat out of habit or association, such as

But most people don't realize just how easy it is to over-consume calories while snacking.

at the cinema or when meeting a friend for coffee and cake. The wide range of snacks available to shoppers is now evident in all outlets—in shops, transport hubs, and vending machines. But rarely are these snacks of the healthy variety—think snack bars, chips, and chocolate. And these can often tip daily calories into excess without people realizing—which can lead to weight gain. But rather than banning snacking on public transport altogether—as has recently been suggested by former chief medical officer Dame Sally Davies—food labeling, education, and “choice architecture” (this is the way food is displayed to enable healthier choices) should be implemented more widely to help nudge people in the right direction. This is important, because generally if people are hungry, they eat what's there. So providing healthy options at an affordable price should help people make better choices. Indeed, when it comes to eating healthily, the British Nutrition Foundation also recommends that people plan ahead and rethink their portion sizes in a bid to cut out excessive eating.

Feeling Peckish
Snacking today is just a normal part of eating for many. Indeed, the food industry has lured people into believing they cannot sustain themselves without the input of several hundred calories between meals—and

a whole “snack” industry has been established. Eating habits have drastically changed over the years—with people now more likely to eat out while consuming less home-cooked food. According to the National Food Survey, in the 1950s, most households didn't eat out—compare this with survey results from 1983, by which time most people ate three meals a week outside their home. Today, traditional family meals have been largely replaced by meals in front of the TV. Home cooking has also declined and been replaced by ready meals. People now also eat out more often, regularly order take-out, and they snack between meals. Combine this with a food industry that's selling for the benefit of the industry and not the health of the individual, and it's not surprising that unhealthy food culture and snacking is now seen as normal. But small swaps can make a big difference in overall calories. So next time you're peckish, consider an alternative—a banana, a small handful of nuts, or plain low-fat yogurt and fruit. All of which will fill you up and provide nutrients, rather than the added sugar and fat you don't need in your diet.

Ruth Whiteside is a senior lecturer in public health nutrition at Sheffield Hallam University in the UK. This article was originally published on *The Conversation*.

FOOD IS MEDICINE

Preventing Ear Infections With Proper Nutrition

There are foods that help our immune system and others that work against it

LISA ROTH COLLINS

Ear infections are the most common pediatric complaint today. Most children will have had at least one ear infection by the time they reach 5 years of age. Ear infections are often a difficult experience for both children who have to endure the pain as well as parents who have to watch their children suffer. The good news for all involved is that the incidence of ear infections can be significantly reduced, if not avoided entirely, by adopting certain nutritional and lifestyle habits. By taking a proactive approach to ear infections, parents can save their children a lot of grief while also strengthening their immune-defense capabilities.

Breastfeed
Babies and toddlers who are breast-fed suffer from far fewer ear infections than their formula-fed peers. Breast milk contains antibodies that coat the mucosa of the respiratory tract and protect the baby by fighting off harmful bacteria. Breast-feeding exclusively for six months, and then continuing to breastfeed alongside solids for as long as possible, will help to minimize the risk of developing ear infections.

Remove Allergens
Because allergens create inflam-



Most children will have had at least one ear infection by the time they reach 5 years of age.

mation, they can be linked with ear infections. If the Eustachian tube (a connection from the nose to the ear) becomes inflamed, there is a greater likelihood the tube will lock in fluids and become the perfect breeding ground for bacteria that cause these infections. Therefore, it is important to uncover any food or environmental allergens to try to minimize the occurrence of inflammation. Common food allergens are dairy, wheat, soy, nuts, corn, citrus, beef, and chocolate.

Limit Dairy
If your child is prone to ear infections, you may want to consider removing dairy from their diet. Because dairy is mucous form-

ing, it can create congestion in the Eustachian tube, creating a prime environment for bacterial infection. Many parents have been able to eliminate chronic ear infections through this one change alone.

Avoid Sugar
When sugar is consumed, it reduces the immune response by inhibiting white blood cell activity. White blood cells are essential because they help fight off dangerous bacteria and viruses that cause infections. By avoiding or at least limiting the amount of sugar your child eats, you can help to ensure that their immune system is at its strongest.

Deal With Colds Promptly
To avoid ear infections, it is best to address colds immediately. Since colds often lead to ear infections, it is wise to try to prevent them, as well as reducing their severity. Children should eat a high-nutrient diet rich in vitamins C and A, as well as zinc and omega-3s. It is also important to minimize sugar and refined grains and to wash hands frequently.

Probiotics
Numerous studies in the last decade, such as one published in the British Medical Journal, have confirmed that adding a probiotics supplement to a child's diet can

help reduce the frequency of ear infections. Probiotics are good bacteria that help boost the immune function of the body. They are very safe and can even be given to infants. You can find probiotics in the refrigerated section of certain stores, and be sure to store them in the fridge, to maintain the effectiveness of the product. Probiotics are also found in fermented foods.

Bottle-Feed Upright
If you are feeding baby with a bottle, it's important to remember to always feed them in an upright position. Because of the angle of the Eustachian tube, milk or formula can get lodged in this tube and subsequently lead to ear infections. Although there is no surefire way to completely avoid the possibility of ear infections, implementing the above strategies can certainly assist in minimizing their occurrence. It makes sense that if we work with the body's own defense system and maximize its effectiveness, we can boost its ability to fight off the harmful bacteria that lead to ear infections.

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



Cacao was often reserved only for the very wealthy or very ill and was known for centuries as the 'Food of the Gods.'

Powerful Health Benefits of Cacao

Chocolate's source seed is a modern obsession and an ancient medicine

GREENMEDINFO

Cacao is a powerful medicinal substance used since ancient times with a growing body of research affirming its health benefits.

Raw cacao powder has recently gained popularity among health food enthusiasts, but cacao concoctions have been used as a therapeutic measure against a variety of illnesses as early as 600 B.C. Because of its costly nature, cacao was often reserved only for the very wealthy or very ill and was known for centuries as the “food of the gods.” It wasn't until recent years, however, that modern scientific researchers began to seriously consider the use of cacao as a medicinal substance with powerful and proven health benefits. Now, there is a growing body of evidence supporting many of the health claims of traditional cacao usage.

Cacao is made by cold-pressing raw seeds from the Theobroma Cacao tree. Cocoa powder, a similar product, is made by fermenting and roasting raw cacao. Both cacao and cocoa have similar health benefits and are high in cocoa flavanols, a specific kind of plant-based nutrient with multiple health benefits. However, studies have found that the roasting process used to make cocoa powder may remove a significant portion of these flavanols and therefore reduce the potential health benefits of cocoa powder. Until processing methods can be optimized to retain maximum nutritional value, raw cacao powder may be a more nutritious food than cocoa powder. Here are six evidence-based reasons to include more cacao or cocoa powder in your diet:

1. Reduced Risk of Cardiometabolic Disorders

Studies have shown an association between chocolate consumption and a reduction in the risk of heart failure and cardiovascular disease. Dietary intervention trials showed cocoa flavanols (present in raw cacao and dark chocolate) to have strong vascular effects, including improved blood pressure and platelet function. These results suggest that the

regular consumption of cacao or chocolate products containing flavanols may reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease.

2. Rich Source of Antioxidants

Cacao seeds are a rich source of antioxidants, especially compared to most other antioxidant-rich foods. In one study, it was reported that “cocoa-based products contribute a greater proportion of the dietary intake of phenolic antioxidants than do green tea, wine, soya beans, and blueberries, which are known antioxidant-rich food products and beverages.” Despite a loss of antioxidants during roasting and fermentation processes, cocoa powder also contains up to 50 milligrams of polyphenols per gram, a much higher amount than the antioxidant levels found in most foods.

3. May Reduce Inflammation

Multiple studies on cocoa consumption involving subjects with coronary heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, and other diseases related to chronic inflammation showed that a “consumption of flavanol-rich cocoa may reduce inflammation, probably by reduced activation of monocytes and neutrophils. This may prevent or even reduce vascular inflammation.” Other research similarly found that cocoa flavanols could be used as a possible preventative measure against diseases linked to inflammation and further supported the anti-inflammatory effect of cacao.

4. Lowered Risk of Diabetes

In a 2019 study published in *Nutrients*, the authors note: “Besides the antioxidant, anti-inflammatory and hypolipidemic effects demonstrated by cacao flavanols, publications have emphasized their potential benefits in reducing hypergly-

cemia, insulin resistance, and diabetes.” Further studies showed that consistent supplementation with cacao lowered the glycemic levels and improved insulin sensitivity and glucose tolerance, reducing the risk of Type 2 diabetes.

5. Improves Cognitive Function

Research has linked the consumption of cocoa flavanols with improved mental performance. This may be due to the increased cerebral blood flow caused by cocoa flavanols. Additionally, flavanoids found in cacao protect neurons from oxidative damage and may play a role in the regulation of oxidative stress, one of the main causes of decreased cognitive function. In another study involving aging rats, flavonoids preserved cognitive ability, lowering the risk for stroke and Alzheimer's disease.

6. Potential Anti-Cancer Properties

Cacao seeds may have anti-cancer properties thanks to their potent antioxidant quality. Cancer is characterized as the uncontrollable dividing of abnormal cells that invade and interfere with the functioning of healthy tissue in the body. Cacao has been shown to have antimitotic (inhibiting cell division) effects, making it a potential preventative measure to fight abnormal cell growth. Additionally, the flavonoids present in cacao “appear to be effective as anti-cancer agents.”

How to Safely Add Cacao to Your Diet:
While cacao is a wonderful compound that can be safely used at home, it's important to note that most chocolate products contain added ingredients that may outweigh any health benefits, and over-

Even Former Presidents Fall Down

Jimmy Carter recovering from fall, a common problem facing older Americans

MAT LECOMPTÉ

On Oct. 21, former President Jimmy Carter fell at his home, resulting in a slight pelvic fracture. Carter, 95, is the oldest living president and is reportedly recovering well in hospital.

Falls can affect anybody, but older Americans are at increased risk. For example, reports are that Carter has fallen twice this month. And although you may not be 95 or falling with the same frequency, it's something you should be thinking about.

There are several factors that contribute to falls. It could be an existing medical condition like diabetes, heart disease, or thyroid problems. These conditions can impact blood circulation that leads to dizziness, or be side effects



Falls become more likely as we age, but we can protect ourselves with a fall prevention plan.

of medications used to treat them. Balance and falls can also be influenced by eyesight, hearing, or slower reflexes. Or your senses just might not be what they used to be.

Other causes include muscle weakness, poor posture, compromised balance, and even standing up too fast from a seated position. As you can see, there are a lot of things working against you. But can you protect yourself? You bet you can. As you might have noticed, some of the causes of falls result from illnesses that we already know how to treat. Managing blood pressure, blood sugar, and staying active are all part of a fall prevention plan.

In addition to those factors, you can also do things like get your vision and hearing tested. Finding ways to maintain vision and lower the risk of age-related eye diseases like cataracts and AMD can help. Eating food with vitamin E and antioxidants can help, especially items like sweet

potato, bell peppers, and leafy green veggies. If you need new glasses, get them.

Taking your time to stand up slowly and being aware of your surroundings is another way to limit the risk of falling. Maintaining clear pathways in your home and limiting potential obstructions can also help, as can performing agility and balance-exercises. Yoga and Tai-chi may help.

Falls are a risky part of aging but aren't guaranteed. Limit your chance of a potentially devastating fall by taking care of yourself, managing existing conditions, and making your home a safe space.

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

What You Can Do to Keep Your Kids Safe From Pesticides

Children need special protection from pesticides due to their developing brains and bodies

PATTI VERBANAS

Children appear most at risk for pesticide exposure, but how can we keep them safe? One expert has some answers. Studies show that exposure to pesticides—specifically those containing chlorpyrifos, which attacks an insect’s nervous system—can harm a child’s physical and mental development. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey detected chlorpyrifos in 96 percent of children sampled nationwide, with those ages 6 to 11 having concentrations higher than adults.

A child’s brain development is most vulnerable in utero through early childhood.

Nancy Fiedler, a professor at the Rutgers University School of Public Health and deputy director of the Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences Institute, who is studying how pesticide exposure affects fetuses in each trimester of pregnancy, says it is unknown exactly when children are the most vulnerable, but says there is no question that most children—even those who live outside of agricultural areas where pesticides are

sprayed—are at risk. Here, Fiedler, who researches the effects of neurotoxicants, including pesticides, on human brain function and development, explains how children get exposed and what parents can do to keep them safe: **QUESTION:** Who is most at risk for exposure to chlorpyrifos? **NANCY FIEDLER:** A child’s brain development is most vulnerable in utero through early childhood. Such young children do not have the same ability to detoxify chemicals as adults. If a pregnant mother ingests or breathes in the chemical, it can cross through the placenta and affect the fetus. This is of particular concern for pregnant women who work in agriculture and for children who are exposed to the chemical residues on foods that are sprayed, like fruits and vegetables, and in drinking water.

QUESTION: How can exposure affect development? **FIEDLER:** Studies have shown that babies exposed to chlorpyrifos before birth are at risk for developmental conditions, including low birth weight, lower mental and motor development, and lower intelligence. Studies also have shown increased risks for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and autism. Moreover, these risks persist into middle childhood, resulting in lower overall cognitive ability. Exposures to chlorpyrifos as well as other organophosphate pesticides is greater in low- and middle-income countries, such

as Thailand, where we are currently conducting a birth cohort study. This study will help provide greater specificity about potential windows of vulnerability during pregnancy and the impact on neurodevelopment. Early measurement of the infant’s neural integrity at birth and the building blocks of attention and memory in infancy will help determine how pesticides may affect the trajectory of neurodevelopmental skills needed for performance in school and beyond.

QUESTION: How can parents reduce children’s exposure to pesticides? **FIEDLER:** It is not safe for pregnant women to work

where pesticides are sprayed. Families whose apartments and homes are sprayed can start by asking the building manager about the company it uses, how it is licensed, and what products are sprayed. Even though companies say you can reenter your home a few hours after the application, there is good evidence that the chemicals are still present. It’s best to wait at least a day, if you can, before returning home. Families with young kids should put away or remove items that they might touch or put in their mouth, especially stuffed animals, which can be

coated by the chemical for days. Carpets, which likewise can collect chemicals, should be removed if possible. Parents should wash all produce, including those with peels you do not eat, thoroughly by soaking it in water then scrubbing it. Also, wash your hands after touching fruit with thick skins like oranges and bananas so you do not contaminate the washed produce after peeling.

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