

# THE EPOCH TIMES

# MIND & BODY

A little playfulness  
goes a long way  
toward a more  
enjoyable work life.

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## How a Little Humor Can Improve Your Work Life

Laughter, jokes can make  
us happier and more  
productive on the job **2**

Metal in Baby Food:  
Study Finds

95

Percent Contain  
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# How a Little Humor Can Improve Your Work Life

Laughter, jokes can make us happier  
and more productive on the job

JESSICA LINDSEY

ork may seem like a serious place, but, according to research, introducing some laughter into work life can contribute to our well-being and productivity.

In fact, finding humor is one of the practices we teach students in the Greater Good Science Center's online Foundations of Happiness at Work course. The funny stories that participants share remind us that a little playfulness goes a long way toward a more enjoyable work life.

Humor creates an atmosphere of levity and a sense of perspective that can dissolve tension and, in turn, protect us from stress at work and even benefit our health. Research suggests that people who engage in more conversational humor with colleagues feel happier and have higher job satisfaction.

Laughter serves to create and strengthen social bonds, which may explain why colleagues who laugh more together tend to enjoy a more safe or comfortable environment and a greater sense of cohesion among teams.

"When friends laugh ... in unison, their fight-flight response (e.g., increased blood pressure) is calmed and mirror neurons fire," the Greater Good Science Center's director, Dacher Keltner, said. "Shared laughter becomes a collective experience, one of coordinated action, cooperative physiology, and the establishing of common ground."

**How to Find the Humor at Work**

One way to get more out of the funny moments that happen at work is by writing them down. A 2016 study found that participants who journaled about three funny things every evening for a week felt less depressed immediately afterward, and happier up to six months later, compared to a group who journaled about their early memories.

**People who engage in more conversational humor with colleagues feel happier and have higher job satisfaction.**

In the Foundations of Happiness at Work course, we asked people to try this out. We took a close look at their responses to see what they found funny at work. While some funny moments are out of our control—from pen ink leaking onto our work clothes to accidentally hitting "reply all"—most funny moments can be created with a little bit of practice.

Often, they come from making jokes related to everyday work life. Melissa from Oregon wrote: "My coworker and I were getting ready to step out for a cup of coffee, and she grabbed a huge Big-Gulp-sized mug. We both erupted into laughter because it wasn't that far-fetched at how much we both needed that much coffee."

We can also get more creative and integrate humor into work tasks. Leif-Arne from Norway shared: "The HR department had made their own rap during a leadership gathering. That was quite funny, and it helped loosen up the whole gathering."

Even when work is stressful, finding humor in the situation (if we're able to) can help. Mariëlle from the Netherlands wrote: "I was talking to a colleague about how much time the local government took to decide whether they wanted me to lead a project about shortening waiting times in youth care. Kind of funny it took them so long to decide, considering the subject of the matter. To complain and joke a bit about it made waiting for their final call less of a burden. It places things in perspective."

Of course, humor isn't always called

“Shared laughter becomes a collective experience, one of coordinated action, cooperative physiology, and the establishing of common ground.”

Dacher Keltner,  
Greater Good Science Center

for—particularly if it's a distraction from our tasks (as Jim Halpert's from "The Office" is) or keeps us from seeing and addressing real problems at work. But in many situations, sharing jokes with colleagues and finding humor in the chaos or the mundane can make work a little more fun.

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

RELATIONSHIPS

What Do You Say to an Insecure Spouse?

Simple question could transform your romantic relationship

JOANNE WOOD & KASSANDRA CORTES

LOVING an insecure person can be frustrating. You always feel like you have to offer praise or reassurance. Not only can that be exhausting, but in trying to do what you think is helpful, you might actually be making matters worse.

When people with insecurities hear something good about themselves, they tend to doubt or even dismiss it, as much research shows. This means, quite perplexingly, that hearing positive feedback can often raise their anxieties, because it may clash with the more pessimistic views they hold of themselves.

Insecure people may wonder whether their partner truly knows

Fly Under Their Insecure Radar

To determine our research participants' level of security and trust in their partners' love, we gave them a questionnaire assessing how confident they were that their partners love them, are committed to them, and will be responsive to them in times of need. Another questionnaire tapped into their relationship satisfaction.

In two studies, we found that the satisfaction reported by those who usually felt more insecure in their relationships actually increased when their partners asked them

Showing genuine interest is special.

about their day.

For people higher in security, who were already high in relationship satisfaction, being asked "How was your day?" was rarely the boost that it was for people lower in security.

Why is asking "How was your day?" effective? We anticipated that this expression of interest, if it is genuine, signals caring.

To test the idea, we conducted another study. Participants read a scenario in which a couple, Mike and Sarah, had a pleasant, brief conversation after Sarah arrived home from work. Participants in one group read that during that conversation, Mike asked Sarah about her day. Participants in a second group weren't given this detail.

Those who read that Mike asked Sarah about her day predicted that Sarah felt more cared for than participants who weren't given this detail. The benefit didn't derive from Sarah describing her day; when participants read a scenario about Sarah describing her day, even though Mike hadn't asked, participants thought Sarah wouldn't feel as cared for as when Mike asked her directly.

We suspect that this care

signal works especially well for people low in security because it is subtle and non-threatening. It doesn't make them question why a partner is asking or whether they deserve it. Thus, asking about a partner's day may fly under the insecure person's radar.

Curiosity More Effective Than Praise

There is nothing special about the four words "How was your day?" Rather, showing genuine interest is special.

In a final study, we brought 162 romantic couples (undergraduates or from the community, between 17 and 47 years of age) into the laboratory and separated them, ostensibly to work on different tasks.

We led participants to believe that their partner had written a note to them. In one group, the partners simply described their own experiences, whereas in the other group, partners described their own experiences, but also asked, "How did your task go? Did you enjoy it?"

Partners lower in security who received the note that asked about their experiences felt more cared for by their partners than those who weren't asked. In contrast, for people higher in security, being asked didn't matter. We suspect that people high in security don't need the signal of interest to feel valued.

We're not suggesting you should stop praising your insecure partner altogether. The complete absence of praise could be harmful, especially if your partner asks for praise or reassurance. But praise may not accomplish what you

When people with insecurities hear something good about themselves, they tend to doubt or even dismiss it.

Joanne Wood is a professor of psychology at the University of Waterloo in Canada, and Cassandra Cortes is an assistant professor at Lazaridis School of Business and Economics, Wilfrid Laurier University in Canada. This article was originally published on The Conversation.



## BECOMING MINIMALIST

# It's OK to Be Happy With a Quiet Life

Keeping busy can fill our days with the rush of 'being productive' but could rob us of something deeper

BRIAN GARDNER

"Sometimes you need to sit lonely on the floor in a quiet room in order to hear your own voice and not let it drown in the noise of others." —Charlotte Eriksson

We live in a world where busyness is king. We're so busy glorifying how busy we are, we miss out on experiencing the moments that matter. And while we're so busy making a living, we forget to make life—which is quite tragic.

Here's a sobering truth: Busyness crushes our soul, and we should focus more on reducing the number of things on our calendar than adding to it.

The key to removing busyness is simple—live intentionally, and identify areas in our life we can replace with quiet time. After all, the white space is where the magic happens. And who isn't down for a little magic?

**Comparison Is the Thief of Joy**

"Envy is ever joined with the comparing of a man's self; and where there is no comparison, no envy." —Sir Francis Bacon

When we compare ourselves to others, we set ourselves up to add "more" into our life. More money, more cars, more houses, and more stuff. We fall victim to the old adage of "keeping up with the Joneses," which prevents us from living the life we really want to live.

The problem is that we typically compare our "worst" to their "best," which really paints a bleak picture.

As Joshua Becker writes: "Too many people live their lives without intentionality or thought. They rarely find a quiet moment to sit in meditation or solitude and examine their life—who they are and who they are becoming."

We should stop comparing our lives, and start living them.

**The Importance of a Quiet Life**

"Almost everything will work again if you unplug it for a few minutes, including you." —Anne Lamott

Many of us, including me, suffer from FOMO—the fear of missing out. We're simply afraid if we don't take up that project, don't sign up for that committee, or don't enroll our kids in that sport, we'll miss out on something.

We think there is happiness to be had, joy to be experienced, and moments to be made. Yes, there might be some truth to this, but who's to say the moments of solitude or quiet time won't

measure up—or even exceed those altogether?

I love what Katrina Kenison shares in her essay, "Why You Must Have Time Alone":

"In solitude, we see more clearly. Alone—in moments of prayer or meditation, or simply in stillness—we breathe more deeply, see more fully, hear more keenly. We notice more, and in the process, we return to what is sacred."

Do yourself a favor and reclaim margin in your life. It might make a world of difference and bring you happiness. Because you are worthy of it.

**Why Minimalism Is the Answer**

"I am pursuing minimalism. I know this to be true. I want less, and I want simplicity, and I want to spend my days connecting and caring, not consuming and completing." —Erin Loechner

I don't know about you, but that sounds appealing to me. Isn't this the kind of life you



When we compare ourselves to others, we set ourselves up to add "more" into our life.

want to live? It's definitely the kind of life I want to live.

Minimalism doesn't have to be about living in a tiny house with only a few shirts in your closet. Minimalism is about paring down and focusing on the things that are important—or as Marie Kondo says, the ones that bring us joy.

Here's how Joshua Fields Millburn and Ryan Nicodemus describe minimalism:

"Minimalism is a tool that can assist you in finding freedom. Freedom from fear. Freedom from worry. Freedom from overwhelm. Freedom from guilt. Freedom from depression. Freedom from the trappings of the consumer culture we've built our lives around. Real freedom."

I believe we all want to incorporate some level of minimalism into our life, and experience the freedom that Joshua and Ryan talk about. And it's important for us to know there isn't a "right" or "wrong" way to do it.

Annie Dillard says, "How we spend our days is how we spend our lives."

It starts with the decision to live more intentionally and to make quiet time a priority. Each day is just as important as the next in creating the life we imagine.

**Experience the Quiet Life**

Here's the bottom line: It is not selfish to want time for yourself.

It is not selfish to want moments in which you can leave the world behind, and recapture the magic. I encourage you today to find one—just one—area in your life that you can make a change. Take one small step toward a quiet life.

So turn it off. Put it down. Do not open it. And do not answer it.

For once, put yourself first. Love yourself, and make yourself a priority. Even for just one day, you deserve everything. Every part of the life you are after.

Brian Gardner is the creative director and operations at BecomingMinimalist.com, which first published this article.



INHALING TOXINS

# Cigarettes Versus Vaping Is ‘Wrong Comparison,’ Says Researcher

Cigarettes are the most toxic consumer product available, but vaping isn’t necessarily a solution

CARMEN HEREDIA RODRIGUEZ

**I**lona Jaspers initially approached the outbreak of vaping-related illnesses with a clinical curiosity.

As an inhalation toxicologist at the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill, Jaspers has for nearly 20 years studied the health effects of many substances that can be inhaled. Seven of those years involved researching e-cigarettes. She had been following cases of patients with symptoms similar to those seen in the outbreak through academic articles since 2016.

Her academic detachment shattered, however, this summer when she received word about the first vaping-related death. For Jaspers, who has two children, that was a “game-changer.”

“It’s different when you sort of read about it in the literature and in a more anonymized way rather than seeing [teens on respirators] on TV,” she said. “It was just a little bit personal.”

Since then, Jaspers has written an editorial about potential dangers associated with vaping. She believes the common notion of comparing e-cigarettes with traditional, combustible cigarettes is an off-kilter analogy because the vaping products expose consumers to chemicals in a fundamentally different way.

Carmen Heredia Rodriguez of Kaiser Health News recently spoke with Jaspers about her research. This transcript has been edited for length and clarity.

**Q: You argue that people jumped the gun in terms of thinking that e-cigarettes are safer than regular cigarettes. Are they wrong and why?**

A: I always say that was the wrong comparison to begin with. There isn’t really—at least not to my knowledge—any consumer product that if used according to its instructions is more toxic than cigarettes. Period. So finding something that is more unsafe than cigarettes I think would be hard to do just because of where we are with the toxicity of cigarettes.

When you think about cigarettes, you are looking at the inhalation of a mixture that’s caused by combusting tobacco plants and other chemicals within. Whereas in e-cigarettes, you are aerosolizing in a liquid. By definition, that’s a very different exposure. Would you compare cigarettes to smoking crack? No, we don’t. Because we know they’re very different from the get-go.

**Q: You talked about how some of the ingredients in e-liquids can turn into toxic chemicals when vaped. What are those chemicals?**

A: The vast majority of these vaping products contain what we refer to as base compounds. That’s propylene glycol and vegetable glycerin. And when that’s heated to a certain temperature, it actu-

ally forms things like acrolein, formaldehyde, acid aldehydes. These are all chemicals that we know are toxic when inhaled. Just because it’s not there in the base liquid doesn’t mean your lungs will not eventually be exposed to it.

**Q: The e-cigarette Juul has gotten a lot of scrutiny in part because of its popularity among youth. How is it different from previous versions of e-cigarettes?**

A: This is where it gets a little complicated. Regular nicotine in a cigarette comes in the form of free base. That’s actually very irritating to the back of your throat. So, you can only take in a limited amount.

What Juul did is basically use a nicotine salt in a form of benzoic acid. So, they reduced the pH to something that’s much more neutral—much more tolerable to someone who’s never been a smoker. Juul found a way to make the nicotine much more palatable and, as a consequence, they jacked up the nicotine concentration.

**Q: Many of the lung injuries being reported by federal health officials have been associated with people who were vaping THC, the psychoactive ingredient in marijuana. But you note in your recent editorial that traditional marijuana has not led to any of these injuries. Is the difference in the way THC**

**is consumed part of the problem?**

A: Possibly. I think some of the things that are now under review are these sort of bootlegged THC products that probably have contaminants in there like vitamin E and some other oils and maybe even pesticides. So, all of this is highlighting a bigger problem that none of this is truly rigorously regulated.

“**What was not done in the beginning was actually backing up the statement that [vaping products] are safe—or safer—with real controlled studies.**”

*Ilona Jaspers, inhalation toxicologist at the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill*

It’s unfortunate that it took this outbreak to really highlight that problem, but it’s expediting the studies and hopefully some regulation. It’s not going to be one chemical causing all of these hospitalizations. It’s not going to be that simple.

**Q: Do you agree with some federal and**

**state officials who are calling for a ban on vaping products?**

A: There are certain flavoring compounds that should never be contained in any e-liquid. We know they’re dangerous. We know they cause irritation. We know they cause toxicity. They should not be allowed in any e-cigarette, in any flavored vaping device or vaping product.

But we need to get this [outbreak] under control first. What was not done in the beginning was actually backing up the statement that [vaping products] are safe—or safer—with real controlled studies. So, let’s back up.

**Q: What are the lessons that can be learned by the scientific community and society at large about this outbreak?**

A: Keep an open mind to things that are unexpected. People got caught off guard here. If there’s a new something out there, really take a careful look at it.

The other thing is that we need to educate all of our health care providers to ask the right questions. When you ask a 16-year-old who uses Juul, “Do you use nicotine or tobacco products,” they’re going to say, “No.” Because that’s not the language they use. They Juul.

*Carmen Heredia Rodriguez is a health care reporter for Kaiser Health News, which first published this article.*



Comparing e-cigarettes with traditional, combustible cigarettes is an off-kilter analogy because the vaping products expose consumers to chemicals in a fundamentally different way.

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MARCOS MESA SAM WORDLEY/SHUTTERSTOCK

INHALING TOXINS

## Tobacco Smoking Linked With Risk of Developing Depression and Schizophrenia

New study affirms causal relationship that links cigarette smoking to devastating mental illnesses

MAT LECOMPTÉ

Research has shown that smoking tobacco is more common among people with mental illness, especially depression and schizophrenia. However, until now, there has been no evidence for cause-and-effect

and in which direction. A new study published in Psychological Medicine poses the question, does mental illness increase the likelihood of smoking, or is smoking itself a risk factor for mental illness?

The study led by the University of Bristol’s Tobacco and Alcohol Re-

search Group with support from the University of Bristol’s MRC Integrative Epidemiology Unit and the NIHR Bristol Biomedical Research Centre has found that smoking tobacco may increase risk of developing depression and schizophrenia.

For the study, researchers used UK Biobank data from 462,690 individuals of European ancestry, comprised of 8 percent current smokers and 22 percent former smokers. Participants were treated with an analytic approach called Mendelian randomization. This approach uses genetic variants associated with an exposure to support stronger conclusions about cause-and-effect relationships. It was found that smoking tobacco increased the risk of schizophrenia and depression. However, it was also noted that the two mental disorders also increase the likelihood of smoking.

**Bipolar Disorder**

The study adds to a growing body

of work suggesting that smoking can have adverse effects on mental health. The same group of researchers from this study had published a similar study in the British Journal of Psychiatry earlier this year that showed evidence that tobacco can increase the risk of bipolar disorder.

Dr. Robyn Wootton, a senior research associate in the School of Experimental Psychology and the study’s lead author, spoke about the study. “Our work shows that we should be making every effort to prevent smoking initiation and encourage smoking cessation because of the consequences of mental health as well as physical health.”

Marcus Munafò, professor of biological psychology in Bristol’s School of Psychological Science and senior author on the study added: “The increasing availability of genetic data in large studies, together with the identification of genetic variants associated with a range of behaviors and health out-

comes, is transforming our ability to use techniques such as Mendelian randomization to understand causal pathways. What this shows is that genetic studies can tell us as much about environmental influences—in this case, the effects of smoking on mental health—as about underlying biology.”

This new research adds evidence to support the implementation of smoke-free policies in public areas. Smoking has not only been shown to be detrimental for mental health, but studies have also shown that excess mortality associated with mental illness is due to smoking. Quitting smoking greatly reduces the risk of developing smoking-related diseases. For help with quitting smoking, see a health care professional who will be able to offer a variety of treatments and resources for quitting.

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



PHARMA

## Why the Prescription Drug Market Doesn’t Work for Patients

A corrupt regulatory system has profited bureaucrats and corporations at the expense of our health

LAURA WILLIAMS & DAN SANCHEZ

**W**hat does it take to get vital medical care in America? For Laura Matson, a Type-1 diabetic, it took upending her whole life. To pay for her insulin treatments, she had to sell her car and furniture, relocate, and even give away her dog Nicky, as the BBC reported. And she isn’t alone. Many Americans struggle to make ends meet as their health care costs rise.

These rising costs are strange, in a sense. The prices of other consumer goods—nutritious food, digital devices, clothing, etc.—generally fall as technology advances and production become more efficient. Why is health care such an exception to this rule?

After all, most of the medications Americans take are made of relatively simple ingredients. And once treatments are established, drugs cost very little to produce. Insulin itself is a century-old technology. So why are Matson’s insulin treatments so expensive?

Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) blames corruption. At a recent Democratic debate, Warren said:

“Who is this economy really working for? It’s doing great for a thinner and thinner slice at the top. It’s doing great for giant drug companies. It’s just not doing great for people who need a prescription filled ...

When you’ve got a government, when you’ve got an economy that does great for those with money and isn’t doing

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great for everyone else, that is corruption, pure and simple. We need to call it out. We need to attack it head on. And we need to make structural change in our government, in our economy, and in our country.”

To an extent, Warren is right: Corruption is the problem. The pharmaceutical pipeline is clogged with it. What she leaves out is the key role that government regulation plays in that corruption.

**How Regulation Makes Health Care More Expensive**

Regulation in the health care industry drives up prices for patients in many ways.

The Food and Drug Administration’s approval system requires billions of dollars and nearly a decade to navigate. This strangles supply by hampering production and constrains competition by preventing smaller companies from entering the market. And as Economics 101 informs us, lower supply and less competition mean higher prices.

Federal patent policy also restricts supply and competition, especially by blocking generics. For example, as one of us wrote earlier this year in “A Government Guide to Keeping Insulin Unaffordable: 3 Easy Steps to Hogtie a Market”:

**Many Americans struggle to make ends meet as their health care costs rise.**

“Even though insulin treatment itself can’t be patented, improvements in delivery mechanisms can be. These incremental improvements, no matter how small, can be used to extend the 20-year patent on a drug, a process called “patent evergreening.” Sanofi has filed 74 patent applications on its long-acting insulin Lantus—nearly all of them after the drug was on the market—and boxed out generics for decades. Drug makers seek extensions to their exclusivity when they add pill coatings and alter inactive ingredients, extending their monopoly but offering no marginal advantage to patients.”

Cheaper drugs of comparable quality produced abroad are simply illegal to import or resell in the United States.

At every stage where regulation narrows the choices available, patients lose. Life-saving treatments become harder to access and more expensive.

To return to Matson, regulation drove up the cost of her insulin treatments by limiting competitive market innovation at every opportunity. A generic version of a drug or insulin injector pump can drop the price by up to 90 percent, but the government blocks generics. Nearly identical, perfectly safe insulin products can be bought from Canadian drug makers, but imports are illegal. Heavily regulated insurance issuers are legally limited to a handful in each state, and each plan reimburses only some brands.

Pharmacies could dispense treatments popular in the 1990s for pennies, instead of the expensive, cutting-edge tech. Matson might have been willing to test her blood sugar more than once a day with tedious strips or deal with the hassle of vials and needles if it meant she could keep her apartment and her beloved dog. But regulations deny her that choice.

**Patients Lose—So Who Wins?**

If you want to understand any regulatory scheme, ask yourself, who benefits from it? Policymakers may have pitched the rules as protections for patients—indeed that may have been the sincere intention of some. But clearly, the system doesn’t benefit Matson or others like her. When a dirt-cheap, exceptionally common prescription like insulin keeps getting more costly while everything less regulated becomes less expensive, the regulations are standing in the way of progress.

So if not patients, who benefits?

The executives and shareholders of big, established pharmaceutical companies certainly do. They hold the valuable patents that prevent generics competitors from underselling them. And Food and Drug Administration (FDA) compliance costs may hurt their bottom line, but they are big enough to absorb them, while smaller would-be competitors are not. So regulation creates a barrier to entry—a “you must be this big to ride” bar—that keeps out upstart competitors. By stifling competition in the above ways, regulation can protect the market share of the big boys, granting them inflated, cushy profit margins, at the expense of patients, who pay inflated, onerous prices for care.

Of course, FDA bureaucrats benefit,

too: A lengthy approval process provides them highly paid jobs. And for many of them, the gravy train doesn’t stop there. Big pharmaceutical companies often hire former regulators at very generous salaries to help navigate the FDA gauntlet.

Scott Gottlieb was FDA commissioner until just months ago and is now on Pfizer Inc.’s board of directors. Current Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar is a former Eli Lilly executive.

A revolving door between regulatory agencies and the companies they’re regulating creates pressure to be “good for (big) business.” Doing little favors for one another (downplaying an unfavorable trial, tying a competitor up in some extra red tape, delaying the approval of a generic alternative) overrides public interest as former and future colleagues play a slow, highly profitable game of musical chairs.

**The Problem of Regulatory Capture**

When regulatory agencies are thus “captured” by big players in the industries they regulate, it is called “regulatory capture.” Regulatory capture runs rampant in highly regulated industries, and it isn’t too hard to understand why.

In a free market, the way to “win the game” is straightforward and fixed: Serve your customers better than your competitors do. But in a highly regulated market, the rules of the game are malleable. This opens a new path to success: Help make regulations that disadvantage your competitors.

Influencing the rules of the game then becomes a big part of the game. Instead of playing better, you can win by calling the referee and getting your opponent thrown out. So gaining sway over the rule-makers and rule-enforcers (regulators) becomes paramount, and satisfying customers less so.

The free-market “satisfy the customer” game has historically been characterized by businesses rising and falling. Time after time, incumbent Goliaths are brought down by upstart Davids. (Think of Netflix busting Blockbuster.) Out of the companies in the Fortune 500 of 1955, only 52 still ranked on that list in 2019.

But in the regulated-market “cripple your competitor” game, the Goliaths have an extra advantage. With their lobbying budgets and political connections, they are in a better position to capture their regulators and rig the rules of the game in their favor.

**The Food and Drug Administration’s approval system requires billions of dollars and nearly a decade to navigate.**

**Regulatory Power Corrupts**

So Warren is right in a sense: Prescription drugs are indeed expensive because of corruption. But that corruption is made possible (and irresistible) by regulation. Power corrupts, and regulatory power is no exception. This isn’t a problem of capitalism, but of cronyism: a symbiotic relationship between big government and big business.

And Warren’s proposed solutions—further concentrating power with a Medicare for All plan, or letting government agencies oversee production of generic drugs—would only make the problem worse. Imagine the profitability of requiring only name-brand drugs through Medicare; giving regulators more power increases interest groups’ incentives to manipulate regulators instead of serving customers.

The real solution to rising health care costs is less regulatory power, not more. The great disruptors that lower prices and accelerate access—the Amazons and AirBnBs of health care—are out there, but regulation is standing in their way. As long as regulators have the power to exclude products and companies from the marketplace, some businesses will try to game the system instead of upping their game. Less rule-rigging would mean more competition, more services, and lower prices for people like Matson.

*Dr. Laura Williams teaches communication strategy to undergraduates and executives. She is a passionate advocate for critical thinking, individual liberties, and the Oxford comma. Dan Sanchez is the director of content at the Foundation for Economic Education (FEE) and the editor of FEE.org, which first published this article.*



EAT WELL

# Staying on Track Through the Holidays

A conversation with weight management expert Dr. Luiza Petre

BARBARA DANZA

Beginning with the influx of Halloween candy, continuing with the pies and comfort foods served Thanksgiving, and culminating with cookies, chocolates, and other delectable delights of Christmastime, the holiday season can be a particularly challenging time to keep fitness goals on track.

I spoke to cardiologist and weight management specialist Dr. Luiza Petre about advice for navigating the festivities of the season. Here's what she said.

**THE EPOCH TIMES:** What are the key fundamentals of nutrition to keep in mind during the holiday season?

**DR. LUIZA PETRE:** A traditional holiday meal averages 3,000 calories, just a little short of one pound of weight gain. The average American gains 6–8 pounds between Thanksgiving and Christmas, just to start the New Year with the most popular resolution—to lose weight.

Unfortunately, 90 percent of those self-inflicted diets fail, for many reasons. Most people end up adding those extra pounds from year to year. With this picture in mind, it would be easier if we avoid this weight gain altogether.

**THE EPOCH TIMES:** Thanksgiving, Christmas,

and other festive celebrations have a big focus on food. What traditional foods are healthy to eat and what should be avoided?

**DR. PETRE:** The key points to keep in mind are: moderation on portions and elimination of as much sugar as possible while staying processed and preservative-free.

**THE EPOCH TIMES:** The social pressure to partake in the goodies being served makes this time of year especially challenging for those with fitness goals. What advice can you give those feeling the pressure from family or friends?

**DR. PETRE:** Graciously say no. We all can recall at least one occasion when being told, “please take one more” or “I cooked this for you.” Sometimes “no thank you” can work.

Additionally, focus on people and less on food. Feed your mind with conversations and catch up with friends and family versus feeding your stomach. Make sure that you choose a location far from the food table so that mindless nibbling is not an option.

**Eat a protein meal before the party.** Do not skip meals just because you have a party and want to ‘save up’ your calories. You will arrive famished and that spells trouble. Never hit a holiday party on an empty stomach.

“A traditional holiday meal averages 3,000 calories, just a little short of 1 pound of weight gain.”

Dr. Luiza Petre, cardiologist and weight management specialist

## HEALTHY SUBSTITUTES FOR THANKSGIVING

### Bone Broth Gravy

- 2 egg yolks
- 3 tablespoons of butter
- 1 1/2 tablespoons of gelatin powder
- 2 cups of beef bone broth

In a saucepan, add broth and gelatin, simmer 8-10 minutes. Remove from heat; let rest for 2 minutes, quickly stirring in egg yolks. Return to low heat, add butter, and stir well.

### Jellied Cranberry Sauce (no sugar)

- 1 medium orange
- 1 teaspoon of ginger juice
- add ground cloves to taste
- add Stevia powder to taste
- 12 ounce bag of fresh washed cranberries

Chop orange with peel into small pieces; add to food processor with prewashed cranberries. Add ginger juice and start with 1 teaspoon of Stevia and a dash of cloves.

Pulse until desired consistency, taste and add additional Stevia and/or cloves as needed. Should taste sweet and tart.

Can be made up to two days in advance with a 5–7 day maximum in the refrigerator.

Any leftovers can be used in muffins, loaf or cake batters as well as a cheesecake topping.

## Alcohol can wreak havoc on your weight.

Not only does it add calories, but it also lowers your inhibitions and you wind up eating more. Drink one glass of water for every alcoholic beverage and limit yourself to two drinks per evening.

**Eat only half.** If you do not want to give up those harmful bites during holidays, you have to pay attention to portions.

**Stay Hydrated.** Sipping before meals helps dieters consume 90 calories less at each meal. The additional benefit is that water is good for your skin. Staying hydrated also makes you look and feel younger.

**Enjoy without guilt.** While the holiday season can be a very challenging time of the year, there are smart ways to indulge and not pay the price with weight gain. You can still stay on track. Moderation and planning are key so all those seasonal delicacies can be as enjoyable as ever.

**THE EPOCH TIMES:** When one does overindulge over the holidays, what steps can be taken to get back on track?

**DR. PETRE:** Try intermittent fasting after your holiday indulgence. Intermittent fasting helps with cravings, mood, and memory. It improves blood sugar levels, decreases the risk of cancer and heart disease, and might help with Parkinson's and Alzheimer's. I find it helps with weight management too. Fast 14 to, ideally, 16 hours between meals, and eat during an 8–10 hour window.

Your body starts and stays in its fed state while absorbing and digesting food. This lasts 4–5 hours after you begin eating, and during that time, your insulin levels are high and your body does not burn fat. When your body is done processing its meal it can begin to burn fat, as insulin levels are low. You'll enter a fasting state after 12 hours, which is ideal for fat burning. A normal eating schedule rarely allows you to make it into this fat-burning state. It will make you feel energized and ready for the New Year.

**THE EPOCH TIMES:** What final advice would you give anyone hoping to keep their nutrition on track throughout the holiday season?

**DR. PETRE:** As with everything, awareness, mindful eating, moderation, and planning are the keys to a healthy holiday season. Making healthy swaps for your family favorites while watching your portions will keep your weight stable and keep you from feeling deprived.

Continue your exercise routine to help burn any excess calories. If away from your local gym, try walking. Walking will relieve that bloated feeling, aid digestion, improve your mood, and offer a great time to catch up with family and friends. Holiday or not, make it a daily goal to get in your 10,000 steps.

Incorporate some tips below with intermittent fasting and sail through the holiday season feeling healthy with no deprivation.

Satisfying swaps include:

- Sip bone broth throughout the day to stay satiated
- Cauliflower mashed potatoes instead of real
- Instead of nuts, crackers and cheese have low fat/yogurt dips with raw veggies
- Rather than dark meat with skin, have white meat turkey breast—half the calories
- Instead of flour-laden, fatty gravy, make your own bone broth version and add spices
- Make fresh cranberry sauce using a little sugar and avoid canned jellied sauce
- Instead of vegetable casseroles with cream sauces, steam corn, green beans, and peas.
- Make low-fat stuffing by baking it, instead of stuffing the bird, using less butter and broth.
- Have a wine spritzer instead of a full glass of wine
- Bring a dessert or have a small piece of pie; chose pumpkin over pecan and add low fat whipped cream
- A last suggestion: sip ginger and turmeric tea throughout the day. You can buy the teabag or make it fresh. It keeps you feeling full and satiated, aids in digestion, is anti-inflammatory, and will warm you up.

Remember always to be kind to yourself; treat yourself well emotionally and physically every day. Drink your water, make good choices, and maintain an exercise routine you like to do. Soon the holidays won't be a time for stress and questions, but a time for peace and the self-satisfaction that you are doing the best you can.



Baby foods have been known to contain heavy metals for nearly a decade but progress resolving the problem has been slow.

TOXINS

# Metal in Baby Food: Study Finds 95 Percent Contain Heavy Metals

Tests find lead, cadmium, arsenic, and mercury are common neurotoxins found in baby foods

CHRISTINE RUGGERI

Of all food categories, it may be safe to say that ensuring the purity of baby foods and making sure there are no toxic ingredients or metal in it should be a priority. However, a national investigation showed that toxic metals were found in 95 percent of tested baby foods.

The fact that heavy metals in baby food exist was uncovered nearly a decade ago, but we assumed measures were taken to resolve this danger. It's true that efforts made by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), along with baby food companies and nonprofit organizations, have reduced metal in baby food products.

Although we've seen some progress since 2011, we have a long way to go before baby food can be declared completely safe.

What does this latest study tell us about the risk of toxic baby food exposure and how it may affect your child's health? Many parents and public health advocates are demanding answers.

## Heavy Metal in Baby Food: Study Results

When 168 baby foods made by 61 different brands were tested by Healthy Babies Bright Futures (HBBF), toxic heavy metals were found in 95 percent of them.

How many baby foods were contaminated with heavy metals? Researchers found that:

- 94 percent contained lead
- 75 percent contained cadmium
- 73 percent contained arsenic
- 32 percent contained mercury

The report also shows that one in four baby foods contained all four toxic heavy metals. Of the 168 samples:

- 26 percent contained four metals
- 40 percent contained three metals
- 21 percent contained two metals
- 8 percent contained one metal
- 5 percent (only nine samples) contained zero metals

Why were these four metals tested? They all have a unique significance—they are developmental neurotoxins.

These metals can harm a child's developing brain and nervous system, and metal in baby food may even cause permanent loss of intellectual capacity. Plus, consuming these toxic metals can also cause behavioral problems, like ADHD.

According to this new study, the lead and arsenic in rice-based foods alone account for one-fifth of the more than 11 million IQ points that children lose from birth to 24 months old from all dietary sources.

When new containers of 25 foods were sent to a separate lab for heavy metal testing, scientists detected another neurotoxic

pollutant in 19 of 25 foods: perchlorate.

Perchlorate disrupts thyroid functions that are crucial to brain development and has also been linked to IQ loss.

## Most Dangerous Baby Foods to Avoid

Test results show that 15 foods account for more than half of the heavy metal in baby food risk. Here's a breakdown of the most dangerous baby foods, according to this most recent report:

1. Rice-based foods, including infant rice cereal, rice dishes and rice-based snacks
2. Apple juice
3. Grape juice
4. Fruit juice blend (100 percent juice)
5. Cheerios and oat ring cereal
6. Macaroni and cheese
7. Puff snacks and teething biscuits
8. Soft cereal bars
9. Oatmeal cookies
10. Fruit yogurt
11. Sweet potato baby food

## If there's one major takeaway from this most recent study on baby foods, it's that rice-based foods should be avoided.

The study authors also point out that choosing organic baby food products doesn't necessarily mean that it will contain lower levels of toxic metals.

According to HBBF and past studies on metal in baby food, organic standards do not address these contaminants. Heavy metals are naturally occurring in both soil and water, and pesticides, fertilizers, airborne contaminants, and industrial operations elevate the levels.

Of the 61 baby food brands that were tested, some of them were organic brands, including Plum Organics, Beech Nut, and Earth's Best.

This means that organic baby food and



Dicing, mashing or soft-cooking nutrient-dense foods is a healthier option.

even homemade baby food aren't safe from these heavy metals, unless you use the safest baby foods that are recommended by HBBF and other organizations.

## What Parents Can Do?

According to the report, “only a dramatically accelerated pace at FDA and the fruition of the new Baby Food Council's pursuit of industry-wide change will be enough to finally solve the problem.”

This is an issue that's been known for almost a decade, and although measures have been taken to limit heavy metal exposure in foods, clearly there's much more work to be done.

In the meantime, HBBF has made recommendations about what parents can do to make safer baby food choices. These safer choices are said to contain 80 percent less arsenic, lead, and other toxic heavy metals than other “riskier picks.”

Here are the five action steps you can take to lower your child's exposure to heavy metals:

1. Choose rice-free snacks: Opt for diced fruits and veggies or rice-free crackers.
2. Avoid teething biscuits made with rice: Instead of rice biscuits for teething babies, opt for other soothing foods, like chilled cucumber and frozen banana. You can also use a clean, wet washcloth or a cold spoon.
3. Opt for multigrain infant cereals, oatmeal, barley, and quinoa.
4. Offer filtered tap water instead of fruit juice.
5. Offer a variety of fruits and vegetables.

## Healthy Nutrition Options

Nutrition for babies is extremely important because this is a time of major development. If there's one major takeaway from this most recent study on baby foods, it's that rice-based foods should be avoided.

Instead of choosing rice-based snacks, offer your child snacks that are rich in nutrients and low in metals. Dicing, mashing or soft-cooking nutrient-dense foods is a healthier option.

It can also be done if you're using the baby-led weaning method. Try these recommended safe baby foods: avocado, pumpkin, green beans, beets, zucchini, parsnips, peas, apples, bananas, berries, grapes (cut length-wise), peaches, beans, and hard-boiled eggs.

Adding high-protein foods to your child's diet is also important. Some of the best options include: turkey, chicken, beef, fish (no shellfish), lentils, beans, and diluted peanut butter.

Christine Ruggeri is a writer and nutrition counselor based in Northport, N.Y. This article was originally published on DrAxe.com

AGE WELL

# Slowing Down Cellular Aging

Living young might actually help you stay that way

DEVON ANDRE

Sometimes you're not as old as the numbers you've been assigned may indicate. Other times, you can be older. The truth is that you've got two ages: your chronological age and your biological age.

You can see your chronological age each time you look at the calendar, but your biological age can be a bit harder to determine. It's more of how your cells, gut, organs, and tissues are holding up.

Another difference between your biological and chronological age is that your biological age is variable. Lifestyle decisions and other factors can move it up or down or in fast-forward or rewind. That's why chronological age is little more than a number—it only tells a fraction of the story of how old you really are.

The best anti-aging strategy involves a firm knowledge of biological age and how you can control it. If you're not sure where you are or how to start, here are some things to look for and the appropriate action to take.

## Extra weight around the waist:

Carrying excess fat around the waist is an indication that your biological age is up there. Inside, your body is likely inflamed, and your risk for heart disease and diabetes is high. To reduce this, try to include more activity throughout the day, walking for about an hour at least three times per week.

**You sit all day long:** Feeling the need to sit down most hours of the day can also indicate you are aging faster than you might think. Sitting for more than six hours per day can worsen symptoms of existing illness while leading to weight gain that further increases inflammation. If you're always tired, you may want to try implementing sleep hygiene, dietary changes, or introducing a nicotinamide riboside supplement.

## Frequent trouble with digestion:

Regular diarrhea, cramps, or bloating can signify that your gut is in trouble—especially if it's happening after nearly every meal. Poor gut health can be a sign of inflammation, which means your immune system is heavily taxed. You can fight back this symptom of biological aging by including more fiber-rich fruits and vegetables, along with probiotic foods into your diet.

Slowing down cellular aging can hit the pause button on health problems and “feeling old.” Addressing the signs of biological aging can help you live better the longer you're alive.

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



The best anti-aging strategy involves a firm knowledge of biological age and how you can control it.



Holidays are full of delicious foods that are responsible for much of our annual weight gain.



MADE TO MOVE

# How to Stay Fit Into Your 60s and Beyond

Keep your body tuned up and it will carry you around for longer

JULIE BRODERICK

Aging is inevitable and is influenced by many things—but keeping active can slow aging and increase life expectancy. Evidence shows that aging alone is not a cause of major problems until you are in your mid-90s. And strength, power, and muscle mass can be increased, even at this advanced age.

So here are my top exercise tips for people in their 60s and older, at different levels of fitness.

For Lifetime Fitness Fanatics

If you fall into this group, you are in the minority. You are robust, likely to be a “super-ager” and you are doing wonderfully. You are certainly optimizing your chance of living longer and aging successfully.

Generally, this is when you reap your reward from a lifetime of keeping active. With your healthier metabolic, skeletal, cardiovascular, and immune systems you can probably outperform people decades younger.

Keep up the kettlebells, spin classes, rowing, triathlons, or manual work such as gardening—whatever you like to do. You can keep challenging yourself physically. Mix your routine up—a combination of aerobic and resistance work—as well as an activity to challenge your balance—is ideal.

Maximize health benefits by swimming outdoors and as part of a community. You might want to try sea swimming—although it’s not for everybody.

But watch out for chronic overloading, that is, diversify your exercise program by incorporating cross-training. For example, if you are a runner, incorporate cycling or swimming to avoid overloading any part of your body.

Recovery after strenuous exercise is slower

as you age and can take up to five days. So exercise smart.

For the Averagely Fit

You are doing well, so keep going. Long-term consistency is the key to benefits. You don’t necessarily have to join a gym, just keep building meaningful physical activity into your day. For example, walk briskly to the shops to get your groceries, keep up gardening, and be active around your house. Even repeating simple stair climbing is a great exercise.

**If you are a runner, incorporate cycling or swimming to avoid overloading any part of your body.**

If you are suffering from hip or knee pain, walking may be painful, so try cycling or water-based exercise instead.

Coupling physical activity with social engagement can optimize its benefits, so try yoga or a dance class. Incorporate some outdoor exercise for an added mental health boost.

The main thing is to avoid long periods of sitting. Also, ideally, continue to do the exercise you enjoy. Try to steadily build up your level of aerobic exercise at a level where you build up a sweat and feel slightly out of breath.

Exercises for strength and flexibility are often neglected, so try to include these types of exercises when possible.



As bodies go, the old adage holds: move it or lose it

For the Unfit or Unwell

You may be managing complex chronic conditions, which makes it more difficult to exercise. Or it may be that exercise isn’t a habit for you. If you have several chronic conditions, you may need clearance from a doctor to exercise and specialized exercise advice from a physiotherapist or other exercise professional.

If you are experiencing three or more of the following: unplanned weight loss, exhaustion, slowness, weakness of grip, or physical inactivity, you may be considered frail, which will leave you vulnerable to even minor health stresses. But it is never too late to build more physical activity into your daily life.

Even reducing the time spent sitting and doing a little exercise will have major health benefits, doing any type of activity at all is better than none. Even chair-based exercises or practicing sit-to-stand can be a great start.

Feeling a bit out of breath with exercise is normal and some initial aches and joint pain are fine. But if you ever feel chest pain or severe discomfort, you need to see a doctor

straight away.

If you have a set-back such as a chest infection or fall which results in hospital admission, get up and move as soon as is safely possible. Even a few days of bed rest can result in major decreases in strength and fitness.

If you have surgery scheduled, be as active as possible before being admitted to the hospital and start moving as soon as possible afterward. This will help your recovery. It may also prevent complications that could prolong your hospital stay.

If you are diagnosed with cancer, keep active, even during treatments (such as chemotherapy and radiotherapy) and during recovery. If you have other common chronic conditions, such as heart or lung disease, keep as active as your condition allows.

Just remember, whatever your state of health, it’s never too late to reap the benefits of being more physically active.

Julie Broderick is an assistant professor of physiotherapy at Trinity College Dublin in Ireland. This article was originally published by The Conversation.

# Evidence of Porn Addiction and a Path to Freedom

The drug-like pull of pornography can leave many men ashamed, isolated, and feeling powerless



Some talk about how they become disgusted by the images they’re watching and hating themselves for watching it, yet still remain unable to stop.

CONAN MILNER

Sex can be a powerful drive. And it’s always been a fascinating subject. In the past, this fascination was limited to imagination and experience. Today, you can go online and see a vast pornography library. No imagination or experience necessary.

But we may be paying a high price for making this once sacred veil so easy to lift. A growing number of researchers, legislators, and even former porn stars all

warn that widespread exposure to internet pornography is bad for society, and harms the people who use it.

One prominent worry is addiction. While pornography can’t be snorted, smoked, or injected, more than 40 neurological research studies examining porn’s impact on the brain show a consistent pattern that closely parallels substance abuse. As with drug and alcohol addictions, regular porn consumption has been shown to significantly influence the pleasure and reward centers of our brain, creating an insatiable hunger that many feel powerless to deny.

Pornography addiction is a relatively recent concept; not an official diagnosis. But studies suggest this common habit is taking a substantive toll. A 2016 review by seven U.S. Navy doctors points to mounting evidence that “internet pornography may be a factor in the rapid surge in rates of sexual dysfunction,” such as erectile problems, delayed ejaculation, decreased sexual satisfaction, and diminished libido among men under 40 years of age.

Over the last three years,

such evidence has led at least 16 states to declare resolutions identifying pornography as a public health crisis. These resolutions don’t try to ban sexual images. Rather the aim is to raise public awareness about the impact this media has on our world. The latest state to seek such a resolution is Ohio. On Sept. 23, Rep. Jena Powell (R-Ohio) presented sponsor testimony on her state’s porn bill: House Resolution 180. In addition to evidence of addictive behavior, Powell showed that porn also perpetuates human trafficking, and the abuse of women and minors.

“Pornography is integral to prostitution and coerced sexual acts, and over half of sex trafficking victims report that they were required to learn and perform according to pornographic material,” Powell stated. You can find lots of anecdotal evidence for porn addiction at Nofap.com (fap is slang for masturbation). The online forum features many testimonials from people who report a difficult to control habit that hurts the quality of their lives and relationships.

**We may be paying a high price for making this once sacred veil so easy to lift.**

Continued on Page 14

THE EPOCH TIMES

TRUTH and TRADITION

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The very fabric of America is under attack—our freedoms, our republic, and our constitutional rights have become contested terrain. The Epoch Times, a media committed to truthful and responsible journalism, is a rare bastion of hope and stability in these testing times.

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By Kate Kelland  
From Reuters





Having your mother nearby may make your menopause symptoms lighter and easier to bear, researchers find.

MIND TO BODY CONNECTION

# Your Family May Affect Your Menopause Experience

A woman’s social environment may have a significant effect on how she experiences the change

MEGAN ARNOT

Menopause happens around the age of 50, and for many women, the end of their fertile life is accompanied by uncomfortable symptoms, such as hot flashes, night sweats, and anxiety. In the West, it is generally taken as read that these symptoms are a normal part of menopause. But cross-cultural research suggests that menopause symptoms are not necessarily inevitable.

For example, Japanese women rarely report hot flashes, whereas they are a common complaint for European women. As a result, scientists have begun to focus on what causes this difference in

experience and the potential impact that behavioral and lifestyle factors, such as smoking, might have.

Our latest study adds to this knowledge. We found that living away from your genetic family may worsen menopause.

**Family Matters?** Where people live once they’re married varies across cultures. To investigate whether these different living arrangements affect menopause symptoms, we traveled to southwest China to collect data.

In this region, there are groups with distinct living arrangements. First,

Cross-cultural research suggests that menopause symptoms are not necessarily inevitable.

the Han and the Yi, in which women typically leave their family after they’ve married and live with their husband’s family. Second, the Mosuo and Zhaba, who engage in the practice of zou hun (“walking marriage”), in which the husband and wife live separately with their own related families and only visit each other at night.

We found that women who remained living with their own family following marriage had significantly less severe menopause symptoms than those who went to live with their husband’s family.

**In-Law Conflict** Many anthropologists are interested in how different levels of relatedness within households can have behavioral and physiological implications. For menopause, we think the difference in symptom severity between the groups may be the result of the different levels of conflict that result from being more or less related to other members of your household.

If a woman lives with her husband’s family, then until she has children, she is unrelated to anyone in the household. This lack of relatedness can cause tension between the new wife and her husband’s relatives as they have little direct genetic interest in her.

As well as conflict with non-related household members, earlier research has shown that women who live with their husband’s family tend to argue with their partners more and are also more likely to get divorced. Additionally, rates of domestic violence are higher when women live away from their genetic family.

But how does this relate to the severity of menopause symptoms? We think that increased levels of household conflict would result in the woman being more stressed. Stress is known to worsen pain perception and so could aggravate menopause symptoms.

In contrast to women who leave their kin group, women who live with their own family once they’re married also tend to have higher levels of social support. There are more people to help with childcare and more shoulders to cry on. This can help to lower stress and thus soften the mental and physical burden of the menopause.

**Global Perspectives** While our research was conducted in China, globally, we see a wide range of living arrangements, which themselves can bring different levels of conflict and social support. In the West, many women live away from their families, which may mean that they lack social support, perhaps contributing to more turbulent menopause symptoms. Distance from one’s own family can also be seen to increase conflict within the household—be it between a husband and wife, or wife and in-laws.

These results aren’t an excuse to visit your in-laws less, but they show that menopause symptoms are not only about hormonal irregularities. They may also be a product of your social environment, which should be worth bearing in mind when approaching and going through the menopause.

*Megan Arnot is a doctoral candidate in evolutionary anthropology and behavioral ecology at University College London. This article was originally published on The Conversation.*

BODY TO MIND CONNECTION

# Inflammation Messes With Your Behavior

An immune response run amok is also affecting your better judgement

DEBORAH MITCHELL

Recently a group of researchers reported that inflammation messes with how people behave and is associated with impulsivity, difficulty focusing, and an inability to delay gratification (as in “I gotta have that doughnut now”). How is it possible for there to be a relationship between inflammation and behavior?

Inflammation is a natural process that wears two hats. Its good-guy hat is involved in defending your body against invasion by bacteria, viruses, and other pathogens or traumas such as cuts or falls. For example, if you cut your finger, your immune system kicks in. The damaged tissue releases substances that result in inflammation and triggers the immune system to block off the injured area, kill any invading organisms that may cause infection, get rid of the damaged tissue, and begin the healing process. As healing progresses, inflammation goes away.

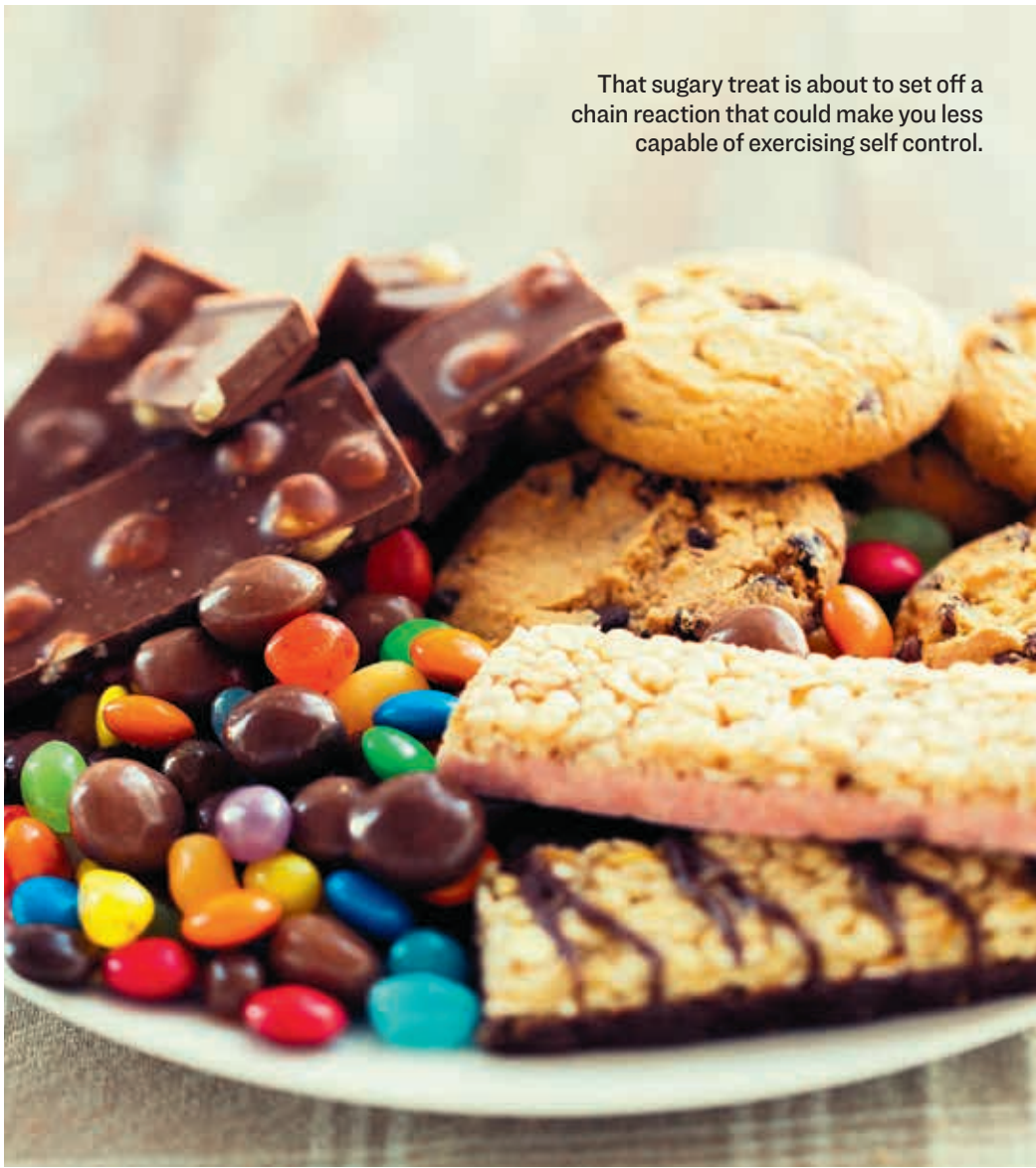
Chronic inflammation, however, wears the bad-guy hat and is a different scenario. It is a sign that your body is out of balance, and it is associated with scores of health problems and diseases ranging from headaches

and heart disease to arthritis and digestive problems.

Deep-seated systemic inflammation can have many causes and contributors, most of which are linked to lifestyle. At the top of the list is a poor diet (processed, refined foods, sugars, and unhealthy fats). Other factors include lack of exercise, chronic stress, insufficient sleep, alcohol and tobacco use, and food allergies. Fortunately, all of these can be modified.

**Inflammation and Behavior** A group of researchers at Texas Christian University recently published a report suggesting that “inflammation may contribute to decision-making patterns that can result in undesirable personal and societal outcomes.” Put another way, inflammation seems to have an impact on how the mind makes decisions, resulting in behaviors such as impulsivity, engaging in risky behaviors such as drug use or drinking, or difficulty staying focused on activities.

Prior to this research, there’s been evidence that inflammation promotes psychological changes that can increase a person’s sensitivity to changes in their environment. For



That sugary treat is about to set off a chain reaction that could make you less capable of exercising self control.

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

There’s been evidence that inflammation promotes psychological changes that can increase a person’s sensitivity to changes in their environment.

example, it seems that inflammation may have an effect on a negative experience, such as being rejected by others. However, it also may impact our positive encounters, such as receiving social support.

**Inflammation and Behavior: New Study** In the new study, the authors hypothesized that inflammation would be associated with more immediate gratification. They tested this idea by looking at the relationship between inflammation and current-focused decision-making among 159 young adults (80 men, 79 women) who were told to abstain from sex, alcohol, and smoking for 48 hours before testing.

The authors measured levels of substances associated with inflammation; namely, interleukin-6, interleukin-1-beta, tumor necrosis factor-alpha, and white blood cell count after stimulation of the immune system. A technique called LPS (lipopolysaccharide) was used to promote inflammation. LPS stimulates certain immune system cells, which in turn cause the production of inflammatory mediators.

The relationship between the levels of the inflammatory substances was compared against behavioral factors, which included temporal focus, self-reported impulsivity, and self-reported inability to delay gratification.

Overall, the authors found that inflammation, even low levels in healthy people, can impact our decision-making choices, causing more impulsivity, trouble focusing on the task at hand, and delaying gratification. The experts noted that these results “suggest that the activities of the immune system may plan an important role in shaping decision-making preferences.”

The findings are important because they provide new insight into how inflammation has an impact on our behavior, which in turn suggests new ways to manage and treat social and health problems by targeting inflammation.

**How You Can Reduce Inflammation** Fortunately, there are several lifestyle changes you can initiate right now to help you lower inflammation in the body and begin feeling better.

- Avoid or significantly limit your intake of added sugars and processed foods.
- Choose whole, natural foods free of preservatives and other food additives.
- Work with a health care professional who can help you identify any nutritional deficiencies and then make adjustments to your diet, or use supplements to return your body to balance.
- Limit or avoid alcohol.
- Participate in physical activity on a daily basis, at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise 4-5 times a week.
- Engage in stress-reducing activities daily, such as meditation, tai chi, yoga, progressive relaxation, deep breathing, listening to soothing music, or other relaxing activities.
- Get 7-8 hours of sleep every night and adopt healthy bedtime and sleeping habits.

**Bottom Line** Inflammation appears to have a significant impact on our decision-making skills which, in turn, can have a big effect on how we behave and our interactions with others. Although much more research is needed to understand the relationship between inflammation and behavior, in the meantime everyone can take steps to reduce inflammation in their lives by adopting some general lifestyle guidelines.

COMMUNICABLE DISEASES

# What Is a Virus

These unusual entities have different roles in our bodies

CONAN MILNER

Viruses may be small, but their influence is huge. These simple organisms are just a nucleic acid-coated in protein, but they can result in a wide variety of illnesses. Some can be deadly; others can be beneficial and an important part of your immune response.

For centuries doctors could see the results of viruses—illnesses such as polio, rabies, herpes, mono, and smallpox—but the particles working behind the scenes weren’t detected until the dawn of the 20th century. That’s when scientists discovered a bacteria-

like being with a unique feature: It couldn’t reproduce without another being’s cells.

According to Dr. Sophia Tolliver, a family medicine physician at the Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center, this is the main difference between viruses and bacteria. A bacterial infection comes from a microbe that can thrive in a wide variety of environments. A viral infection, on the other hand, comes from a microscopic parasite that requires very specific conditions for survival.

“They are unable to live or reproduce outside of a host body,” Tolliver said.

Scientists have identified more than 400 different viruses that can infect people. Others can infect animals, plants, even bacteria. It’s not clear how many viruses exist. By one estimate, there are more than 100 million different viruses that can infect all known species of vertebrates, invertebrates, plants, lichens, mushrooms, and algae.

And that’s just the viral estimate for our planet. Some scientists propose that an entity so abundant on Earth is likely found on other planets, too.

There is a debate as to whether viruses are truly alive, or simply a biological mechanism. Some

scientists argue that viruses fail the qualifications for a living entity because they lack the self-replication feature found in all other organisms. Viral particles reproduce by binding to a host’s cells and inserting some of their genetic material. The host cell gets hijacked into making copies of the viral DNA necessary to grow the disease.

In a sense, when we catch a viral infection, we turn into a virus-making factory, churning out an exponential growth of these parasitic particles until our immune system puts a stop to it. All types of viral infections, from colds and flu, to hepatitis and HIV, propagate this way.

This makes viral infections tricky to treat. Antibiotics can kill off a bacterial infection by targeting its growth mechanism. Since viruses lack this mechanism, antibiotics have no effect.

**Helpful Viruses** But some viruses can actually kill

bacteria. The mucous membrane lining our digestive, respiratory, and reproductive tracts is host to bacteriophages (or “phages”). These viruses infect and destroy specific bacteria. Others can fight against more dangerous viruses.

Just as scientists have learned that there are essential and helpful bacteria that live inside us, it appears there are protective viruses also residing in our body.

And recent research out of San Diego State University suggests that these helpful viruses, or phages, are a natural part of our immune system.

This isn’t all new news. Phages have been used for nearly a century to treat sepsis caused by *Staphylococcus aureus*, *salmonella* infections, dysentery, and more. As drug-resistant infections become a greater concern, phages have taken on greater interest as a way to treat infection, including other viral infections.

Because when it comes to bad viruses, nobody wants to be a host

for viral reproduction. That said, exposure to some viruses actually make us stronger, because they trigger our immune system to produce antibodies—special proteins that thwart microbial invaders. There’s a specific antibody to address each microbe we come in contact with, but they don’t come cheap. Tolliver says the main way we get these antibodies is through something called “active immunity.”

“The body fights off viruses and bacteria through its own immune system by mounting an immunological response and by making antibodies to help fight future infections,” she explains.

Another part of our defense system is called “passive immunity.” As the name suggests, our own body does not create this protection. Instead, passive immunity comes from protective antibodies that we inherit, like those we received from our mother’s milk or while in utero.

Until we’ve acquired these spe-

cific antibodies, we’re at the mercy of the harmful viruses that can infect us. Some just make us sick, but others can be deadly. Tolliver says the difference lies in the ability of a virus to use our own cells against us.

**Exposure to some viruses actually make us stronger, because they trigger our immune system to produce antibodies.**

**Fighting Viral Invasions** The common cold virus may only affect us for a week or two before our immune system puts an end to it. However, with HIV/AIDS, the virus can completely takeover—driving its own replication, and

killing our cells in the process.

“With the advent of medications, this condition has gone from a virtual death sentence to more of a chronic disease where people can still live a full life,” Tolliver said.

The drugs used to treat HIV—known as antiretrovirals—work by suppressing viral activity. It prevents the virus from multiplying so it stops killing the patient’s cells. This strategy doesn’t kill the virus or cure the disease, but it does increase patient lifespan and reduce the disease’s transmission.

But antiretroviral drugs may not be the only option. We often assume that modern medicine offers the only answers to microbial infections, but ancient medicine can still provide some help. And emerging science is backing that up.

For example, one study that began in the early 2000s looked at otherwise healthy AIDS patients in their 50s and 60s. Instead of antiretrovirals, the nine partici-

pants in the study were given a traditional Chinese formula made of 13 different herbal extracts. By 2016, 8 of 9 had an undetectable viral load, and the remaining patient’s viral load was low. Other studies have shown that including traditional Chinese medicine in treatment can reduce some of the side effects associated with conventional antiretroviral therapy.

Modern science also recognizes that ancient forms of medicine may offer greater immune protection. Regular application of herbs such as andrographis and echinacea have been shown to reduce the impact and severity of certain viral infections.

There are even simpler methods we can all practice to keep from getting sick. Hygiene is huge. Washing your hands regularly, especially before touching your mouth, nose, and eyes, is an effective way to prevent infections.

The Centers for Disease Control states that hand-washing helps prevent diarrhea and respiratory

infections, and may even help prevent skin and eye infections.

“Keeping hands clean is one of the most important steps we can take to avoid getting sick and spreading germs to others. Many diseases and conditions are spread by not washing hands with soap and clean, running water,” according to the CDC.

Keep in mind that regular soap will do just fine. Antibacterial soap not only contributes to antibiotic resistance, but it offers absolutely no advantage against viruses.

Finally, learn to take it easy, and make sure to get plenty of sleep, because nothing weakens our defenses like too much stress. Stress robs our body of resources that it could use to mount an immune attack, leaving us more vulnerable to viruses we may come in contact with.

“The level of stress in the body can influence how our bodies respond to illness and how strongly the body can fight an infection,” Tolliver said.



# Evidence of Porn Addiction and a Path to Freedom

The drug-like pull of pornography can leave many men ashamed, isolated, and feeling powerless

Continued from Page 9

Several celebrities are speaking out as well. In his 2018 Netflix special, “Tam-borine,” comedian Chris Rock talked about how his porn addiction contributed to his crumbling marriage, and desensitized him to the point where he needed a “perfect porn cocktail” to feel any arousal. Metallica frontman James Hetfield narrated the 2017 documentary “Addicted To Porn: Chasing The Cardboard Butterfly.” And actor Terry Crews shares his years-long struggle with porn, and the effect it had on his life and marriage in a YouTube video titled “Dirty Little Secret.”

“Pornography really messed up my life in a lot of ways,” Crews said. “This is a major problem. I literally had to go to rehab for it.”

Heavy porn users report wasting several hours a day viewing explicit imagery. Some talk about how they become disgusted by the images they’re watching and hating themselves for watching it, yet still remain unable to stop.

Author and speaker Matt Fradd knows from personal experience that the struggle is real. For years, his porn habit gave him little cause for concern. His friends did it. Some of the adults he knew even encouraged it. But when Fradd turned 17, he took an interest in Christianity. Aiming for a higher moral standard, he tried to cut porn out of his life. That’s when he realized how much of a hold his habit

had. Despite many attempts to stop, he kept going back. It even followed him into his marriage.

With years of practice, resistance, and perseverance, Fradd’s efforts eventually paid off. He hasn’t viewed pornography in several years, and now gives talks worldwide encouraging others to do the same.

“It began because I found a significant degree of heal-

ing from my own life,” Fradd said. “It was a level of healing I didn’t know was possible. Once I began experiencing it and having known many other men and women who were dealing with this, I thought, ‘We obviously have to talk about this.’”

Faith may have been his inspiration, but much of Fradd’s arguments against porn come from hard science. In his 2017 book, “The

Porn Myth: Exposing the Reality Behind the Fantasy of Pornography,” Fradd deliberately takes a nonreligious approach, citing many peer-reviewed sources. He tackles several common notions, such as the idea that porn makes us happy, that it liberates women, or that it’s just a fantasy with no negative impact on your real life.

The influence of science has been a significant turning point in how we evaluate the influence of pornography. In the past, porn critics (primarily religious) argued from a purely moral, anti-lust angle. But in a largely secular society, this sin-based argument was routinely written off as an oppressive puritanical dinosaur that did nothing but threaten free speech and smother a good time.

But times have changed. Armed with decades of research revealing verifiable harm means that some attacks on porn are now

Within just a few generations we’ve gone from age-restricted magazines and after-hours cable programs, to a seemingly endless supply of hardcore, high-resolution imagery.

waged by strictly secular soldiers.

“Gary Wilson runs the website, Your Brain on Porn. Wilson says he is an atheist with politics to the left of Bernie Sanders,” Fradd said. “So the idea that this is a religious issue is another smokescreen the opposition throws up to attack the arguments against it.”

**Porn Revolution**  
Of course, not every science-minded individual buys the idea that porn could either be addictive or harmful. While there is lots of research to support it, contradictory research breeds some doubt. However, consider that nearly all the studies used to debunk the addiction model are led by the same scientist, Dr. Nicole Prause.

There are several reasons to be skeptical of Prause’s motives. Wilson devotes a page of his website to the red flags associated with her



## EMOTIONAL HEALING

# Taming the Grief Monster: Beginning to Heal

LINDA ZELIK

Since grieving is as individual as a fingerprint, each person’s journey through it is unique. I will share some suggestions that helped me get through the devastating early years after the loss of my son in hopes they can make the journey a little less painful for you.

### Grief Groups

There is a Swedish proverb that says “Grief shared is halved but joy shared is doubled.” I believe this is true. Grief groups aren’t for everyone, but my husband and I found The Compassionate Friends to be a lifesaver, especially in the beginning. At first, I was frightened and barely able to share my story. As each person in the group shared his or her unique loss, however, we felt connected and not as lost or alone in our grief.

We learned that anger, memory loss, anxiety, inability to make a decision, excessive crying, and trouble sleeping were all “normal” after losing a child. We became hopeful that we, too, could survive and eventually rebuild our lives as these other parents who were farther along in their grief had done. The Compassionate Friends has over 600 chapters around the country, one near you can be found on the group’s national website.

Additionally, there are hospice groups who team a professional grief counselor with a group of people experiencing similar kinds of losses (such as loss of a child). We also found this to be very helpful. Ours met weekly for nine weeks and had a nominal fee.

Personally, I found that the general

grief support groups at local hospitals or churches were not nearly as helpful. Losing an elderly parent or spouse is difficult, but it cannot compare to the loss of a child. It was so much more helpful to be with other families who had experienced a loss like ours.

### Professional Counseling

A loss of this magnitude may very well warrant help from a good professional. I encourage any bereaved parent or sibling to consider this. My medical doctor diagnosed me with “complicated grief disorder” which means that the painful emotions after a loss are so severe that the patient has difficulty resuming normal life activities. The psychiatrists I visited only wanted to prescribe anti-depression or anti-anxiety medications. This was not helpful in my case since I suffered severe side effects from each one. Many bereaved parents do find help from these medications, however. Regarding psychologists, finding the right one for you can be challenging. I tried several before finding someone who actually helped me. In just a couple of visits she gave me

Regarding psychologists, finding the right one for you can be challenging.

der” which means that the painful emotions after a loss are so severe that the patient has difficulty resuming normal life activities. The psychiatrists I visited only wanted to prescribe anti-depression or anti-anxiety medications. This was not helpful in my case since I suffered severe side effects from each one. Many bereaved parents do find help from these medications, however. Regarding psychologists, finding the right one for you can be challenging. I tried several before finding someone who actually helped me. In just a couple of visits she gave me



promotion of porn, accusing her of working on behalf of the porn industry—a global enterprise which rakes in about \$97 billion a year. Plus, some neuroscientists say Prause misinterprets her own data.

“The studies themselves weren’t problematic, it was the findings she drew from them,” Fradd said. “The scientists have said that her studies actually prove the opposite of what Prause says they do.”

But even if you doubt that pornography has addictive potential, you can’t deny how much this media has infiltrated our society. Within just a few generations we’ve gone from age-restricted magazines and after-hours cable programs, to a seemingly endless supply of hardcore, high-resolution imagery that otherwise innocent internet users can stumble upon from either a pop-up ad, social media scrolling, or web search.

How did things change so rapidly? According to Fradd, the key to this societal acceptance has been twofold: a shift in the culture, and the rise of the internet.

Sexual temptation is nothing new, but it’s never been so prevalent, and the internet is clearly the vehicle that made porn use skyrocket. It brought about what Fradd calls the three As—accessibility, affordability, and anonymity. These features obliterated the biggest barriers that once restricted its use.

The cultural consent for porn consumption began decades earlier. The late Hugh Hefner helped undo much of the guilt traditionally associated with collecting explicit imagery by presenting it in a sophisticated package. What made Playboy revolutionary is that the naked pictures were interspersed with high brow article topics such as how to throw a great cocktail party, the evolution of jazz, and the value of Picasso.

“Hefner gave it this air of respectability which kind of lulled us into thinking that this is what upper-class

folks do,” Fradd said.

Today, nobody goes to Pornhub for the articles. But the same message of savvy and sophistication is still used to sell porn’s existence. Some talk about porn use as healthy, natural, even therapeutic. It’s promoted as a form of safe sex, and celebrated for helping normalize unorthodox desires.

Porn also appeals to the modern mindset of convenience. It caters to a desire in the comfort of your own home without having to face any of the hassles of a real partner to satisfy it. Porn never has a headache. It is always ready to please.

Hefner gave it this air of respectability which kind of lulled us into thinking that this is what upper-class folks do.

Matt Fradd, author, speaker

And with the wide variety of porn available today, you can narrow your search to an experience that best portrays your wildest fantasies. Over time, however, the fantasy grows stale. Many heavy porn users report an evolution in their habit in which the type of content that turned them on in the past just doesn’t do the trick anymore. As a result, they often turn to strange or violent content just to achieve the same thrill they used to get from the softer stuff. Ever wonder why there are all these weird sub-genres like Japanese newscaster porn or clown porn? They cater to a desensitized consumer hungry for novelty.

Fradd sees this downward spiral as a delusion fueled by denial. Like strip joints that label themselves “gentlemen’s clubs,” it promises virtues that clearly aren’t

there. He says people chase this obsession in pursuit of happiness, when what they are really starving for is joy, intimacy, and freedom.

Partners of porn users suffer, too. Fradd has heard from many women who say they feel much more used than loved. They blame it on their partner’s consumption of an inherently objectifying medium.

“Pornography destroys love. It destroys our sense of dignity and leads us into places that we never thought imaginable,” Fradd said.

### STRIVE to Quit

Fradd’s latest project is an online platform designed to help men who find themselves with a habit they can’t put down (A similar program designed specifically for women will be available next year). It’s called STRIVE: A 21-Day Detox from Porn.

The program consists of short, daily videos, covering topics such as how porn impacts your brain, ugly facts about the industry (one video features a former porn star), and tools to uncover the stresses and personal triggers that make a man turn to pornography for comfort.

“After having talked about this for more than 10 years, I wanted one place for people to go to walk them by the hand and tell them, ‘Here’s how you do it,’” Fradd said.

Chris Cope, founder of Cardinal Studios, which produces STRIVE, says the program is not a silver bullet, but it can give men a solid starting point on their path to success.

“There is no quick fix from breaking free from pornography,” Cope said. “We know freedom is really just a daily decision. It’s not a destination. So we point them towards some partners we suggest for group therapy or counseling, clinical psychologists we trust and work with.”

Cope says the importance of this online format is that it provides a much needed first step, because the men who struggle with

this problem are often too ashamed to come forward in real life.

“Our hope is that if we provide this anonymous, online, initial solution which brings men into a community with thousands of other men around the world on the same mission, all of sudden it brings them out of isolation, and they realize they’re not alone,” Cope said. “They realize their story is similar to many other stories in how they were first exposed to pornography and how they dealt with it, and the impact it’s had on their relationships.”

This understanding of psychological principles and emotional triggers are ideas Fradd borrows from sexual addiction specialist, Dr. Kevin Skinner. These tools help STRIVE users develop their own unique sobriety plan.

“Those things that lead you down the path of acting out, you learn how to squeeze those triggers out of your calendar, and add in healthy behaviors that lead you away from pornography,” Cope said.

Another aspect of STRIVE is that it sits men down in a serious moment and asks the big questions.

“What kind of husband or father do you want to be?” Fradd asked. “Do you want to be the kind that creeps away from his wife late at night to troll 20-second videos on your Twitter? Is that how you want to be remembered? Is this how you want your children to speak of you? Unless they’re drunk or being an idiot, they’ll say no.”

STRIVE is available for free until at least the spring of 2020. And it’s open to any man with an open mind and a desire to change.

“STRIVE is very un-judgmental. It’s not about making you feel bad. It’s me coming alongside and saying, ‘Hey, I’m exactly like you: beset with weakness and temptation,’” Fradd said. “I’m a Christian, but I think any person of goodwill can go through this, and not feel like they’re being preached at.”

## MINDSET MATTERS

# Marcus Aurelius on How to Turn Around a Rotten Day

Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius believed that battling reality was futile

BARRY BROWNSTEIN

When you wake up in the morning, notice how quickly your mind checks into its physical and psychological ailments. Back pain? Still there. Afternoon meeting to worry about? Still there. Troublesome financial situation? Still there.

Did you expect it to be different? If you look for them, there will always be difficulties to drag through your day.

### All Days Are Challenging

Today, like most days, it will probably be too hot or too cold. Traffic will be terrible. Troubling events will happen in the world. Your colleagues and even family members may not see things your way, and you may experience some interpersonal conflicts.

Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius was a Stoic philosopher. He would say, “Nothing has to go right today for you to act with honor and character.”

To do the impossible and think only positive thoughts is not the answer. Quite the contrary, Aurelius advises in his “Meditations,” “When you wake up in the morning, tell yourself: The people I deal with today will be meddling, ungrateful, arrogant, dishonest, jealous, and surly.”

Making the mindset adjustment that Aurelius advises, you are not battling with reality.

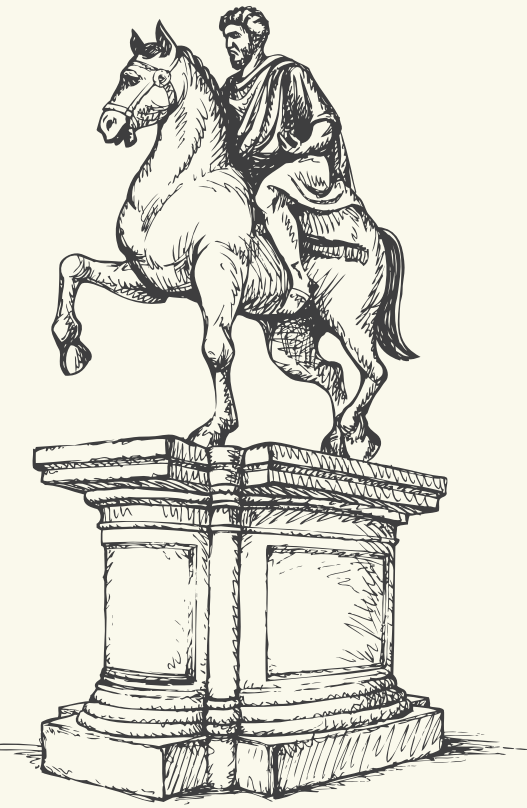
Of the disagreeable people encountered in any given day, Aurelius says: “They are like this because they can’t tell good from evil. But I have seen the beauty of good, and the ugliness of evil, and have recognized that the wrongdoer has a nature related to my own—not of the same blood or birth, but the same mind, and possessing a share of the divine.”

Everyone you will meet today, despite their poor behavior, does not differ from you. There is no need, Aurelius advises, for anger, hate, or conflict. Things may not go well, and things don’t have to go well for you to have a good day.

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When you wake up in the morning, tell yourself: The people I deal with today will be meddling, ungrateful, arrogant, dishonest, jealous, and surly.

Marcus Aurelius, Roman emperor, Stoic philosopher



practical “tools” I could use to help overcome many of my emotional challenges.

### Meditation

Meditation can be extremely helpful on many levels: reducing anxiety, allowing a respite from the pain, helping to manage the responsibilities of daily life, and so forth. Meditation, although sounding simple, can be a challenge.

Since I am a “Type A” personality, sitting quietly while pushing a myriad of thoughts out of my head seemed impossible. Most techniques involve sitting in a comfortable chair, away from noise and distractions. Breath control is sometimes involved, with slow and controlled breathing techniques. The objective is to clear your mind of any and all thoughts.

There are many techniques: some involve a mantra (a repeated sound or word), others have you look at a candle flame and/or play meditation music, and still others use guided imagery. Personally, I had the most success when listening to guided imagery. There are many books on the subject. As with anything worthwhile, it takes practice and perseverance.

### Television, Music, and Books

I recommend scrutinizing everything you watch on television or in the movies. News reports contain so many stories about death and violence, it can be hard for a fragile heart to take. Instead, I found enough news by simply scanning the newspaper. I also avoided any violent shows or movies. My heavy heart couldn’t bear to watch anything that wasn’t uplifting or heart-warming. If something you’re watching makes you feel worse, change the channel or turn it off.

Music can be used to reflect your mood or even to change your mood. I would play a sentimental song when feeling the need to cry. Tears are healing and a good

way to release emotions. Conversely, if I wanted to lift my mood, I would listen to something more upbeat.

Instead of watching TV or listening to music, reading can be a source of relaxation and/or learning. I loved to read about near-death experiences, after-death communications, and psychic mediums. I felt compelled to know what happened after death and what Heaven was like.

### Exercise

Some form of exercise is important even if you need to push yourself in the beginning. Changing your surroundings and getting your circulation and energy flowing is well worth the effort to aid in healing. Again, what is appropriate for each person varies greatly. It can be as simple as a short walk or as vigorous as kick-boxing.

I would use a brisk walk in a park with trails and hills in order to decrease my anxiety. Yoga was my other favorite form of exercise. It allowed me to work on multiple things at once; stretching, balance, core strengthening, energy flow, breath control, and meditation. Other people prefer swimming, running, sports, or salsa dancing. Of course, whatever activity you start with can change to fit your needs as you heal.

### Pets

Bernard Williams once said, “There is no psychiatrist in the world like a puppy licking your face.” There are great healing benefits from a pet’s unconditional love. Whether it’s a cat, dog, or even a horse, a beloved pet can go a long way to fill the hole in a broken heart. I attribute a great deal of my healing to my intuitive and loving golden retriever. She never tired of my hugging her or crying into the scruff of her neck.

Look for the last part in this series, “Taming the Grief Monster, Moving Forward.”

Part 2 of 3

Linda Zelik lost her 24-year-old son in 2010. She is currently the facilitator of the South Bay/LA chapter of TCF. The above article was adapted from her recently published book, “From Despair to Hope, Survival Guide for Bereaved Parents,” which can be found through the website: [www.GriefHelp4Parents.Weebly.com](http://www.GriefHelp4Parents.Weebly.com) or at Amazon.com

Meditation can be extremely helpful on many levels: reducing anxiety, allowing a respite from the pain, helping to manage the responsibilities of daily life, and so forth.



MINDSET MATTERS

# Marcus Aurelius on *How to Turn Around a Rotten Day*

Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius believed that battling reality was futile

Continued from **Page 15**

Others, like you, sometimes make a poor choice and, like you, have the power to make a better choice. Aurelius says:

“We were born to work together like feet, hands, and eyes, like the two rows of teeth, upper and lower. To obstruct each other is unnatural. To feel anger at someone, to turn your back on him: these are obstructions.”

Notice how reluctant your mind is to believe “we were born to work together.” Your fellow commuters seem to be in your way, and some of your colleagues seem to be obstacles.

No wonder the day has barely begun and you’re exhausted already.

How laughable your mindset is, Aurelius might say. You expected the world to provide no obstructions while your mind was filled with obstructions.

**Focus on Your Character**

“What fresh hell is this?” famously quipped Dorothy Parker when the doorbell would ring in her apartment. Perhaps you greet the new day with similar trepidation.

Although it seemed otherwise to Parker, Aurelius taught that we, not other people, are the problem. How much time do we waste focusing on what others are doing? Aurelius offers sound advice:

“Don’t waste the rest of your time here worrying about other people—unless it affects the common good. It will keep you from doing anything useful. You’ll be too preoccupied with what so-and-so is doing, and why, and what they’re saying, and what they’re thinking, and what they’re up to, and all the other things that throw

you off and keep you from focusing on your own mind.

“Yes, keep on degrading yourself, soul. But soon your chance at dignity will be gone. Everyone gets one life. Yours is almost used up, and instead of treating yourself with respect, you have entrusted your own happiness to the souls of others.”

When our thoughts are not hijacked by today’s disruptions, we free up our mental energy to concentrate on our own efforts:

“Concentrate every minute ... on doing what’s in front of you with precise and genuine seriousness, tenderly, willingly, with justice. And on freeing yourself from all other distractions. Yes, you can—if you do everything as if it were the last thing you were doing in your life, and stop being aimless, stop letting your emotions override what your mind tells you, stop being hypocritical, self-centered, irritable.”

Not convinced? Do you still think others are the problem and you need to get away? Aurelius has a bucket of ice water for your mistaken belief and a better path for self-renewal:

“People try to get away from it all—to the country, to the beach, to the mountains. You always wish that you could, too. Which is idiotic: you can get away from it anytime you like.

“By going within.”

“Nowhere you can go is more peaceful—more free of interruptions—than your own soul. Especially if you have other things to rely on. An instant’s recollection and there it is: complete tranquility. And by tranquility, I mean a kind of harmony.”

“So keep getting away from it all—like that. Renew yourself. But keep it brief and



AKARANAN/SHUTTERSTOCK

Rather than getting down about how things turn out, you could prepare yourself to face the worst and better roll with it should the worst unfold.

“We were born to work together like feet, hands, and eyes, like the two rows of teeth, upper and lower. To obstruct each other is unnatural.

Marcus Aurelius, Roman emperor, Stoic philosopher

basic. A quick visit should be enough to ward off all and send you back ready to face what awaits you.”

Marcus Aurelius wrote “Meditations” as guidance for himself, never expecting it would become a lasting treasure for humanity. A Byzantine poet once advised his readers to study what he called “The Book of Marcus”: “If you desire to master pain, unroll this book and read with care.”

If you want to read more, the translation of “Meditations” by University of Virginia classics professor Gregory Hays is magnificent. Read and reread. Begin to observe, each morning as you get out of bed, you will have an opportunity to learn a truth: Nothing has to go right for you today, and yet, as the Stoic philosopher Epictetus prescribed, you can “act your part with honor.”

Barry Brownstein is a professor emeritus of economics and leadership at the University of Baltimore. He is the author of “The Inner-Work of Leadership.” To receive Barry’s essays, subscribe at Mindset Shifts. This article was originally published on Intellectual Takeout.

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