

WEEK 50, 2019

THE EPOCH TIMES

MIND & BODY

The Mind: an Untapped Health Resource

The interconnection
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Chemo therapy can be a brutal ordeal, and sometimes it is okay to say "no."

CANCER UP CLOSE

My Chemotherapy Experience

Making the tough decision to stop treatment early

MICHELE GONCALVES

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

To say that I was frightened going into my intense chemotherapy regimen (IV and pill) after my tumor removal surgery is a huge understatement, since I knew that my ultra-sensitive body wouldn't handle it well. Even though my experience was brief (I only ended up having two of the standard six cycles), the lessons I learned about chemo and myself on this difficult journey will stay with me forever.

I remember crying in my therapist's office explaining how my anxiety was growing as the date of my first treatment approached. I was reminded again and again that I have a voice in this matter, and that if I didn't want to continue with my treatments, I could just say stop. This was my right. It was incredibly empowering to hear, and it helped me get the courage to face my fears and go through with it.

Finally, the day came. I arrived at the cancer center and it all began with an IV being put into my arm—like so many times before. I had a bunch of appointments prior to going to the infusion center, but I will never forget the look of concern on the nurse's face when I showed up to begin my treatments.

"Um, do you have a port in your chest?" she asked as she looked at my IV.

"No, I don't want any ports and I was told I didn't need one," I replied.

"Well, you see, the type of chemo drug you are going to be getting (Oxaliplatin) is extremely acidic and it is going to burn badly going through a normal IV. You need to have a central line, but we have workarounds we can use this time since the rest of the center has closed for the day."

The lessons I learned about chemo and myself on this difficult journey will stay with me forever.

Things got a bit foggy after she said that. I was in full-on panic mode. The next two hours were intense as the chemo stung its way through my veins. The worst of the pain came afterward as I faced swelling and tenderness in my nose for several weeks and needed

to have a PICC line for each treatment going forward. The second treatment went better.

As for the side effects, I recall how my eyes kept twitching like crazy on my car ride home just 30 minutes after my first infusion. By the next day, I was dealing with common issues like intense, sharp pains from touching or drinking cold things, and less common severe neurological issues such as the random paralysis of my left hand, the left side of my face, and my lips. Fortunately, these oddities only lasted a few minutes or so. My eyes also felt like they were being stabbed with a thousand knives when I teared up, which was unfortunately often.

I was reminded again and again that I have a voice in this matter, and that if I didn't want to continue with my treatments, I could just say stop.

On top of all this came expected nausea. My first cycle wasn't actually too bad, but by the second cycle, I vomited so much the days following my treatment that I couldn't eat or drink for several days and had to temporarily stop the oral Xeloda chemo pills I had to take for 14 days following each infusion.

I was having so many neurological issues that I went in for an emergency appointment to see the general practitioner at my cancer center and finally informed my oncologist a few days later by phone that I wanted to stop the treatments. I made an appointment to see him a week later, and he agreed to stop. He noted that the benefits clearly didn't outweigh the serious risks in my case since the biopsies taken during my surgery all showed no cancer was present in my tumor or surrounding lymph nodes. I was thankful that he supported my decision, and relieved that this very difficult phase was over.

Join me next week when I will share my challenging ileostomy reversal surgery experience.

Until then, breathe deep, be kind, and take it one day at a time.

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

THE ROOT CAUSE

Parkinson's Disease Linked to Antibiotic Overuse

The destruction of our gut microbiome may be wreaking havoc on our nervous system

ARMEN NIKOGOSIAN

Overuse of antibiotics can lead to an increased risk of Parkinson's disease according to a study published recently in the journal *Movement Disorders*.

Parkinson's disease is a progressive nervous system disorder associated with build-up of alpha-synuclein, a neuronal protein that affects movement. Symptoms progress gradually over many years and can begin with simple hand tremors and can culminate in complete disability and even death. It afflicts up to 10 million people worldwide with 1 million cases in the United States alone. The prevalence of the disease increases with age, particularly after the age of 50.

The gut microbiome is the community of microbes including bacteria, viruses, protozoa, fungi, and their collective genetic material, which is present in the gastrointestinal tract. This diverse community of microbes weighs around 4 1/2 pounds (two kilograms) in an adult and helps maintain the immune system, manage inflammation, detoxify the body, and much more. Damage to the microbiome can have long-ranging effects as it disrupts these important functions. The vagus nerve is the primary parasympathetic nerve controlling the organs and it is one of the primary communication routes between the gut and the brain.

A well-known side effect of antibiotics is the destruction of the gut microbiome's valuable diversity. This effect is compounded by the use of modern, more powerful, broad-spectrum antibiotics.

As early as the 1970s, scientists had theorized that there could be a connection between Parkinson's disease and the gut. More recently, Swedish researchers had finished a 40-year study that followed more than 9,000 patients and compared the prevalence of Parkinson's disease in patients who had their vagal nerves severed for medical purposes compared to patients who hadn't. Researchers had come to the conclusion that there was a protective effect against Parkinson's disease in patients



Parkinson's disease affects movement as it takes its toll on the nervous system.

Strongest associations were found with macrolide antibiotics, such as azithromycin, and lincosamide antibiotics, such as clindamycin. There were also associations found with tetracyclines, sulfonamides and trimethoprim, and antifungal medications.

This study further supports the larger concept of the gut-brain axis.

The gut-brain axis consists of two-way communication between the central nervous system and the nervous system of the gut, linking the cognitive and emotional centers of the brain with gut functions. The gut microbiome plays a hugely important role in this interaction. The signaling from the gut microbiome to the brain and from the brain to gut microbiome is by means of neural, endocrine, immune, and humoral links.

with severed vagal nerves. If Parkinson's disease begins in the gut and is potentially microbial in origin, the vagal nerve could be the path by which it travels to the brain.

In the past decade, there has been a flood of research regarding Parkinson's disease, the gut, and any link between the two. It was known that the bacterial composition of the intestine in Parkinson's patients was abnormal, but the cause was unknown. Many Parkinson's patients report chronic gut problems and these pathological changes have been observed up to 20 years before diagnosis. Constipation, irritable bowel syndrome, and inflammatory bowel disease have all been associated with a higher risk of developing Parkinson's disease.

Results in the recently published study suggest that some commonly used antibiotics, which are known to strongly influence the gut microbiota, could be a predisposing factor to Parkinson's disease. The strongest associations were found for broad-spectrum antibiotics and those that act against fungi and anaerobic bacteria. A delay of 1 to 15 years between excessive antibiotic use and the onset of Parkinson's disease was observed in the study with the strongest associations seen at 10 to 15 years from the date of antibiotic use. The study compared antibiotic exposure between 1998 and 2014 in more than 10,000 Parkinson's disease patients and compared it to more than 40,000 non-affected persons matched for age, sex, and residence.

While we have known about the actions of the brain to gut for hundreds of years, we are only recently discovering the actions of the gut to brain. The vagus nerve is a bidirectional pathway and the simple act of understanding this concept opens the door to new and exciting viewpoints in the diagnosis and treatment of many diseases.

This discovery will hopefully have implications for antibiotic prescribing practices in the future. With our new understanding of the effects the microbiome has on the gut, brain, and the downstream implications on a multitude of diseases, we should always consider the long-lasting effects of antibiotics on the gut microbiome as well as the long-standing problem of antibiotic resistance.

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

While we have known about the actions of the brain to gut for hundreds of years, we are only recently discovering the actions of the gut to brain.

Statistically Speaking, These 7 Foods May Extend Your Life

DEVON ANDRE

The Blue Zone is a selection of regions around the globe where residents live unusually long and have a minimal risk for disease. They are healthier than most people, and it is believed a large part of that has to do with the foods they eat.

It is important to note, however, that Blue Zones don't all have the same foods available to them. In Okinawa, a Japanese region made up of a group of islands in the East China Sea, residents have the longest life expectancy in the world. The islands are believed to hold a record number of people over 100, and the average age for males and females is 84 and 90, respectively.

Here are some foods that are staples in the region.

maintain healthy cells, and is also capable of reducing cholesterol.

- **Sweet potato:** Sweet potato is a rich source of vitamin A and other antioxidants that may help reduce inflammation. When consumed whole (with skin) it is a good source of fiber that can aid digestion and heart health, while also helping to regulate blood sugar.
- **Turmeric:** Turmeric is a powerful spice that is associated with a number of health benefits like potentially delaying dementia and lowering inflammation. In Okinawa, it is used in teas and as a common spice and is consumed almost daily.
- **Shiitake mushrooms:**



PAULO VILELA/SHUTTERSTOCK



People in Okinawa have the longest life expectancy in the world, and the local diet helps explain why.

The islands are believed to hold a record number of people over 100, and the average age for males and females is 84 and 90, respectively.

Used in soups and more, these mushrooms can help build immune strength.

• **Seaweed:** Seaweed is another fixture in the diet, and it is a very rich source of vitamins and minerals. It is rich in magnesium that can help improve heart health and benefit sleep; iodine for thyroid health; calcium for bone health; as well as carotenoid antioxidants.

Diet alone isn't supplying the health and longevity to the residents of this Blue Zone, but it surely plays a part. Making healthy food decisions every day might improve your quality of life and extend it, too.

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.

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The Mind: an Untapped Health Resource

The interconnection between mind and body is often underestimated

TATIANA DENNING

M

y husband Michael used to never get sick. He prided himself on it. For years, while his co-workers were periodically at home sick with a cold or the flu, he would never miss a single day of work.

Then we moved to Florida. He was exposed to a lot of molds and, perhaps more importantly, a lot of stress. He suddenly found himself getting recurrent sinus infections. His doctor thought sinus surgery was the answer, but alas, while they were fewer, the sinus infections continued. I could see it was not only a physical burden on him but a mental one as well.

When we're stressed or have a lot of negative thoughts, it manifests physically, with things such as increased heart rate, respiratory rate, blood pressure, and elevated cortisol.

When we moved back home to Virginia, I noticed that the sinus infections mostly subsided. There was less mold, but then again, there was much less stress. One day I pointed this out to him. He hadn't really paid attention, but upon realizing he hadn't had an infection in some time, he became determined to avoid anyone who was sick for fear of the sinus infections returning.

And I then began to notice a new pattern with him. If our young son picked up even the sniffles at school, and my husband knew about it, he would immediately get sick himself. It surprised me at just how quickly it would happen. However, if I didn't mention my son's sniffles, or that my son seemed to be getting sick, my husband would be fine.

This went on for nearly a year before I brought it up to him. He didn't believe me at first, but as time went on and he observed the situation, he came to realize that what

I'd pointed out was true. His thoughts were, at least in part, creating his illness.

Our Perceptions Matter

The mind is very powerful.

This fact is something that drug companies know all too well. If pharmaceutical companies could bottle and sell the placebo effect, they would be many times wealthier than they already are. A placebo, commonly known as a sugar pill, is what a new drug coming to market must be measured against to determine which works better, the drug or the mind, by way of a placebo. And, more often than these companies would like, the placebo wins out, sometimes by a huge margin. Simply by virtue of a person perceiving that they are taking a drug, the intended benefit can be created in the body.

A study of 5,888 Americans over the age of 65 by researchers at Johns Hopkins University found that a poor image of one's health roughly doubled the risk of death within five years. This held regardless of other risk factors. "In fact, a pessimistic outlook proved to be deadlier than congestive heart failure or smoking 50 or more packs of cigarettes every year," noted a Health Day article on the study.

My husband was under a lot of stress when his sinus infections first began. With increasing anxiety, his mind had difficulty managing it all, and he began developing sinus infections. Of course, it's well-recognized that stress decreases immunity. In time, when various treatments didn't give the desired results, my husband grew to believe that he would continue to get sick, especially if he was around anyone who was sick. His perceptions had changed over time.

Gunnar Engstrom, MD, a professor at Lund University in Sweden, who has extensively studied self-ratings of health, told Health Day that a positive attitude about health can ward off mental distress and improve protection against many diseases.



impact of a positive attitude, or what she calls dispositional optimism in some papers. Her findings affirm that people with a more upbeat attitude about challenges are much better able to handle the stress they bring and find ways to cope.

But being positive doesn't mean believing you will never experience difficulties. Bad things happen and we will inevitably be hurt by others. But optimists are more likely to learn from these situations and see them realistically.

The popular medical site WebMD mentions just some of the health benefits recognized in those who view things in a more positive light. "When people in one study were exposed to the flu and common cold, those with a positive outlook were less likely to get sick and reported fewer symptoms.

"During another study, women who were more optimistic were less likely to die from cancer, heart disease, stroke, respiratory disease, and infection."

"And in a study of people over the age of 50, those who had more positive thoughts about aging lived longer. They also had less stress-related inflammation, which shows one possible link between their thoughts and health."

More Kindness, Better Health

Kindness also matters, and for more reasons than we may realize.

A 2014 study published in the journal *Circ: Heart Failure*, noted that "Studies have identified potent psychosocial risk factors for cardiovascular disease. Besides pessimism, these include depression, anxiety, chronic stress, social isolation, and a low sense of life purpose." In other words, attitude has a major impact on the risk of developing cardiovascular disease.

In talking with patients over the years, I've noticed that those who are genuinely kind-hearted and put others first, who strive to do the right thing, and who are forgiving and tolerant of others, seem to oftentimes have better health than those who are not. In an article I did on aging well, I noted this fact with the patient I interviewed.

A positive attitude and a kind heart are the two biggest commonalities that I've observed over the years in those who are aging well.

An article in *Psychology Today* discusses the impact kindness has on our health. It states that, "Researcher, Barbara Fredrickson, had an interesting viewpoint—that kindness, specifically loving-kindness,

moved one out of the selfish realm. Stated differently, it took one off the hedonic treadmill. Compassion and kindness also reduce stress, boost our immune systems, and help reduce negative emotions such as anger, anxiety, and depression."

Kindness can manifest as an act, but it most certainly begins with our thoughts and impacts both what we say, and what we do. Checking in with ourselves throughout the day to make sure we are thinking kind thoughts and putting others first can go a long in benefitting not just our relationship with others, but also our own health.

Health Care Reimagined

It seems our perception regarding our state of health can impact a number of both acute and chronic conditions. But as physicians, are we emphasizing this enough with our patients?

Researcher Alia Crum in an article in *Stanford Business* notes that public health campaigns are geared toward motivating people to eat better, exercise, and reduce their stress, but these are incomplete. "An important variable is being left out of the equation: people's mindsets about those healthy behaviors."

I once knew a colleague who wrote some rather unorthodox prescriptions for his patients. They would leave his office with prescriptions saying things like, "watch two happy movies a week," "laugh ten times a day," or "do at least one kind thing for someone every day." Patients would report back to him, and he said based on his years of experience, it made a significant difference in his patients' physical and mental health. While behavior change is important, he recognized that it all begins with the mind.

Crum agrees "It's time that we start taking the role of mindsets in health more seriously," Crum told *Stanford Business*.

Perhaps if we physicians stressed the importance of things like a positive outlook, reframing a difficult situation into a positive one, and being kind and helping others, we would help our patients achieve significant improvement in their health with the need for either fewer or maybe even no, medications.

Choosing Our Thoughts

The great thing about our thoughts is we don't have to believe everything we think.

My husband believed that he would get sick if he was around someone sick. If he had not accepted this thought, and instead, replaced it with one about being healthy, he likely would have had different results.

We have countless opportunities to check our thoughts each day, and each time we do, we can make a choice about that thought.

In his book, *You Are The Placebo: Making Your Mind Matter* Dr. Joe Dispenza writes "95 percent of who you are by the time you are

Women who were more optimistic were less likely to die from cancer, heart disease, stroke, respiratory disease, and infection.

WebMD



WAYHOME STUDIO/SHUTTERSTOCK

35 years old is a set of memorized behaviors, skills, emotional reactions, beliefs, perceptions and attitudes which function like a subconscious automatic computer."

That's a powerful set of mental habits to overcome, but it can be done.

Knowing how important our thoughts are to our mental and physical health empowers us, and can motivate us to train ourselves to think differently.

An article on the University of Minnesota's website notes the work of Dr. Fredrickson, who has spent years researching the physical and emotional benefits of positivity. These include faster recovery from cardiovascular stress, fewer colds, better sleep, and an improved sense of overall happiness.

Fortunately for all of us, positive attitudes and habits can be cultivated, giving us another way to improve our health and wellbeing.

As you go about your day, periodically pause to evaluate your thoughts. When challenges come, instead of listening to any negative thoughts, reframe them and put a positive spin on things. Accepting that change is a part of life and flowing with what life brings, including challenges, also helps. It's really about resilience.

A wealth of research has brought the importance of resilience into greater focus. Resilient people face life's challenges honestly, without trying to escape or deny the suffering involved. This helps them better retain that sense of positivity that many of us lose in the face of difficulty.

About four years ago my husband stopped getting sick all the time. What changed? Well, one day, when he found himself getting sick, he decided to try a concoction that he'd read about, one made of crushed garlic clove juice, raw apple cider vinegar, and raw honey. And it worked. He decided to take it daily as a means of prevention. Since then, he's only gotten sick once or twice. The change has been amazing. He firmly believes in this recipe, and if he misses it, he'll occasionally feel he's catching something. But he'll double up on his next dose, and voila!—illness avoided. I'd like to think he's also learned to watch his thoughts a bit more. Placebo? Positive thoughts? An effective home remedy? Perhaps a bit of each.

Several years ago, as I was stepping out of my car one afternoon, I found this discarded fortune lying on the ground at my feet. It's a little tattered and worn, but I kept it on the board above my desk as a reminder:

It's important to remember we don't have to be a slave to every thought that comes our way. With time, practice, and vigilance, we can learn to tap into one of the most powerful, and completely free, health resources we have—Our mind.

Tatiana Denning, D.O., is a family medicine physician who focuses on wellness and prevention. She believes in empowering her patients with the knowledge and skills necessary to maintain and improve their own health.

Constant Toxins Call for a Radical Response

Rising rates autoimmunity and neurodegenerative disease are warnings

ANN LOUISE GITTLEMAN

Do you have an autoimmune disorder, or has your thyroid come to a screeching halt? Is that extra body fat stuck to you like glue? When it comes to autoimmune issues, a sluggish thyroid, or other metabolic issues, it's time to turn the spotlight toward toxicity as the prime suspect.

Toxicity plays an enormous role in today's exploding rates of autoimmunity, neurodegenerative disease, and obesity. The links between cumulative environmental exposure and autoimmune illnesses are complex because our bodies are exposed to countless mixtures of toxins over time.

Sadly, our inundation with these exposures essentially amounts to a massive public-health experiment—and one you may be paying for with your health. The statistics speak for themselves.

Cancer and other serious illnesses are linked to exposure to industrial chemicals, heavy

EMFs produce oxidative stress and damage DNA, which increases the production of stress hormones cortisol and adrenaline.

Dandelions are considered weeds, but every part of them is edible and their tea can help your gallbladder, an important organ for detoxification.

metals, and other toxins. Similar links have been found to autoimmune disease, causing the body's immune system to mistakenly target healthy cells throughout the body. The autoimmune con-

dition Hashimoto's thyroiditis is a prime example, accounting for up to 90 percent of hypothyroidism cases. Between 2013 and 2015, 54 million Americans were diagnosed with some form

of arthritis, gout, lupus, or fibromyalgia. More than one-third of Americans are obese, and the incidence of type 2 diabetes is through the roof.

We can detox our liver and



CHAMILLE WHITE/SHUTTERSTOCK

blood, and our intestinal tract, but we will never get ahead of it unless we cleanse and rebuild our cells. The cell is where everything happens, whether you're talking about immunity or brain health, or stoking your metabolic fires. If your cells are toxic, you have what I refer to as toxic metabolism, and no diet in the world will work.

Dangers Lurk in the Stranges Places

Your tap water may be poisoning your thyroid. Fluoride intake blocks iodine receptors in your thyroid gland, which shuts down your body's thyroid hormone production. Your thyroid gland uses fluoride to make an "imposter hormone" that triggers fatigue, depression, weight gain, and even hair loss. Making matters worse, this hormone charlatans poses as thyroid hormone in blood tests, making deficiencies almost impossible to detect.

Then there's glyphosate. Glyphosate is the primary chemical in the notorious weed killer Roundup and is extremely damaging to the body by several different mechanisms. Besides being carcinogenic, it's an endocrine disruptor and major metal chelator. That means it binds tightly to metals such as mercury and aluminum and carries them directly

into your brain.

In terms of weight loss resistance, endocrine-disrupting chemicals (EDS) shut down your thyroid and trick your body into storing excess fat. Endocrine disruptors are SO good at this that they've earned the nickname "obesogens." Increased body fat means more toxins can be stored—but it gets worse. Glyphosate makes other chemicals even more toxic by blocking certain enzyme pathways in your liver that detoxify harmful compounds. These blocked pathways also prevent your liver from converting vitamin D into its active form, thereby contributing to vitamin D deficiency.

Glyphosate is only one endocrine disruptor—we are exposed to many others each and every day. Science has shown that immunoneuro-endocrine alterations, such as those caused by EDCs, precede the onset of autoimmune disease. Your cell phone, smart meter, computer, and other tech may be intensifying the problem.

A number of modern-day diseases have been scientifically linked to physiological disruptions from man-made electromagnetic fields (EMFs). These fields cause cell membranes to lose calcium ions, which leads to neurotransmitter misfirings

and disrupted hormone communication. EMFs produce oxidative stress and damage DNA, which increases the production of stress hormones cortisol and adrenaline. High cortisol leads to elevated blood sugar and insulin and increased abdominal fat.

The Bitter Truth About Detox

In the face of all these toxic assaults, you need a secret weapon—so I will give you one right now: bitter foods. Besides being the antidote to "sweet addiction," bitters are an important but forgotten detox food and it's beyond time to bring them back. A surprising number of your favorite foods are classified as "bitters"—artichokes, asparagus, grapefruit, and dandelion tea, and even coffee and cacao.

One thing making bitters such a nutritional boon is that they help restore gallbladder, and even more importantly, healthy bile flow. Gallbladder disease is often a symptom of a more serious problem: congested bile. The reason so many people are losing their gallbladder is they've developed thick, sludgy, congested bile that literally mucks up the works. Why is bile important? It's a crucial detox vehicle—and hardly anyone is talking about it!

Bile binds with and carries a

multitude of toxins out of the body via the intestines—heavy metals, drugs, excess hormones, chemicals, food preservatives, pesticides, flame retardants and the like. Bile is what flushes away the toxins your liver collects. An alarming number of people have bile and gallbladder issues but are completely unaware. Among other things, toxic bile can drag down your thyroid.

One Finnish study showed that hypothyroidism is seven times more likely in people with reduced bile flow.[v]

It's no surprise that sluggish bile and accumulation of body fat go hand in hand. If your bile is thick and not flowing freely, all that sludge remains in your system and the excess toxins get parked in your fat cells. And you'll have plenty of those because, without adequate bile, your digestive tract cannot properly break down fats into forms your body can use, so it has no choice other than to store them.

Today's toxic world calls for a radical new approach. My latest book *"Radical Metabolism"* (released August 28, 2018) addresses toxicity as a prime factor in chronic health problems such as Hashimoto's, type 2 diabetes, and others, and aims to tackle the problem at the level of the cell. "Radical Me-

tabolism" brings back the healing power of bitters and "forbidden" fats that specifically repair cellular and mitochondrial membranes. The book addresses how to fuel three metabolically active tissues you didn't even know you had, each with different nutritional requirements.

Today, it is impossible to avoid all health-compromising agents, but with diligence and increased awareness, you can substantially reduce your exposure—starting right where you are. It is never too late. Regardless of your age, health status or situation, your body wants to be healthy and possesses an immense capacity for self-healing. Even small changes made consistently over time can make a world of difference.

Ann Louise Gittleman, Ph.D., CNS, is a New York Times bestselling author of more than 30 books, including "Radical Metabolism." She is a nutritional visionary and trendsetter on the frontlines of nutrition. For more information, please visit her website: www.AnnLouise.com/. This article was originally published on GreenMedInfo.com. Sign up for the free newsletter at www.GreenMedInfo.health

Four Reasons to Cultivate Patience

Good things really do come to those who wait

KIRA M. NEWMAN

As virtues go, patience is a quiet one. It's often exhibited by the absence of a reaction, or behind closed doors rather than a public stage: A father telling a third bedtime story to his son, a dancer waiting for her injury to heal. In public, it's the impatient ones who grab all our attention: drivers honking in traffic, grumbling customers in slow-moving lines.

We have epic movies exalting the virtues of courage and compassion, but a movie about patience might be a bit of a snoozer.

Yet patience is essential to daily life—and might be key to a happy one. Having patience means being able to wait calmly in the face of frustration or adversity, so anywhere there is frustration or adversity—i.e., nearly everywhere—we have the opportunity to practice it. At home with our kids, at work with our colleagues, at the grocery store with half our city's population, patience can make the difference between annoyance and equanimity, between worry and tranquility.

Religions and philosophers have long praised the virtue of patience; now researchers are starting to do so as well. Recent studies have found that, sure enough, good things really do come to those who wait. Some of these science-backed benefits are detailed below, along with three ways to cultivate more patience in your life.

1. Patient People Enjoy Better Mental Health

This finding is probably easy to believe if you call to mind the stereotypical impatient person: face red, head steaming. And sure enough, according to a 2007 study by Fuller Theological Seminary professor

Sarah A. Schnitker and UC Davis psychology professor Robert Emmons, patient people tend to experience less depression and negative emotions, perhaps because they can cope better with upsetting or stressful situations. They also rate themselves as more mindful and feel more gratitude, more connection to mankind and to the universe, and a greater sense of abundance.

In 2012, Schnitker sought to refine our understanding of patience, recognizing that it comes in many different stripes. One type is interpersonal patience, which doesn't involve waiting but simply facing annoying people with equanimity. In a study of nearly 400 undergraduates, she found that those who are more patient toward others also tend to be more hopeful and more satisfied with their lives.

Another type of patience involves waiting out life's hardships without frustration or despair—think of the unemployed person who persistently fills out job applications or the cancer patient waiting for her treatment to work. Unsurprisingly, in Schnitker's study, this type of courageous patience was linked to more hope.

Finally, patience over daily hassles—traffic jams, long lines at the grocery store, a malfunction-

ing computer—seems to go along with good mental health. In particular, people who have this type of patience are more satisfied with life and less depressed.

These studies are good news for people who are already patient, but what about those of us who want to become more patient? In her 2012 study, Schnitker invited 71 undergraduates to participate in two weeks of patience training where they learned to identify feelings and their triggers, regulate their emotions, empathize with others, and meditate. In

two weeks, participants reported feeling more patient toward the trying people in their lives, feeling less depressed, and experiencing higher levels of positive emotions. In other words, patience seems to be a skill you can practice—more on that below—and doing so might bring benefits to your mental health.

2. Patient People Are Better Friends and Neighbors

In relationships with others, patience becomes a form of kindness. Think of the best friend who

comforts you night after night over the heartache that just won't go away or the grandchild who smiles through the story she has heard her grandfather tell countless times. Indeed, research suggests that patient people tend to be more cooperative, more empathic, more equitable, and more forgiving. "Patience involves emphatically assuming some personal discomfort to alleviate the suffering of those around us," writes Debra R. Comer and Leslie E. Sekerka in their 2014 study. Evidence of this is found in

a 2008 study that put participants into groups of four and asked them to contribute money to a common pot, which would be doubled and redistributed. The game gave players a financial incentive to be stingy, yet patient people contributed more to the pot than other players did.

This kind of selflessness is found among people with all three types of patience mentioned above, not just interpersonal patience: In Schnitker's 2012 study, all three were associated with higher "agreeableness," a personality

Having patience means being able to wait calmly in the face of frustration or adversity.

trait characterized by warmth, kindness, and cooperation. The interpersonally patient people even tended to be less lonely, perhaps because making and keeping friends—with all their quirks and slip-ups—generally requires a healthy dose of patience. "Patience may enable individuals to tolerate flaws in others, therefore displaying more generosity, compassion, mercy, and forgiveness," write Schnitker and Emmons in their 2007 study.

On a group level, patience may be one of the foundations of civil society. Patient people are more likely to vote, an activity that entails waiting months or years for our elected officials to implement better policies. Patience may have helped our ancestors survive, allowing them to do good deeds and wait for others to reciprocate, instead of demanding immediate compensation (which would more likely lead to conflict than cooperation). In that same vein, patience is linked to trust in the people and the institutions around us.

3. Patience Helps Us Achieve Our Goals

The road to achievement is a long one, and those without patience—who want to see results immediately—may not be willing to walk it. Think of the recent critiques of millennials for being unwilling to "pay their dues" in an entry-level job, jumping from position to position rather than growing and learning.

In her 2012 study, Schnitker also examined whether patience helps students get things done. In five surveys they completed over the course of a semester, patient people of all stripes reported exerting more effort toward their goals than other people did. Those with interpersonal patience, in particular, made more progress toward their goals and were more satisfied when they achieved them (particularly if those goals were difficult) compared with less patient people. According to Schnitker's analysis, that greater satisfaction with achieving their goals explained why these patient achievers were more content with their lives as a whole.

4. Patience Is Linked to Good Health

The study of patience is still new, but there's some emerging evidence that it might even be good for our health. In their 2007 study, Schnitker and Emmons found that patient people were less likely to report health problems like headaches, acne flairs, ulcers, diarrhea, and pneumonia. Other research has found that people who exhibit impatience and irritability—a characteristic of the Type A person—

ality—tend to have more health complaints and worse sleep. If patience can reduce our daily stress, it's reasonable to speculate that it could also protect us against stress's damaging health effects.

Three Ways to Cultivate Patience

This is all good news for the naturally patient—or for those who have the time and opportunity to take an intensive two-week training in patience. But what about the rest of us?

It seems there are everyday ways to build patience as well. Here are some strategies suggested by emerging patience research.

- **Reframe the situation.** Feeling impatient is not just an automatic emotional response; it involves conscious thoughts and beliefs, too. If a colleague is late to a meeting, you can fume about their lack of respect, or see those extra 15 minutes as an opportunity to get some reading done. Patience is linked to self-control, and consciously trying to regulate our emotions can help us train our self-control muscles.
- **Practice mindfulness.** In one study, kids who did a six-month mindfulness program in school became less impulsive and more willing to wait for a reward. The GGSC's Christine Carter also recommends mindfulness practice for parents: Taking a deep breath and noticing your feelings of anger or overwhelm (for example, when your kids start yet another argument right before bedtime) can help you respond with more patience.
- **Practice gratitude.** In another study, adults who were feeling grateful were also better at patiently delaying gratification. When given the choice between getting an immediate cash reward or waiting a year for a larger (\$100) windfall, less grateful people paved in once the immediate payment offer climbed to \$18. Grateful people, however, could hold out until the amount reached \$30. If we're thankful for what we have today, we're not desperate for more stuff or better circumstances immediately.

We can try to shelter ourselves from frustration and adversity, but they come with the territory of being human. Practicing patience in everyday situations—like with our punctuality-challenged coworker—will not only make life more pleasant in the present but might also help pave the way for a more satisfying and successful future.

Kira M. Newman is the managing editor at the Greater Good Science Center. This article was originally published on the Greater Good online magazine.



Patience is essential to daily life—and might be key to a happy one.

Taming the Grief Monster: Moving Forward

Giving to others can help us heal from the loss of a loved one

LINDA ZELIK

Profound grief has no timetable. Moving forward is an individual thing—both in how it's done and how long it takes. I would like to offer some suggestions to help make this difficult journey a little easier.

Although there is no such thing as "getting over" losing a child, it is possible to achieve a new normal. Of course, you will never forget or stop loving your child, but it is possible to achieve happiness again.

Life is a gift and every day is a blessing, even though it doesn't always feel that way. There are others in your life that you love and who love you, maybe even need you.

I am quite sure that our child on the other side would not want any of us to spend the rest of our lives grieving for them. It makes them happy to see us happy.

Holidays and Other Special Days

Special days like holidays, birthdays and anniversaries, (or angel-versaries as I like to call them) are definitely challenging. Most of us dread and fear the looming day. There are ways to tame these days so they are not so overwhelming.

With holidays, such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Hanukkah, simplification is the key. You can even have a family meeting in advance

to brainstorm what can be eliminated or minimized. Think of ways to scale down the decorations, cards and/or gift-giving. For instance, shop on-line instead of fighting the crowds. Possibly another family member could host the event.

If you have younger children, of course, you still want to maintain holiday traditions, presents, etc. as much as you are able. Try making new traditions, like having family members mention a short memory of your child before the meal, or providing a journal where family and friends can share their funny or touching stories. Just remember to be kind to yourself, and trust that others close to you will understand.

Regarding special dates related to your child, like their angel-versary or birthday, keep in mind that the anticipation is always worse than the actual day. It helps to have a plan: you can give a party for friends and/or family, get out of town, host a "giving day" in their honor, or just go to a quiet place to give yourself the chance to be alone.

Personally, I hosted parties for my son's first few birthdays. The planning and work involved helped to distract me before the dreaded day. His friends and family also appreciated a way to celebrate his life and share memories. It turned out to be a pleasant day, not nearly as bad as I'd feared. For his first angel-versary, I organized a beach clean up, (something dear to my son's heart) and followed it with a barbeque at our house.

There is no right or wrong way to do this, but planning ahead can help.



Life is a gift and every day is a blessing, even though it doesn't always feel that way.

SHUTTERSTOCK

Affirmations

Although we don't have the ability to control many of the things that happen to us in our lives, we do have the ability to choose how we react towards them. There is an old Chinese proverb that says, "You cannot prevent the birds of sorrow from flying over your head, but you can prevent them from building a nest in your hair."

I didn't want to stay imprisoned by depression and I found positive affirmations helped me to refocus my thinking. I would type several affirmations on a piece of paper, cut them into strips and place them in conspicuous areas around the house. These included:

"I accept all of my feelings as part of my healing and will allow them to wash over me."
 "I realize that letting go of this grief does not mean letting go of my love for Kevin."
 "I am taking care of my health."
 "I am getting a little stronger every day."
 "I appreciate and celebrate the love from my family and friends."
 "I will embrace today as the gift it is and

notice the beauty around me.

Affirmations are personal and need to resonate with you as well as where you are in your grieving process. It is important to recognize each success, big or small and reward yourself accordingly. These would include passing the first anniversary as having gone through the year of "firsts." Also, if you have joined a grief group, or made new and supportive friends, or even been able to laugh for the first time, congratulate yourself. Ignore family or friends who try and put a timetable on your grief, let them know that you are doing the best you can through this difficult time.

The Benefits of Giving Back

Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "It is one of those beautiful compensations of life that no one can sincerely try to help another without helping himself." I found that "getting out of my head" and giving to others went a long way towards my healing. Practicing random acts of kindness can be a very good way to start. As Mother Theresa said, "Not all of us can do great

things, but we can do small things with great love." One bereaved family decided to do an act of kindness every day in honor of their daughter. They would put money in an expiring meter, or let someone get in front of them at a light or hold open a door for a stranger. They would silently say, "This is for you, Kelly." I believe that every time you give of yourself to help others you get at least as much back in return.

I didn't want to stay imprisoned by depression and I found positive affirmations helped me to refocus my thinking.

I had no intention of staying depressed so I decided to find a volunteer activity. My unpredictable emotions within the first two years, however, did limit my choices. Eventually, I was able to find Canine

Companions for Independence that use volunteers for the first phase of raising a training potential service dogs. Since I have some experience in that area, and the dog didn't care if I cried, this was the perfect fit. I have thoroughly enjoyed raising four dogs, three of whom have graduated and are making a huge difference to people in need. It has given me such a happy heart to see "my" dogs graduate and be part of a noble cause.

You have a choice: will you choose to be a prisoner of your depression or will you do your best to rise above it?

This is the last in a series of three segments by Linda Zelik, who lost her 24-year-old son in 2010. She is a U.S.C. graduate and retired occupational therapist.

This series was adapted from her book, "From Despair to Hope, Survival Guide for Bereaved Parents." If you would like to read more the book can be found at Amazon.com, Barnes & Noble, or BookBaby.com. Linda's website at www.GriefHelp4Parents.weebly.com

CONNECT TO LEAD



The first part of developing a trust mindset is understanding that there are different kinds of trust.

Lead Others With a Trust Mindset

Getting beyond tribal trust takes an awareness of our 'in-group' mentality

SCOTT MANN

It seems like everywhere we look, trust is breaking down. In the years I spent in trust-depleted villages as a Green Beret, this was something we had to contend with regularly as we worked to overcome trust gaps between tribes. Since I retired and started working with business leaders, I am seeing those same indicators of low trust—and you probably are too.

Recently, I was working with a company that was struggling with groups within their business that wouldn't get along. They wouldn't support each other, and certainly wouldn't fight for each other. There was heavy tension between

the groups and a complete lack of trust.

This has always been pervasive in human culture, but who gets hit with that in your business? You, the leader. They chirp in your ear and dump their issues on your lap. This can bleed you dry as a leader because it has a corrosive effect on your organization and an eroding effect on you.

At an institutional level, trust is dropping significantly. Percentage-wise, trust in Congress has dropped from the high seventies to low teens. Trust in the media has dropped by 25 to 30 points over the last several decades. Trust in law enforcement, banking, mortgages, and corporate leadership has gone down as well.

We've got to first understand this at a fundamental level. If we don't know that people are losing trust in the institutions that have kept this country operating at the highest level, then we are setting ourselves up for failure. The second, more worrisome thing, is that trust at the community level is dropping even faster.

Gallup took a poll in 1972 that asked, "Do you trust your neighbor?" One-third of Americans said "no." Today, the same poll shows that it's up to two-thirds. But you don't really need that poll; all you have to do is look around. In your neighborhood, do you see more privacy fences or front porches? Look at how people treat strangers. Watch the news for 30 seconds, and you'll get a sense of the erosion of community-level trust. Walk this back to your business, and it's plain to see why you're having conflict between your personnel. If we don't take responsibility for this, trust will continue to erode in our organizations.

We have aquifers in Florida; underground rivers that cut through the bedrock. At some point, a sinkhole opens up. When you think about erosion of trust, that's what's happening. It's eroding underneath your feet, underneath your business, and underneath your community. Eventually, it will open up and suck you down.

The first part of developing a trust mindset is understanding that there are different kinds of trust. The trust that we dealt with in tribal societies is called bonding trust. That's when you trust your family and tribe, and you don't trust anyone else. It creates this in-group/out-group dynamic, and it's been around forever.

Bridging trust is another form of trust. A couple hundred years ago in the United States, bridging trust started to arrive on the shoulders of that bonding trust as a byproduct of a free society. Bridging trust allows you to trust beyond your in-group and trust other individuals who are different from you.

It's bridging trust that's eroding. The ability to trust beyond our in-group is fading back into bonding trust, where we only trust our in-group; everyone else is an out-group. We only trust the people

who look, think, and act like us. Bonding trust is on the rise in the United States, and that's a problem. You can't build a high performing country, culture, or business around bonding trust, because the in-group/out-group dynamic will tear you apart.

As leaders, we have to employ the knowledge of this trust mindset to diffuse these situations. Bonding trust is where we come from; it's our natural default. We'll always default to our in-groups if we get scared or cornered, so we have to bridge beyond that. We have to create a common, unifying vision of something that's bigger than any single in-group.

The good news is that trust can be restored, but it cannot be done without leadership.

How do we do this?

First, we need to shift our mindset to recognize these in- and out-groups. As a leader, you should be looking around, noticing where in-groups and out-groups pop up, and the resulting tensions. Identify the formal or informal leaders in those groups and bring them together. Talk to them about the overarching culture and bridging vision that you're building and ask them to help you build it. You'll be surprised at the answers that you'll get.

The good news is that trust can be restored, but it cannot be done without leadership. Leaders have to build their mindset around trust, lean into it, understand the different levels of trust, and always look for opportunities to bridge beyond the in-groups.

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

Prolong Your Life

by Balancing, Preserving Your Life's Essence

As we head into the New Year, in a world full of seemingly endless challenges, we can look to ancient wisdom that has guided humanity for centuries.



Why the kidneys play a vital role in health and longevity

CONAN MILNER

It's almost a new year—a time to reflect on the past and look forward to the future. It's also a great time to take stock of your health and set some goals for achieving wellness and balance in life.

To make the most of your energy this year, look to nature as your guide. For example, for a plant to survive long term, it requires strong roots—ones that pull in nutrients and water from its environment and give it the strength to carry on.

In Chinese medicine, the roots of the human body are the kidneys.

Modern physiology sees the kidneys primarily as a filter that removes waste from the blood and excretes it as urine. Chinese medicine also acknowledges this filtering function, but sees the organs as possessing a much deeper purpose: storing and protecting our life's essence.

According to Brandon LaGrecia, an acupuncturist and Oriental medicine practitioner in East Troy, Wisconsin, this concept of the kidney shares several similarities with our modern understanding of the adrenals, the small but mighty glands that sit on top of our kidneys. The adrenal glands produce over 50 hormones that drive our growth, development, reproduction, inflammation, blood pressure, blood sugar, and

nearly every other process in the body.

Because they produce hormones, the adrenals are categorized as part of the endocrine system in Western medicine. But the Chinese kidney concept recognizes some of the same functions.

"Someone with a lack of energy we diagnose as having kidney qi deficiency. This has close parallels to someone who is adrenal fatigued," said LaGrecia.

One of the most important jobs of the kidneys is to store a form of energy known in traditional Chinese culture as "jing."

The 2 Bank Accounts

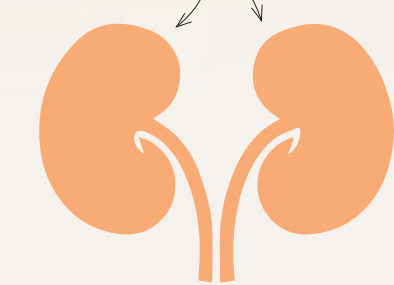
The earliest texts of Chinese medicine describe our life essence as a substance called "jing." Ancient doctors believed we could achieve longevity by learning to preserve this precious substance.

There are two kinds of jing: postnatal and prenatal. You can think about them like two bank accounts. Your postnatal jing—the energy you get from eating, drinking, and breathing—is your checking account, which you regularly deposit into and withdraw from to meet the demands of life.

The prenatal jing is your savings account, essentially an inheritance from your parents. This is a deep reserve of energy that you should only touch when you really need it.

Continued on Page 10

In Chinese medicine, the roots of the human body are the kidneys.



“If you have good habits and you sleep well, then you're only depositing and withdrawing from your [life energy] checking account.”

Brandon LaGrecia, acupuncturist and Oriental medicine practitioner

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Prolong Your Life

by Balancing, Preserving
Your Life's Essence

Why the kidneys play a vital role in health and longevity

Continued from Page 9

Unlike your checking account, which you can supplement when funds get too low, any withdrawal you make from savings is gone for good.

"If you have good habits and you sleep well, then you're only depositing and withdrawing from your checking account," said LaGreca. "But if you're burning the candle at both ends and you have a poor diet, you're going to have to start dipping into your savings account and taking more out. If you follow this analogy to its conclusion, when your savings account balance goes down to zero, that's the end of your life."

We don't all start life with a big inheritance. Genetically robust individuals come into this world with much more jing, while others must make do with a meager amount. But no matter how much you start with, everyone can learn to preserve and protect the jing they've got.

Conserving Energy for Winter

Winter is the season associated with the kidney in Chinese medicine because winter teaches the importance of conserving our energy. Unlike the warmth and abundance of spring and summer, winter is cold and harsh, and resources are scarce. If we have enough jing when hard times hit, we can bounce back. However, if our jing is low, and stress starts chipping away at our savings, recovery is harder and the signs of age begin to show. The typical symptoms of old age—fatigue, hair loss, a bad back, and brittle bones—are also signs of depleted jing.

Consider what a rapid loss of jing looks like in the "before" and "after" pictures of people addicted to crystal meth, a drug that triggers the adrenal glands to secrete high levels of stress hormones for extended periods of time. Within just a few months, you can see youth and vitality deteriorate as meth users burn their essence away.

This is an extreme example, but there are other, more common behaviors that, over time, can sap our precious jing.

"The biggest one, by a long shot, is overwork," said LaGreca. "Mental overwork is thought of as harming the spleen in Chinese medicine, but I've seen it in modern times hurt the kidney too; mostly just because of how much we do it."

Sleep is another important aspect of

jing preservation. Rest recharges your battery. It's also an activity associated with winter. Think hibernation, or how the energy of a tree descends to its roots after the leaves fall.

Fertility is a sign of good jing [life essence], but ancient doctors gave stern warnings about wasting our reproductive resources.

Cultivating Life

Reproductive function is a key part of the Chinese kidney concept. Fertility is a sign of good jing, but ancient doctors gave stern warnings about wasting our reproductive resources. Chinese medical texts, and even ancient erotica, strongly cautioned against overindulgence in sexual activity—particularly for men.

While some cultures discourage such behavior from a moral standpoint, Chinese medicine addresses it for very practical reasons.

"If you think about it, the production of sperm takes a lot out of your body," LaGreca said. "You're drawing on your nutrient reserves in order to produce the best quality and the best possible chance for the strongest offspring. Ejaculating more times than your kidney can keep up with starts to draw on your reserves."

Chinese medicine believes that by minimizing ejaculation, men can preserve their jing. This is why Ming Dynasty doctor Zhang Huang wrote, "If you want to protect your source of longevity, there is no better way than to guard yourself against sexual desires."

We have to sacrifice some of our jing to create the next generation, and mothers give up much of theirs during pregnancy. Modern medicine acknowledges that women need extra rest and nutrition as they carry a baby to term, but Chinese medicine advocates that moms get several more months of rest and nutritionally dense meals after they give birth, to help build back their personal reserves.

AGE WELL

Your Plan for Better Aging

Your body will do what you use it to do—so don't stop using it

MOHAN GARIKIPARITHI

Everyone knows someone who must be lying about their age. After all, how can they look like that and have all that energy if they were as old as you?

After about 35 or 40, I'd say "the real you" starts to show, and it will typically go one way or the other. Some will almost hit the pause button, and they'll look that age (or even younger) for decades, in some cases. Whereas others start to look like someone pushed a fast-forward button. And while some of it might be genetic, a lot of it is lifestyle.

After about 35 or 40, I'd say 'the real you' starts to show, and it will typically go one way or the other.

Feed Your Bones

We eat to replenish our energy, but according to Mary Rogel, a Chicago-based acupuncturist and editor of the *Oriental Medical Journal*, the quality of our jing is only as good as the quality of our fuel.

"Nutritious food, clean water, and good air are critical for treating kidney weakness," said Rogel.

In Chinese medicine, the health of the internal body is reflected in details at the surface. The classic barometers for assessing kidney strength can be seen in the quality of the bones, teeth, and hair. Straight and sturdy posture, a bright smile, and a thick mane are all signs of good jing.

This is why when it comes to strengthening the kidneys, Rogel looks to feeding the bones. One of her top choices is bone broth.

"Bone soup provides the building blocks for bone, cartilage, and synovial fluid in our joints," she said, adding that dark leafy vegetables also provide key vitamins and minerals for good bone health. "These two things are much better for building back your kidney health than any supplement I can think of."

Salt is another important component of kidney nutrition in Chinese medicine. Salt gets a lot of flak today because of sodium's effects on blood pressure, but our body needs a lot of other minerals that salt can provide, says Rogel. She recommends mineral-rich salt from sea sources, such as seaweed and sea salt.

There are herbs in Chinese medicine known as kidney tonics that are prized for their jing-building ability. Today, these herbs are categorized as adaptogens, because they help the body adapt to stress. Herbs such as ginseng, licorice, and rehmannia are used by modern herbalists specifically to support adrenal health.

Rogel's favorite jing-building herbs are medicinal mushrooms. She recommends Asian classics such as reishi, shiitake, and maitake, and a Native American variety called Agaricus blazei.

"I suggest mushrooms for people who are complaining of low energy. These are very good sources of kidney energy," Rogel said.

A mushroom omelet is a good start, but if you're trying to build back depleted jing, a more concentrated dose of mushrooms is necessary. Mushroom teas, extracts, or powders are good options to get high enough quantities into the body.

Exercising With the Universe

Another tool to maintain good jing in Chinese medicine is a special form of exercise called qigong. The most well-known style is tai chi. These slow, meditative movements have been practiced for ages to promote longevity and strengthen our roots. According to ancient medical texts, these exercises allow us to harmonize ourselves with the natural flow of the universe.

"We have these great studies that show how tai chi affects balance and can even affect bone density," LaGreca said. "It could be that it just makes people more fit and strong. Or there could be this very notion of drawing in this energy from the universe

“

Nutritious food, clean water, and good air are critical for treating kidney weakness.

Mary Rogel, a Chicago-based acupuncturist and editor of the *Oriental Medical Journal*

around you."

Rogel also recommends qigong for kidney weakness, but says movement of any kind can help.

"In order to keep your bones strong, you have to move," she said.

Fear Is the Enemy

Emotion is a significant driver of disease in Chinese medicine, and fear is the emotion that the kidney is most sensitive to. When jing is low, anxiety tends to run high. When jing is strong, will and determination are strong too. This idea can also be viewed in modern medical terms. One of the hormones produced by the adrenal glands is adrenaline. This chemical kicks in when we sense danger, triggering our fight-or-flight response.

This mechanism works great when it's only activated for life or death situations, but if we live in constant fear and perpetual worry, adrenaline levels never come down. If we're always on edge, it can quickly wear us out.

Kidney Yin and Yang

In addition to storing jing, the kidneys are also the root of your body's yin and yang—a pair of opposing forces that dance (preferably in balance) throughout the universe.

To get an idea of how these forces come into play, Rogel suggests thinking about the kidney as the body's steam furnace; yin is the water, yang is the fire. This is the energy that drives growth, development, and reproduction.

"Fire is the force that propels us through life and allows us to consume the food we take into our bodies. The water balances out the fire. Balance between these elements is what keeps us healthy through life," she said.

Not enough fire (kidney yang deficiency) results in symptoms such as a weak lower back, cold hands and feet, asthma, and chronic bronchitis.

"Think of an old man who is bent over and needs a cane," said LaGreca. "He no longer has any of that yang uprightness to keep him up. Especially if he's had a lot of hard labor in his lifetime, this takes some of that fire out of him."

Not enough water (kidney yin deficiency) results in symptoms such as dryness, wrinkles, hair loss, lack of sexual fluids, and brittle bones.

"We see more yin deficiency in women as they age. It plays out in menopausal symptoms such as hot flashes and night sweats," LaGreca said.



Winter is the season associated with the kidney in Chinese medicine because winter teaches the importance of conserving our energy.

THE EPOCH TIMES



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Keep moving and you'll keep moving well into your elder years.

For me, that person is my dad. When he was in his 40s, people thought he was 30. Same when he was in his 50s. In his 60s, people pegged him in his 40s. And now he just celebrated his 74th birthday the day before Thanksgiving, and he still looks like a guy

who's 60.

His brothers—and one is a twin—on the other hand, are quite a different story. And that's where lifestyle comes into play. Research has indicated that with twins, for example, lifestyle outweighs genetics when it comes

to health. Even my dad's younger brother looks remarkably older—and had substantially worse health—than my father.

Part of the reason for this is that my dad developed and stuck to a routine that promoted anti-aging, even if he didn't think about it at the time. He made a point of waking up early to engage in physical activity. He ate plenty of fruits and vegetables, remained socially active, and committed to regular exercise. All of this stuff added up to a younger appearance and more physical capabilities. While some of his brothers might find it tiring to get off the sofa, he's out on the roof cleaning eavestroughs, raking the lawn, gardening, and lifting heavy stone.

So, what can you do to slow down the aging process to improve your health and natural glow? Here are a few ideas:

- with a set bed and wake time.
- Enjoy yourself—and occasionally indulge.
- Lift weights a couple of times per week.
- Stay active with friends and social groups.
- Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables
- Limit processed foods that promote inflammation.
- Moisturize.

The sooner you get involved with a healthy lifestyle, the more it will help stave off aging. It's never too late to reap the rewards of doing your body good.

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

Ancient Wisdom for Modern Life

As we head into the New Year, in a world full of seemingly endless challenges, we can look to ancient wisdom that has guided humanity for centuries.

When our jing is plentiful and yin and yang are in balance, we will be better equipped to meet any curveball that life throws at us. This is the secret of the so-called "immortals" of ancient Chinese mythology. Those who protect their kidney health say the root of this wisdom still holds true.

When our jing is plentiful and yin and yang are in balance, we will be better equipped to meet any curveball that life throws at us.

Research has indicated that with twins, for example, lifestyle outweighs genetics when it comes to health.

- Commit to a physical activity like snowshoeing, hiking, dancing, tennis, or golf, and do it a couple of times per week.
- Build a consistent sleep schedule

DIGITAL DISEASE

Too Much Screen Time Harms Brain Development

Researchers provide more evidence to support limits on screen time for children

You may want to think twice before gifting your child a new tablet or cellphone this holiday season, as increasing research suggests screen time may cause more harm than good.

Preschool-aged children may be particularly at risk, which is why the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends limiting use for 2- to 5-year-olds to just one hour a day of “high-quality programming,” and even then watching it with them so you can support learning.

Watching beyond this amount could have lasting effects on your child’s health, even harming brain development, according to a study by researchers at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center. Those with greater screen time had “lower microstructural integrity” of brain white matter, an area linked with cognitive function and language.

Excess Screen Time Changes Preschoolers’ Brains

The study involved 47 children between the ages of 3 and 5. ScreenQ was used to measure screen usage in accordance with AAP recommendations, taking into account such factors as access to screens, frequency of use, what type of content was viewed and whether co-viewing occurred, as in, did an adult watch along with the child and discuss the content?

A higher ScreenQ score was associated with greater screen time. MRIs were then used to assess the children’s brains, revealing that more screen time was harmful to the brain’s white matter, particularly in tracts supporting language and literacy skills.

“While we can’t yet determine whether screen time causes these structural changes or implies long-term neurodevelopmental risks,” Dr. John Hutton, director of the Reading & Literacy Discovery Center at Cincinnati Children’s and lead study author said in a news release, “these findings warrant further study to understand what they mean and how to set appropriate limits on technology use.”

A number of recent studies have highlighted the risks of too much screen time for preschoolers. A Canadian study suggested preschool children spend an average of two hours using screens daily, and those who spent more than this amount had a 7.7-fold



A game or video can provide parents a much needed respite, but too much screen time can harm their child’s development.

Those with greater screen time had ‘lower microstructural integrity’ of brain white matter, an area linked with cognitive function and language.

higher risk of meeting criteria for attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Among 18-month-old children, those who were allowed to view media on mobile devices were more likely to have expressive speech delays, with each additional 30 minutes of viewing time associated with greater odds of a speech delay. AAP recommends toddlers younger than 18–24 months avoid digital media, except for video chatting.

Limit or Avoid Screen Time for Children’s Health

Researchers are only beginning to understand the many ways that screen time interferes with human health. Beyond your brain, staring at screens is damaging for eyesight and comes with the risks of exposure to electromagnetic fields (EMFs), Wi-Fi radiation and other threats of cellphone exposure.

There’s also the fact that most screen time occurs while sitting down, cutting down on physical activity and increasing the risks of prolonged sitting time—a health risk in itself.

There’s no need to wait for more definitive research before taking action to protect children’s health. Use AAP’s screen time guidelines as a maximum, and even better reduce your child’s screen time, including television viewing, as much as possible, or eliminate it completely, especially in their early years.

It’s also a good idea to establish screen-free times and activities for your family. Even as your children enter their teen years, ensure that meal times, bedtime and other times you designate are free from any digital distractions.

Some school environments, such as Waldorf, exclude all technology from their classrooms and their student’s cur-

riculum. They also encourage the same standards for the children at home. This is increasingly becoming a healthy option for concerned parents who are aware of the growing number of unintended, adverse effects of EMF associated technologies. For more information on EMF harms, visit the GreenMedInfo database on Electromagnetic Fields, which contains over 1,000 studies linking EMF to over 140 different adverse health effects.

The GMI Research Group is dedicated to investigating the most important health and environmental issues of the day. Special emphasis will be placed on environmental health. Our focused and deep research will explore the many ways in which the present condition of the human body directly reflects the true state of the ambient environment. This article was originally published on GreenMedInfo.com

physical activity opportunities are essential training.

We also need to support ECEs with appropriate equipment and resources. Dedicated gross motor space (outdoors and indoors, for when the weather is bad) and portable play equipment, such as balls, hoops and logs, are essential for getting kids to hop, skip, jump and run.

Children 10 Times More Active Outdoors

Finally, the importance of outdoor free play needs to be emphasized as an easy and inexpensive way to increase physical activity levels among this young population.

Our research suggests that children are 10 times more active outdoors than indoors in child care. So getting kids (and adults) outside, regardless of the weather, supports their movement endeavors.

Outdoor play among young children has been associated with improved self-confidence, self-awareness, and decision-making.

Outdoor play is also associated with increased access to better air quality (compared to indoors), thus decreasing children’s exposure to common allergens (e.g., dust, mold, pet dander) and infectious diseases.

Research Into Action

Research has identified the influence of child care centers and staff on the physical activity levels of young children. Now is the time

to put this knowledge into action.

Creating physical activity policies, supporting professional development and training in ECE diploma programs prior to entering the workforce, and consistent provision of varied portable equipment and outdoor play are key places to start.

However, there is still lots we need to know. How can we integrate more movement into educators’ daily programming with kids? How can we make lesson plans more active? What can be done to maximize opportunities for gross motor movement indoors? More research is needed.

We are addressing this need with research which we hope will support and inform early childhood care settings. Such supports could include daily opportunities for short, frequent outdoor play periods. It could include educating children about the importance of moving their bodies daily along with active role modeling and positive prompts to kids when they engage in active play.

Trish Tucker is an associate professor and director of the child health and physical activity lab at Western University, and Leigh Vanderloo is an adjunct professor of the child health and physical activity lab at the School of Occupational Therapy at Western University. This article was originally published on The Conversation.

MADE TO MOVE

Children in Child Care Aren’t Getting Enough Physical Activity

Preschool-aged children need more moderate to vigorous play to enhance growth and development

TRISH TUCKER & LEIGH VANDERLOO

Many children are now enrolled in some type of child care while their parents work, many for multiple hours a day, several days a week.

Given the increasingly busy schedules of today’s families, parents often rely on early childhood educators (ECEs) in child care centers to supply children with their daily physical activity, as well as other opportunities for nurturing their development.

But are they prepared for the challenge? The evidence suggests we may be placing an unfair burden on these education specialists.

Physical activity, in the form

of active play, offers many benefits—physically, cognitively, and socially. New Canadian and international guidelines from the World Health Organization identify the need for young children to participate in daily heart-pumping physical activity. The CDC also recommends that preschool-aged children be physically active throughout the day to enhance growth and development.

We both have doctoral degrees in health promotion, with a particular emphasis on physical activity in the early years. Our research in the Child Health and Physical Activity Lab at Western University shows that young children in child care are not meeting national or international

guidelines on physical activity. Specifically, they are not getting enough moderate to vigorous-intensity activity.

This places our kids at a huge disadvantage from a physical, psychological and social developmental perspective.

Child Care Providers Need Better Training

In one study of Ontario-based child care providers, ECEs identified that they lack the confidence to develop opportunities and to engage young children in physical activity during child care hours.

This means that teacher education and professional development opportunities that teach “how much” and “how-to” lead



PETRENKO ANDRIY/SHUTTERSTOCK



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Watching Pornography Rewires the Brain to a More Juvenile State

A porn-stimulated brain becomes addicted to a surge of chemicals spurred by the body’s response to ever-darker imagery

RACHEL ANN BARR

Pornography has existed throughout recorded history, transforming with the introduction of each new medium. Hundreds of sexually explicit frescoes and sculptures were found in the Mount Vesuvius ruins of Pompeii.

Since the advent of the internet, porn use has skyrocketed to dizzying heights. Pornhub, the world’s largest free porn site, received over 33.5 billion site visits during 2018 alone.

Science is only just beginning to reveal the neurological repercussions of porn consumption. But it is already clear that the mental health and sex lives of its widespread audience are suffering catastrophic effects. From depression to erectile dysfunction, porn appears to be hijacking our neural wiring with dire consequences.

In my own lab, we study the neural wiring that underlies learning and memory processes. The properties of video porn make it a particularly powerful trigger for plasticity, the brain’s ability to change and adapt as a result of experience. Combined with the accessibility and anonymity of online porn consumption, we are more vulnerable than ever to its hyper-stimulating effects.

Impacts of Porn Consumption

In the long term, pornography seems to create sexual dysfunctions, especially the inability to achieve erection or orgasm with a real-life partner. Marital quality and commitment to one’s romantic partner also appear to be compromised.

To try to explain these effects, some scientists have drawn parallels between porn consumption and substance

abuse. Through evolutionary design, the brain is wired to respond to sexual stimulation with surges of dopamine. This neurotransmitter, most often associated with reward anticipation, also acts to program memories and information into the brain. This adaption means that when the body requires something, like food or sex, the brain remembers where to return to experience the same pleasure.

Instead of turning to a romantic partner for sexual gratification or fulfillment, habituated porn users instinctively reach for their phones and laptops when desire comes calling. Furthermore, unnaturally strong explosions of reward and pleasure evoke unnaturally strong degrees of habituation in the brain. Psychiatrist Norman Doidge explains:

Pornography satisfies every one of the prerequisites for neuroplastic change. When pornographers boast that they are pushing the envelope by introducing new, harder themes, what they don’t say is that they must, because their customers are building up a tolerance to the content.

Porn scenes, like addictive substances, are hyper-stimulating triggers that lead to unnaturally high levels of dopamine secretion. This can damage the dopamine reward system and leave it unresponsive to natural sources of pleasure. This is why users begin to experience difficulty in achieving arousal with a physical partner.

Beyond Dysfunction

The desensitization of our reward circuitry sets the stage for sexual dysfunctions to develop, but the repercussions don’t end there. Studies show that

Porn use has been correlated with the erosion of the prefrontal cortex—the region of the brain that houses executive functions like morality, willpower, and impulse control.

Viewing pornography shares parallels with drug addiction, including wanting more, even though the addict doesn’t actually like it.

changes in the transmission of dopamine can facilitate depression and anxiety. In agreement with this observation, porn consumers report greater depressive symptoms, lower quality of life, and poorer mental health compared to those who don’t watch porn.

The other compelling finding in this study is that compulsive porn consumers find themselves wanting and needing more porn, even though they don’t necessarily like it. This disconnect between wanting and liking is a hallmark feature of reward circuitry dysregulation.

Following a similar line of inquiry, researchers at the Max Planck Institute in Berlin, Germany, found that higher porn use correlated with less brain activation in response to conventional pornographic imagery. This explains why users tend to graduate to more extreme and unconventional forms of porn.

Pornhub analytics reveal that conventional sex is decreasingly interesting to users and is being replaced by themes like incest and violence.

The perpetuation of sexual violence online is particularly troubling, as rates of real-life incidences may escalate as a result. Some scientists attribute this relationship to the action of mirror neurons. These brain cells are aptly named because they fire when the individual performs an action but also while observing the same action performed by someone else.

The regions of the brain that are active when someone is viewing porn are the same regions of the brain that are active while the person is actually having sex. Marco Iacoboni, a professor of psychiatry at the University of California–Los Angeles, speculates that these systems have the potential to spread violent behavior.

“The mirror mechanism in the brain also suggests that we are automatically influenced by what we perceive, thus proposing a plausible neurobiological mechanism for the contagion of violent behavior,” explains Iacoboni.

Though speculative, this suggested association between porn, mirror neurons, and increased rates of sexual violence serves as an ominous warning. While high porn consumption may not drive viewers to harrowing extremes, it is likely to change behavior in other ways.

Moral Development

Porn use has been correlated with the erosion of the prefrontal cortex—the region of the brain that houses executive functions like morality, willpower, and impulse control.

To better understand the role of this structure in behavior, it’s important to know that it remains underdeveloped during childhood. This is why children struggle to regulate their emotions and impulses. Damage to the prefrontal cortex in adulthood is termed hypofrontality, which predisposes an individual to behave compulsively and make poor decisions.

It’s somewhat paradoxical that adult entertainment may revert our brain wiring to a more juvenile state. The much greater irony is that while porn promises to satisfy and provide sexual gratification, it delivers the opposite.

Rachel Anne Barr is a doctoral student of neuroscience at Université Laval in Canada. This article was first published by The Conversation.

SELF-MASTERY

A (Self-Interested) Reason to Be a Good Person

Your experience of the world will be cast in the light you create

JAMES WALPOLE

Why be good?

People have spilled a lot of ink on this one. There are more good arguments for being good than you might guess.

Some are pretty simple—and while they aren’t full, rigorous systematic answers to the problem of “why” in morality, they’re useful heuristics for getting through life.

You might consider being good, for instance, because you want to be able to see the good in the other humans you interact with.

It’s pretty obvious that we project our own worst attributes onto others. As C.S. Lewis noted regarding vices like pride: [T]he more we have it ourselves, the

more we dislike it in others.

The same goes for any of the traditional vices: Greed tends to cast the world in a greedy light, hate in hateful light, and so on. Your experience of the world will be cast in the light you create.

Fortunately, you’ll have also noticed that you tend to also see the virtues in others (courage, generosity, honesty, etc.) when you have been virtuous yourself. No one can deny that it’s strongly in our self-interest to hope for these things in our fellow humans and in the world we live in.

Remember when you helped that poor person, visited that sick person, comforted that lonely person? I doubt you went out afterward seeing more of the badness in humanity and the world. We control our



GOODLUZ/SHUTTERSTOCK

If you emphasize kindness from yourself, you’re much more likely to find it in the world.

experience of life and program it with our actions, so we benefit by choosing to cast clear light.

Again, this is not a full answer, by any means, to the philosophical question of morality. But then, maybe the question is not as complicated as the philosophers think. Self-interest tends to justify itself, and there is plenty of self-interest on the side of the virtues.

James Walpole is a writer, startup marketer, intellectual explorer, and perpetual apprentice. He is an alumnus of Praxis and a Foundation for Economic Education’s Eugene S. Thorpe fellow. He writes regularly at JamesWalpole.com. This article was originally published on FEE.org

Responsibility Is the Antidote to Mental Enslavement

The cure for being stuck in victimhood is to see ourselves as responsible for making our own choices

BARRY BROWNSTEIN

Over 2,000 years ago, the Stoic philosopher Seneca wrote, “Show me a man who is not a slave.” Seneca was speaking of mental enslavement: “One is a slave to lust, another to greed, another to ambition, and all men are slaves to fear.”

The Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius was also a Stoic philosopher. In “Meditations,” he wrote, “Alexander and Caesar and Pompey. Compared with Diogenes, Heraclitus, Socrates? The

philosophers knew the what, the why, the how. Their minds were their own. The others? Nothing but anxiety and enslavement.”

Conquering politicians may have ruled over millions, but they still couldn’t control their own minds.

Do privilege and wealth help one escape mental enslavement? We have only to look at all the dysfunctional behavior in Hollywood and see that money cannot buy psychological freedom.

Aurelius reproached himself: “Stop allowing your mind to be a slave, to

Our self-justifying stories create resentment.

be jerked about by selfish impulses, to kick against fate and the present, and to mistrust the future.”

Their contributions are great works of humanity because they reflect timeless themes.

Stuck in Victimhood

Few of us have not suffered bitter setbacks, as Ryan Holiday, author of several books on Stoicism, observes:

So much of what happens is out of our control: We lose people we love. We are financially ruined by someone we trusted. We put ourselves out there, put every bit of our effort into something, and are crushed when it fails. We are drafted to fight in wars, to bear huge tax or familial burdens. We are passed over for the thing we wanted so badly. This can knock us down and hurt us. Yes.”

Each of us forms our identity around what could be called our “story of me.” In his book “Question Your Life,” Greg Kreck observes how often these stories contain resentment. Through our stories, Kreck cautions, we create our own burdens:

Wearing a garment of disappointment, resentment and anger is a great burden. It continuously weighs us down as we try to move forward in our lives... It affects our fundamental view of life. It buries us in a complaint-based lifestyle in which our attention is consistently drawn to what is going wrong and how the world fails to meet our expectations.”

In his book, “Bonds That Make Us Free,” philosopher C. Terry Warner asks us to reflect on this question: “Why do we embrace our miseries and preoccupy ourselves with our victimhood?”

“Experiencing other people or circumstances as having more power over our own happiness than we do,” Warner says, is to be “stuck” in our victimhood. “We believe they have the ability to cause troubling feelings in us that we cannot do anything about, no matter how we try.”

When we believe other people and circumstances are responsible for how we feel and for the choices we make, we are living a lie of victimhood.

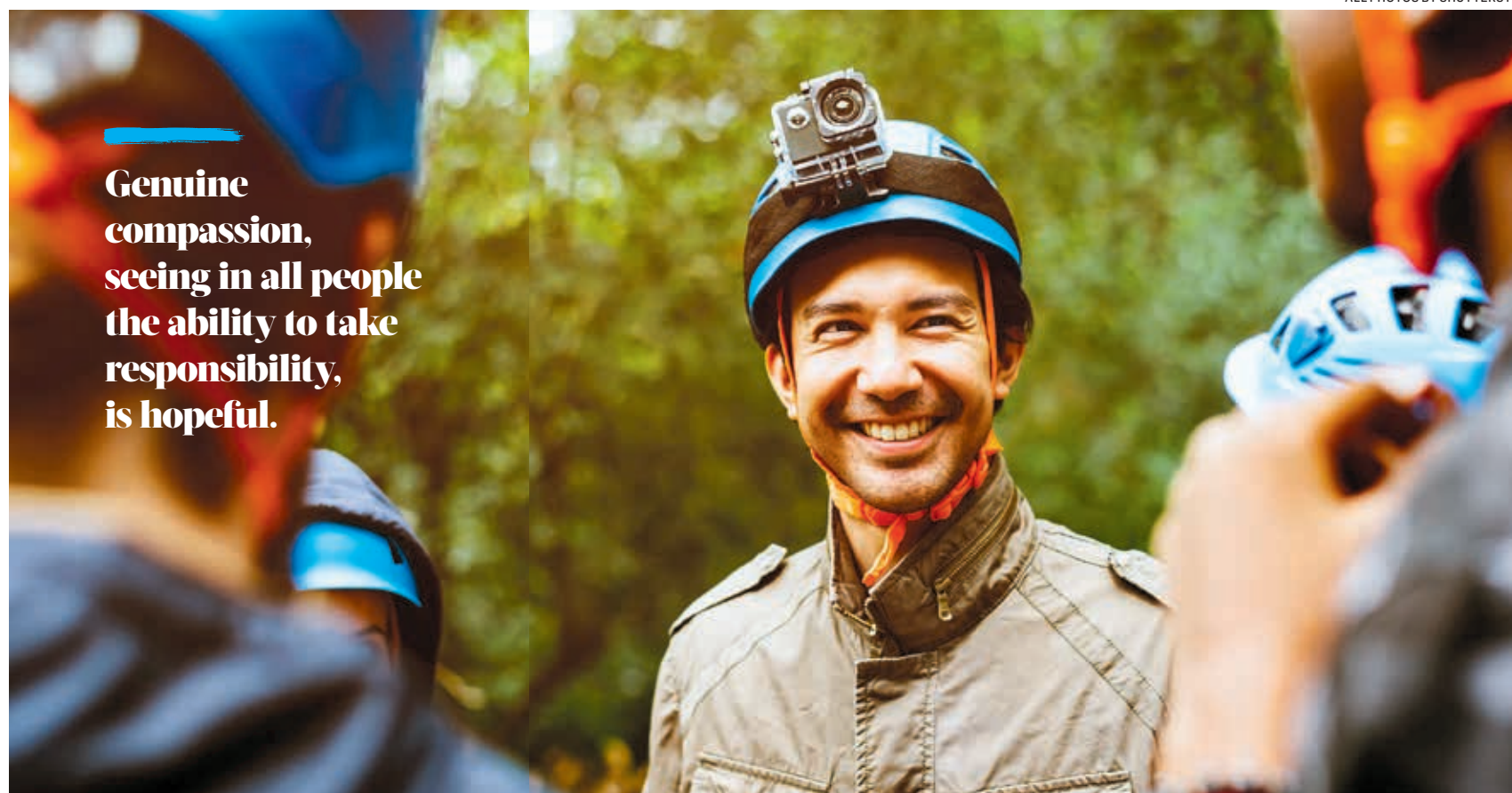
Seeing Our Self-Victimization

Warner asks us to reflect on times we are most troubled. The real source of our “afflicted emotions” can be found in our “self-absorption.” Warner writes, “Those times when we feel most miserable, offended, or angry are invariably the occasions when we’re also most absorbed in ourselves and most anxious or suspicious or fearful, or in some other way concerned about ourselves.”

In our self-absorption, we betray our sense of right and wrong. Warner helps us recognize that our self-betrays can occur in small ways, as in this story of a “busy man”:

A busy man driving home late at night notices the gas gauge dropping near empty. Almost imperceptibly, yet unmistakably, he feels he ought to fill the tank for his wife so she won’t have to do it the next day. But he doesn’t.

In the mind of this busy man, an urge



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Genuine compassion, seeing in all people the ability to take responsibility, is hopeful.

arose to act from his highest values, yet he did not. This is self-betrayal.

To justify his choice, the busy man may have searched his mind for “data.” Thinking of all the things he does for their household that his wife doesn’t, he may have concluded, I’m far busier than my wife; she should be keeping the tank filled for me. In his mind, he became the victim of an unsupportive wife. His wife, not he, was to blame for his failure to put gas in the car.

In this trivial example, the busy man got stuck in his thinking. Portraying himself as a victim, he undermined his relationship and a happy life.

Warner writes, “Life becomes hard to bear only when we, as self-betrayers,

cast ourselves in a victim’s role by regarding others as our victimizers and nurse our misfortunes as if they were badges of honor.”

Feelings of “irritation [escalating to anger], humiliation, self-pity, resentment or frustration” come with self-betrayal. These emotions are accusatory. Warner writes, “Only people who are doing something that goes against their own sense of right and wrong have to spend time and energy spinning out a self-justifying story.”

Our self-justifying stories create resentment. Warner writes, “To take up a hard, resentful attitude toward others is to have to live in a resented world, a world full of people who oppose and

threaten us. How they are in our eyes is reflective of how we are.”

Warner warns of three aspects of self-betraying conduct: “Accusing others, excusing oneself, and displaying oneself as a victim. We can’t seek vigilantly for evidence that others are mistreating us, as self-betrayers do, unless we actively put ourselves in the victim’s role.”

Having chosen the role of a mistreated victim, we may also choose to feel resentful and entitled. We may see the world as unjust and owing us something. We may believe we are broken while seeing others as advantaged and privileged.

In our victimhood, we believe we are not responsible, others are. And many politicians are happy to exploit our false belief.

False Compassion

What might one say to a man who grew up in a single-parent household in a violent inner-city neighborhood and attended a public school where he learned little and was bullied by classmates? This man may face racial discrimination. If he fathers illegitimate children with several women and is in and out of prison, is he responsible for his behavior? Is he not a victim of his circumstances?

Warner recognizes life’s trials and sees life beyond victimhood:

Though none of us is responsible for the misfortunes that befall us, we are, thankfully, responsible for how we use those misfortunes. We cannot alter past events, it’s true. Not having been responsible for them, we cannot take responsibility for them. But we are responsible for the effect they have upon us—for the meaning we assign to them and the way we remember them. And we can learn and grow from them.”

Marcus Aurelius put it this way in “Meditations:” “It can ruin your life only

if it ruins your character. Otherwise, it cannot harm you—inside or out.”

Warner acknowledges that one may be called “uncharitable” for holding the view that we are responsible for what we make of our lives. Yet to say a person is not responsible “says, ‘You can’t!’ rather than ‘You can!’”

Warner reflects on what it means to believe that a person is not responsible:

Although those who hold this view think they’re being compassionate and kind, they are only being indulgent. Indulgence is a punitive counterfeit of charity. It extends no hope at all for freeing ourselves of our emotional troubles. It takes the position that we are stuck with being the deficient vessels we think we are and are doomed to cope with our lot as best we can.”

Genuine compassion, seeing in all people the ability to take responsibility, is hopeful. Warner writes, “It is because we are responsible for whatever we have become that there is hope for us to change fundamentally. True compassion can be found only in extending this hope to others, never in denying it to them.”

Look around, Warner says. “Have you known people who seem to have made a lifestyle out of amplifying their victimhood?” Don’t stop with seeing the choice for victimhood in others. Warner asks, “Do you see any of this tendency in yourself?”

The cure for being stuck in victimhood is to see ourselves as responsible for making our own choices.

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When we believe other people and circumstances are responsible for how we feel and for the choices we make, we are living a lie of victimhood.



How I Learned to Need People (The Hard Way)

When work is all that matters, things can get a little lonely

KIRA M. NEWMAN

I’ve been told that I’m calm under pressure, but that’s only on the outside.

To prepare for my first TV news show appearance, I put on berry-red lipstick and started breathing into my belly, an alleged relaxation technique that never seems to work. In the background of the video feed, my turquoise-blue couch stood out against white walls, where I had hung Cambodian fans and other colorful souvenirs from my travels.

The topic of discussion that day? Loneliness among young people.

Initially, I had assumed the network wanted me to share some of my expertise as a science reporter—including the extensive research on loneliness, social connection, and well-being. But after a few emails, it became clear that I wasn’t the expert guest on the show. Instead, I was the human-interest story—the example of a lonely young person, “exhibit A” of the isolated millennial.

As I waited for the show to begin, my public-speaking nerves churned in my stomach with the sinking realization that I was about to talk about some of my most vulnerable feelings in front of thousands of people. How did I get here? For four years, I had been a “digital nomad,” traveling the world and living for months at a time in places like Bali, Rome, Beijing, and more. Along with my partner, I had stood in awe of golden Thai temples, hiked the white cliffs of Dover, and slept fitfully on bumpy overnight trains in Vietnam.

Travel can be glamorous, but it’s also solitary. When you move every few months, making awkward small talk with strangers in the hopes of forming a friendship that probably won’t last seems futile—particularly for an introvert like me. So, to be honest, I didn’t really try to meet people.

Travel can be glamorous, but it’s also solitary. When you move every few months, making awkward small talk with strangers in the hopes of forming a friendship that probably won’t last seems futile—particularly for an introvert like me. So, to be honest, I didn’t really try to meet people.

But I can’t put all the blame for my loneliness on travel. In fact, the seeds had been planted much earlier. I grew up valuing self-reliance to the extreme, and I would have to learn the hard way how much I needed people.

Productivity Above All

When I started high school, my violin was my best friend. At least that’s what I told myself when the girls around me paired up into twosomes. One summer, I practiced violin for four hours a day, perched in front of a fan to stay cool. I counted the minutes with a timer that I would pause when I stopped for a water break. Afterward, I’d note in a pink felt journal how much I’d practiced: “July 7, 2004: 3 hours, 50 minutes.”

I grew up valuing self-reliance to the extreme, and I would have to learn the hard way how much I needed people.

That was also the year I enrolled in a prestigious Saturday music program in New York City. Sometimes I’d attend a Friday-night sleepover—I did have some friends—and then wake up at the crack of dawn, emerging from a warm sleeping bag into the chill morning fog. During the one-hour commute into the city, I’d doze in the backseat of the car and think about my friends lazily waking up and eating pancakes together, without me. In my memory, Kelly Clarkson is always playing on the radio, singing “Breakaway”: “I’ll take a risk / Take a chance / Make a change / And break away.”



MAX ILLNER/WEISUNFLASH

Travel can be glamorous, but it’s also solitary.

But I couldn’t break away yet. Thanks to a bit of early reinforcement, my identity was set: I was the smart one, the good student, the valedictorian. I was the type of person who valued achievement, not the type of person who valued love and friendship. Four hours of daily violin practice eventually morphed into studying from nine in the morning to nine at night, including on weekends.

In college, I learned that you can feel lonely even when you’re surrounded by people. One of my first nights there, I went to a Montreal bar with a group of friends and acquaintances who (far braver than me) danced to hip hop music, arms up and clothes flowing. I sat back and watched, sipping a strawberry margarita—the first full drink of my life.

A friend kept checking on me, as if a few ounces of alcohol were going to make me pass out. “I’m fine,” I kept saying, waving her away.

That night, I lay in the darkness and stared up at the ceiling, feeling far away from home. All I could think was, “These aren’t my people.” I didn’t love to party or drink like all my peers seemed to, and so I turned back to my books.

Back then, I believed achievement was the source of happiness. I thought that needing others in order to be happy was a form of dependence—one I wanted to avoid. No, I was independent. My perfume was *Femme Individuelle* (no joke). When my partner and I started dating, school was my top priority; we routinely haggled over what time I’d finally quit studying and meet him for dinner. In my mind, we were two separate people with separate, busy lives—and I liked it that way.

After college, when I had the chance to travel the world and write—a fantastic career opportunity—I didn’t really consider how it might affect my social network.

But research (and common sense) could have predicted how it would all turn out. Constantly moving, I was cutting myself off from the benefits of settling in a single place, of living close to family, and volunteering in my community. Indeed, research suggests that frequent travel often leaves people “searching for more enduring relationships.” When someone remarked on how difficult it must be on the road, though, I had no idea what she was talking about.

Oddly enough, I hadn’t felt lone-

ly during most of my travels. But that was about to change.

The Opposite of Wanderlust

During a six-month stay in Toronto, Canada, I started a meetup that met monthly to discuss happiness. I told myself it was a smart career move, a way to build credibility in the psychology world—but deep down, some part of me probably just wanted to be part of a group. Among the frequent attendees was my partner’s sister, who (in my mind) didn’t fall into the category of “people I’ll never see again who thus aren’t worth getting to know.”

She and a good friend of hers—who would become my friend, too—were there at the first meeting when I sat, latte in hand, eager to see if anyone would show up. They jumped in when the conversation lagged and congratulated me afterward.

They were all there at the last meeting that summer, on a boiling August day just a week before I left Toronto. A dozen of us convened on the back patio of a cafe to discuss self-esteem over iced teas and coffees. As people started to leave, they asked me where I was headed next—and I smiled and talked about Oktoberfest in Germany, about Italy and Greece. Inside, I was sad that I wouldn’t be seeing everyone in September.

Back on the road, some of my enthusiasm for travel was gone. I had gotten a glimpse of connection and community, and I wanted more. I was relieved and excited when my plane touched down in Toronto the following year. My four-year, 17-country world tour was over.

Suddenly, there were no more shiny objects to pursue—no Korean signs to decipher, no Parisian cafes to discover, no Berlin history to learn. And I was hit with a deep and chilling sense of loneliness.

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How I Learned to Need People (The Hard Way)

When work is all that matters, things can get a little lonely

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How to Win Friends

When I went on TV, the host assumed I had already “crossed the threshold” and gotten over my pangs of loneliness. She asked when it had happened, and I confessed that it hadn’t. “I’m still on the journey,” I said, seven months after signing a long-term lease.

One of the other guests on the show was the founder of Hey! VINA, an app for women to make female friends that I decided to try. (Yet another guest was running a platonic cuddling service, but that seemed like a bit much for me.) Hey! VINA is basically like Tinder or Bumble—you create a profile, swipe through other people’s profiles, and get matched up when there’s mutual interest.

I matched with a native Torontonian who seemed to share my love of cats, optimism, and shyness. We eventually met for a nighttime walk, and the blocks passed unseen as we chatted about psychology, fitness, and the city that was now my home. My conversation felt halting and inelegant; in nomadic life, I had gotten out of practice talking about myself and telling my life story. But on the subway ride home, I couldn’t stop smiling.

The benefit of this digital friend-making approach, in my mind, was that everyone was just as desperate as me.

The downside was that it’s almost exactly like online dating. After each “date,” I’d ponder all the things I had said: Was I interesting? Did I offend her? Then there was the question of whether—and when—to suggest another hangout. Should I play it cool and wait a few days? What if she agrees just because she feels sorry for me?

My first VINA friend disappeared for a few weeks, and I lamented to my brother. “She was so cool, I liked her so much,” I said. “Why doesn’t she like me?”

After some merciless brotherly teasing, he told me not to put all my eggs in one basket.

A Change of Heart

Luckily, I did have eggs in other baskets. At the time, my personal loneliness-busting



I believe we all need the support, empathy, and joy that other people bring; we’ve evolved to need it.

initiative amounted to something like, “Go meet people, at least once a week.” I kept “dating” other prospective new friends; I went to meetups, book clubs, and dinners hosted by my neighbors. I attended weekly blues dances, whether my partner decided to come that night or not.

This was a change for me. A decade ago, I defined myself by my work ethic, my intelligence, and my productivity—all brains and no heart. On some level, that became a self-fulfilling prophecy: I didn’t see myself as the type of person who had friends and community, and so I didn’t seek them out.

As my behaviors changed, though, my view of myself started to change, too. Someone said I had a “kind and gentle presence,” a far cry from the cold, logical intellectual I once fancied myself to be. I’ve become more warm and emotional than before. Shockingly, I seem to have joined the ranks of people who believe, in some fundamental sense, that love is the answer.

I no longer think that needing connection makes me pathologically dependent. I believe we all need the support, empathy, and joy that other people bring; we’ve evolved to need it. I think relationships are worthy of time, energy, and money. I recognize that connection is a big pillar—maybe the core—of my well-being. Is that what they call interdependence?

My old self would call me touchy-feely or weak, but I’m realizing the ways that connection requires strength. To cultivate the kind of relationships I want, I have to speak up and set boundaries, and be honest when I’m hurt. I have to tell other people things that I’m ashamed of, my biggest fears and insecurities. I have to forgive people when they hurt me, because, ultimately, I still want them in my life.

These changes didn’t happen overnight, and I’m still grappling with them. Old habits die hard. I still get uneasy when my personal life interferes with my to-do list, and I still have to battle the impulse to prioritize work above everything else,

even my partner. When he tries to talk to me during the workday or convince me to leave work early, I feel a surge of annoyance, a little alarm bell signaling a threat to my productivity.

In those moments of internal conflict, I’ve learned to soften a little. I take a deep breath. I try to remember what’s important—that loving, connecting with, and supporting others is not frivolous, but some of the most meaningful things I can do.

Where You Belong

I’ve celebrated my birthday in many exotic ways: with a Segway tour in Paris, with open-air dining and a massage in Bali. But my 29th birthday was different. Last year, it was a dinner party and game night at home.

My partner suggested a potluck, where everyone would bring some food. “We can’t make people supply the food for my birthday party!” I protested, uncomfortable about the imposition. “Sure we can,” he said. “Don’t worry about it.”

That night, the table was set for 12, not two. I kept hearing knocks at the door, and someone else would appear—the couple who had reached out to us, wanting to make new friends after many of theirs had moved away, sporting an elaborate fruit tart. A fellow newcomer to Canada, who had attended my meetups, brought her homemade cornbread. A blues dancer, handing me a cat-shaped bottle of wine. My phone pinged with a message from my VINA friend, who had liked me after all but was working that night.

All the friends and community I had ever wanted were now sprawled across my turquoise couch, eating cupcakes and chatting. They looked like they were having fun, and all I could feel was a little surreal. Were they all here for me?

My head couldn’t grasp it, but some corner of my heart did.

Kira M. Newman is the managing editor of the Greater Good Science Center, which originally published this article.

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