

WEEK 1, 2020

THE EPOCH TIMES

MIND & BODY

HELENALANSKY/SHUTTERSTOCK

As you begin to be more mindful, you are no longer fused with the character you've scripted for yourself, with the help of this world and its varied influences.



An Ancient Guide to Inner Freedom

Marcus Aurelius's 'Meditations' instructs us in practices to restore our power of free will **6**

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Top Benefits of Choosing Natural Products

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THE EPOCH TIMES

TRUTH AND TRADITION

East Acupuncture Dr. Ping H Liou

Chinese Medicine Acupuncturist, Pharmacist



Born in a family of traditional Chinese medicine, Liou studied at Chengdu University of Traditional Chinese Medicine under famous doctors Benshu Diao and Yuqin Lai, has been practicing Chinese medicine for 13 years. Liou is expert in comprehensive treatment combining acupuncture and medicine.

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CANCER UP CLOSE

Putting My Body (and Life) Back Together After Treatment

After cancer and immediate recovery, comes the longer process of a body getting back to normal

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.

In my very first article, I equated a cancer diagnosis and going through treatment to being kidnapped, tied up, and tormented for ages in a cold dark basement, and then suddenly set free from captivity one day. Well, March 20, 2019, was the day I was finally set free.

It was a difficult year and a half-long journey being diagnosed and treated for rectal cancer. While getting through it was a huge victory, I was anxious about the challenges ahead as I went back to my old life with a changed body.

After my tumor removal and ileostomy reversal surgeries, the doctors prepared me by explaining that life after these procedures would be different. Most of all, the possibility of incontinence. These words didn't really sink in until I had my first experience with this issue three days after being released from the hospital. Out of nowhere, about 10 minutes after eating lunch, I had an explosion in my pajamas while in bed. It was at that moment I finally grasped how serious this was.

It was overwhelming to realize that I had absolutely no control to stop or hold back my bowels anymore. It was embarrassing, messy, disgusting, and unfortunately frequent. All I remember thinking was how I'd be able to go back to work or leave the house in this condition.

It is now nine months later, and while things have calmed down since those early days, I am still having daily issues with bathroom urgency and experiencing occasional accidents. This is especially so after having a meal and walking, or doing some other vigorous physical movement immediately afterward.

I've read online forums in which other rectal cancer patients have shared that it can take a year or even two for the bowels to return to some sense of normalcy. Although it's discouraging to hear it could take this long, I'm at least hopeful that it may improve with time.

At this point, I carry in my purse an adult disposable undergarment, baby wipes, and a plastic bag just in case something happens when I am out. Even though this issue hasn't really stopped me from socializing or going to work, it does make me nervous and choosy about the activities I agree to do. Mostly, I have to strategically plan my meals and eat lighter if I know I will be out for a long period and not close to any bathrooms.

Another challenge that I have faced since completing treatment is heavy metal toxicity and severe intestinal in-

fections, which resulted from my chemotherapy infusions.

I knew something was going on when I woke up several times one night just after my reversal surgery sensing my fingers and toes were badly swollen and tingling with pins and needles.

Soon after, my functional medicine doctor ordered blood tests, an organic acid test, a stool test, and a heavy metal test, which discovered that my platinum levels (and four other metals) were through the roof, plus my belly was full of bad bacterial overgrowths such as candida and H. pylori to name a few.

Another challenge that I have faced since completing treatment is heavy metal toxicity and severe intestinal infections.

I am currently taking herbal supplements under the care of my functional medicine doctors to rid my body of these substances as we speak, and I am happy to say that I am making slow but steady progress. I've even invested in a small infra-red sauna for my house to help my body detox the metals quicker. I love it so far and look forward to relaxing in the intense heat for 30 to 40 minutes after work. It is a nice way to end the day.

Lastly, I wanted to share my struggle with one of the bigger emotional challenges I am confronting. Every morning when I come out of the shower and see my scars in the mirror, I still cringe at the sight of my disfigured belly all full of scars. My once flat stomach is now a caved-in, lopsided mess. While my intellectual mind knows this is a small price to pay to be cancer-free, it is still something that affects me. I've tried ignoring it, or telling myself that I still look OK, but I don't really believe it yet. This is a work in progress, and I hope that someday soon I can feel comfortable in my own skin again.

Come back next week when I will close out this series in my final article by sharing my experience with the administrative and financial side of my cancer journey: short-term disability and medical bills from an out-of-network hospital.

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.

FOCUS AND BLUR/SHUTTERSTOCK



Cancer can change a person's body in ways many people struggle to accept.

LIGHTFIELD STUDIOS/SHUTTERSTOCK



Those overindulgences can be satisfying at the time, though we inevitably regret them as they take their toll on our body.

SELF-MASTERY

HOW TO BREAK FREE OF Emotional Eating

We can develop a healthier relationship with food and gain more control over what we eat

JILL SUTTIE

Do you have struggles around eating? If you do, you're not alone. In the United States, millions of people will fit the diagnosis of binge eating disorder at some point in their lifetime. Many more have less severe eating issues, such as obsessing over calorie counting or feeling shame when they eat "bad" foods. These issues can wreak havoc on their health and happiness.

Often, people with problematic eating patterns are worried about their weight and attempt to lose weight by cycling through dieting regimens, which often backfire. Even if a diet does result in weight loss, it can lead to an unhealthy preoccupation with food and eating.

According to Howard Farkas, a psychologist specializing in emotional eating and the author of a new book, "8 Keys to End Emotional Eating," part of the problem lies in how our minds work against the goal of weight loss.

Our minds respond negatively to deprivation, says Farkas, and the self-denial that diets usually require is a recipe for failure. Restrictive eating, he says, pits "willpower" against our basic psychological need for personal autonomy—meaning the desire to make our own choices regardless of outside pressures. Farkas believes that as willpower fades, as it's bound to do, the desire for autonomy tends to win out, causing people to turn to eating as a way of reasserting their personal control over their lives.

To overcome this pattern, Farkas says we require something differ-

ent than a diet: We need an end to emotional eating. He believes that understanding how our brains and bodies work—and honoring our desire for autonomy around eating—are the keys to developing healthier eating habits. Here are a few of his recommendations to improve your relationship with eating and food.

Understand How Emotions Affect Eating

People sometimes eat to relieve emotional discomfort in their lives, says Farkas, and these people tend to have certain things in common. Through his work as a therapist, he's learned to identify four common patterns of emotional overeaters: pushing your own needs aside to appease others, and feeling resentment; believing your successes in life are undeserved and feeling afraid of being shamed; being perfectionistic around your own behavior and anxious about making mistakes; and suppressing all negative emotions for fear of losing control of them.

Each emotional pattern requires suppression in order to keep social relationships and opportunities safe. But suppression requires personal control, and the tension eventually becomes too much. As a result, many binge eaters find that giving up control around eating lets off steam and reasserts their sense of autonomy—at least in the moment, even if that relief is followed by guilt or a sense of failure.

Overeaters also tend to have all-or-none thinking—meaning they judge things in their lives as either "all good" or "all bad." This kind of thinking can affect their eating habits, too. Often, they restrict their eating only to "good" food and eschew their own desires, not trusting their body's cues about what they want to eat.

"They think about food as either good or bad—not based on how it tastes, but in categorical terms that refer to how likely it is to cause weight gain, how unhealthy it is, and even as a moral judgment that reflects on themselves if they eat it," writes Farkas. The problem

with this way of thinking is that it ignores the underlying emotional tensions, which he believes will continue to plague us until we deal with them.

Be More Strategic About Control

Many of us equate control with restraint. But, says Farkas, it's better to aim for a different type of control—autonomy. "To be autonomous means having the capacity and freedom for self-governance, and it's the opposite of feeling externally controlled."

How can you increase your autonomy around eating? By allowing all foods back into your life—eliminating their cachet as "the forbidden fruit"—while learning to choose what you want, when you want it, rather than fighting your body's cues. To make this easier, he suggests things like staying ahead of your hunger by adding small snacks between meals, taking smaller portions of food initially with the understanding that you can give yourself more later if you need it, and eating more consciously, allowing yourself to fully savor your food while paying attention to when eating more doesn't bring more pleasure.

"If you're mindful of how much it would take to satisfy your hunger or desire for whatever you're eating, you can maximize your pleasure while keeping the amount you eat to a minimum," he writes.

Accept Yourself

While it may seem contradictory to the goal of changing your behavior, practicing acceptance is an important part of making any healthy habit stick. That doesn't mean resigning yourself to never feeling in charge of your eating; but it does mean accepting yourself, as you are, so that you can be a good coach to yourself as you tackle new behaviors.

Changing habits can be difficult—two steps forward, one step back. Understanding that can help you stay on track with your goals and prevent backsliding into a "What the heck, I may as well give up" attitude at the first slip-

up. Interestingly, when we accept our feelings and urges, they have less power over us, Farkas writes. So, learning to be patient with the process and acknowledge urges we have to overeat or binge is an important part of becoming more autonomous.

Break the Diet Mentality

While weight loss may be the goal of many people on a diet, Farkas says this is the wrong focus, especially when measuring progress. Too many factors affect whether or not we lose weight, and diets often don't work in the long term.

Instead, he suggests, it's best to give up on monitoring your weight religiously and focus instead on behavioral changes that are more likely to be sustainable. For example, you can start experimenting with smaller portions of food and paying attention to your feelings of satiety, or going out to lunch at work less often, or walking or biking to work rather than driving. Aiming for behavioral changes that can be measured—instead of numbers on a scale—helps to keep the focus on building a healthy lifestyle, which (perhaps counterintuitively) will likely result in weight loss eventually.

These are just some of Farkas's insights. His book contains many more keys to understanding and helping with emotional eating—including how to boost your coping skills around stress, how to use reasoning when you feel overwhelmed with emotion, and more. Filled with useful tips and compassionate expertise, this book could help anyone to become more conscious around their eating, whether you're experiencing issues or not. For those who suffer most, it could mean the end of emotional eating and painful dieting and hope for a better relationship with food and life.

Jill Suttie holds a doctorate in psychology. She is Greater Good Magazine's book review editor and a frequent contributor to the magazine. This article was originally published in the Greater Good Magazine online.

MIND TO BODY CONNECTION

Uncovering the Emotional Message of Chronic Pain

Our fear and anxiety drive biochemical processes that leave us with real physiological suffering

CONAN MILNER

We usually think of it as a bad thing, but pain helps keep us from harm. In fact, without pain, our lives would be cut short.

In the book "Pain: The Gift that No-body Wants," authors Philip Yancey and Dr. Paul Brand write about a congenital disease that causes people to be born unable to experience pain. Lacking this sensory guidance, these people easily fall prey to serious injuries, fail to seek medical attention in a timely manner, and often die before they reach adulthood.

Like the negative aspects of our other senses—experiencing stinky smells, a foul taste, a grating noise, or a dreadful sight—pain serves as a message that something is wrong and change is necessary. If you stub your toe or bump your head, the message is to pay attention and become more conscious of your surroundings.

However, if we suffer and the message isn't clear, pain seems cruel, unnecessary, and unfair.

Our culture generally isn't interested in uncovering the message of pain. An old jingle for an over-the-counter pain killer sums up the feeling: "I haven't got time for the pain." But efforts to silence

pain without deciphering its message can lead to unintended consequences.

For example, starting in the 1990s, prescription opioids became increasingly popular among doctors tasked with treating chronic pain, but the result was an addiction epidemic. When the medical establishment realized their error and began to deny these patients pain pills, many turned to heroin, fueling an unprecedented appetite for a dangerous drug. Since 1999, the number of opioid deaths (from both prescription and illegal drugs) has quadrupled. According to the Centers for Disease Control, each day, 91 Americans die from an opioid overdose.

There are safer methods promising an escape from pain, but they may fail to bring immediate relief. And after weeks, months, or even years of constant agony, pain sufferers are willing to try anything that offers some sliver of hope.

This is a drama Steven Ozanich knows well. At the age of 14, his back locked up, and for the next 30 years, he tried everything to stop the pain.

"I was desperate. I tried acupuncture, thousands of chiropractic manipulations, physical therapy, and hanging upside down like a bat trying to stretch it out," he said.

Finally, Ozanich resigned himself to surgery: spinal fusions and titanium

plates. A couple of weeks before the procedure was scheduled, however, he found Dr. John E. Sarno, a professor of rehabilitation medicine at New York University School of Medicine.

Thanks to Sarno, Ozanich canceled his surgery, and 17 years later he's still pain-free.

"Dr. Sarno saved my life," Ozanich said.

Sarno's Discovery

In 2012, Forbes magazine called Sarno "America's Best Doctor" thanks to his "miracle cures." He has received glowing celebrity endorsements—ranging from shock jock Howard Stern to former Iowa Sen. Tom Harkin. Millions are said to have benefited from his work, yet you've probably never heard of him. Perhaps it's because his strategy for addressing pain seems so at odds with how we typically understand the pain mechanism.

From Sarno's perspective, pain isn't rooted in the physical, but rather the mental and emotional. He calls the process tension myoneural syndrome, or TMS. The idea is that our dark, unexpressed feelings cause chronic tension, resulting in physical pain.

Sarno hit on the idea in the 1970s while examining a woman he called Helen, who was bedridden due to severe pain. Under psychoanalysis, Helen recalled being molested by her father. Uncovering these memories culminated in an emotional meltdown, and a feeling that she was going to die. But after sobbing for several minutes, she felt the pain she'd been carrying for years suddenly disappear.

Observations like these convinced Sarno to see chronic pain as a kind of protective mechanism—a distraction from feelings you're not ready to face.

Observations like these convinced Sarno to see chronic pain as a kind of protective mechanism—a distraction from feelings you're not ready to face.

For those willing to confront the emotional demons that lurk behind their pain, the process is a revelation. In a 2016 documentary about Sarno called "All the Rage," Larry David (of "Seinfeld" and "Curb Your Enthusiasm" fame) confessed to weeping after his appointment. "All of a sudden, the pain was gone. It was

the closest thing I've ever had in my life to a religious experience," David said.

At age 93, Sarno is now retired, but others have taken up his torch. One is Ozanich, who has written three well-received books about his experience helping people resolve their TMS. Many heal just from reading the books alone, he says.

Ozanich isn't a doctor, but he doesn't have to be. Sarno's treatment doesn't require a medical degree because it comes down to the simple process of a patient accepting an idea or new way of viewing the pain.

"The source of the pain is unwanted emotions," Ozanich said.

Whether it's foot pain, carpal tunnel, or an aching back, Ozanich poses the same question: "What's going on in your life?"

Resistance

While modern medicine is focused almost exclusively on the physical, ancient doctors understood that emotions play a major role in health and healing. In traditional Chinese medicine, for example, negative emotions are believed to injure the organs. Fear hurts the kidneys, anger the liver, and grief the lungs.

In contemporary culture, however, chronic pain sufferers are often deeply offended when anyone suggests that the source of their discomfort is emotional. But Ozanich knows how they feel.

"When I first started to read Dr. Sarno's book, I threw it against the wall, it made me that angry," he said. "Now I know, looking back, that it was because it was true that it made me angry."

This can be especially frustrating to patients who already hold evidence of a physical problem—like a doctor's diagnosis that points to a clear cause. But Ozanich isn't fazed.

"You always want to go get checked out first," he said. "We want to make sure there isn't some malignant process happening that is threatening your life."

It may sound strange to suggest that physical evidence found right at the site of pain isn't entirely the cause of a patient's discomfort, but according to Dr. David Hanscom, a renowned spine surgeon at the Swedish Medical Center in Seattle, it's true.

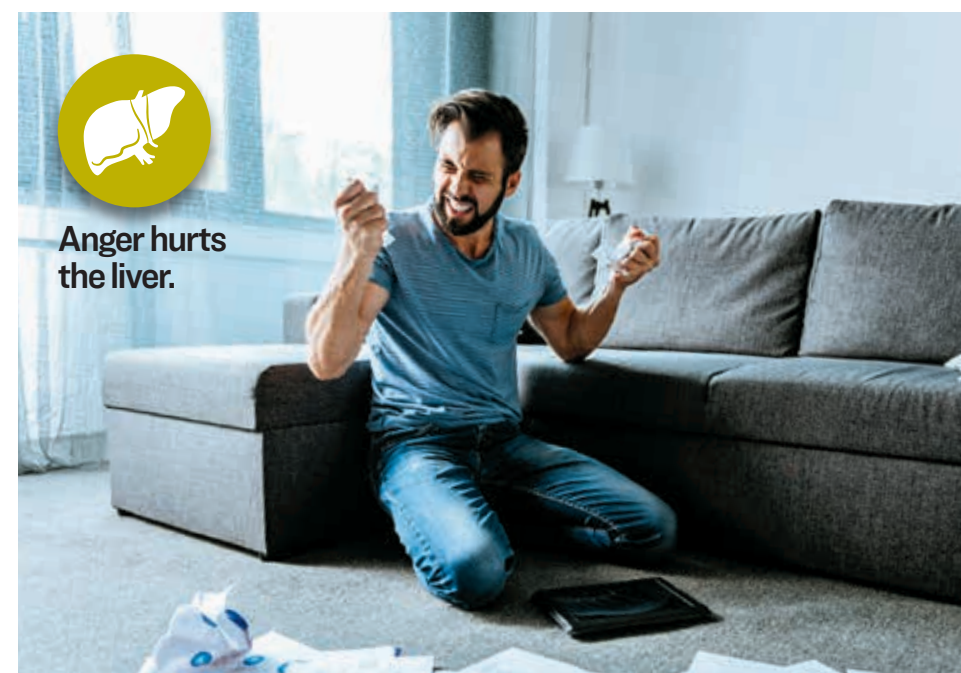
"It's just not logical that any given bone spur is really going to cause that much pain," Hanscom said. "Those bone spurs have probably been there for years, but all of a sudden the pain lights up. Why?"

Hanscom didn't study with Sarno, but through his own clinical experience and study of evidence in the medical literature, he has arrived at similar conclusions. In his new book, "Back In Control: A Surgeon's Roadmap Out of Chronic



Grief hurts the lungs.

For those willing to confront the emotional demons that lurk behind their pain, the process is a revelation



Anger hurts the liver.



Fear hurts the kidneys.

BODY TO MIND CONNECTION

Can Sugar be the Cause of Your Holiday Blues?

Sugar has far-reaching affects in the body that can drain your energy and lower your mood

JAYA JAYA MYRA

Sugar is a very misunderstood food. It tastes good, makes you feel good, and gives you the energy and motivation to do good, so what's not to love, right? We're exposed to sugary treats almost everywhere—especially during the holidays. Sugar isn't your enemy, but before you jump on the holiday dessert train, here are a few things you should know about how sugar impacts your mind, body, and emotions.

Sugar Is a Highly Addictive Substance

Did your parents ever give you candy as a reward when you were a child? There's more to that on a biological level than you or your parents probably knew. Research shows that sugar is more addictive than cocaine and acts like a drug in the body. Sugar and other highly-addictive drugs (legal and illegal) trigger reward centers in the brain on a biochemical level that make you feel good when you consume them. Your body



Your body knows that when you consume sugar it will feel good: as such, the body keeps craving more.

knows that when you consume sugar it will feel good (thank you, serotonin): as such, the body keeps craving more. The more sugar you eat, the more intense this addictive cycle gets with quite a few unexpected consequences.

Sugar, Mood, and Willpower

Because sugar is so addictive, it has a direct negative correlation to willpower and your ability to make good decisions. This is amplified by the prolonged effect sugar has on mood. In the

short term, sugar makes you feel happy and elevated, but it then causes a rollercoaster of up-and-down emotions including irritability, impulsive behaviors, anger, anxiety, and even an increased risk for depression.

This culminates in the inevitable "sugar crash" that leaves you craving more.

None of this is good during the holidays when you are faced with shopping and spending decisions, visiting with friends and family who get under your

skin, and even dealing with the numerous other stressors the holidays bring.

The effect of sugar on mood and willpower is in part due to how sugar deregulates neurotransmitter production and causes inflammation in the body.

Neurotransmitters like dopamine and serotonin help regulate mood and affect happiness, motivation, and stress. Inflammation is now believed to be a factor in depression, more-so than a chemical imbalance, which is why anti-inflammatory foods like turmeric and ginger have such a profound effect on mental health. One study even showed how turmeric nearly outperformed Prozac in treating depression.

Sugar's Effect on the Physical Body

The mental and emotional effects of sugar are compelling enough to control your sweet tooth, but what effect does sugar have directly on physical health? Excess sugar can cause brain fog, inflammation, a decline in cognitive function, Type 2 diabetes, increases the risk of heart disease and cancer, not to mention acne.

Inflammation, in addition to being a factor in depression, also causes pain in the body, making any other health conditions feel that much worse. Sugar is also linked to fatty liver disease, gout, and increased cellular aging, which makes you look older than you are. And the icing on the cake?

That energy boost you get from sugar? After the initial sugar high, it actually drains your energy and vitality, leaving you more tired and sluggish than before you consumed it.

Excess sugar can cause brain fog, inflammation, and a decline in cognitive function.

Easy Ways to Reduce Sugar Intake

The holidays should be a time for celebration and joy, not frustration and fatigue. The so-

lution isn't to eliminate sugar, but to minimize its impacts by reducing the amount you eat, and this may be easier than you ever imagined.

Processed foods and drinks have more sugar than you probably realize, and you're not even getting the full sweet flavor experience from them. If you want energy, go for a coffee, unsweetened. If you want the energy and mood-boosting effects of sugar, have some dark chocolate or pure cacao. These trigger a dopamine mood and energy-boosting response in the body and have far less sugar than other sweets or types of chocolate.

Add other foods that trigger mood-boosting neurotransmitters in the body that don't

important to know what sort of person has a disease than to know what sort of disease a person has," but modern medicine seems to have forgotten this idea.

Hanscom points to strict time constraints imposed by the industry that makes gaining a deeper understanding of an individual patient nearly impossible.

"Today in modern medicine, patients have almost become like target practice—we're just giving them random treatments without any thoughts behind them," he said. "You walk in, get some test or injection, and walk out. But that's not really medicine."

According to a 2015 report from the National Institutes of Health, about 25 million Americans (about 11 percent of the U.S. population) are in chronic pain. But now that opioids are off the table for most patients, the medical establishment is at a loss for how to treat it. Hanscom believes that if patients and doctors can acknowledge the emotional root of the protective process behind pain, it could change the world.

"A lot of societal problems right now are driven by anxiety and fueled by anger," he said. "I think there are major societal implications to getting this diagnosis correct."

have the addictive side effects. But stay away from diet soda and artificial sweeteners. These trick the brain into thinking it's going to get a dopamine hit, and when it doesn't, you'll crave the sweets even more. Pick one of these things, stick with it for a week, and see how you feel. Happy holidays!

Jaya Jaya Myra is a wellness lifestyle expert and go-to media expert on mind-body wellness, stress management, mindfulness, food for mood, and natural, healthy living. She's a best-selling author, TEDx and motivational speaker, and creator of The WELL Method for purpose-filled healthy living. Visit www.JayaJayaMyra.com

GOAL SETTING

Tricks to Making Healthier New Year's Resolutions That Stick

Finding the fortitude to follow through on an important lifestyle change is easier with better goals

CARLY HARRILL

The end of the year is a time for reflection and making peace with the things in your life you couldn't change.

Therefore, it only makes sense that the New Year would be about tackling the things you can change in your own personal act of *carpe diem*. Still, while more than 40 percent of the population will make New Year's resolutions toward positive change, less than half of them will follow through within the first six months. Sadly, only 8 percent will have successfully met their goal at the one-year mark. The question is ... why?

According to experts, the answer lies in how we set these goals. As a whole, we tend to make broad-sweeping, unrealistic resolutions such as "get more exercise," "lose weight," or "drink less." While these are great in concept, they don't offer measures of success or actionable steps in how to be successful, which ultimately leaves too much room for failure. As a result, we often give up.

As you start to map out your reinvention to a healthier you in 2020, here are a few tips to ensure success with your New Year's resolutions.

1. Make your goals measurable: Rather than make a resolution to "eat healthier" in the New Year, turn this into something measurable according to where you stand in relation to this goal. For instance, if you want to be healthier by

consuming less meat, consider framing your New Year's resolution to go meatless for lunch. Set a deadline to re-assess your healthier eating goal. If you find that you are having a difficult time achieving that goal by the set date, tweak accordingly to avoid setting yourself up for failure. On the other hand, you can also tweak your goals to increase the challenge (i.e.: only purchase meat that is USDA certified organic).

2. Make your goals realistic: If you have an addiction to diet soda, don't make a New Year's resolution to cut it entirely from your diet. This may be unrealistic for you and is also likely to make you (really) unhappy! Instead, look for a natural healthier version of your diet soda or swap out for herbal tea on weekdays. This will help you reach for a healthier goal more aligned with your lifestyle.

3. Make a resolution to 'add' something: Too often, New Year's resolutions revolve around eliminating things from your diet or life. Adopt a glass-half-full mentality by making resolutions to add something. This could be a commitment to incorporate at least one veggie to every lunch and dinner or have a glass of water with every meal.

4. Create 'mini' goals to achieve healthier resolutions: If you are shooting to cook more fresh, wholesome food in the New Year, outline mini-goals to help you

reach your resolutions. Some examples could include:

- Sign you and your significant other up for a healthy cooking class.
- Sign up for CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) to have fresh fruits and vegetables delivered to your front door every few weeks. Visit Localharvest.org to find one in your area.
- Search the internet for healthy recipes. Just add the word "healthy" in front of your favorite meals to find a healthy version.
- Get a Pinterest account (if you are one of the few who isn't addicted already). Pinterest is full of simple, healthy recipes that you can "pin" now and pull up when you're ready to make your weekly shopping list.

5. Incorporate rewards: Since most New Year's resolutions are based on deprivation of some sort, consider weaving in rewards to better achieve your goals to be healthier. Examples include dining out on Saturdays if you followed the plan, or allowing yourself to have dessert twice a week. Rewards keep you motivated and give you something to look forward to so you are more likely to stick with your goals.

6. Make resolutions one at a time: Make one resolution at a time, starting



Getting to the gym is a common New Year's resolution, and it is easier to do if you make this goal more specific and maybe even give yourself a reward.

with the one that is most important to you. They are "resolutions" for a reason:

They aren't easy to accomplish, otherwise, you would have already done it by now, right? According to experts, focusing on one goal may also have a trickle-down effect, helping you to accomplish other goals. "When keystone habits start to change, they set off a chain reaction that changes other habits, almost unconsciously," says Charles Duhigg, the author of "The Power of Habit."

7. Accept that you will make mistakes: Chances are, you are going to have a bad day and slip. Tell yourself it's OK, and then use it as an opportunity to ask yourself why you gave in. Understanding your obstacles will help you to overcome them the next time you go to order that cheesy pizza or drink that large soda.

Carly Harrill is a social impact strategist with a 15-year career focused in corporate partnerships, development and fundraising, marketing and integrated communications, community mobilization, and content/campaign curation. This article was originally published on NaturallySavvy.com



The effects of expressing gratitude go beyond improving one-on-one relationships, they could bring entire groups together.

The Ripple Effects of a



A new study shows that expressing gratitude to a single person can affect an entire group

JILL SUTTIE

Researchers studying gratitude have found that being thankful and expressing it to others is good for our health and happiness. Not only does it feel good, it also helps us build trust and closer bonds with the people around us.

These benefits have mostly been observed in a two-person exchange—someone saying thanks and someone receiving thanks. Now, a new study suggests the effects of expressing gratitude go beyond improving one-on-one relationships, they could bring entire groups together—inspiring a desire to help and connect in people who simply witness an act of gratitude.

In this extensive study, Sara Algoe of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and her colleagues ran multiple experiments to investigate how witnessing gratitude affects people's feelings toward the grateful

person and the benefactor (the person who is being thanked).

They came up with a few different ways for participants to observe gratitude. In one experiment, participants were tasked with reading a movie review draft and underlining eye-catching passages for the reviewer's benefit. Before they began, though, they saw an example (supposedly done by a previous participant). Several lines of text were underlined, as the assignment required, but many typos were also corrected, showing effort that went beyond the original assignment. In some cases, this help was acknowledged with a handwritten note from the reviewer saying, "Thank you so much for catching those typos!"

Afterward, participants underlined passages in another article by the reviewer, and researchers counted how many typos they corrected as a measure of their willingness to offer extra help.

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“When a grateful person actually takes the time to step outside of themselves and call attention to what was great about the other person's actions—that's what distinguishes gratitude from other kinds of positive emotional expressions.”

Sara Algoe, researcher, University of North Carolina—Chapel Hill

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A NEWSPAPER GEORGE WASHINGTON WOULD READ

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The Ripple Effects of a Thank You

Continued from Page 9

Then, people were asked how much they might like to be friends with the reviewer.

The results showed that people who had seen a note of gratitude were more willing to correct typos and help out, and more likely to want to become friends with the reviewer, than those who hadn't.

"When people witness an expression of gratitude, they see that the grateful person is the kind of person who notices when other people do kind things and actually takes the time to acknowledge them—meaning, they're a good social partner," says Algoe. "People who are responsive as social partners are really desirable people."

Based on other survey questions, Algoe and her team also discovered that participants wanted to help and affiliate with the person receiving the gratitude. That's because receiving gratitude marks you as a person who is effective at being supportive or helpful, says Algoe.

"It's helpful to know who the people in our environment are who will do nice things for other people, because they are attractive relationship partners," she says.

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It's helpful to know who the people in our environment are who will do nice things for other people, because they are attractive relationship partners.

Sara Algoe, researcher, University of North Carolina—Chapel Hill

What was the exact cause of participants' reactions, though? It's possible that people are attracted to others who seem positive in general, like the reviewer, or they simply felt elevated by witnessing the other participant's generosity. To find out the active ingredient in gratitude and why it may have effects on bystanders, Algoe and her colleagues ran more experiments.

In one, they had participants watch videos where one member of a real-life couple expressed gratitude toward their partner. The videos varied in how much the grateful person praised their partner's fine qualities—e.g., admiring their partner's listening skills or their generous nature—and expressed how the partner's generosity had benefited them—e.g., helping them work through a difficult problem or save money they would have spent on a cab. The videos also varied in how warm, positive, or competent the person in

the video appeared.

The results showed that participants were more drawn to videotaped individuals who praised their partner than to those who focused on how they'd benefited personally. True, they were also drawn to grateful people who seemed warm, competent, and positive—but those traits didn't matter nearly as much as praising another's fine qualities.

To Algoe, this points to a particularly important element of gratitude—its other-focused nature—which may be key to influencing witnesses of gratitude.

"When a grateful person actually takes the time to step outside of themselves and call attention to what was great about the other person's actions—that's what distinguishes gratitude from other kinds of positive emotional expressions," she says.

Interestingly, Algoe's findings weren't affected by the gender of the witnesses, grateful people, or benefactors. Although men might fear that gratitude makes them look weak or become indebted, even men who expressed gratitude were rated as more competent than those who didn't.

These findings build on prior research by showing that expressions of gratitude not only provide social glue for the people involved—the grateful person and the benefactor—but also spread beyond the dyad, affecting witnesses in ways that could reverberate throughout a group.

"It's easy to imagine how this might work in a workplace, where people are actually attending to and acknowledging other people's good deeds and kindnesses," says Algoe. "A whole group of people could be inspired to be kinder to one another, and, through this interwoven kindness, the group itself could become a higher-functioning group."

Does this mean we should all be expressing gratitude more frequently? Yes, says Algoe—though how it's expressed could differ by context and culture. For some situations, she says, it may be appropriate to be demonstrative rather than verbal—giving a hug, for example, or bringing a gift of flowers. In another context, a simple thank you—especially if it's sincere and not manipulative—will get the ball rolling.

Whatever the case, though, it's clear we can do more to increase social connection if we acknowledge the good in those around us.

"Gratitude expression seems to be a unique kind of emotional experience that is really well-suited for relationship building," says Algoe.

Jill Suttie, Psy.D., is Greater Good's book review editor and a frequent contributor to the magazine. This article was originally published on Greater Good's online magazine.

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Not only does it feel good, it also helps us build trust and closer bonds with the people around us.



Cities offer a swath of obstacles and opportunities, freedom and captivity, that can challenge as well as nurture us, often at the same time.

Cities Increase Your Risk of Depression, Anxiety, Psychosis—Usually

While generalized findings indicate city living is rife with challenges, it can bring mental health benefits as well

ANDREA MECHELLI

More than half of the world's population—4.2 billion people—live in cities. This number is expected to rise, with 68 percent of the global population estimated to live in urban areas by 2050.

Among the world's megacities—defined as urban areas with more than 10 million inhabitants—Tokyo, Japan, is the largest, with 37 million citizens. It is followed by Delhi, India (29 million), and Shanghai, China (26 million). In the UK, after several decades of rural-to-urban migration, 83 percent of people live in urban environments—and London has become the first European megacity.

The detrimental effects of urban living on physical health have long been recognized, including higher rates of cardiovascular and respiratory disease. More recent, however, is the revelation that urban living can also have adverse effects on mental health.

The risk of developing depression—the most prevalent mental disorder in the world, characterized by low mood and feeling helpless—is 20 percent higher in urban dwellers than those who live outside the city.

Meanwhile, the risk of developing psychosis—a severe psychiatric disorder associated with hallucinations, delusions, paranoia, and disorganized thought—is 77 percent higher in urban than rural dwellers.

The risk of developing a generalized anxiety disorder, a state of mind characterized by feeling anxious and a sense of impending danger or panic, is also 21 percent higher in urban than rural dwellers.

Critically, the longer you spend in an urban environment during childhood and adolescence, the higher your risk of developing a mental illness in adulthood. This "dose-response" association provides indirect support for a causal relationship between urban living and mental illness.

Brain Science Support for these epidemiological findings comes from the brain sciences. In a pioneering study in 2011, researchers measured neuronal activation during a stress-inducing task.

As expected, all participants showed increased neuronal activation within the limbic system—a network of regions that

plays a key role in our day-to-day regulation of emotion. Within this network, neural activation in the amygdala—the "fight-or-flight" center of the brain—correlated with the size of the city in which an individual resided at the time of the experiment. And neural activation of the perigenual anterior cingulate cortex—a region implicated in the processing of social stress—correlated with how long a participant had lived in a city during their childhood.

Intriguingly, other studies have shown similar alterations in people who have a high genetic risk of developing psychiatric disorders. This supports the notion that urban living causes changes within a network of regions implicated in the development of mental illness.

It's important to recognize that those factors within the urban environment that increase the risk of mental illness are neither intrinsic nor inevitable aspects of urban living.

Underlying Factors

Taken together, epidemiological and neuroscientific studies provide converging evidence that, indeed, people who live in urban areas are at greater risk of mental health problems. So, which specific factors within the urban environment increase the risk of developing such problems?

Epidemiological studies have identified a large number of factors. Some of these highlight potential problems in the built environment, such as reduced access to green spaces and high levels of noise and air pollution. Others pertain to the social environment, such as loneliness, perceived and actual crime, and social inequalities.

These studies were based on the collection of a single snapshot per participant and therefore couldn't capture the multiple and diverse environments that most people experience throughout the day. But some new studies are using smartphone technologies to collect multiple measurements as people go about their daily

life. Urban Mind, for example, is a citizen-science project that uses a smartphone app to measure the experience of urban or rural living in real-time.

It's important to recognize that those factors within the urban environment that increase the risk of mental illness are neither intrinsic nor inevitable aspects of urban living. Instead, they are the result of poor planning, design, and management, and could be reversed. Which takes us to the next question: Could urban living be good for our mental health?

The Bright Side

While existing research focuses on the negative impacts of urban living on mental health and frames the accelerated urbanization taking place worldwide as a challenge to humankind, it's an oversimplification to say this is what it means to live in a city for at least three reasons.

First, urban living is a complex, contradictory, and difficult to define phenomenon, with little in common between the resident of a deprived suburb and that of a garden city, or between the processes of gentrification and those of inner-city decline. Consistent with this notion, the incidence of depression within urban areas is lower when people have access to high-quality housing and green spaces.

Second, we know that all health, and mental health, in particular, depends on both nature and nurture. For example, emerging evidence from epigenetics, which examines how the environment affects the expression of our genes, suggests that the impact of urban living depends on our preexisting genetic makeup.

Third, for many people, urban living can bring great benefits to mental health through increased opportunities for education, employment, socialization, and access to specialized care. Moving to a city can be the first step toward the realization of one's full potential, and a necessary condition to gain access to communities with similar interests and values.

Ultimately, cities offer a swath of obstacles and opportunities, freedom and captivity, that can challenge as well as nurture us, often at the same time.

Andrea Mechelli is a professor of early intervention in mental health at King's College London. This article was originally published on *The Conversation*.

How to Feel One With Your City

Get a job as soon as possible. Become a part of the flow. Contribute. Create Value.

JAMES WALPOLE

When was the first time you felt connected to the life of a city?

When I was younger, I could see the busyness of the world around me—the high-rise buildings, the businesses, the traffic, the construction, the people rushing off to do things. But it all felt foreign and unrelatable.

These were things that other people did and places where other people went. I had no inkling of what it was like inside those things. As a child and teenager, I was a net consumer, taking what was given to me and not contributing all that much.

I had to get a job before I started to realize the beauty of a city skyline, or even a busy interstate. The high office buildings, the businesses, the traffic, the construction, the people rushing off to do things—I'm a part of that flow now. I know what these places and things and activities are like. I know some of what it takes to create value in the world.

And that's a wonderful thing.

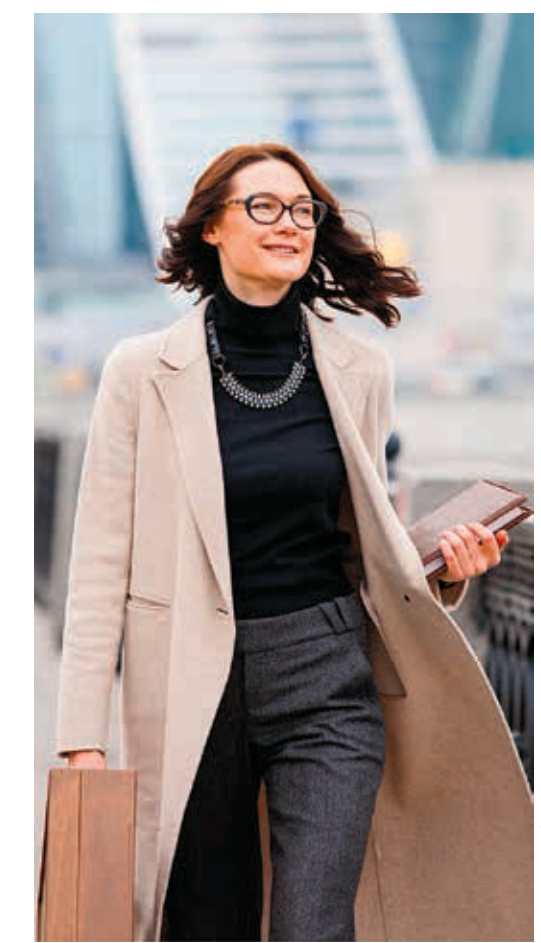
When I create things, I become connected to every other creator, whether they're fixing cars or stringing guitars or building spreadsheets. We're all trying to improve our lives by trading the value we have for the value someone else has. That puts us into a virtuous flow of exchange. That flow ultimately improves the lives of all the other people in all the other cars rushing toward the city skyline.

When I create things, I become connected to every other creator, whether they're fixing cars or stringing guitars or building spreadsheets.

Seen that way, everyone I pass by on the interstate now is a fellow laborer, or (better yet) a fellow player in a symphony. And every building, every helicopter or plane, every train, every imposing landmark of city life becomes familiar. Instead of finding a city that feels frightening, imposing, or foreign, I feel at home and engaged. I belong here, in the middle of the activity of life.

Get a job as soon as possible. Become a part of the flow. Contribute. Build. As long as it is good, be a part of it.

James Walpole is a writer, start-up 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 the Foundation for Economic Education.



We're all trying to improve our lives by trading the value we have for the value someone else has. That puts us into a virtuous flow of exchange.

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Why You Don't Need More Time for Self-Care

You have all the time you need to take care of yourself, if you take care of yourself all the time

RANDI KAY

In a world where time seems more precious than gold and making to-do lists is now on our to-do list, it can feel like every second is spoken for.

In this scenario, the idea of making time for ourselves can feel overwhelming, or even selfish.

But what if there was a better way? What if this whole “self-care” thing wasn’t just another task on your to-do list? What if it was a part of how you operated? Or better yet, what if self-care actually made you feel like you had more time?

The term “self-care” has been commandeered by the wellness industry as of late and is often defined by activities ranging from lighting a candle to luxurious spa days. With this mentality, it can be hard to fathom self-care as a part of your everyday life. But the good news is that true self-care

is more a way of life than something you include on your to-do list.

I define self-care as the act of tuning into your true needs and then acting accordingly. By this, I mean: a) you take a moment to check in; b) you listen to that wise part of yourself; c) and then you act on what you hear.

That may look like items on your to-do list, such as getting a massage, going to therapy, or having a solid morning ritual. But the real magic happens when you bring self-care into your everyday life. And a great way to do this is to make tweaks to your current activities, or “self-care power-ups,” as I like to call them.

Here are some examples of what that could look like:

Let’s start at how you start your day. What are you listening to when you get ready in the morning? Is it some heavy news story or could it be some uplifting music?

How you start your day sets the stage

for how the rest of the day will go. So why not harmonize your getting-ready routine with music or media that bring you joy? Save the news and other information consumption for later in the day.

If you have a morning commute, this is a great time for a gratitude practice. Thinking or saying aloud what you are grateful for can put you in a wonderful mindset for your workday or other commitments. There’s a lot of power in leading with gratitude.

The next thing to consider is how you go about your daily tasks. If you sit at a desk for hours at a time, take a look at how you hold yourself. If you are hunched over and your head is jutting forward, adjust your posture to a more neutral position and get up and move around regularly. This little tweak alone can save your body from a lot of aches and pains.

In any task you do, notice how you are breathing. Turn your shallow chest breathing into deep belly breaths. This takes tension away from your neck and shoulders, calms the nervous system, and keeps the abdomen healthy. You are breathing anyway, why not make it therapeutic?

Moving to the end of the day, it’s common to want to relax and veg out with your favorite TV show. If this is something you choose to do, I recommend powering-up with some gentle stretching while you watch to make sure your body processes the stress of the day properly. This helps you stretch for longer periods of time and nurtures your body’s needs.

These are just some common examples, but the number of tweaks you can make are endless.

If you are unsure what to do, a helpful exercise is something I like to call “This for That.” Think how you can sub out an unhealthy choice for a healthier one. More water and a quick walk in the afternoon instead of another cup of coffee. A mindful breathing break instead of a social media break. Or getting up and talking to your coworkers instead of sending an email. Face-to-face contact has a naturally relaxing effect.

You really don’t need more time for self-care. You just need to swap something out for it. And these power-ups can make all of the difference. Most of our body pain and life stressors were created by small and simple actions repeated over and over. So the best way to heal these unhealthy actions is also by small and simple actions repeated over and over. A good habit for a bad habit.

There’s a popular quote floating around the internet that states, “We are what we repeatedly do.” And while the internet can’t decide on who actually said it, no one’s debating its truth. Why not make sure that what we do repeatedly serves us?

And remember, it’s not always about what you do, it’s how you do it. Changing how you do something can make that task less draining and less stressful, giving you more energy to do more meaningful things.

Imagine if you weren’t so maxed out by the end of the day. It would feel like you had more time and energy to play with your kids, gather with friends, or do other acts of self-care that you enjoy.

Embrace the small and simple. Let your daily habits serve you. And trust that you have all of the time in the world to be happy and healthy.

The good news is that true self-care is more a way of life than something you include on your to-do list.



Thinking or saying aloud what you are grateful for can put you in a wonderful mindset for your workday or other commitments. There’s a lot of power in leading with gratitude.

Randi Kay is a holistic health practitioner based out of Fargo, N.D. Along with her local healing practice, she produces the Simple Self-Care podcast and offers mentoring and online courses at Naturally Randi Kay. This article was originally published on *Becoming Minimalist*.

New Study Suggests a Meaningful Life Translates to a Healthier Life

DEVON ANDRE

Are you comfortable with why you’re here and where you’re headed? If you are, it could lead to a healthier life and boost how you feel every day.

A small new study reports that people who have found meaning in their lives fare better in terms of both physical and mental health compared to their counterparts who continue to search for purpose.

The findings of the research team from the Center for Healthy Aging at the University of California-San Diego School of Medicine suggest that people with meaning may experience better health, wellness and longevity, improved mood, better relationships, and improved mental performance.

More than 1,000 people from a variety of ages filled out questionnaires designed to assess purpose, physical and mental health, as well as mental acuity. Results indicated that older individuals—who may be struggling with retirement, lost friends and family, illness, and mortality—tend to look for meaning as the world they know often changes drastically.

Overall, researchers noted a U-shape relationship between meaning and age. People sought meaning in the early part of their lives (the 20s) then less so as they grew into themselves (30-plus) but returned to their search as they aged.

The reason why meaning may play such an important role in overall health is its potential re-

lationship to stress. A lack of purpose may lead to fear and anxiety about what comes next, or about your place in the world. In turn, this stress can lead to physical symptoms like poor sleep, inflammation, high blood pressure, and other conditions associated with stress and anxiety.

It’s common to wonder about life’s purpose as you age. The meaningful things that occupied so much of life for so long—career, family, friends—may no longer be relevant. Retirement may mean the end of a career and children may have moved out to start lives of their own. Family and friends, once central to daily life, may have passed on or moved away. These changes can leave a person asking what is the purpose of living.

If you are searching for meaning in your life after a rough go of things, one place to start is by accepting the things in your life that you can’t change. From there, begin to focus on the various things you can do to make yourself happy and useful to others. It could be something like joining a club, volunteering, planning your retirement, or taking on a hobby. If you struggle to come up with something on your own, consider having a meaningful conversation with a friend.

Devon Andre holds a bachelor’s in 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*.

How to Tell If Your Holiday Drinking Is Becoming a Problem

For most people, it’s not the amount they drink that is a problem, it’s their relationship to alcohol

SARA JO NIXON

It’s the most wonderful time of the year, when holiday parties collide with collegiate and professional athletics events. What do they all have in common? Booze, lots of it, and often free. It’s no wonder the lead reindeer has a red nose.

Of course, drinking isn’t limited to a single season, but it holds a prominent place during the holidays. Across a few short weeks, consumption of spiked cider, boozy nog, wine, beer, cocktails and variations thereof may be higher than at any other point in the year. One industry study suggested that drinking doubles at this time of year. During this party time, we see up close the drinking habits of our partners, co-workers, relatives and, of course, ourselves.

This holiday season, you might take notice of just how much you drink. You may start to question your motivation for drinking. Or wonder about the long-term effects. While it might be tempting to dismiss these unsettling reflections, as director of the University of Florida Center for Addiction Research and Education, I encourage you to consider them more closely.

How Many Is Too Many?

About one in eight U.S. adults met the criteria for an alcohol use disorder in 2013—the most recent year for which we have data. Compare that to just over one in 12 in 2002. That’s a nearly 50 percent increase. Alcohol misuse can lead to violence, physical injury, and can worsen medical and psychiatric conditions. Besides its impact on health and well-being, alcohol misuse costs the U.S. an estimated \$224 billion a year in lost productivity, health care costs, criminal justice costs, and more. More than 75 percent of those costs are associated with binge drinking.

But these statistics don’t answer the question I get most often from friends, family, casual acquaintances, and even strangers at parties or on cross-country flights. What everyone wants to know is, “How much can I drink without being an alcoholic?” The answer is, “It depends.”

For Starters, Stop Calling Names

To effectively address the question, we must rethink our use of the term “alcoholic.” People have disorders; they are not themselves these disorders. The distinction is not merely a matter of semantics. It is fundamental to eliminating the stigma of substance use disorders and other psychiatric conditions.

Still, the more appropriate question, “How much can I drink without developing an alcohol use disorder?” gets the same answer: It depends. The amount that a person drinks doesn’t directly determine an alcohol use disorder diagnosis. But how can a “drinking problem” not have a definitive cutoff?

That’s because two people could drink the same amount and experience completely different consequences. So, the diagnostic criteria for alcohol use disorder focus on those consequences, rather than number of drinks imbibed.

For example, the inability to control your drinking, no matter how much you drink, is a red flag. Having cravings for alcohol is another one. Does drinking interfere with your work, school, or home responsibilities? Do you drink in situations in which you know it’s risky to do so?

Of course, the more you drink, the more likely it is that you will experience negative consequences.

Risky Business

Most drinkers do not develop a disorder. But that doesn’t mean you’re off the hook. Research



Women, in particular, seem to drink more as they age.



‘Tis the season to be jolly, and that often involves a few drinks. That makes it a great time to reflect on our drinking generally.

Before that party, eat something, even if you have to eat it in the car.



shows that Americans are drinking more and for longer each time they drink than ever before. And, adults are continuing to drink into older ages than ever before.

Women, in particular, seem to drink more as they age. A significant percentage of drinkers over age 55 often exceed the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism’s suggested guidelines for moderate drinking without necessarily meeting criteria for an alcohol use disorder. Whether you have a diagnosable disorder or not, all this drinking can cause problems.

One of those problems is driving. People mistakenly think of this as a young person’s problem. But about one in four adults 45 to 64 and another one in 12 over age 65 report driving after drinking in the previous month.

At blood alcohol concentrations equivalent to one or two drinks, older adults show notable shifts in cognitive performance, neural activity, and driving strategies compared to younger adults.

Putting all this in the context of the holidays, it’s not just the pervasive presence of booze that makes us drink. It’s the party culture. If you’re seen without a drink, you are often encouraged to take one. If you lose track of your drink, you get another (full) one.

This excess may meet the criteria for a binge-drinking episode. For women, that’s four or more standard drinks on a single occasion. For men, it’s five or more. And, as for “standard” drinks, we all know that many of us are typically pouring ourselves two to three times the standard in every glass.

Binge drinking, too, is increasing in older adults. And that matters because it has an immediate impact on driving abilities, risk of falling, and reaction to prescription medications.

Should I Take Action?

If your alcohol use is gnawing at your conscience, you have options. Talk candidly with a trained professional about your drinking. Access the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism website, where you can assess your drinking and seek help. If you believe a friend or relative has a problem, talk with someone who can help you identify the next steps.

Here are some ways to be a safer drinker:

- Before that party, eat something, even if you have to eat it in the car.
- Make your first drink nonalcoholic. It keeps you from gulping down the first “real” drink and allows your “car snack” time to settle.
- Alternate alcoholic and nonalcoholic drinks.
- Eat (actually, graze) throughout the evening. Assuage guilt about calories by prioritizing fitness.
- Disregard peer pressure. Susceptibility to it may lessen with age but seldom vanishes. When you reach your limit, don’t be swayed.
- To escape from an awkward conversation, don’t make a beeline to the bar. Take an indirect route through the room, mingling, checking out decorations.
- Take a ride-share home or to and from a party.

Sara Jo Nixon is a professor of psychology and psychiatry at the University of Florida. This article was originally published on *The Conversation*.

If you think your holiday drinking could be a sign of a year-round issue, discuss it with a medical or behavioral health provider. There are a variety of options, including the support and help of Alcoholics Anonymous, which is free. Online AA meetings are also available. For more information, visit: www.aa.org



Sleeping and napping too long might boost stroke risk by a whopping 85-percent.

The Danger of Oversleeping

Consequences and cures for those prone to oversleeping

DEVON ANDRE

You’ve heard about the dangers associated with too little sleep, but what about getting too much?

It seems crazy, doesn’t it? But like most things, too much sleep can be problematic. That’s the finding from a new study recently published in *Neurology*.

The study notes a close association between long naps and sleeping more than nine hours per night and stroke risk. Specifically, the research team noted sleeping and napping too long might boost stroke risk by a whopping 85-percent.

In a world where sleep deprivation is a major concern and finding ways to get more sleep is regularly recommended, these results can be a shock. The study suggests that sleep quality is more important than sleep quantity.

One reason people may be sleeping longer is that they are not sleeping well. A number of conditions, including stress or sleep apnea, can disturb sleep and require that lost time to be made up. For some, that can take the form of regularly sleeping longer than nine hours per night and napping for ninety minutes per day.

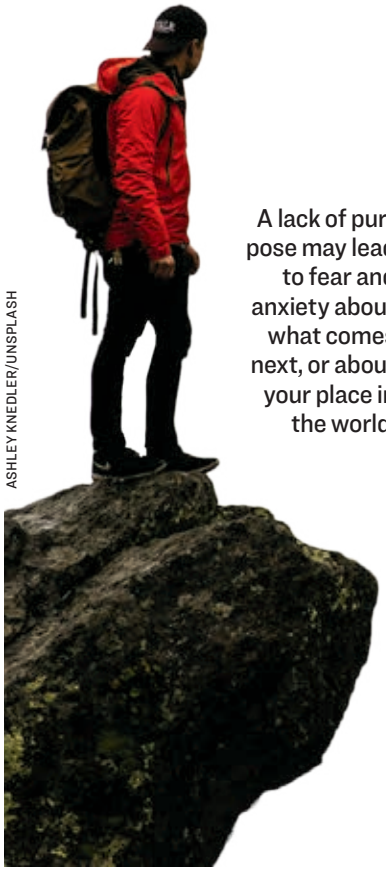
Sleep apnea and poor sleep are associated with high blood pressure and heart disease, which likely account for a portion of the increased risk.

Another way too much sleep may influence stroke risk is that oversleeping likely signifies a lack of activity. The more time you spend in bed or napping, the less time you’re moving around. A sedentary life is associated with a series of stroke risk factors like high blood pressure, obesity, and poor blood sugar control.

If you’re sleeping too much or have little energy, it might be the result of an underlying medical condition or could boil down to the fact that even though you’re in bed, you’re not sleeping well. If the latter is the case, trying ways to improve sleep quality is imperative.

Get tested for sleep apnea, take a look at your diet (particularly magnesium intake), and boost your activity level to encourage more restful sleep. Aim for the sweet spot of 7-9 high quality sleep hours per night. If you need a daytime nap, keep it 30 minutes or less.

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*.



A lack of purpose may lead to fear and anxiety about what comes next, or about your place in the world.

Dill is a fantastic flavor enhancer with natural antibiotic properties.



Dill

Nature's Lesser-Known Antibiotic

Dill is beloved for its flavor, but researchers are finding new dimensions to this delicious herb

Dill is chock-full of nutrients and compounds that are widely used for reducing excess gas, aiding in digestion, and boosting the immune system. But the perks don't end there: dill also provides strong antibiotic properties.

People have appreciated Anethum graveolens, commonly known as dill, for thousands of years for its taste and medicinal uses. Both seeds and leaves give off a strong, tangy flavor that can enhance other food.

Most of dill's medicinal properties are thought to come from compounds known as monoterpenes, along with minerals, certain amino acids, and flavonoids. Based on the USDA National Nutrient Database, dill contains a significant amount of vitamins A and C, as well as folate, iron, and manganese in trace amounts.

For babies, dill seed is a handy natural remedy. It's deemed a miracle for infant colic, earning the title "the secret of British nannies" as it acts as the active ingredient in "gripe water," the colic treatment taken in the British empire.

Dill as a Natural Antibiotic
Dill has been widely investigated for its antimicrobial action, showing potential against several bacteria strains such as Staphylococcus aureus, and the growth of a plant pathogen that causes a dangerous disease in wheat and barley.

In 2009, researchers probed the

antibacterial properties of dill, fenugreek, and the herb ajwain, analyzing their aqueous and organic seed extracts as well as isolated phytoconstituents. Their antibiotic effect was also compared with certain standard antibiotics used today.

The findings: their extracts showed significant antibacterial activity against all the bacteria tested, except Klebsiella pneumoniae and one strain of Pseudomonas aeruginosa. The antibacterial efficacy demonstrated by the plants provided a scientific basis for their use in homemade remedies. In addition, isolating and purifying various phytochemicals from these herbs may lead to the development

The antibacterial efficacy demonstrated by the plants provided a scientific basis for their use in homemade remedies.

ALL PHOTOS BY SHUTTERSTOCK



For babies, dill seed is a handy natural remedy. It's deemed a miracle for infant colic.

of notable antibacterial agents.

A 2005 study isolated three known compounds from dill and concluded that they exhibited antibacterial action against a panel of rapidly growing mycobacteria.

Research from 2007 also studied how the essential oils from three plants—spearmint, dill, and peppermint—enhanced the antibacterial activity of nitrofurantoin, an antibiotic, against enterobacteria, which includes E. coli, salmonella, and other bacteria. The scientists found that spearmint and dill had the highest antimicrobial activity, containing 40.12 percent and 20.32 percent carvone, one of dill's monoterpenes, respectively, which increased nitrofurantoin's antibiotic activity.

Other studies found dill extracts to be beneficial in killing a few fungal strains, from the mold Aspergillus niger to the common yeast Candida albicans. Besides being an effective microbial killer, the herb also proved helpful in reducing menstrual cramps and fighting depression.

Dill has exhibited impressive flexibility as a medicinal food. As the battle against antibiotic resistance rages on (due to indiscriminate or improper use of antibiotic drugs), this natural remedy offers a safer way to combat harmful bacteria. To learn more about dill's disease-fighting potential, be sure to review GreenMedInfo's research database on the topic.

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Yoga Could Be Your Primary Relief Against Menstrual Cramps

Korean researchers find that yoga can now add menstrual pain to its long list of treatable conditions

Yoga, a common yet powerful practice, could dramatically ease or put an end to period pain according to a new study. Yoga not only floods your system with feel-good hormones and improves circulation, but also provides relief for common menstrual complaints, the researchers found.

Writing in the journal Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice, a group of Korean scientists set out to see if yoga could be an effective complementary therapy for primary dysmenorrhea, which is cramping pain that occurs in the lower abdomen just before or during menstruation.

Alongside meditation, yoga is also known for its stress-relieving and relaxing effects.

Yoga for Menstrual Pain

The researchers conducted a meta-analysis of four randomized controlled trials, including 230 women ages 20-33 who were experiencing menstrual cramps. Yoga sessions were done in various durations:

- 30-minute sessions twice a week for 12 weeks
- 120-minute sessions five times a week for 12 weeks
- Four sessions a week for four weeks
- 20-minute sessions a day for 14 days

In evaluating the effects of practicing yoga for menstrual pain, researchers found patients with menstrual cramps reported pain relief after the interventions. Yoga programs demonstrated a high effect on menstrual pain in primary dysmenorrhea, emerging as a helpful regimen to alleviate the pain that recurs every month for mil-

lions of women worldwide.

The meta-analysis linked yoga to reduced severity of related symptoms, including bloating and breast tenderness. It also associated regular yoga practice with increased regularity in women's cycles, enhanced mood, and better relaxation and concentration.

According to the authors, yoga works on the autonomic stress response and also affects how pain is experienced, likely through stimulating the release of the body's natural painkillers. Further research is necessary to determine the best yoga practices for menstrual wellness.

Yoga has also been closely tied to health benefits such as improved blood circulation, reduced stress, and better respiration, and may be effective as a depression buster. Alongside meditation, yoga is also known for its stress-relieving and relaxing effects, which may be due to reduced stress markers and a release of endorphins.

4 Top Benefits of Choosing Natural Products

LISA ROTH COLLINS

When we shop, sometimes we have too many choices. But the beauty of that is that some of them are actually good for us. That's the case when it comes to making purchasing decisions between conventional, chemically-laden items and natural products.

We live in an increasingly polluted world but we can take effective steps toward safeguarding ourselves and our families against the toxins found in common, everyday products. Every time we vote with our wallet and choose natural products, we keep one more contaminated item from entering our economy. We also bring one more natural product into our life to improve our health and make our world a better place to live for many years to come.

Environmental Benefits of Natural Products

If you read the labels on conventional health and beauty products or household cleaners, you might wonder what chemical factory it came from, but not all of the problematic ingredients appear on the label. For example, if you look at a conventional shampoo bottle, you will likely see sodium laureth sulfate. This ingredient is often contaminated with 1,4 dioxane, a byproduct created during the manufacturing process of certain cosmetic ingredients. It is a likely carcinogen, according to the FDA, that is also flammable. Another ingredient seen in laundry detergents, body wash, and surface cleaners is alcohol ethoxylates, which are also sometimes contaminated with 1,4 dioxane.

Once you understand the benefits of choosing natural health and beauty products and household cleaners, you will appreciate how essential they are to our future.

For example, even though you will never see the words "1,4 dioxane" on any of those regular health or beauty care items, this substance has been produced in sufficient quantity to be found in our water supply, according to the EPA. Most in-home water filters are not effective at removing 1,4 dioxane from the water.

Phosphates are another common toxin, often used in dishwashing detergents. When this water softener is released into the environment, it can cause algae blooms that kill aquatic life in lakes and ponds.

Using all-natural products can help reduce the amount of these—and scores of other contaminants—from entering our environment.

Enzymes added to detergents and carpet cleaners help remove stains, but when we inhale them, they can attack our lungs.

Respiratory Benefits of Natural Products

Among the chemicals found in cleaning and beauty items are volatile organic compounds (VOCs), bleach, and ammonia. When you use conventional household cleaning products in your home, you are introducing these chemicals into the air you and your family breathe.

These chemicals can contribute to chronic respiratory problems, such as asthma, and cause headaches and allergic reactions. VOCs and other irritating substances can be found in aerosol spray products, air fresheners, detergent, dishwashing liquid, rug and upholstery cleaners, floor polish, oven cleaners, and general cleaning products.

Enzymes added to detergents and carpet cleaners help remove stains, but when we inhale them, they can attack our lungs.

Natural products don't contain VOCs, bleach, enzymes, or ammonia. They also don't harbor synthetic fragrances. Many manufacturers of conventional products use synthetic perfumes and fragrances, which are composed of thousands of chemicals that have not been tested for their impact on human health. Many of these common irritants are listed on product labels simply as "fragrance" and they can contribute to respiratory irritation, asthma attacks, migraines, and allergic reactions.

The solution, of course, is plant-based fragrances and essential oils. You also may choose unscented natural options.

Skin Benefits of Natural Products

Do you experience rashes, pimples, flaking, itching, excess dryness, or other skin irritations that are unexplained? It could be caused by the ingredients in your health and beauty products. For example, does your laundry detergent promise to make your clothes whiter and brighter? The chemicals responsible for this feature are optical brighteners, which can stay on your clothing and cause allergic skin reactions.

Dozens of other chemicals found in health and beauty items—such as shampoos, conditions, body wash, body lotions, soaps, deodorants, and sunscreens—contain irritants that can cause your skin to break out and worse. These include, but are not limited to, triclosan, oxybenzone, retinyl palmitate, retinyl acetate, retinol, petroleum distillates, resorcinol, methylchloroisothiazolinone, and benzisothiazolinone, among others.

Animal Benefits of Natural Products

Common products are typically tested

on animals. Although actual figures are difficult to come by, as many animals are not counted, an estimated 100 million animals are subjected to painful experiments and killed each year in the U.S. alone for drug, food, and cosmetic testing. All-natural producers typically do not test on animals. That's partially because they don't need to. Many natural products have been used for centuries.

In addition, pets and small children that are closer to the floor will benefit from natural products since they will not be exposed to chemicals on surfaces such as carpets and floors. Using all-natural products to control pests both inside and outside also is safer for our companion animals and our immediate ecology.

Natural Product Ingredients

When you read the label of an all-natural health or beauty item or household cleaning product, you will likely see words like these:

- **Polyglucosides:** These are naturally derived ingredients that are the result of a fermentation process of corn starch and vegetable oil. You may see polyglucosides on items that produce foam, such as shampoos, soaps, and dishwashing and other detergents.
- **Natural food flavors, essential oils, and plant-based fragrances:** These are used rather than synthetic, chemical flavors and fragrances.
- **Hydrogen peroxide:** This natural product takes the place of chemical optical brighteners.
- **Phenoxyethanol, sodium benzoate, and ethylhexylglycerin:** These are natural preservatives that are necessary in minute amounts in some personal care and cleaning products to prevent the growth of bacteria. They take the place of synthetic preservatives and are usually listed near the end of an ingredients list.
- **Guar gum:** Guar gum, which is from the guar bean, and coco-caprylate, which is derived from coconut oil, are used in place of silicones. Silicones are toxic and added to conventional skincare products to make them go on smoother.

Bottom Line

We hear a lot about the health benefits of using all-natural products. However, we often forget that the move to clean health, beauty and household items can also improve the place we live and the lives of the people and animals we care about. Are you ready to make the switch to safe, effective, clean natural products?



Once you understand the benefits of choosing natural health and beauty products and household cleaners, you will appreciate how essential they are to our future.

Getting Your Yoga Journey Started

It's worth noting that the term "yoga" is sometimes wrongly used only to refer to practicing physical postures and poses. In reality, the physical element is only a small portion of the more complex ancient discipline, which incorporates physical and mental, and spiritual practices to bring about a total balance for well-being.

If you're a beginner and wondering how you can start harnessing the wonders of yoga for menstrual pain, experts recommend starting with a gentle Hatha-style class before you branch out into other types.

Child's pose is also an extremely relaxing pose where you sit on your knees in a way that your body rests on top of your thighs, with your arms stretched outward in front of you. If you're seeking relief for period pain and mood symptoms, it might also be worth considering classes that incorporate breathing, postures, and relaxation methods.

Other Natural Remedies for Period Pain

With an abundance of natural remedies such as yoga, there's little reason to reach

for painkilling drugs at the first sign of menstrual cramps or period pain.

A hot water bottle, for instance, can still be one of your best friends for dysmenorrhea symptoms. Use a heated patch or wrap on your abdomen to help relax the muscles of your uterus, which cause cramps. In addition, heat can boost circulation in your abdomen for pain reduction.

Essential oils also help with period pain. In 2017, researchers highlighted abdominal aromatherapy massage with essential oils as an effective complementary method to relieve menstrual cramps. Oils that appear to effectively reduce period cramps due to their ability to improve circulation include lavender, rose, sage, cinnamon, marjoram, and clove.

Acupressure, a non-invasive Chinese medicinal therapy used for many health concerns, has also emerged as an effective period painkiller. It involves using the fingers to apply firm pressure to specific parts of your body. Re-

The meta-analysis linked yoga to reduced severity of related symptoms, including bloating and breast tenderness.

search from 2007 confirmed acupressure's positive effects against menstrual cramps and skin temperature changes in college students in the study.

With millions of people practicing yoga every day and reaping tangible health gains, it's helpful that modern science is confirming yoga's many health benefits.

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MADE TO MOVE

Things People Say About Exercise That Aren't True

Mistaken notions about exercise can block some people from getting their body up to speed

JULIE BRODERICK

It can be hard to include exercise in our busy lives, despite the best of intentions. There are a lot of reasons why people don't exercise, and a lot of misconceptions about exercise.

Here are nine common misconceptions about exercise and what research actually tells us.

'I was fit once, so I don't need to exercise.' Unfortunately, the health benefits of exercise won't last if you don't sustain your exercise regime. A significant reduction or drop out can cause a marked loss of initial benefits, such as cardiovascular fitness and endurance. Consistency is the key. Mix it up and keep it interesting as maintaining high levels of physical activity throughout your life is associated with the best health outcomes.

'Being on your feet all day doesn't have the same benefit as exercise.' Being on your feet, moving around all days means you have a high level of physical activity. This is health-enhancing. To optimize health benefits, increase your level of exercise—enough to cause you to sweat a little—to at least 150 minutes a week, where possible.

'Exercise needs to be 10 minutes or longer, otherwise it's a waste of time.' The good news is that recent guidelines have eliminated the need for physical activity to be delivered in bouts of at least 10 minutes. There is no minimum threshold for health benefits, so carry out active daily chores, such as carrying heavy shopping bags and

vigorous house or garden work, to improve your health.

Try to do three to five exercise "snacks" spread across the day. These snacks are short bouts of activity half a minute to two minutes long, such as climbing a few flights of stairs at a high enough intensity to make you a bit out of breath.

'I have a chronic disease, so I should avoid exercise.' This isn't the case. Being more active will benefit a range of chronic conditions, including cancer, heart disease, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Be as active as your condition allows, aiming for 150 minutes a week of moderate activity if possible. If you have complex health needs, seek medical clearance from a doctor before you start a new exercise regime and get exercise advice from a physiotherapist or other exercise professional.

'I'm too old to exercise.' This isn't true. Evidence shows that aging alone is not a cause of major problems until you are in your mid-90s. And strength, power, and muscle mass can be increased, even at this advanced age. Ideally, include aerobic exercise, balance training, and muscle strengthening if you are 65 years or older.

'Exercise will make me thin.' Not necessarily. Combine calorific restriction with physical activity for more successful weight loss and remember: You cannot outrun a bad diet. People who have substantial weight loss goals (more than 5 percent of body weight) and people trying to keep a significant amount of weight off may need to do more than 300 minutes a week



Being more active will benefit a range of chronic conditions, including cancer, heart disease, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

of moderate-intensity activity to achieve their goal. Include resistance work to build lean body mass.

'I run once a week, but that's not enough.' Rest assured that any amount of running, even once a week, results in important health benefits. If you don't have much time to exercise, even as little as 50 minutes of running once a week at a pace slower than 6 miles per hour has been shown to result in a decrease in the risk of premature death. Higher levels of running do not necessarily improve the mortality benefits.

'I'm pregnant, so I need to take it easy.' Moderate-intensity physical activity is safe for pregnant women who are

generally healthy and poses no risk to the well-being of the fetus. Physical activity decreases the risk of excessive weight gain and gestational diabetes during pregnancy.

'I'm not feeling well, I shouldn't exercise.' If you have a fever, are acutely unwell, or are experiencing high levels of pain or exhaustion, don't exercise. In most other cases, being physically active is safe, but listen to your body and decrease your exercise load if you need to. And if you can, get dressed and moving as soon as possible to avoid "PJ paralysis."

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

Ancient Inspiration for Today

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